



# A New Strategy for Building Better Neighborhoods

Presented to the  
Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency

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NEW SCHOOLS • BETTER NEIGHBORHOODS  
811 W. 7th Street, Suite 900  
Los Angeles, CA 90017  
213-629-9019 • [www.nsbm.org](http://www.nsbm.org)  
*written by Renata Simril*

*“what if  
the most telling measure  
of a society is  
how a community  
educates its people?  
then education  
reformers and the  
'smart growth'  
movement must all  
work together to create  
new schools,  
better neighborhoods,  
more livable  
communities”*

## Our Mission

NEW SCHOOLS • BETTER NEIGHBORHOODS (NSBN) is a statewide civic organization formed to promote a 21st Century vision for California's urban school districts: new schools should be centers of neighborhoods and likewise, neighborhoods and communities should serve as centers of learning.

California & Los Angeles face the unenviable task of building hundreds of new schools to relieve overcrowded classrooms and serve a growing student population. These new facilities must be community-centered schools which serve as anchors to neighborhoods by providing a range of services that can be accessed and utilized by all residents and community stakeholders.

To accomplish this mission, NSBN promotes the concept of designing smaller, accessible facilities that can build upon and accommodate existing community assets and adjacent facilities to save on time, money, land, and other resources now used to duplicate functions elsewhere.

NSBN's goal is to create small, neighborhood-centered schools which: (1) function as community centers open at night and on weekends by providing other social services such as day care, health clinics, libraries, and recreation space and (2) reduce sprawl development and suburban migration by more efficient and imaginative use of limited inner city and suburban land.

## Goals of NSBN

- Provide a framework for the best way to site, design, and build public schools.
- Create a strategy for including community dialogue and input as a component in determining the siting and design of public schools.
- Move from the outmoded "factory model" that has defined our public schools until now, to a 21st century vision of community-focused schools, anchoring our increasingly diverse communities.
- Understand how joint ventures between schools and other services (family resource centers, child care, recreational, & libraries) can help make schools the centers of their communities and bring valuable services closer to those who use them.
- Understand if and how we must change our statutes regulations, and/or decision-making processes, and/or procedures to implement this vision.
- Build a permanent constituency group of stakeholders to support and implement these goals.

## Foreward

*New Schools • Better Neighborhoods has evolved from a one-time Spring gathering of civic and educational leaders at a Getty Center Symposium in 1999 to a proactive advocacy organization powered by the common vision of a committed cadre of neighborhood, city, regional and state leaders who see the potential of voter-approved school, preschool, park, library, health and other public funds being intelligently utilized to build not only public facilities that keep the rain out, but more livable urban communities throughout California.*

**David Abel**

Chair

NEW SCHOOLS • BETTER NEIGHBORHOODS

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## Introduction

The Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) is challenged with developing and implementing geographically based action strategies to facilitate the social infrastructure of a community as well as its physical and economic revitalization. However, due to the severe nature of blight and economic disinvestments, many project areas have not yet been able to produce sufficient tax increment to finance CRA work programs. Additionally, in these Los Angeles inner city communities a limited availability of developable land, lack of adequate community infrastructure, environmental contamination, and the regulatory approval processes are key barriers to development.

*“Improving communities requires a comprehensive approach to the challenges and opportunities in each community. The challenge lies in effectively coordinating the variety of public, private, and non-profit resources available to make real and lasting improvements.”*

*Mayor James Hahn  
City of Los Angeles*

Similarly, the CRA's current policy of exacting community facilities through agreements with commercial developers is viewed as an obstacle for many private investors. These existing conditions add risk and additional cost to the development process, so much so that it severely limits the number of private sector developers and investors willing to pursue development in targeted communities. Additionally, lack of available public sector resources and rules that restrict the creativity and the risk-taking required to engage in predevelopment activities necessary to set the stage for private sector investment, have compounded the challenge of neighborhood revitalization.

As a result, the CRA is often limited to pursuing small, individual projects that become temporary *band-aids* for gaping redevelopment *wounds* - projects like residential rehabilitation, façade improvement and streetscape enhancements. While these strategies are important for showing progress in project areas, they fail to leverage extremely limited financing tools and attract the degree of economic investment required to reverse deteriorated conditions.

Even when presented with opportunities for large-scale mixed-use projects that may attract further private investment, the CRA is only able to assist private developers on a site-by-site basis and, in today's economic climate, rarely has funding to close required project-financing gaps. This piecemeal approach to redevelopment often results in a small deal flow and seldom achieves catalytic neighborhood improvement. For the most part, progress in many project areas comes to a screeching halt soon after plan adoption.

*“Opportunities abound for investment in our urban centers. If smart public investments are strategically made in new schools, libraries, and health facilities, new private investment and more livable communities will be the result.”*

*Linda Griego  
Board of Directors  
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation*

A new redevelopment model for the CRA is herein suggested. By partnering with an "intermediary" organization to engage in predevelopment project planning that leverages bond financing for a variety of community infrastructure projects, the CRA can achieve a holistic approach to redevelopment. This new model can provide the missing link between redevelopment plan adoption and desired private sector investment in project areas.

Holistic, or collaborative, predevelopment planning focuses on building much needed community infrastructure projects. This planning approach has demonstrated to other cities, like San Diego and Glendale, that government agencies can achieve faster and more widespread neighborhood revitalization than when they use traditional redevelopment strategies alone. Agencies can leverage public dollars more efficiently with a partner who manages predevelopment work that brings together key government, business and community organizations. This process yields individual benefits for participants and collective gain for the entire community.

