
March 22-24, 1991

Culver City: The Downtown Charette

Presented to

Culver City Redevelopment Agency
Culver City, California

Prepared by

LDR International, Inc.
and the
Technical Resource Team

Culver City: The Downtown Charette

Introduction

On March 22-24, 1991, 125 interested citizens of Culver City joined with members of the Redevelopment Agency Board, RDA and City staff and a team of outside urban development professionals to formulate a vision for the downtown area. The workshop, or "charette," was designed to solicit the active involvement of community stake-holders in the formulation of a plan for downtown land uses, development patterns, and public and private design criteria. Thus, the participants would have an opportunity to directly convey their insights, their experiences, and their aspirations to the planners and decisions-makers. Equally important, the participants would be encouraged to share their feelings with each other, to mutually discover areas of agreement and disagreement.

The results would give direction to and frame the deliberations of the Resource Team, who in turn would apply their expertise in market feasibility, traffic engineering, urban design, landscape architecture, and implementation strategies to the preparation of recommendations to the Redevelopment Agency.

The plan as presented in this report focuses on recommendations for:

- Proposed land uses and their distribution within the downtown area
- Re-use of four specific parcels owned by the City or Redevelopment Agency
- Improvements to relieve traffic conflicts within the Culver-Washington "X", as well as other traffic improvements
- Design guidelines and criteria for streetscape and other public and private improvements.

Background

Culver City lies in the western portion of Los Angeles County. It is strategically located fifteen minutes east of Marina del Rey, fifteen minutes north of Los Angeles International Airport, fifteen minutes south of Century City and Beverly Hills, and twenty minutes southeast of Santa Monica. It directly abuts the City of Los Angeles. The current population of the city is approximately 40,000 people, housed in 17,000 residential units. The Culver City Police Department estimates that the day-time population swells to over 300,000.

Though settled earlier by a variety of ranchers, farmers and real estate entrepreneurs, Culver City owes much of its legacy to developer Harry H. Culver who, in 1913, prepared a master plan for a balanced community in the area. Four years later, citizens voted for incorporation as a municipality.

Culver City is perhaps best known for its long involvement with cinema. Since 1915, with the relocation of Thomas Ince and his studio into town, the city has housed a number of major motion picture studios including Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, RKO-Pathé, Cecil B. DeMille, Hal Roach, Desilu, and David O. Selznick. Many of the world's best known movies were filmed here; a selected list includes the original *Ben Hur*, *Gone With the Wind*, *Raintree County*, the *Tarzan* series, and *Wizard of Oz*. Today, The Culver Studios and Columbia Studios continue to produce films within the city's boundaries.

Culver City continued to develop as a community over the years, its growth particularly noteworthy following World War II when it was sometimes referred to as "Boom Town USA." By the 1960's, however, city leaders became concerned about the combined effects of age and rapid growth. A renewed emphasis was placed on planning.

A key part of this concern was the downtown area which, as in so many other cities, had begun to decline in both vitality and appearance. A 1976 plan noted the lack of a central focus, proposing the creation of a Town Center as a catalyst for revitalization.

To implement this proposal, the City and its Redevelopment Agency initiated a series of land acquisition, clearance and improvement projects. Among these have been the Filmland Corporate Center, Meralta Office Plaza, design of a new City Hall and a new Fire Station No. 1, the Watseka Parking Garage, and acquisition of the Culver Theater.

Setting

Columbia Studios occupies almost 45 acres of land abutting downtown on the west (Madison Avenue) and bounded on the north and south by Washington Boulevard and Culver Boulevard. Recently, the owners announced a 15 year expansion plan which would consolidate operations from other parts of the metropolitan area and result in an eventual employment of nearly 5,000 people. As proposed, 1.1 million net additional square feet of office, studio, craft, and retail space would be developed, including 150,000 square feet of retail along Culver Boulevard.

Immediately to the east, and just within the downtown boundaries, is the **Filmland Corporate Center**, completed in 1986. The eight-story structure contains 320,000 square feet of office space and 1,100 parking spaces. Its prime tenant is the corporate headquarters of MGM; the rooftop features the historic MGM Lion sign.

The **Brotman Medical Center**, at the northern edge of downtown, is a 500-bed tertiary care facility. It is housed in three primary buildings with future plans to replace a one-story structure with a new two-story building. Eventually, hospital officials hope to close Delmas Terrace to through traffic. Between Brotman and the telephone switching facility on Watseka, employment in this portion of downtown is estimated at 2,000 people.

The Culver Studios are at the eastern edge of downtown, extending south from Washington Boulevard. The fourteen-acre property saw major renovations completed within the last year, including two new stages, renovation of several historically significant structures, and a major subterranean parking garage. Employment varies seasonally from 500 to 750 employees.

A new **City Hall** for Culver City is planned for the block fronting on the south side of Culver Boulevard between Lafayette Place and Duquesne. The first phase is proposed to contain 80,000 square feet, with a second phase of 20,000 square feet. Its design will incorporate the elements of Mission style architecture, and will feature a "square" fronting on Culver Boulevard and incorporating public gardens, water features and other landscape elements.

Across the street from the new City Hall is the **Culver Theater**. The theater was built in the mid-1940's and ceased operations in 1989. It was acquired by the Agency in 1985. It includes the original ticket booths and a unique entry floor design. Current studies plan for its reuse for film-oriented events.

East of the new City Hall site is the **Meralta Office Plaza** building. Completed in 1985, it includes 35,000 square feet of office space. Original plans called for a second phase immediately to the east but that site is now the location of the planned new **Fire Station No. 1**. The fire station includes a headquarters building and three apparatus bays, which have direct access onto Culver Boulevard. A break in the median and signal coordination are planned to accommodate emergency response. The fire station, too, is designed including elements of Mission style architecture.

The **Ivy Substation and Media Park** are at the northeast edge of downtown, bounded by Culver Boulevard, Venice Boulevard, and Canfield. These properties actually lie within the city limits of Los Angeles but are controlled by Culver City under 50-year leases. The substation once served the regional trolley system and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It is scheduled for renovation to accommodate approximately 3,500 square feet of useable space, primarily for cultural activities. It will have a 250-seat capacity including several small meeting rooms. The two-acre park will be redeveloped concurrently.

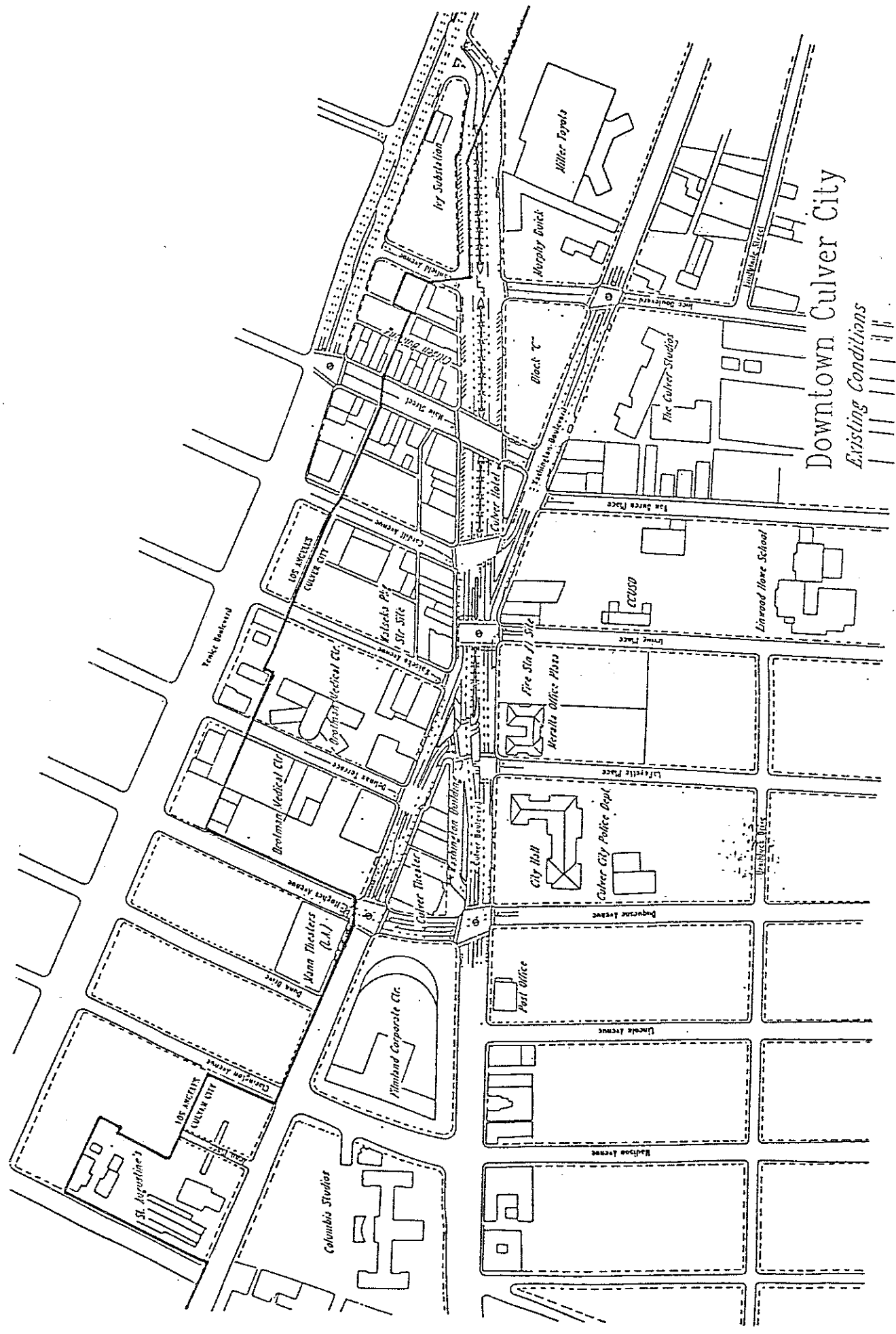
The **Watseka Parking Garage**, to be under construction shortly, will include six levels and accommodate approximately 325 automobiles. Its design is intended to complement the historic **Hull Building** immediately to its south.

A number of structures within the downtown area have been recommended for designation under the City's historic preservation ordinance. Six of these are classified as "landmark", placing strong restrictions on their demolition. In addition to the Culver Studios and the Hull Building, these include the **Citizen Building** on Culver Boulevard, and the **Washington Building** and the **Culver Hotel**. The latter two are "flat-iron" buildings, their footprints shaped by the acute angle of the intersection of Washington and Culver Boulevards.

