Chinatown Gold Line Station

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# Table of Contents

Chapter 1. Introduction ..............................................................4-5

Chapter 2. Station Area Analysis .................................................6-15

2.1 Historical Background
2.2 Physical Environment
2.3 Urban Design Analysis
2.4 Demographics and Social Issues
2.5 Development Plans and Potential
2.6 Station Area Planning Policies, Regulation, and Capital Improvement Programs
2.7 Community Stakeholders

Chapter 3. Station Analysis ......................................................16-19

3.1 Urban Design and Functionality Analysis
3.2 Station Ridership and Functions
3.3 Access-Auto, Bus, Pedestrian and bicycle
3.4 Station Impacts

Chapter 4. Identification of Issues .............................................20-22

4.1 Lack of Affordable Housing
4.2 Isolation From Neighboring Communities
4.3 Lack of Open Space and Recreational Facilities
4.4 Inconsistent Development Patterns
4.5 Not a Pedestrian Friendly Environment

Chapter 5. Identification of Opportunities ..................................23-27

5.1 Affordable Housing
5.2 Recreational Areas or Parks
5.3 Cultural Center
5.4 Pedestrian Linkage to the Central Core of Chinatown and Neighboring Communities

Chapter 6. Goals and Objectives ..............................................28-32

Chapter 7. Alternative Plan Concepts ........................................33-36

Chapter 8. Recommended Plan..................................................37-41
Figures.

1.1 Chinatown Station Context ........................................4

2.1 Land Use Map ..........................................................7
2.2 Ethnic Diversity .........................................................9
2.3 Year of Entry for Foreign Born Residents ......................10
2.4 Language Barrier .......................................................10
2.5 Age Distribution ........................................................11
2.6 Household Income .....................................................11
2.7 Means of Transportation (Chinatown) .........................12
2.8 Place of Work ..........................................................12
2.9 Means of Transportation (Monterey Park) ...................13
2.10 Overall Growth Rate ..................................................13

3.1 Station Location .........................................................16
3.2 Station Ridership ........................................................17
3.3 Walkability ...............................................................18

5.1 Potential Development Parcels ....................................23
5.2 Cornfields State Park Location ...................................25
5.3 Cornfields Phase I .......................................................25
5.4 Little Joe’s Site ..........................................................26

Tables.

5.1 Development Possibilities of Vacant Parcels East of the Station ...23

References .................................................................28
Chapter 1: Introduction

The Chinatown team studied the potential for Transit Oriented Development (TOD) around the Chinatown Gold Line Station in the city of Los Angeles. TOD incorporates the idea of compact, mixed-use development within walking distance of a transit station, also known as “transit villages”. It is a pedestrian-oriented land use design that encourages people to use their cars less and instead opt for walking or using public transit. The mixed-use areas surrounding the transit stations are usually moderate to high density, created to match the existing scale of development. Mixed uses can include commercial, residential, office, hotel or a combination of these and more.

The Chinatown Station is situated in a prime location just on the outskirts of the central business district, surrounded by vacant parcels that have excellent TOD potential. One can view the fact that the station is off the main commercial strip as a negative; however, this provides a chance to expand pedestrian activity east of Broadway. By adding a mixed-use element on the adjacent vacant lots, this would not only address the need for housing in the area, but would hopefully attract specialty and diverse shops. By having ground level commercial, street connectivity and walking is
more pleasurable. These shops would cater to the present community as well as create a more regional scale draw by providing services that are needed, while keeping the cultural Chinese component. Also, by providing diverse, affordable housing options, we address the needs of the senior residents moving into the area, as well as the young, artist community.

Because a main factor in TOD design is providing for alternative, non-automobile modes of travel, we feel that it is important that any future development include pedestrian and bike linkages to and from the main strips and open spaces. The addition of a regional park on the ‘Cornfields’ site is an excellent way to stimulate walking to the recreation areas and in turn, other nodes in the community. One of the most essential aspects we think should be incorporated into any future development is the idea of creating linkages to the surrounding El Pueblo and Union Station communities. These neighboring communities have strong historical elements that attract tourism. Chinatown, at times, may seem isolated from them due to geography. A system should be created that links all three locations as places of cultural importance in Los Angeles.
Chapter 2: Station Area Analysis

2.1 Historical Background

Chinatown has been developed as a Chinese community twice in the history of Los Angeles. Its roots date to the late 19th century when Chinese immigrants began to form a community in the area that is now known as Union Station. This racially segregated community was formed as a support system for the Chinese people of the area. The Chinese people were unable to live or own property amongst the white population, forcing them to develop their own self-sufficient community. There were times when the dominant white population of the area wanted Chinese immigration to stop and to expel those already living in the area. This idea was later retracted after many people felt that they could not remain prosperous without the services and labor provided by the Chinese immigrants.

With the city of Los Angeles continuing to growth into the early 20th century, new infrastructure was needed and the area known as Old Chinatown was condemned for development of a passenger rail station, Union Station. While their community was taken away from them, this did not stop the Chinese residents from developing a new, more organized Chinatown. The new area was just north of the previous location and began as a planned community to establish a Chinese cultural area to support the continuing influx of Chinese immigrants as well a place of promoting racial integration through tourism. The area was opened in 1938, living up to its expectations.
Although the area prospered after its inauguration, new immigrants and American ideology led to a recent decline in prosperity. The population began to receive American education and became more fluent in the English language, allowing integration into a new culture and migration to other areas of the Los Angeles metropolitan area. The San Gabriel Valley is an area in competition with Chinatown. Both areas provide the same services and resources for the Chinese culture, making it less cost effective for those living in the San Gabriel Valley to commute to Chinatown to purchase the same items they can get in their own area.