While the CRA and other City departments have staff members with the skills to carry out portions of predevelopment activities, they do not have the resources, time nor mandate to ensure win-win solutions for all the parties involved. A predevelopment partner, on the other hand, is specifically organized to execute this role. The partner must bring a successful history of navigating the internal culture of cities, school districts and other

government departments, attract resources to expand predevelopment activities, and bear the initial risk inherent in managing predevelopment activities.

*“Right now we have an added opportunity to invest in community infrastructure in conjunction with the school district and other public agencies...The alternative is to invest in an ad hoc manner that could detract from or even destroy the neighborhood and the community fabric we have endeavored to create.”*

*Gail Goldberg  
Planning Director  
City of San Diego*

Armed with this new redevelopment approach, the CRA can take advantage of several voter-approved bond programs that are available for community infrastructure projects. New school facilities development, in particular, is at the heart of this strategy. School development can eliminate economic and physical blight. Schools play a key role in decisions by individuals and businesses to

remain or locate in a particular area. With new schools as an anchor for collaborative land use planning, the City can amplify redevelopment benefits by leveraging additional public funding for neighborhood parks, police stations, libraries and pre-schools (including early care and education). The result of this strategy can significantly reduce the real and perceived risk for the private sector and spur significant revitalization in CRA project areas. Building new schools and other community amenities with available public funding through a collaborative process can be a linchpin to greater economic development and a tremendous redevelopment opportunity for Los Angeles’ inner city and suburban neighborhoods.

## The Investment Environment

The communities of South Central Los Angeles, East Los Angeles, Westlake, Boyle Heights, Pacoima, and even Downtown bring forth a rush of images. It is not surprising that these images of Los Angeles’ urban core communities are overwhelmingly negative. They are images of abandoned neighborhoods, crime and violence, roads in disrepair, abandoned buildings separated by desolate vacant lots, and neighborhoods without community centers.

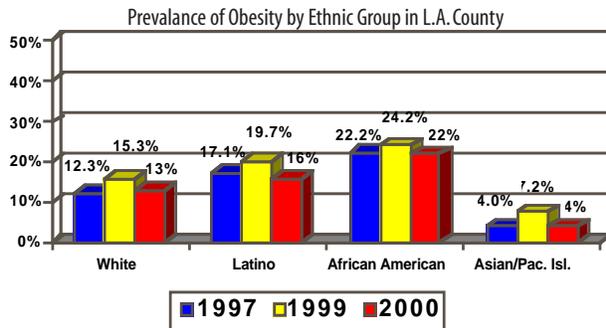
The negative images are substantiated by very real evidence about the physical and social infrastructure problems of most of these communities.

These urban core neighborhoods contain old housing stock overburdened with tremendous residential growth. In addition to great population density, the neighborhoods face a profound lack of vitally needed public assets such as affordable housing, new and modernized schools, parks and open space, libraries, day care and health care centers, and other provisions that nurture the communities' hard-working families

The degree of disinvestment in these communities is astounding. Schools in urban Los Angeles areas are among the most overcrowded in the nation. It is not unusual to see parents gathered at six o' clock in the morning at their neighborhood schools, waving goodbye to buses carrying their young children (many only five or six years old) up to one and a half hours away towards "receiver schools" in outlying areas.

These same urban Los Angeles communities are the most park-starved in California. There is barely one acre of park and open space per one thousand people in most areas, far less than the national standard of ten acres per one thousand people as established by the National Park and Recreation Association. Most neighborhoods do not have parks within walking distance nor contain the picnic areas, playgrounds, and soccer fields available to support community activities.<sup>1</sup> Many children are often resigned to creating makeshift recreational spaces in vacant lots and alleyways.

Additionally, due to a lack of access to adequate health resources, open space and school facilities, the local residents, a majority of whom are racial and ethnic minorities, demonstrate poor health status when compared to the Los Angeles-area White population. Health disparities facing people within these communities are reaching epidemic proportions.<sup>2</sup> Even though some of the most respected and sophisticated health resources in the nation are located near these urban core areas, language and cultural barriers, poor education, poverty and lack of insurance conspire to make those resources inaccessible to local residents.



Physical activity is an important component to a healthy lifestyle and could help to directly address these health disparities. Inactivity and obesity are two health conditions that lead to diabetes, cardiovascular disease, hypertension, stroke, and potentially cancer. Walking and biking to school can increase physical activity

among children and adults, but the current standard solution to overcrowding - placing children or driving them in private vehicles to outlying schools - directly prevents this potential health benefit. Neighborhood parks could provide yet another opportunity to increase physical activity but the lack of neighborhood park space in most urban communities deny families this option.

## A New Paradigm for Redevelopment

The profound need for public infrastructure investments in these dense urban communities is not news. The problems have been stated and restated and “silo-managed” government entities have each attempted to address the problem independently for decades. The Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks builds neighborhood parks, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) builds schools, the Library Department builds libraries, and the Police Department builds police stations. Each is required to analyze and evaluate capital funding and development impacts separately. But none are required to inform a community-wide vision and maximize investment impact by securing predevelopment funding to coordinate efforts with other agencies or private entities. Instead, unyielding competition for limited land and financial resources pits department against department, and despite best intentions, uncoordinated public facilities development often leaves communities in no better position than before.<sup>3</sup>

Fortunately, a new consensus has formed on collaborative planning strategies as the solution to building healthier neighborhoods in dense

urban areas. This opens up a window of opportunity for the region’s civic leaders to meet the extraordinary challenge of boosting community infrastructure by identifying, planning and developing opportunities for combining and consolidating public uses on scarce plots of available land. Specific to this point is the opportunity to leverage state and local bond allocations that is being provided for new school development and modernization projects.

