



Study Mission delegates included business and civic leaders.

Re-inventing urban assets and neighborhoods

Study Mission to Los Angeles underlines creative opportunities for Silicon Valley spaces

Three dozen delegates for the San Jose Silicon Valley Chamber's 2013 Study Mission, Oct. 16-18, 2013, toured Union Station, Pasadena, the Los Angeles River District, the city's Central City downtown district and NBCUniversal Studios.

Among other strategies and concepts, the Study Mission showed business and civic leaders how:

- High density housing can be beautifully integrated into an historic neighborhood,
- Hazardous or liability-laden assets can be turned into destinations and provide a sense of place,
- Smart use of design guidelines can encourage developers to take on high-risk remodeling projects,
- City government needs to provide certainty for developers and creative design guidelines and compromises on building codes can help preserve existing structures, and
- Residents are needed to first live in a downtown area before businesses can be enticed back.



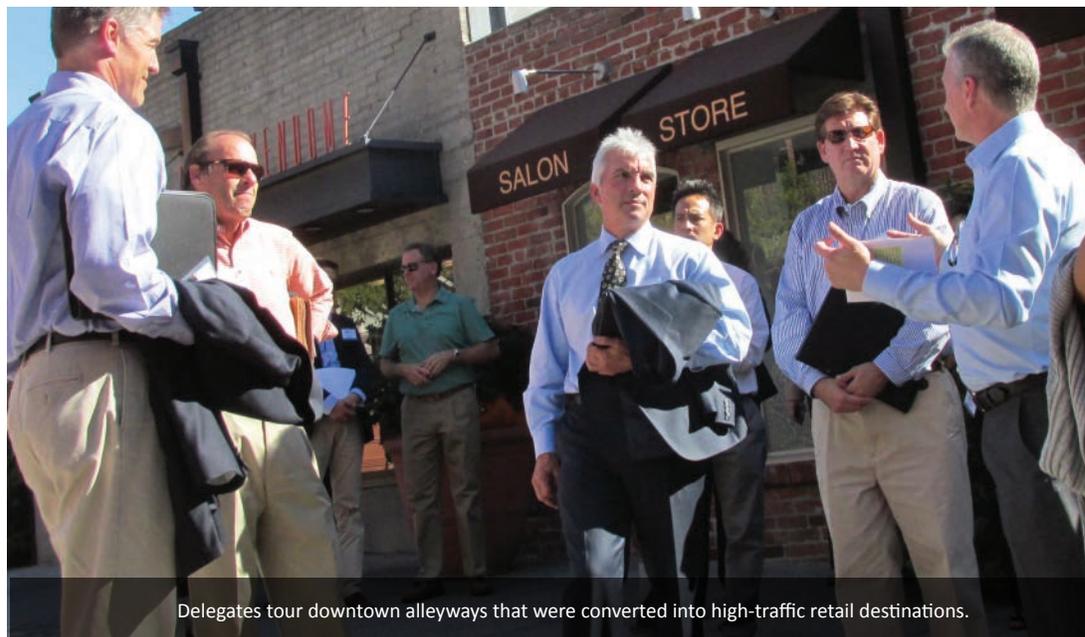
High-density housing hides behind creative design and landscaping.

In historic neighborhoods: Blending high-density residential

Silicon Valley cities face this challenge: How to blend high-density housing into existing and sometimes historic neighborhoods.

In Pasadena, delegates witnessed how Los Angeles-based Creative Housing Associates used smart design, tapped into public financing and brought together public-private partnerships to construct a transit-oriented development, a half block from the Gold Line light rail. The development consists of 67 homes on an acre-plus in an established neighborhood of historic bungalows.

Mission Meridian Village looks like it's been part of the Old Pasadena neighborhood for decades. A new boulevard style three-story brick building of street-level retail spaces and upper-story condos anchors the development that fronts the commercial street and also camouflages an underground public parking garage. Next to the brick condos is a classic bungalow home—a duplex—that begins the residential portion and in fact masks three-story court-yard bungalows reminiscent of turn-of-the-20th century Southern California style. Design features such as first-story porch roofs that match the height of existing single-story homes across the street help meld the new with the old. During the downturn five years ago, nearby single-family homes dropped 16 percent, but Mission Meridian Village



Delegates tour downtown alleyways that were converted into high-traffic retail destinations.

prices increased 10 percent. Prices now range \$500,000 to \$1 million for the units.

Creating new urban spaces: Under-used assets, flexible permitting

Very much like San Jose, Los Angeles is more than 200 years old, and the city very much is having to live with past decisions: there are not many green fields left for development. Thus, the city's economic development experts talk a lot about "adaptive reuse" of buildings and infrastructure.

The city's river district of industrial sites and working class neighborhoods is one area of focus. It's called the Cornfields/Arroyo Seco Specific Plan, and according to City Planner Claire Bowen, will be a fountain of urban renewal not seen anywhere else in Los Angeles.

The specific plan took six years to develop, and a vast array of stakeholders made the project stronger. A focus, too, was to keep blue-collar residents from being priced out of the area by gentrification.