### 2.2 Physical Environment

Chinatown has great potential to enhance its development as a mixed-use area. As of now, nearly all of its housing is located on the west side of the station on both sides of the half mile radius study area. The residential uses are completely separate from the commercial corridor, which is located along Broadway and Hill Street between Cesar E. Chavez Avenue to the south and Bernard Avenue to the north. [Figure 2.1 Land Use Map]
Street to the north. In the Chinatown area, there are two relatively small open space areas, one close to the center and the other on the southern edge of the area. The distribution among the various land uses is fairly equal in regards to residential, commercial, and industrial. On the east side of the station there is a great deal of vacant land. Just to the north of the station, there is a 32 acre site known as the cornfields that has been set aside for future open space development and recreational use, not only for the Chinatown area but for other neighboring communities as well. Just across the street to the east of the station there are two vacant lots, one 5 acre and one 2 acre lot that are possible development sites. Much of Chinatown is designated as a redevelopment zone. The majority of central Chinatown consists of many small businesses linked together on various size parcels. The commercial corridor of Chinatown is not a very pedestrian oriented area; varying setbacks, above ground utilities, and lack of landscape (both aesthetically and as a barrier between the automobile traffic) make the area difficult to walk.

2.3 Urban Design Analysis

The area surrounding the station provides no link to the central core or any other part of Chinatown. A person coming into the area would probably only realize that they are at the Chinatown station by the extravagant design of the station itself. Upon exiting the station there is a chain link fence surrounding a normally empty parking lot. Walking up College Street as in many other areas of Chinatown, the sidewalk width is relatively small for the amount of people that use them. There is a large amount of automobile traffic on the main corridors of Broadway and Hill Street, but nothing
separates the cars from the pedestrians on the sidewalk. Also detracting from the walkability of the area is the inconsistent commercial development patterns. Walking down Broadway, the setbacks of the buildings vary from one to another, making it difficult for pedestrians to walk the area. Whereas one building will be right up to the sidewalk another may have a parking lot in front of the building or just a side of a building with no windows or doors. The design of the buildings creates a feeling that you keep coming in and out of the Chinatown area. Some buildings have a Chinese design while others lack style and are just box-style designs detracting from the character of the area.

2.4 Demographics and Social Issues

Our half mile study area of Chinatown had sections of four census tracts among it, but only one had a major share of population within that study zone, it will be referred to as Chinatown in the subsequent figure (census tract 2071). In this tract, the Asian population accounts for 81% of the overall population, showing that there is a strong cultural identity in the area. Going along with the mainly Asian population that resides in the region, there is a large amount of new immigrants that flock to the area realizing that there will be others from their culture who speak the language. This makes the impact of moving to a new area of the world less of a burden, in that they have entered a
community that caters to their needs. In recent years, other suburban areas have been competing with Chinatown for Chinese immigrants. Chinese communities have formed in the San Gabriel Valley and other areas of Southern California, allowing an alternative place of residence. Therefore, to illustrate the differences and similarities between Chinatown and other Chinese communities of Southern California, we compared Chinatown with one of the most populous Chinese communities of Southern California, Monterey Park. Referring to the charts above, Chinatown has a majority of immigrants that have entered the area in the last fifteen to twenty years. Monterey Park shows a population that has been in this country for a longer period of time, most likely who have learned the English language and have received better jobs. These groups may have left the Chinatown area for other Chinese communities throughout the San Gabriel Valley. Looking at the language barrier in the Chinatown area, 82% of the Asian population is considered to be linguistically isolated (all members 14 years old and over have at least some difficulty with English). There is a strong Chinese community that can rely on one another, speak the Chinese dialect, and not have to rely on neighboring communities for employment or services.
Chinatown has a fairly even age distribution ranging from four to six percent in each five year age cohort until about the age of sixty-five, then there is an increased share in population, showing the large elderly population. The city of Monterey Park has a majority of middle-aged residents while its elderly population makes up the smallest percent. Chinatown needs to continue developing services for the elderly population, but also may wish to make the area a more family oriented development. Monterey Park more closely resembles a typical suburban community, with mainly middle-aged residents that may be looking to start or expand their families.

