Community Constructed

Participatory Design-Build in Lower Los Angeles River Communities

606 Studio

California State Polytechnic University, Pomona

Department of Landscape Architecture • College of Environmental Design


PUSH

Community Constructed

Participatory Design-Build in Lower Los Angeles River Communities

606 Studio | Cal Poly Pomona | 2016

Department of Landscape Architecture • College of Environmental Design

SUMMARY REPORT

606 STUDIO TEAMS

TEAM BELL:
Charmy Adesara
Jie Dang
Lianwei Ding

TEAM CUDAHY:
Xie Fei
Adam Kehoss
Matthew Moffa
Jeremy Munns

TEAM SOUTH GATE:
Cristhian Barajas
Kasandra Di Pieri
Sara Yazdi
Matthew Wild

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS

Lee-Anne S. Milburn, Ph.D., FASLA, RLA
Weimin Li, Ph.D., ASLA
Steve Rasmussen Cancian, RLA


CARNICERIA MILAGRO

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The Los Angeles River helped give life to a metropolitan region which is home to 15 million people. Today, attention has turned back to the river as many residents and leaders have developed environmental consciousness and recognize the river's potential to provide open space and an attractive "green" context for development. A great deal of this attention has come in the form of large-scale master plans which seek to revitalize significant portions of the river with large-scale multi-benefit projects that combine ecology, recreation, flood control, and real estate development.

This project starts in a different place physically, methodologically and philosophically. It focuses on a portion of the Los Angeles River that until now has received little attention during revitalization efforts, has limited accessible parks and open spaces, is highly dense, and whose residents are predominantly Hispanic and low-income. This specific study region in southern Los Angeles County reaches from the City of Maywood south to the Rio Hondo confluence.

Rather than plan the entire area, students from the 606 Studio at Cal Poly Pomona collaborated with local community members through a participatory design-build approach to design and build improvement projects in neighborhoods in this region.

Broadly, participatory design is a method by which local community knowledge and expertise is called upon to shape design decisions that will directly affect that community. Often, this takes the form of a series of workshops that gather community input at each stage of the design process. At other times the process brings residents out into the field to identify important characteristics of their community and/or issues and needs that an improvement project might address (Cancian, 2015) (see Table 1). Projects which utilize a participatory design-build approach tend to focus on improvements which start with local residents and their priorities for improving their neighborhood.

These community-led projects are more amenable to short time horizons (3 to 6 months), which are more in line with the immediate needs of low income families. Unlike the millions of dollars required for river master planning, these projects can require just hundreds or several thousand dollars—an amount well within the reach of grassroots fundraising. Participatory processes are intended to be catalyzed by and catalyze further community volunteer-led efforts to improve the neighborhood, which ultimately better serves low-income residents.

These projects demonstrate an alternative way to begin improving river-adjacent communities and the river itself. They explore the potential of starting in the neighborhood by creating short-term, low budget improvements. Together, residents and students designed and built projects that immediately improved the communities, and which set a foundation for these communities and their residents to influence, shape, and design larger future improvements along the LA River.

The Los Angeles River bends past the industrial City of Vernon and into the residential neighborhoods of the study region.
Photo credit: Doc Searls / Flickr

Residents of Bell participate in a design workshop.

Table 1 Tools, Techniques and Methods

Tool/Technique	Group or Individual Activity	Forum (in-person or other)	Primary Activity (discussion or other)	Focus (education, data collection, idea generation)	Communication Format (one-way or two-way	Venue (public or private)
Blogs (etc.)	Individual	On-line	Written ideas	Education; idea generation	One-way	Public
Canvassing	Individual	In-Person or via flyer	Receiving information; providing feedback	Education; engagement; feedback	Primarily One-way	Public or private
Community Educational Forums	Group	In-person	Presentation	Education	One-way	Public
Community Education Symposia	Group	In-person	Presentation	Education	One-way	Public
Community Meetings	Group	In-person	Creative activity	Education; engagement; data collection; idea generation	Two-way	Public
Crowdsourcing	Individual contributions to a group effort	On-line	Written Ideas	Data collection; idea generation	One-way	Public
Design Charrettes or Workshops	Group	In-person	Creative activity	Engagement; Idea generation	Two-way	Public
Diagramming Exercises	Group	In-person	Creative activity	Idea generation	Two-way	Public
Focus Groups	Group	In-person	Discussion	Data collection; engagement; idea generation	Two-way	Public
Games & Role Playing	Group	In-person	Physical interaction	Engagement	Two-way	Public
Interviews	Individual; group	In-Person; on-line; phone	Receiving information; discussion	Data collection	Primarily One-way	Private
Kitchen Table Meetings	Group	In-person	Discussion	Data collection; engagement; idea generation	Two-way	Public
Mapping Exercises	Individual; group	In-person	Creative activity	Data collection	One-way	Public or private

Table 1 Tools, Techniques and Methods (cont.)

Tool/Technique	Group or Individual Activity	Forum (in-person or other)	Primary Activity (discussion or other)	Focus (education, data collection, idea generation)	Communication Format (one-way or two-way	Venue (public or private)
Measuring Exercises	Group	In-person	Physical interaction	Data collection; engagement	Two-way	Public
Newsletters (etc.)	Individual	On-line or mail	Information communication	Education	One-way	Public
One-on-One Meetings	Individual	In-Person	Discussion	Data collection	Primarily One-way	Private
Open Houses	Group	In-Person	Receiving information; providing feedback	Education; feedback	Primarily One-way	Public
Photo Journals	Individual; group	In-person	Physical interaction	Data collection	One-way	Private
Public Meetings	Group	In-Person	Receiving information; providing feedback	Education; feedback	Two-way	Public
Questionnaires	Individual	In-Person; on-line; phone	Receiving information	Data collection	Primarily One-way	Private
Round Table Forums	Group	In-person	Discussion	Data collection; engagement; idea generation	Two-way	Public
Simulations	Individual; group	In-person or on-line	Creative activity	Engagement	One-way	Private
Site Selection Walks	Group	In-person	Physical interaction	Data collection	Two-way	Public
Staffed Street Displays	Group	In-person	Information communication	Education	One-way	Public
Steering Committee Meetings	Group	In-person	Creative activity	Education; engagement; data collection; idea generation	Two-way	Public
Transect Development	Group	In-person	Physical interaction	Data collection;	Two-way	Public
Work Days	Group	In-person	Physical interaction	Engagement	Two-way	Public

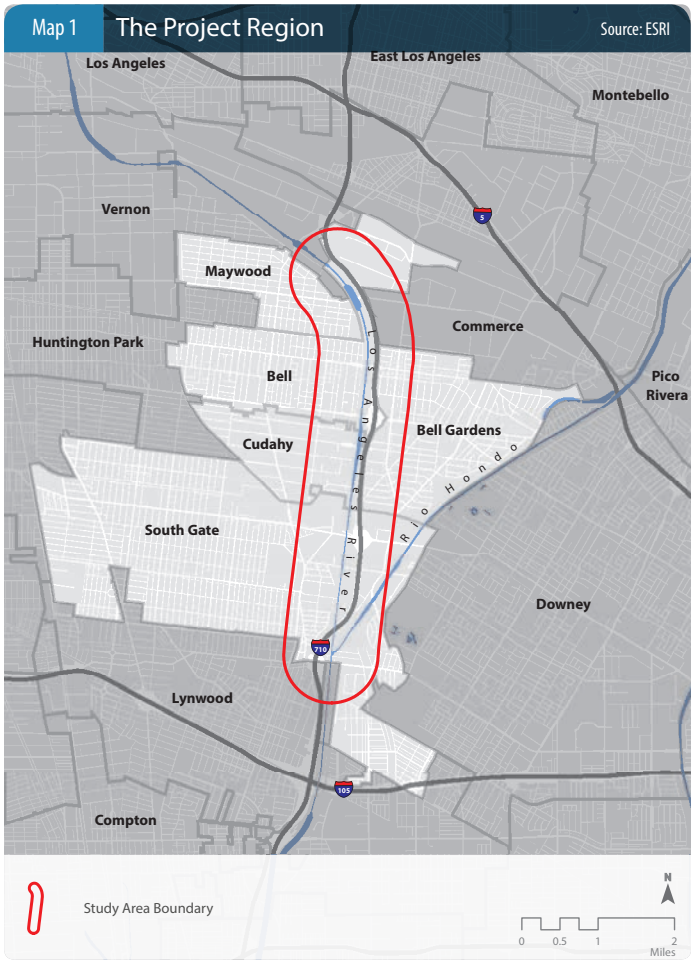
One-way communication can be community to designer/expert/facilitator or just designer/expert/facilitator to community

NEIGHBORHOOD SELECTION

This project focuses on river-adjacent communities within a half-mile of the Los Angeles River, and includes the cities of Maywood, Bell, Bell Gardens, Cudahy, and South Gate (see Map 1). In this region the river is bordered by heavy industry, transportation corridors, and dense residential development. It is bisected by the I-710 freeway which parallels the river, cutting many communities off from the river's potential amenities.

