

**Community Planning in 21st Century Los Angeles:
Assessing the Effectiveness of LA's Neighborhood Council System**

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by

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Abstract

By the late 1990s, Los Angeles faced threats from three neighborhoods — the San Fernando Valley, Hollywood, and San Pedro — which all sought municipal independence by seceding from the consolidated city. The orchestrators of each secession movement promoted similar goals such as “fair share of taxes”, “smaller, more individualized government”, and “more local control.” Wealthy homeowners associations and business leaders joined forces in the San Fernando Valley to bring the issue to a citywide referendum, which ultimately failed in 2002.

As former Mayor Richard Riordan became increasingly worried by these secession movements, he launched two commissions to draft a revised City Charter that voters would need to approve via referendum. A major component of the revised Charter was the creation of a “neighborhood council” system designed to “promote more citizen participation in government and make government more responsive to local needs.” Voters approved the City Charter in 1999 and neighborhood councils have been operational for nearly two decades.

This thesis gauges how effective the system has been in achieving its goals of greater citizen participation and more responsive local government. The report hones in on the San Fernando Valley, where secession fervor was the strongest, to examine the extent to which land use- and development-related projects have been debated and discussed by Valley neighborhood councils. Lastly, given the anecdotal stereotype that neighborhood councils are bulwarks against any sort of change, the research explores if and how councils are embracing Los Angeles’ contemporary urbanization trends towards higher-intensity mixed-use and infill developments as well as a growing commitment to public transit expansion.

The study reveals that neighborhood councils have been moderately successful in achieving goals of greater participation and more responsive municipal government despite only serving advisory functions. Neighborhood councils are frequently concerned with land use and zoning matters, and often provide feedback to City Council with their opinions of projects. As Los Angeles becomes less car-centric, neighborhood councils seem to be increasingly more amenable to higher-intensity developments and public transportation projects depending on their local impacts.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Research Questions	5
Background and Literature Review	
Historical Overview of Development in the City of Los Angeles	6
The San Fernando Valley	20
Methodological Approach	21
Findings	25
Conclusion	70
Appendices	
Appendix A: Article IX of Los Angeles City Charter	74
Appendix B: List of Certified Neighborhood Councils	77
Appendix C: Spatial Demographic Patterns in the San Fernando Valley	80
Bibliography	84

List of Tables

Table 1: Selected Resident Demographics and Voter Registration in the San Fernando City vs. Rest of Los Angeles

Table 2: Selected Demographic Characteristics for the Top 8 Neighborhood Councils in Terms of CISs Submitted

Table 3: Selected Demographic Characteristics for the Bottom 8 Neighborhood Councils in Terms of CISs Submitted

List of Figures

Figure 1: Wilshire-Ambassador District Zoning Map (1926)

Figure 2: Ventura Boulevard in the 1980s, Tarzana

Figure 3: Neighborhood Map of the San Fernando Valley in Los Angeles City

Figure 4: “Vote Yes on Measure F” Campaign Literature

Figure 5: “Yes to Valley Cityhood” Campaign Postern

Figure 6: Coverage of Neighborhood Councils in Los Angeles as of March 2019

Figure 7: Screenshot of Candidates for the Lake Balboa Neighborhood Council 2019 Election

Figure 8: Multi-Variate Regression Results

Figure 9: Voter Turnout in 2016 Election and Submitted CISs per Neighborhood Council

Figure 10: Percentage of Residents in Represented Neighborhood with Bachelor’s Degree and Submitted CISs per Neighborhood Council

Figure 11: Percentage of White Residents in Represented Neighborhood and Submitted CISs per Neighborhood Council

Figure 12: Percentage of Households in Represented Neighborhood with Incomes Greater than \$100,000 and Submitted CISs per Neighborhood Council

Figure 13: Percentage of Residents in Represented Neighborhood with Limited English Language Skills and Submitted CISs per Neighborhood Council

Figure 14: Percentage of Residents in Represented Neighborhood that have lived in Unit since 2000 (or earlier) and Submitted CISs per Neighborhood Council

Figure 15: Percentage of Owner-Occupied Housing Units in Represented Neighborhood and Submitted CISs per Neighborhood Council

Figure 16: Advocates attend a hearing at Los Angeles City Hall about Street Vending Legalization

Figure 17: Updated Site Plan for Verdugo Hills

Figure 18: DCP Outreach Process for Community Plan Updates

Figure 19: Community Plan Updates in Los Angeles: 2017 - 2024

Figure 20: Eight District Zones created by the Warner Center 2035 Specific Plan

Figure 21: Rendering of Westfield Promenade 2035 Project in Warner Center

Figure 22: Rendering of the East San Fernando Valley Transit Corridor Light Rail

Introduction

Los Angeles (L.A.) is an iconoclastic metropolis like no other in the world. When Spanish colonizers first established “El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora de los Angeles de Porciuncula” in 1781, it began as a modest farming community with just 44 townspeople. By the turn of the 20th century, Los Angeles became one of the nation’s fastest-growing metropolises due to the completion of new railroad routes and a nascent oil drilling industry (Taylor, 2014). Its explosive growth coincided with the proliferation of the automobile, which in concert with hundreds of square miles of flat, buildable land, resulted in the expansive morphology of single-family homes that continues to define L.A. today.

Within a century, the city’s population burgeoned from 102,479 in 1900 to 3,694,820 in 2000. These 100 years of rapid growth resulted in constant construction, environmental degradation, crippling traffic, and multifamily developments encroaching leafy, suburban neighborhoods. Since the 1950s, two camps have battled over the proper direction of the city; wealthy, primarily-White, slow-growth homeowners interested in protecting their neighborhood character and property values, and real estate developers eager to build larger commercial structures and apartment complexes to accommodate waves of new residents.

L.A. does not have a strong identity as a united city with easily-definable borders. The metropolis’ boundary is irregular and pockmarked, and residents are often unclear if they actually live in the City of Los Angeles (“the City”). Individuals tend to associate their residential affinity to local neighborhoods. City residents living in peripheral districts, like San Pedro or Northridge, often believe that those places are incorporated municipalities, while

residents living in separate incorporated cities in Los Angeles County, like Compton or West Hollywood, consider themselves Angelenos.

This confusion over Los Angeles' identity is exacerbated by the metropolis' notoriously low level of civic engagement (Culbert, Pomirchy & Sonenshein, 2015). Participation in local government elections is very low due to a number of compounding factors that dissuade voters from heading to the polls, such as nonpartisan elections and the requirement to hold an additional "run-off" election when a candidate does not attain at least 50 percent of the votes in the primary. Only 18 percent of registered voters participated in the city's most recent mayoral election in 2017. By comparison, 32 percent of registered voters participated in New York City's mayoral election of the same year.

Residents have a general distrust of elected officials which erodes at Los Angeles' civic fabric. A March 2003 survey found that residents of Los Angeles City were significantly more critical of city government with only 25 percent of respondents rating the municipal government as "good" or "excellent" (Box & Musso, 2004). In addition to concerns over red tape, financial mismanagement, and certain communities feeling physically and mentally separated from Downtown, this sense of distrust in city government stems from a long history of "pay-to-play" schemes between City Council members and real estate developers and investors.

Sociologist Harvey Molotch describes the "growth machine" as a land-based elite that "persuades the government to implement permissive land use policies so that the bulk of profits return to this elite" (Whittemore, 2011). Corruption involving real estate development kickbacks has existed in Los Angeles' City Council for decades, particularly during the rapid development of the San Fernando Valley in the mid-20th century. This unethical partnership between City Council and the real estate industry persists today, evidenced by a FBI probe opened in January

2019 which investigates possible “bribery, extortion, money laundering and other crimes as part of a corruption investigation at City Hall involving several City Council members” (Reyes & Zahniser, 2019).

A culmination of factors centered on residents’ dissatisfaction with the City’s service delivery, land use decisions, deteriorating schools, and failure to mitigate traffic spurred secessionist campaigns in the neighborhoods of Hollywood, San Pedro, and the San Fernando Valley beginning in the mid-1990s. The Valley campaign gained the most traction and amassed over 200,000 signatures of support as it was led by a powerful coalition of experienced slow-growth leaders from several Homeowners Associations (HOAs) and pro-business boosters.

In an attempt to quell the surmounting calls for secession, then-Mayor Richard Riordan launched two committees to devise an updated City Charter for Los Angeles. An essential component of the revised Charter was the creation of a neighborhood council system, which sought to promote more citizen participation in government and give greater local control to communities. Neighborhood Councils (NCs) would take an advisory role on issues of concern to the neighborhood, including proposed land use actions and planning projects. NCs would be granted \$50,000 each year to spend on community events and initiatives, and would be given the opportunity to provide a list of priorities and feedback during the annual city budgeting process.

While the revised City Charter was approved by voters in 1999, the San Fernando Valley secession referendum failed by a margin of two-to-one in 2002. By the time voters went to the polls in November 2002, civically-minded Valley residents had already bought into the NC system, establishing 17 separate councils within the program’s first year.

Los Angeles has continued to morph throughout the 20 years since the revised City Charter went into effect. According to some academics, L.A. has recently entered its third phase

of urban transformation; one that is re-committed to the public transit investments and walkable, dense built environments that defined the city before World War II. The NC system was crafted to allow for communities to adapt to changing local demands and concerns. Rather than being reactionary institutions focused on an idyllic past of low-density single-family neighborhoods, NCs are now cautiously embracing streetcar projects, mixed-use infill projects, and permanent supportive housing projects to solve the city's homelessness epidemic.

Clearly, the differing opinions of all constituents cannot be supported by NCs. The ideologies and demographic characteristics of NC board members are never exactly representative of their constituents, often resulting in mismatches between public opinion and the actions of NCs. Nevertheless, participatory theorists agree that citizen participation in governance at the local level is the most practical and effective because "at the local level one can see the benefits of participation most clearly" (Cooper & Kathi, 2005).

This report focuses on the San Fernando Valley region of Los Angeles. It analyzes the effectiveness of the mechanisms of participation afforded by the City's NC system, and assesses the ways in which community-representing organizations influence the City's land use and development decisions.

Research Questions

Spurred by the growing threat of secession movements in the mid-1990s, the City of Los Angeles passed a revised charter in 1999 intended to increase citizen participation and make local government more responsive to residents' needs. To gauge how effective Los Angeles' neighborhood council system has been at meeting the goals outlined in the City Charter, the thesis explored interrelated research questions. The first question is evaluated at a citywide scale and the other two inquiries are focused on the San Fernando Valley region.

- (1) Is Los Angeles' neighborhood council system effective in promoting greater citizen participation and making government more responsive to local needs?
- (2) Are Neighborhood Councils in the San Fernando Valley discussing discretionary land use issues and proposed developments in public forums? If so, to what extent have they been able to influence and/or modify certain projects?
- (3) Are neighborhood councils in the San Fernando Valley supportive of the city's transition to the "Third L.A." era of higher intensity development and expanding transit infrastructure?

Background and Literature Review

Historical Overview of Development in the City of Los Angeles

In 1925, author Aldous Huxley pejoratively wrote that Los Angeles was “nineteen suburbs in search of a metropolis”. The cliché that L.A. is an unruly, sprawling metropolis of highways and single-family homes, absent of sensible planning or urban form, is a hyperbolic simplification of the nation’s second-most populous city. With 8,534 residents per square mile, Los Angeles’ population density is comparable to that of Seattle and Minneapolis (US Census, 2017). L.A.’s present urban form is unlike that of older American cities, such as Philadelphia or Savannah, defined by their dense, cartesian street grids and square parks. Founded in 1781 by Spanish colonizers, Los Angeles became an incorporated city in 1850 when California joined the Union. Although L.A. developed an orthogonal street grid and had streetcar networks up until the early 20th century, its current morphology and character were profoundly influenced by the proliferation of the private automobile beginning in the 1910s.

The rise of the automobile occurred at a fortuitous time in L.A.’s history as infrastructural projects (i.e., the completion of the L.A. aqueduct in 1913) and economic factors (i.e., discovery of nearby petroleum sources in 1892) attracted tens of thousands of new residents at the turn of the 20th century. Rather than live in crowded apartments clustered around the city center, middle-class newcomers could own detached bungalows miles away, yet only short drives, from their places of employment. Urban planner Richard Weinstein describes L.A. as “the first consequential American city to separate itself decisively from European models and to reveal the impulse to privatization embedded in the origins of the American Revolution” (Weinstein, 1996).

Although Los Angeles’s growth followed a new paradigm of urban development, it was actually the first American city to adopt a municipal zoning ordinance in 1904. Ordinance 9774

sets aside three zones of the city as “residence districts”, which prohibited the erection of public laundries or wash houses within. In 1910, City Council established a 15-member Planning Committee to develop a “comprehensive plan whereby Los Angeles may develop her material improvement along artistic as well as practical lines”. By 1921, the City Council, following the recommendation of the Planning Committee, approved a citywide zoning scheme based on five zones: ‘A’ for single-family homes only, ‘B’ for all types of residential structures, ‘C’ for commercial and retail, ‘D’ for light industrial uses, and ‘E’ for heavy manufacturing (Gish, 2007). A 1926 zoning map of central Los Angeles illustrates that nearly 60 percent of the district was placed in zone ‘B’, 18 percent in zones ‘D’ and ‘E’, 13 percent in zone ‘C’ and only 9 percent in zone ‘A’. The pervasiveness of the flexible residential zone ‘B’ permitted the construction of thousands of new homes “to be built in a mix of sizes and configurations on the same streets” (Vallianatos, 2017).

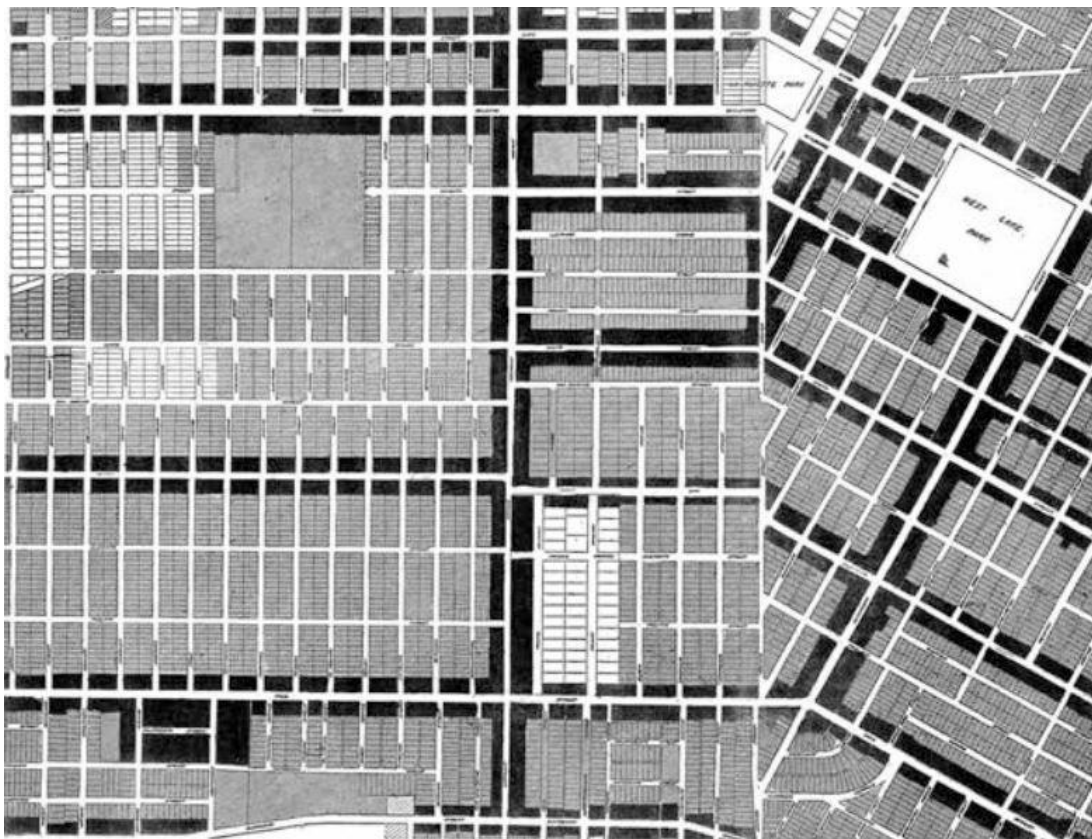


Fig. 1: Wilshire-Ambassador District Zoning Map (1925)

White = Single-Family Residential Only

Grey = Multifamily or Single-Family Residential

Black = Commercial or any Residential

(Source: Gish, 2007)

Andrew Whittemore's "Zoning Los Angeles: A Brief History of Four Regimes" (2012) outlines how current land use regulations in Los Angeles are the result of decades-old battles between various political groups vying for power and money. Whittemore traces the culminating factors that transformed Los Angeles into a sprawling, low-density residential urbscape. L.A.'s "era of the community developer" commenced when the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) was founded in 1934. This agency required lending standards for the dissemination of federally insured, low-interest mortgages. The FHA was cautious as to only give mortgages to residents living in "safe investment areas" (Whittemore, 2012). A parallel federal agency, the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC), created color-coded maps to assess the credit-worthiness of residents living in urban neighborhoods. The scoring formula assumed the "inherent volatility of mixed-use blocks and the economic stability of the socially and physically homogeneous single-family district" (ibid). City Council responded by rezoning 14.3 miles of street frontage from "multifamily" designations to "single-family" R1 districts, and over 6 miles of frontage from business to residential uses between 1936 and 1938.

The 1950 Census revealed that Los Angeles experienced an explosive population boom following World War II as it now accommodated 1.97 million residents (a 31 percent decennial increase). Whittemore posits that "Municipal-level planning, federal standards, and the private housing industry together worked to build a city characterized by large expanses of single-use development" (ibid). In response to the postwar housing shortage, the city paradoxically engaged in large area-wide downzonings. This zoning strategy permitted real estate developers to plat scores of FHA-funded tract developments, each adding thousands of single-family homes. The demand for such homes in peripheral districts was aided by the construction of widened thoroughfares and intersecting freeways funded by the Federal Highway Act of 1956. By 1960,

L.A.'s population increased 26 percent to nearly 2.5 million residents, with 60.8 percent of the city's housing units as single-family homes (US Census, 1960).

Both federal and private corporate practices worked in tandem to mold Los Angeles into a markedly racially-segregated city. L.A.'s developer-driven residential growth meant that corporations often placed restrictive covenants on private properties which explicitly prohibited Blacks from purchasing homes on the grounds of "incompatible racial elements" (Rothstein, 2017). The aforementioned HOLC maps exacerbated segregation since the FHA and HOLC valued homogeneity over heterogeneity, especially in regard to ethnicity and race (Reft, 2017). Developers were able to retain high HOLC investment ratings, and thereby ensure that homebuyers could receive federally-backed mortgages, by remaining exclusively-White.

By 1960, L.A.'s Black population was largely clustered in "South Central" neighborhoods, such as Watts and South Park, where restrictive covenants were never imposed, while large swaths of the city, particularly on the Westside and San Fernando Valley, had virtually zero Black residents. The Watts Riot of 1965, which resulted in 34 deaths, 1,032 injuries and over \$40 million in property damage, revealed the devastating economic and social impacts of abetting racially-segregated, geographically-isolated, and disinvested urban neighborhoods. A City Planning Commission report found that by the mid-1940s, Watts already had "inadequate recreational facilities, deteriorating streets, decaying private and public buildings, ineffective public transportation, limited shopping facilities, and high disease, death, and delinquency rates" (Olson-Raymer, n.d.).

Despite worsening environmental conditions and social unrest, Los Angeles continued to experience residential growth, reaching 2.8 million residents by 1970 (13.5 percent decennial increase). Writer Mike Davis, in his book *City of Quartz* (1990), notes a shift starting in the 60s

as tens of thousands of migrants, including Blacks, Mexicans, and returning Vietnam Veterans, demanded apartment units across Los Angeles County. Although 36.9 percent of residential structures built between 1940 and 1959 were multifamily units, 66.5 percent of residential structures constructed during the 1960s and 70s were multi-unit. This period from 1960-1979 introduced at least 250,000 new multifamily structures in Los Angeles (US Census ACS, 2010). This increased demand for rental units driven by the continual flow of migrants was satisfied by transformative changes to L.A.'s zoning regulations. The *Comprehensive Zoning Plan of the City of Los Angeles*, passed in 1946, rezoned the entire city and established five types of residential districts with increasing development intensity (R1-R5). This new continuum of residential districts permitted multifamily residences to act as buffers between mid-block stretches of single-family houses and busy thoroughfares (Office of Historic Resources, 2018).

Davis (1990) surmises that HOAs perceived the construction of new apartment complexes and office buildings as a “categorical threat to the detached culture of low-density residential life.” HOAs and other community-representing organizations arose with increasing frequency throughout wealthy residential communities beginning in the 1950s. One of the oldest and most powerful homeowner consortiums, the Federation of Hillside and Canyon Associations, brought dozens of affiliated organizations together to create a powerful slow-growth group armed with land use law and planning experts. The Sherman Oaks Homeowners Association, founded in 1964, has spearheaded petitions against apartment construction in the affluent San Fernando Valley district since its inception. Although these HOAs originally focused on stalling out-of-scale developments, they expanded their efforts and became the ringleaders of some Los Angeles’ most controversial movements, including Proposition 13

(which rolled back assessments on property taxes) and BUSTOP (a movement against school busing).

During the 1980s, Los Angeles experienced a downtown boom, fueled by optimistic domestic and foreign investors impressed by the city’s hosting of the 1984 Olympic Games. Rising 1,017 feet, the US Bank Tower in Downtown L.A. became the tallest building on the west coast when it was completed in 1989 using air rights from the adjacent Central Library. In response to this development boom, wealthy homeowner coalitions, such as Not Yet New York, spearheaded a campaign to successfully pass Proposition U in 1986. This citywide referendum cut the allowable FAR in half for most of the city’s commercial- and manufacturing-zoned land. Concurrently, San Fernando Valley HOAs led “an exotic welter of ‘nimby’ protests” against the construction of an arts park, various apartments, and a tortilla factory (Davis, 1990).