After analyzing the basic demographics of the area, we looked to transit oriented data. By looking at the income of the area and how it has changed over the last ten years, we can see that as of 2000, 38% of the population makes less than ten thousand dollars a year. In 1990 only 32% of the population...
made less than ten thousand dollars a year. This could be due to a variety of factors, such as businesses moving out of the area or more immigration to the area. Since the majority of the residents bring in an extremely low income (per capita in 2000 was $9,562) many of them cannot afford a car and must rely on public transit if they wish to leave the area. Proving this point is the chart presented below. This chart shows the means of transportation for the people of the Chinatown area. It has a relatively low automobile reliance (by California standards) at fifty-three percent, while the other half of the population relies on both public transit and walking. The low income of

![Means of Transportation (Chinatown)](image)

![Place of Work](image)

the area is a factor in why automobile ownership is so low, but there is also another factor, the place of work. By looking at how many residents work in their place of residence we can find out if the area is likely to be automobile dependent or more likely to use public transit. In this case, 64% of the population of Chinatown work in their place of residence, meaning that they will either walk to work or take a short bus trip on a daily basis. While the majority of the population works in the area, 36% do not. Having low income means that those workers may also rely on public transit to get them to work. Analyzing MTA data of the Gold Line, the Chinatown station sees most of its traffic on weekends. Of the people that use the Chinatown Gold Line station, the majority head north towards Pasadena or get off at the station from a
train from Pasadena. The opposite can be seen in Monterey Park. Nearly all of the residents of the city, 85%, work in areas outside of where they live. Therefore, in viewing the means of transportation for the city of Monterey Park we see that 90% of the residents of the area rely on personal vehicles to get them to work.

The growth of the area is also a significant measure of whether transit oriented development should take place in the area. Chinatown is continuing to grow year after year, and would most likely grow at a faster rate if more affordable housing was developed in the area. As of now there are waiting lists to acquire residence in the area. The chart below shows the growth rate of both Chinatown and Monterey Park from 1990 to 2000, showing that, even though Chinatown is mainly rental housing and is expensive due to lack of land in the area, people are still moving to the area. There are many factors that show potential for transit oriented development in Chinatown; low income, reliance on public transit, place of work, and growth rate. These factors by themselves present reasons for development in some areas, but the combination of the many factors in Chinatown should push forward development.

Figure 2.9 Means of Transportation (Monterey Park)

Figure 2.10 Overall Growth Rate
2.5 Development Plans and Potential

As mentioned earlier, Chinatown has a great need for affordable and diverse housing. Recently there have been a few housing developments in the area that have provided seniors and families an opportunity to live in the area. With this said there is still a long waiting list of people wanting to live in the area (e.g., Cathay Manor). Even though Chinatown is close to the downtown area, there remains a large amount of vacant land on the east side of the station area that has great potential for development. While the larger, cornfield area has been reserved for open space and recreational facilities, the two smaller areas of vacant land adjacent to the station would be suitable for bringing both residential and commercial to the east side of the station through mixed use development. The historical and commercial core of Chinatown also fully resides within a redevelopment zone, which can help keep the development of the area consistent and more inviting to pedestrians. One of the more promising parcels, the Little Joe’s site, located to the west of the station has had many unsuccessful proposals for development. There have been suggestions for a mixed use development that would involve a centralized parking structure that would help consolidate various parking areas throughout the Chinatown area, a transit transfer center, and the possibility of both commercial and residential below the structure and in the air space above. There have also been plans of converting the site into a cultural center that would allow for museums and or theaters that display cultural art. This site has great potential for creating a link to Chinatown’s central core. Upon leaving the station a path can be created, possibly in the style of a Chinese garden. As you walk through the garden it could tell of the historical past of Chinatown and how the area came into being.
2.6 Station Area Planning Policies, Regulations, and Capital Improvement Programs

As mentioned, most of the Chinatown area is within a redevelopment zone. This zone was created in 1980 to help meet the needs of the community. One of the main goals of the redevelopment agency has been to establish more affordable housing throughout the area in hopes to generate more vibrant cultural activities and communities. The agency hopes that by having more housing opened up to the Chinese community, which there is plenty of demand for, more businesses would open in the area, filling vacant lots and enhancing the tourism appeal of the area. Nearly all of the housing that is being put in place is considered to be medium density (29-55 units per acre) with the intention to present affordable alternatives to the Chinese population that had previously been turned away from the area by high rental costs.

2.7 Community Stakeholders

The Chinese community in the area is extremely particular about the type of development that takes place in the area. In China, many cities consist of high density development in mixed-use areas, but the population in Chinatown has become accustomed to living in an environment separate from commercial areas. The people that have lived in Chinatown longer may be reluctant to move to more affordable housing in mixed-use developments, while these types of developments may suit recent immigrants from China. Recently, Chinatown residents took a stand concerning what is built in the area that was the original proposal of the cornfield area being turned into an industrial park. The people of the area did not want this and fought against it; and they have won the development of an open space area that better serves their needs.
Chapter 3: Station Analysis

3.1 Urban Design and Functionality Analysis

The station is located at the northwest corner of College and North Spring in Los Angeles, a mile away from Union Station. By setting the station at the bottom of College, this makes it easier for residents of the surrounding area including Chinatown to be able to walk down to the station area. Although this might provide a convenience for residents and commuters coming to the station; this does not provide convenience to the residents and visitors coming to Chinatown. Riders face a hill to climb to get to Broadway Boulevard where most of Chinatown’s activities take place. If the station was located on Broadway Boulevard it would have been a bigger part of Chinatown than sitting on the outskirts of the area.

3.2 Station Ridership and Functions

Comparing other stations along the Goldline corridor, Chinatown is in the top half of the stations in boardings and alightings. It is the fourth highest station area in boarding and alightings. There are more people boarding and alighting on the weekends than the weekdays. As the chart demonstrates, Chinatown station serves many different functions on Saturdays. It also demonstrates that people who use the Gold Line from the Chinatown station are primarily heading northbound towards
Pasadena for various reasons. The Gold Line allows people from other areas along the Gold Line route to come any day of the week to experience the Chinese culture through shopping or dining. The Gold Line also serves the low income residents of the area to have an affordable means of transportation to other areas of Southern California for pleasure or on a daily basis for work. Many people of the Chinatown area depend on this station both for their use and to their economic base, because of tourism that is brought in by the rail. As development in Chinatown progresses, it is likely that more and more people will use the Gold Line.

