

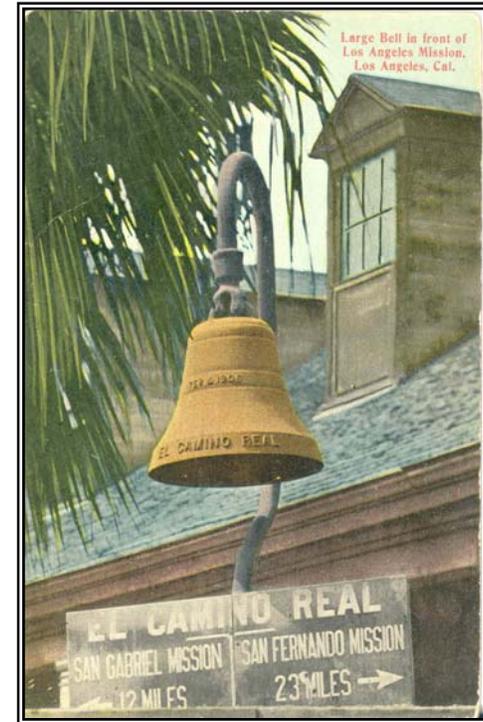
## El Camino Real ~ The First Steps

Just as the Gabrielino-Tongva tribes did before the European settlement of the area and just as the Franciscan padres did in the 1700s, we, as the San Gabriel Mission District, are taking steps for the further development of the area. Our steps towards the future are being taken with the knowledge we have gained through the rich history of the area, from previous planning efforts, and through the development of the Mission District Specific Plan.

The historic San Gabriel Mission District is one of the most important places in California's history. The District encompasses the Mission San Gabriel Archangel (the second oldest building south of Monterey), the legendary San Gabriel Civic Auditorium, the Civic Center, the Historic Museum and Hayes House, the Ramona Museum of California History, and many other historic and cultural sites. The District has been designated by the National Parks Service as an interpretive center for the De Anza National Historic Trail, which runs from the Mexican border to San Francisco. But in the 1990s the Mission District underwent rapid changes marked by the loss of tenants, physical constraints, and blight.

### **1994 REVITALIZATION PROGRAM**

On July 30, 1994, the City of San Gabriel celebrated the implementation of the Mission District revitalization program. This program was a multifaceted revitalization project, which developed community support to both fund and coordinate the implementation. Participating government agencies included the City of San Gabriel, the San Gabriel Unified School District, and the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority. Community organizations included the Gabrielino-Tongva Band of Mission Indians, the San Gabriel Historical Society, the San Gabriel Chamber of Commerce, the Parish of Mission San Gabriel Archangel, and



the San Gabriel Light Opera Guild. This revitalization included the completion of the following improvements:

- The construction of a 101-space Park-and-Ride lot.
- The implementation of a streetscape program consisting of new landscaping, streetlights, signage, and street furniture.
- The expansion of parks and public plazas.
- The installation of an historic walk with tile artwork involving over 600 fourth graders from local schools.

The early retail successes in the mid-1990s in this once blighted area consisted of an influx of new businesses, such as the Brave Bull, Mission Family Restaurant, and the Java Joint Coffee House. These businesses had a short life span, and the District once again had several vacancies in January 2001.

### **DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE**

San Gabriel's demographics have shifted dramatically within the last 20 years. We have seen growth in the Asian population, decreases in the white-non-Hispanic population, and slight decreases in the Hispanic population. Many of the new Asian immigrants are not familiar with California history nor the cultural Mission landmarks. The dynamics of the population have not been integrated into the Mission District.

### **STRENGTHS OF THE MISSION DISTRICT**

- The history and architecture of the buildings including the historic Mission Civic Auditorium and City Hall.
- San Gabriel's historic significance to the region and California's development.
- Beautiful streetscape including tile artwork and markers identifying historical sites.
- Three parks and three museums.
- Available parking, including the City Hall and Civic Auditorium parking lots and the Park and Ride lot.
- The MTA express route to downtown Los Angeles that stops in the District.



- Daytime population from major employers. The San Gabriel Valley Medical Center and the San Gabriel Unified School District Offices are within walking distance to the District's core.
- A safe environment.
- A variety of neighborhoods within walking distance.
- Existing tourism market.
- Fourth grade students and their families visiting the Mission (Fourth graders in California study California history, including the history of Mission life.)
- City-owned properties within the District: City Hall and adjacent parking lot, Civic Auditorium and adjacent parking lot, Grapevine Park, Padillo Room, Parks and Recreation building, Park and Ride lot, and the Fine Arts Gallery.