*“If we leverage different dollars and we plan the uses at the outset, we could come up with much better ways of using both the land, which is scarce, and the dollars, which are scarce, to create housing, schools, parks, and other kinds of neighborhood amenities.”*

*Jane Blumenfeld  
Principal City Planner  
City of Los Angeles*

Faced with the challenge of building more than 150 new schools in the next decade to relieve overcrowded conditions, the LAUSD is a ready partner for mixed-use collaborations that further its educational mission and help to minimize the displacement of residential properties, which heretofore has been the standard approach by most school districts.

These new schools are a major investment by the state of California in urban areas throughout Los Angeles County and could represent the single opportunity for any new facilities in many overcrowded neighborhoods or provide for the only public open space in which people can take pleasure. Because of the extraordinary opportunity this presents, every effort should be made to leverage this investment to provide for other equally important needs of the community. Collaborative land-use planning could make schools the new focus for the community and the quality of neighborhoods could be significantly improved if new school facilities are planned creatively to also address other pressing needs of dense urban communities.

Public agencies, such as the Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA), have a vital interest in understanding and participating in both the planning and implementation of such collaborative projects. As the partnership arm of the City of Los Angeles, a key mission of the CRA is to use its redevelopment authority to build healthy neighborhoods and

communities. Success in this regard is usually a time-intensive and complex process, and requires a number of redevelopment tools, strategies, and programs to address the conditions that have led to blight and economic disinvestment. Unfortunately, given the challenging nature and limited financial resources in most project areas, widespread project objectives are seldom achieved. But how can development of new school facilities be leveraged to maximize redevelopment results?

### *New School Development Eliminates Blight*

The removal of physical blight as a first step to revitalizing communities is a fundamental reason for redevelopment and will lead to the overall economic revitalization of a neighborhood. Buildings, vacant lots, and infrastructure in poor condition hasten disinvestments in a community. The visual appearance of a neighborhood is critical to the attraction of the private sector dollars essential for community revitalization.

But the role of school development as a redevelopment tool is much more than just about placing a school in a neighborhood. What a school district removes is just as important. The South Park proposal in South Los Angeles is an excellent example. As an alternative to removing one hundred plus "historically significant" homes, the school district could acquire other sites in very close proximity to their ideal location, sites that are currently blighted.

Working in collaboration with the CRA and other City departments, school districts could leverage opportunities to assist redevelopment agencies with the elimination of blight while still maintaining the character of the neighborhood. This balanced and collaborative planning approach is critical to successfully building healthier neighborhoods. Additionally, this type of strategic public investment can help to create a more visually attractive environment and set the stage for private sector developers to invest with a sense that the risk of investment has been reduced and is more manageable. The key is planning for the long term.

Removal of blight through new school development is directly related to economic development and neighborhood revitalization. In addition to providing a much-needed resource to communities, new schools can serve as a catalytic project, demonstrate positive change and help to attract additional investments. By making strategic public investments on a previously blighted site, the result will give a private investor more confidence in the economic potential of that area.



The Future Site of the Vermont-Manchester Shopping Center

The Youth Opportunities Unlimited Learning Center in the CRA's Vermont/Manchester Redevelopment Project Area provides a direct example. Prior to the development of this approximately 38,000 square foot LAUSD continuation high school, day care (for 60 children) and recreation center, the southeast corner of Vermont and Manchester was a collection of vacant,

abandoned lots and alleyways cluttered around a series of half burnt buildings, remnants of the 1992 civil unrest. The area was an open-air receptacle of old tires and worn out couches. Since completion of the facility, a private developer is now pursuing development of a commercial shopping center immediately adjacent to the new school facility. Additionally, there is a renewed spirit amongst the surrounding residents about the future economic possibilities of their neighborhood.

### *New School Development Enhances Real Estate Values*

Seizing the current opportunity to leverage school bond funding can also create a better climate for economic development in some of Los Angeles' urban neighborhoods. According to the California Health and Safety code, economic blight is a function of depreciated or stagnant property values and high business vacancies. New school development has been established to enhance local real estate values and attract businesses. This fact is substantiated in a May 2000 study conducted by Karen Finucan, a freelance writer in Bethesda, Maryland. Finucan compared home value changes in Brookline and Arlington, two Massachusetts communities, where the former

invested in new public schools and the latter did not. According to Finucan, median home prices rose far more in Brookline, (from \$275,000 in 1990 to \$520,000 in 1999) than in Arlington. Yet the Brookline minority population is almost double that of Arlington. And more Brookline students are eligible for the free lunch program, suggesting an overall lower income population.

The difference, according to the report, seems to be an investment in school facilities. Brookline began building and renovating school facilities in the early 1990s while Arlington did not. When Arlington finally built a new school facility in the mid-1990s the effect was apparent. Since 1998, the median sales price of a single-family home in Arlington rose by \$36,000. According to Oklahoma City's planning director, interviewed for the same report, the renovation of the Cleveland Elementary School led to a 30 to 100 percent increase in property values in the surrounding urban neighborhood. Obviously, some of this gain can be attributed to residential price appreciation but the research clearly demonstrates a direct link to new school development.