### 3.3 Access – Auto, Bus, Pedestrian and Bicycle

Access to the station area is relatively easy for every mode of transportation. If people are walking to the station, the only difficulty they face is in crossing Spring Street or walking up to Chinatown via a small sidewalk on College Street. In a 5 minute walk a person can travel up to a quarter mile around the station. If a person were to walk for 10 minutes they can reach up to a half a mile if walking at a steady
pace. Interestingly, it is easier to walk west of the station even though it is uphill because that route faces the least amount of signalized intersections. Walking to the north of the station proved difficult because the sidewalk ends at the Cornfield project and one either has to walk back or cross to the other side of the street, where a sidewalk reappears after a block. This will change due to the construction of the Cornfield project, which would require the addition of a sidewalk on the west side of North Spring Street. Heading south leads to Union Station, Olvera Street and the 101 Freeway, while heading east also provides difficulty in that there is no crosswalk to cross Main Street, and by the time a person has crossed the street there is no area to travel besides the recycling center. A railroad track and chain link fence prohibits others from traveling any farther.

There are no bike lanes marked within the station’s area of influence, unless riders take a dirt path behind the Cornfield project that runs along the Los Angeles River out of Chinatown. There is bus access provided to the station by the DASH bus line B, which stops underneath the Gold Line overpass. More bus stops are located on Broadway Boulevard and College Street. Automobile access is limited in that there is no onsite parking provided by the Gold Line rail system. Automobiles either have to be
parked on the street or pay for parking at a lot located next to the station.

3.4 Station Impacts (e.g., safety, noise, vibration, spillover parking, etc.)

As far as the safety at the station, police officers routinely patrol Spring Street and usually park underneath the stations overpass. There are also security cameras that are installed at the station itself, mainly monitoring the ticket booths located at the street level of the station. The only noise level that proved to be of annoyance at the station was that squealing of the escalators going up to the station level. The trains themselves made minimal noise when coming to a stop at the station or making the turn coming or going to Union Station. There was no vibration felt at the street level of the station, while there was minimal wind felt at the station level. Spillover parking was not a concern at this location, since there was plenty of metered parking on College Street that was not being used. The same goes for the paid all-day parking lot available next to the station. The reason that there were not many automobiles parked at these pay locations was that those who used the Gold Line were parking on Spring Street for free either for 2 hours south of College Street or all-day parking north of College Street. The days that metered parking and the parking lot are used the most are on the weekends.
Chapter 4: Identification of Issues

4.1 Lack of Affordable Housing

Chinatown’s primary issue is lack of affordable housing. Chinatown is currently experiencing shortage of housing. According to the “Central City North Community Plan” (page I-5) a large proportion of Chinese population cannot be accommodated in Chinatown; therefore they had to live in other places, such as Monterey Park and other areas of the San Gabriel Valley. Due to the lack of land in the Los Angeles area, developments in Chinatown have higher rents, which many new immigrants cannot afford. As shown in our charts presented earlier, the majority of the Chinatown population is considered low-income. The high housing price in Chinatown means that many seeking affordable housing must find it in Chinese suburban areas. This allows them to still feel a part of the community due to less of a language barrier and by having similar amenities as they would in the Chinatown area.

4.2 Isolation From Neighboring Communities

Chinatown is located on the outskirts of the downtown area, making it difficult to integrate with different communities in the central city. Chinatown needs better linkages to connect both the station and the core of Chinatown with other places in Los Angeles so as to attract more visitors and stimulate economic growth. The pedestrian environment discourages visitors from coming to the area and enjoying their experience. The sidewalks are narrow with no barrier to separate them from the high traffic flow through the area. El Pueblo is within walking distance of Chinatown, but
since the area is not pedestrian oriented or scaled, this walk is rarely taken by tourists from either direction.

4.3  Lack of Open Space and Recreational Facilities

Chinatown needs more recreational facilities such as parks and playgrounds in order to accommodate community activities and social gathering. The parks should be well integrated with the surrounding environment in terms of design and functionality. Currently there are only two parks in the community, but the development of the Cornfields project will add a significant park facilities. In order for the Cornfields project to gain significant use from the residents of Chinatown, a link must be provided so that it can be easily accessed.