Beginning in Canoga Park, the Los Angeles River forms from the confluence of Bell Creek and the Arroyo Calabasas. The river runs east and then turns south, traveling through the study region and terminating in Long Beach at the Port of Los Angeles. Within the study region, the Los Angeles River is completely channelized while in other areas the river has a soft-bottom allowing for natural vegetation. The channel width is significantly wider than in other river communities and development is behind a levee system that includes a regional bike path accessible at limited points.

Communities in the study region adjacent to the river have limited parks and open spaces due to higher land use density and unequal distribution of recreation spaces. Some areas along the river, such as downtown Los Angeles and Vernon, are characterized by heavy industrial land uses. These areas, in contrast to residential zones, have increased stormwater runoff due to higher percentages of impervious ground cover. Often they contain higher levels of waterborne pollutants because of manufacturing practices. The study region is greatly impacted by polluted runoff during rain events, compared to other communities north and east of downtown Los Angeles.



This section of the river channel in Cudahy exemplifies the typical 400 foot width and 20 foot depth common throughout the study area.

Figure 2 Los Angeles River Sections by City

The region is predominantly Hispanic which disadvantages the residents when dealing with professionals, grant funding bodies, and government officials and staff. In the study region, 30% of the population are non-English speakers which is a challenge for communication. It is also characterized by low educational attainment. Generally, people with lower levels of education are less likely to engage in participatory processes or express their opinions through the political system (Dee, 2004), and as such, have less of a voice in decision-making (U.S. Census: American Community Survey (ACS), 2015; OEHHA CalEnviroScreen 2.0). Lower levels of educational attainment also have a negative effect on income. The region has a high rate of poverty with 59.6% of the population living below the poverty line. Similarly, unemployment in this region is higher than other parts of the county.

While the whole region would benefit from intensive participatory design processes, to perform impactful work, the 606 Studio had to choose a small number of neighborhoods. To select these neighborhoods from the many underserved communities in the area, the students developed a list of criteria. The 606 Studio split into three project teams to investigate the study area and identify potential neighborhoods through a five stage process.

STAGE 1 Preliminary investigation of large unused vacant lots (by the 606 Studio)

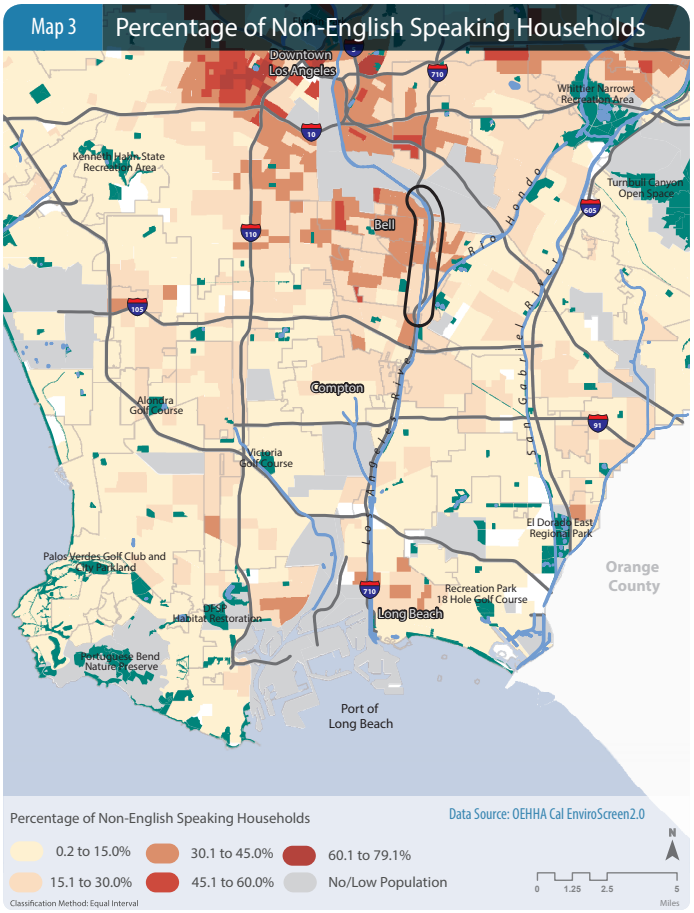
STAGE 2 Investigation of neighborhoods with unused open available land (by the 606 Studio)

STAGE 3 Investigation of neighborhoods with unused open available land and specific neighborhood characteristics (by the 606 Studio)

STAGE 4 Identification and evaluation of 12 potential neighborhoods (by each project team)

STAGE 5 Development of final selection criteria and selection of final neighborhoods (by each project team)

The 606 Studio selected three final project neighborhoods, one for each project team—Bell del Río (Bell), La Santana (Cudahy) and Thunderbird Villa (South Gate) (see Map 6).



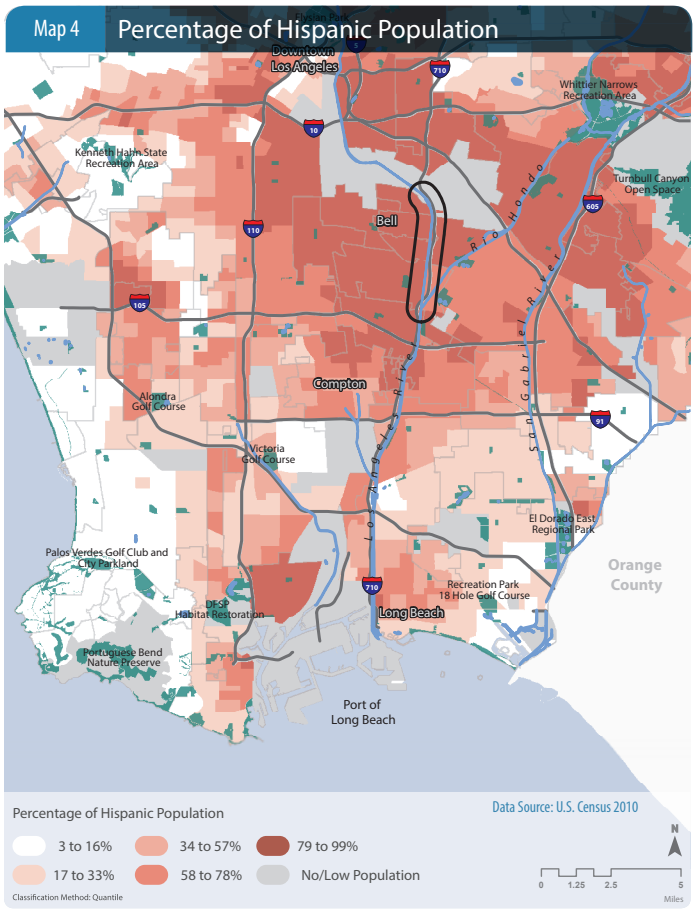
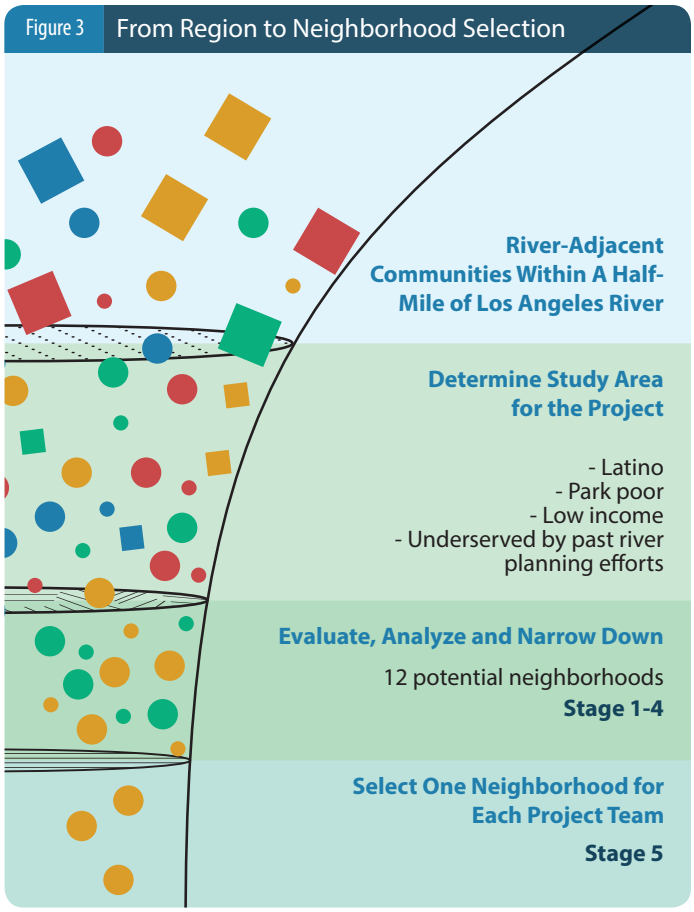
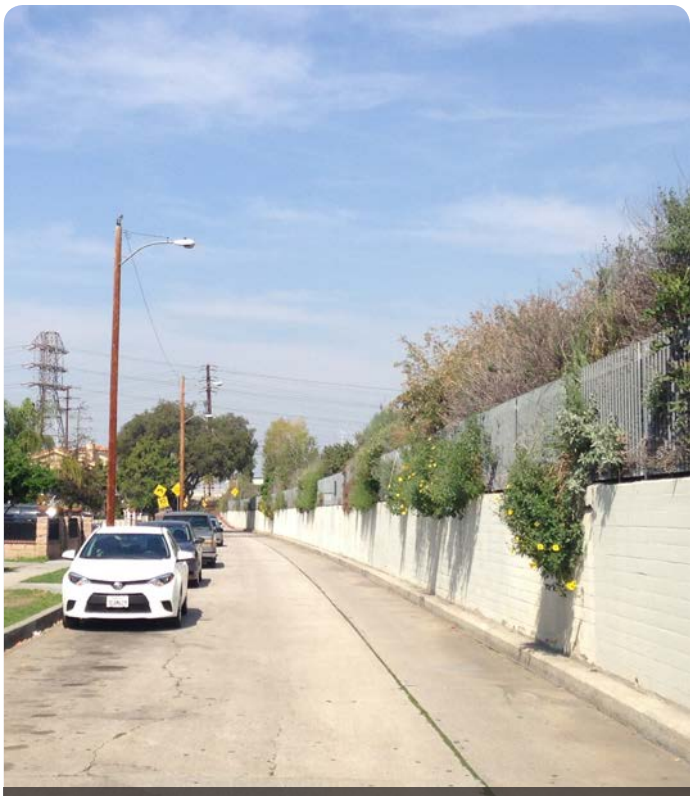