### *New School Development Supports the Local Economy*

In addition to enhancing real property values, schools also support relationships with businesses that are productive for students and supportive of the local economy. They can encourage the use of outside experts and skilled community volunteers for a variety of educational functions, including mentorships, apprenticeships, and work-based and service learning.

Leveraging the current funding to build new schools should not be underestimated. Development of new school facilities is a direct sign of a city's commitment to students, to neighborhoods and to a city's economic vitality. Additionally, according to the Los Angeles Economic Development Corporation, the quality of schools is a key criteria in a business's decision to remain or locate a business in a particular area.

### *New School Development Supports Community*

It takes a village or, in the case of Los Angeles County, a neighborhood, to raise a child. To the extent that the quality of the community affects the mindset that students bring to school, to the extent that a strong and cohesive neighborhood can provide positive outlets for young people, and to the extent that schools can serve as community centers and catalysts for revitalization, the interest of the public agencies throughout the City, including the CRA and LAUSD, must converge.



Los Angeles School Children at Play

The development of new school facilities alone, however, cannot provide for the degree of need in many urban neighborhoods nor influence the level of investment required to successfully revitalize these areas. A successful collaborative master planned strategy - whereby community infrastructure projects such as public school facilities, early education centers, neighborhood parks, health facilities, and other public assets are developed in an interrelated, holistic, and community-drive manner - can help to leverage very limited resources while maximizing results.

This holistic approach can also strengthen a community's sense of identity, unity and consensus. Like a new version of the old town square, it can serve as a community hub and a place where neighbors can engage. The foundation of redevelopment is economic development. And any pragmatic economic development strategy must include investment in a variety of community infrastructure projects including the development of new school facilities.

## Collaborative Planning: A Catalyst for Redevelopment

The City Heights Initiative is an outstanding case study for how leveraging limited public resources and employing a collaborative land-use planning strategy can serve as a catalyst to widespread neighborhood revitalization.

City Heights in San Diego's Mid-City area is a community of 73,000 people on approximately 2,062 acres and was approved as a redevelopment project area in 1992. At the time of plan adoption, City Heights had no center, no

focus, and little to no community infrastructure. It was a victim of physical and economic blight. The area's crime rate was higher than the city as a whole, over one-third of the residents lived below the poverty line, and school performance was far below the city average. Although the area generated very little tax increment, the San Diego Redevelopment Agency did its best to develop and implement comprehensive redevelopment strategies to restore physical and economic health to the neighborhood, unfortunately with no significant success.

In 1996, Sol Price, the founder of The Price Club and Price REIT decided to expand his retail development activities into the inner city and tap an underserved market. Price, along with William Jones, a former San Diego City Councilman, formed a company named CityLink Investment Corporation to implement the idea. When Vons, one of only two supermarkets in the neighborhood, closed down, Price and Jones saw an opportunity to build a retail project. However, soon after approaching Vons, they discovered that the City had already bid on the property with the intent of building a police substation.

**URBAN VILLAGE  
IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE**

**Planning**

1990 • Declaration of Emergency called in City Heights due to increasing crime rates and lowered standard of living

1992 • City Heights Redevelopment Project Area adopted

1996 • William Jones and Sol Price form CityLink Investment Corp. and begin scouting retail opportunities

• Vons Retail Site in City Heights closes and City acquires the site

• City Heights holds Economic Development Summit

• Community driven master planning process engaged in 8 weeks

**Development**

1996 Police Substation/Community Gym

1998 Mid-City Community Center Library, Day Care, & Theatre

2000 Continuing Education Center

2001 Albertson's Grocery/Retail Center

2002 116-unit Townhome Project  
136,600/SF Office/Retail Building

During this same time, the City sponsored an economic development and crime summit to devise new solutions to provide critically needed public assets for the residents of the City Heights neighborhood, including a police substation and public elementary school. It was at this moment that Jones saw an opportunity to develop not just a retail project but to create the necessary components of a healthy, vital community through a collaborative, community-driven revitalization effort.

*“I think [a collective sense of urgency] is lacking in many neighborhoods; the appetite is there, the interest is there, and in many cases the dollars are there. But, there isn’t one single force able to bring together a diverse group of stakeholders and lead them down a specific path of action.”*

*William Jones  
President  
CityLink Investment Corporation*

Recognizing that revitalizing City Heights requires focus on all the factors that contribute to physical and economic blight, Price and Jones committed to employing holistic strategies of redevelopment and making the redevelopment effort community driven. The Urban Village, as the initiative was dubbed, focused on a seven square block area, totalling nearly 38 vacant acres with four city streets.

Price and Jones believed that a strong urban core of facilities and services was essential to a healthy community, and, ultimately, the success of their retail project. As an initial step, they provided the funding to initiate a master planning and community outreach strategy for the Urban Village concept. The goal was to develop a master plan that encouraged and facilitated a synergistic around-the-clock relationship between public, community, and educational facilities.

The completed project was implemented over a six-year period and developed as a partnering venture between numerous public agencies, private foundations, and CityLink Investment Corporation. The building uses for the Urban Village, in order of implementation include:

- Mid-City police substation and community facility, including a gymnasium
- Rosa Parks Elementary School
- Community park, public library, recreation center, and swim & tennis center with joint-use fields associated with the elementary school
- Multi-purpose theater
- Four-classroom Head Start learning & day care center
- Community College District 32 classroom continuing education facility
- Conversion of Wightman Street to a landscaped parking promenade providing a direct link from the park to the retail center

- Three square blocks of retail, commercial, and residential uses
- 46-units of affordable housing

Through the community-focused master planning process, two critical residential demands were raised. One demand was with regard to public safety. Almost unanimously the residents identified public safety as one of their paramount concerns and many expressed the fact that the area did not have its own police substation. Regrettably, the City could not afford to complete construction of the substation until sometime between 2000 and 2005.