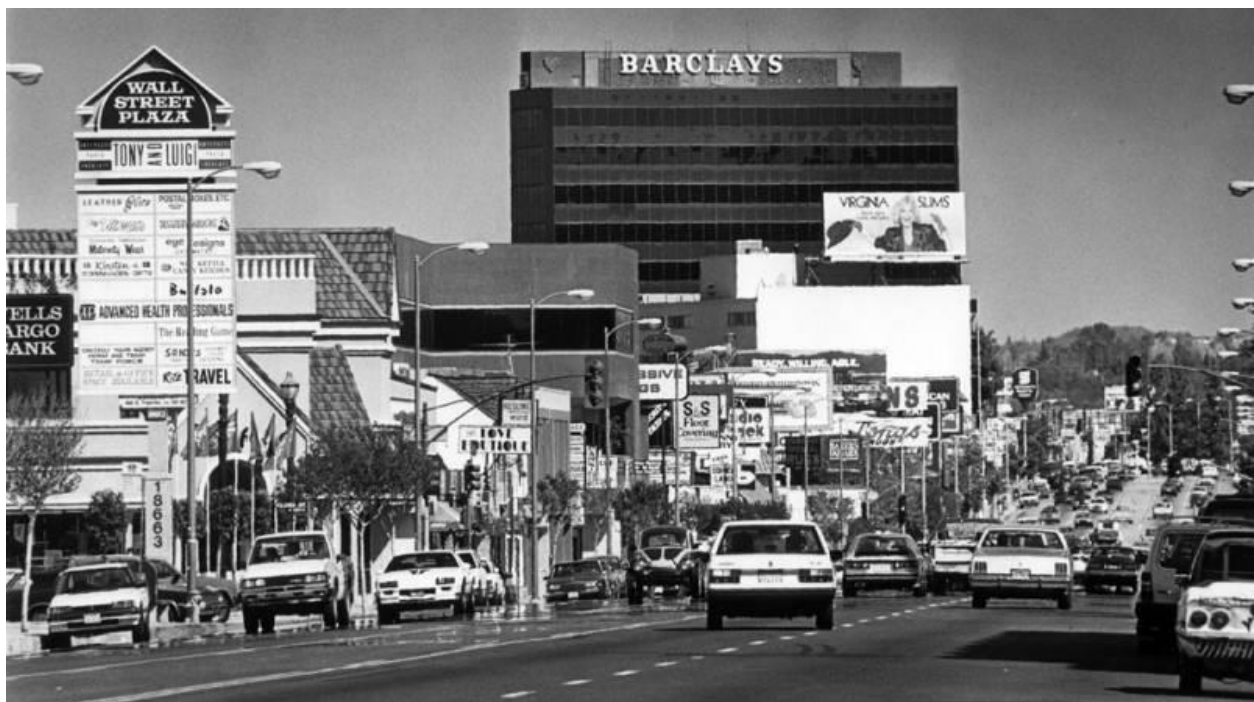


Fig 2: Ventura Boulevard in the 1980s, Tarzana. (Source: Los Angeles Public Library Image # 00050200)

By 1990, Los Angeles's population surpassed 3.4 million as the city evolved into one of the nation's most diverse metropolises after two decades of transformative demographic change. The bulk of this diversification is attributable to large waves of Mexican migration which ramped up beginning in the 1970s. Between 1970 and 1990, L.A.'s Hispanic population rose by 909,743 residents (a 189 percent increase over two decades). The city's Asian and Pacific Islander population also surged during this period as Chinese, Vietnamese, Filipinos, Indians, and Koreans immigrated en masse (collectively adding 240,192 residents in two decades - a 236 percent increase).

A culmination of factors — ranging from complaints of out-of-context development spurred by the Downtown growth machine, demands for greater 'local control', and rapidly changing demographics — gave rise to a number of neighborhood secession movements during the mid-1990s. Julie-Anne Boudreau and Roger Keil's "Seceding from Responsibility? Secession Movements in Los Angeles" (2001) likens the secession movements to a neo-conservative wave reacting to Southern California's rapidly-changing demographic landscape. According to the authors, the campaigns were responses to the pressures brought upon by globalization and the rescaling of urban governance. Boudreau and Keil posit that the San Fernando Valley secession leaders sought to remain economically and socially tied to the global city of Los Angeles while developing an identity, governance structure and lifestyle unique to the Valley.

Although campaigns in Hollywood and San Pedro gained moderate traction, the San Fernando Valley secession movement threatened to take substantial tax revenue generated by the region's 1.24 million residents and 260 square miles of land away from the City of Los Angeles. Mark Purcell's "Metropolitan Political Reorganization as a Politics of Urban Growth: The Case of San Fernando Valley Secession" (2001) explains that the Valley secessionist movement was

led by an unlikely coalition of regional pro-business advocates and slow-growth HOA leaders. Though these two groups were fundamentally at odds about the future growth of the region, they were both dissatisfied with how Los Angeles governed the Valley. They set aside their fundamental differences and launched a unified cityhood campaign focused on L.A.'s unfair taxes, corrupt politicians and unsatisfactory municipal service delivery.

After numerous unsuccessful attempts to amend the city's flawed Charter, which had not been updated since 1925, L.A. politicians and "good government" reformers banded together for City Charter reform as a means to placate the growing calls for secession. In addition to granting the mayor additional powers, the 1999 Charter revisions included initiatives to decentralize land use and zoning decision-making powers through the creation of five Area Planning Commissions, and promote greater neighborhood engagement by establishing a citywide system of advisory, self-selected neighborhood councils, similar to New York City's Community Boards.

Raphael Sonenshein's *The City at Stake: Secession, Reform, and the Battle for Los Angeles* (2006) elucidates how the establishment of the NC system was seen as an integral solution to incite civic participation in a city notorious for high levels of government disdain and distrust. Sonenshein, who served as the Executive Director of the Appointed Charter Reform Commission, explained how slow growth proponents in the Valley would have preferred to have councils with decision-making authority over land use decisions, but were still satisfied with the establishment of advisory NCs. In November 1999, the citizens of Los Angeles passed the reformed City Charter with 60 percent approval.

The San Fernando Valley

Acknowledging the complexity and varying regional concerns of Los Angeles, this thesis pays particular attention to the ways in which NCs have influenced development proposals and infrastructural projects in the San Fernando Valley.

The San Fernando Valley (the Valley) refers to the northern third of the City of Los Angeles; a flat 260-square mile basin wedged between the Santa Monica and San Gabriel Mountains¹. In 1913, a group of political elites secretly bought up water rights in Owens Valley which required the aqueduct to pass through the then-largely agricultural San Fernando Valley. The region was annexed to the City of Los Angeles between 1915 and 1923, which more than doubled the area of the metropolis. Although the annexation was originally perceived as an essential step to intensify irrigated agricultural operations, speculative real estate developers saw it as an opportunity to expand residential, commercial, and industrial development in a city whose rapid population growth in the early 20th century placed significant stress on its existing housing stock.

Although the Valley had attracted a fair amount of residential development up until 1930, the subsequent decades were profoundly metamorphic as the region's population increased from 78,000 in 1930 to 840,000 in 1960 — a 970 percent increase in just three decades. Although most of the Valley's residential development during this time took the form of single-family homes, trends began to change in the late 1950s as multifamily structures were being constructed at unprecedented rates. One report from 1967 claims that “the building of single-family homes in the Valley has subsided markedly in the 13 years since 1954” (Security First National Bank of

¹ San Fernando, California is an independent 2.35-square mile city that is entirely surrounded by the City of Los Angeles. It was incorporated in 1911 and was able to remain independent due to its abundant groundwater supply

Los Angeles, 1967). While permits for multiple-unit buildings steadily increased, reaching its apex in 1963 when over 17,000 dwelling units in multifamily structures were authorized compared to just 6,000 single-family homes. High rise construction in the Valley was also at its peak around this time as close to \$100 million of such developments had been authorized from 1960 to 1967 (ibid).

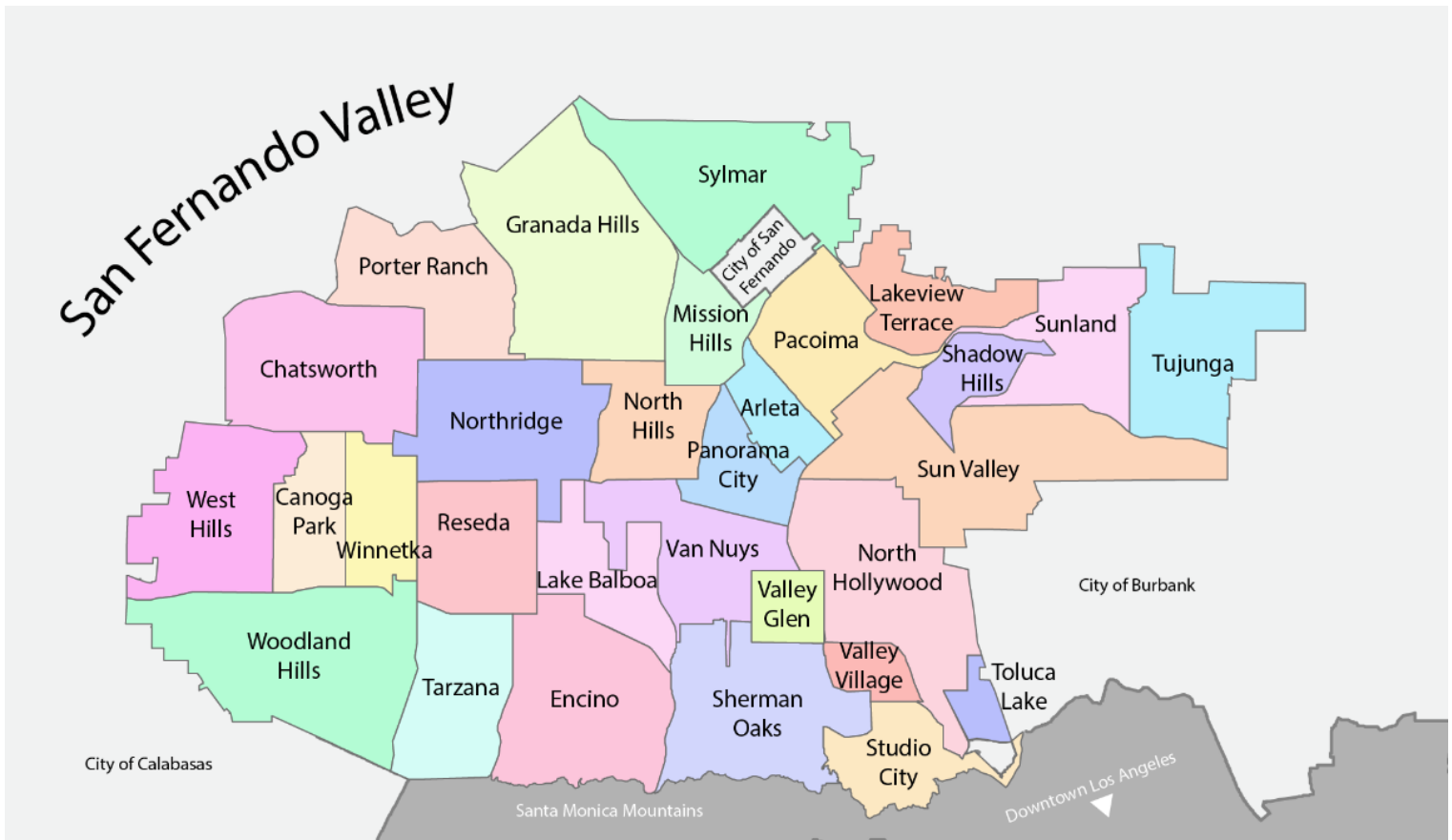


Fig 3: Neighborhood Map of the San Fernando Valley in Los Angeles City. (Source: Los Angeles City GIS Portal)

As out-of-scale residential and industrial development, increasing traffic, and haphazard growth threatened the quiet, suburban ideal of the Valley, a number of HOAs arose to fight for land use control. These associations represented wealthy suburbs adjacent to the Santa Monica

Mountains in the South Valley, including the Tarzana Property Owners Association and the Sherman Oaks Homeowners Association (SOHA), founded in 1962 and 1964, respectively. Tom Hogen-Esch studied the Valley's various cityhood campaigns beginning with the Valleywide Better Government Committee (VBGC) which was formed in 1961 by local chamber of commerce leaders rallying for Valley secession due to high taxes, poor city services, and unchecked land use management (Hogen-Esch, 2001). Although the movement fizzled out, it paved the way for the Committee Investigating Valley Independent City/County which propelled a veritable secession campaign beginning in 1975. Their grievances were similar to VBGC (lack of Valley representation, disparity between taxes paid and services received), but their land use-related complaints were actually that restrictive planning and zoning processes limited the Valley's economic growth (Hogen-Esch, 2002).

Although HOAs concentrated on protesting out-of-context development and advocating for better quality-of-life during their nascent years, these organizations, particularly SOHA and the Hillside and Canyon Federation, took on larger fiscal and social concerns. These two organizations fathered Proposition 13, a statewide law passed in 1978 which drastically limited the tax rate for real estate, limiting annual property taxes to just one percent of the full cash value of the property. According to Mike Davis (1990), the tax revolt originating in the Valley “overlapped and intermingled with massive resistance” to another social issue plaguing the region in the late 70s; a court mandate requiring citywide school busing to achieve racial balance. SOHA was intimately involved in this Valley coalition against school busing, known as BUSTOP.

In addition to being physically separated from Downtown, the San Fernando Valley's populace has long felt like the city's ‘black sheep’ as its residents have historically been whiter,

more conservative, wealthier, and more suburbanized than the rest of Los Angeles. By the 1990s, the litany of grievances expressed by the earlier secession movements had persisted, and even worsened, in the eyes of many Valley residents. In 1996, the long-time President of SOHA, Richard Close, and Jeff Brain, a Sherman Oaks-based commercial real estate broker, banded together to start Valley VOTE (“Voters Organized Toward Empowerment”) to resurrect the Valley secession idea. The group’s key arguments paralleled those that have been made for decades by earlier San Fernando slow-growth coalitions, including the Valley not receiving its fair share of city services for the taxes residents pay, the benefits of a smaller government whose values more closely align with the community’s, as well as a need for residents to gain more control over local matters.

	San Fernando Valley				The Rest of Los Angeles			
	Total Population	% White Residents	% Hispanic Residents	% GOP Voter Affiliation	Total Population	% White Residents	% Hispanic Residents	% GOP Voter Affiliation
2017	1,491,953	36.1%	46.7%	16.5%*	2,459,009	23.9%	49.7%	11.8%*
2010	1,392,803	37.8%	45.5%	24.1%*	2,382,457	23.9%	49.5%	12.1%*
1990	1,239,246	55.6%	32.4%	33.0% ±	2,246,152	26.7%	44.1%	18.3% ±
1970	967,128	85.3%	11.6%	N/A	1,848,933	48.4%	20.0%	N/A

Table 1: Selected Resident Demographics and Voter Registration in the San Fernando City vs. Rest of Los Angeles

Sources: US Census (1970-2017), Hogen-Esch (2002), California Secretary of State (2010-2017)

Notes: *Congressional Districts 29 + 30 for Valley ± Estimations from Tom Hogen-Esch (2002)

In December 1999, Valley VOTE submitted the 205,000 required signatures to launch a LAFCO-led feasibility study for municipal independence. The final report concluded that “A


new Valley City could be financially viable during its first three years” and that the issue could be decided by a citywide referendum in November 2002 (Los Angeles LAFCO, 2002).

The campaign in favor of Valley Cityhood (Yes for Measure F) harkened back to the San Fernando Valley of yesteryear when neighborhoods were safer, streets were less congested, and public schools were better-resourced (Valley VOTE, 1997-2002). The campaign’s focus on “changing times” in the Valley have prompted some to surmise that some proponents viewed Valley independence as a way for White residents to regain control of governmental affairs and priorities (Fig. 4). Between 1970 and 1990, the Valley’s Hispanic population had increased from 112,152 to 401,367 while the White population dropped by 135,550 residents during this period (Hogen-Esch, 2002). Hogen-Esch discovered that although White residents would form a slim majority in the new Valley City, they would comprise more than 75 percent of the electorate. This conflation of political clout is attributed to higher levels of voter registration and civic participation as well as greater economic resources and more well-developed social organizations (ibid).

Angeles defeated Measure F in 2002 by a margin of two-to-one, although it did muster fifty percent support among Valley residents. The movement lost steam late in the campaign as LAFCO’s final fiscal analysis revealed that Valley City taxpayers would be required to give Los Angeles \$65.8 million annually as a mitigation payment to offset negative fiscal impacts. Furthermore, the successful passage of the updated City Charter in 1999 and the creation of the city’s NC system persuaded enough Valley residents to give L.A. another shot to address regional concerns. By the time voters went to the polls to decide the fate of Measure F, Valley residents had already self-organized to establish 17 different NCs.


Times sure have changed!

"I grew up in the Valley in the 1960's. We were allowed to play outside by ourselves until the streetlights came on. I wish it were still safe enough for my kids to do the same... **Times have sure changed.**"
— Irwin Rosenberg, Chatsworth



The highest percentage of criminal offenses in the four LAPD bureaus occurred in the San Fernando Valley. Homicides have risen 80% in two years.
Source: 2000 Crime Digest, LAPDonline


"I remember driving from Woodland Hills to the Sherman Oaks Galleria and it only took 10 minutes to get there. Now it takes 10 minutes just to get to the local grocery store. **Times have sure changed.**"
— Tanny Wiggins, Sherman Oaks




Politics Stalls Traffic Fix
Oct. 26, 2001 Daily News

L.A. Leads the Nation in Survey of Worst Traffic
May 8, 2001 Los Angeles Times

"My family moved to the Valley 12 years ago. I remember leaving the windows open on hot summer nights and not having to lock the front door, since then I have had two cars stolen out in front of my house and I am thinking of moving away. **Times have sure changed.**"
— Joiaia Heiser, Van Nuys



"I remember when my family first came to the Valley in the early '70's. We were looking for a safer life. Now our neighborhoods aren't safe and we pay higher taxes. Municipal services are inadequate, neighborhoods without street lights, and potholed streets. **Times have sure changed.**"
— Al Castaneda, Sylmar, First Vice President Mexican American Political Association



There are more bars on the windows, more cracks in the sidewalks and fewer people walking their dogs or talking to their neighbors after dark.
Oct. 7, 2002 Daily News

They have been trying for decades to get streetlights for their crime-plagued neighborhood
April 2, 2002 Los Angeles Times

L.A. Lags Behind Largest U.S. Cities in Basic Services... including police and fire protection
Oct. 13, 2002 Los Angeles Times

Of the more than 730,000 students currently enrolled in LAUSD, it is estimated that roughly 80,000 children lack a "dedicated" classroom seat.
California Journal

Fig 4: "Vote Yes on Measure F" Campaign Literature. (Source: California State University – Northridge)

Today, there are 34 NCs in the Valley, as well as the Valley Alliance of Neighborhood Councils (VANC) which serves as a consortium to discuss issues of regional importance. Despite Valley residents' increased engagement in L.A. government, the region continues to have its own distinct identity and lingering problems, including traffic congestion, out-of-context development, and concerns of rising rents. Beginning around 2010, there were more Hispanic than White residents living in the Valley. Latinos carved strongholds in the neighborhoods surrounding the City of San Fernando (i.e., Pacoima, Arleta, Panorama City), while White residents remained the majority in outer ring neighborhoods along the encircling mountain ranges (i.e., Chatsworth and Porter Ranch in the North, and Encino and Studio City in the South).

Richard C. Box and Juliet Ann Musso's "Experiments with Local Federalism" (2004) outlines the ways in which intrajurisdictional arrangements, such as the creation of a neighborhood council system, can be just as effective in realizing community change as the alteration of jurisdictional boundaries or intergovernmental hierarchical relationships. The authors suggest that the "creation of subunit structures of governance within large cities may usefully be viewed as an extension of traditional concepts of federalism" between nation, state, and city (Box and Musso, 2004).

As the Valley continues to diversify and urbanize well into the 21st-century, the planning and land use concerns of community-representing groups have shifted. NCs have given historically-disengaged neighborhoods a platform to advocate for much-needed public transportation projects, while at the same time providing neighborhoods with reputations as NIMBYists the ability to weigh in on large-scale mixed use developments. This thesis studies the role that NCs have played in the San Fernando Valley since the system's inception in 2001. This period in the city's history is particularly fascinating as municipal and county government officials have made concerted efforts to transform Los Angeles into a transit-rich, walkable, sustainable, and dense metropolis with a wide variety of housing options.

Christopher Hawthorne, former architecture critic of the LA Times and professor at Occidental College, has coined the term "Third L.A." to describe this new phase of the city's urban development. Hawthorne says that the Third L.A. is a post-growth city; a city that is aware of its limits and is placing more emphasis on enhancing its quality of life, public realm and civic identity (Boom California, 2016).

Methodological Approach

This project used a mixed-method research design infusing substantial historical, academic and archival research; five semi-structured interviews with various experts and stakeholders; first-hand observations of public hearings and community meetings in Los Angeles; and qualitative and spatial data collection and analysis.

A comprehensive mixed-methods approach was applied due to the complexity and contemporaneousness of the topic. This approach blended a contextualizing of historical and theoretical sources with data analysis and first-hand observations.