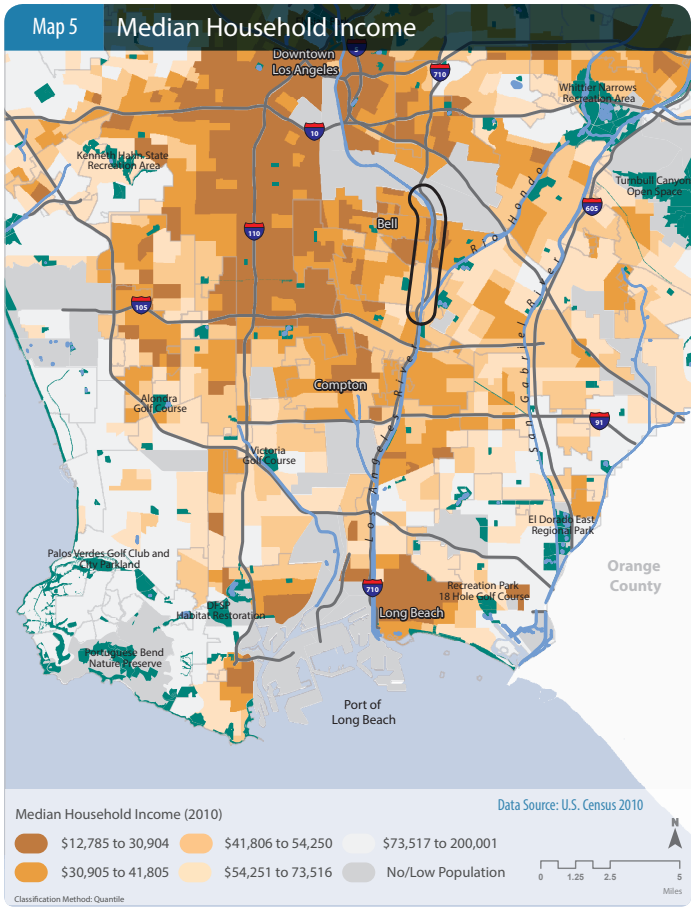
Figure 3 From Region to Neighborhood Selection





The river in the study region is separated from residential neighborhoods by tall levee walls, seen here along River Drive in the City of Bell.

Map 5 Median Household Income



Map 6 Final Selected Neighborhoods

METHODS

Throughout the project, teams employed a variety of methods which allowed them to gather information from many sources and engage with communities in a participatory process that highlighted the local knowledge, expertise, and needs of local residents. The following methods were employed and adapted by all the teams during various phases of the project:

Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

GIS technology was utilized at both the regional and neighborhood levels during the investigation and analysis processes of the project.

Data Mining

Data mining was used during the inventory phase to gain a better understanding of the project neighborhood. While the majority of information was collected using GIS databases, data mining included the use of government documents and websites, research by subject matter experts, and a variety of quality non-academic resources.

Interviews

Formal interviews were used to gather information about the selected communities and the local context of the project neighborhoods. Student teams interviewed a variety of people who represented local stakeholders, local government officials, and interested non-profit groups.

Field Observations

Field observations were used throughout the project to gather detailed qualitative and quantitative data about the community and its physical environment.

Canvassing

Canvassing consisted of in-person door-to-door outreach to residents in homes and apartments in project neighborhoods. Bilingual flyers were used to introduce the project to residents.

The project team in Cudahy receives help in canvassing from interested residents.

The project team and Thunderbird Villa residents walk the neighborhood to identify potential site locations.

Steering Committee Meetings

The steering committee was the lead group of community members in each project neighborhood. Steering committee members were selected because of enthusiasm and commitment, to help create a more representative or diverse committee, or because of a specific skill that they brought to the project. These steering committee members acted as representatives of their broader community. Steering committee meetings were held by project teams (student teams and steering committee members) to make decisions or plan community meetings.

Community Meetings

Community meetings were employed to interact with members of the larger community, including members of the steering committee. Community meetings were held at a variety of public locations and all members of the project neighborhood were invited to attend. Project teams designed community meetings to address specific questions with the intent of collecting and sharing information and making community decisions.

Site Selection Walks

The project teams held site selection walks to explore locations for the community improvement project. During these walks, residents and student teams identified and evaluated potential sites. Residents were engaged in open discussion, brainstorming, training, mapping exercises, and comparative exercises.

Design Workshops

After the selection of project sites, the broader community and steering committee members attended design workshops and explored improvements to the project site. Design workshops engaged residents in mapping and site design exercises with the intent of developing conceptual designs.

Work Days

Work days were held to implement the community's designs. During these days, community and steering committee members joined students on-site to prepare and build the community design-build project. These work days had tangible outcomes such as built and painted elements, but also produced intangible outcomes such as community capacity and new relationships.

Community members share ideas during a design workshop in Bell.

Community members mix and pour concrete for a bench planter on a work day in Cudahy.