In order to expedite construction of the substation, Price Charities, the non-profit entity of the Price REIT, agreed to lend funds to the City for building the substation. In exchange, the City agreed to incorporate the substation in the Urban Village master plan and to relate the building design to the community.



Urban Village Master Plan

The substation was also equipped with public meeting rooms to provide a safe place for community members to meet and foster interaction between the community and the police. Most creatively, the substation was intentionally situated in the same building as the community gymnasium in order to build positive connections between the police and the youth of City Heights.

The police substation as the first development project was key to the successful implementation of the Urban Village. It provided the focal point of the Urban Village concept and allowed other investments to go forward. The second key development of the Urban Village concept was the new Rosa Parks Elementary School. During community meetings, many residents expressed the need for a new school. They articulated that their personal investment decisions would be based on whether or not a new school was built.

The overall importance of the new school was not as an attraction for new investors; rather it was intended to provide an economically vibrant community for the benefit of the people who already lived in the neighborhood. The resulting increase in median home values is astounding. In 1996, prior to implementation of the Urban Village initiatives median home values were approximately \$80,000. Today, the entry price for a single-family home is \$160,000. While this is great news for the City Heights community, there is a concentrated effort to ensure that quality affordable housing is built so that residents of City Heights can remain in the community.



Rosa Parks Elementary School

Other outcomes of the City Heights Urban Village are extraordinary. Tax increment financing for the project area was non-existent prior to the Urban Village project and has more than tripled in the last year. This provides the Redevelopment Agency with resources with which to enhance and expand redevelopment efforts for the area and beyond.

Additionally, and just as important, there is an amazing sense of empowerment to the community and a renewed sense that things can change for the better. People are taking pride in their neighborhood and making efforts to keep it up. The physical space is much more visually appealing, and commercial developers and new businesses are investing in the area. The community now has a center.

The City Heights model demonstrates that articulating a clear vision, seizing opportunities to leverage public resources, employing a collaborative land use planning strategy, and securing public sector endorsement, can lead to the restoration of healthy neighborhoods and communities. However, the critical component to the overall success of the Urban Village concept was having an independent, non-profit organization serve as a predevelopment partner to the City and CRA, with the flexibility to react appropriately to any new challenge, access to predevelopment funding and the willingness to take on risk inherent in predevelopment activities.



The Mid-City Police Substation

Additionally, there was early “buy in” from all parties involved to build out the master plan once it was developed. Without the involvement of Price Charities leading the parties toward a shared vision of neighborhood redevelopment, all agree that the revitalization of City Heights would not have happened. This statement is not intended as an indictment of the City or the San Diego Redevelopment Agency. Price Charities was specifically organized to serve an extremely vital role not under the mandate of city departments nor the redevelopment agency, and was staffed with a passionate team of experts with the skills, background, and resources necessary to execute win-win solutions for all parties involved.

## Shared-Use Collaboration Maximizing Limited Public Resources

The Edison School / Pacific Park Project in the City of Glendale, California provides for a more local example of how collaborative planning and development can maximize limited land and public financial resources through a shared/mixed-use partnership. Mixed-use projects are a mixture of facilities such as school facilities and housing units developed jointly on one site. Shared-use partnerships are mixed-use projects where the functions such as ball fields, multi-purpose library facilities are shared by both the students at the school and residents of the housing facility.

The City of Glendale and the Glendale Unified School District are collaborating on a joint-development project known as the Edison School/ Pacific Park Project. Siegal Diamond Architecture in association with M.I.G. Landscape Architects collectively served as the predevelopment partner in this example. The project will provide a new elementary school, community center, library, and park expansion for Glendale residents.

This project is a groundbreaking example of shared-use concepts. A detailed programming effort that involved community members, City and School District staff, and elected officials identified key components of the facility that could be shared between the elementary school and the City.

The shared-use facilities include:

- Multi-purpose Cafeteria and Gymnasium
- Art, Science, and Computer Classrooms
- Library combining functions of both a city branch and school facility
- Hardscaped & grass playing field
- Parking facilities

*“When we drink from the public trough, let’s make leverage the beverage. Each acre of college campus that can be shared with a high school may generate \$2 million in improvements. Each new school in a neighborhood can create the equivalent of a new 2-acre park. But we get these results only if school, park and college leaders are willing to share their turf - literally.”*

*Bob Niccum*

*Former Director of Real Estate and Asset Management  
Los Angeles Unified School District*

In a detailed agreement negotiated between the City and School District, the elementary school has exclusive use of the joint-use facilities during all school hours, while the community has use of the same facilities after school and on weekends. All joint-use facilities are accessible from either the school grounds, or the community center/library/park, and have two entrances - one for the school and one for the community. The

facilities will be used seven days a week from 6:00 a.m. when the free school breakfast program starts until 10:00 p.m. when the lights go out on the softball and soccer fields in the park.

The project will cost \$17.9 million, and is estimated to be completed by the last quarter of 2002. Fiscal benefits of joint-use include reduced initial construction, land, and operational costs. It is estimated that the joint-use strategy saves each agency approximately \$5 million when compared to costs incurred if they built stand-alone facilities on separate sites. The shared-use facility concept also significantly reduces the need for land acquisition, demolition of affordable housing, and relocation of existing tenants, through the efficient use of dense urban land. This project will benefit children, teenagers, adults, and seniors. Consequently, City and School Officials believe that the Edison School/Pacific Park project will serve as a true multifunctional center for the entire community.