According to Sharon and John Gaber, a mixed-methods approach is advantageous in urban planning as it affords “a more comprehensive understanding than would be possible under a single method” (Gaber & Gaber, 1997). One of the biggest advantages of the mixed-method approach is triangulation, in which the researcher uses several competing methods to attain convergence to increase the validity and credibility of their described results. This approach also promotes processes of complementarity and expansion, both of which “extend the breadth and range of inquiry for using different methods for different inquiry components” (ibid). The research process for this thesis was highly iterative, with the results of one method informing and modifying the scope of other analyses.

Academic and Archival Research:

Twenty academic and twenty-eight news articles contextualized the history and planning regimes of Los Angeles. Academics based in L.A. have specialized in some of the broad topics explored throughout this thesis, including Tom Hogen-Esch’s work on urban secession movements and Juliet Ann Musso’s longitudinal study on the city’s neighborhood council system.

Newspaper and magazine articles provided scores of quotes, which were useful to understand communities' and individuals' opinions about past planning initiatives. These sources also helped construct timelines of lengthy development projects or changing opinions of public policy, such as the Valley secession referendum measure.

Archival research was conducted at two libraries in Los Angeles while the researcher was visiting the city in January 2019. The Los Angeles Public Library's "Special Reorganization Documents" collection contained 41 primary documents and correspondences regarding the feasibility of the San Fernando Valley's secession. California State University-Northridge's special collections held Valley VOTE's archival file (donated by co-president Jeff Brain) which contained the campaign literature promulgated by the pro-secessionist and anti-secessionist camps during the movement.

Semi-Structured Interviews:

The researcher conducted five semi-structured interviews (either in person or via telephone) to gain a better understanding of certain processes and projects explored in the thesis. The five individuals who agreed to participate in the project each provided invaluable insight which shaped subsequent research inquiries and strengthened the findings. The following five individuals were interviewed:

- A founding member of a San Fernando Valley neighborhood council who is also involved in teaching other board members across Los Angeles about planning and land use issues in the city.
- An influential Valley Homeowners Association leader who was also active during the San Fernando Valley secession movement.
- A professor of Political Science who specializes in urban secession movements and is well-versed in the political environment of Los Angeles.

- A City Planner at the Los Angeles Department of City Planning who works in the San Fernando Valley region.
- A Project Manager at the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LA Metro).

Field Observations:

The researcher attended six public meetings and hearings in Los Angeles from January 8 to 16, 2019. These meetings were instrumental in understanding the different ways in which the public interacts with various units of municipal government. The researcher conducted informal participant observations, jotting notes about the topics on the agendas, meeting protocols and formalities, and any interactions between the general public and the board. The attended meetings and hearings included:

- **Sunland-Tujunga Neighborhood Council General Board Meeting** - Wednesday, January 9th (6:30pm) - North Valley City Hall
- **Los Angeles City Planning Commission Hearing** - Thursday, January 10th (8:30am) - Los Angeles City Hall
- **South Valley Area Planning Commission Meeting** - Thursday, January 10th (4:30pm) - San Fernando Valley Constituent Service Center
- **Valley Alliance of Neighborhood Councils (VANC) Monthly Meeting** - Thursday, January 10th (6:30pm) - Sherman Oaks Hospital
- **Arleta Neighborhood Council General Board Meeting** - Tuesday, January 15th (6:30pm) - Osborne Neighborhood Church
- **Sherman Oaks Homeowners Association (SOHA) Monthly Meeting** - Wednesday, January 16th (7:15pm) - Notre Dame High School

Spatial/Data Analysis:

The researcher also utilized a database that compiled all Community Impact Statements (CISs) that NCs submitted to the City Council between January 2013 and March 2019. The researcher organized CISs by NC and tagged each submission by relevant subject. A series of linear regressions were conducted using a variety of independent variables (educational attainment, limited English competency, income) to test for correlations between the number of

CISs submitted by the NC and the aggregated socioeconomic characteristics of the council's constituents.

The researcher also downloaded relevant American Community Survey files from the US Census and used Geographic Information Systems to visualize this information spatially across the San Fernando Valley. A series of maps are included in Appendix C to highlight the bifurcation of the Valley into two general areas: the inner core and the outer ring. The outer ring is more suburban, whiter, wealthier and exhibits higher rates of homeownership than the inner core which contains a greater share of Hispanic residents and workers who rely on public transit. Although these spatial differences are not essential to my thesis topic per se, they do explain why certain projects, like the East San Fernando Valley Transit Corridor, occur at particular locations in the Valley.

Findings

Finding 1: Los Angeles Had a Long History of Community Organizing Before

Neighborhood Councils

Prior to the 1999 City Charter updates which created the Neighborhood Council system and the complementary Department of Neighborhood Engagement (DONE), Los Angeles' citizens had a reputation of exhibiting low levels of civic engagement and trust in local government (Sonenshein, 2006). The last three mayoral elections have exhibited a mean voter turnout rate of just 19 percent.

Although L.A. did not form a government-managed system for local community planning until 1999, it developed a robust network of private community-representing organizations, usually in the form of voluntary homeowners associations (HOAs). These organizations started to develop in greater frequency beginning in the 1960s, and typically represented wealthier, Whiter neighborhoods with higher-than-average homeownership rates. The rise of HOAs in Los Angeles has been explained as a form of “activist resistance to the growth machine” at a time when “suburbanites’ use values began to suffer from excessive traffic, lack of parking, air pollution, noise, crowded public place, and the like” (Purcell, 1998).

Homeowners associations were originally formed to halt encroaching, “out-of-context” development. Some organizations focused on amending citywide zoning regulations to control the rate of hillside development, such as slope-density downzoning or minimum lot sizes. Others focused on projects affecting their specific neighborhoods, such as the Tarzana Property Owners Association whose website proclaims that the group was formed in 1962 “after residents rallied to combat a large non-residential project from landing smack in the heart of an established hillside neighborhood of homes” (Norman, n.d.).

Over time, HOAs broadened their responsibilities and began to tackle more social and fiscal issues. In fact, The Federation of Hillside and Canyon Associations, a coalition of several wealthy hillside Los Angeles HOAs, fathered Proposition 13— a statewide measure passed by voters in 1978 which rolled back property taxes to their 1976 level and capped annual increases at no more than two percent (Davis, 1990). This law has had long-term impacts on California’s fiscal policy and has created a development paradigm in which municipalities are reliant on sales taxes from commercial activity to generate sufficient revenue for government functions. Ironically, Prop 13 has forced municipalities to permit developments that slow-growth homeowners detest, such as lucrative strip malls, hotels and auto dealers (Grabar, 2016).

Although certain neighborhoods with enough resources and clout were able to create a quasi-governmental system focused on land use and quality-of-life concerns via HOAs, they still had to contend with the City of Los Angeles for municipal services, such as police protection, road maintenance, sanitation, and social services. A 1998 *Los Angeles Daily News* editorial emphasizes the essential role of HOAs to act as watchdogs for ineffective or unscrupulous local government: “Homeowners groups fill the void and hold officials accountable for decisions detrimental to the good of the area” (Los Angeles Daily News, 1998).

Finding 2: The San Fernando Valley Secession Movement Did Not Focus on Land Use and Zoning Issues

Fed up with a municipal government that was neither participatory nor responsive to local needs, two San Fernando Valley influencers, Jeff Brain (a commercial real estate broker) and Richard Close (longtime president of the Sherman Oaks Homeowners Association) banded together in 1996 to explore the feasibility of creating a separate city in the Valley. Their efforts

resulted in a new organization called Valley VOTE, which stood for “Valley Voters Organized Toward Empowerment”. The timing of this movement was not coincidental. The Valley had experienced tremendous change during the 1980s in terms of its physical built environment and the demographics of its residents.

The population went from being over 85 percent White in 1970 to just 55 percent in 1990, meanwhile the Hispanic population blossomed from 11.6 percent in 1970 to 32.4 percent twenty years later. By 1990, the Valley’s total population had surpassed 1.2 million residents, making it more populous than the entire cities of San Diego, Detroit, and Dallas (Table 1).

To accommodate this influx of new residents, 1,340 single-family homes were razed between 1980 and 1986 to construct over 15,000 new apartment buildings (Schwada, 1989). Commercial development expanded throughout the region and looming skyscrapers popped up in Studio City, Encino, and Warner Center. Critics blamed this dense residential and office construction for the region’s unprecedented traffic gridlock by the end of the decade, which was so crippling that the California Department of Transportation spent \$40 million to widen Ventura Freeway (ibid).

Valley residents felt dissatisfied under the control of the City of Los Angeles, often citing that they did not receive adequate municipal services, lacked “local control”, and were excluded from the Downtown power structure (Hogen-Esch, 2002).

Valley VOTE took advantage of this widespread sentiment to amass more than 200,000 signatures of support required to commence a study of the fiscal impacts of Valley secession from the City of Los Angeles. This study was conducted by the Los Angeles County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO). LAFCO’s were established in every California county in the 1960s to oversee municipal incorporations, annexations, dissolutions, and other

boundary decisions. LAFCO's must complete a fiscal analysis of the impact of proposed boundary changes and guarantee that the proposed reorganization results in "revenue neutrality" for both entities impacted. In March 1999, LA LAFCO had determined that Valley VOTE may pursue its reorganization application (Hogen-Esch, 2002).

Having cleared that taxing bureaucratic hurdle, Valley VOTE started a massive campaign to gain support for the Valley cityhood movement. The group's central arguments centered around three talking points: (1) "Fair Share", (2) "Smaller is Better", and (3) "More Local Control" (Hogen-Esch, 2002).

California State University-Northridge possesses Valley VOTE's archived materials from the campaign (donated by alum Jeff Brain himself). Fliers, press releases, and pamphlets reiterated the three aforementioned rallying cries, often harking back to an earlier era of low-density suburbia with high-achieving schools, low crime, and a heightened sense of neighborhood camaraderie.

In terms of the "fair share" argument, the campaign material claims that every year the Valley pays \$128 million more in taxes than it receives in services. What the materials fail to mention is that LAFCO determined that Valley City residents would need to pay the City of Los Angeles this \$128 million² in the form of annual mitigation payments to satisfy California's "revenue neutrality" requirement for special reorganizations. Interestingly, Valley VOTE hired an opinion research firm to assess support if the ballot measure were to require explicit language outlining the fiscal impacts on future taxpayers. The June 2002 survey results show that support for Measure F dropped 14 points to only 31 percent when residents understood the fiscal impact of secession (Valley VOTE, 1997-2002).

² Reducing 5% annually for twenty years.

The pro-secession literature assumes that a smaller government resulting in greater efficiency is a self-evident truth. The fragmentation perspective is usually rationalized on economic grounds using the “theory of clubs” which argues that individuals benefit by breaking up into smaller, homogenous groups that can better match services to local preferences (Box & Musso, 2004). Charles Tiebout’s concept of “voting with one’s feet”, in which residents are constantly mobile searching for municipalities that have tax packages matching their personal needs, has been deliberated and critiqued among urban planning academics for decades.

An interesting point reiterated in the literature is that the new Valley City would have smaller, more responsive city council districts. Los Angeles has the highest ratio of residents-to-council members than any large American metropolis (Sonenshein, 2006). Although the population of Los Angeles had risen to nearly 3.7 million in 2000, the city had not increased the size of its fifteen-member City Council since 1925, resulting in each City Council member representing an average of about 246,000 Angelenos. New York had the second largest ratio with its 51 council districts each representing approximately 157,000 residents in 2000.

Tom Hogen-Esch analyzed the impact that a separate Valley City would have in terms of representation and political clout in the Valley’s proposed City Council. Valley VOTE proposed a 14-member city council with each district representing roughly 100,000 residents — a massive improvement compared to a unified Los Angeles. Utilizing 1990 Census data, Hogen-Esch determined that although Latinos represented 32.4 percent of the Valley’s population, they would only compose approximately 14 percent of the registered voters due to a number of cultural and economic factors including low rates of naturalization, age, and education. Conversely, despite making up 55.6 percent of the Valley’s total population, Whites would compose 79.0 percent of the registered voters in the proposed city. For comparison, Whites and Latinos make up 68

percent and 17 percent of the registered voters in Los Angeles, respectively. Hogen-Esch surmises that the City Council lines would be drawn in a manner in which, “Whites will continue to exercise a disproportionate amount of political influence...” (Hogen-Esch, 2012).

Although Valley homeowners associations had historically used the “more local control” demand in terms of land use control, the Valley secession literature mentions very little about land use and zoning. This glaring absence may be attributable to the fact that Valley VOTE brought together two factions that differed sharply on the question of growth: slow-growth homeowners associations and pro-growth Valley business interests (Purcell, 2001). While the HOA members hoped for a new city with more stringent land use codes and a neighborhood council system with binding authority over land use decisions, the business boosters sought a city with a more laissez-faire approach to land development with fewer building restrictions and without a parochial-minded council system at all (ibid).

Measure F campaign literature repeat platitudes including that cityhood will improve residents’ quality of life because local priorities will be better met (“public safety, traffic, gangs, graffiti, social services”) and that smaller government will permit neighborhoods to have stronger voices in City Council. According to Mark Purcell, the “local control” mantra is really about Valley residents resenting the fact that city bureaucrats who have little connection to the Valley make decisions that impact them (Purcell, 1998). Land use is hardly mentioned because the two sides of the Valley VOTE coalition have diametrically opposing views regarding the matter. The group decided to put aside differences and avoid internal conflicts to focus on winning the secession referendum before hammering out the nuts and bolts of the new government (Purcell, 2001).

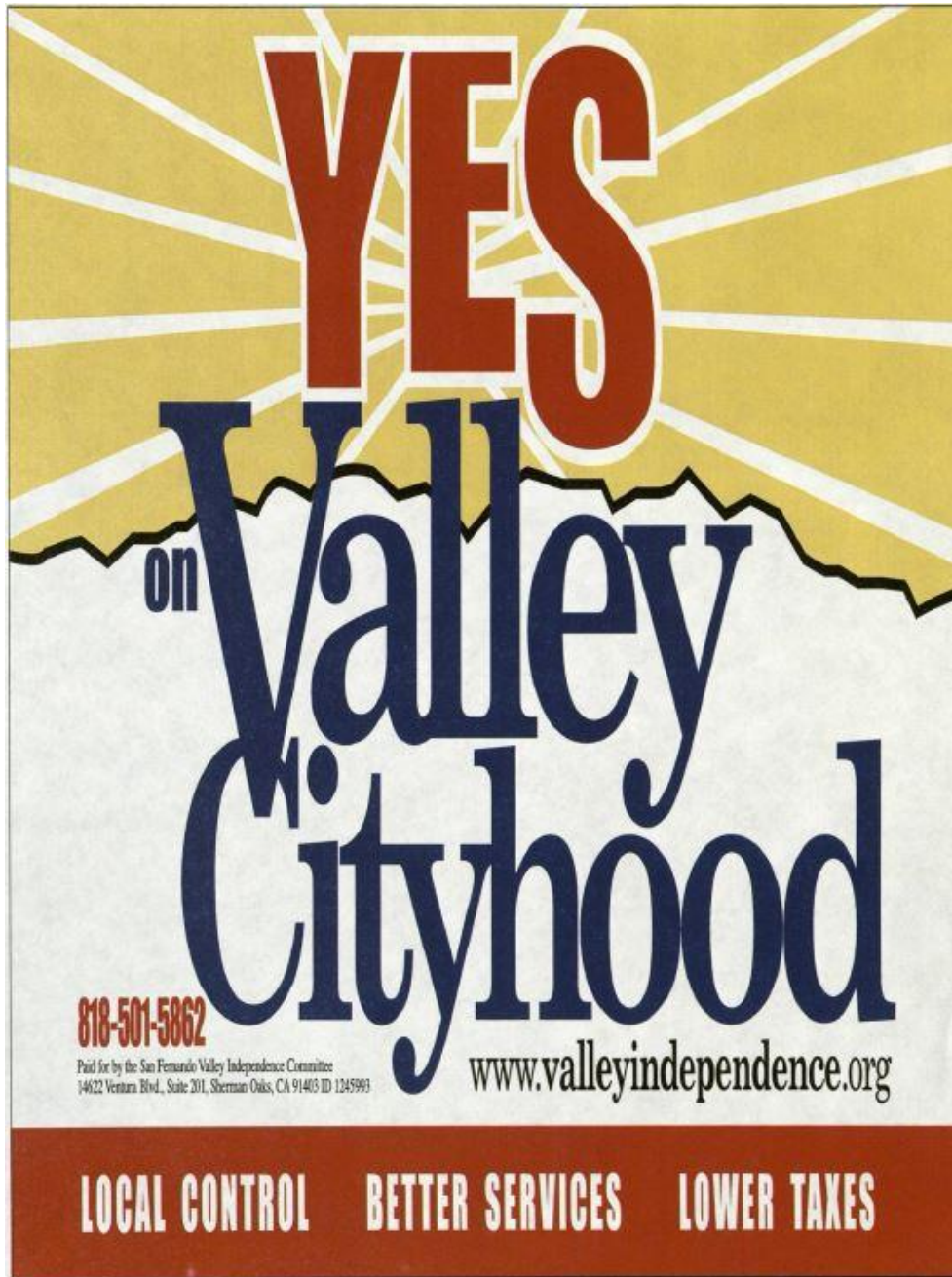


Fig 5: “Yes to Valley Cityhood” Campaign Postern (Source: California State University – Northridge)

Finding 3: Mayor Riordan Believed That Neighborhood Councils Would Placate the Intracity Secessionist Movements

Just after Valley VOTE gained some momentum by receiving the “green light” on the LAFCO fiscal feasibility study, Los Angeles voters approved the updated City Charter proposal in June 1999. The seventy-four-year-old document was discarded in favor of a new charter that had been drafted by two separate commissions — one appointed and the other elected.

The updated city charter had three major achievements: (1) it increased the power of L.A.’s weak mayor by granting them more power to terminate city department general managers, (2) it created a system of self-appointed, advisory neighborhood councils, and (3) it decentralizes the control of planning and zoning decisions by creating regional Area Planning Commissions that decide on most appeal cases.

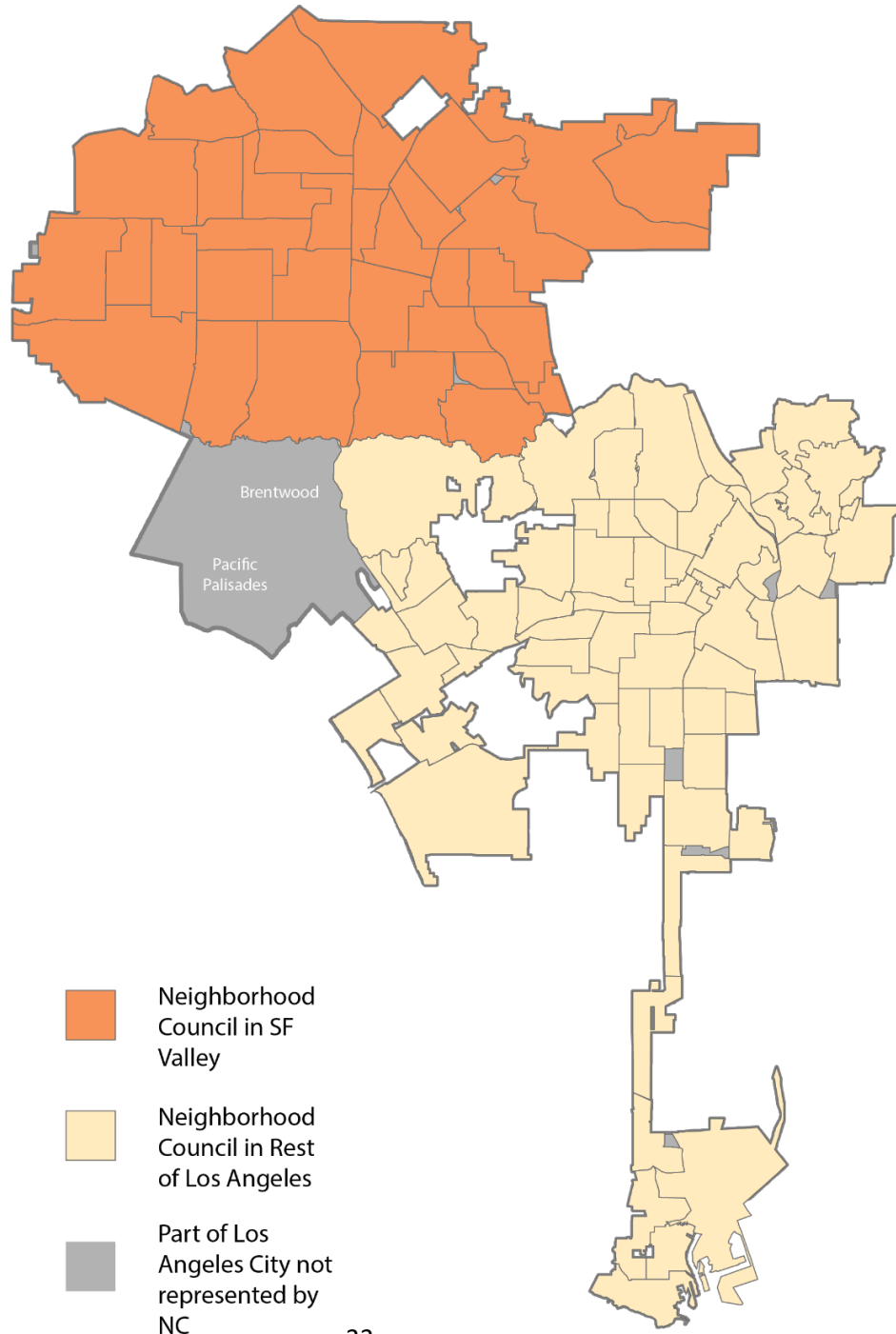
Then-mayor Richard Riordan was transparent about the timing and purpose of the particular revisions to the city charter saying, “charter reform could go a long way toward easing the move toward secession” (Purdum, 1999). The new charter’s explicit attempts to decentralize City Hall’s influence on land use and quality-of-life issues was paramount in the revisions chosen to be included in the amended charter referendum. City officials could now point to improved government responsiveness and granting communities greater local control as reasons that secession was now unnecessary (Sonenshein, 2004).