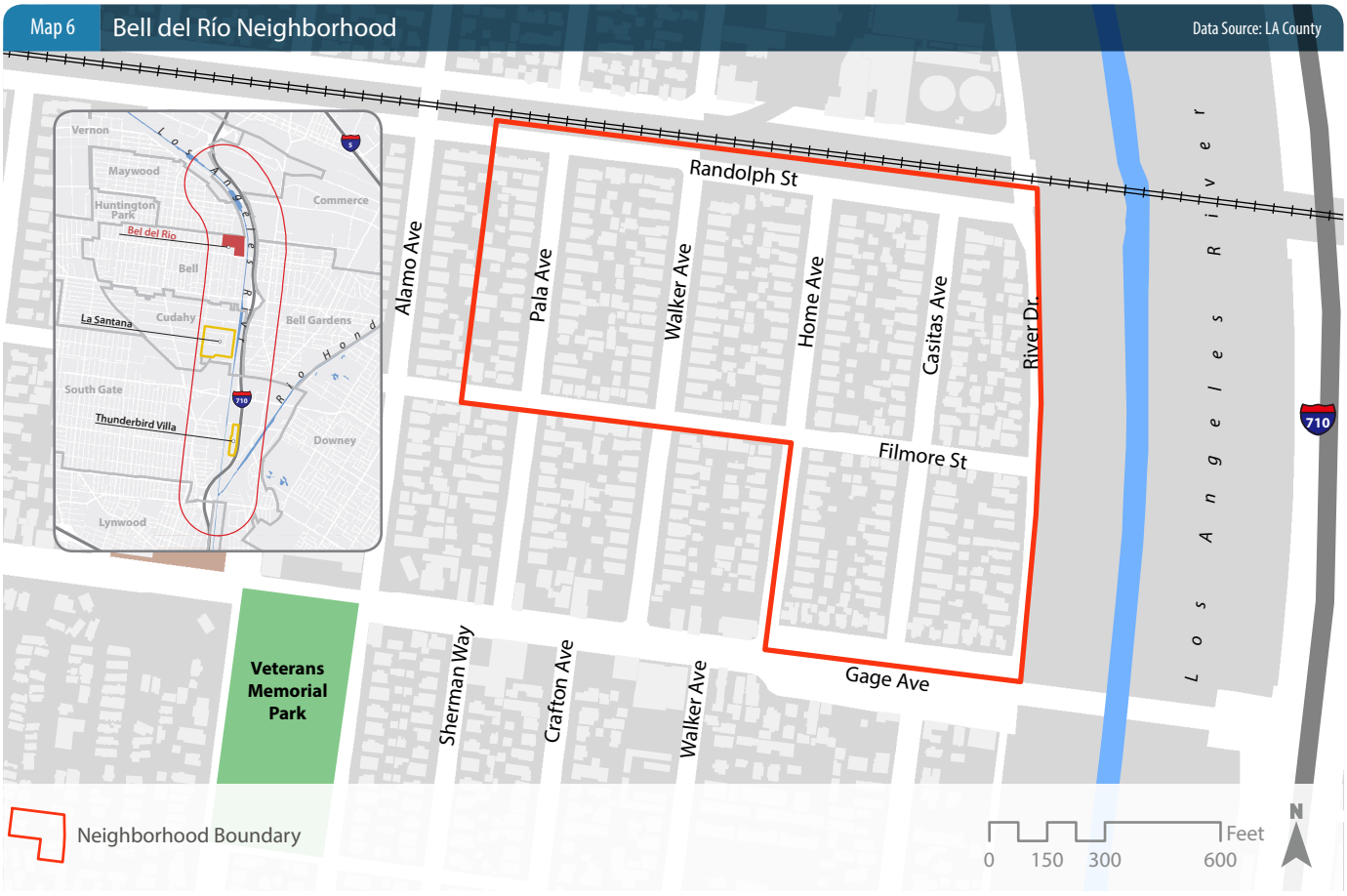
BELL DEL RíO NEIGHBORHOOD

The Bell del Río neighborhood is located in the City of Bell, a 2.8 square mile city in Los Angeles County 10 miles south of downtown Los Angeles. The city is bordered by the Los Angeles River to the east, Maywood to the north, Huntington Park to the west, and Cudahy to the south. Land use patterns divide the city into two distinct parts: the residential and commercial core in the south of the city to the west of the river, and the heavily industrialized zone in the north of the city on the eastern side of the river.

The boundaries of the Bell del Río neighborhood are Pala Avenue to the west, Randolph Street to the north, and Filmore Street and Gage Avenue to the south. The Los Angeles River sits behind a seven-foot high levee wall adjacent to River Drive, defining the neighborhood's eastern boundary (see Map 6).

Bell del Río is a predominantly working class Hispanic community. The neighborhood has an overall population of 7,769 people of whom 96% are Hispanic, and a population density of 12,107 people per square mile, a figure high above the county average of 2,419 people per square mile and the City of Los Angeles' density of 8,092 people per square mile (2010 U.S. Census). The median household income is $29,744 which is lower than the county median of $55,870; roughly 65% of residents live below two times the federal poverty level (American Community Survey) (OEHHA, 2014). Of the population over 25 years of age, roughly 55% have attained less than a high school degree (OEHHA, 2014).

Bel del Río is a quiet neighborhood with limited park access. The neighborhood is a culturally expressive place, where the residents express their cultural identity through elaborate front yards decor, vibrant colors, and culturally significant plant materials. The residents use their front yard and the Los Angeles River Bike Path as their primary recreational resources. Although some residents perceive the Los Angeles River Bike Path and the railway right-



1. Situated beneath a transmission tower, the corner of Randolph Street and River Drive is popular for dumping discarded furniture and other trash.

2. The railway right-of-way widens near the intersection of Walker Avenue and Randolph Street and accommodates large pine trees.

3. Walker Avenue is one of Bell del Río's busiest streets.

4. Located on the eastern edge of Bell del Río, the high levee wall and vegetation of the Los Angles River Bike Path characterize River Drive.

5. While the corner of Randolph Street and River Drive is popular with neighbors due to its informal river access, some residents find it unpleasant because of the poorly maintained railway right-of-way.

of-way as unsafe, for many residents it is their favorite and only location for outdoor recreation. This indicates that there are great opportunities to improve these underutilized resources due to their high frequency of use.

The intersection of Walker Avenue and Randolph Street is an area favored by motorists for speeding. This poses a significant safety threat to the community as pedestrians use the street as a main access point to the Los Angeles River. The residents felt the need to install speed bumps and stop signs for traffic calming measures.

Site Selection

The project team used canvassing, steering committee meetings, and community meetings to facilitate the site selection process. The meetings employed open discussions, a site selection walk, and mapping exercises; the project team also prepared a presentation package including photos of sample projects using sidewalks, streets, intersections, empty lots, and remnant open spaces as sites to encourage discussion. Three project sites were short-listed, and eventually Randolph Street became the location of the build project.

Community members draw mural designs during Design Workshop One.

Program

The project's program was determined over several community and steering committee meetings using techniques such as brainstorming, open discussions, and comparative exercises.

Design

The project team developed designs with the community and then presented several alternative designs to city staff. At the end of negotiations, only the mural and painted play areas were approved for construction. The community requested a pattern that represented nature and incorporated vibrant colors that reflected the working-class Hispanic character of the community such as red, yellow, blue, green, and orange. The project team utilized a mural design that was created by a community member during a previous design workshop. The mural pattern proposed was simple, used colors representing the community, and could be painted by untrained community members.

The design phase culminated with the design of the murals at the intersections of Randolph Street with Walker, Home, and Casitas Avenues, and River Drive. These murals perform the function of traffic calming by drawing attention to the intersections with bright and colorful floral designs.

Build

From the beginning of the build process, committee members were excited about the project. Community members swept the ground clean of debris while city staff used blowers to clear away excess dirt. The design was sketched onto the pavement using a stencil, chalk, and spray paint. A local artist and steering committee member helped the project team with this process. Each section within the outline was sprayed with a sample of the color to be filled in by a community member. With consistent and enthusiastic community support from people of all ages, the four murals were successfully completed over the course of three Saturdays.

Long-Term Project

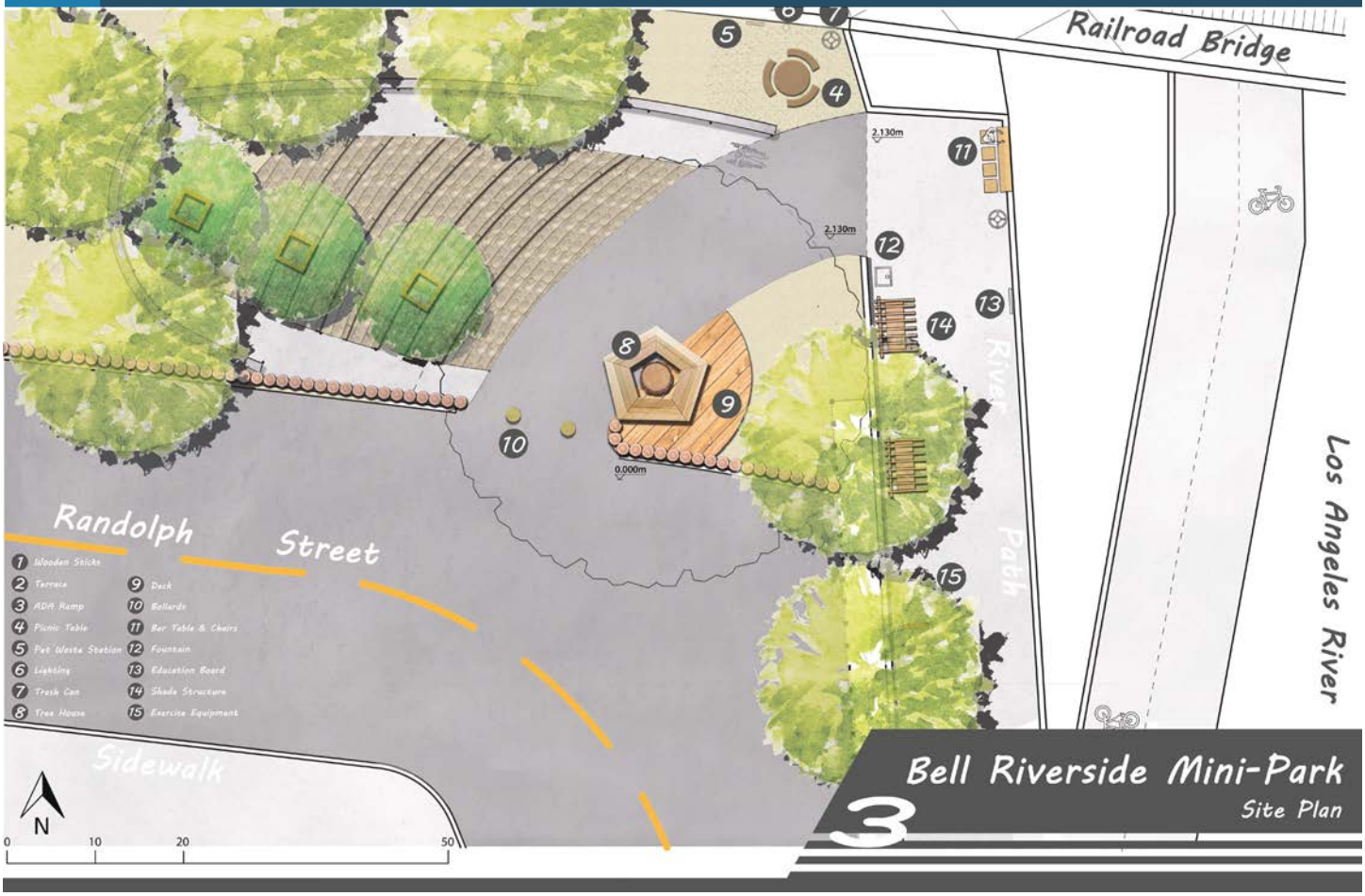
While the built project addressed the neighborhood's short-term needs for traffic calming, a larger project is needed to bring in more fundamental and positive change to the environmental and social setting of Bell del Río.

