



MEMORANDUM

DATE: January 19, 2024

TO: Vincent P. Bertoni, Director of Planning
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FROM: Traci Park
Councilwoman, Eleventh District

SUBJECT: Council District 11 Community Plan Update Listening Session Report

From September through December 2023, Council District 11 staff conducted 39 listening sessions, gathering feedback from local stakeholders about the policies and zoning maps proposed in the Westside Community Plan Update program. This report is the result of the community input we received from our constituents and its findings provide insights into what we heard throughout these listening sessions.

After reviewing participants' comments and suggestions, our office recommends that Planning staff incorporate the following guiding principles when considering revisions and improvements to the Westside Community Plans.

- **Sustainability and Walkability.** Locate higher-density residential and mixed-use developments in proximity to public transportation hubs and commercial corridors.
- **Respect Neighborhood Character.** Ensure that new developments align with the established architectural style, scale, and character of the existing homes in the neighborhood.
- **Scale and Density.** Maintain an appropriate scale and density that complements the surrounding residences, avoiding overly large or dense structures that may disrupt the neighborhood's feel, especially in or adjacent to single family neighborhoods.
- **Green Spaces and Landscaping.** Prioritize green spaces and landscaping to enhance the visual appeal of the neighborhood, provide recreational areas.



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- **Parking Considerations.** Plan for sufficient parking to accommodate residents and guests without causing congestion or encroaching on the neighborhood's aesthetic or street parking.
- **Infrastructure Compatibility.** Ensure that new developments align with the existing infrastructure, including utilities, roads, and public services, to prevent strain on resources and maintain a seamless integration.
- **Community Engagement.** Encourage active participation and input from the community during the planning and development process to address concerns and incorporate local preferences and feedback.
- **Affordability and Housing Diversity.** Strive for a mix of housing types to accommodate various income levels, promoting socio-economic diversity while addressing the need for affordable housing.
- **Preservation of Historic Elements.** Protect and preserve historically significant buildings, landmarks, or features that contribute to the neighborhood's cultural and historical identity.
- **Transparency and Communication.** Foster transparent communication between developers, local authorities, and residents to keep the community informed about proposed developments and changes.
- **Environmental Sustainability.** Promote sustainable building practices, tree preservation, energy-efficient designs, and eco-friendly initiatives to minimize the environmental impact of new developments.
- **Pedestrian-Friendly Design.** Encourage the creation of walkable neighborhoods with pedestrian-friendly infrastructure, such as sidewalks and crosswalks, to enhance safety and connectivity.

Background

Since April 2023, my staff and I have been overwhelmed with calls and emails regarding the Community Plan Updates taking place in four Community Plans within the Eleventh District: West Los Angeles, Venice, Palms-Mar Vista-Del Rey, and Westchester-Playa del Rey. Although the Community Plan Update process and its associated outreach fall under the purview of the Department of City Planning, I immediately recognized the importance of ensuring that my office remained responsive to the growing number of constituents reaching out to us. These individuals conveyed a range of sentiments, including questions, doubts, concerns, opposition, support, appreciation, and suggestions.



Many constituents reached out asking for more opportunities to engage with the City on the Community Plan Update process. With that in mind, I instructed my staff to conduct listening sessions to gather information from community stakeholders regarding the draft Community Plan Update land use maps and materials.

For the last several months, my staff and I met with constituents from every corner of the district, actively seeking their direct input. My goal was to foster collaboration with the Planning Department staff and strengthen their community outreach efforts. I recognized that achieving this in a meaningful way was essential to meet the demands of the situation. The people of CD 11 deserve nothing less, and we are grateful for the participation of City Planning staff during the process.

Community Plan Update

The Los Angeles Department of City Planning is currently in the process of updating the City's thirty-five Community Plans, which serve as crucial documents guiding policy and land use in the diverse neighborhoods of Los Angeles. Periodic updates to the Community Plans are essential to ensuring their continued effectiveness as tools for guiding growth and development in response to changes in the areas they govern.

The Westside Community Plan Update, which includes **West Los Angeles, Venice, Palms - Mar Vista - Del Rey**, and **Westchester - Playa del Rey**, is part of this comprehensive effort to reflect the evolving needs and priorities of the community.

Listening Sessions Overview

The Westside Community Plan Update's listening sessions were held by the Council Office between September and December. These sessions were designed to foster open communication, aligning with the broader goal of the City to ensure that the updated plans are responsive to the dynamic and diverse nature of our district's neighborhoods.