Possibly the most prominent feature of downtown Culver City is the "X" formed by the 30° angle of the **intersection of Culver Boulevard with Washington Boulevard**. Said to have been influenced by Times Square in Manhattan, the configuration results in confusing and conflicting movements for vehicles and pedestrians alike. Having once been a rail transit route, Culver Boulevard has a right-of-way of as much as 140 feet. The right-of-way of Washington Boulevard ranges from 70 feet to 90 feet. Each, especially Culver Boulevard, is wider than needed given both current and projected traffic volumes.

Downtown Culver City

Existing Conditions



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The Process

The charette weekend was organized in three parts: (1) a Friday evening orientation session; (2) a Saturday tour and small group discussions, involving Culver City residents and business people; and (3) a Sunday work session by the Technical Resource Team. On Sunday evening, the Team presented its recommendations to the Redevelopment Agency Board and to the charette participants and support staff.

From the beginning, there was a goal of participation from as broad a cross-section of the community as possible. Invitations were extended to a variety of interest groups representing commercial and residential owners and tenants, City Commissions and advisory committees, civic organizations and other relevant entities. In addition, "at-large" places were held open to accommodate others who might want to attend.

For logistical reasons, the total number of participants was limited to 125. All were required to pre-register, with a commitment to be present for the entire Friday and Saturday portions of the agenda. The available places were filled within a short time of the charette's announcement.

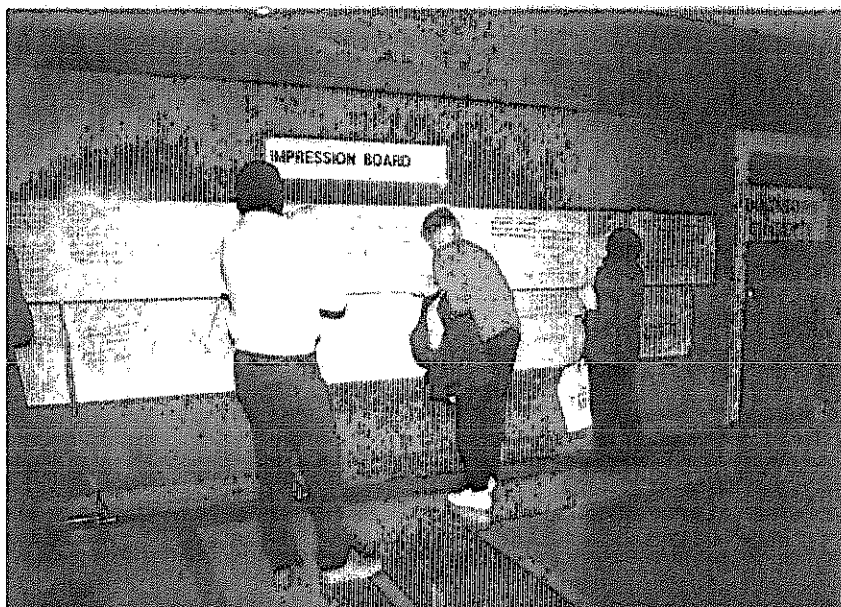
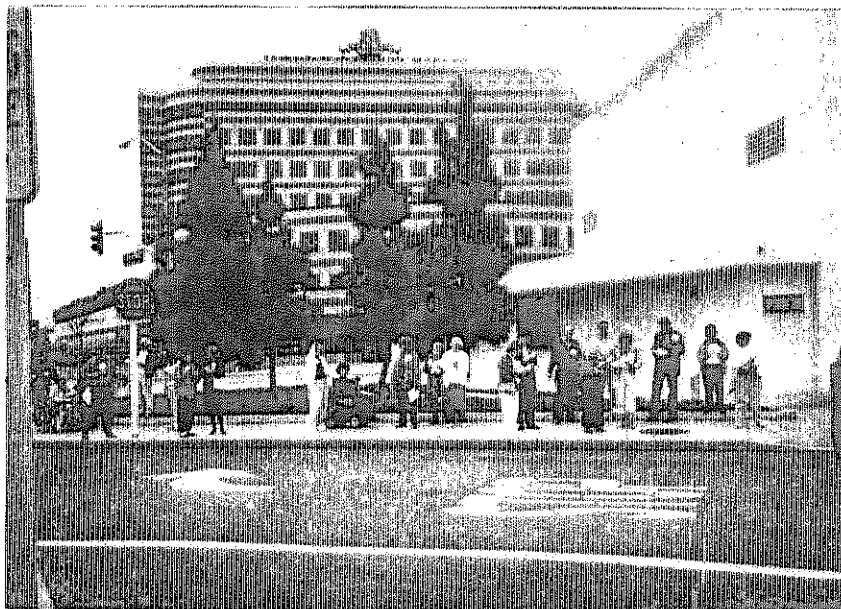
Friday evening took place at Veteran's Memorial Auditorium. Following a light supper, Dr. James Boulgarides, Chairman of the Redevelopment Agency, welcomed the participants, assuring them of the value the Board placed on their involvement.

Next, James A. Cloar, Principal with LDR International and Leader of the Technical Resource Team, presented a slide show, illustrating successful examples of downtown development projects in other cities.

Mrs. Jody Hall-Esser, Assistant Executive Director of the Agency, and Cloar closed the evening with a review of the format and objectives of the charette weekend.

Saturday morning began with an "awareness walk." Led by facilitators, participants spent an hour walking through the downtown area. At each of ten stops, their notebooks asked for observations and impressions. The purpose of the tour was to see familiar things in a new light.

Upon returning to the Vets, attendees recorded their reactions in both written and graphic form on a series of Impression Boards posted in the lobby. Comments covered a range of issues dealing with the visual and functional character of downtown Culver City. In the "graffiti" tradition, notations were often of a point-counterpoint nature, expressing contrasting



viewpoints on such matters as the quality of existing development, need for curb-side parking, the importance of Main Street, and the future of Block C (across from Culver Studios). By far, the most disparate of opinions were expressed regarding preservation of the Culver Hotel. A representative listing of Impression Board comments is included in Appendix A.

For the remainder of the day, participants were divided into ten groups for facilitated discussion. Assignments were made with the objective of achieving a cross-section of perspectives in each group.

During the morning, the groups were asked to address the following:

1. What are the strengths of Culver City's downtown area?
2. What are its weaknesses?
3. What should the role of downtown be?
4. What uses and activities should occur in downtown?
5. What overall theme or image should it have?

At the end of the morning, the charette reconvened to hear the results of the small group discussions. Each team selected a spokesperson and helped them prepare their presentation.

Among downtown's **strengths**, the following were the most frequently mentioned:

- ***Lots of space.*** Downtown has numerous undeveloped and under-developed land parcels, including several significant sites under City or Agency ownership. This is an important opportunity.
- ***Entertainment industry.*** Culver City's long association with movie production has given it an international prominence. This tradition continues today with two major studios still in operation at the edge of downtown.
- ***Location.*** Proximity to LAX and location between downtown Los Angeles and Marina del Ray, along with the metropolitan freeway pattern, give Culver City's downtown excellent accessibility.

TURN THE
PARKING LOTS
INTO PARKS
AND PUT MIXED
USE DEVELOPMENT AROUND IT. ADD DESIGN
ELEMENTS TO ELATED HIGH
REST OF DOWNTOWN AREA
(BENCH PLANTERS)

CONNECT AND REUSE
ACTIVITIES & PLACES

THERE IS
NO GOOD
GARD!

THIS PARK IS A
REAL GEM!

make a
VILLAGE SQUARE
where all kinds of activities
can go on during the
heart of the day to eat

Keep the streets
individual - DON'T
impose them or make them
lose the old-worldly landscape
that is part of the city's
history & the people

KIND OF DOWNTOWN OPEN
CURVE OUTLINE - UNDER
THE REST OF LA - TIME

MAJOR CENTER?
LOCAL SERVICES?
WHAT IS THE LONG TERM
GOAL?

Washington Blvd
Traffic Flow must
be improved

CUNER CITY MAIN SQUARE

PEDESTRIAN
BIKES

CUNER HOTEL
MUST GO FOR
REDEVELOPMENT
PLANNING TO
REUSE AS ARCH
BLVD FROM VANCE
TO MAIN

- VANCE BLVD CROSSED TO AVOID
HAVE MORE OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES AT INTERSECTION
- WATER FEATURE NEEDED
- SEPARATION OF PEDESTRIAN & VEHICLES NEEDED

There shall be a 'Village Square'
full of yesterdays life a calm center
in today's traffic crossroads

Cunier Hotel must stay!
It is the heart of our downtown
& our community's heritage!

Plaza SPAC
Center located
in parking lot
in front of Cunier
Hotel
Connect to Cunier
Park

No (on street) SEED
Bury but don't remove
9/11 2001-2011

Don't disconnect
historic built
up floor retail

City hotel built
in 1900s
is supposed to still
be there created

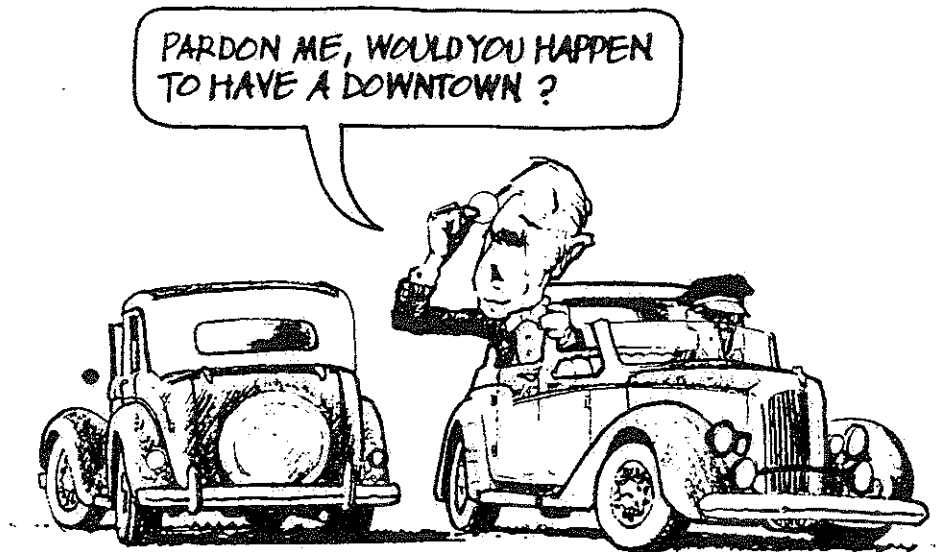
On the development in Block 4

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- **Landmark buildings.** There are several structures of historic and/or architectural significance scattered throughout downtown. These not only evoke special feelings among at least some of the community but help make the area unique.
 - **Citizen pride and spirit.** The enthusiasm and interest in the charette are characteristic of a community that is committed to long-range improvements.
 - **Width of Culver Boulevard.** As the former route of a transit line, Culver Boulevard's extraordinary right-of-way allows an opportunity for significant streetscape improvements without unduly constraining traffic flow.

