

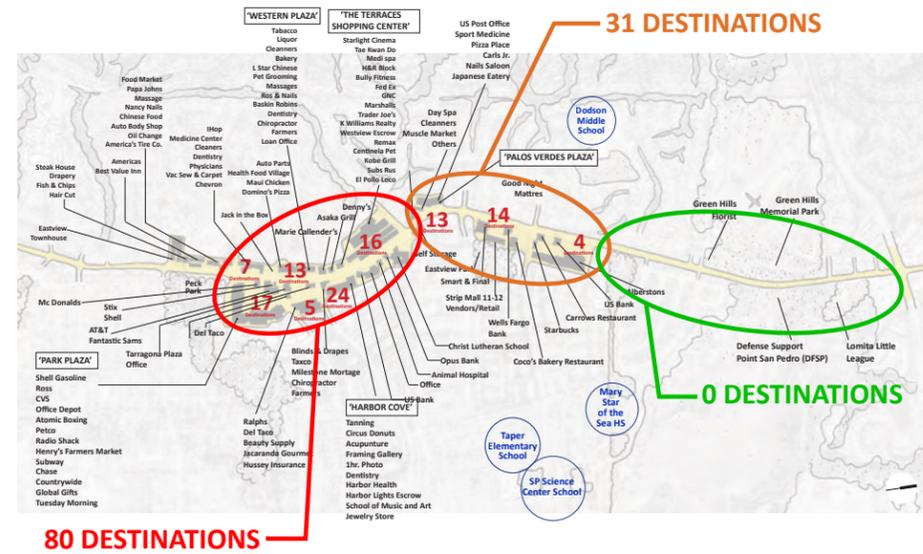
Executive Summary

In 2012, the City of Rancho Palos Verdes embarked on a community-led effort to improve Western Avenue for residents, businesses, and visitors alike. This document summarizes and illustrates the shared vision, ideas, and process that underlie the year-long planning effort.

The significance of this effort, for the City of Rancho Palos Verdes and the adjoining communities, cannot be overstated. It will shape Western Avenue for the next generation and its recommendations will impact the quality of life of residents and visitors, the potential of property holdings, the provision of additional amenities and infrastructure, and the overall image of the Avenue.

The study area constitutes a small segment of Western Avenue, one of the longest streets in Southern California. At 27.5 miles, it could well host the Los Angeles Marathon with room to spare. It is also the only corridor in the region that connects the mountains (at Griffith Park) to the sea (at White's Point). In its long journey to the bluffs of San Pedro, Western Avenue traverses some of the most iconic neighborhoods and communities in the region, successively adopting their identities, and serving as a lasting symbol of Southern California's diversity and vitality. The cities that host Western Avenue include Los Angeles, Westmont, Gardena, Torrance, Lomita, and Rancho Palos Verdes, as well as the unincorporated communities of Westmont and West Athens.

Western Avenue has an anachronistic name. Early in the twentieth



century it did indeed serve as the western boundary of the city of Los Angeles. The city and the region have, since, decisively blown through the frontier it represented, and Western Avenue today finds itself occupying the heart rather than the periphery of the metropolitan region. It has become the pre-eminent north-south boulevard of the region, and the only one that matches the iconic significance of the region's celebrated east-west boulevards – Sunset, Hollywood, Wilshire, Venice, Pico and Olympic.

Western Avenue is the primary corridor of the South Bay, Peninsula, and San Pedro communities. This study focuses on a two-mile stretch from Palos Verdes Drive North on the north to Peck Park at Summerland Avenue on the south. This segment of Western Avenue has historically provided services, amenities, connectivity, and residential opportunities to the region.

The study corridor, for most of its length, constitutes the municipal boundary between the cities of Rancho Palos Verdes (on the west) and Los Angeles (on the east). It provides a diversity of uses with commercial being concentrated on the south, a mix of commercial and residential uses between Toscanini and John Montgomery Drives, and institutional uses located at the north end. Western Avenue is by no means homogenous. It provides a multitude of amenities to a multitude of users.

The corridor is, however, dated. Its patterns of development are representative of a time and approach long past. The commercial cluster on the south end of the study area is auto oriented; with a notably poor pedestrian experience. The residential uses in the middle and north

segment turn their backs to the street and do not contribute to the street's vitality. Neither commercial nor residential developments would be considered acceptable today. Further, the study corridor lacks special places – plazas, parks, and other hubs of community life. These are essential for a successful, if not great, boulevard.