These sessions were publicized through various channels, including announcements at Neighborhood Council meetings, community events, interactions with our office, and through our weekly newsletter. There was no requirement to participate other than an interest in the Community Plan Update process. Listening sessions were held between Council Office staff and individual residents, representatives from Neighborhood and Community Councils, representatives from community and stakeholder organizations, entire residential blocks, and groups formed specifically to advocate on behalf of the general public during the course of the Community Plan Update process.



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A total of 39 listening sessions were conducted, each ranging from 30 minutes to an hour in duration. The sessions allowed our office to engage with almost 100 community members. With the exception of a few in-person meetings, nearly all of the sessions were conducted virtually. Every listening session was as unique as its participants, yet this report will show that several recurrent themes emerged consistently across these engagements. In addition to the feedback heard at each session, constituents provided written comments via email.

Findings

This section outlines key findings from the listening sessions. Through direct engagement with community members, stakeholders, and local leaders, we gathered perspectives, concerns, and ideas that will inform Planning staff as they work on the next iteration of the community plans.

- The most mentioned topic among participants was the densification (i.e., upzoning) proposed in the land use maps and related impacts on traffic, parking, infrastructure, and City services.
- Almost all of the feedback came from residents who live in a neighborhood undergoing a Community Plan Update – business owners, employees, and students were less likely to participate in the listening sessions even if they worked or dwelt within these neighborhoods.
- Despite strong criticism of the proposed land use maps, stakeholders we spoke with were generally interested in improving the plan and anticipated revisions to the plan.
- The desire for greater transparency was a consistent theme – when asked to provide specific recommendations, participants said written notice should be provided by mail and requested more opportunities to participate in the formal process along the way.
- Most participants were homeowners of single-family homes, many of whom had owned their property for over a decade.
- The impact of state housing laws was often brought up as a point of contention.
- While Los Angeles' declining population was mentioned as a counterpoint to increasing density, most participants acknowledged the need for more housing.
- A recurring theme throughout the sessions was the consistent concern raised by participants regarding the potential impact on property values and personal lives.
- While the focus of the listening sessions was on the Community Plan Update, participants used the opportunity to discuss other topics such as public safety, transportation issues, citywide policies, and specific developments and projects.



West Los Angeles-Sawtelle

CD 11 held 5 listening sessions with the stakeholders of WLA-Sawtelle. A total of 22 people attended these sessions. Takeaways from these sessions are provided below:

- At all of the listening sessions, there was a perception that the Planning Department's drafts for WLA-Sawtelle saw more significant changes from the Draft Concepts (2020) compared to other communities, leading to a sense of inequity in the distribution of densification impacts.
 - Sawtelle Japantown residents stated that the area is parking challenged and has already seen increased densification due to its current zoning.
 - Concerns were expressed about the loss of single-family homes and affordable housing. Residents also expressed concerns about the displacement of Japanese and Oaxacan communities.
- Many constituents were deeply concerned with protecting the historic significance of this distinctly Japanese/Japanese-American community.
 - This community became the home of Japanese and Japanese-Americans after WWII-era oppression.
 - Protecting the R1 status of homes belonging to them is of paramount importance.
- Some constituents noted that Planning staff should consider concentrating the most significant changes along Bundy Drive, and particularly near the Expo/Bundy Metro station.
- Requests were made for green space to be made available in response to increased residential density.
- Participants mentioned that increasing density would add to traffic congestion.
- Participants have expressed concern with the impact of Citywide policies such as ED1 on the historic core of Sawtelle; further, there's a grievance that most of the West LA community plan area is exempt from ED1 - due to R1 status - while Sawtelle is not exempt.

Venice

CD 11 held 5 listening sessions with the stakeholders in Venice. A total of 27 people attended these sessions. Takeaways from these sessions are provided below:

- One recurring theme was the idea that Venice is a unique coastal community, with an emphasis on its history and proximity to the coast.
 - Preserving the R1 development patterns and retaining existing affordable housing are of paramount importance.



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- Constituents expressed that heavy traffic and scarce parking is a known issue, and with the new changes in the plans, they are afraid these issues would only get worse.
- Repeated concerns included the lack of transparency in decision making, plan changes, and data used to justify upzoning. There was a strong desire for more information to be shared with the community.
- Improved beach access and the need for better parking options for visitors were emphasized.
- Participants brought up gentrification and the loss of affordable housing, highlighting the importance of balancing the needs of residents and business/tourism/development.
- Residents who lived along Rose Avenue or Penmar Avenue saw no need to bring commercial zoning onto mainly residential streets, stating that there are enough commercial uses in the area.
- There was a desire for more green space to meet the demands of increased densification.