## Westlake Community: Collaborative Planning in Los Angeles

Many urban neighborhoods in Los Angeles, from the Port to the Valley, could benefit from such collaborative planning and development, particularly in CRA redevelopment project areas. The City Heights and Glendale examples provide for a blueprint of how collaborative master planning and joint-use development can result in maximized redevelopment objectives. Both models worked well for the circumstances presented at the time and in those places. But, no two neighborhoods are the same. Different social, economic, and political trends of a neighborhood will usually dictate the appropriate route that will yield win-win solutions for the parties involved. There are, however, several fundamental elements that make an area prime for such an effort. These elements include:

- Civic leadership committed to collaborative land use planning and development
- Underlying land use policies that allow for and support mixed-use development
- An area experiencing severe physical and economic blight
- An area within an approved CRA redevelopment project area with all its redevelopment tools available
- A densely populated area with a limited availability of land and financial resources
- Community infrastructure projects planned for the area
- A market for community infrastructure and services
- A well-established organization with the predevelopment funds necessary to initiate a master planning effort

One area in Los Angeles that is well positioned to benefit from such an effort is the Westlake neighborhood. Westlake is a non-descript largely Latino neighborhood on the western fringe of downtown. Some 50 years ago, prominent local families called Westlake home and the major thoroughfares were lined with Victorian houses from two-and three-story

mansions to small exquisitely detailed cottages. Westlake began to lose its exclusiveness as migration towards the coast increased in the 1940's. Today the roughly three-mile area is the most densely populated area in the city with approximately 34,000 persons square mile<sup>4</sup> and is an eclectic mix of overcrowded residential buildings and underutilized commercial properties, dotted with vacant lots and abandoned buildings.



A Group of Los Angeles Area Students

Westlake is the first point of entry for most Latino immigrants coming to Los Angeles. Of the approximately 106,000 people that make up the Westlake community, approximately 91% are Latino and nearly 20% of the population is children under the age of nine years old. Of this segment of the population, approximately 10% or 10,500 children are under the age of five<sup>5</sup>. Many residents of the Westlake community are very-low and low-income individuals and are transit dependent. And, as would be expected, the community suffers from a lack of public amenities such as neighborhood parks, health facilities, and libraries. Additionally, due to the large number of school age children in the area, the public schools are severely overcrowded, as is evidenced from the fact that all of the schools in the neighborhood are on the year-round track system.

Several critical community infrastructure projects, including a new police facility for the Rampart Division, new primary and secondary public school facilities, including Gratts Primary Center, and an affordable housing project by A Community of Friends, have been proposed for the Westlake community. These projects provide for a unique opportunity to leverage public investment in a way that maximizes the greatest benefit for the community as a whole. In addition to these projects, various city departments, the CRA, and non-profit organizations are actively trying to provide for neighborhood parks and other public open space amenities, quality health facilities, daycare centers, and early education opportunities.

Unfortunately, the projects are being planned by the various agencies and organizations in the traditional “silo” managed manner with little regard for addressing the greater needs of the community through a collaborative and holistic master planning approach - an approach that has demonstrated significant results in other cities. For instance, this failure to collaborate has everyone competing over a soon-to-be-available 4.25-acre property at the intersection of 6th and Valencia. However, a casual drive around the neighborhood demonstrates the vast quantity of other land resources that are available with which to realize project objectives.

*“Collaborative planning is not about pie-in-the-sky theories...it is about pragmatic approaches to how we reintroduce mixed-use scenarios that can help to sustain the cost of development.”*

*Ed Reyes  
Los Angeles City Council  
District 1*

There are several other key resources that conspire to make Westlake a prime target project for a collaborative planning and development effort. The area has an adopted redevelopment project area with its full powers of redevelopment. There exists an established community infrastructure with which to engage initial planning efforts, including the

Westlake Citizens Advisory Committee and two, soon to be, certified neighborhood councils. Well-established non-profit organizations like New Economics for Women and Central City Neighborhood Partners are actively seeking to develop revitalization projects. The area is a prime market for the products and services being planned, and the City Councilman representing Westlake is supportive and committed to engaging in a master planning and development effort.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned however, the single most important reason why Westlake is a prime area for this type of effort: because it is the most effective way to plan. The potential economic development benefits for the Westlake community could be maximized if a collaborative master planning and development approach is implemented.

What’s missing? An established organization that can effectively bring the various government entities and organizations together. The value of

this organization would be distinguished by its ability to articulate a clear vision of the possibilities, engage civic leaders and the community as owners and advocates, and access predevelopment funding with which to initiate a master planning effort for the broader Westlake community. This partnership would result in win-win solutions for the parties involved.

## The Framework for Collaborative Planning and Development

The foundation of this new strategy for building better neighborhoods is predicated upon the conclusion that collaborative planning and development can result in win-win solutions for all parties involved and that this approach must become the new planning paradigm if civic leaders are to succeed in restoring health to urban neighborhoods.



Community Collaboration

The simple fact is that urban areas no longer have available land with which to build single-purpose facilities. Therefore, to accommodate future growth, urban cities must plan and development mixed-use projects in more much more creative ways than before. Most would agree that sharing resources is often much smarter than duplicating resources and that working together can produce greater community benefits than working in isolation.