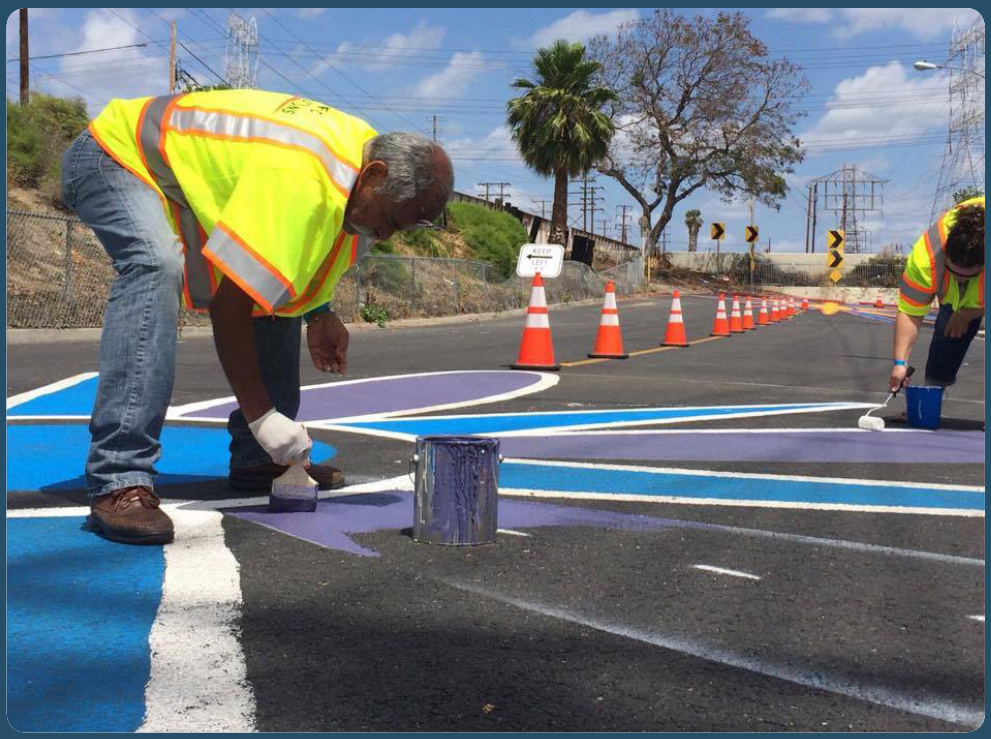
On April 23, 2016, the project team conducted a workshop to facilitate community involvement in the long-term project. During the meeting, the community was reintroduced to the river access point, a site that was chosen by the community as a potential project location during the earlier design-build phase. This project addresses the community's need for enhanced environmental quality and multi-functional open space as well as provides passive recreation opportunities at the neighborhood's access point to the Los Angeles River.

The Riverside Mini-Park would be located on a 4,000 square foot site located at the intersection of Randolph Street and River Drive- the connection between the Bell del Río neighborhood and the Los Angeles River. The site has an approximately thirty-degree slope rising from the corner of Randolph Street and River Drive to the connection point at the railroad right-of-way and the railway bridge, which defines the northern boundary of the project site.

The Bell Riverside Mini-Park plan utilizes the site's unique topography to create an outdoor gathering, entertainment, and socializing space. The plan proposes an ADA ramp on the western side of the site and a children's play area around the existing Jacaranda tree. Bar-style tables and chairs face the Los Angeles River to take advantage of the river views. Benches with shade structures, exercise equipment, and educational signs provide passive educational and recreational opportunities for bicyclists and pedestrians. The proposal focuses on increasing accessibility, seating, and play areas by using a variety of materials and design elements (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 Bell Riverside Mini-Park Design Concept






