

## Project Highlight



# Southeastern San Diego Community Plan Update

Southeastern San Diego is a vibrant, diverse community located just east of Downtown San Diego. The western portion of the area was settled early in the city’s history and was directly connected to the city center by streets and the railroad. The community was home to both large estates, where San Diego’s elite lived, and modest cottages, where many working families lived.

After World War II, with large tracts of rural land available in the eastern portion of the community, Southeastern San Diego experienced major physical and population growth. It was one of the few communities in San Diego with housing available to working class families and non-white residents. In the postwar period, freeways were also constructed around and through the neighborhood, bringing great changes to the neighborhood.

Today, Southeastern San Diego is one of the most culturally diverse and inclusive neighborhoods in San Diego. It is served by the San Diego Trolley and bus lines, a traditional street grid in much of the area, and regional freeways. Eight distinct neighborhoods make up the area, mostly with lower density residential development. Underutilized commercial corridors and industrial areas have opportunity for new economic activity that could benefit residents. Compared to San Diego at large, the Southeastern San Diego community is younger, contains far more Spanish speakers, and has significantly lower household incomes (just half of the citywide household median income).

### The Project

The *Southeastern Community Plan* creates a policy structure to achieve the following community vision, formulated during the extensive community engagement process:

“Southeastern San Diego is a diverse, inclusive, and vibrant place to live and work, experiencing a renaissance while celebrating its distinct history. The community promotes economic well-being, with a job-ready population, active employment areas, and cottage industry, and investment by property owners.



*The community’s sustainability assets include central city location, transit infrastructure, walkable scale, strong identity, and natural creek. Source: Dyett & Bhatia*

The low-density character of its neighborhoods is maintained, while the corridors are enhanced with a vibrant mix of retail, restaurant, cultural uses, jobs, and higher density housing along the transit corridors. Parks are safe, well-maintained, and full of community-serving amenities. The community benefits from its strong connections to the rest of the region. Movement within the community is enhanced with good north-south connections and attractive, well-lit, and pedestrian-friendly streetscapes, making it easy to get around car-free.”

Structurally, the *Southeastern Community Plan* incorporates nine chapters addressing land use, mobility, urban design, economic prosperity, public facilities/services/safety, recreation, conservation and sustainability, historic preservation, and arts and culture. Consistent with the City’s more recent community plans, these topical chapters include goals that express broad intent, and policies that establish the specific direction, practice, guidance, or directives that need to be developed further and/or carried out through implementing plans by the City or other agencies. The chapters also contain easy-to-read maps showing policy applications as well as illustrations showing how envisioned improvements and development may look.

Importantly, a concluding chapter of the *Southeastern Community Plan* delineates implementation mechanisms for realizing the community vision, including necessary actions and key responsible parties. As part



Source: Dyett & Bhatia

## Locally-Driven Solutions

- Preserving existing single-family and historic neighborhoods while planning for mixed-use high density growth and development in close proximity to the transit corridors and stations.
- Utilizing the traditional street grid for walking and cycling in addition to vehicles.
- Passing local history, stories, and culture to future generations through public art, food, music and dance.
- Leveraging a natural creek corridor and urban forestry for recreation, nature interactions, public health, bicycle and pedestrian connections, climate cooling, carbon sequestration, and beauty.



Illustrations of mobility and mixed-use development helped the community to formulate policies that will enhance livability and safety. Source: Dyett & Bhatia

of the process, barriers to development were removed by transitioning development regulations from a local planned district ordinance to the citywide *Land Development Code*.

## Local/Regional Connection

The *Southeastern Community Plan Update* represents a major implementation step for three foundational regional plans: The San Diego Association of Governments *Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy* and the City of San Diego *Climate Action Plan* and *General Plan City of Villages Strategy*. Not only does the plan guide new transit-oriented development opportunities integrated with the character and identity of established neighborhoods, it also sets forth multi-modal transportation improvements to make it easier for existing residents to bike and walk to transit stations, school, work, parks, and shopping. Trip reduction features are coupled with other sustainability actions, such as urban forestry for cooling and carbon sequestration, community farming, local jobs, natural open space experiences, housing for multiple income levels, and continued cultivation of San Diego's local culture.

When added together, these plan components will enhance Southeastern San Diego as a fantastic place that retains existing residents and businesses and attracts new ones, thereby achieving significant



Examples of the City of San Diego community outreach that resulted in new ideas and input from many residents new to planning. Source: City of San Diego

*One particularly noteworthy tactic for achieving rich dialogue was connecting people to the built environment with on-the-ground outreach activities conducted around the community.*

energy conservation and greenhouse gas reduction benefits by avoiding new green field development.

### Agency Collaboration for Action

At the onset of the *Southeastern Community Plan Update* project, the City convened an Internal Working Group of various

departments, disciplines, and agencies. The Internal Working Group included representatives from the Fire, Police, Transportation, Development Services, and Park & Recreation (including Open Space division) Departments, as well as the San Diego Metropolitan Transit System. Internal Working Group members became the coordinators for their departments' review and input on the incremental technical studies and draft plan materials prepared during the planning process.



Arts and culture recommendations reinforce community identity by connecting the past with the present and future. Source: Dyett & Bhatia



An award-winning community engagement program resulted in new ideas and input from many residents new to planning.  
Source: M.W. Steele Group

## Effective Community Engagement

The inclusive, innovative community engagement program has earned multiple awards from planning advocacy organizations. The City, working with its consultant team, created new activities to widen the circle of involvement and include community members who might not normally participate due to language barriers, schedule constraints, and/or previous experience with civic process.

The City-sponsored community planning group convened public meetings and workshops on vision and goals, opportunities and challenges, and alternatives, which is the standard process for community plan updates in San Diego. Spanish translation was integrated into all meeting components. Also, the community planning group provided the official community recommendations on the plan.

The project team also found success in several non-traditional engagement tools, which resulted in input from a greater number and diversity of community members. The new tools informed people about community planning, why it is important, and what it can accomplish. These new tools included:

- **Three “Pop-Up” Installations:** 1) Chalkboard Chats, with self-standing chalkboards and project exhibits at high foot-traffic locations to spark dialogue; 2) Pop-up Feedback Tree, for distributing information about the plan, display maps, and graphics, as well as “leaf comment cards;” and 3) Feedback Survey Boxes, comprised of durable metal suggestion boxes, painted with a thought-provoking question in both English and Spanish (such as, “What makes a street safe?”), with a holder for note paper and pens.

- **Office Hours:** Members of the City’s planning team set up a table at locations in the planning areas and the pop-up events, giving community members an opportunity to drop by for one-on-one conversations. Small conversations like this proved easier for some people and provided a setting where they could delve into the questions, ideas, and issues of greatest interests to them.
- **Self-Guided Walking Tour:** The tour activity was provided as a brochure, complete with a map showing the route and points of interest, and a card for making notes and giving input.

## Sustainability Benefits for California

Implementation of the *Southeastern San Diego Community Plan Update* will help to advance many of California’s sustainability objectives, particularly in the areas of:

- Equity
- Revitalized urban and community centers
- Infill and compact development
- Reduced automobile use and fuel consumption
- Economic prosperity
- Clean air and water
- Housing affordability

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