Weaknesses included:

- **A lack of visual appeal.** Participants cited the downtown as lacking cohesion or continuity. One group described its appearance as boring. Another said it had no style.
- **Pedestrian un-friendly.** Many narrow sidewalks and sparse amenities make for an overall unappealing pedestrian environment. The street widths and a lack of cross-walks make it difficult to walk from one block to another in several locations.
- **Need for convenient parking.** The emphasis was on convenience. While the overall parking supply is ample, spaces are not always available where desired. (Note: the perception of convenience often relates to the quality of the pedestrian environment).
- **No sense of center.** Visually, downtown offers no element or setting which is readily apparent as its focus or which gives it an identity. In addition, it contains few features which would make it a focal point for community activities. Participants felt that there were few quality businesses in downtown and that it lacked a central square or public gathering space.
- **Traffic patterns.** The X formed by Washington and Culver Boulevards gives downtown a sense of uniqueness. However, the elongated stem where the two thoroughfares coincide results in a series of confusing intersections which more than offset any traffic flow benefits from the generous rights-of-way.

- **Building conditions.** In some cases, comments referred to poor structural quality; in others there was concern about design character. The most prevalent issue related to maintenance and cleanliness.



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Workshop participants said that the **roles** of downtown Culver City should be as:

- **Civic focal point.** Downtown should be seen as the hub of the community. It should be the location of governmental and other service agencies which are patronized by Culver City as a whole.
- **Social gathering place.** It should be oriented to everyone in the community, attracting and accommodating a wide variety of business, cultural, entertainment and other activities. It should appeal to all age groups.
- **Business center.** It should be the location in which professional and other offices are concentrated within Culver City.
- **Image-setter.** Downtown is seen as establishing the overall image of the community. It should effectively say "this is Culver City." This role takes on added significance since downtown effectively acts as a gateway to the community.

To achieve the desired roles, participants felt that downtown should contain a **variety of uses**, including some mixed uses on the same site. Specific uses listed were:

- **Better retail**, including improvements in the quality and types of stores available and their location within downtown.
- **Professional offices**, building on the proximity of the movie studios and Brotman Medical Center as well as the numerous banks and other office facilities already in and near downtown.
- **Residential**, with housing for the elderly specifically noted by several teams.
- **Cultural and entertainment** uses covering a variety of performing and visual arts activities. A city museum and public sculpture garden are among the possibilities.
- **Restaurants**, particularly outdoor restaurants.
- **Town square**, an open, landscaped area which would serve as a community "gathering place" where people could sit and relax, occasionally enjoying special outdoor performances.
- **Civic** uses such as the City Hall, Post Office and other facilities either present in or planned for downtown.
- **Greenery and open space** in a variety of forms, from street trees and landscaped medians to parks and plazas.
- **Family attractions** which would draw peoples of all ages, especially young people, to the downtown area.
- **Transition to nearby neighborhoods**, providing for the harmonious relationship of downtown uses to the quality abutting residential areas.
- Several specific uses which were mentioned by several teams included a **farmers' market**, **hotel**, **roller rink**, and a **child care** facility.

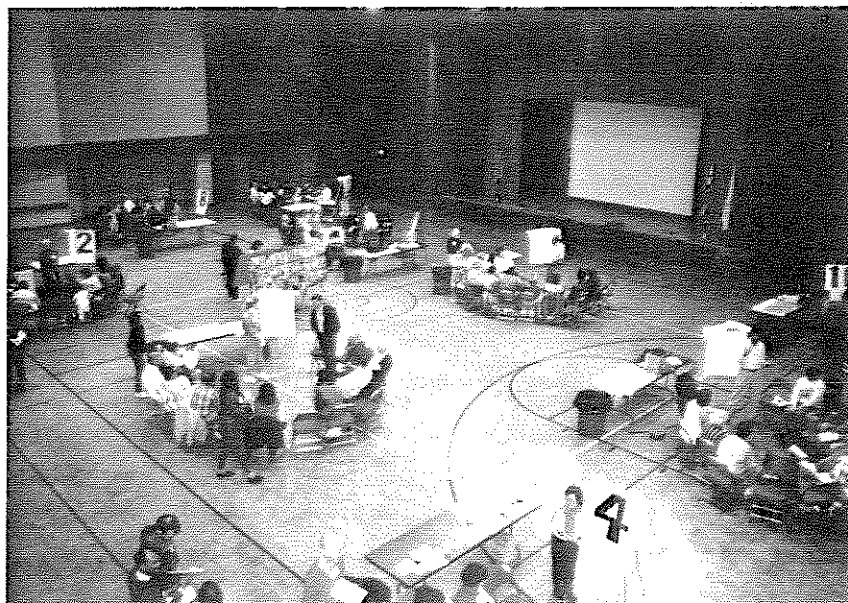
The **themes** which participants generally agreed should guide future planning and design for downtown Culver City are:

- **Film Land** or "crossroads of the stars," tastefully reflecting the community's long association with the movie industry.
- **Small town**, with a scale, design quality, and activities which make it warm, friendly, pleasant and inviting for the entire family.
- **Diversity** of lifestyles and functions ranging from active to passive.
- **Landscaping**, using trees, flowers and other plant materials to provide color, shade and visual amenity.
- **User-friendly**, making the downtown worker or visitor feel welcome and comfortable.

During **Saturday afternoon**, participants again met in small groups. Building on the morning's discussion and a synthesis of the small group presentations, they were charged to consider:

1. Where various land uses and activities should generally be located within downtown.
2. Improvements or changes which should be made to the existing traffic system.
3. Where the primary pedestrian areas should be and how they should be developed or reinforced.
4. The re-use of four designated City/RDA land parcels.
5. Features and characteristics to be reflected in the street, sidewalk and other open space areas.
6. Overall design character of public and private development in downtown.

As the afternoon concluded, the workshop reassembled to share the findings and conclusions of the individual small groups. Team representatives portrayed their recommendations for downtown's future development, using colored plans as aids.



A prominent theme throughout the presentations was the inclusion of public parks and plazas. In some instances this involved the closing of portions of Culver Boulevard, either for the expansion of Media Park or the creation of new open spaces. On the other hand, half of the teams specifically recommended that Culver Boulevard remain open. (One team sought the best of both worlds by suggesting that it be tunneled under a new park.)

Portions of Washington Boulevard were also considered for closure. The most frequently mentioned was the segment south of the Culver Hotel, from Culver Boulevard to Main Street. This area would be combined with Municipal Parking Lot #3 to create a site for what a number of the teams saw as the Town Square, or central gathering place.

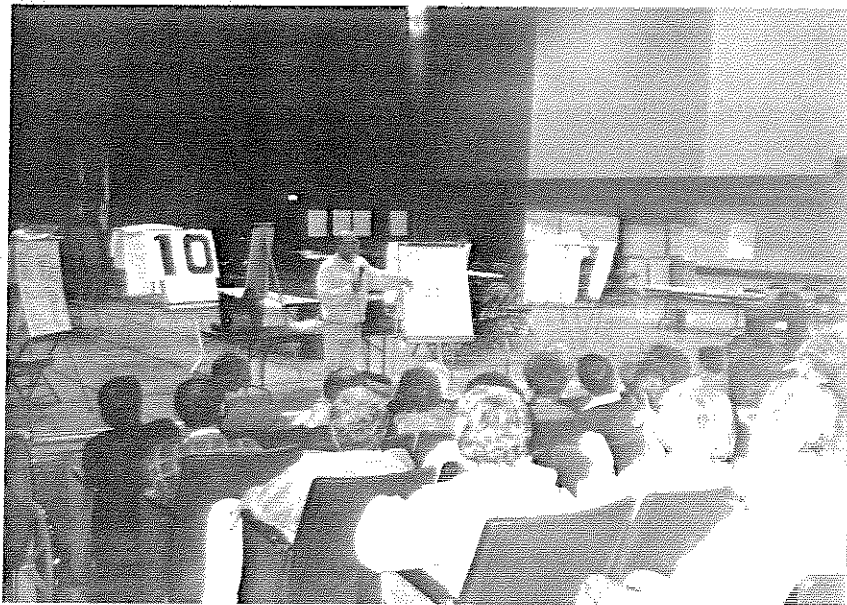
Another suggested open space site would be created by removing some or all of the existing structures between the Culver Theatre and the Washington Building. Variations included extending the site north into a closed block of Washington Boulevard or south, across a closed block of Culver Boulevard, to physically connect with the square at the new City Hall.

The future of Block C, bounded by Culver, Washington and Ince Boulevards and by Main Street, was noted by almost every group. Eight teams proposed some form of development on the site, though most stressed low density and protection of view corridors. One team recommended it be developed as open space, though possibly incorporating a museum.

The Culver Hotel remained a subject of much discussion. Half the teams recommended it be retained (or expanded) as a structure. Its use, however, was left for future consideration with suggestions including a roof-top restaurant and ground floor museum. Several teams reported that they were split on the question of it being razed.

Retail was shown as primarily concentrated on Main Street. Some suggestions for improving Main Street included closing it to traffic or removing parking, both intended to expand the area available for walkways and amenities. Several teams also indicated retail rounding the corner from Main and extending east and west along the north side of Culver Boulevard.

Traffic flow improvements centered on the connections between Culver and Washington Boulevards. Several teams incorporated schemes which would have Washington Boulevard curve northward to intersect with Culver Boulevard either at approximately Main Street or along Ince Boulevard. One alternative involved precluding through traffic on either thoroughfare, instead directing vehicles in a one-way pattern in a "bow-tie" configuration.



There appeared to be little interest in perpetuating a specific design style for new public or private buildings. In fact, several teams recommended a greater degree of variety be sought in the downtown architecture.

On the other hand, streetscape improvements were seen both as an amenity and the key unifying design element throughout downtown. Recommendations focused primarily on Culver Boulevard, establishing it as a pedestrian promenade and linking Media Park, the new City Hall and additional new parks and open space areas. Special features such as sculpture, monuments, a clock tower, and a film-strip walk were noted as possible streetscape elements.

Suggestions for re-use of the Coast Media site included multi-family housing, a senior citizens center and a daycare facility.

Technical Resource Team Report

On Sunday, March 25, the Technical Resource Team spent the day preparing a set of findings and recommendations for consideration by the Redevelopment Agency. Building on the results of the citizen charette, and applying their own experiences and research, proposals were formulated for a bold yet achievable vision for the future of downtown Culver City. A verbal feed-back session was held for the Agency Board and Charette participants later that evening.