Raphael Sonenshein, who served as the executive director of the Appointed Charter Reform Committee, provides an inside scoop about the deliberations and processes required for two charter reform committees to agree on a single proposal in his book *City at Stake* (2004). Although the two commissions had wanted to increase the size of the City Council to reduce the city’s infamously high constituent-to-council member ratio, Angelenos, who are weary of

increased local bureaucracy, were vehemently opposed to any size increase. Pollsters discovered that had the increased council size been included in the charter measure, it may have failed. Still adamant about increasing the number of council members, the commissions created two additional ballot measures to increase the council to 21 and 25 members, respectively. Both measures failed at the polls by a margin of two-to-one.

Fig 6: Coverage of Neighborhood Councils in Los Angeles as of March 2019

(Source: City of Los Angeles GIS Portal)



Finding 4: Los Angeles' Neighborhood Council system is effective in promoting greater citizen participation and making government more responsive to local needs

Article IX of the 1999 City Charter outlines the purpose and mechanics of Los Angeles' neighborhood council system. According to the section, the system was created to "promote more citizen participation in government and make government more responsive to local needs". The section goes on to state that the councils "shall include representatives of the many diverse interests in communities and shall have an advisory role on issues of concern to the neighborhood." A new city agency, the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment (DONE), was created to carry through these duties and assist neighborhoods in preparing petitions for recognition (City of Los Angeles Charter §900).

According to Berry, Portney, and Thompson (1993), there are there are four crucial components to a successful neighborhood council system: (1) a citywide system, (2) adequate resource support, (3) innovations to support participation in city governance, and (4) political support. The following section uses Berry et. al's framework to analyze how effective Los Angeles' neighborhood council system has been in meeting the objectives outlined in the revised charter.

Requirement 1: A Citywide System

Unlike New York's Community Board system in which the original 62 boards were established by charter mandate, Los Angeles' system was intended to be self-organized with communities deciding their own boundaries and by-laws. Once the community representatives submit their application for incorporation, DONE oversees and ultimately certifies the new NC if the proposal is completed satisfactorily. Once certified, community stakeholders elect their own board members and representatives as per their approved by-laws (Jun, 2007). Although the charter does not mandate every neighborhood to create their own council, all but two

communities in Los Angeles have established certified NCs. About 96 percent of Los Angeles' total population and 93 percent of the city's land area is represented by a NC as of March 2019 (Fig. 6). The two neighborhoods that have opted out of the neighborhood council system are Pacific Palisades and Brentwood — two of the Whitest and wealthiest districts in Los Angeles that already have long-running, independent “community councils” to handle local matters.

Since the majority of the city's area has already been incorporated into a certified neighborhood council, City Council approved Ordinance 12-1681 in 2013 which amended L.A.'s Administrative Code to establish a subdivision process that allows a new neighborhood council to be created within the boundaries of an existing council. There have been a number of new neighborhood councils borne out of subdivisions, including North Westwood, the majority of which covers University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). This movement was started when a group of UCLA students were fed up with the Westwood NC — whose board is decidedly wealthier, whiter, and older than UCLA's student base — working against projects that would benefit students, such as new apartment buildings and bike lanes. The students were able to rally 3,500 students and allies to vote in the subdivision election, which passed with 57 percent of voters approving the split (Schneider, 2019).

Requirement 2: Adequate Resource Support

Title IX of the City Charter states that “each neighborhood council may present to the Mayor and Council an annual list of priorities for the City budget”. Each NC appoints two budget representatives who are responsible for soliciting input from their council and its stakeholders to determine the neighborhood's top funding priorities. Three budget representatives from each neighborhood council service region are nominated as “budget advocates” who send

out surveys to get information from each NC in order to prepare regional budget recommendations to the Mayor's Office³ (Kramer, 2017).

One concern has been the fluctuating budget allocation granted to each neighborhood council. In 2002, DONE appropriated \$50,000 (\$71,000 adjusted) to each NC, however that figure dipped down to \$37,500 (\$41,000 adjusted) in 2013 when L.A. was facing financial difficulty but has crept back up to \$42,000 for Fiscal Year 18-19. This money may be used for operating costs, including equipment, electronics, supplies, fees for meeting space, and outreach to residents.

NCs may also apply for Neighborhood Purposes Grants up to \$5,000 by partnering with a local non-profit looking to spearhead a project that broadly “provides a demonstrable benefit to the community”. The Reseda NC used their grant money to fund performances for senior citizens at area nursing homes. Similarly, NCs may apply for Community Improvement Projects which fund beautification and capital improvement projects on public property (LA City Clerk, n.d.).

Requirement 3: Innovations to Support Participation in City Governance

Although NCs may only serve as advisory bodies, the City of Los Angeles has given a tremendous amount of thought into how the system can fulfill the Charter's goals of increasing residents' involvement in local government and making government more responsive to local needs. Despite DONE's good intentions, some tools work better than others.

Some procedures that may just seem like good practices, such as the requirement that all NC meetings must be open to the public and that all agendas must be posted for the public at least 72 hours in advance of meetings, are actually requirements of the Brown Act. This statewide law, passed in 1953, was intended to cut down on corruption, make public officials

³ : There are 12 service regions representing the 99 NCs for budgetary purposes.

accountable for their actions, and encourage the general public to participate in local decision-making. Since every NC has a website, the Brown Act guarantees that there are fairly comprehensive archives of meeting agendas and minutes available online.

The Brown Act also stipulates that NC board members may only discuss items that are listed on the published agenda during public meetings. Although there are only a few requirements for agendas and meeting procedures, such as dedicated time for public comment, many neighborhood councils voluntarily follow a similar agenda format. In the two public meetings attended by the researcher (Sunland-Tujunga NC and Arleta NC), there were public affairs liaisons from both the local City Council Member's office as well as the Los Angeles Police Department.

Despite this formal consistency, NC general meetings can vary quite dramatically in terms of attendance, public interaction, and dynamics between board members. There were over 30 attendees at the Sunland-Tujunga NC meeting. Several attendees from both the general public and the board took advantage of the “Event Announcements” agenda item. Announcements ranged from new class offerings at the local community college to a human trafficking workshop to a call for volunteers to participate in the city’s annual homeless count. On the flipside, the Arleta NC meeting was attended by six members of the public who sat in silence for the majority of the meeting as the board discussed mostly internal matters.

One of the most profound ways in which the City of Los Angeles has increased government participation is through the biennial Neighborhood Council board elections. Unlike New York’s Community Board system in which board members are appointed⁴, L.A.’s NC board members are elected through local elections. Starting in 2019, the City Clerk’s office

⁴ NYC Community Board members are appointed by the Borough President and City Council members nominate at least half of all the appointees.

began conducting the elections while DONE remains responsible for marketing. DONE held nine candidate workshops for the 2019 election and has created an interactive “Candidate List” feature on their website which includes a photo and biography of candidates (Fig. 7).

Although the elections often have paltry voter turnout rates⁵, they espouse excitement for candidates and are often residents’ first foray into local government. Many of the candidates running for board seats are in their twenties and thirties, which is contrary to the leadership of local HOAs which tend to be much older. Los Angeles’ current Controller Ron Galperin has become a success story for DONE as he is the first Neighborhood Council board member elected to citywide office.

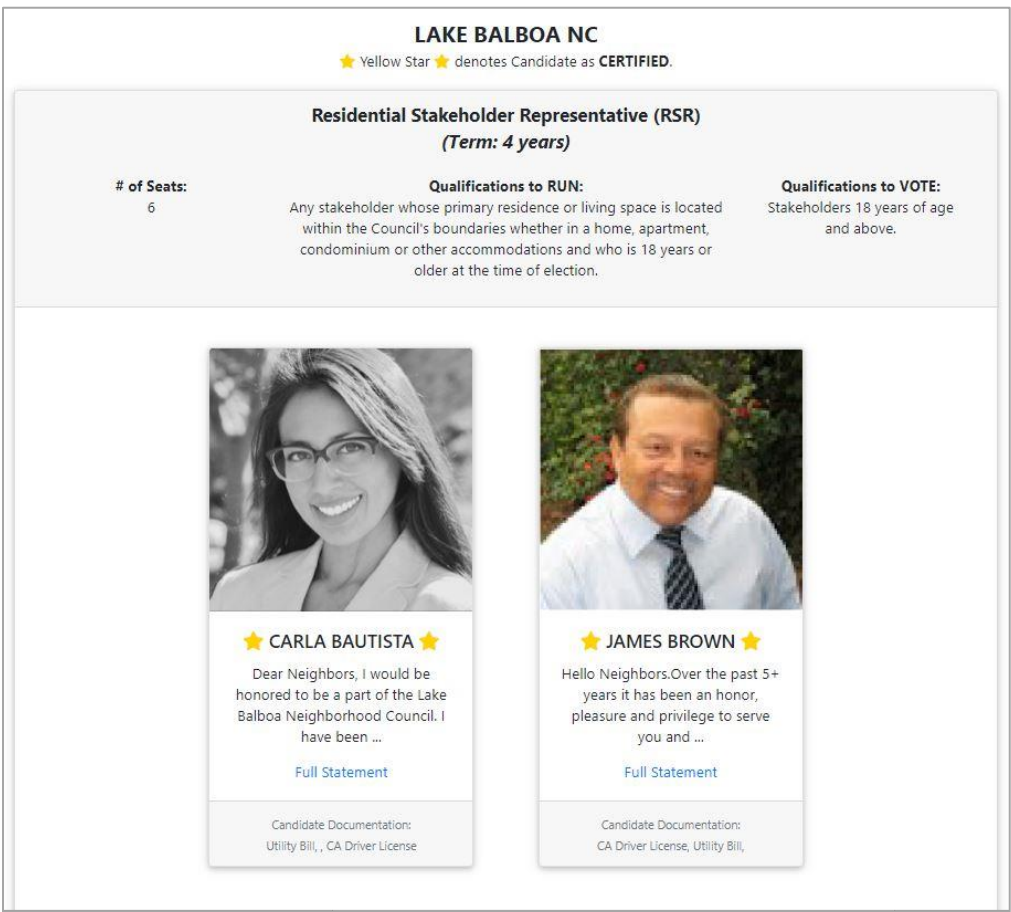


Fig 7: Screenshot of Candidates for the Lake Balboa Neighborhood Council 2019 Election
(Source: Los Angeles Department of Neighborhood Empowerment)

⁵ In the last four neighborhood council elections (2010, 2012, 2014, 2016), an average of 23,145 residents cast a ballot each year. This represents just 0.6% of the eligible voter pool.

Perhaps the most innovative and effective tool available to Neighborhood Councils is the “community impact statement” (CIS). CISs were not prescribed in the City Charter, but were rather adopted in February 2003 by the City Council. This participatory innovation allows neighborhood councils to prepare and submit a statement detailing the board’s opinion about a particular City Council file (Musso et. al, 2007). These statements become a permanent part of that case’s council file and are archived on the city’s online “Council File Management System”. The submission of CISs are noted on the agendas of City Planning Commission and City Council hearings, as well as reports from the Chief Administrative Officer and Department of City Planning (DCP). A total of 1,713 CISs were submitted by 89 neighborhood councils between January 1, 2013 and March 20, 2019.

Requirement 4: Political Support

The University of Southern California’s longitudinal study of NC implementation showed that councils had limited political influence at City Hall (Musso et al, 2007b). A number of DONE project coordinators were interviewed. They agreed that although the Mayor had just come around to accepting the system, City Council members were still wary about NCs. Interviewees ascribe this tension to the fact that City Council had “historically been the channel through which stakeholders field complaints and receive services” and that the new system “may complicate elected representatives’ views” (ibid).

The following section assesses the impacts that the NC system has had in terms of politicians building and maintaining good rapports with increasingly influential NCs. The analysis is an effort to gauge the success of the NC system in meeting its second overarching goal outlined in Article IX of the revised City Charter: “make government more responsive to local needs.”

In recent years, L.A.'s City Council members have embraced the NC system. On the "Community Empowerment" page of his website, Paul Krekorian, the current Councilman for District 2, describes himself as a "vocal advocate for neighborhood councils and bringing more community involvement to city government" (Krekorian, n.d.). Mayor Eric Garcetti mentioned working with neighborhood councils several times throughout the 2018 State of the City address, including future partnerships with NCs to solve the city's rampant homelessness problem.

City Council's growing interest in NCs peaked in May 2018 when Councilman David Ryu introduced Council File #18-0467 which proposed reforms to the NC system. The bulk of the recommendations were intended to instill consistency and standards throughout the 99 NCs which each operate under their own self-designed by-laws. Ryu also recommended a one-time study to evaluate NC by-laws to determine if board seats are equitably allocated amongst stakeholder types (LA City Council, 2018). This motion prompted 38 CISs from NCS across the city.

Finding 5: Community Impact Statements are Innovative Tools to Increase Citizen Participation, But They Are Not Utilized Uniformly Across All Neighborhoods

While community impact statements have become one of the most utilized tools for NCs to express their opinions and exert influence in City Hall, their utilization is not uniform across L.A.'s 99 NCs. An analysis of CIS submissions between January 2013 and March 2019 was conducted to assess whether certain demographic or socioeconomic factors within communities correlated to the number of CISs submitted by NCs. The median number of CISs submitted by NCs during this six-year period was 11, although submissions ranged from zero to 105⁶. The most hotly-contested council item during this period received 42 CIS submissions.

⁶ A total of ten NCs submitted zero CISs, however two were new NCs certified during the study period.

When one studies the NCs that submitted the most and the least CISs, it becomes clear that the residents of these neighborhoods have very different socioeconomic characteristics. The table below compares some socioeconomic factors between the top-eight submitting NCs and the eight NCs that did not submit any CISs during this study period. The data shows that the NCs that readily submit CISs tend to be Whiter, wealthier, more educated, and more politically active than the NCs that did not utilize the tool.

Top 8 Neighborhood Councils	# CISs	% White	% Household Making Over 100k	% Bachelor's Degree or Higher	% Turnout in 2016 Presidential Election
Los Feliz NC	105	67.5%	34.5%	61.9%	71.7%
Historic Highland Park NC	89	14.1%	22.2%	23.8%	66.8%
Studio City NC	76	70.8%	47.4%	62.2%	74.7%
Glassell Park NC	73	18.2%	29.1%	29.9%	67.6%
Bel Air-Beverly Crest NC	67	80.2%	69.7%	71.1%	73.0%
Greater Valley Glen NC	65	51.8%	26.4%	31.7%	62.4%
Van Nuys NC	58	23.9%	13.8%	20.8%	59.6%
Greater Wilshire NC	44	32.7%	31.5%	51.3%	65.0%
Mean of Subset	72	44.9%	34.3%	44.1%	67.6%

Bottom 8 Neighborhood Councils	# CISs	% White	% Household Making Over 100k	% Bachelor's Degree or Higher	% Turnout in 2016 Presidential Election
Empowerment Congress Central Area NC	0	1.3%	11.8%	10.4%	56.1%
Empowerment Congress Southeast Area NC	0	0.8%	7.6%	6.0%	47.3%
Harbor City NC	0	18.1%	25.1%	24.8%	61.8%
Mission Hills NC	0	15.8%	28.7%	16.7%	65.5%
Olympic Park NC	0	15.4%	24.1%	35.2%	60.1%
Watts NC	0	0.8%	6.0%	4.8%	40.3%
Westlake North NC	0	3.6%	4.8%	11.1%	55.7%
Westlake South NC	0	5.2%	5.3%	11.8%	49.9%
Mean of Subset	0	7.6%	14.2%	15.1%	54.6%

Tables 2 and 3: Selected Demographic Characteristics for the Top 8 and Bottom 8 Neighborhood Councils in Terms of CIS Reports Submitted (2013-2019)

This analysis must not be misconstrued to infer that the demographic characteristics of the represented communities at-large determine how frequently their representing NC submits CISs. How frequently, and for what purposes, NCs take advantage of the CIS tool depends on the individual board members and the particular suite of council files deliberated at City Hall.

Acknowledging this methodological limitation in using the actions of the NC board as a proxy for civic engagement of the represented neighborhood, several scatterplots (linear regressions) were created to gain a better understanding of the relationship between the number of CISs submitted and selected socioeconomic characteristics of NC. The results of these linear regression models are visualized in Figs. 9-15 on the proceeding pages. The R^2 value in a linear regression is a statistical measure of how close the data are to the fitted regression line. Ranging from 0 to 1, the R^2 value is the percentage of the response variable variation that is explained by a linear model. The higher the R^2 value is, the better the independent variable (the selected socioeconomic indicator) is at predicting the dependent variable (the number of submitted CISs).

The socioeconomic variable that exhibited the highest correlation when compared to the quantity of CIS submissions was the percentage of registered voters who casted a ballot in the 2016 general election ($R^2=0.208$). This finding reflects other studies that have found direct correlations between voting frequency and participation in other forms of civic engagement. An online field experiment proved that subjects who voted in the 2016 primary elections were nearly three times more likely to engage with a survey distributed by a civic organization than those who did not vote in the primary election (Werfel, 2017).

Fig. 8: Multi-Variate Regression Results

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>
% White	14.111	19.014	0.742	0.460
% >\$100k	-25.209	30.076	-0.838	0.404
Voter Turnout (%)	100.409	53.553	1.875	0.064*
% Bachelor's +	18.691	23.366	0.800	0.426

* p<.1, ** p<.05, *** p<.01, **** p<.001

Fig. 9: Voter Turnout in 2016 Election and Submitted CISs per Neighborhood Council
(Source: University of Southern California)

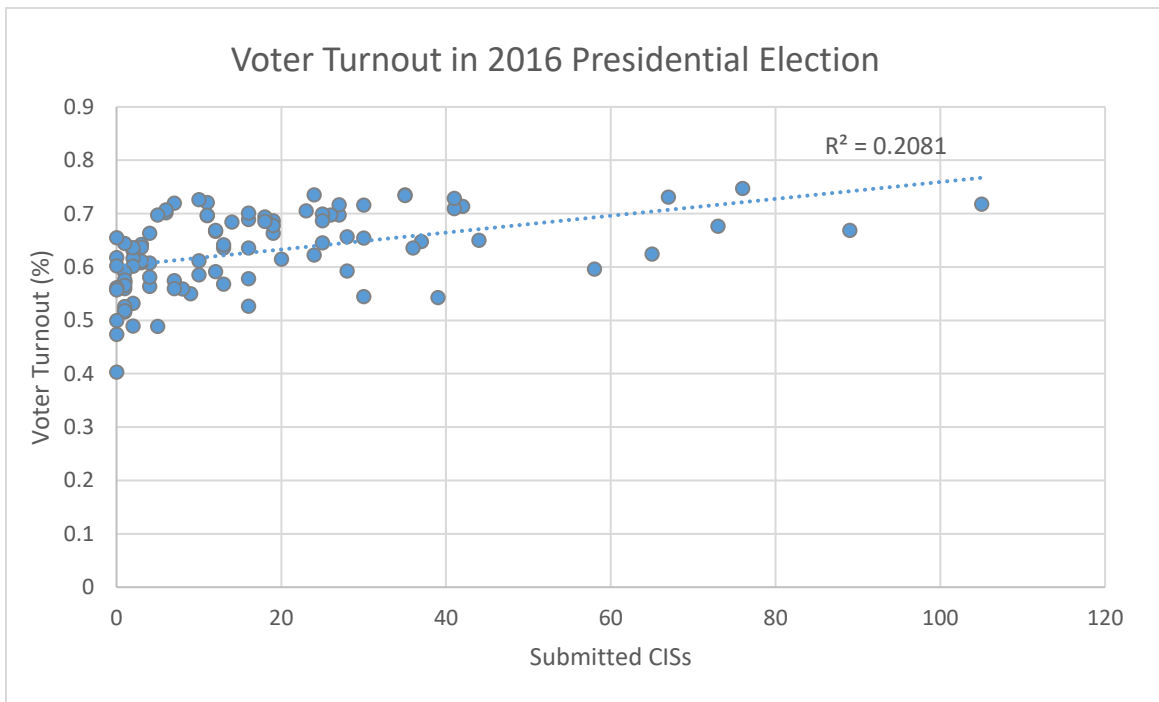


Fig. 10: Percentage of Residents in Represented Neighborhood with Bachelor's Degree and Submitted CISs per Neighborhood Council. (Source: ACS 2017 5-Year Average Table S1501)