Palms - Mar Vista - Del Rey

CD 11 held 2 listening sessions with the stakeholders in Del Rey. A total of 5 people attended these sessions. Takeaways from these sessions are provided below:

- Constituents did not believe there was adequate community engagement or outreach. Many of the comments expressed frustration with not enough actual residents being involved.
 - Lack of advertisement was a major criticism.
- In all listening sessions, there was concern about what data was being used to justify the upzoning of specific areas.
- There was also mention of the lack of bike lanes providing north-south routes. Some said they did not understand why certain existing bike lanes were cut off without a connecting bike lane making it difficult for bikers to travel.
- Some members of the Del Rey Neighborhood Council expressed a sense of being overlooked, stating that their feedback, communicated through motions and letters to the Planning Department since 2017, had not been adequately considered.

CD 11 held 10 listening sessions with the stakeholders in Mar Vista. A total of 13 people attended these sessions. Takeaways from these sessions are provided below:



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- During all listening sessions, constituents raised concerns about the Mar Vista Oval, highlighting its historical significance in the community. They expressed confusion and sought clarification on why this location was targeted for densification.
- In all sessions, constituents expressed that there was not sufficient outreach done to residents and that the department should not just rely on advisory groups for feedback.
- In all sessions, there were also a lot of requests for more green spaces in Mar Vista since they only have one park.
- During every session, participants expressed significant apprehensions about the upzoning and commercialization of their single-family neighborhoods. They emphasized the potential loss of the tranquility and safety that initially attracted them to invest in their properties.
- Constituents remarked on the complexity of the plans, expressing difficulty in understanding them.
- Participants recommended that upzoning be limited to major thoroughfares such as National, Sepulveda, Venice, and Centinela.

Westchester - Playa del Rey

CD 11 held 17 listening sessions with the stakeholders in Westchester-Playa del Rey. A total of 30 people attended these sessions. Takeaways from these sessions are provided below:

- In nearly all sessions, there was a feeling that Westchester had already taken on a disproportionately high share of densification in recent years.
 - This community was already very concerned about the impact of existing state laws and current development incentives related to land use and their impact on the neighborhood.
 - This community's essential character being suburban since its initial establishment in the post-War landscape, there was a strong aversion to the reduction or elimination of the single-family home nature of its main neighborhoods.
 - In several listening sessions, there was an expressed preference for more targeted approaches to densification that recommended the rezoning of specific sites instead of entire neighborhoods.
 - In several listening sessions, concerns were raised about the potential impact of the proposed densification of residential areas on Rent Stabilized Ordinance (RSO) units.
- Traffic conditions played a significant role in the arguments against densification.
- Concerns were voiced about the Planning Department's outreach efforts, including those carried out through the Westside Community Plan Update Advisory Group, indicating dissatisfaction with the outreach process.



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- In many listening sessions, there was skepticism about the data behind the regional housing numbers allocation figures that had been presented as the reason for residential densification.
 - Recent population decrease per the latest Census was cited as a reason to hold off on upzoning.
- Many mentioned that the cumulative impacts of Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) on the neighborhood's corridors had not been considered at all or strongly enough by the Planning Department.
 - Though LAX is not within the Community Plan Area, its greatest impacts are felt within the Westchester Community Plan Area.
 - Ongoing expansion at LAX has been a major concern of this community over the last few decades. Development of a terminal, a concourse, an automated tram, and a large consolidated rental car facility to accommodate greater numbers of travelers are a major source of concern.
- There was considerable neighborhood awareness among the major areas of Westchester-Playa del Rey (i.e., Kentwood or Osage), with participants almost always leading with neighborhood-specific concerns.
 - Neighborhoods identified as more diverse or affordable were frequently the focal point of concerns regarding the potential inequities associated with densification.
- There was a widespread desire for infrastructure improvements and more green space.
- In 2 listening sessions, clear support was voiced for the Community Plan Update, with only minimal suggestions provided.

Next Steps

The transmission of this report to the Planning Department reflects our continued effort to elevate community voices and ensure that they inform the forthcoming draft of the Community Plans, anticipated for release in early February 2024. This next iteration of the plans will be accessible online through an ArcGIS StoryMap.

Additionally, my staff will continue to work alongside Planning staff to incorporate suggestions aimed at enhancing transparency and facilitating community empowerment in the planning process.