The Plan

Charette participants had been urged to be creative and to not be overly concerned with feasibility. To free up their imagination, they were promised that the Resource Team would apply a "reality check" to the charette proceedings, to ensure that recommendations were couched in practicality. Accordingly, the Team's deliberations began with the development of a mutual understanding of the market for a variety of potential downtown uses.

Market Conditions

Office uses are generally the most dominant function in downtowns. Though the Filmland Corporate Center and Meralta Office Plaza buildings, both constructed in the mid-1980's, are prominent examples of this type of development in downtown Culver City, the projected demand for office space warrants some qualification.

First, the future of downtown Culver City as a regional office center is unlikely. Many such centers are already established in the area; most have clear competitive advantages. Nor would such development be in keeping with the apparent desires of the citizens of Culver City, as expressed during the Charette.

Second, three specific types of office uses hold promise for downtown and would be consistent with the desired character.

- ***Studio-related.*** These will be ancillary uses, not likely to be housed on the studio properties. The recent renovations at The Culver Studios and the announced plans for the Columbia Studios provide a stability which should leverage growth in this market segment. These users are inclined toward non-traditional or unconventional space. Thus, they are primarily candidates for occupying space in older, "funky" buildings.

-
- **Local-serving.** These are smaller professional firms, such as accountants and lawyers, as well as other corporations which are primarily patronized by downtown businesses and the local community.
 - **Medical.** There may be some limited demand for additional office, lab or similar space attracted by the proximity of the Brotman Medical Center.

A major business-style **hotel** is doubtful for the downtown area, due to the lack of direct freeway access and the distance to corporate office concentrations. Most studio-related visitors will continue to show a preference for the Beverly Hills area. Nor is there a strong tourist or visitor draw to support the hotel market. On the other hand, it is possible that a unique entrepreneurial venture may emerge for a smaller hotel facility; such eventuality would be an asset to downtown and future plans should allow for such a possibility.

There is a potential for multi-family **residential** development in downtown, including units oriented to seniors. The number of likely site, however, is limited. Concerns about proximity to the new Fire Station can be overcome through appropriate design and strategic marketing. The concept of housing on the upper floors of retail buildings has had limited success in other cities and is generally more expensive and difficult to market.

Other potential uses are those of a municipal or quasi-public nature. The Post Office, Police Station and sites for the new Fire Station and City Hall help to establish downtown as a **civic focal point**, identified by the Charette as a desired role. Additional related facilities would build on this foundation and complement the office, residential and retail activities. **Cultural uses**, such as a museum or theatre (including re-opening the Culver Theater) would be particularly desirable, though some degree of underwriting is likely to be necessary to support their operation. A **Farmers' Market** would be a great draw for downtown.

Perhaps the most intriguing prospect for downtown lies in the opportunity for **retail**. Demographic characteristics show a phenomenal population and income base within two miles. As shown on the accompanying charts, Culver City compares favorably with both Santa Monica and Pasadena.

How this market support translates into successful retail development should be carefully considered. It is not recommended, for instance, that stores be oriented to a regional market in any significant way. The community is not likely to welcome such development nor is the downtown particularly well-suited to accommodate it from a physical standpoint.

On the other hand, the availability of goods and services to serve Culver City, particularly the downtown office segment and the close-in neighborhoods, is substantially lacking. That such demand has not been addressed to date can be attributed largely to the lack of an overall niche or image.

The most likely niche lies in casting downtown physically and functionally as the heart of a small town. This theme, in keeping with the spirit of the Charette, builds on the natural market.

Accomplishing this involves creating a new look, one that makes downtown visually identifiable. An obvious early step is the implementation of a strong streetscape program to create a human scale. Sidewalks should be widened, creating space for public amenities and allowing outdoor dining.

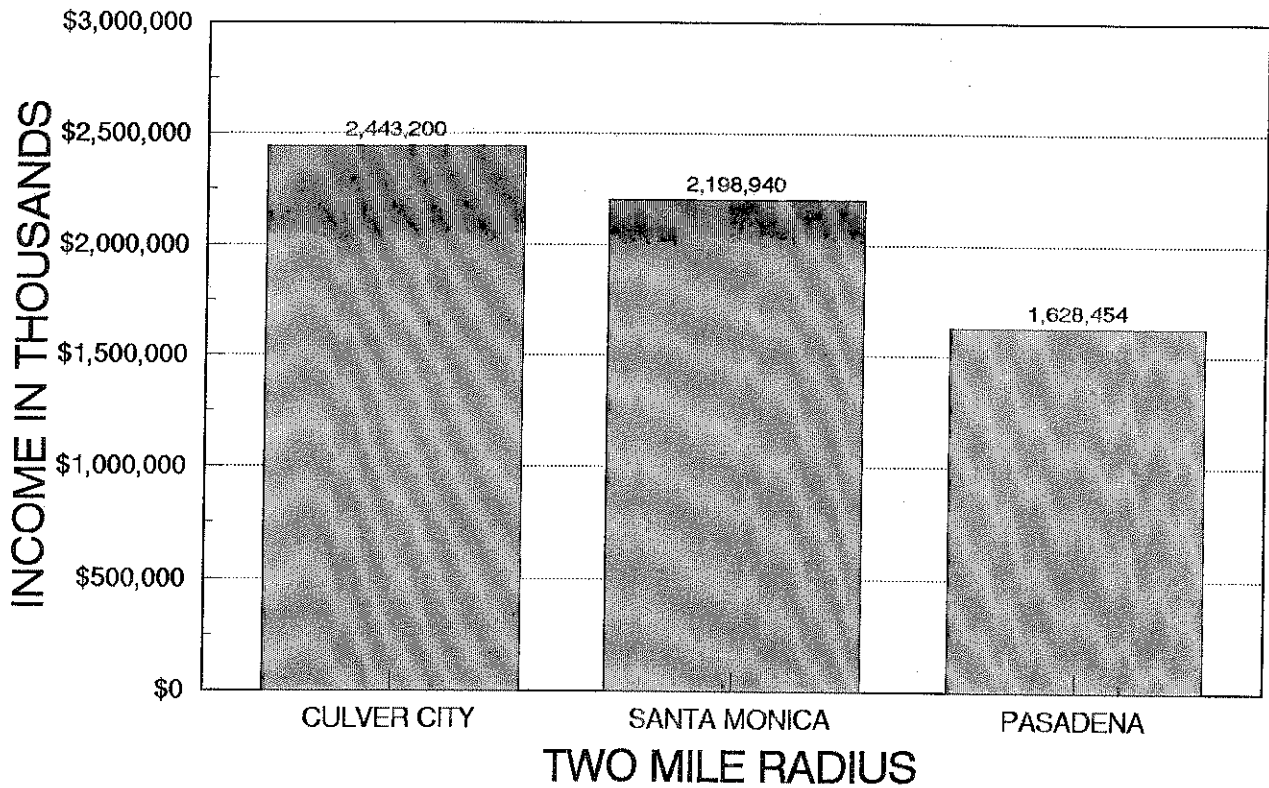
Concurrent actions will be necessary with respect to the retail properties themselves. Many are in need of facade improvements which incorporate more contemporary storefronts, transparent display windows and quality architectural character. In some cases, the structure itself may require renovation or even replacement.

Retail activity should be focused on Main Street, rounding the corner to extend in each direction along the north edge of the Culver-Washington "X". Ground floor uses in this area, including the Washington Building block, should be oriented to shopping.

Block C has received some consideration as a site for future retail. The extraordinary width of the Culver Boulevard right-of-way makes it difficult for such a development to effectively link to Main Street. Since the site is of insufficient size to create a critical mass of merchandising on its own, any shops are more likely to be specialized, probably serving adjacent uses.