Three zoning districts were created to allow flexibility and creativity to transform the area: the urban village, the urban center and the urban innovation. Each allow varying degrees of residential density and mix of commercial and manufacturing—so jobs are kept where people live.

"We still see this as a jobs area," Bowen said. "Only 8 percent of the land in L.A. is zoned industrial, so it's really important for a city to

have jobs. A city with just residents is not a strong city. All of the zones allow developers to build up to 100 percent industrial on their land. The urban village zone, for instance, allows up to 90% residential.



Plans to make the L.A. River a destination include terracing and adding pedestrian walkways.

Notably, the project areas have a completed environmental impact report. "We are saying to developers if you follow the rules and you know the design standards, let's try something completely different." One aspect of the project different—especially for car-crazy L.A.: There are zero parking requirements. The zoning calls for bicycle parking and small

accommodation for electric charging spaces and share cars. The city expects the project to attract so-called early adapters and innovators: "Exactly what we want."

Other aspects to the Cornfield/Arroyo Specific Plan:

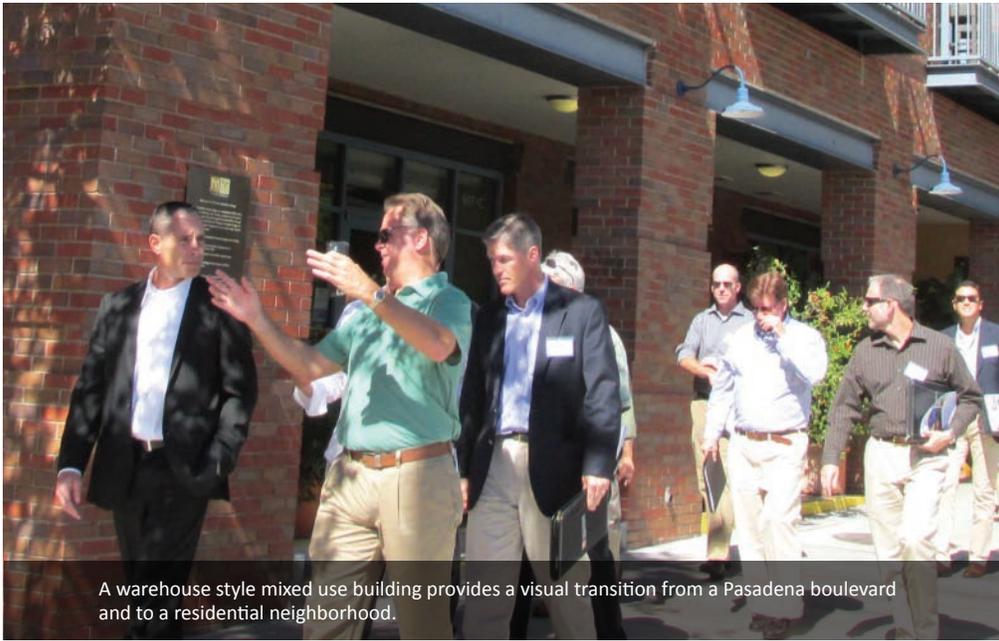
- All landscaping has to be native and low water use,
- There's incentive for right-of-ways down to the river and for pedestrian paseos,
- Building coverage on lots is capped at 50%. "We require open space!" and
- Incentives have been built in for residential affordable housing.

L.A. River: Yes, this river can be attractive

When the Army Corps of Engineers channelized the Los Angeles River, it solved a flood problem but created another one—a 51-mile concrete corridor of urban blight. Now, Angelinos are trying to put lipstick on the proverbial pig: Turn the river into a

regional asset and destination. Fortunately, one third of light rail stops in Los Angeles are within one mile of the river, and the river corridor has characteristics that can be flexed to good use:

- Bicycle, pedestrian and equestrian trails that can be linked to serve commuters and recreation,



A warehouse style mixed use building provides a visual transition from a Pasadena boulevard and to a residential neighborhood.

- Habitat for wildlife, including more than 200 bird species that nest along the river,
- Space for recreation and quality of life: That new Cornfield/Arroyo Seco project will have hundreds of new residents who need a place to stroll on the weekends and evenings, and
- Source for groundwater recharge.

Also on the agenda is to develop the river channel by adding terraced landscaping down to the river water level. Other initiatives, include:

- Bicycle share programs at light rail stops near the river to encourage commuting and recreation,
- A \$10 million signature cable bridge—already nearly half funded by one individual—to connect bike paths and draw attention to the river from nearby freeway traffic,
- Patrols to provide public safety and reduce loitering by river rangers and river ambassadors, the latter made up of L.A. Conservation Corps youth, and
- Viewing decks for storm surges: a storm-fueled river can be very entertaining.

Downtown Center: Rehabbing the functionally obsolete

In the last 11 years, downtown L.A.'s population grew from 18,000 to 45,000 residents because of new market-rate housing and remodeling of older structures. For

revitalization of Los Angeles' downtown center, the password is "adaptive re-use," more evidence of business and civic leaders creatively building upon the past.