STOP


Before


After

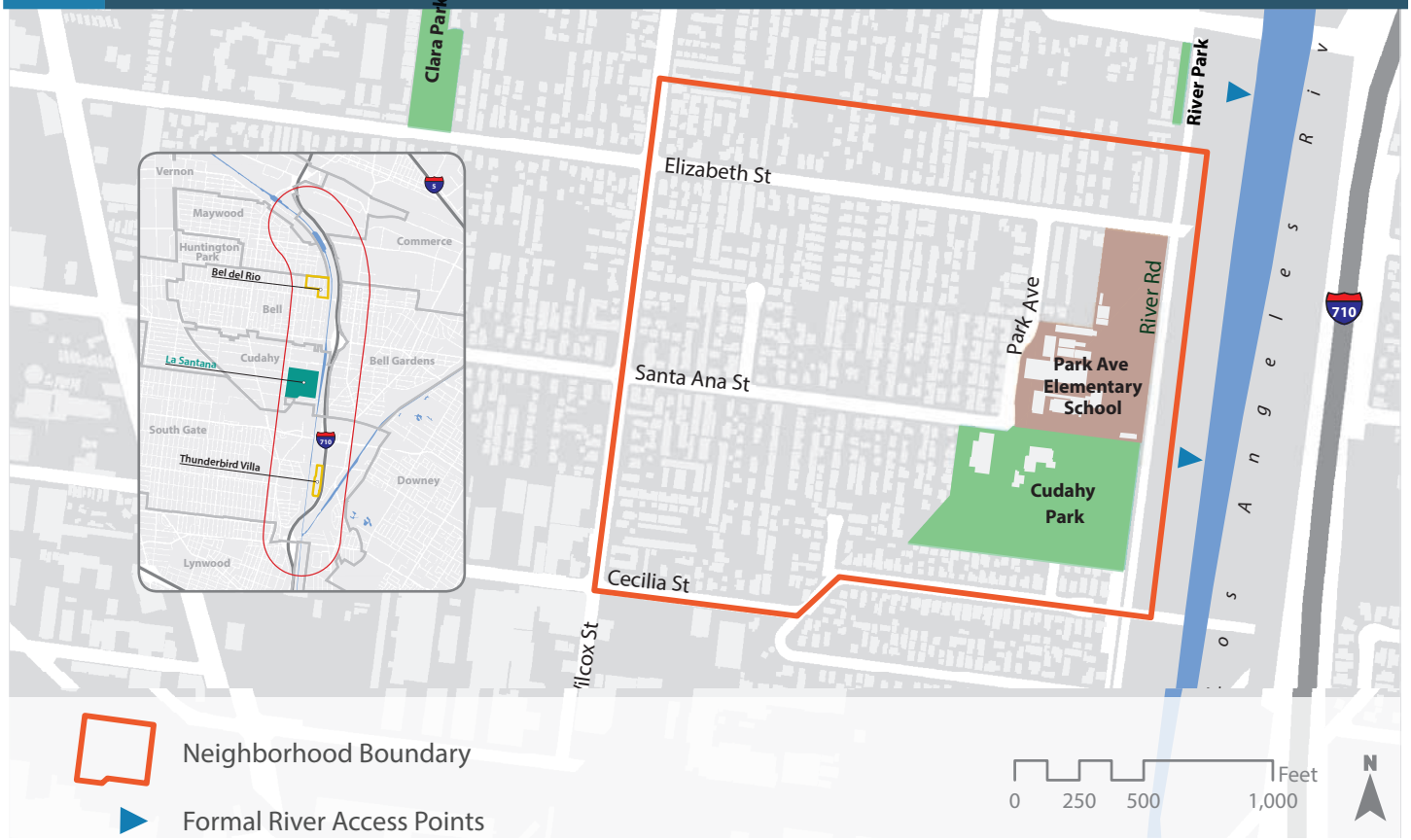
LA SANTANA NEIGHBORHOOD

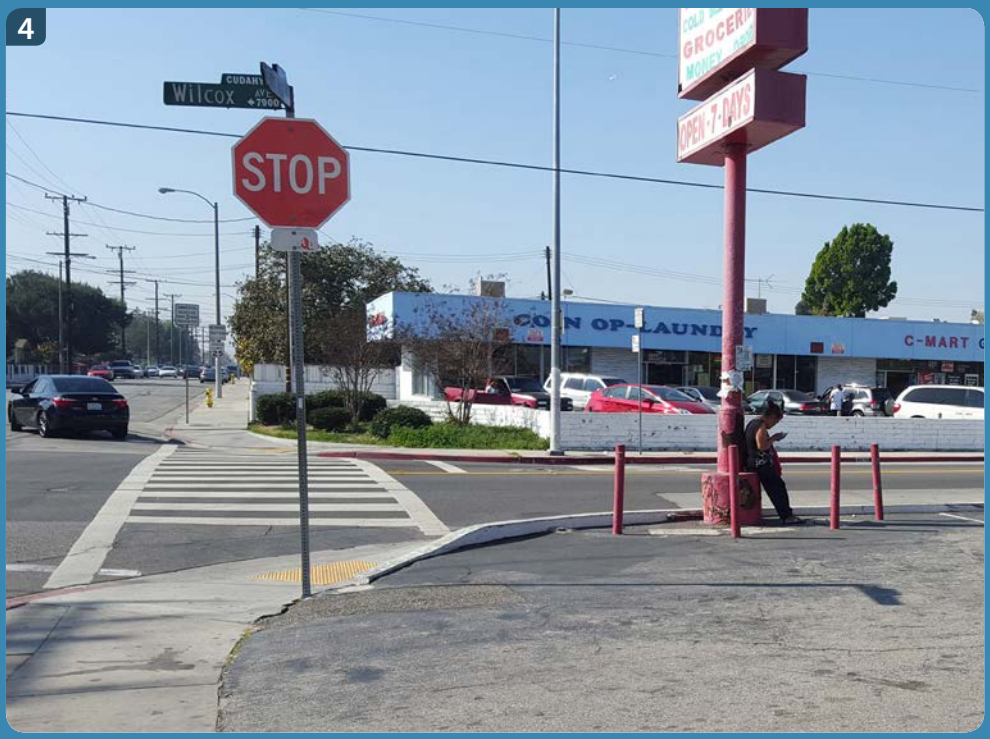
This project neighborhood is situated in Cudahy, California, a small but densely populated city located in central Los Angeles County south of downtown. Cudahy borders the Los Angeles River on the city's eastern edge. Its other borders are defined by Salt Lake Avenue to the east, Patata Street to the south, and a northern border that generally follows Florence Avenue. Cudahy borders the cities of Bell, Bell Gardens, South Gate, and Huntington Park. The project neighborhood's boundaries are defined by the Los Angeles River to the east, Wilcox Avenue to the west, Cecilia Street to the south, and Elizabeth Street to the north. Known locally as "La Santana", the neighborhood sits on the eastern edge of the city. Urban form in the neighborhood is characterized by long rows of apartments extending roughly 400 feet from Santa Ana Street and Elizabeth Street, creating sub-communities inside the larger neighborhood. The Los Angeles River is accessible via two ramps located along River Road, one of which sits behind Cudahy Park, and the second of which sits slightly to the north of the neighborhood across River Road from Cudahy River Park (see Map 7).

While Cudahy is one of the densest cities in the state, the La Santana neighborhood surpasses even Cudahy's averages. With roughly 4,600 residents within its boundaries, the neighborhood has a density of 28,000 people per square mile, far above the county average of 2,419 people per square mile and even the City of Los Angeles' density of 8,092 people per square mile (2010 U.S. Census). Ethnically the neighborhood is 96% Hispanic (compared to 48% at the county level), with the remaining population being split almost evenly between white and African-American residents (OEHHA, 2014) (American Community Survey, 2014). Economically the neighborhood is working class, with a 2012 median household income estimated at $39,534 (far below the county median of $46,128) and roughly 63% of residents live below twice the federal poverty level (American Community Survey, 2014; OEHHA, 2014). Of the population over 25 years

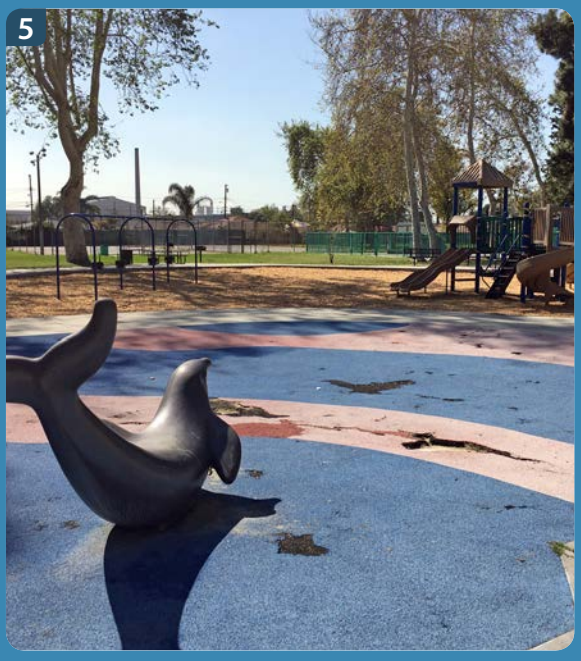
Map 7 La Santana Neighborhood Map

Source: LA County





1. La Santana's long residential lots divide the street into several mini-neighborhoods.
2. Due to the neighborhood's high density, residents are frustrated by problems with street parking.
3. Park Avenue quickly fills up with pedestrians and cars when Park Avenue Elementary lets out.
4. The corner of Wilcox Avenue and Santa Ana Street, on La Santana's western border, is the neighborhood's sole commercial area.
5. Cudahy Park is a popular location but is plagued with maintenance issues.
6. The sun sets over small apartment complexes on Elizabeth Street.



of age, roughly 60% have attained less than a high school degree, in comparison to only 23% at the county level (OEHHA, 2014) (American Community Survey, 2014).

Inventory results reveal a portrait of a neighborhood marred by the fear of crime and hurt by political corruption. It is a neighborhood that lacks self-esteem, derides its own physical surroundings, and has little sense of community identity. And yet it is also a neighborhood with the optimism to elect one of the youngest city councils in the county and to organize significant local improvements. It is a neighborhood that fears and ignores the Los Angeles River but finds deep value in the bare concrete street corner between a carniceria and laundromat. Several important themes arose that deserved consideration during the inventory process. These themes affected where the project was located and the type of project that was built.

Site Selection

The project team, steering committee members, and community members conducted site selection walks of the neighborhood. During the walks, the project team used open discussion and a mapping activity to foster a dialogue about the proximity of potential sites to areas that the committee felt were unsafe or undesirable. As a result of the site walk, 13 potential sites were identified. Eventually, through the use of dotmocracies and comparative exercises, two sites and two alternative sites were selected. The preferred site, a paved area outside the neighborhood meat market at the intersection of Santa Ana Street and Wilcox Avenue, was chosen because of its relationship to the neighborhood, halfway between Atlantic Avenue (a major thoroughfare in the community), and the Los Angeles River, in addition to being a place residents use often. The site is also next to the bus stop closest to the neighborhood.

An important consideration when selecting a site location was choosing a site that was easily accessible to all residents. The ideal location needed to be somewhere on one of the neighborhood's primary walking routes—and preferably along one of the routes to the river—as this would foster connections to the river by increasing accessibility, regardless of whether or not the project is directly adjacent to the river.

The project team and steering committee members met with the operator of the carniceria, who leases the space from the property owner. After some negotiation, the carniceria operator and property owner both agreed to allow the project to move forward to the design phase. This agreement coincided with a hold on the carniceria's operational license because of the requirement for a six percent increase in property landscaping. Meeting the city's conditions and the needs of the community members and the property owners was an ongoing and challenging process that took place simultaneously with the development and implementation of the project.

Steering committee members rank program elements using dotmocracy.

Program

Many elements of site programming happened simultaneously with site selection. The project team and steering committee members met on March 6, 2016 at a committee member's residence to determine the final program for the top two site locations from the site selection phase. The rankings resulted in a list of 13 different program items that were prioritized by number of votes. The results of the final program were evaluated using open discussion.

Design

The project was designed at a series of steering committee and community meetings. A mapping exercise consisted of a collaborative site analysis, where elements such as noise, sun, wind, and accessibility were visually placed on a prepared site plan. Community members provided additional information about the site, which was added to the site analysis. The project team then reviewed the results of the program ranking exercises.

Next the project team discussed a number of design principles such as spatial proximity, prospect and refuge, and size relationships, using terminology that was clear to non-designers. The project team presented pre-made examples of "good" and "bad" site design, using ready-made pieces. The same pieces were then used by participants to represent their design ideas. Community members worked together in groups and openly discussed their ideas, arranging pieces on the base map collaboratively. A post-design discussion allowed participants to present their designs and describe the relationship between design decisions and program. These pieces were eventually glued and taped to the prepared base plans. After a series of meetings, the project team developed a final site plan, design details, and draft construction documents.

Eventually, as a result of city requirements, the project team agreed to remove existing asphalt in an area between the parking wheel stops and the carniceria entrance in addition to the project scope determined by the community. In order to preserve access, the project team chose to keep alterations largely limited to the ground plane. The use of infiltration trenches met the city's conditions, accommodated foot traffic, and increased stormwater permeability.

Community members work in groups to design solutions for the carniceria site.