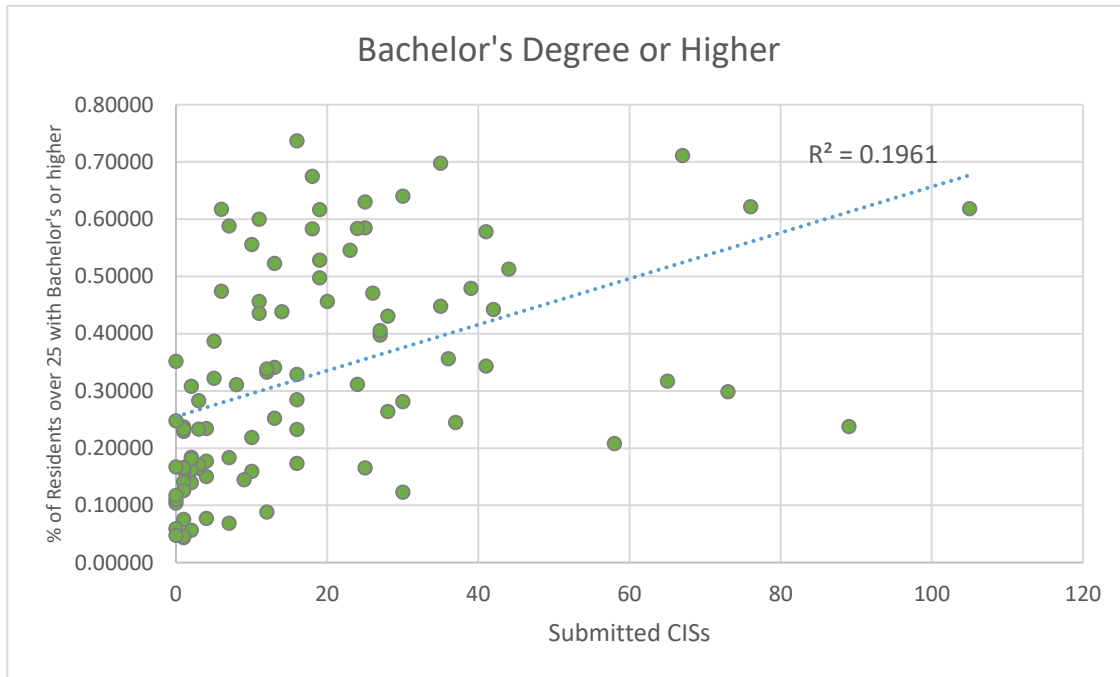


Fig. 11: Percentage of White Residents in Represented Neighborhood and Submitted CISs per Neighborhood Council (Source: ACS 2017 5-Year Average Table P9)

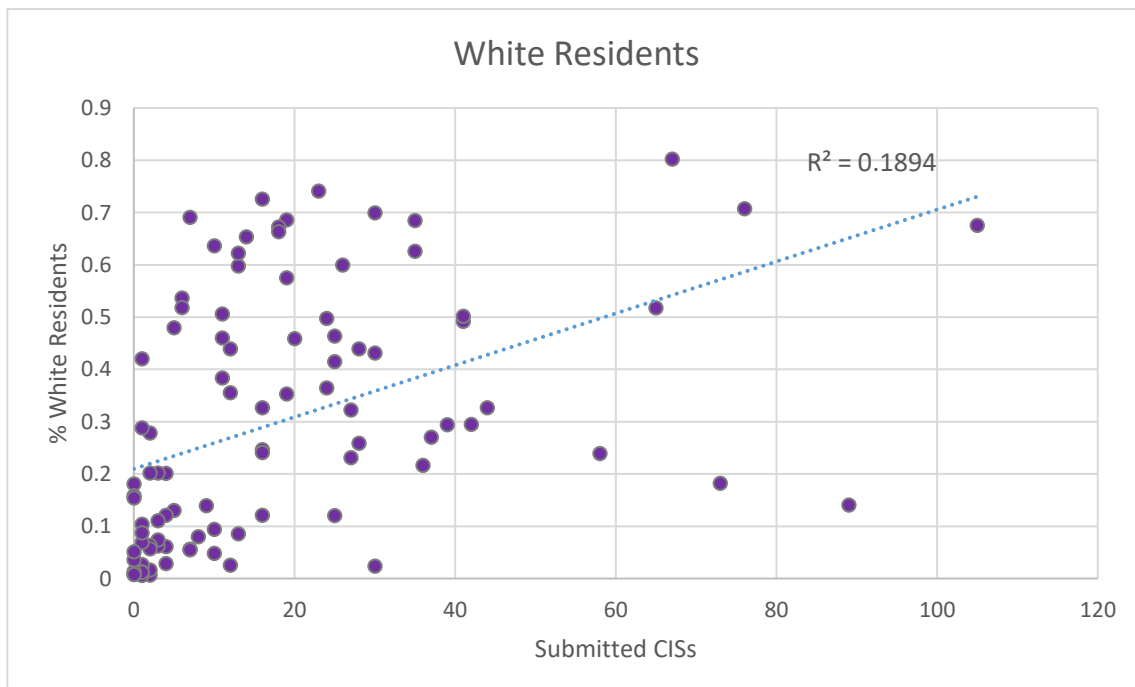


Fig. 12: Percentage of Households in Represented Neighborhood with Incomes Greater than \$100,000 and Submitted CISs per Neighborhood Council (Source: ACS 2017 5-Year Average Table S1901)

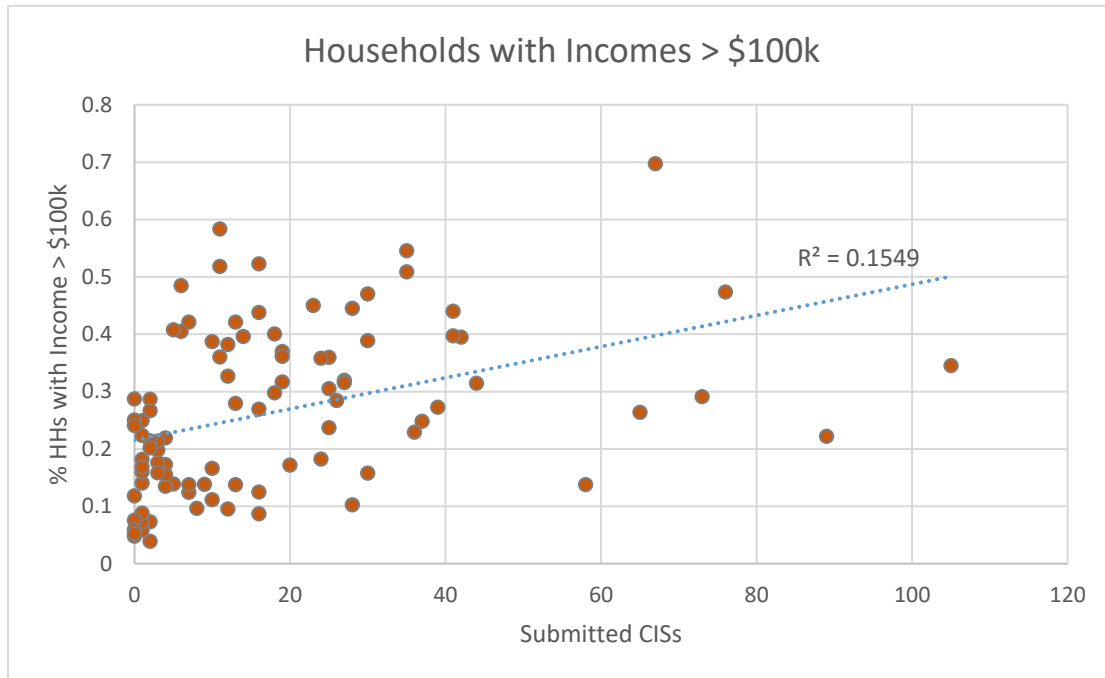


Fig. 13: Percentage of Residents in Represented Neighborhood with Limited English Language Skills and Submitted CISs per Neighborhood Council (Source: ACS 2017 5-Year Average Table B06007)

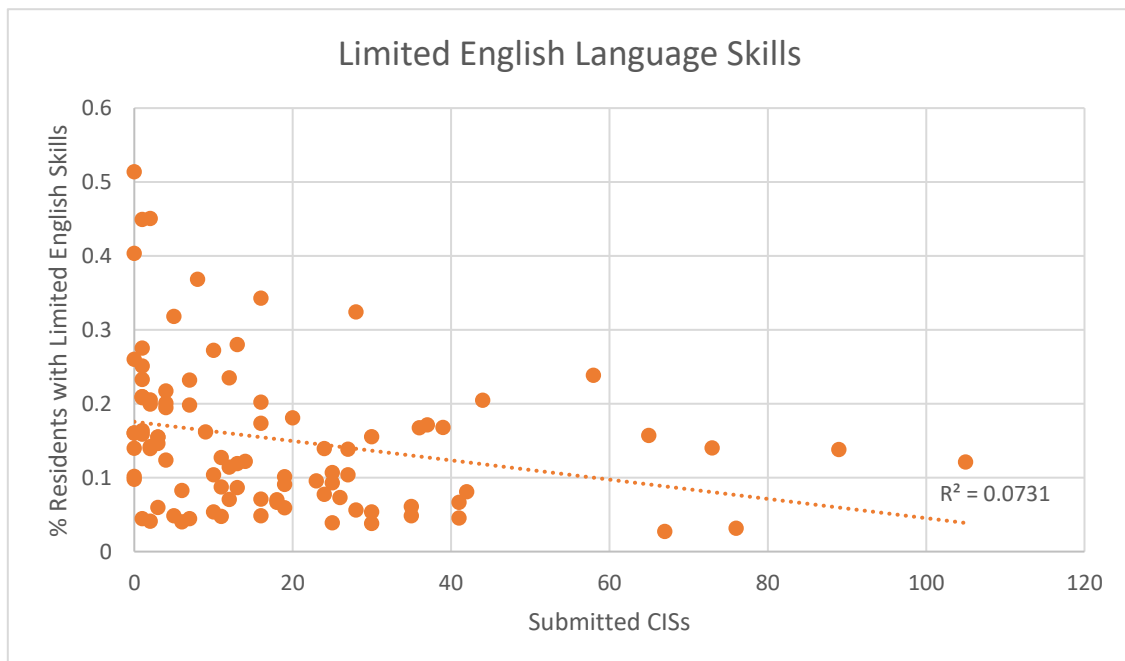


Fig. 14: Percentage of Residents in Represented Neighborhood that have lived in Unit since 2000 (or earlier) and Submitted CISs per Neighborhood Council (Source: ACS 2017 5-Year Average Table B25026)

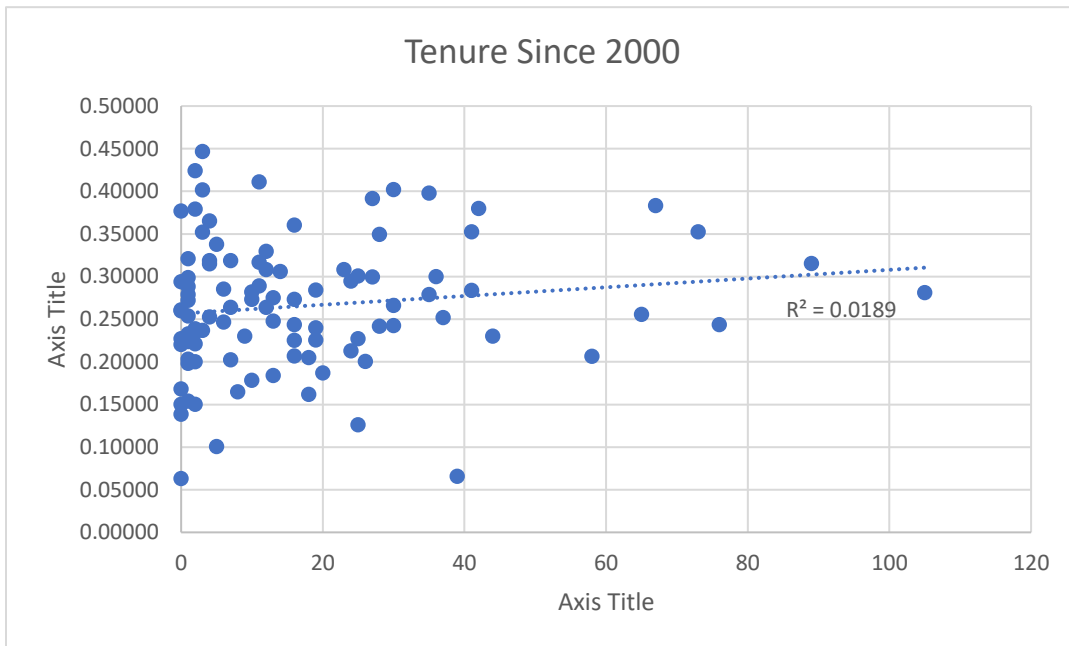
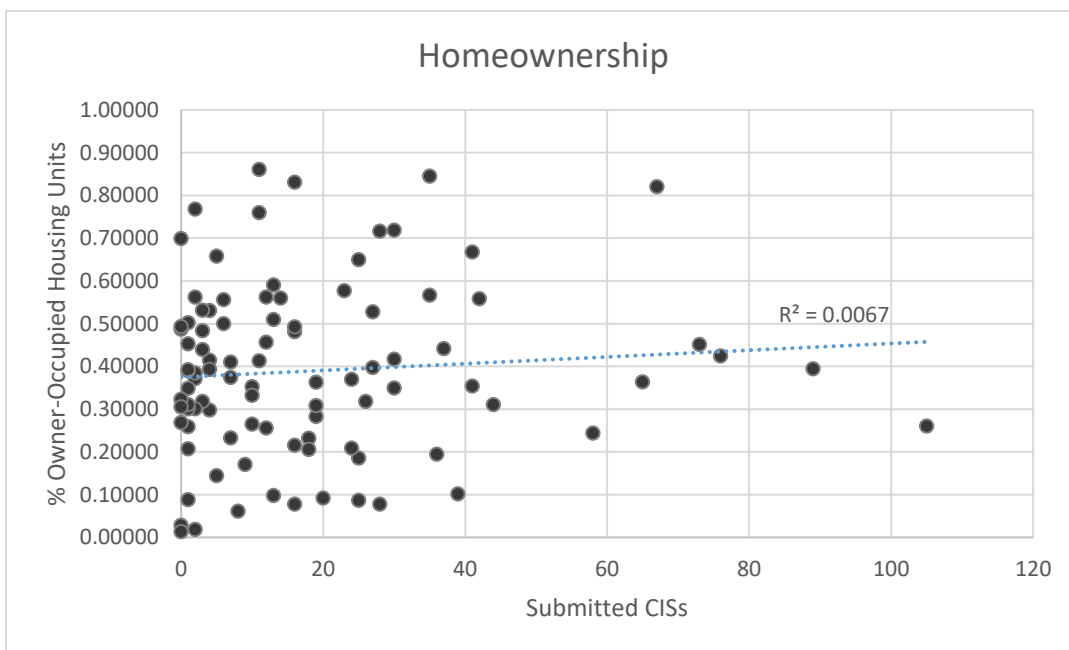


Fig. 15: Percentage of Owner-Occupied Housing Units in Represented Neighborhood and Submitted CISs per Neighborhood Council (Source: ACS 2017 5-Year Average Table B25003)



Other variables showing higher correlations to CIS submissions are percentage of residents with bachelor's degrees ($R^2=0.1961$), percentage of white residents ($R^2=0.189$) and percentage of household with incomes greater than or equal to \$100,000 ($R^2=0.1549$).

Equally interesting were the socioeconomic indicators that did not exhibit any correlations. Despite the tendency for recent immigrants to shy away from civic engagement, the analysis showed that the percentage of residents with limited English language skills was a weak indicator of CIS submission rates ($R^2=0.0731$). Furthermore, homeownership rates ($R^2=0.007$) and tenure in the neighborhood ($R^2=0.0189$) were meaningless compared to CIS submissions. This is contrary to Los Angeles' tradition of homeowners associations which privileged the agendas of single-family homeowners above the desires of renters. This finding highlights the effectiveness of the neighborhood council system in providing districts with high percentage of renters a say in municipal affairs. Although Los Angeles has a reputation as a suburban city, over 63 percent of units are renter-occupied.

A multivariate regression model using the four indicators exhibiting the strongest correlations (voter turnout, bachelor's degree, white residents, and income over \$100k) was ran to predict the number of CIS submissions. The analysis showed that the only statistically-significant predictor variable was voter turnout, which exhibited a p-score of 0.064 (Fig. 8). The adjusted R^2 value was only 0.201 meaning that these four variables only explained about 20 percent of the CIS submission variable.

These regression analyses prove that although using the socioeconomic data of the represented neighborhood to predict the political savviness of neighborhood councils reveals some weak correlations, this is not the right approach. The decision to submit CISs is the decision of the NC board, not the neighborhood's constituents at-large. A more prudent analysis

may involve studying the socioeconomic and governmental experiences of board members to gauge if certain personal characteristics are better predictors of CIS utilization. According to Musso et al (2007b), the demographics of the NC boards do not represent the diversity of the represented constituents at-large. The report found that Whites make up the greatest share of board membership, while Asians and Hispanics are under-represented in proportion to their share of the city's population.

Finding 6: Although City Council Members Do Consider Community Impact Statements, They Are Not Tethered to Their Constituents' Opinions

Two hotly-contested council motions were examined to gauge how seriously City Council members consider the opinions expressed by neighborhood councils in submitted CISs.

CF# 11-1705 seeks to revise Los Angeles' citywide sign ordinance, which restricts digital signs to designated sign districts typically located along highways and industrial areas. The proposed ordinance, which was drafted by the Council's Planning and Land Use Management (PLUM) Committee on December 12, 2017, would reward billboard companies for removing old non-digital billboards in exchange for permission to erect new digital signs in areas outside of the current sign districts (Fuller, 2017).

NCs submitted dozens of CISs in opposition to this PLUM proposal, stressing that digital signs add unsightly blight and are dangerously distracting to drivers since they are often animated. The majority of NCs preferred an ordinance update approved by the City Planning Commission in 2015 known as "Version B+" which imposed stricter brightness provisions and reduced the date in which signs could be grandfathered out of the new ordinance rules.

One CIS from the Historic Highland Park NC serves as a follow-up statement changing the council's "approve" stance for Version B+ to "oppose" for PLUM's looser ordinance

proposal. The CIS goes on to say that City Council repeatedly refers to a number of supportive CISs to show wide support for their proposal, when in reality these letters refer to a previous proposal. Highland Park NC surmises that PLUM revised the proposed ordinance under pressure from the outdoor advertising lobbyists, and that such a proposal would sell out L.A.'s neighborhoods for corporate gain (Historic Highland Park NC, 2017).

In a private letter from Michael Menjivar, board member of the North Hollywood Northeast NC, the author advocates that PLUM's proposal would allow a greater number of communities to fund community improvement programs through the increased revenue the city would receive from advertisers. Menjivar also notes that the proposal would dismantle old billboards from neighborhoods and provide communities with participatory forums to identify appropriate locations for new digital signs (LA City Council, 2018).

In May 2018, the Chief Legislative Analyst released a report drafted in partnership with a private consultant which provides a comprehensive financial analysis of off-site digital signage in Los Angeles. There has been no action on the file since last year indicating that the City Council has considered the widespread community backlash to the PLUM proposal and will revisit the issue with an amended ordinance in the future.

Another controversial case, CF #13-1493, deals with Los Angeles' long tradition of street vending by proposing a regulated sidewalk vending permit system. Although the City had decriminalized street vending in 2017, a lack of a formal ordinance resulted in street vendors being harassed and receiving hefty fines from law enforcement officers unclear of the law. Vendors, many of whom are unnaturalized immigrants from Central America, feared deportation as they tried to make a living.

Several vendors testified in front of City Council supporting the ordinance which would clarify sidewalk vending and put into place a just permit system (Sulaiman, 2018). The program was opposed by the business community, including directors of business improvement districts who cited unruly behavior, increased refuse, and insufficient sidewalk space as primary concerns.

A total of 31 CISs were submitted by neighborhood councils on behalf of this council file. Although the majority of NCs were supportive of the concept of creating the citywide permitting system, many expressed NIMBY concerns about the impacts that rampant vending would have in their communities. Van Nuys NC listed a plethora of concerns about the proposed ordinance's lack of details, such as the lack of provisions barring vendors from selling competing goods next to brick-and-mortar stores and carts not receiving letter grades from the Health Department.

Several NCs requested that communities be given the option to "opt-out" of the program on the grounds of local control. The CIS submitted by Sun Valley NC recommends that street vendors ought to receive permission from 60 percent of adjacent property owners to operate rather than the bill's requirement of 20 percent. The CIS states that the proposed ordinance is "very one-sided with only the vendor in mind" and that the Sun Valley NC is against the ordinance unless it is amended to provide communities with more regulatory input (Sun Valley NC, 2016).

On October 31, 2018, City Council unanimously passed the ordinance, ushering in a new era for the city's 50,000 or so street vendors (Fig. 16). The additional restriction proposed by many neighborhood councils highlight a concern expressed by Hunter and Leyden (1995) that a small group of LULU ("locally unwanted land use") opponents may have the effect of biasing

local decision maker's perceptions of community preferences. This came to light at the Arleta NC meeting that the researcher attended on January 15, 2019 in which board members complained about a suite of nuisances caused by the neighborhood's vibrant sidewalk vendor community. While over 82 percent of residents are Latino in this vibrant immigrant community, the board members were disproportionately Whiter than the community at-large, and likely did not represent the opinions that many residents have about these affordable food providers.



Fig 16: Advocates attend a hearing at Los Angeles City Hall about Street Vending Legalization

(Source: Saul Gonzalez, PRI's The World)

Finding 7: Neighborhood Councils are Discussing Proposed Land Use Actions and Developments in Public Forums

As the San Fernando Valley's population and commercial development continues to grow, the sprawling suburban region of yesteryear will continue to contend with congestion, small lot subdivisions, and environmental degradation and hazards. The loss of single-family housing during the 1970s and 80s detailed in Hogen-Esch (2002) continued into the 21st century. As of 2017, there were approximately 280,000 single-family homes and 225,000 housing units in multifamily structures in the Valley (US Census, 2017).

Although it is lagging behind the rest of the city, the Valley is slowly transforming into the "Third LA", becoming denser, more mixed-use, and more transit-oriented. The Valley's transformation began in 2000 with the opening of the Universal City/Studio City and North Hollywood stations on the Red subway line. A Bus Rapid Transit route, known as the Orange Line, was put into place in 2005, creating an efficient east-west connection to the subway. The Orange Line was extended 4.5 miles to Chatsworth in 2012. Looking ahead, the Valley's built environment will be shaped by two major projects; a new light rail line running at-grade along the median of Van Nuys Boulevard, and the build-out of new mixed-use developments permitted by the Warner Center 2035 Specific Plan. These two initiatives are explored in further detail in the "Question 3" section of this chapter.