The message heard resoundingly from stakeholders and the community was to improve storefronts, quality of the public realm, and perception of the corridor. It was felt that the corridor also needed to create diversity in its retail, access, and mobility options. If the needs of locals were addressed by providing amenities and improving the Avenue's image, surely visitors and business activity would follow thereafter.

The core recommendation of this vision is to update the nature of development along the corridor and reverse the relationship that buildings and surface parking have with the street. New developments should be built along the property line creating a strong street wall. Surface parking should not be located adjacent to the sidewalk and should not serve as the arrival experience of the corridor. With buildings located at the property edge on the sidewalk, active, visitor-serving uses should be located at ground level. With regards to each of the three segments of the corridor, the following recommendations apply:

SOUTHERN SEGMENT (SUMMERLAND AVE TO CADDINGTON DR)

- This is the commercial heart of the study area, and its experience and image needs updating to sustain its success.
- Reverse the relationship that buildings and surface parking have with the street. New developments should be built along the property line creating a strong street wall. Parking should be located at the rear of the parcel and/or consolidated in strategically located structures.
- Active, visitor-serving uses should be located at the ground level.
- Sidewalks widths should be 15-feet at a minimum with streetscape (vegetation, furniture, lighting, and pedestrian amenities) that promote a vibrant street life.
- Opportunities to create outdoors spaces and special places should be a priority on all new redevelopments.
- The Terraces parcel is a key redevelopment opportunity and, if programmed and designed sensitively, can serve as the catalyst for positive transformation up and down the corridor.

MIDDLE SEGMENT (CADDINGTON AVE TO JOHN MONTGOMERY DR)

- The east side of the street (primarily commercial) will receive similar improvements as the southern segment.
- The west side of the street (primarily residential) presents a challenge with regards to activation. The backyards of homes are not going away and residents, by and large, do not support reconfiguring backyards to allow secondary pedestrian access directly off the street.
- As a result, improvements will mainly be cosmetic and address softer treatments of the harsh cinder block wall. Several options have been considered, with a variety of treatment options.
- Due to the lack of active uses and access to homes, parking along the street is underutilized on the west side. The sidewalk here can be widened by reclaiming the asphalt occupied by parking. This expansion can serve as bio-swale to assist storm water infrastructure and also provide a soft, vegetation buffer between auto traffic and sidewalk.

NORTHERN SEGMENT (JOHN MONTGOMERY DR TO PALOS VERDES DR N)

- The east side of the street is entirely occupied by the fuel storage infrastructure of the Defense Fuel Support Point (DFSP)

San Pedro. This facility, for all practical purposes, is here for perpetuity.

- The west side of the street is entirely occupied by Green Hills Memorial Park. This facility too is here for perpetuity.
- Given that the east and west side of the streets will never house active, visitor-serving uses the experience of this segment of the study area is decidedly auto-oriented.
- Monumental public art, scaled to be visible to auto users, can be located on the street edges (in partnership with the Cemetery and DFSP).
- This segment is also an ideal location for a gateway element announcing the arrival into the commercial heart of the study corridor.
- Surface parking in the northern segment rarely sees any use. Like on the west side of the middle segment, here too, the sidewalks on both the east and west side of the street can be widened to accommodate a bio-swale.

To be sure this is not a unique and innovative set of recommendations. Celebrated boulevards all across the country and in Southern California have used this pattern of development to great success. Stakeholders repeatedly and decisively preferred precedents that exhibited these characteristics. The reality is that undoing a generation of development will not happen overnight and definitely cannot be mandated.

As a path to move forward the key next step recommended by this effort is to prepare design guidelines that will apply to new developments as they come online and incrementally shape the corridor in line with the vision. While this may appear to be straightforward, it is anything but. Western Avenue forms the municipal boundary of the Cities of Rancho Palos Verdes and Los Angeles. As is typical of such frontier streets, efforts to improve them are always more challenging because of the jurisdictional constraints imposed on expenditure of city funds. A further complication arises from Caltrans' ownership and maintenance of the right of way.

Fortunately, the cities of Rancho Palos Verdes and Los Angeles are strong partners in the process and actively support the vision. Both should commit to partnering on preparing joint design guidelines for the corridor where the east and west sides of the streets are looked at holistically; and ideally via a similar SCAG funded process.

Now is the time to begin setting the policies and crafting the incentives to improve Western Avenue so it can continue to serve as the pre-eminent corridor of the Peninsula and South Bay. It will take time, as positive change always does, but the vision is in place, the stakeholders are lined up in support, and the jurisdictions are ready to get going.