AGGREGATE HOUSEHOLD INCOME

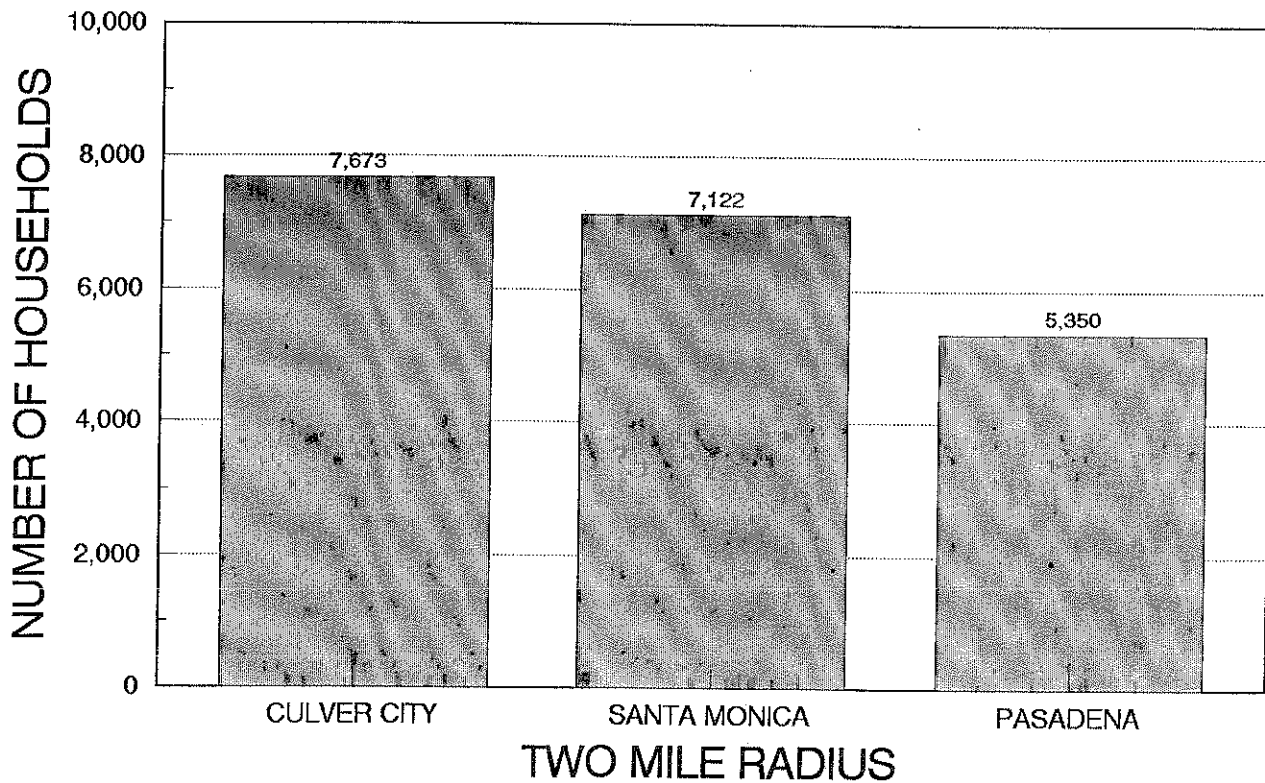
1990 ESTIMATES



SOURCE: DONNELLEY MARKETING INFORMATION SERVICES

HOUSEHOLDS EARNING OVER \$75,000

1990 ESTIMATES



SOURCE: DONNELLEY MARKETING INFORMATION SERVICES

Traffic Improvements

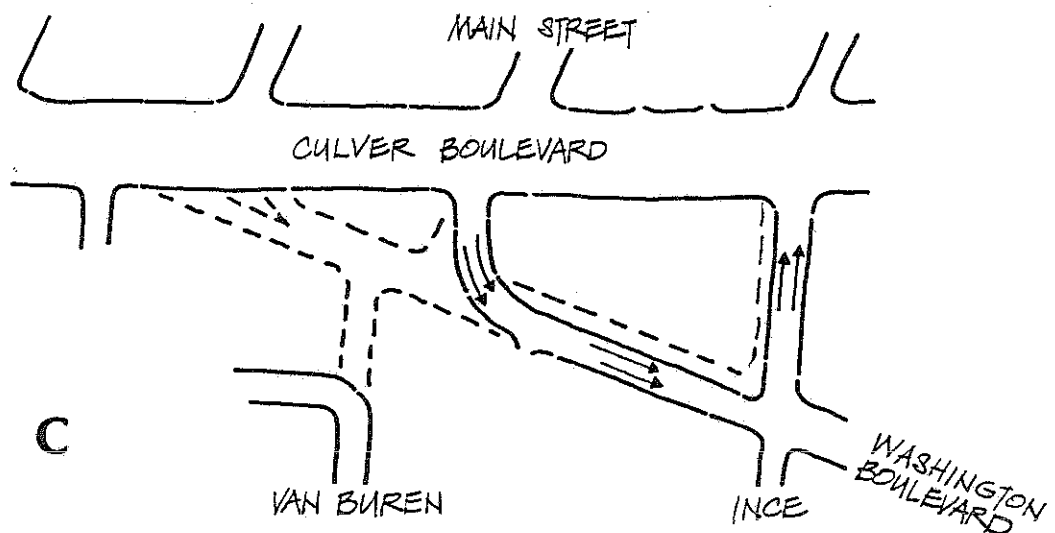
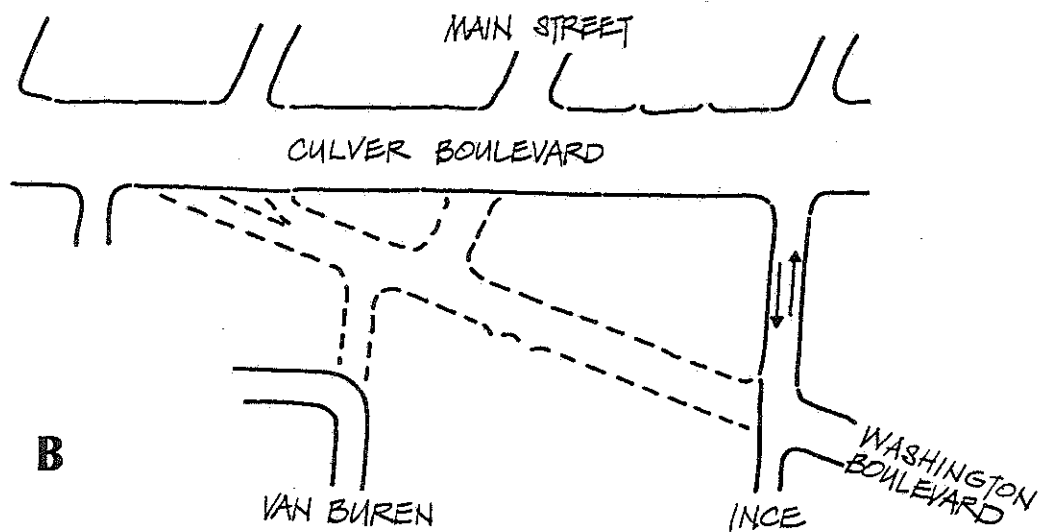
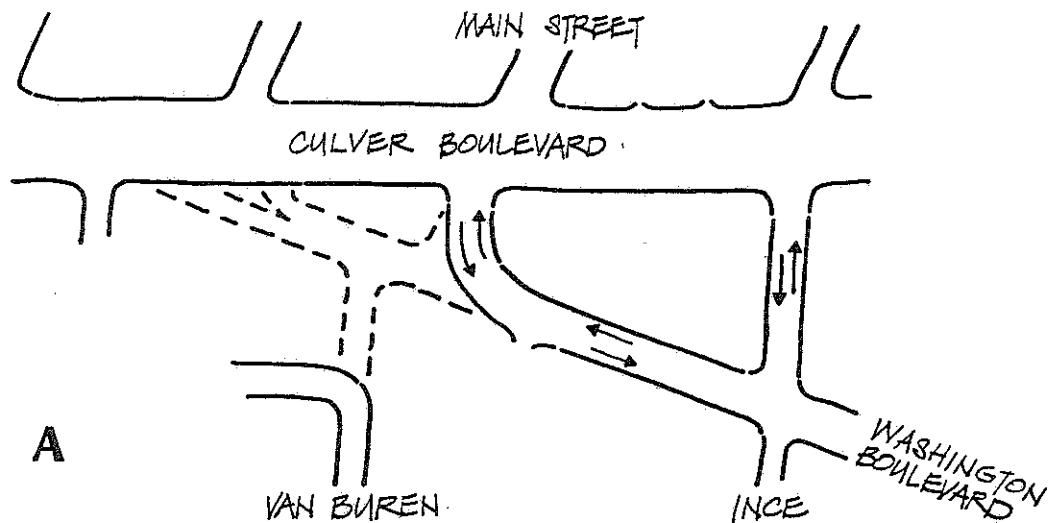
Ideally, planning should focus first on identifying desired land use patterns, with the street system designed to accommodate those patterns. In the case of Culver City, as in other communities in the midst of a major metropolitan area, much of the traffic is generated beyond the corporate boundaries and transportation planning is based on broader regional needs. Thus the future character of downtown is more heavily influenced by traffic considerations than would ordinarily be the case.

The most dominant feature in downtown Culver City is **Culver Boulevard**. Once the route of a trolley line, it has a remarkable width. Its right-of-way reaches 140 feet, more than ample to serve the some 25,000 trips per day it presently experiences. For most of its length, Culver Boulevard only needs to provide for two moving lanes plus turning bays, in each direction, requiring only 64 feet of pavement. An additional 16 feet would provide for parallel curb-side parking on both sides of the street.

Thus, for almost its entire length through downtown, Culver Boulevard could accommodate sidewalks of twenty-five feet in width, parallel curbside parking, and a landscaped sixteen foot median, without unduly constricting traffic flow. In the segment which must also carry Washington Boulevard traffic, the parking area should become a traffic lane, with sidewalks reduced to a still ample twenty-two foot width. (Suggestions that portions of Culver Boulevard be closed to provide more open space opportunities would mean that traffic would seek other routes, such as Washington Boulevard or even some neighborhood streets. These streets then would become overcrowded and need widening).

The most difficult aspect of the current street system is the confusing array of maneuvers associated with the **Culver-Washington "X"**. The major problem with the "X" is its elongated stem. The decision points are too far apart to treat as one location, yet are too close together to allow drivers room to comfortably sort themselves out. The situation is further aggravated by the intersections with Irving Place and Cardiff Avenue.

Solutions which the City has been considering include curving Washington Boulevard northward just west of Block C, closing its existing right-of-way south of the Culver Hotel. **Van Buren Place** would turn westward to intersect with Irving Place, running along the southern edge of Municipal Lot No. 3 (see Diagram A). This approach has much merit in its ability to clarify traffic movement, with the bonus of making 43,000 square feet of land available.



Two variations of this solution are offered for consideration. One possibility would be to divert Washington traffic north along Ince (Diagram B). This would create an additional 30-35,000 square feet of land area. On the negative side this option would mean an additional block which must carry both Culver and Washington traffic. Access to the Culver Studios would also be difficult (though not unsolvable).

A third alternative (Diagram C) would make Ince one-way north-bound between Washington and Culver and make Main-Washington one-way east-bound between Culver and Ince. This would allow an additional sixteen feet on the southern and eastern edges of Block C to be made available for other uses, including enlarging the footprint of a potential sub-surface parking facility on the site.

It is also recommended that **Irving Place** be closed to through traffic south of Culver, while preserving the right-of-way for emergency access. This would help to tighten up the "X" and allow the doors of the new Fire Station No. 1 to more directly align with the intersection, thus avoiding the need to jog around the medians. In addition, in conjunction with the reconfigured Van Buren, noted earlier, through traffic would be diverted away from the residential blocks just south of the business district.

Officials of Brotman Medical Center have indicated that their future plans include the possible closing of **Delmas Terrace** to unify their properties. This closure could be accommodated with no adverse impact on overall traffic flow.

Land Use

The market and traffic conditions, rather than acting as constraints, serve to focus a set of remarkable opportunities for Downtown Culver City. Its strategic location, favorable demographics, the interest of its citizens, and especially the amount of land available either in rights-of-way or on City/Agency-owned sites should accommodate and support the uses the community desires, provided they are appropriately located in a quality environment.