4.4  Inconsistent Development Patterns

The Chinatown development process has taken place for over sixty years. While beginning as a planned community, it has slowly strayed away from its roots, becoming more sporadic. The commercial district is a difficult area for pedestrians to walk. The buildings do not have consistent setbacks that lead people from window shopping to walking through a parking lot or along a blank wall. These building do not remain consistent in design with the character of the area. Some buildings represent Chinese architecture while others are simple box shaped design.
4.5  Not a Pedestrian Friendly Environment

As the Chinatown area has aged, the environmental conditions of the area have worsened. According to the “Central City North Community Plan” (Page I-6) residents and visitors to the area see it as an unsafe environment, making it difficult to attract tourism. Pedestrians also have a hard time walking through the area because of inconsistent development patterns, small sidewalks, and no barrier between them and the automobile traffic. To get to the central core of Chinatown, crossing Broadway, a busy commuter corridor that lies in the heart of Chinatown, must be accomplished. Broadway is a four-lane wide street that may intimidate some pedestrians and keep them from entering the heart of Chinatown’s commercial and historical core.
Chapter 5: Identification of Opportunities

5.1 Affordable Housing

The site that has the most potential for housing in Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) is located on the East side of the Gold Line Station, at the intersection of College and Spring Street. The site has seven acres of vacant land. Currently, two acres of land are used for school bus parking, and the other five acres are left vacant. The site is currently under private ownership and for lease only. In analyzing this site with an overview of the possibilities for potential mixed-use development we came up with the scenario that follows. Taking into account that parking in this area will most likely have to be placed underground; we calculated the maximum density possible at these two sites at various FAR’s, 2:1, 3:1, and 6:1 to see the potential of the sites. Setting 10% aside for commercial uses on each site we came up with these possibilities: at a 2:1 ratio both lots have a potential to reach a density of 78 units/acre, 3:1 ratio there is a potential of 117 units/acre, while at a 6:1 ratio it can reach 235 units/acre.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FAR</th>
<th>2 Acre Lot</th>
<th>5 Acre Lot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2:1</td>
<td>78 units/acre = 156 units</td>
<td>78 units/acre = 390 units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:1</td>
<td>117 units/acre = 234 units</td>
<td>117 units/acre = 585 units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:1</td>
<td>235 units/acre = 470 units</td>
<td>235 units/acre = 1175 units</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1 Development Possibilities of Vacant Parcels East of Station
The suggestion is to create new housing complexes featuring affordable and senior housing to meet the needs of the community. The site has the advantage of overlooking Downtown skyline as well as the hills on the northeast of the site. There are already many large scale developments in the Chinatown area; therefore, the development of a large scale project would not inhibit the area’s character. The new housing development could be a combination of a mixed-use complex on the ground floor and upper level for residential uses. The majority of the population living in Chinatown is seniors, but most are without adequate housing. Therefore, new affordable housing would provide a benefit for the existing community, as well as to attract new residents to Chinatown, such as the younger generation and families with children. The new housing complexes would provide convenience for residents to use the adjacent transit (Gold Line) and would be a block away from the core commercial area of Chinatown. The objective of the new housing is to enhance the existing retail shops and to revitalize the unique character of Chinatown as a place to live. The new housing will revitalize the existing commercial uses and restore the livability of Chinatown.

Another potential site for housing is the Capitol Milling Company site that is adjacent to the northeast side of the Gold Line station. The building is currently unoccupied and is titled as a historical building. A suggestion for the building is to revitalize it for loft space. According to the information provided from the Chinatown Redevelopment Agency, Chinatown has an increasing young artist population. Therefore, the potential of the Capitol Milling building is for the use of affordable loft space.
5.2 *Recreational Areas or Parks*

Chinatown is a built-out area and in need for areas of open space in the community. A new state park project is located on thirty-two acres of land north of the Gold Line Station, the Cornfields area. Currently, the area is undergoing phase one construction (Refer to figure 5.3). The objective for this State Park is to raise the quality of life in the region and to bring visitors into the community.

The opportunity for this parcel as a park is to add two more possible features. The first possible feature is a Soccer field as an area for sport. There are an enormous number of registered soccer players in the Los Angeles area with a lack of fields to meet their needs. This area presents a great opportunity to satisfy a majority of the population of the downtown area. Another possible feature is a Chinese Garden to enhance the historic character of Chinatown.

Mini parks are another possibility. They can be inserted in the new housing complexes. Mini parks are suitable for potential development and provide for a friendlier environment.
In addition, it is also possible to add housing developments adjacent to the park. New housing complexes especially attract senior residents and families with children since those are the groups that tend to use recreation facility the most. The new State Park with more variety recreation facilities also brings in the use of residents from adjacent communities.

5.3 Cultural Center

The potential parcels for a cultural institution include the former Little Joe’s Restaurant, located in the northeast corner of Broadway and College Street. The City of Los Angeles has already released a proposal for redevelopment of the site in the year of 2001. The site is proposed for a three-level parking structure with the possible development of a Community Cultural Plaza featuring residential and retail complex in its air space. The objective of this redevelopment is to restore the historical center of Los Angeles to serve as a resource for tourists and the local residential population. The area is served by multiple transportation modes, such as, the Metro buses, the L.A. Dash, and the Gold Line. The project aims to be the linkage that leads tourists from the Gold Line Station and the bus stop to the core of Chinatown. This development could also serve a tourist attraction for Chinatown. The museums are the cultural institution that features the display of historic cultural art. The art displays will change seasonally to
provide variety. The site also presents a way to teach visitors to the area about the Chinese culture and the development of Chinatown. We feel that this can be achieved through a historical walk that leads people from the station and bus stops to the central core of Chinatown. This can be as simple as kiosks that take the visitors through the struggle the Chinese culture had to go through to develop this area in the Los Angeles.