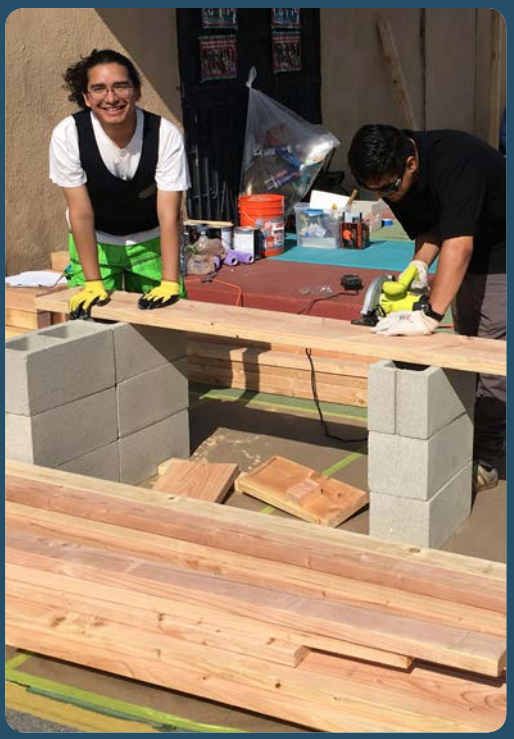
Build

The students and community prepped the site and painted the concrete vibrant colors chosen by the community. As site construction progressed, many curious shoppers and people passing by grew excited about the project and volunteered to help. Together, the project team and community constructed tree planter benches, a seating wall, succulent planters, a large tree planter bench, a shade structure planter bench, and planted trees and perennials.

To create the infiltration trenches in the parking lot as required by the city, the project team rented a walk-behind concrete saw and cut out four long strips of asphalt in the area behind the parking wheel stops. The team then filled the trenches with gravel and painted the asphalt between them in order to create a visual signal for pedestrians that the ground plane had changed. The project team and community also constructed small planters in the same style of the Plaza Milagro space and planted them with ground cover plants.

Long-Term Project

During the site selection and programming phases of the participatory design process, the community chose a site across from Park Avenue Elementary School for the long-term community design project. Although the project team did not have sufficient time or resources to design the site with the community because of the increased scope of construction required by the City of Cudahy, they set plans in motion and identified a project partner to implement this larger project within a few years.




12PK BOTTLES
12PK CANS
$12.99

Before

After

THUNDERBIRD VILLA NEIGHBORHOOD

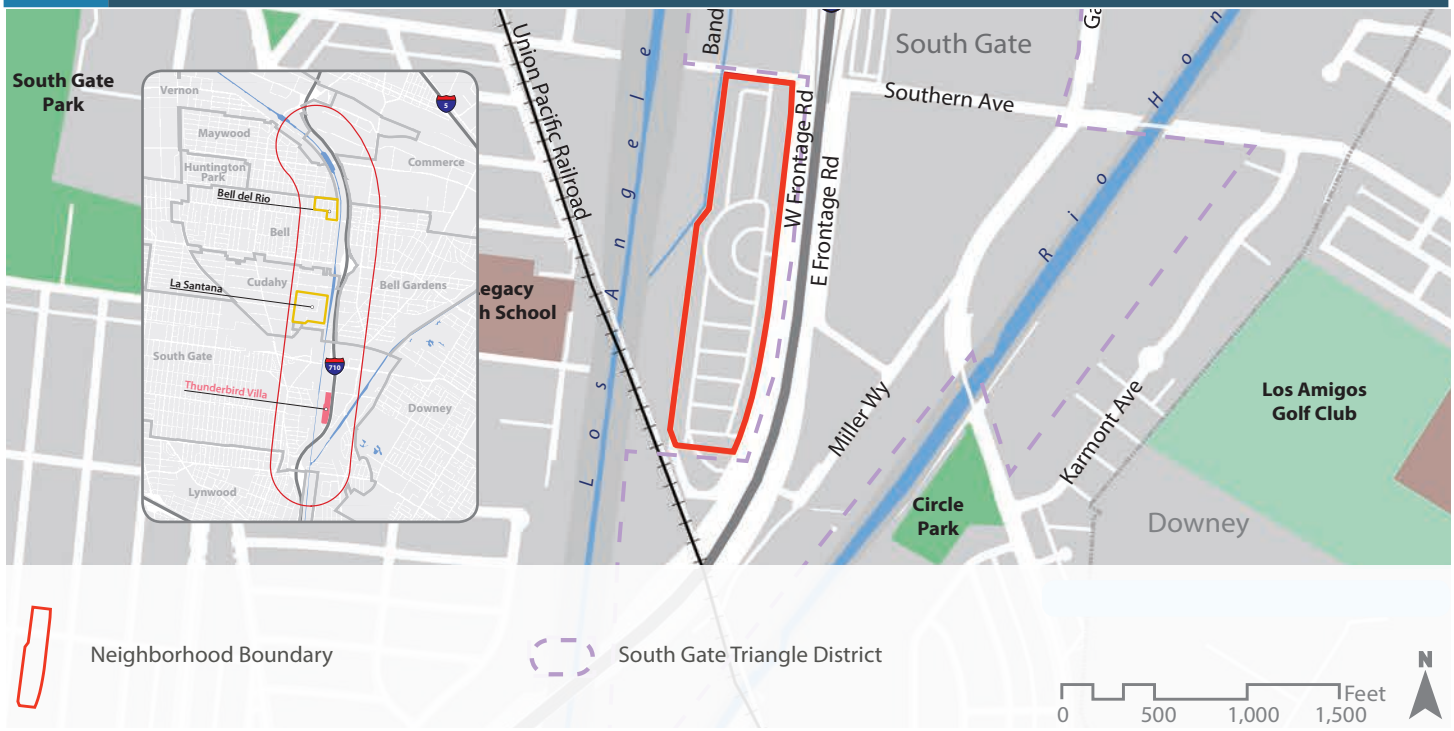
The City of South Gate, California is located in southern Los Angeles County along the Los Angeles River. About seven miles south of downtown Los Angeles, South Gate is set between the cities of Los Angeles and Downey to the east and west, and Cudahy and Paramount to the north and south. The Los Angeles River divides the city, with a significant portion of the City on the west side of the river. The project neighborhood, Thunderbird Villa Mobile Home Park, is on the eastern bank of the river, in a primarily industrial neighborhood. Built in 1965, Thunderbird Villa is physically segregated from the rest of the city by the Los Angeles River and high tension power lines to the west, and the I-710 freeway to the east, with only one access via a small tunnel under the freeway.

Thunderbird Villa is a unique community within the City of South Gate. A restricted community, only residents over 55 years old may own homes there. Due to its geographical location, the community has thrived in some ways, while it has struggled in others. The Thunderbird Villa community is an island of well-kept homes situated adjacent to the Los Angeles River and tucked between two sizable vacant parcels of land. There is a strong sense of community and camaraderie among the residents, and many signs of care in the landscape. The neighbors take pride in their front yards and the neighborhood has strong curb appeal. Although the residents live adjacent to the Los Angeles River, they cannot access it directly and with ease. There is only one entrance to the community through an underpass beneath the I-710 freeway. The residents live in an area devoid of a park or public open space because that of the city is still industrially zoned.

The City of South Gate has nearly 96,000 residents, 96% of whom are Hispanic. By contrast, Thunderbird Villa's isolated population is non-Hispanic White, with only 26% Latino/ Hispanic. The County of Los Angeles is around 46% Hispanic. While median income in the City of South Gate is near $47,000, it is only $28,000 for residents of Thunderbird Villa (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016; city-data.com, 2016). Like Los Angeles County, around 18% of South Gate's population also lives below the poverty line. Of Thunderbird Villa's 400 residents, only 6% live in poverty (city-data.com, 2016).
The isolation of the neighborhood between the LA River, the railroad, and the I-710 freeway

Map 8 Thunderbird Villa Neighborhood Map

Source: LA County



1. The North Rec. Hall provides lawn areas and open space for leisure in a quiet and isolated environment.

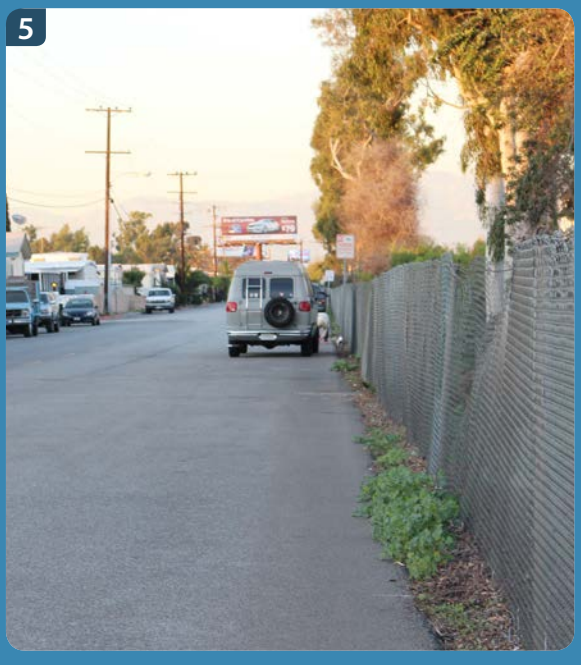
2. The landmark of the neighborhood is the iconic Thunderbird Recreation Room. Guests and residents are attracted to its resort-like amenities.