Valley NCs have a vested interest in land use issues in light of their purely advisory role. Although NCs cannot stop the City from approving entitlements for large-scale projects, Valley councils have remained vigilant as community watchdogs for out-of-context developments and incongruous land use ordinances. All 34 of the Valley's neighborhood councils have planning and land use committees. Boards regularly submit CISs for land use-related council files. From

January 2013 to March 2019, Valley councils submitted a total of 93 CISs in response to zoning- and land use-related council files.

Musso et al. (2007b) corroborates this finding that NCs are committed to land use and planning issues. The team coded the content of agendas from 43 certified councils for a 3-year period. Approximately 16 percent of the agenda items were in response to land use and planning items; the majority of which were specific discretionary actions such as zoning changes and other project-level variances.

Contrary to perceptions that NCs are reflexively oppositional to all development, Musso et al (2007b) discovered that NIMBY-oriented activities only accounted for three percent of all land use agenda items. The bulk of deliberated topics were related to transportation projects or proactive planning efforts.

My analysis of CIS submissions and meeting agendas revealed similar trends for NCs in the Valley. Although NCs did occasionally oppose individual development projects that they felt were out-of-content or disruptive, they were usually willing to work with the developer to modify projects to mitigate adverse impacts. This was evident with the Sunland-Tujunga NC as they remained in close communication with the developer of a 215-unit subdivision throughout the 15 years of project modifications. NCs are also intimately involved with updating their respective Community Plans. A recent City Council ordinance has mandated the Los Angeles DCP to update the city's 35 Community Plans by 2024. Since these documents dictate the types of developments that receive discretionary approvals, NCs are eager to become involved in the participatory planning process to express their preferences and concerns.

Verdugo Hills Golf Course Project in Sunland-Tujunga

Sunland-Tujunga Neighborhood Council (STNC) has been tracking the 60-acre Verdugo Hills Golf Course site ever since Snowball West Investments bought the property for \$7.6M in 2004. In 2009, a Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) was released to the public assessing the impacts of a proposed 229-unit housing development in one of the neighborhood's most treasured open spaces. In subsequent years, several of the project details had changed, prompting two recirculated portions of the DEIR. A Final EIR reflecting an alternative project with 215 units was released in 2018 — nine years after the original DEIR.

To actualize this large-scale project, the developer has requested a plethora of entitlements from the DCP, including a vesting zone change from agricultural to residential, and a vesting tentative tract map for a small lot subdivision. Although this lot is currently zoned as Residential Agricultural, the 1997 Sunland-Tujunga Community Plan designates this site's permitted land use as "low/medium multiple-family residential".

STNC drafted lengthy comments for both the original and recirculated portions of the DEIR. The STNC's public comment letter from February 3, 2016 highlights the iterative, somewhat collaborative, process that had developed between the applicant's project architect and the council: "The applicant's project architect has attempted to engage the community and solicit input on the currently proposed project and has attended numerous meetings of the Land Use Committee throughout the past year" (STNC, 2016).

The revised proposal reduces the development by 14 housing units, preserves over 28 acres of undeveloped land by clustering the residential units, and commits to protecting an on-site Historic-Cultural Monument (Fig. 17). Nonetheless, STNC expressed disdain in the City's decision not to release a new DEIR after the project was substantially modified. The letter also

highlighted the lack of public benefits the project would afford to residents stating that, “this project (at its current density) will further degrade the quality of life of our residents who live and commute in this area and will rob them of an important recreational asset...” (ibid). STNC board members have expressed the community’s preference that the site be transformed into a regional park.

As the project awaits environmental clearance, STNC continues to be involved in the development process. On February 13, 2019, Snowball West Investments, Glendale-Crescenta VOICE, and the Tuna Canyon Detention Center Coalition all came to the STNC’s monthly board meeting to update the NC and its constituents about the scaled-back proposal outlined in the recently-released Final EIR.

Fig. 17: Updated Site Plan for Verdugo Hills

(Source: Gaines & Stacey LLP)



Community Plan Updates in the Valley

In February 2017, Los Angeles' City Council voted unanimously to commit to updating the metropolis' 35 community plans every six years. According to councilmember Mike Bonin, the city's lax policy on plan updates has created a "culture of speculation" in which real estate developers buy and hold onto properties in the hopes of getting permission from the City Planning Commission to rezone and build larger developments (Chandler, 2017).

The State of California requires municipalities and counties to create, and then periodically update, comprehensive planning documents known as "General Plans". A General Plans serves as "the long-term blueprint for the community's vision of future growth" (Governor's Office of Planning and Research, n.d.) Each General Plan is required to have certain elements, including land use, housing, conservation, and environmental justice⁷. Since Los Angeles' built environment is so big and diverse, the City has created 35 sub-districts that each develop their own "Community Plan" to satisfy the General Plan's land use requirement.

According to DCP Director Vince Bertoni, a Community Plan "looks at the long-term vision of a community in Los Angeles in terms of how it should be built and what uses it should have" (Chiland, 2018). DCP has committed to tackle the first round of community plan updates for all 35 regions between 2017 and 2024. 14 of these community plan regions are located in the San Fernando Valley; the three Southwest Valley plans are expected to be completed in 2020, while the three Southeast Valley plans will be released a year later. The remaining eight community plans in the North Valley will be finished between 2023 and 2024 (Fig. 17).

Although new structures must adhere to the zoning and land use ordinances detailed in the Community Plan to be built as-of-right, it is common practice for developers to seek "general

⁷ Circulation, Open Space, Noise, Safety, and Air Quality are the other required elements to the general plan

plan amendments” through the City Planning Commission. DCP Director Bertoni believes that L.A. has so many variance applications because Community Plans are decades old and do not reflect what residents currently demands. Bertoni is confident that regularly-updated Community Plans, as well as the City’s forthcoming zoning code revisions (though an initiative called re:code LA), will result in more nuanced, adjustable and responsive planning.

Councilmember José Huizar, former chair of the Planning & Land Use Management Committee, highlighted the importance of community participation in the process, saying that the updates should have “ample stakeholder input so that we can consider in a thoughtful and deliberate manner how our neighborhoods grow and evolve into the future” (LA DCP, 2018b).

SOUTHEAST VALLEY COMMUNITY PLANS UPDATE OUTREACH PROCESS

NORTH HOLLYWOOD-VALLEY VILLAGE | VAN NUYS-NORTH SHERMAN OAKS |
SHERMAN OAKS-STUDIO CITY-TOLUCA LAKE-CAHUENGA PASS



email: planning.southeastvalley@lacity.org
website: southeastvalleyplans.org

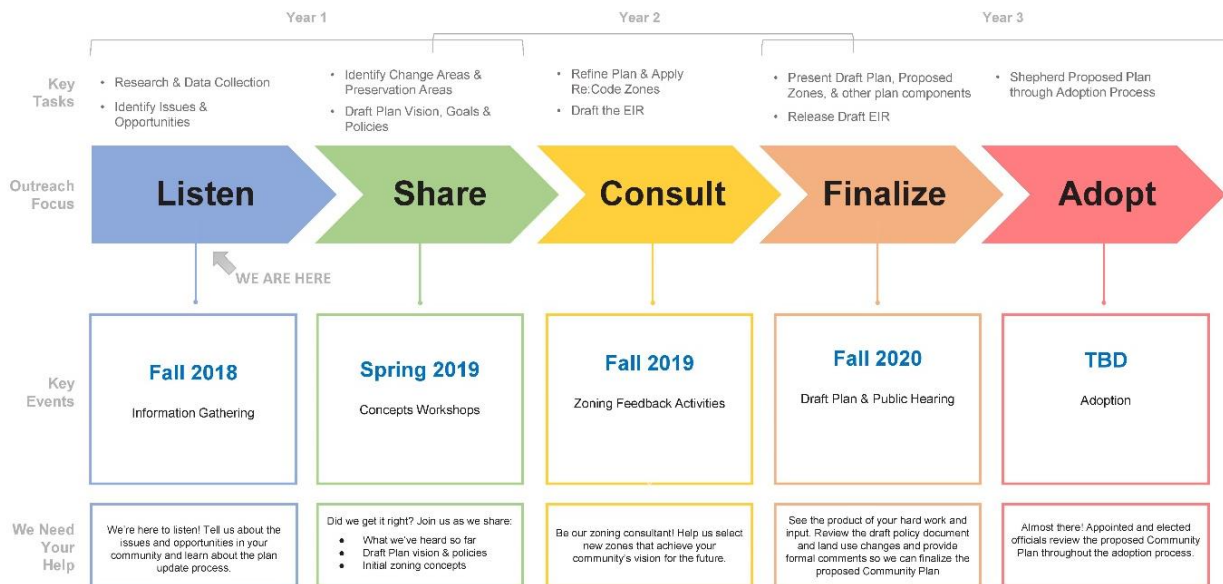


Fig. 18: Outreach Process for Community Plan Updates

(Source: Los Angeles Department of City Planning)

When Sylmar updated its Community Plan in 2015, DCP engaged in a robust community outreach campaign which included 30 community meetings, several town hall meetings, the distribution of informational materials, and continual partnerships with a number of neighborhood groups, including the Economic Alliance of the San Fernando Valley and the Sylmar Neighborhood Council.

As the Community Plan was being developed, the City released two important documents in the Fall 2012; the first draft of the community plan and the project's DEIR. In subsequent months, the Plan was discussed at five separate Sylmar NC Land Use Committee meetings. On a meeting on October 15, 2012, the Land Use Committee agreed to "divide various portions among ourselves and meet as an ad hoc committee only to share what we have found, discuss the significance of these findings, and plan to meet as many times as we could until the due date for comments" (Sylmar NC, 2012). Although the General Board made a motion to authorize the Land Use Committee to respond to the DEIR, there is no public comment documented from the Sylmar NC in the Final EIR.

The North Hollywood-Valley Village Community Plan update process began in 2018. A city planner managing DCP's Community and Project Planning divisions stated that the agency strengthened its outreach process for the Southeast Valley updates (Fig. 18). The first year of the Plan update consists of listening, sharing, and information gathering. The second year focuses on refining the Plan with specific code recommendations and drafting the EIR. The last year of the update includes the release of the DIER and draft Plan, as well as a public hearing. The final Community Plan must be approved by the Area Planning Commission, City Planning Commission, and City Council before it is adopted.

Neighborhood Council Valley Village (NCVV) has made its ongoing Community Plan update a top organizational priority. NCVV has added a “Community Plan” banner to its webpage and has created a public survey for residents and other stakeholders to assess numerous elements related to the area’s land use and planning. In September 2018, the NCVV board codified the organization’s official “goals and priorities” in a published motion. The document emphasizes that future Community Plan updates must comply with the district’s Specific Plan which was approved in the early 90s. NCVV envisions a mixed-use neighborhood with “orderly, attractive and harmonious new and expanded multifamily development... and commercial development” that is compatible with the district’s existing fabric of single-family homes (NCVV, 2018). The recommendations also aim to improve the aesthetics of commercial corridors and calls for the establishment of design standards.

NCVV’s proactive role in advancing the board’s and constituents’ opinions and recommendations for the updated Plan should serve as a new model of citizen participation in land use planning. Some critics have expressed concerns that this round of Community Plan updates is a thinly veiled attempt for DCP to increase density regardless of residents’ preferences. Chiland (2016) notes that the second public hearing for the South and Southeast LA Community Plans was held in an unheated tent in December 2016, and that the Plans rely heavily on incentives for developers to increase building FAR beyond what zoning currently permits. In light of these criticisms, the true litmus test will be seeing what DCP decides to ultimately adopt in the draft North Hollywood-Valley Village Community Plan, expected to be released in Fall 2020.

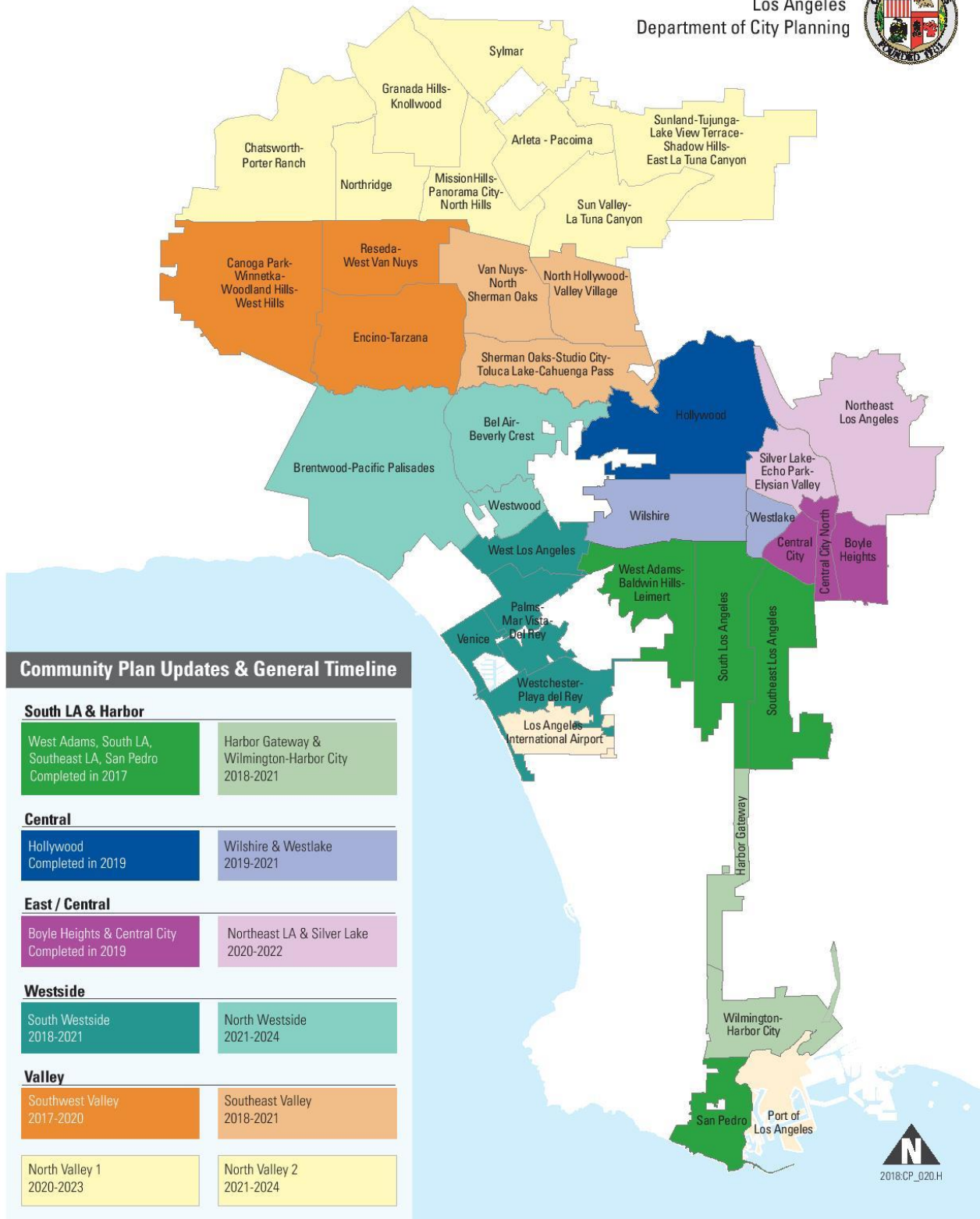


Fig 17: Community Plan Updates in Los Angeles: 2017 - 2024

(Source: Los Angeles Department of City Planning)

Finding 8: Many Neighborhood Councils Are Supporting High-Density, Mixed-Use Developments and Public Transit Projects

The 21st century has challenged notions of Los Angeles' legacy as a sprawling, car-dependent city composed largely of single-family homes. The City has made it a top policy goal to transform Los Angeles into a transit-rich, walkable, sustainable, and dense metropolis with a wide variety of housing options. Christopher Hawthorne, former architecture critic of the LA Times and professor at Occidental College, has coined this new phase of the city's urban development as "Third L.A." This period is explained as a reaction to the post-war era of automobile-centric, low density growth, and decades of disinvestment in the city's transit system and public realm. At the heart of this concept is the idea that "the city is no longer pushing out at the edges but folding back on itself, doubling back, looking to develop more intensely the sections it developed lightly before" (Artbound, 2016).

Urban theorists, such as B-H Lévy, have questioned whether Los Angeles is a city at all because of its lack of a single urban center. Lévy (2006) contends that the law of isonomy was so essential in the Athenian definition of cityhood that L.A. ought to be thought of as something else. Edward Soja refutes this narrow-minded claim, describing the Chicago School of Urbanism's concentric ring model simply as an articulation of centralized capitalism when all businesses huddled in the central business district out of transactional necessity. Soja argues now that capitalism has fragmented and dispersed into a polynucleated globally disseminate form, it is only logical that urban structures reflect this change (Sullivan, 2014).

Third L.A. does not focus solely on Downtown Los Angeles. Transportation projects, neighborhood-wide upzonings, and pedestrian safety improvements are being made in all neighborhoods across L.A.'s 500 square miles. The Warner Center 2035 Specific Plan and the East San Fernando Valley Transit Corridor are examples of two Third L.A. projects underway in

the Valley. As previously noted, NCs do not represent monolithic NIMBY opposition to all development. Their involvement in these two projects underscore how NCs are different than the reactionary HOAs that operated for decades prior. In recent years, NCs have been largely amenable to higher-intensity development and transit projects. NC board members are cognizant that increased housing production and expanded public transit will aid in solving some of the metropolis' problems, but remain vigilant throughout the planning and implementation processes to guarantee that their communities are not disproportionately impacted by project specifics.

Warner Center 2035

Warner Center is a 925-acre shopping and office hub in the San Fernando Valley – some 28 miles northwest of Downtown LA. Planners and development boosters have dubbed this district the “Downtown of the Valley” since the 1960s due to its dense confluence of shopping malls, tall office towers, and wide thoroughfares. Warner Center has been molded by a series of Specific Plans, the first of which was approved in 1971 to create a regional employment center to ease congestion from Downtown. A Specific Plan is a planning tool used throughout the State of California to create special overlay zoning districts for areas that serve unique functions in the community. These documents, which in Los Angeles must be approved by City Council, provide a comprehensive and clear framework for developers, establishing the “link between the [city’s] general plan and the individual development proposals in a defined area” (Governor’s Office of Planning and Research, 2001).

In 2013, City Council approved an updated scheme called the Warner Center 2035 Specific Plan. The Plan was the result of a participatory process beginning in 2005 when City Council mandated a restudy of the district and the establishment of an advisory committee to guide a comprehensive overhaul of the old Warner Center Specific Plan which had been

amended in an ad-hoc fashion since the 1993. Although the general public had several opportunities to express their opinions about the proposal⁸, the Specific Plan was largely crafted by members from a consortium of organizations. Such decision-makers included the Warner Center Community Advisory Committee, municipal agencies, consultants, and several community-based organizations, such as the Valley Industry Commerce Association, Woodland Hills Homeowners Organization, and Woodland Hills-Warner Center Neighborhood Council (WHWCNC).

DCP hopes that the Plan will transform Warner Center into a mixed-use, transit-oriented, and pedestrian-friendly neighborhood. The Plan does not only support the City's larger planning vision to increase density and reduce car dependency, it is also conceived as an economic development tool that will add 40,000 new jobs and spur a vibrant business district specializing in green and clean professional, scientific and technical businesses, and other "creative class" sectors (LA DCP, 2013). The area is split up into eight districts, each with their own functional purpose and corresponding development and design standards (Fig. 19).

WHWCNC was intimately involved in the conceptualization and drafting of the Specific Plan. The Chair, Vice Chair, and Parliamentarian of WHWCNC were all members of the Warner Center Community Advisory Committee. One *Daily News* article highlighted the irreverence of a NC and HOA working so hard to increase development intensity in their neighborhood, noting that "Unlike most neighborhood councils and homeowners groups that fight to scale back development, [Woodland Hills Homeowners and WHWCNC] are saying: Build an urban-looking project. And build it bigger" (Smith, 2011).

⁸ Including five community workshops in 2008/2009; public hearings required for the Environmental Impact Review and City Council Approval.

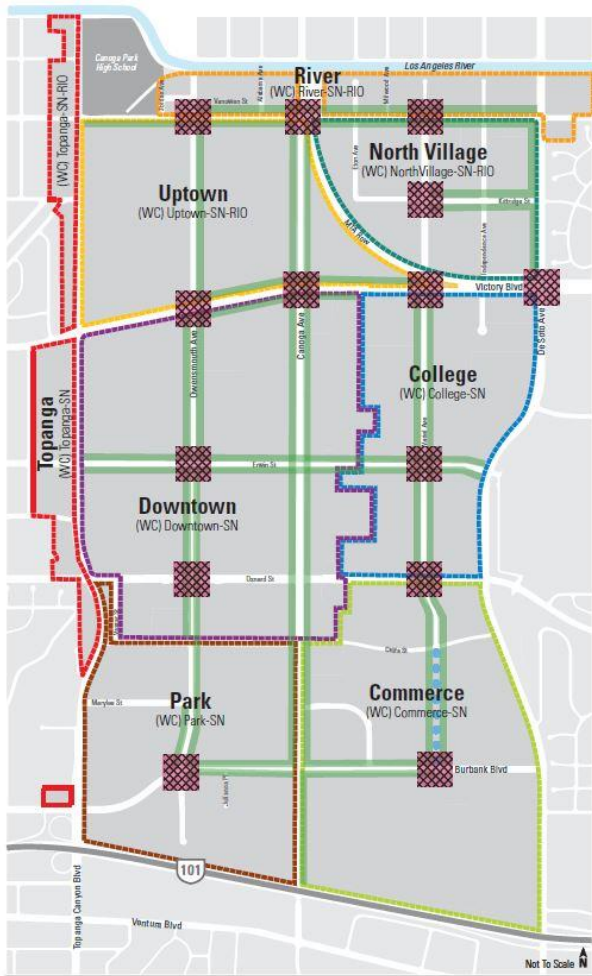


Fig. 19: Eight District Zones created by the Warner Center 2035 Specific Plan

(Source: Los Angeles Department of City Planning)

Even more surprising is the history that Woodland Hills Homeowners Organization has had in protesting (and filing lawsuits against) the development of office towers in Warner Center throughout the 80s and 90s. The Spound Company’s “Warner Ridge” project proposed the erection of seven office buildings ranging from three to seven stories next to a residential neighborhood. Although the Community Plan identified the project site as an office area, the lot was zoned for residential. The HOA was instrumental in successfully convincing key City Council members to vote against the proposal in 1990, only to have the developer and HOA launch a series of subsequent lawsuits, ultimately resulting in a medium-density apartment complex (Leovy, 1996).