For the most part, the arrangement of land uses within downtown becomes rather obvious. A series of alternatives developed by the Technical Resource Team had many more commonalities than differences. Each, for instance, recognized the importance of integrating the significant visual and economic influences of The Culver Studios and the Columbia Studios into the downtown. Each called for parks and open spaces. The most obvious location for retail to be concentrated under any alternative is on and near

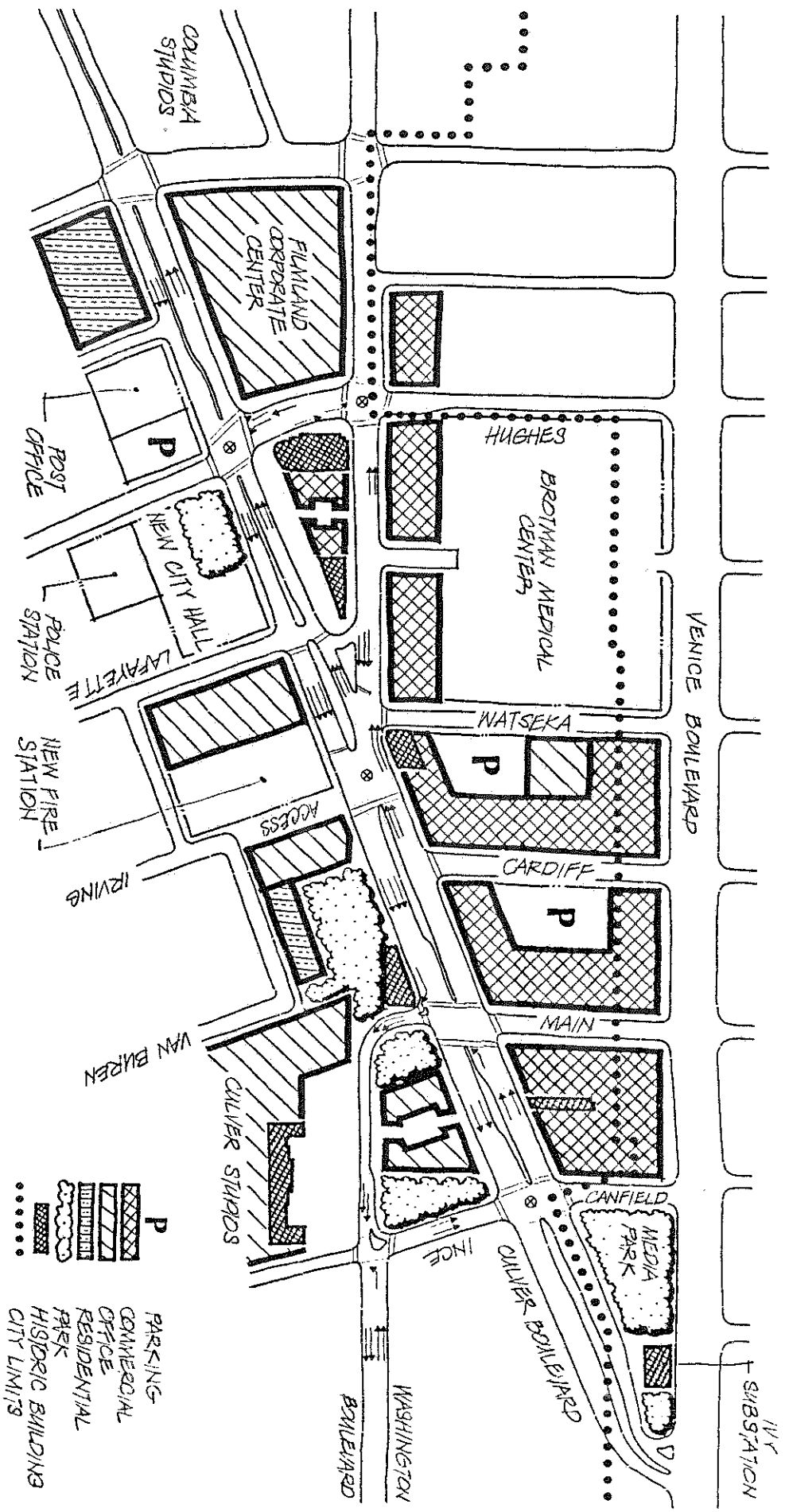


Exhibit: Land Use and Transportation Plan

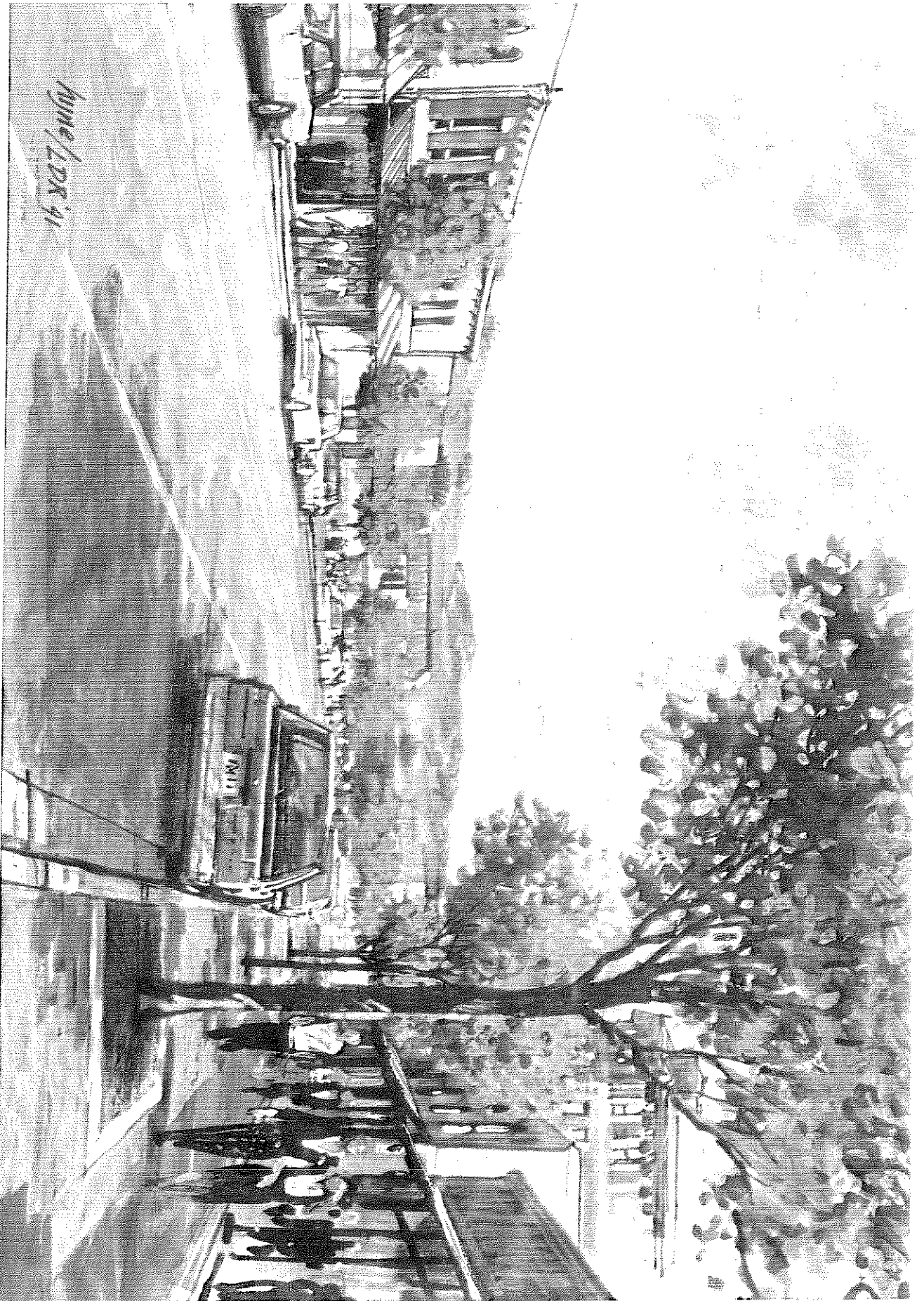
Main Street. The several historic structures are significant elements, in part because each enjoys a prominent location (and possibly because there are so few of them); these should be reinforced. Though sometimes maddening, the acute angle of intersection of Culver and Washington provides dramatic view corridors which should be maintained and capitalized upon as a part of establishing a sense of place for Downtown Culver City.

The Land Use Plan for downtown proposed by the Team begins with a recommendation that Main Street be reinforced and upgraded as the primary location for "small town" shopping. Its scale, historic identity, and presence of storefronts on both sides of the street lend themselves to the viability of this approach.

On the other hand, it faces several problems. Some of these relate to design, including a hodge-podge of storefront treatment which collectively sets a negative image. The streetscape environment also needs upgrading. The sidewalks are narrow with few pedestrian amenities. The practice of angle parking further detracts from pedestrian comfort, both physically and psychologically.

The plan also calls for extending the retail character along the north edge of the "X"; that is, along Washington from Hughes to Watseka and on Culver from Watseka to Canfield. The nature of this retail is somewhat broader than that proposed for Main Street. While some comparison shopping may evolve, this area may also include service-oriented retail, restaurants, and other uses which relate to the general public in both function and design. Presently there are some uses which are inconsistent with this objective. In the long run, it is hoped that future renovation or redevelopment activity will take advantage of the opportunity to convert the ground floor space accordingly.

Where possible, similar commercial uses should be encouraged throughout the remainder of that portion north of Culver Boulevard, including the frontages on Cardiff. This area includes several service areas and surface parking lots which should be considered for conversion to a series of passageways and courtyards with additional retail frontage.



hume/208 41

Exhibit:

Main Street

The renovation of the Ivy Substation and Media Park will enhance the entry to Culver city from Venice Boulevard. It should also leverage improvements to adjacent areas. The Culver Boulevard right-of-way in this block could accommodate an extra wide median, one with very dramatic gateway features or activities. In addition, the Park lends itself to anchoring a Farmers' Market, either on the site or in Canfield Avenue, or a permanent Farmers' market could be developed on properties to the west.

The Team recommends that the area between the Washington Building and the Culver Theater be redeveloped, though the existing small residential building could possibly be retained for theater-related uses. The new project would include a mid-block passageway which both physically and visually links Washington and Culver Boulevards; some particularly dramatic views of the new City Hall could be created at this location. Uses in this redevelopment should be for retail and restaurant activity, oriented toward the passageway as well as to the Washington and Culver frontages. Ideally, the ground floor uses in the Washington Building would eventually take on a retail character.

The area south of Culver Boulevard presents a dramatic opportunity to reshape the image of downtown. It is this area that contains the four parcels under control of either the City or the Redevelopment Agency and on which the Charette and the Resource Team were asked to focus. The remaining land features the Post Office and planned new City Hall and Fire Station, the historic Culver Studios and Culver Hotel, and the relatively new Meralta Office Plaza. These elements suggest that the southern edge of Culver Boulevard should take on a softer, almost campus-like setting with generous setbacks, landscaping, and open space.

Block C is proposed to contain a limited amount of low density office development, including potential ancillary uses, placed atop an underground parking structure. The parking structure should be sufficient in size to serve Block C uses as well as the retail along Main Street and north of Culver Boulevard.

Great care should be taken in the design of this project. Views of The Culver Studios are dramatic and should be protected. A variety of solutions are possible, including concentrating development at the northern and central portions of the site. Additional small structures may also be accommodated, creating essentially a village in an open space setting, maintaining corridor views while complementing the Media Park project.