5.4 Pedestrian Linkage to the Central Core of Chinatown and Neighboring Communities

An issue in Chinatown is that many pedestrian sidewalks end at the boundary of the community to an auto-oriented setting. The opportunity is to widen sidewalks in the community as well as those sidewalks that link to the adjacent communities. The sidewalks should also include aesthetic improvements, such as adding more street trees and benches to improve the pedestrian environment. Another suggestion is to add bike lanes that link the adjacent communities to the Chinatown area. Bicycle repair shops, sports gear retail shops, and bike racks in front of the restaurants and retail shops along the bike lane can create destinations for bikers. For the non-motorized residents of Chinatown, the additional pedestrian sidewalks and bike lanes will create more linkages to visit other attractions of the adjacent communities as well.
Chapter 6. Goals and Objectives

Through the help of various community groups, one-on-one interviews, and activity involvement, we were able to get a sense of the true meaning of community identity of the Chinatown residents. We acknowledged their concerns about change, the need for economic vitality, and the influence/significance of the senior population. After taking these and other factors into account, we created three development typologies that meet the requirement of three different densities and land uses that could be used by a local government in deciding the best alternative for development. Because there is no “one size fits all” model, typologies must be chosen according to the appropriate balance of surrounding land uses. Overall, there are many TOD opportunities around the Gold Line station, and any one, or a combination of our three typologies, could work in order to meet our overall goals and objectives.

The following summarizes the goals we propose to guide the selection of transit-oriented development in Chinatown.

Goal #1. The first goal for the station area and Chinatown as a whole is “A community identity that reflects Chinese culture, community history, and is open to an evolving future.” The existing condition of Chinatown does not illustrate its cultural value to the maximum potential. The peeling paint off of building façades does not reflect the warm smiles and soft chatting of people inside. The rich culture and the principles of kindness and friendship can be seen in the seniors who stroll along leisurely with the wake of dawn and who chat over coffee, or gather to play Chinese checkers and dominos.
The first objective is the presence of “Visual and architectural elements that reflect Chinese culture.” It is these elements that create a sense of place not only to residents, but also to tourists and visitors. Many of the current buildings have incorporated Chinese styles arches and bright colors into their design. For instance, the Bank of America looks very much Chinese. Also, a typical element of second story residential units in the older alleys is balconies with lanterns, crosshatched wood shades, and large windows that allow interaction with those on the street level. Residents in the area enjoy coming out and talking to people, therefore the development of a Chinese marketplace for people to meet and gather on a weekly basis to shop and simply interact with their fellow residents and community leaders would be appreciated.

Some policies that could be implemented would require the “display of public art and murals” throughout the community as well as the “addition of historical plaques and kiosks in public places” as a way to remind us of historical Chinese events and people. Also, the incorporation of a museum and/or cultural center would serve as a resource to all who wish to educate themselves on Chinese culture both in the Southland and abroad.

The second objective is to “Define community identity through the views of the majority of the local residents.” By surveying and finding out what residents find most important aspects of their community, we are able to understand their reality and what they value the most; this can usually be representative of the whole. Also, we gathered responses about what residents think of the promotion of Chinese culture, such as the street vendor food festivals and New Years Festivals, and if they think the need is met
for people to truly understand their values and beliefs. One reason why people may have close-minded views about other cultures is because they are ignorant of the reasoning behind their belief system. In addition, workshops would be a tool in understanding what type of services are needed by the community.

The second goal is “An urban form that is coherent, functional, and vibrant.” In making pedestrians and their physical, immediate surrounding area the priority in the design process, they are encouraged and enticed to take part in the environment. Our demographics analysis shows that next to private automobile use, transit use and walking are the most common forms of transportation.

The first objective is “A pedestrian experience that creates coherence along blocks and defines easy to read spaces.” Presently there are inconsistent development patterns throughout parts of Chinatown, where one minute one walks by a commercial strip, only to be followed by vacant lots. With the addition of streetscape and landscaping along these parts, the pedestrian experience could be more pleasant. Also, the addition of nodes along the main strips with street furniture such as benches, and stools would be much appreciated by the seniors.

**Goal #2.** The second objective is “Consistent architecture styles that defines districts” within the community. In Chinatown, there are a variety of ethnic groups within the Pan-Asian community, not only Chinese. Perhaps keeping Chinese architectural forms and limiting the type of architecture to be consistent in design, but adding unique, personal touches to the various groups in the area, would make all residents feel like they are being represented fairly. The current design standards for the buildings need to be improved to further modify the physical environment. Some
of the existing buildings need to be rehabilitated/remodeled to eliminate visible
deterioration.

The third objective deals with the “Accessibility that aids pedestrian and traffic
flow.” If getting from point A to point B is difficult, people will not want to do it
again. In this case, if the pedestrian environment makes foot or bicycle travel difficult,
whether it be at crosswalks, intersections, or sidewalks, they will think twice about
doing it again. The existing condition of the sidewalks in some areas in Chinatown is
deteriorating, such as poor alignment and uneven pavement. By having bigger setbacks
to widen sidewalks and maintaining these sidewalks, it makes the walking experience
pleasurable as well as safe.

Because of the large population of seniors in the Chinatown area, keeping them
a priority is essential in making this community a safe one. By installing timer devices
next to street lights, this aids not only the seniors know how much time has elapsed
once they’ve started crossing an intersection, but also helps mothers with children and
kids walking home from school. The creation of bike paths and corridors throughout
the community would be good for the residents of the nearby artist lofts. Pavers (street
bumps) at crosswalks and at certain areas of the street would slow traffic and make
people more cautious.