Dennis DiBiase, former co-chair of the Woodland Hills-Warner Center NC, spoke to several media outlets about how the Warner Center 2035 Specific Plan reflected residents’

changing preferences for denser, more walkable destinations. Skeptics challenged this generalized claim, pointing to a recent debate regarding The Village at Westfield Topanga, a new mall slated to include a Costco, gas station, and a hotel. While 2,000 letters were sent to DCP in support of this lower-density, car-centric commercial project, only 200 letters were submitted advocating for a denser, more pedestrian-friendly alternative (Smith, 2011).

Although it has been six years since the Specific Plan was approved, the WHWCNC is still invested in the long-term execution and success of the district. In June 2017, the City Council approved an ordinance that established the Warner Center 2035 Plan Implementation Board to identify funding priorities and guarantee that mitigation efforts are completed. Two of the nine members of this ad-hoc committee are also board members of the NC.

One of the most transformative projects currently underway is Westfield Promenade 2035. This multiple-phase mixed-use makeover of a struggling mall embodies everything that the Warner Center 2035 Specific Plan envisioned. The 34-acre development will consist of residential, retail, restaurant, office, and hotel uses, and will even include a 15,000-seat sports stadium (LA DCP, 2018b). In total, the project will create 3.2 million sf of floor area, including 1,400 residential units and 629,000 sf of office space⁹ spread out in several buildings ranging from one- to 28-stories. The project is intended to be both pedestrian-friendly and transit-oriented. Westfield will operate a circulator bus connecting residents, shoppers, and office workers to the nearby Metro Orange Line station. Pedestrian-adapted pathways will encourage walking and bicycling. Furthermore, the developer will add 5.6 acres of publicly accessible open space including a central green called Promenade Square (Fig. 20). The entire project is anticipated to be completed by 2033.

⁹ The DEIR specifies that office buildings will be outfitted for “create office spaces” defined by large floor plates, high ceilings, exposed building systems, brick walls, and interesting, edgy furniture (LA DCP, 2018a).

Although the project “checks all the boxes” in terms of its compliance with the Specific Plan, the project’s DEIR perturbed community members because it presents “unavoidable and significant” impacts related to constructed-related air quality emissions, noise, and traffic. More than 40 community members attended a WHWCNC meeting in July 2018 to discuss the findings of the DEIR. Joyce Fletcher, President of WHWCNC, verbalized her concern about traffic, stating that additional residential developments and the sports stadium will cause vehicles to come to standstill: “...I don’t know how you are going to do that unless you are talking about adding more lanes to the freeway,” (Grigoryants, 2018b). Westfield argues that the project is in full compliance with the Specific Plan and assures residents that mitigations have been identified and will be fully implemented. Some attendees believed that the project would bring a positive change, including one resident who said, “I am not going to be alive in 2035. Why would we criticize something the next generation would enjoy?” (ibid).



Fig 20: Rendering of Westfield Promenade 2035 Project in Warner Center

Source: Unibail-Rodamco-Westfield SE

East San Fernando Valley Transit Corridor

The East San Fernando Valley Transit Corridor (ESFVTC) is an approved 9.2-mile at-grade light rail transit line being constructed by The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LA Metro). This \$1.3-billion capital project is expected to be operational in 2027 and will add 18 stations to several transit-dependent, largely-immigrant communities throughout the eastern San Fernando Valley. The new light rail line will run down the median of Van Nuys Boulevard, a north-south thoroughfare whose local bus routes are the second-busiest in the Valley behind the Orange Line BRT (Fig. 21).

This transformative light rail project was made possible by the voters of Los Angeles County. Measure R (passed in 2008) and Measure M (approved in 2016) increased county sales tax by ½-cent each to raise \$860 million annually for critical transportation projects. In addition to public transit and highway repairs, Measure M will pay for “much needed sidewalk improvements, pothole repairs, cycling infrastructure, bike share expansion and a network of greenways” (Walker, 2016). The passage of Measures R and M represent a pivotal shift in the city’s history as residents expressed their commitment to public transit expansion. With this new flow of capital funds, LA Metro is pursuing a suite of transformative projects including an expansion of the Purple Line to UCLA, a new metro spur that will traverse the Santa Monica Mountains (“the Sepulveda Pass Corridor”), and a new light rail line to LAX airport.

Prior to the release of the ESFVTC’s DEIR, LA Metro launched a comprehensive outreach campaign to inform constituents about the project’s logistics and receive feedback reflecting local knowledge and preferences. LA Metro has held a number of different informational events and public hearings as far back as October 2011. The project elicited more than 900 written and oral comments during the public review process.

According to Walt Davis, Project Manager for the ESFVTC, LA Metro was very amenable to public input and believed that community stakeholders' passion and involvement throughout the process has ameliorated the final design (W. Davis, personal interview, 2019). Public insight persuaded LA Metro project managers to modify the line's northern terminus so that it connects to the Metrolink commuter rail station in Sylmar. Overall, proximate residents were very supportive of the project. This region of the Valley has never had public rail transit despite there being high public demand for such infrastructures since the 1980s. A 1988 article published by the *Los Angeles Times* underscores the irony of LA Metro's priorities as it planned to build an east-west rail line through wealthy South Valley communities that vehemently opposed it. Northeast Valley residents would have gladly accepted those capital funds to build a much needed north-south spur. Despite public desire, residents were not surprised that the Northeast Valley was snubbed in the 80s. According to one Sylmar resident, "We do not have the money, the name, the push or the power... We always get the shaft" (Pyle, 1988).

NCs throughout the Northeast Valley have been supportive and enthusiastic about this massive project that will provide much-needed congestion alleviation. LA Metro hosted informational meetings for the Pacoima, Panorama City, Sylmar, Arleta, and Encino councils. Despite years of construction, the elimination of two traffic lanes, and speculation of gentrification, NCs have been supportive of the project. A board member of the Van Nuys NC called the ESFVTC "a win for the Valley" (Grigoryants, 2018a). The project was even supported by the Sherman Oaks HOA, albeit conditionally. Although the HOA opposed Measure M, it is currently advocating for a significantly more expensive, yet less disruptive, below-ground subway that would connect to the Sepulveda Pass Corridor project (Chou, 2017).

NCs were most vocal during deliberations about the location of the ESFVTC’s required rail yard. The original location, known as Option A, would have displaced 180 established businesses and several families in Van Nuys. Metro received a great deal of backlash regarding the Option A rail yard, prompting 2,000 comments about the matter. 94 percent of comments, including those from the Panorama City and Van Nuys NCs, were in support of the Option B alternative, which would be less disruptive to the community as it would situate the rail yard in a more remote industrial neighborhood (LA Metro, 2018).

The business owners’ vocal discontent was supported wholeheartedly by board members of nearby councils, such as Tony Wilkinson, Land Use Committee chairman of the Panorama City NC. Wilkinson was impressed by the business owners’ advocacy: “Now, you have to get the appointed representatives like Nury Martinez to say that we don’t want let Metro to take over the area. Now, they have a chance to influence politics” (Grigoryants, 2017).



Fig 21: Rendering of the East San Fernando Valley Transit Corridor Light Rail

Source: LA Metro

Conclusion

The United States has had a long history of local autonomy and decentralization beginning with the New England Town Meeting of the colonial era. Alexis de Toqueville marveled at Americans' propensity for collectivism and direct democracy at the community-level: "Without local institutions, a nation may establish a free government, but it cannot have the spirit of liberty" (Tocqueville, 1835).

Although the Valley secession movement failed, it indirectly sparked the creation of the City's neighborhood council system. These advisory bodies of local government have already had a marked impact on Los Angeles's civic engagement and the ways in which elected officials interact with constituents. NCs have decentralized legislative and land use powers that had previously been concentrated in City Hall, and have chipped away at the "black box" of governmental decision-making. The system has also challenged the hegemony of community-representing organizations in the city, which had previously been dominated by wealthy homeowners associations since the 1950s.

In answering the first research question, the findings reveal that NCs have been adequately effective in promoting greater citizen participation. The greatest achievement of the system has been the democratization of community governance, which was once only attainable in neighborhoods that had the economic resources, social clout, and technical expertise to influence political affairs. The ability for neighborhoods to express their local concerns through community impact statements that are submitted to the City Clerk is an important measure to guarantee that the voices of all NCs are documented. The second half of the research question, whether NCs make government more responsive to local needs, is complicated since community

concerns vary geographically and because the City often enacts policies that benefit the population at-large, which may be at odds with the parochial demands of certain councils. Nonetheless, City Council members are cognizant of their constituents' opinions through submitted testimonies or CISs, and must remain largely aligned with popular opinions to win elections.

The second research question was an attempt to measure the impact that NCs have had in the San Fernando Valley, a region that was so dissatisfied with Los Angeles municipal government that 50 percent of residents voted to secede from the city just two decades ago. NCs remain committed to land use and zoning concerns as residents strive to balance the region's distinctively suburban character with development pressures stemming from a growing population. The role that certain NCs, like NC Valley Village, have taken in advising Community Plan updates has been reassuring since the process encourages councils to think of land use in their neighborhoods holistically, rather than piecemeal reactions to development proposals. Instead of acting as reactionary dissentients, NCs have embraced plans to increase the vitality and multifunctionality of their neighborhoods; strategizing how they can integrate retail, community facilities, and denser residential uses to improve the quality of life for all residents.

The third research question tackles the nascent concept of Third L.A. As the 21st-century version of Los Angeles ditches its reputation as a sprawling, auto-dependent metropolis and invests more in transit and infill developments, NCs will serve as rational mediators who can decide whether a proposed project (or citywide initiative) works well within their community's local context. The new light rail in the East San Fernando Valley is feasible along Van Nuys Boulevard due to residents' demand for bus service and the concentration of transit-dependent residents along its route. Although the city is densifying in certain neighborhoods with

appropriate conditions, a one-size-fits-all approach to urban development will fail in Los Angeles. For example, an east-west light rail line would not make sense right now in the northern rim of the Valley where the suburban-rural communities of Porter Ranch and Sylmar still permit equestrian uses.

Now that the NC system has been operational for almost two decades, one must ponder the utility of the seemingly-redundant coalitions of homeowners associations within Los Angeles. My research and fieldwork suggests that HOAs are here to stay due to the loyalty of long-time members and the additional tools available to these private organizations, such as the power to sue developers or even the City of Los Angeles itself. Lawsuits often result in tangible project modifications, evidenced by the years of legal action pursued by the Woodland Hills Homeowners Organization which halted developer's plans for office buildings in Warner Center.

The City of Los Angeles must be careful as to not grant NCs too much decision-making power, especially in land use cases where the minority opinions of the NC board members may overshadow a community's overwhelming support of a project. The Mayor of Seattle disbanded its neighborhood council system in 2016 on the grounds that they were not representative of the city's changing demographics and that their NIMBY tendencies contributed to soaring rents in a city that is 66 percent single-family homes. For decades, neighborhood councils held virtual veto power over nearly every decision on Seattle's growth and development (Barnett, 2017).

Mayor Garcetti's commitment to Community Plan updates, combined with DCP's charge to simplify and streamline the city's antiquated zoning code, provide the perfect avenues for Los Angeles' NCs to help craft comprehensive plans for their communities that preserve local character while simultaneously adapting to the changing needs of all residents.

The City of Los Angeles should consider several changes to maximize the degree to which NCs are efficacious entities that are representative of all residents. Firstly, City Council should require Council Members to attend at least one NC alliance meeting per year to meet their constituents face-to-face and answer questions directly. Although City Council Members often send community liaisons to meetings, they themselves are more likely to attend Homeowners Associations meetings than NC events. Requiring City Council Members to periodically attend NC alliance meetings would build residents' trust in their representatives and hold elected officials accountable when they vote against their community's interests

Secondly, the NC system should provide platforms for citizens not serving on boards to engage in decision-making processes. For example, NCs should hold workshops about how residents can independently submit public testimony in response to Environmental Impact Reports or proposed City Council motions. Also, since the City Clerk currently runs an election process for NC board positions, Los Angeles should consider how else voters can express their opinions while already at the ballot box. NC elections would be an ideal arena for residents to engage in participatory budgeting. The City had previously attempted to roll out a participatory budgeting process through NCs, but the implementation was hampered by several obstacles, most notably, poorly articulated goals, a hostile fiscal environment, and mayoral politics and organizational culture that have not supported participation in the budget process (Musso et al, 2007a). Previous failures should not deter future attempts as NCs have not only grown in number and influence, they have also garnered the support of current Mayor Eric Garcetti who believes that NCs are an integral part of solving the city's most pressing issues ranging from homelessness to more efficient delivery of municipal services to combatting climate change.

Appendix A: Article IX of Los Angeles City Charter (1999)

Sec. 900. Purpose.

To promote more citizen participation in government and make government more responsive to local needs, a citywide system of neighborhood councils, and a Department of Neighborhood Empowerment is created. Neighborhood councils shall include representatives of the many diverse interests in communities and shall have an advisory role on issues of concern to the neighborhood.

Sec. 901. Department of Neighborhood Empowerment.

The Department of Neighborhood Empowerment shall have the duties and responsibilities set forth in this Article and elsewhere in the Charter to implement and oversee the ordinances and regulations creating the system of neighborhood councils enacted pursuant to Section 905. Duties and responsibilities shall include:

- (a) prepare a plan for the creation of a system of neighborhood councils to ensure that every part of the City is within the boundary of a neighborhood council, and has an opportunity to form a neighborhood council (Plan);
- (b) assist neighborhoods in preparing petitions for recognition or certification, identifying boundaries that do not divide communities, and organizing themselves, in accordance with the Plan;
- (c) arrange Congress of Neighborhood meetings if requested to do so by recognized neighborhood councils;
- (d) assist neighborhood councils with the election or selection of their officers;
- (e) arrange training for neighborhood councils officers and staff;
- (f) assist neighborhood councils to share resources, including offices, equipment, and other forms of support for them to communicate with constituents, other neighborhood councils and with government officials; and
- (g) perform other duties as provided by ordinance.

Sec. 902. Board of Neighborhood Commissioners.

(a) There shall be a board of seven commissioners to be known as the Board of Neighborhood Commissioners (board). Commissioners shall be appointed by the Mayor, and shall be from diverse geographic areas, as further specified by ordinance. Appointment and removal of commissioners shall otherwise be in accordance with Section 502.

(b) The board shall be responsible for policy setting and policy oversight, including the approval of contracts and leases and the promulgation of rules and regulations, but shall not be responsible for day-to-day management.

(c) The board shall operate in accordance with Sections 503 through 508 and 510 of the Charter.

Sec. 903. General Manager.

(a) There shall be a general manager of the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment who shall be appointed by the Mayor, subject to confirmation by the Council, and may be removed as provided in Section 508.

(b) The general manager shall have those powers and duties set forth in Section 510.

(c) The general manager shall appoint, discharge and prescribe the duties of staff, consistent with the civil service provisions of the Charter.

Sec. 904. Development of the Neighborhood Council Plan.

The Department of Neighborhood Empowerment shall develop a Plan for a citywide system of neighborhood councils, in conformance with the following:

- (a) The Department of Neighborhood Empowerment shall seek public input in the formulation of the Plan.
- (b) The Plan shall contain a statement of goals, policies and objectives of the Neighborhood Council system, and shall contain specific regulations, in draft ordinance format (Regulations) which, if adopted by ordinance, would be sufficient to implement the Plan.
- (c) The Regulations shall establish the method by which boundaries of neighborhood councils will be determined. The system for determining boundaries shall maintain neighborhood boundaries to the maximum extent feasible, and may consider community planning district boundaries where appropriate.
- (d) The Regulations must ensure that all areas of the City are given an equal opportunity to form neighborhood councils.
- (e) The Regulations shall establish the procedure and criteria for recognition or certification of neighborhood councils.
- (f) The Regulations shall not restrict the method by which the members of a neighborhood council are chosen, if the process otherwise satisfies the requirements of this Article.
- (g) The Regulations shall require that neighborhood councils adopt fair and open procedures for the conduct of their business.
- (h) The Mayor and Council shall provide for the creation of the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment and appointment of the general manager within 120 days of the effective date of this Article.

Sec. 905. Implementation of the Plan.

The Department of Neighborhood Empowerment shall complete development of the Plan and present the Plan and all necessary Regulations for a system of neighborhood councils to the Council and Mayor within one year of the establishment of the department and commission. The Council shall consider the Regulations, and within six months after presentation of the Plan to Council may adopt ordinances to implement the Regulations as proposed, or as modified by the Council consistent with the requirements of the Plan set forth in Section 904. If implementing ordinances are not adopted within this time period, the Regulations shall become effective, and to the extent not inconsistent with law shall be binding upon all City departments and offices.

Sec. 906. Certification of Neighborhood Councils.

- (a) By-laws. Each neighborhood council seeking official certification or recognition from the City shall submit an organization plan and by-laws to the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment showing, at a minimum:
 - (1) the method by which their officers are chosen;
 - (2) neighborhood council membership will be open to everyone who lives, works or owns property in the area (stakeholders);
 - (3) assurances that the members of the neighborhood council will reflect the diverse interests within their area;
 - (4) a system through which the neighborhood council will communicate with stakeholders on a regular basis;
 - (5) a system for financial accountability of its funds; and
 - (6) guarantees that all meetings will be open and public, and permit, to the extent feasible, every stakeholder to participate in the conduct of business, deliberation and decision-making.
- (b) Petitioning for Certification and Approval. Neighborhood councils may petition for certification or recognition in accordance with rules and procedures set forth in the Plan.

Sec. 907. Early Warning System.

The Regulations shall establish procedures for receiving input from neighborhood councils prior to decisions by the City Council, City Council Committees and boards and commissions. The procedures shall include, but need not be limited to, notice to neighborhood councils as soon as practical, and a

reasonable opportunity to provide input before decisions are made. Notices to be provided include matters to be considered by the City Council, City Council Committees, and City boards or commissions.

Sec. 908. Powers of Neighborhood Councils.

Subject to applicable law, the City Council may delegate its authority to neighborhood councils to hold public hearings prior to the City Council making a decision on a matter of local concern.

Sec. 909. Annual City Budget Priorities.

Each neighborhood council may present to the Mayor and Council an annual list of priorities for the City budget. The Mayor shall inform certified neighborhood councils of the deadline for submission so that the input may be considered in a timely fashion.

Sec. 910. Monitoring of City Services.

Neighborhood councils shall monitor the delivery of City services in their respective areas and have periodic meetings with responsible officials of City departments, subject to their reasonable availability.

Sec. 911. Appropriation.

The Mayor and Council shall appropriate funds for the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment and for the startup and functioning of neighborhood councils for the first two years after the effective date of this Article. Funds shall be appropriated into a special fund to be established by ordinance. The Mayor and Council shall thereafter appropriate funds for the department and neighborhood councils at least one year in advance of each subsequent fiscal year.

Sec. 912. Review.

The Mayor and Council shall appoint a commission as prescribed by ordinance to evaluate the provisions of this Article, the Regulations adopted pursuant to this Article, and the efficacy of the system of neighborhood councils no later than seven years after the adoption of the Charter. The commission shall make recommendations to the Council regarding changes to the Charter or the Regulations, as it deems appropriate.

Sec. 913. Transfer of Powers.

Notwithstanding any other provision of the Charter, the Mayor and Council shall not transfer powers, duties or functions of the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment to any other department, office or agency pursuant to Section 514 during the first five years after implementation of the Plan pursuant to Section 905.

Sec. 914. Effect of Ordinances.

The Council may adopt ordinances concerning neighborhood councils consistent with requirements for the Plan set forth in Section 904 at any time, which ordinances shall supersede any inconsistent Regulations that have become effective pursuant to Section 905.

Source: Official City of Los Angeles Charter, Article IX. 1999.

