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Our Vision for Sustainable

Excerpt from the Diary of a Resident of the Valley Boulevard Neighborhoods in 2010 (developed from the input of San Gabriel residents during community workshops)

It has been another great day living in one of the most wonderful places in the world. I can't imagine living anywhere else. I feel a real part of this community. My neighbors are among my best friends and I spend a lot of time with them as they live nearby and I can easily walk to their houses on our beautiful tree canopied streets. My husband works downstairs and has plenty of time to spend with our children as he does not have to commute the long distance he did three years ago. Boy, was that tough on our relationship!

Our day started when we woke up this morning with sunlight streaming across the ceiling from the windows that ring the upper level of my bedroom. I am still getting used to the fact that I don't have to turn lights on in the morning to find our way around a dark bedroom and house as we prepare for our day. The clerestory windows provide plenty of daylight throughout much of the year. The placement of all of the windows throughout the house has significantly reduced our need for artificial lighting and our entire family feels much better. Plus we are saving lots of money on our electrical bills!

Our morning has developed into quite a routine. While the kids are showering and getting ready for school, my husband is jogging his established route through the neighborhood and I am practicing my Tai Chi in the little park down the street. I love how the businesses and City have worked together to develop these small green parks within the new retail and residential areas that have developed along Valley Boulevard and in the surrounding neighborhoods.

It feels much more like a neighborhood by having places where I can spend time and recreate with my neighbors. Plus, it is a big bonus to have these beautiful green places as a relief from the concrete that covers so much of our lands. My husband remarks about how he enjoys his morning jog, particularly as the City has worked hard to establish a continuous network of tree-lined paths and sidewalks that have been repaved with materials that include recycled tires. This makes the surfaces much more comfortable for joggers and more durable, as well as being much kinder to the environment!

Valley Boulevard Neighborhoods

My husband and I take turns for our showers as our children eat their breakfasts before leaving for school. The technology has really improved. Our showers and toilets use water that is largely recycled from dishwashing and from our outdoor cisterns that store water that has runoff from our roof during rainstorms earlier in the year. The cisterns are great! We use some of the stormwater to irrigate our landscape and the slopes of our yard have been engineered to keep the runoff on site to percolate into the groundwater basin. Our outdoor irrigation is further minimized as we have landscaped our yard with native trees, grasses, and shrubs that require little water. We are particularly proud about how our new housing and business have been developed and existing uses renovated as we have read reports that our total water consumption in the Valley Boulevard Neighborhoods has been reduced by over 30 percent during the past ten years, even though our population has grown by over 10 percent!

After breakfast, my twelve-year-old boy bicycles to school. Like my husband's jogging paths, the City has been diligent in clearly marking the bicycle paths in the street and installing signing throughout the Valley Boulevard Neighborhoods. Street light activation buttons have been installed on utility poles at the level bicyclists can easily access to help them cross crowded streets. Secured bicycle storage areas, changing rooms, and lockers have been provided at all of our local schools, as well as at many of our larger local businesses. Many of our adults also chose to ride their bicycles throughout the neighborhoods and to the local businesses because of the convenience of these facilities.

As every morning, I walk my six-year-old daughter to school. I can't believe that I used to drive her to school in our old neighborhood. There, the sidewalks were not nearly as well-maintained, there were no trees to provide protection from the sun on hot days, and walking was, generally, a much less pleasant experience. In the Valley Boulevard Neighborhoods I also like that I see many of my neighbors sitting on their porch in the morning reading their newspapers and drinking their coffee. We often say hello to one another and, if I have time when walking back home, I will stop for a cup of coffee and find out what has been happening in their lives.

By the time I return home, my husband has started his work day in his computer sales store downstairs. Our location on Valley Boulevard makes it easy for his employees to come to work by foot and transit. One lives in the mixed-use building at the corner of San Gabriel Boulevard, and the others arrive by Metro buses from Covina and Alhambra. It is truly great how close the major transit station is to where we live and work. We almost never use an automobile anymore! We donated our second car to charity two years ago and drive less than 8,000 miles a year now and, with the current price of gasoline, are saving almost \$2,000 a year, not including our insurance savings. Being close to the transit hub also has increased the number of customers that come to my husband's business.

In the morning, I am able to catch up on my work in my home office. Since having children, my company has let me work from home on a 20-hour-per-week schedule. All of the houses and businesses in our neighborhood have been wired enabling me to quickly access my co-workers, clients, and all of the files that I need to use. I spent about an hour on a video conference with my colleagues and our President, who is visiting the Hong Kong office, and present my designs for a new company logo. I love the video conferencing, as it with the wireless computer access, has enabled me to be in the office once every two weeks. On those days that I do travel to the office in downtown Los Angeles, I am able to walk to our transit station and access the Metro for a quick 15-minute commute.