The fourth objective focuses on “Pedestrian activity and increase sidewalk
density.” The requirement of new developments and buildings to have commercial
activities at ground floor level will aid in increasing foot traffic, enhance the shopping
experience, and other activities. The safety of shoppers can also be improved by
having more patrolling security. Street furniture, as mentioned earlier, will help as well
as having human scale street lighting. This lighting should incorporate Chinese lantern
designs in order to keep the cultural touch. Storefronts should have large windows and
doorways and should face the street in order to be attractive and inviting to the
automobile traveler.

**Goal #3.** The third goal is “An economic base that generates opportunities,
employment, and tourism.” In order to achieve this goal, there must be a balance
between retail, recreation, and other activities. There are many shopping center areas;
however, there is an absence of parks. Also, there are many immigrants, but no
employment center. Chinatown needs to create an environment that will service the
needs of the residents today, as well as those of the future.
Chapter 7. Alternative Plan Concepts

7.1 Presentation of three alternative plan concepts

This study entailed locating areas in Chinatown that would be suitable for transit oriented development. Although the area is in close proximity to downtown Los Angeles, Chinatown surprisingly has a large amount of vacant land in the area. There are six parcels that are suitable for development in the area, totaling 14.26 acres (seven parcels and 46.26 acres if the Cornfield area is included). From these parcels, three of them (colored in red in Figure 7.1) are directly adjacent to the station and present the best opportunity for TOD. The remaining three parcels (orange on Figure 7.1) are all located more inland of Chinatown and further from the station but they

Figure 7.1 Location of potential development parcels.
still have great development potential. The Cornfield site (purple in Figure 7.1) has been in debate as to what would be most suitable combination of recreation uses for such a large piece of land. After having located all feasible development locations throughout Chinatown, three alternatives were developed that focused on the needs of the community.

The first alternative looks to provide more affordable and senior housing in the area while maintaining culture features. This would be done with a medium-density development, no more than 75 units per acre, which fits the scale of the area and has commercial located throughout the ground floor. Residents of Chinatown have grown accustomed to smaller scale development, getting away from the crowded high-density developments that exist in China. The height of the building would be no more than 4 stories giving it a comfortable pedestrian atmosphere. This ground floor commercial will make the area very walkable and provide alternative to automobile use in the area. The creation of bicycle paths and pedestrian paths will also add to the experience of the area. The affordable and senior housing elements are greatly needed in the area, with the majority of the population being low income and elderly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Density</th>
<th>75 Units/Acre</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Height</td>
<td>4 Levels</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ground Floor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commercial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking</td>
<td>1 per Residential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 per 1000 SF of Retail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Retail</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. Unit Size</td>
<td>850 SF</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
mixed-use element bringing residential and commercial spaces together. This alternative would be more modern architecture style with the intent of bringing newer and possibly younger crowds to the region. Along with bringing in a younger crowd, the tourism and vibrancy of the area will also increase, bringing back pedestrian activity throughout the day and at night. The structure would have roughly eight levels of residential use with ground floor used for retail and commercial.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Density</th>
<th>150 Units/Acre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Height</td>
<td>9 Levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ground Floor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commercial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking</td>
<td>1 per Residential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 per 1000 SF of Retail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Retail</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. Unit Size</td>
<td>850 SF</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The average size of each unit would be 850 square feet and the building would be about one 150 units per acre. The higher density and modern architecture style of the building would create more pedestrian activity and public interaction which has been proven to lead to safer and more secure environments.

The final alternative is an educational facility which could be used by the surrounding communities as well as other universities in the area. The educational facility would be no more than four levels and would include areas for pedestrians and bicyclist by creating new pathways on the site. This facility could be used as a career.
center facility as well, where residents of Chinatown or the surrounding area would be able to come and learn a new trade or a place where immigrants could receive a better understanding of the English language. Universities could use the site as a satellite location so their students would not have to drive the great distance to their universities, but be able to come to this facility and be able to complete there work. Some examples of schools that could come are UCLA extension, SCI-ARC, LA City College and many more that are in the surrounding area of Chinatown.

7.2 Evaluation of plan concepts

In order to come up with alternatives that meet the needs of the community, it was first important to collect demographics and speak with a variety of community members. By looking at demographics that reflect development needs, income, age, and other factors, our group was able to collect a grasp of the community’s status. By talking with various members of the community, business owners, residence, and community leaders, a greater understanding of the needs of the area became more apparent.

The first alternative was developed out of a need for affordable and senior housing. The area has a housing shortage and the low income and elderly population of the area increases the need for specialty housing. The development of senior housing is especially needed. Cathay Manor is the only senior housing complex in the region and rarely has vacancies. The waiting list to get into Cathay Manor is three thousand people long and takes an average of ten years to get in to. Affordable housing is also scarce in the region. Although the Chinatown Service Center continues to strive for the development of affordable housing their last project, Cesar Chavez Gardens, consisted
of only forty-seven affordable units with over fourteen hundred people applying for those extremely limited spaces.