The Coast Media property extends from Lafayette Place to Irving Place, buffering the Meralta Office Plaza and the new Fire Station from the residential block to the south. Several potential reuses, such as day care or housing, have been suggested and would be appropriate. The Team recommends, however, that the site be cleared to provide for construction of a new one-block street. This would allow closure of Irving Place just south of Culver Boulevard, reducing the amount of traffic passing through the abutting neighborhood. The Irving right-of-way would be maintained for fire station access only.

The Resource Team recommends that the surface parking lot adjacent to the Post Office, at the corner of Duquesne and Culver, be retained for the near future. As the new City Hall opens, the availability of surface parking, primarily to serve visitors, may prove to be an important asset. In the long-term, a number of possibilities are likely but there appears to be no urgency about making a decision on its eventual reuse at this time.

Curving Washington Boulevard northward at approximately Main Street, as described in the traffic section, allows some of its existing right-of-way to be added to the land area now contained in Municipal Parking Lot No. 9/A. This land area is proposed as the site of a Town Square.

Incorporating the Culver Hotel and possible new residential or other development at its western and southern edges, the Square would serve as a central "gathering place" in downtown. It should be designed to accommodate a variety of activities, primarily those that lend themselves to a more passive, intimate character. Thus, it would act as a counterpart to the larger public spaces at the new City Hall courtyard and at Media Park, each of which is intended to be the occasional site of outdoor performances.

Potentials for the site include its expansion eastward, exposing an additional view of The Culver Studios. Suggestions for a museum facility or restaurant on the ground floor of the Culver Hotel would be an excellent complement to the Square. Underground parking could also be provided at this site. This strategic location for the Town Square can serve to bring together the northern, southern, eastern and western portions of the downtown. In combination with the amount of available land, it will become the central focal point that downtown Culver City needs.

Urban Design

Several years ago, mission-style architecture was selected as the preferred theme for new public and private buildings in the downtown area. This concept is reflected in the Meralta Office Plaza and in elements of design for the new City Hall and for the new Fire Station. The Resource Team recommends that the choice of architectural style for individual structures be less constrained. More diverse architecture (within certain bounds) can lead to higher quality buildings and a more stimulating environment.

On the other hand, the streetscape and other public areas should become the unifying elements within downtown. Particular emphasis should be placed on Culver Boulevard. The wide right-of-way allows for significant enhancement of the environment for pedestrians and motorists alike without unduly constraining traffic flow.

The cross section of Culver Boulevard, shown below, illustrates how the existing right-of-way can accommodate sidewalks of up to 25' in width, a 16' wide landscaped median, and two moving and one parking lane for traffic in each direction. In the segment which also carries Washington Boulevard traffic, the parking lane would be used for moving traffic, at least during peak hours.

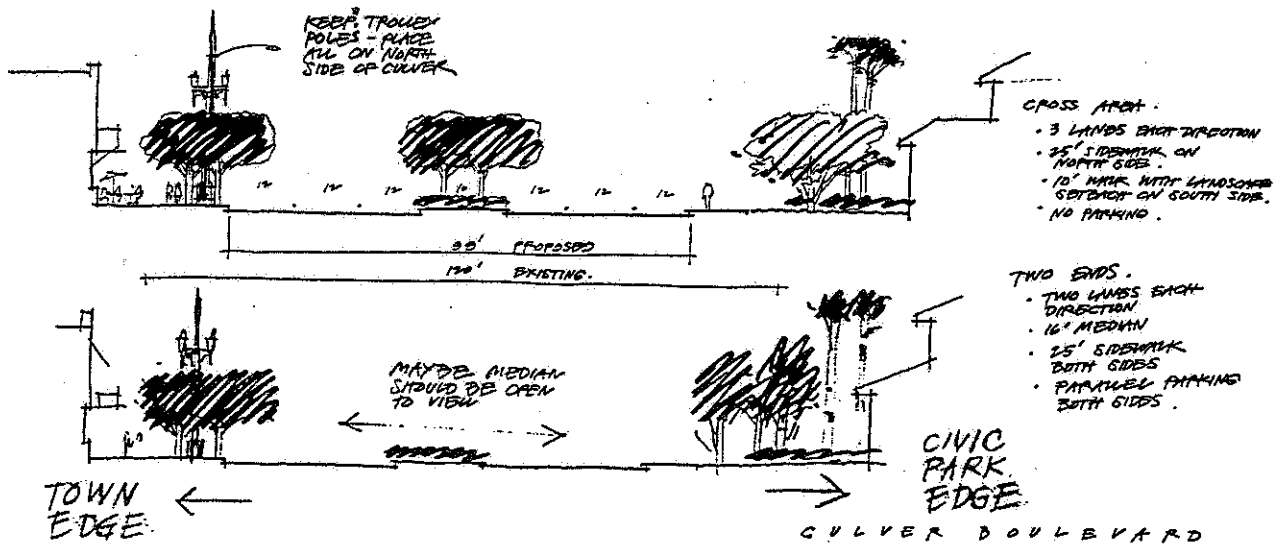


Exhibit: Culver Boulevard Cross Section

The north side of Culver should have a decidedly urban character. Buildings should be set at the front property line, and feature transparent windows. Building frontage should be continuous, gaps and interruptions to the extent possible. The streetscape should include a double row of trees, providing an opportunity for outdoor restaurants, seating, bus stops, and other pedestrian facilities.

In keeping with the softer, campus-like feeling proposed for the south side of Culver, the buildings are proposed to be set further back with grass, ground cover, and other landscape elements. Trees would be more randomly spaced, establishing a meandering character.

The type of tree recommended for Culver is a Camphor. This is a broad, spreading evergreen which can be pruned to an elm-like quality. Eventually, it takes on an arching character so that pedestrian-scaled signage can be seen beneath it.

Palm trees should be the dominant landscape element on Washington Boulevard. They should be placed together, in groups of three, as presently exists behind Columbia Studios. Different sizes of palms should be included in the same cluster. Landscape design is also important to the success of the proposed Town Square.

The row of palm trees recommended along Washington should continue through the Square on a matching alignment as a visual reminder of the historic street pattern. Care should be taken that street trees proposed for Culver Boulevard not block this historic view.

Streetscape improvements are also recommended for Main Street. Parking should be converted from angle to parallel to provide an opportunity to widen the sidewalks. A single row of trees and limited amenities should be provided to create a simple, yet quality shopping environment without infringing on pedestrian movement.

While trees are the most prominent streetscape feature, a host of additional elements contribute to the successful pedestrian movement. Benches, signs, trash receptacles, newspaper racks, telephone kiosks and traffic signals should be designed as a family while sensitive to function. Lighting should serve pedestrians as well as vehicles, illumination without becoming overwhelming. Paving materials should establish continuity and a sense of comfort, while considering its potential to be "matched" at a future time. Plant materials should consider maintenance implications, and primarily be limited to trees.



Block C, From Culver Boulevard

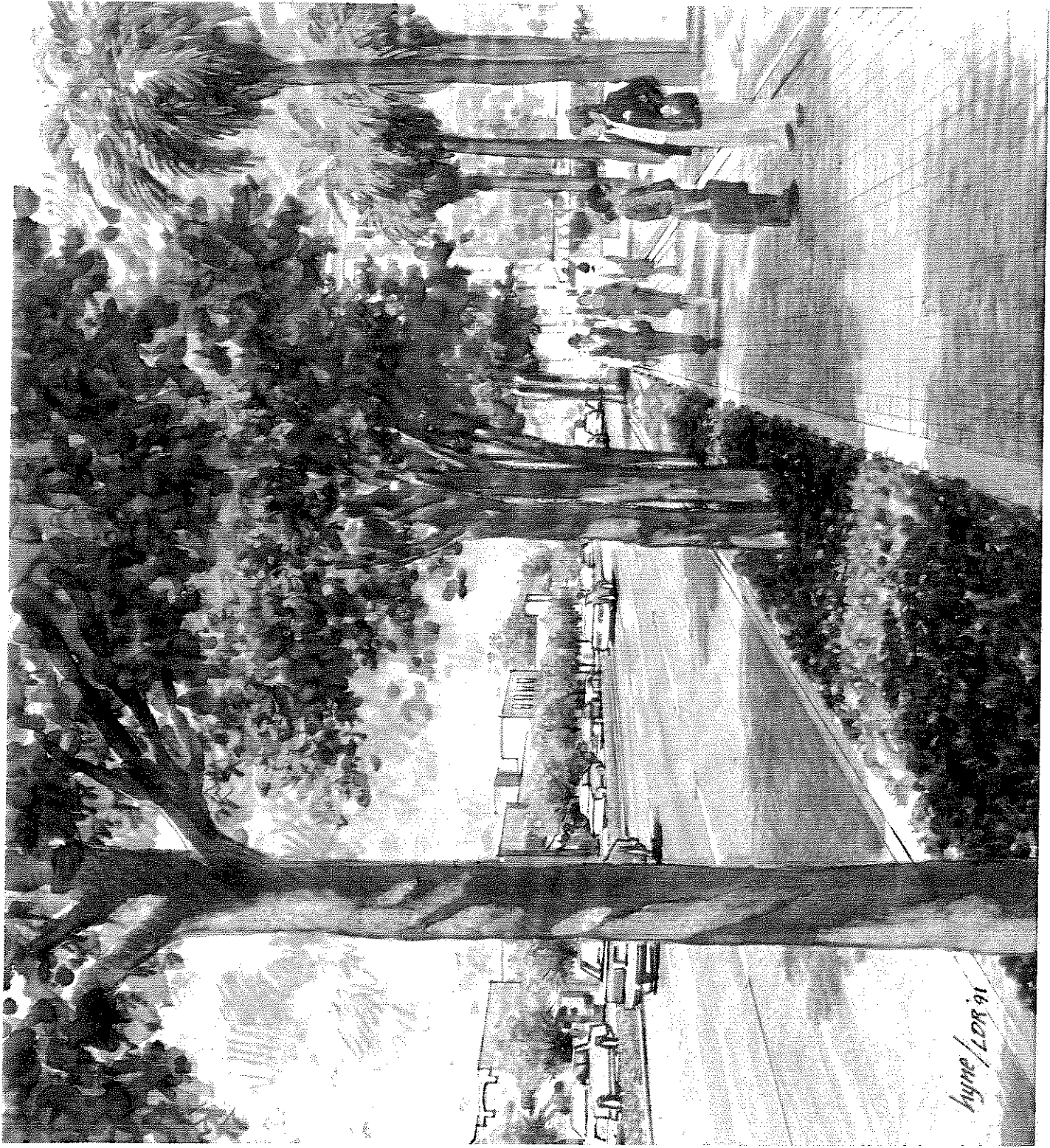


Town Square

The key to successful streetscape design is quality with simplicity. The streetscape should compliment, not compete with, the activities which abut it.