The evolution of a more collaborative and efficient community-based planning strategy will open up significant opportunities to maximizing the resources of the city as a whole. However, implementing this new strategy is a much more difficult proposition and will rely on several key elements.

### *Predevelopment Partner*

Identifying an appropriate, predevelopment partner is essential. This organization, in collaboration with a supportive school district, city and community leaders and organizations can provide the missing link between redevelopment plan adoption and the desired private sector investment.

This “intermediary organization” would serve as the single voice capable of bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders and lead them down a specific path of action. This group must be staffed with strong, credible facilitators who can maintain a broad perspective on underlying civic interests and balance those interests with community needs. Additionally, the staff of this organization must have the skills and stature to convene stakeholders, facilitate planning efforts, negotiate collaborative agreements, provide oversight, and expedite the removal of bureaucratic and political obstacles.

Of specific benefit is experience and knowledge of the various government agencies that will be key participants in the process, such as the Mayor, City Council and CRA, the LAUSD, the Police Department, and the Department of Parks and Recreation. Knowing how government is run, what its interests are, and the constraints and opportunities of which public agencies can take advantage are key to a successful collaborative planning and development effort.

### *Access to Pre-Development and Planning Funds*

Master planning and predevelopment funding, or more specifically the lack of it, is the number one challenge for most public agencies. Therefore, the value of a predevelopment partner should be based upon its ability to access predevelopment funding and its willingness to take on initial risk of funding neighborhood master planning and site design efforts.

The CRA’s selection of one or more predevelopment partners should also be predicated upon the organization’s ability to leverage other public funding sources for project implementation and other civic activities.

### *Engaging Community Participation*

Contrary to popular perception, community residents can be the city’s biggest advocate to getting projects built. However, in today’s climate, residents, along with affordable housing advocates and political leaders

who help to represent their interests, find themselves called reluctantly into battle when the routine forces of city agencies intent on acquiring land for new schools or other public and private facilities present them with an irrevocable eminent domain eviction notice. Often the greatest resentment left lingering from such battles lies not in the ordeal presented by relocating to new housing, but rather in the sense of disrespect and

disconnection residents feel from a process that frequently fails to completely involve and engage them in making determinations about the future of their neighborhood.

*“The fact that one of every three students doesn’t technically have a seat is what brought those that gathered at the New Schools • Better Neighborhoods Symposium together. It’s not good enough to put them in seats. We have to take this opportunity, with the money on the table and overwhelming demand, to create school facilities that are better attuned to what we know works for students in urban areas - and that’s integrated involvement with their communities.”*

*Ted Mitchell  
President  
Occidental College*

The communities where the CRA works want to believe that the City is committed to working with them to build a stronger, healthier neighborhood. One very powerful way to demonstrate this is to engage the community at the very outset of the master planning process.

The CRA can give residents a sense of ownership, pride, and that their involvement made a difference by ensuring widespread and meaningful community participation at the beginning of neighborhood redevelopment planning. The neighborhood projects will ultimately belong to the communities who have been involved.

This is not to represent community involvement as an effortless process. As CRA staff has demonstrated through its numerous redevelopment plan adoption processes, engaging a diverse group of community stakeholders is an extremely delicate process and takes an inordinate amount of time, education and coordination. The key is to leverage the work of other agencies and organizations that have established a foundation of credibility with community stakeholders and expand from this point. An example of this might include working with CRA project/community area committees or building from community relationships and networks established by a local non-profit organization.

Another important element, mentioned previously, is to ensure that predevelopment partners are staffed with strong, credible facilitators who can maintain a broad perspective on underlying civic interests and balance those interests with community needs.

### *Collaborative Master Planning*

A collaborative, comprehensive master planning approach to projects is also critical. The CRA does, in consultation with a variety of civic and community stakeholders prepare and adopt plans that articulate a vision for a project area to direct or target investment toward a common goal. However, these plans provide only standards or guidelines on land use and

urban form and cover the entirety of the redevelopment project area. Engaging a more inclusive community-based planning strategy for a target area within a neighborhood, with support from civic leadership, can open up opportunities to maximize redevelopment objectives and leverage the resources of the entire community.

*“If you want ‘involvement’ you go out and ask people their opinions. If you want ‘participation,’ you challenge people to engage in problem solving.”*

*Rick Cole  
City Manager  
City of Azusa*

The focus should not be to create impressive plans but rather plans that can capture the imagination of all the stakeholders and, more importantly, plans that can be implemented quickly. Planning that yields immediate results is the key. Important to this point is to have early “buy in” from all participants that project components will be built out once a master plan is completed. This approach will give the residents of a neighborhood a voice in the revitalization process and help to build confidence that positive things can happen, and happen quickly.

The focus on developing community infrastructure projects in a collaborative manner can bring neighborhood assets and activities together to create a neighborhood center that is virtually non-existent in most communities. In the end, instead of various government agencies competing for limited land and resources on which to build separate projects, greater gains can

be achieved by working together.

### *Civic Commitment and Support*

Collaboration with a supportive school district, civic, and community leaders and organizations can result in the successful implementation of this new planning and redevelopment paradigm. But to ensure success, civic leaders must be willing players, open and flexible to design recommendations so long as they meet their program objectives and timing requirements, and committed to building out the master plan once it is developed.