3. Residents are received by a welcoming main access, guided by signs communicating community rules.

4. The characteristic vegetation of the neighborhood includes palm trees, ficus trees, and small patches of lawn.

5. Outside the Villa, Frontage Road's width ranges between 40' and 45' and is considered above the South Gate standard for residential local streets.

6. Inside The Villa, the width of the streets range between 25' and 30', and the quality of the pavement is better than in the industrial area. Along with the lower speeds and home decor, this gives the neighborhood a cozy and safe atmosphere that residents take pride in and visitors instantly notice.



creates a unique context for this community. Comparing the pedestrian experience outside the neighborhood to the one inside is quite revealing. Within the community, there is a sense of relative safety due to the peaceful streets, the picturesque houses, and garden art in the tiny front yards, while the industrial area outside is a much more hostile pedestrian experience.

The Villa has an elongated circuit-like layout. Most of the homes are close together and face the internal streets. Any amenity has pedestrian access only through the use of streets since there are no sidewalks. The homes in the northeast area of the mobile home park face Frontage Road rather than the internal streets. Frontage Road is a large street on the eastern part of the Villa, and is oversized in width when compared to the rest of the local streets in South Gate. This is the noisiest part of the neighborhood due its immediate proximity to the I-710 freeway 50 feet away. Moreover, complaints from the residents indicate that the long, wide, straight road and low traffic flows result in vehicles traveling well over the 25 mph speed limit.

Some features considered opportunities by the project team were seen as limitations by the community, such as the LA River or the open space beneath the power lines. The project team had hoped to connect residents to the river and make the most of the unique industrial landscape. However, the community, often expressed fear of and resistance towards river connections, and preferred to look inward.

Wildlife sightings and the potential presence of intruders suggested keeping access points and barriers gated and fenced, while also avoiding vegetation such as tall shrubs that could be used as hiding places, or plants that could attract bees, endangering the users of the North Recreation Hall and its surroundings.
The inventory of the security elements demonstrated a sufficient number of signs, high power lighting, cameras, fences, and walls. No additional security measurements were needed. During a community meeting, residents clearly stated their wish to avoid any additional signs in the area.

Site Selection

The project team facilitated a site selection walk around the neighborhood. A list of potential sites was brainstormed during the first informational meeting. During the walk, the project team and the fourteen community members followed a planned route. Sites included the Laundry Room, the LADWP power line right-of-way to the west of the community, the North Recreation Hall, the North Lot, and Frontage Road, which borders the eastern side of Thunderbird Villa.

The project team presented the potential sites and the community confirmed the choice of the North Lot as their first choice. Following a pro-con discussion of each remaining potential site, the team facilitated a ranking exercise using dotmocracy. The outcome of this exercise was the selection of the North Recreation Hall as the second choice, and Frontage Road as the third. After discussing the North Lot project with the property owners, the team decided to use that as their long-term project and move ahead with the North Recreation Hall and Frontage Road projects.

Program

The program for the potential sites was discussed at every meeting with the committee and community. At these meetings, residents brainstormed ideas, and following several open discussions, the top three choices for the site program were a dog park, walking trails, and planting beds and trees. The program evolved as community members matched it to specific sites.

Design

On Saturday, February 6, 2016, the first design workshop took place at the Thunderbird Recreation Room. The team facilitated a group site analysis, presenting a diagram of the sites with a pictorial analysis of wind direction and the path of the sun from sunrise to sunset. Residents were asked for their input and subsequently added noise, dust, and potential access conflicts to the diagram. Residents were then divided into subgroups of two to three people. The groups were given ready-made icons of outdoor furniture and plant material that could be taped to a base map. These elements corresponded to the community-determined program for the sites. Any design elements that were not provided could be drawn in with pens or colored pencils. After each subgroup completed their design, they presented to the larger group and engaged in a discussion about their design intentions.

Following the community meeting on March 14, 2016, the team created a final site plan for the

North Recreation Hall as well as construction documents that included details for each feature. Features included two shade structures, two tables with four chairs each, five benches, wooden planters, exercise equipment, and a gate for a dog area. A planting plan was also designed using drought tolerant, native plants.

Build

With the final approval of the owners and property management of Thunderbird Villa, Team South Gate and community members began the build phase of the project.

The initial weeks and weekends of the build process were focused on building furniture. This focus provided an excellent opportunity for the team and committee to work out the construction process and how to most effectively involve community members. During these first few weekends, the project team and the community assembled, stained, and installed furniture that had been collaboratively designed during design workshops. This effort resulted in the construction and installation of furniture, a fence and two shade structures made from Douglas fir, which were sanded and then stained with redwood-colored transparent weather-proofing deck stain.

The project team worked with residents to develop a plant palette for the project that would bring color and fragrance to the space, but would also be low maintenance and drought tolerant. The project team was able to reduce costs by acquiring plants through donations from multiple nurseries that were excited to share some of their stock with a community-led volunteer project for seniors. Additionally, community members were eager to contribute plants from their own yard which consisted of a variety of succulents and Amarillis belladonis. During the final weekends of the build process, residents worked with the project team to dig holes and plant and water dozens of plants including a variety of sage (*Salvia spp.*), rosemary (*Rosmarinus spp.*), and bougainvillea (*Bougainvillea spp.)* vines which will climb perimeter walls and the shade structures.

Long-Term Project

The long-term project is an extension of the community and the project team's vision for the design-build project. It will serve as a bridge between what was achieved in the design-build phase and the long-term, large scale projects planned by the City for land adjacent to Thunderbird. As part of the long-term project planning, the team recruited a new partner organization to assist the community after the team graduated. The team also created tools for the community and the partner to use in advocating for their project.

Two workshops were conducted on May 18 and 25, 2016 to facilitate community involvement in the long-term plan. The community was reintroduced to the four sites they chose as potential locations for improvements in the design-build phase. Members were divided into two groups and given a large base map of the four project locations, then encouraged to design all four spaces.

The community expressed a desire for benches on Frontage Road, two-way streets with different pavement patterns, and a curbless sidewalk on one side of the internal streets and Frontage Road.

The final schematic plans consist of designs for four sites: Frontage Road, LADWP power line right-of-way, the North Lot, and the internal streets of Thunderbird Villa. These sites were initially selected during the site selection walk for the short-term project. The team developed conceptual plans for the four sites to give to the community and partner organization.

Conceptual plans for the North Lot include walking and biking paths, community gardens, and shade trees.

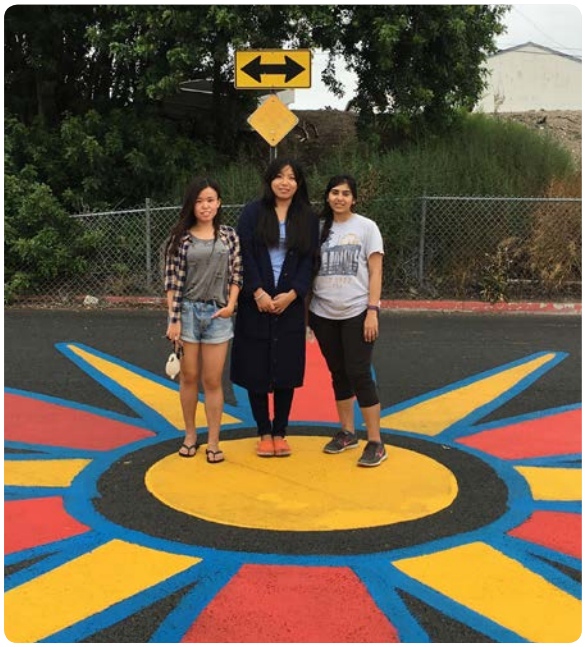

NOTICE


Before


After

CONCLUSION

The goal of this project was to test the efficacy of participatory design-build process in disadvantaged, river adjacent communities. The results speak for themselves. Over the course of nine months, through participatory design, the 606 team was able to build a small urban plaza in the empty space next to a butcher shop, create a community gathering space in a trailer park, and paint four street murals. Community members were deeply engaged throughout the process—recruiting new members, creating designs, selecting sites, swinging hammers, and advocating on behalf of the projects when faced with challenges. Taken as a whole, the success of these projects leaves little doubt as to the readiness of these communities to engage in participatory design.



This project focuses on a portion of the lower Los Angeles River that until now has received little attention, has limited accessible parks and open spaces, is highly dense, and whose residents are predominantly Latino and low income.

Students from the 606 Studio at Cal Poly Pomona collaborated with local community members to design and build neighborhood improvement projects. Through participatory design, the 606 team was able to build a small urban plaza in the empty space next to a butcher shop, create a community gathering space in a trailer park, and paint four street murals. These projects demonstrate a low budget, alternative way to begin improving river adjacent communities, setting a foundation for these communities and their residents to influence, shape, and design larger future improvements along the LA River.