[http://library.amlegal.com/nxt/gateway.dll/California/laac/charter?f=templates\\$fn=default.htm\\$3.0](http://library.amlegal.com/nxt/gateway.dll/California/laac/charter?f=templates$fn=default.htm$3.0)

Appendix B: List of Los Angeles Neighborhood Councils with Dates of Certification and Region

Neighborhood Council	Date of Certification	Region
COASTAL SAN PEDRO NC	12/11/2001	Harbor
WILMINGTON NC	12/11/2001	Harbor
GLASSELL PARK NC	1/8/2002	East LA
WEST HILLS NC	1/22/2002	San Fernando Valley
CENTRAL SAN PEDRO NC	2/12/2002	Harbor
NORTHWEST SAN PEDRO NC	2/12/2002	Harbor
MID CITY NC	2/19/2002	South LA
WEST ADAMS NC	2/19/2002	South LA
WOODLAND HILLS-WARNER CENTER NC	3/6/2002	San Fernando Valley
PACOIMA NC	3/7/2002	San Fernando Valley
PICO NC	3/12/2002	Central LA
VENICE NC	3/12/2002	West LA
WESTCHESTER/PLAYA NC	3/12/2002	West LA
EMPOWERMENT CONGRESS CENTRAL AREA NC	3/23/2002	South LA
EMPOWERMENT CONGRESS SOUTHEAST AREA NC	3/23/2002	South LA
EMPOWERMENT CONGRESS SOUTHWEST AREA NC	3/23/2002	South LA
EMPOWERMENT CONGRESS WEST AREA NC	3/23/2002	South LA
PARK MESA HEIGHTS CC	3/23/2002	South LA
HARBOR CITY NC	3/26/2002	Harbor
EAGLE ROCK NC	4/2/2002	East LA
CENTRAL HOLLYWOOD NC	4/9/2002	Central LA
ECHO PARK NC	4/16/2002	East LA
DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES	4/27/2002	Central LA
EMPOWERMENT CONGRESS NORTH AREA NC	4/27/2002	South LA
HISTORIC CULTURAL NC	4/27/2002	Central LA
LINCOLN HEIGHTS NC	4/27/2002	East LA
HOLLYWOOD HILLS WEST NC	5/7/2002	Central LA
SUN VALLEY AREA NC	5/7/2002	San Fernando Valley
UNITED NEIGHBORHOODS OF THE HISTORIC ARLINGTON HEIGHTS, WEST ADAMS, AND JEFFERSON PARK COMMUNITY	5/14/2002	South LA
BOYLE HEIGHTS NC	5/21/2002	East LA
LA-32 NC	5/21/2002	East LA
HISTORIC HIGHLAND PARK NC	5/28/2002	East LA
WESTSIDE NC	6/4/2002	West LA
LOS FELIZ NC	6/11/2002	East LA

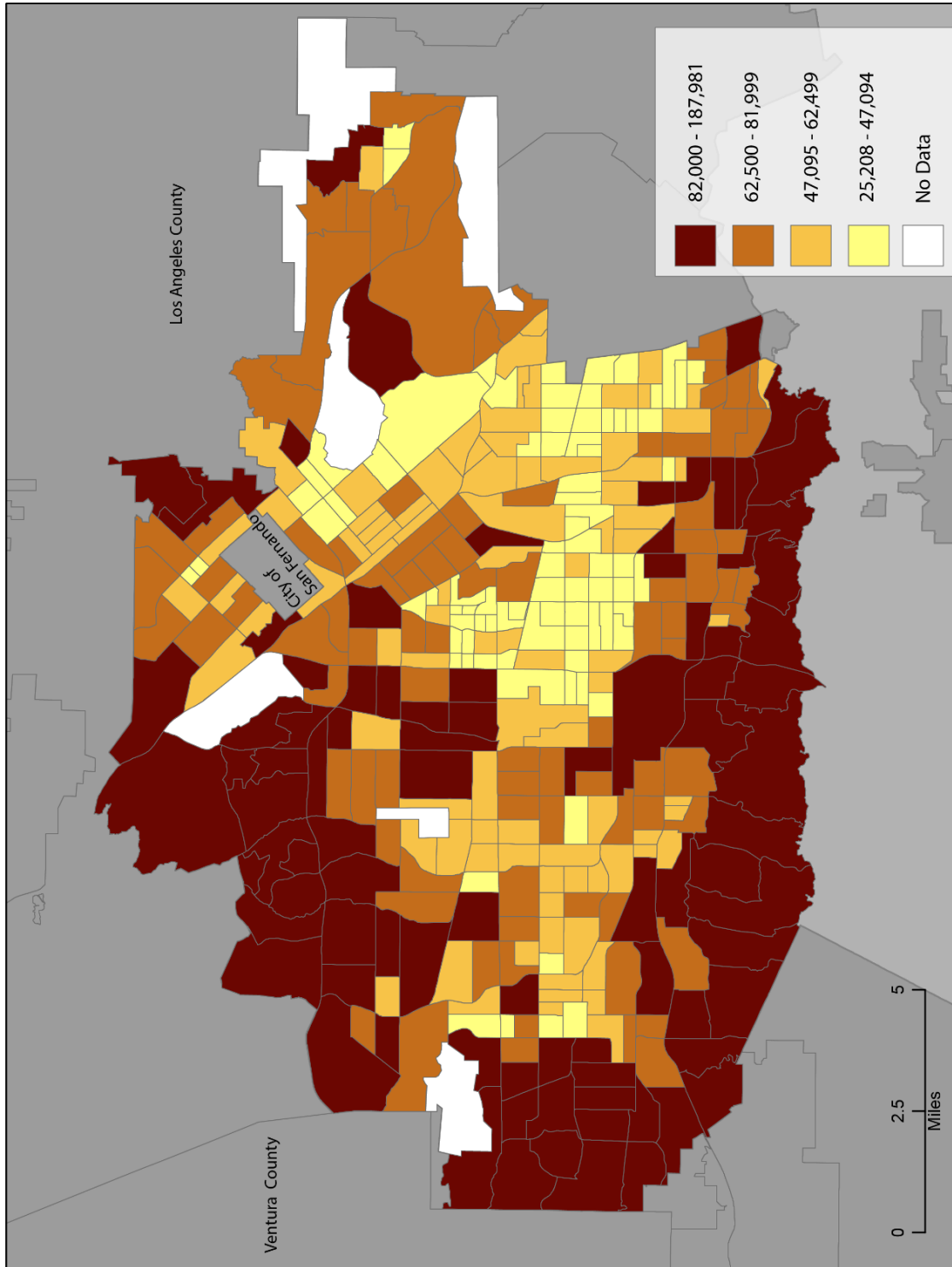
Neighborhood Council	Date of Certification	Region
CANOGA PARK NC	6/18/2002	San Fernando Valley
MID CITY WEST CC	6/25/2002	Central LA
ELYSIAN VALLEY RIVERSIDE NC	7/9/2002	East LA
VAN NUYS NC	7/23/2002	San Fernando Valley
MAR VISTA CC	8/13/2002	West LA
SOUTH ROBERTSON NC	8/13/2002	West LA
GREATER VALLEY GLEN COUNCIL	8/27/2002	San Fernando Valley
GRANADA HILLS NORTH NC	9/10/2002	San Fernando Valley
GREATER TOLUCA LAKE NC	9/10/2002	San Fernando Valley
VALLEY VILLAGE NC	9/10/2002	San Fernando Valley
NOHO NC	9/24/2002	San Fernando Valley
NORTH HOLLYWOOD NORTHEAST NC	9/24/2002	San Fernando Valley
ARROYO SECO NC	10/2/2002	East LA
BEL AIR-BEVERLY CREST NC	10/8/2002	West LA
ENCINO NC	10/8/2002	San Fernando Valley
RESEDA NC	10/8/2002	San Fernando Valley
HOLLYWOOD UNITED NC	10/15/2002	Central LA
ARLETA NC	10/22/2002	San Fernando Valley
SHERMAN OAKS NC	10/29/2002	San Fernando Valley
STUDIO CITY NC	10/29/2002	San Fernando Valley
HARBOR GATEWAY NORTH NC	11/12/2002	Harbor
GREATER CYPRESS PARK NC	11/19/2002	East LA
WATTS NC	12/3/2002	South LA
TARZANA NC	1/14/2003	San Fernando Valley
ATWATER VILLAGE NC	2/11/2003	East LA
SILVER LAKE NC	2/11/2003	East LA
NORTH HILLS WEST NC	2/25/2003	San Fernando Valley
COMMUNITY AND NEIGHBORS FOR NINTH DISTRICT UNITY (CANNDU)	3/11/2003	South LA
FOOTHILL TRAILS DISTRICT NC	3/25/2003	San Fernando Valley
HARBOR GATEWAY SOUTH NC	4/8/2003	Harbor
CHATSWORTH NC	4/29/2003	San Fernando Valley
SYLMAR NC	5/6/2003	San Fernando Valley
SUNLAND-TUJUNGA NC	5/27/2003	San Fernando Valley
MACARTHUR PARK NC	6/3/2003	Central LA
PICO UNION NC	6/3/2003	Central LA
SOUTH CENTRAL NC	6/24/2003	South LA
PORTER RANCH NC	7/1/2003	San Fernando Valley
WINNETKA NC	7/22/2003	San Fernando Valley
WILSHIRE CENTER - KOREATOWN NC	8/5/2003	Central LA
CENTRAL ALAMEDA NC	9/30/2003	South LA
WEST LOS ANGELES NC	10/7/2003	West LA

Neighborhood Council	Date of Certification	Region
DEL REY NC	10/28/2003	West LA
GREATER WILSHIRE NC	12/2/2003	Central LA
OLYMPIC PARK NC	12/2/2003	Central LA
LAKE BALBOA NC	9/9/2004	San Fernando Valley
NORTHRIDGE WEST	10/26/2004	San Fernando Valley
NORTHRIDGE EAST	11/30/2004	San Fernando Valley
PALMS NC	12/14/2004	West LA
MISSION HILLS NC	4/19/2005	San Fernando Valley
HOLLYWOOD STUDIO DISTRICT NC	11/1/2005	Central LA
GRANADA HILLS SOUTH NC	1/17/2006	San Fernando Valley
RAMPART VILLAGE NC	3/5/2007	East LA
PANORAMA CITY NC	3/15/2007	San Fernando Valley
EAST HOLLYWOOD NC	4/19/2007	Central LA
VOICES OF 90037	6/16/2008	South LA
WESTWOOD NC	1/19/2010	West LA
NORTHRIDGE SOUTH NC	5/4/2010	San Fernando Valley
NORTH HILLS EAST	9/14/2010	San Fernando Valley
NORTH HOLLYWOOD WEST NC	1/11/2011	San Fernando Valley
WESTLAKE NORTH NC	6/7/2011	Central LA
WESTLAKE SOUTH NC	6/7/2011	Central LA
ZAPATA KING NC	2/3/2015	South LA
HERMON NC	5/25/2017	East LA
NORTH WESTWOOD NC	5/22/2018	West LA
HISTORIC CULTURAL NORTH NC	6/7/2018	Central LA

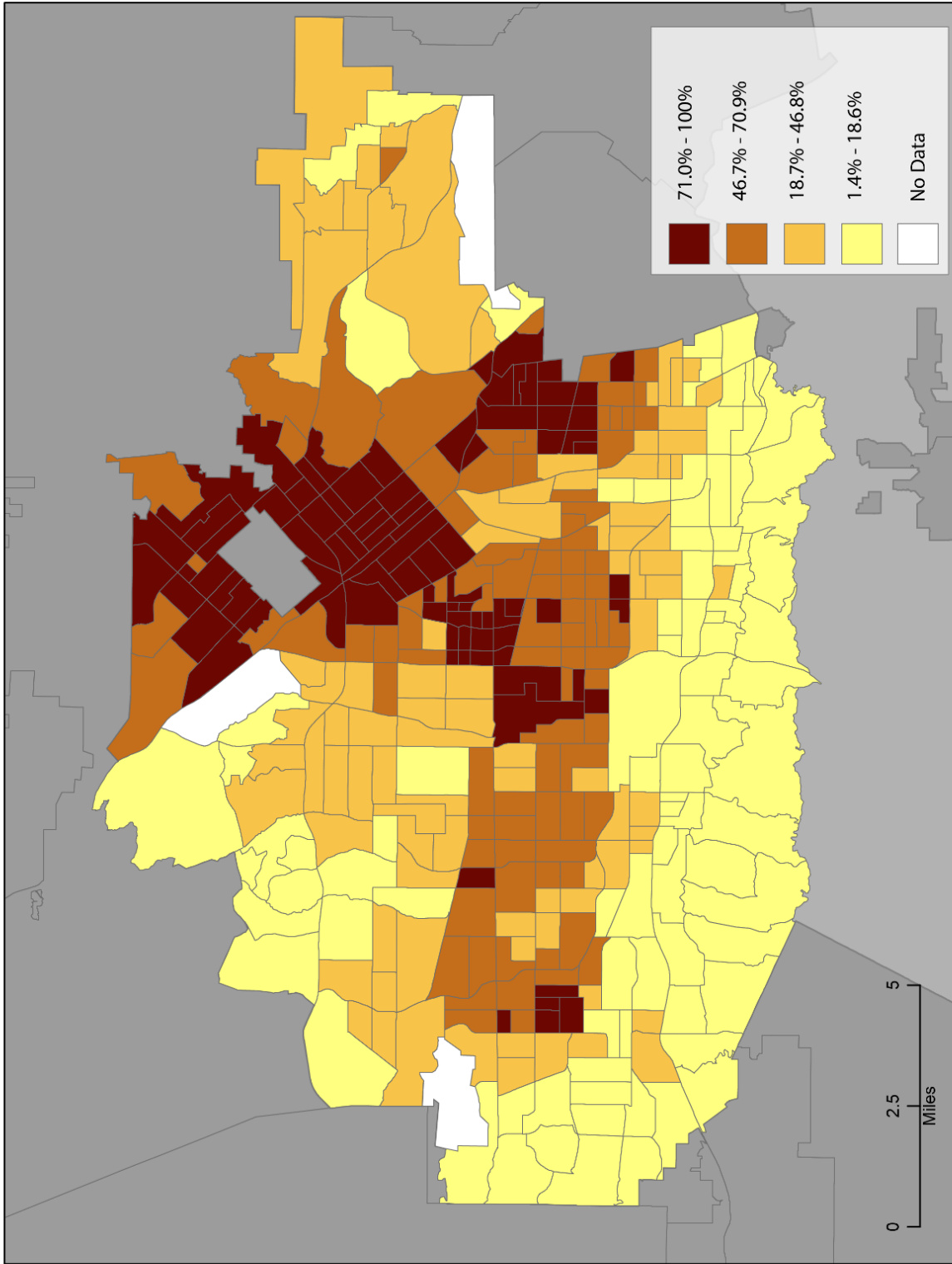
Note: 57 neighborhood councils were certified by the end of 2002. Ten NCs have been established since 2010.

Source: data.lacity.org, “Neighborhood Council (Certified)”

Appendix C: Spatial Demographic Patterns in the SF Valley

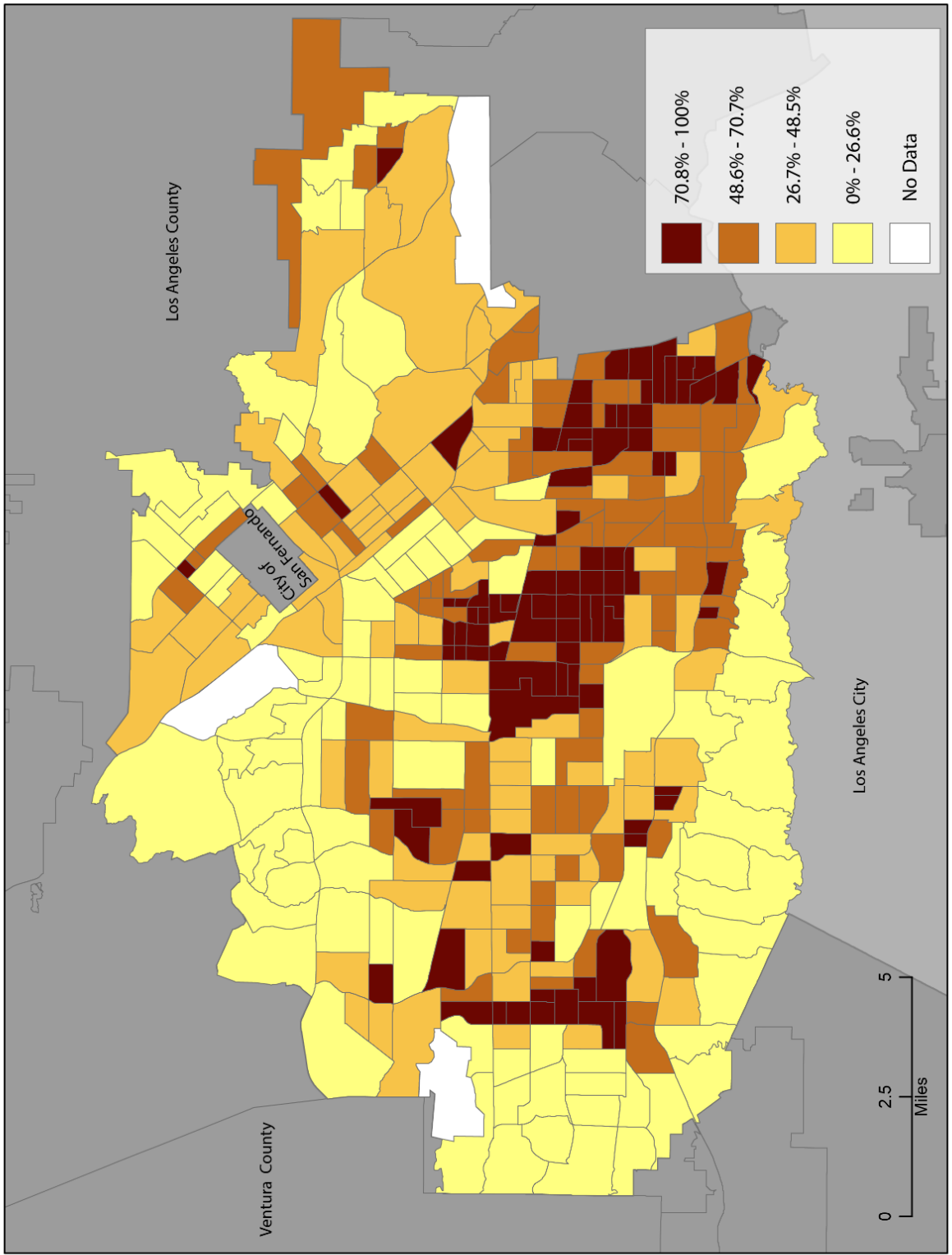


Map 1: Median Income (\$ USD) by Census Tracts
Source: ACS 2017 5-Year Average, Table S1903



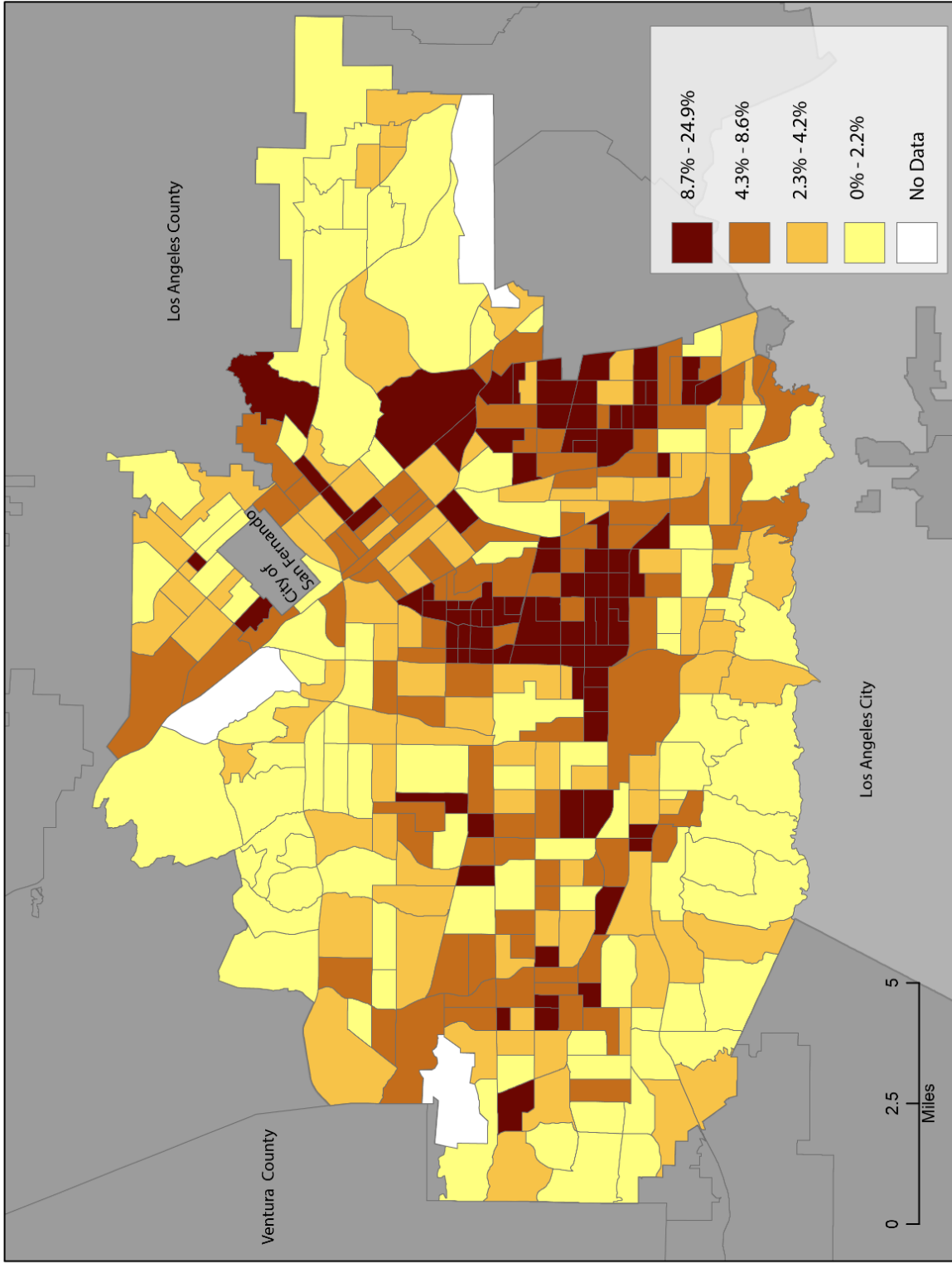
Map 2: Percentage of Hispanic Residents by Census Tracts

Source: ACS 2017 5-Year Average. Table P9



Map 3: Percentage of Renter-Occupied Housing Units by Census Tracts

Source: ACS 2017 5-Year Average, Table B25003



Map 4: Percentage of Public Transit-Dependent Residents by Census Tracts

Source: ACS 2017 5-Year Average, Table S0802

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