*"The health and success of California communities is dependent on strategically located, multi-use school facilities. Community services currently provided independently by cities, counties, special districts and school districts could be provided jointly through neighborhood centers consolidated with neighborhood schools. In this way, community goals, rather than parochial agency goals, could be emphasized and achieved."*

*Steven Szalay  
Executive Director  
California State Association of Counties*

Certainly not to be undervalued, the Los Angeles CRA also has a critical role to play. The agency must take a leadership role in supporting initiatives to implement such projects. The CRA must be ready and willing to use its powers of redevelopment in a very focused manner, to leverage public dollars around a clear and defined strategy, and when necessary provide the staff to help rally other governmental entities to become partners in collaborative redevelopment processes.

## Implementation: The Time is Now

The critical opportunity for Los Angeles lies in timing. The State of California is currently completing the statewide spending of \$9.2 billion in state school bond funds to modernize and build new schools. Concurrently, local jurisdictions are authorizing additional matching bond dollars in order to access the state bonds approved and pending approval. Los Angeles County alone stands to qualify for approximately \$4 billion in new state school construction funds. In total, \$100 million of funds generated from the proposed state school bond, \$250 million from the just approved park bond measure, \$100 million from First Five/Prop. 10 Commission for universal access to preschool including early care and education, and a like amount from the state library bond. These dollars are potentially

available to create incentives for urban school districts and municipalities to jointly build mixed-use projects that locate schools with parks, libraries, health facilities preschools, and other types of public infrastructure. This is not counting the remaining park and police bond funding that might be available.

Unfortunately, if left without a predevelopment partner to initiate collaborative planning and development of these public assets, city departments will build their projects in isolation and to the continued detriment of urban neighborhoods. Today there exists a unique opportunity to leverage the incredible amount of public bond financing for a variety of community infrastructure projects.

Civic leaders must act with speed in order to maximize this current opportunity. Identification of an appropriate organization with the mandate of fostering collaborative civic engagement and decision making processes can lead to the successful development of new school facilities, neighborhood parks, pre-schools, health and other public amenities with maximum effect for communities who need it. Coordinating efforts in this manner is the most efficient way to achieve widespread redevelopment objectives.

## Next Steps

By partnering with a predevelopment partner with the ambition to foster a credible civic engagement and decision-making process leading to the successful development of mixed-use schools, parks, health facilities and other public amenities, the CRA is well-positioned now to act with maximum effect.

The flow of money has yet to begin. Municipalities and school districts have identified potential building sites for parks, schools, libraries, and other facilities, but only a relative few have been acquired. Planning and design concepts for new facilities dependent on new dollars are yet to be

settled upon. Substantial financial inducements from the state will be available in November of this year and are specifically encouraging mixed-use ventures blending school, municipal, and other public services and infrastructure.

Tenacious citizen-led efforts over the last three years have created an atmosphere favoring mixed and joint use among a broad cross-section of elected public officials, community and neighborhood groups, school facilities planners, developers, financiers, and others. The City Heights and Glendale models are a testament to the effectiveness of mixed-use school site development - the result of which are fully revitalized neighborhoods where families and children are the primary beneficiaries of burgeoning new urban villages.

And, finally, the leading proponent and most qualified predevelopment partner advocating this approach, New Schools • Better Neighborhoods (NSBN), in collaboration with supportive school districts, city agencies and community organizations, is enthusiastically ready to help facilitate and manage this new planning and redevelopment paradigm in metropolitan Los Angeles.

### *Recommendations*

The following are recommended as next steps that the CRA can pursue to implement this new planning and redevelopment model:

- Adopt a policy statement that allows the CRA to support this new strategy for building better neighborhoods and commit the strategy as part of the Agency's overall redevelopment mission.
- Develop a demonstration project or projects and initiate collaborative planning processes focused on implementing new school facilities, neighborhood parks, police station, pre-school facilities, health centers, and other public assets in a collaborative master-planned approach.

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- Identify one or more appropriate predevelopment organizations and execute mutual agreements to begin collaborative planning and development efforts for implementation of public infrastructure projects in target redevelopment project areas.
  - Identify a CRA staff person or persons who will serve as the primary point of contact with the predevelopment partner to assist in navigating the political landscape and getting project deals completed.
  - Commit to flexible use of redevelopment tools to support implementation of master plan goals and explore the possibilities of providing “bridge” financing for implementation of other public agency projects.

## Notes

1 According to the Environmental Defense Fund, the five poorest of Los Angeles' City Council districts have just 0.455 acres of park space per resident.

2 Heart disease is the leading cause of death for all Americans, but nationwide, African Americans were 30% more likely to die of heart disease than Whites in 1999.

Diabetes is the sixth leading cause of death among African Americans, and the African American death rate due to diabetes in 2000 was nearly twice that of Whites.

The prevalence of diabetes in Latinos is nearly double that of whites, and Latinos are twice as likely to have incidences of type-2 diabetes.

The prevalence of obesity is on the rise in Los Angeles County, increasing from 14.3% to 16.7% in just two years (1997-1999) in adults age 18 and over.

The prevalence of childhood obesity is increasing at an alarming rate and Latinos and African Americans are 18% to 24% more likely to be overweight or obese than Whites.

3 "When elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers." Yoruba Proverb.

4 By comparison, there are 18,000 persons per square mile in the 1st Council District and an average of 7,440 persons per square mile in the City of Los Angeles.

5 Approximately 8% of the city's population is under the age of five.

## Credits

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NEW SCHOOLS • BETTER NEIGHBORHOODS  
811 W. 7th Street, Suite 900  
Los Angeles, CA 90017  
telephone 213-629-9019  
facsimile 213-623-9207  
website [www.nsbns.org](http://www.nsbns.org)