Since I was able to complete a lot of work this morning, I decide to meet some of my neighbors for lunch. It is always difficult to select a location as we have the choice of so many good restaurants within walking distance. We even have excellent gourmet Chinese and Thai restaurants in the ground level of our own building. I left the house about 12:15 P.M. and walked along Valley Boulevard to the restaurant. Though it was a pretty warm day, I enjoyed my walk due to the canopy of trees that provide shade and the attractive landscape, paving, and benches along the street. Though there are a lot of cars on the street, the attractive sidewalks seem to overcome the noise and visual cacophony. In fact, it seems like a very pleasant urban environment and I see more and more people walking every day. I have read that Southern California's air quality has improved significantly as people in more communities have had the opportunity and opted to walk, bicycle, and use public transit over the last decade. This is great news for people like me who have a history of asthma in our family.

My friends and I spend a leisurely hour and half debating politics and also talking about the City's success in reducing local youth crime through its many intervention and recreation programs. I think that the incredible amount of time that is spent in community activity and socialization, much of which is visible on the streets and in our parks, have been major contributors to this success. People seem to be more involved due to new housing and businesses that provide the opportunity for people to live close to where they work and the great sidewalks and parks where people come together and take pride in their community.

After lunch, I walked back home and logged onto the computer to pay our bills. Since moving here, I have noticed that our monthly utility costs have reduced dramatically. Not only our water savings, but also our electricity, natural gas, and waste disposal costs. In addition to our ability to rely upon natural lighting due to the windows and orientation of the building, we are saving energy through our solar collectors, extra insulation in our walls, placement of the heating and cooling ducts in the conditioned space rather than the attic, and design of interior plenums that help to circulate the air in the house and vent the air at the roof.

Our solar panels have been well integrated with the architecture of our building, are quite attractive, and, more importantly, during the sunniest times of the year (which are frequent in Southern California), generate excess energy that is transmitted to the grid for which we receive credit from Southern California Edison. I was not sure that I liked the visibility of the heating and cooling ducts when we bought the house, but, not only have I become accustomed to it, it is a topic of envious conversation particularly when I am comparing our utility costs with my friends in other cities. Our waste disposal company has also reduced our monthly fee due to the high percentage of waste that we recycle.

Around 2:30 P.M., I ordered our groceries for the week on the computer from the Hawaii Market. I was able to select the meat, fish, and fresh fruits and vegetables by viewing the choices on the video screens. As always, they were delivered within a half hour, with the delivery person able to ride and carry the groceries on our local shuttle that travels throughout the neighborhoods.

Near the end of the day, I once again enjoyed my walk to my daughter's school. I arrived about an hour early so that I could participate in a Chinese painting class. After three months, I am beginning to feel like I may actually have talent. This Saturday, my neighbors and I will be participating in an arts and craft show at the community plaza in San Gabriel Square. This is always a great event and location to make new friends while I try to sell some of my artwork. It is used year round for arts festivals, music performances, cultural events, and other activities and seems like Valley Boulevard's "downtown." After my class, I meet my daughter at the school's foyer and we walk home talking about the great things that happened in each of our days.

Back home, my husband has closed his business for the day and the family gathers for a bicycle ride along the Alhambra Wash. This used to be a very ugly concrete drainage ditch, which the City has turned into a landscaped walkway and bikeway that connect us with surrounding neighborhoods and the historic San Gabriel Mission. It is a very pleasant place to spend the end of one's day.

My husband and I are going to spend our monthly night on the town tonight. But first, we need to prepare dinner for our children and get them ready for their homework and baby sitter. We have so many neighbors in our own building with young adult children that we can always find a reliable baby sitter for our kids. We use the most up-to-date energy-saving gas range and electrical appliances in preparing our children's meal and dishwasher for clean up.

While our daughter and son are eating, we change our clothes for our evening festivities. We are splurging tonight by attending a concert at Walt Disney Concert Hall and starting with a dinner at Patina. In past years, we had to fight the traffic traveling on the San Bernardino Freeway to downtown and waste time finding parking. Now, we are able to catch a Metro down the street and travel to the Concert Hall, which is particularly easy as the buses now run on 15 minute increments. At Patina, we meet friends who have traveled on the Gold Line from Pasadena and we both exclaim how wonderful it is to avoid the stresses of driving and finding parking.

After a great concert, we return to the Valley Boulevard Neighborhoods and enjoy an after-dinner drink on the rooftop of the new restaurant on top of the mixed-use building at the Valley Boulevard–Del Mar Avenue transit center. From here, we walk down the boulevard, with its attractive street lights and lots of other people taking their late-evening stroll, to our wonderful home.

What a fulfilling day!