There are a variety of special features that can also be incorporated into the overall downtown urban design scheme. Elements such as public art help to provide interest and a sense of uniqueness. Brea, California, for instance, heavily promotes the many pieces of sculpture found in and near its downtown area.

A particularly intriguing suggestion from the Charette was to create a "Film Strip Walk", generally along a route from Columbia Studios to The Culver Studios. This might be accomplished by embedding medallions or other devices, each commemorating a locally produced major motion picture, in the sidewalks abutting Culver and Washington Boulevards.



Culver Boulevard Looking East

June / 2009

Conclusions and Next Steps

The Redevelopment Agency has an impressive record of accomplishments. Clearly, it has the authority and resources required to accomplish almost any set of physical improvements, so long as they are well considered and have community support. That it, or the City, already own or control much of the land area which is key to implementing this program is a tremendous asset.

How downtown Culver City looks ten years from now will stem from a whole series of decisions by the public and private sectors. The Plan is intended to serve as a frame of reference, guiding and directing such decisions over time. For the immediate future, there are three key issues to be addressed.

1. The most important item is infrastructure improvements, particularly along Culver Boulevard. The initial steps involve the realignment of Washington and concurrently undertaking the sidewalk, utilities, lighting, landscaping, and streetscape furniture improvements. This project demonstrates an early visible commitment to the spirit of the plan and addresses an urgent traffic problem.

At the same time, or soon thereafter, streetscape improvements should commence along Culver Boulevard and then along Washington. The improvements should be designed to comprehensively address the full set of street and sidewalk elements for compatibility in function and appearance and to minimize construction cost and disruption.

Next Steps:

- a. Focused traffic study to lead to final design regarding best option for Washington re-alignment at Block C.
- b. Schematic streetscape design for Culver Boulevard and Washington Boulevard throughout project length.
- c. Secure applicable approvals and land adjustments.
- d. Finalize design and initiate construction for Washington (Ince to Culver) and for Culver (Venice to Watseka).

-
2. Main Street area improvements should be part of an overall cooperative action program involving the City/Agency, property owners, and merchants. All those with a stake in the future success of Main Street should have a role in its implementation. Thus, streetscape and facade improvements should be implemented in conjunction with a series of additional steps to insure their lasting impact. The agency has further significant leverage by which to assist property owners and tenants through financial support for renovation of historic properties and for downtown commercial facade improvements.

Two further aspects of Main Street should be addressed concurrently with improved physical improvements. First, the present mixture of establishments reflects a series of ad hoc circumstances, with each store having only coincidental relationships to its neighbors. A number of cities across the country have implemented a program called Centralized Retail Management, involving a coordinated effort among owners and merchants to foster more harmonious merchandising and leasing practices. The City may want to consider making its financial participation in Main Street improvements contingent on agreement by the private sector to form such a program.

Second, it is recognized that the reputation as the "shortest Main Street in America" is derived from the fact that a portion of the block actually lies in the City of Los Angeles. While this may frustrate remedial action, the city limits line is hardly perceptible to the shopper -- nor should it be. Special effort should be given to securing the cooperation of Los Angeles and the affected property owners in an overall Main Street improvement program.

Next Steps:

- a. Prepare conceptual streetscape design for Main Street.
- b. Secure cooperation of City of Los Angeles.
- c. Secure cooperation of Main Street merchants and property owners.
- d. Initiate establishment of form of centralized or coordinated retailing program on Main Street (and beyond).

-
- e. **Gear Agency funding for facade and building renovations to conditions related to near-term implementation and cooperation.**
 - f. **Finalize Main Street streetscape program.**
3. Much of the proposed sidewalk widening along Culver Boulevard and Main Street requires converting curbside parking from angle to parallel. Obviously, this provides more useable space. In addition, cars pulling into an angled parking space have a subtly discomforting impact on pedestrians as their peripheral vision detects movement in their direction. On the other hand, cars parked parallel to the curb form a buffer, providing a sense of protection from moving traffic.

Normally, some curbside spaces are lost under a parallel parking alignment (although the presence of curbcuts, parking meters, loading zones, etc., may make the difference relatively minor). For now, the availability of parking does not appear to be a critical factor in Downtown Culver City, even in the vicinity of Main Street. As further development occurs, including bringing City Hall employees back to the area, this may change.

In anticipation of this event, one new parking structure is under construction and others are proposed. The most convenient levels of these structures (the lower levels of above-ground structures and the upper levels of below-grade structures) should be reserved for shoppers and other short term users.

Next Steps:

- a. **Insure that the Watseka Parking Garage design and operations reserve or direct short-term parkers to the lower floor(s), through pricing or access restrictions.**
- b. **Establish City policy to include short-term parking at most convenient locations in newer public-funded or assisted parking structures.**

Final Thoughts

For several reasons, the Resource Team left Culver City with a sense of confidence that a unique and dramatic sense of place should and could be created in downtown. The word "opportunity" emerged time and time again as proposals matched up with right-of-way and land area already under ownership or control of the Agency. It is significant that the film heritage which has given Culver City an International reputation is still reflected in the presence of the major studios in and near downtown. And, the quality close-in residential blocks are an asset missing in most communities.

Finally, our sense of confidence is based in large part on an awareness that the citizens of the community have played an active role in planning for its future. The facilitators did an excellent job in leading their small group discussions. The preparation and attention to detail before and during the Charette are a credit to Jody Hall-Esser and her staff. All of the Agency Board members attended every session, a highly visible show of support for the process.

Most of all, the Technical Resource Team extends its admiration and gratitude to the many enthusiastic and creative citizens who participated in the Charette, the greatest asset of all.

1. The first part of the document is a list of the names of the members of the committee who have been appointed to study the problem of the shortage of housing in the city of New York.

2. The second part of the document is a list of the names of the members of the committee who have been appointed to study the problem of the shortage of housing in the city of New York.

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8. The eighth part of the document is a list of the names of the members of the committee who have been appointed to study the problem of the shortage of housing in the city of New York.

9. The ninth part of the document is a list of the names of the members of the committee who have been appointed to study the problem of the shortage of housing in the city of New York.

10. The tenth part of the document is a list of the names of the members of the committee who have been appointed to study the problem of the shortage of housing in the city of New York.

Appendix A

Impression Board Comments (Selected)

Make Main Street the heart of a revitalized downtown.

Farmers Market at Ivy Station.

We need a Village Square where residents of all ages can go at different times of the day or week.

Culver Hotel must go for any meaningful development along with much of Culver Boulevard from Venice to Main.

Culver Hotel must stay! It is the heart of our downtown and our community's heritage!

Main Street retail expanded to other adjoining streets and theme created.

Need art in public places.

Cohesive landscape and hardscape.

Connect and focus activities and places.

There is nothing there!

The "Heart of Screenland's" downtown should have a village atmosphere and be called "Crossroads of the Stars".

Sidewalks too narrow - eliminate street parking to widen.

"Downtown" needs definition.

We get so attached to all the old crap. It just messes up the *whole city!*

Flowers, trees and plants!!

Great City!

(Picture of person driving vehicle down Venice Boulevard with driver saying, "Where the hell is Main Street [downtown Culver City]?")

Open a farmers market in the downtown area.

Movie themes.

We need a community museum in the downtown area!

Use studios as *theme* for downtown.

Pedestrian horror!

DOWNTOWN CHARETTE

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

CULVER CITY REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY

1990-1991

Dr. James D. Boulgarides
Chairman and Council Member

Mike Balkman
Vice-Chairman and Council Member

Steven M. Gourley
Mayor and Agency Member

Paul A. Jacobs
Vice-Mayor and Agency Member

Jozelle J. Smith
Agency and Council Member

1991-1992

Mike Balkman
Chairman and Council Member

Jozelle J. Smith
Vice-Chair and Council Member

Paul A. Jacobs
Mayor and Agency member

Dr. James D. Boulgarides
Vice-Mayor and Agency Member

Steven M. Gourley
Agency and Council Member

PUBLIC PARTICIPANTS

DOWNTOWN BUSINESSPERSONS/COMMERCIAL PROPERTY OWNERS

Altman, Bernard
Barber, Rob
Brown, Edward
Byers, John
Catlett, Louis
Cline, Barbara
Drucker, Helen
Freeman, Stuart
Heimerl, Brian
Meshul, Renee
Ownes, Michael
Plato, George
Sirchia, Robert
Walton, Dr. Howard

DOWNTOWN MULTI-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY OWNERS/TENANTS

Anderson, Cary
Casey, Jean
Gazal, Joseph
Hefferman, Patricia
Jahen, Carlos
Guillemet, Roland
Heitman, Susan
Johnston, Andrew
Karp, Irving
Kofford, Doug
Schaeffer, James
Wrigglesworth, Arthur

DOWNTOWN SINGLE-FAMILY PROPERTY OWNERS/OCCUPANTS

Ciron, Richard
Grubbauer, Melinda
Milder, Dan

PLANNING COMMISSION

Harris, Dorothy
Wolkowitz, Edward

HUMAN SERVICES & PARKS COMMISSION

Hadley, Patricia
Sloane, Mark

CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION

Giarraffa, Tim
Steinberg, Robert

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Shapiro, Miriam

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Barton, Jack
Fate, Michael
Rose, Steve

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Taylor, Jacqueline
Wells, Harry

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Ehrlich, Madeline
Knott, Dorothy
Walsh, Bonnie

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Stodel, Max

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Alexander, Crystal
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Greenspan, Ethan
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Gardner, Steve
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Schwartz, Stephen
Stitt, Dorothy
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Taylor, Ralph
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Wilkening, Bee
Yu, Edward
Zermeno, George

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James Cloar
Principal
LDR International, Inc.
Lead Consultant

Frank Dreckman
Sr. Urban Planner/Designer
Urban Design Studio

Frank Fuller
Associate Principal
ELS/Elbasani & Logan Architects

Patrick A. Gibson
Senior Vice-President
Barton-Aschman Associates, Inc.

Kathe Head
Principal
Keyser Marston Associates, Inc

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Principal
McGee & Associates

Kathy Rosenow
Principal
Rosenow Spevacek Group

Pat Shoemaker
Principal Planner
City of Irvine

Andrew Spurlock
Principal
Spurlock Poirier Landscape Architects

James Wilson
President
30th Street Architects, Inc.

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Linda Shimada
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Mark Zierten
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CHCG Architects, Inc.
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EDAW

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Susan Berg
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Joe Pannone
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Art Kassan
Agency-Consulting Traffic Engineer

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Pam Robinson
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