### **DISTRICT ISSUES**

A major District weakness is a lack of synergy in the area between the major attractions: the Mission, City Hall, and the Civic Auditorium. These places exist in isolation due, in part, to the lack of contiguous activity at the pedestrian level caused by vacant storefronts, dilapidated buildings, blank walls, lack of merchandising in store windows, and unidentified parking lot locations. Other issues include the restrictive zoning code and design requirements.

### **DISTRICT POTENTIAL**

Mixed-use: The idea of combining commercial and residential uses under one roof is a very old concept given new currency in recent years by proponents of “new urbanism,” “livable cities,” and “sustainable development.” A convergence of forces is taking place in contemporary cities that is making mixed use less like an outdated anachronism and more like a viable tool in combating the forces of auto-dependency, sprawl, and high housing costs.

An area, like the Mission District, is ideally suited for mixed-use development because it is expressly created to be a place where people can easily walk and do not have to rely on the automobile for getting around the District.

Finally, part of what makes city neighborhoods dynamic is their diversity. In considering mixed-use, it is important to remember that mixed-use development can take many forms. While the City has standards for mixed-use projects in commercial zones, application of these standards to the Mission

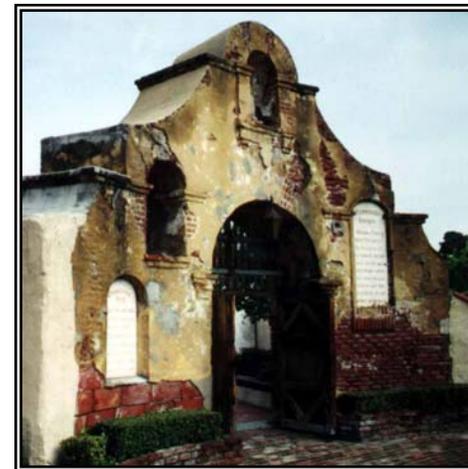


District in a “one size fits all” approach would be a mistake. Mixed-use development must respect the scale, character, and history of the District to be truly effective. The development standards should be tailored to the unique setting of the District. Other uses that can add vitality to the District include live/work space and lodging.

**DOES THE DISTRICT FUNCTION AS A DOWNTOWN?**

In June of 1999, the City of San Gabriel hosted a facilitated discussion with Mr. Donovan Rypkema, principal of the Real Estate Group to assess economic potential for the City including the Mission District. Mr. Rypkema stated that no current area in San Gabriel functioned as a downtown and questioned whether San Gabriel needs a downtown. He further proposed that the Mission District could fulfill that function. He itemized a list of roles for a downtown, noting that a district needs to have at least four of the twelve functions to be a downtown district:

- Retail Center
- Business Center
- Civic Center
- Entertainment Center
- Housing Center
- Medical Center
- Arts and Cultural Center
- Tourism Center
- Educational Center
- Sports Center
- Special Events Center
- Heritage Center



Mr. Rypkema observed that retail gaps in the Mission District would, most likely, be filled with entrepreneurs who are risk takers, funky, and independent. He offered the following suggestions for the Mission District:

- Increase the density through mixed use and mixed users within a building.
- Build a residential component to the District; residents generate four times the economic impact of workers.
- Develop effective private sector entities to partner with the City and other entities.
- Look at the commonalities within the District and deal with those as strategies.



**MAXIMIZING UNDERUTILIZED PROPERTIES**

The City is a key player in the Mission District. It can set the standard for other District property owners by maximizing the uses of City-owned property and by setting the standards for design. Currently, these sites contribute to the lack of synergy in the District. The present lack of street rhythm is a factor in the lack of vitality. Many key blocks have gaps between buildings that are used for parking and driveways. One way to create a pedestrian friendly street is to provide ground level activity. These panorama pictures show the underutilized properties, and the two largest gaps are City property: the Civic Auditorium parking lot, and the Park and Ride lot. Developers have shown interest in building mixed-use developments, introducing lofts and apartments into the area, and rebuilding displaced parking facilities. This Plan not only addresses the need to densify the city property but to improve the entire study area by enhancing each neighborhood's strengths and reducing its weaknesses.



Park and Ride Parking Lot



Mission Drive: West Side between Santa Anita and Carmelita



Mission Drive: East Side between Broadway and Santa Anita