Executive Director Hal Bastian of the Los Angeles Downtown Center Improvement District, is in charge of bringing more business, residents—and life—to a cityscape that had by the early 1990s become another place where you could, yes, roll a bowling ball down the streets and not hit anyone. Upper stories of buildings along Broadway were vacant for 40 years. But now, residents—both young and old—have returned to live. Among initiatives and strategies that have resulted in attracting developers, residents and businesses:

- Building codes that allow preservation of historic building materials. Historic doors, for instance, are permitted in exchange for beefed-up sprinkler systems,
- Earthquake standards for rehabbed buildings do not have to match standards for new construction,
- Dog-friendly apartments and fenced dog parks built by the district. With residents allowed to bring their dogs has come a public safety benefit: More people walking the streets during daylight and nighttime hours,
- Turning under-utilized space into public benefits, such as areas near freeway off-ramps and under freeways that are planned for more dog parks,

PRESENTING SPONSOR



GOLD

Cal Beverage Association
Microsoft

SILVER

Comcast Business
Oakland A's
San Jose Water
Company
Santa Clara Valley Water District
Ruth & Going

- Kid-friendly events that attract families. A Halloween night in the park let kids knock on "doors" for trick-or-treat. The LADCID used the lists of attendee parents to find out if they wanted a charter school in the downtown—the parents did, and the improvement district helped get the school started,
- Even more dog-people events: The local cathedral offers a "Dog Day Afternoon" over the past seven years has built to 900 dogs and 1,400 people, and
- The district spends \$4 million on cleaning up the downtown streets and security. "It has to be safe and clean" to attract and keep people, "Or the district won't have anything to develop," Bastian said.

Delegation Wrap-Up Comments: What L.A. strategies can be brought to Silicon Valley?

The chamber delegation coalesced strategies and ideas on lessons learned from the Study Mission. Best practices from Los Angeles that might be applied in San Jose and the region include:

- Creative use of under-utilized space: Dog parks along freeway underpasses, like the one at Highway 280 and Monterey Road. We can take a place that's a hazard or liability today and turn it into a benefit for the community,



L.A.'s Public Market celebrates the city's diversity and is a big destination for residents and visitors.

- A better job of featuring or explaining our downtown assets and make more interesting use of space. Look at entertainment and other venues facing the Guadalupe River Trail; beautify the area leading up to the S.J. International Airport—making it a more attractive gateway,
- Changes in the floor-area-ratio quota/ allocation to developers for affordable housing,
- San Jose actually has multiple downtowns, but a “sameness” that has been enforced. We need to brand different areas of the city to highlight their attributes,
- Successful cities have housing areas that surround distinct neighborhoods and cultivate attraction of people’s distinct personalities to those neighborhoods they like. “If you are that personality, you move to that area.” The L.A. public market celebrated ethnic diversity. Districts such as around the Sacred Heart Church can be improved with celebration/promotion of micro-businesses. We need to create distinct areas and bring in the amenities, as well as doing transition housing densities for high-density housing into neighborhoods. South Pasadena did it well. The elevation design of three-story bungalow homes was dynamic,
- San Jose can learn from Los Angeles’ gridlock which happened slowly. We can learn from L.A. and look at investing in additional transportation tax that gets a system to connect the broader community with the airport, etc.,
- The city can readjust its outlook as did L.A. River Corp to innovate toward solutions, and “solve for the opportunity and not the

- problem.” Everything we do should be framed toward the bigger picture of city-building—it’s not just housing, transportation or jobs—it’s all together. How do we create quality to life? Every speaker talked about design and was proud of it—it’s a tangible and intangible product that creates an environment and further investment,
- Examples of office buildings converted to housing are worth pursuing in San Jose and elsewhere. Older buildings with distinctive architecture should be preserved and incentivized into rehabbing into living spaces. We ought to replicate what the city of L.A. has done here, especially with regard to permitting and planning. We learned that when L.A. gave developers certainty, development occurred,
 - Being creative with design guidelines that call for no parking requirements. On one hand, that’s risky for developers; on the other hand, our parking lots are generally empty at night,
 - Silicon Valley—the county and surrounding—needs a film commissioner and our local jurisdictions to establish incentives like San Francisco did that help fill in the gaps of the state’s film-making tax credit,
 - L.A.’s creative use of sides of buildings for artwork and advertising could be replicated in San Jose, and
 - L.A.’s nightlife is cool and attracts a certain kind of person—the young person—to downtown. Need more entertainment, restaurants, clubs, to attract young person. Rooftop bars are big in New York, Chicago, San Diego, too. How do we foster that? 🍷

Participating Businesses & Organizations

- Arcadia Development Company
- Bozzuto & Associates Insurance Services
- City of San Jose
- Economic Development, City of San Jose
- Parks and Recreation, City of San Jose
- Public Works, City of San Jose
- Planning Dept., City of San Jose
- Comcast Business
- Garden City Construction
- Goodwill of Silicon Valley
- HMH Engineers
- Hoge, Fenton, Jones & Appel, Inc.
- Meacham/Oppenheimer, Inc.
- Microsoft Corporation
- Oakland A’s
- Pacific Gas & Electric Company
- Ruth and Going, Inc.
- San Jose Mineta International Airport
- San Jose Water Company
- Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority
- Santa Clara Valley Water District