The second alternative involved bringing in a 150 units per acre development that would not necessarily be designed in Chinese architecture, but something that would attract tourism to the area. The reasoning behind this scenario was that as of now there is a high population of seniors in Chinatown; the result of this is there is a smaller amount of younger individuals in the area. By building this scenario it would give Chinatown an improved ability to attract tourists as well as younger generations of people that would help also increase the nightlife that is currently not as vibrant as it can be. Currently, most stores and small shops close by six o’clock and this eliminates the opportunity to shop in Chinatown for those who end their work day at five o’clock; there is no time for them to come down except on the weekends.

The final alternative deals with building an educational/employment facility. This alternative would allow residents in Chinatown and the surrounding neighborhoods to find places of work and/or extend their educational capacities. Local universities would also be able to use the facility as an offsite campus or a satellite campus in which students who live further away yet close to Chinatown could come to this location for their classes and still be able to be close to their residences in Los Angeles, rather than driving the great distances to the colleges. Even local colleges could use this facility, as this would take more and more vehicles off the road and would ease up traffic congestion on the surrounding freeways and street systems.
Chapter 8. Recommended Plan

8.1 Recommended Plan/ Policy Concept

The first proposal for the Chinatown community is the potential of medium density housing development, pedestrian-oriented, and Chinese Architectural design. The locations that are suitable for medium density development are the former Little Joe’s site; intersection of Hill Street and South Alpine; and interaction of North Spring Street and South of Alpine. First, the location of the former Little Joe’s site has a project proposal of a mixed-used development, Blossom Plaza. The density of the Blossom plaza could be used to set an example of medium density housing development.

Blossom Plaza includes 223 residential condominium units and 25,000 square-foot retail space.

Figure 8.1 Medium Density parcel locations

The parking lot next to the Little Joe’s site will be replaced by the development; therefore, future parking lot for the plaza may be underground. Since the plaza would be adjacent to the Gold Line Station, it would draw the immediate attention of the Gold Line riders. The plaza’s site has an advantage of bringing visitors from the Gold Line Station immediately to Chinatown to experience the culture and for its services. The two other locations, Hill Street and South Alpine and North Spring and South Alpine,
are in the heart of the commercial corridor. It is appropriate that medium-density housing that is similar to the density of Blossom Plaza be placed on these locations because they are adjacent to other smaller, commercial uses. People coming to the United Commercial Bank and other smaller shops currently use the vacant Parking lot on Hill. This medium density housing development could serve as senior housing for the senior population in the community, which is one of the current proposals for the site.

The second proposal for the community is high-density residential and mixed-use development. The three locations chosen for the high-density development are the vacant lots east of the Chinatown Gold Line Station; and the surface parking lot located on Broadway, across from the Cathay Manor senior housing complex. The reason for a high-density development is because the Chinatown community is already built out and it has higher demand for housing opportunities than it can supply. Since the community of Chinatown is already in a densely built environment, a high-density housing development could be suitable. This high-density housing development serves as a regional draw, and aims for more tourism. Not only would high-density be feasible to supply more housing opportunities; it could better utilize the limited land resources.
that is available. The nature of selecting the vacant lot and the parking lot is different from the previous selection of medium density. First, the vacant lot is located adjacent to the Gold Line Station, and high-density development works well next to a transit station because of the high flow volume of people. Secondly, the parking lot across Cathay Manor has potential for high-density development is because Cathay Manor itself is a high-rise building; therefore, it is appropriate to have adjacent high-rise development. Also, since the parking is located on Broadway, which is a main arterial, it is able to draw more visitors and serve the high flow capacity need of a high-density development. One of the issues many residents expressed was the business closing times of the shops and stores. Currently, businesses open at noon and close around 6 p.m. This limited time frame does not allow for visitors who either get up early to visit destinations, or those who arrive in the late afternoons. By incorporating higher density developments in various lots throughout the community, this would help increase density per acre and hopefully add services and shops on the ground level that would attract more business.

This third proposal includes an educational facility that institutions, colleges, and universities in the surrounding area could use it for their extension classes. The 5 acre lot immediately on the east of the station would accommodate an educational center as well as job training/placement center. The building would be approximately

![Figure 8.3 Educational/Employment Parcel Locations](image)
55,000 to 75,000 square feet with a parking requirement of 1 space per 5 fixed seats, and not taller then 4 stories. A mixed use element could be incorporated into the ground floor level; however this space would be a small portion.

The educational facility could provide job training and English classes for immigrants. According to the US Census 2000, the unemployment status of Chinatown residents is 9,547. Another important aspect studied for the feasibility of an educational center was the close proximity of various colleges and universities within a 6 mile distance, including LA Trade Tech, FIDM, SCI-arch, and Cal State Los Angeles. By having an extended-university campus, this would not only bring students into the area, but commercial centers and restaurants would benefit.

The suggested development is convenient to the new immigrants because housing, jobs, recreation, schools, and transit are all closely developed adjacent to one another. And since the suggested development is located next to a transit station, the Gold Line is able to serve the transit need of the new immigrants.

Another suggested location for a mixed-use commercial, educational, and open space element would be the Cornfields site that sits on 32 acres. Because of the vast amount of open space on this lot, there are many possibilities and great potential for a multi-use complex that would service to many needs in the community.
References:


Scharlin, Jerry A. “Memorandum: Various Actions to Facilitate Acquisition and Development of Public Parking, an Intermodal Facility, and a Community Cultural Plaza at the Former Little Joe’s Site.” CRA/LA, December 6, 2001.


