

urban form

The form of a city is largely shaped by the combined forces of its geographic and environmental features, people and their culture, historic settlement patterns, economic resources and collective actions. In Santa Monica these defining characteristics have come together to create a desirable home for the City's residents, a regional recreation and shopping destination, a sought-after business address for companies large and small and a tourist destination for people from around the world. Historically a small beach community, Santa Monica has sought to maintain and perpetuate its small beachfront town character as it grew and evolved over time.

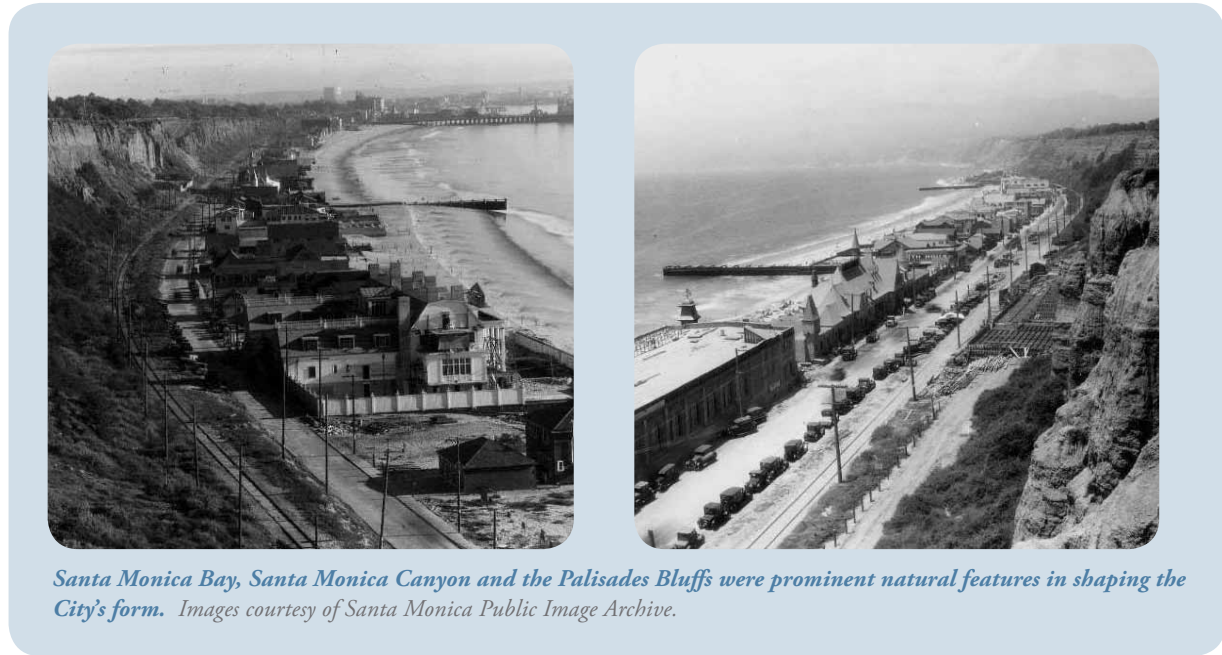


This chapter explores the evolution of the City's form and the forces that created it including the:

- Relationship to the beach
- Early settlers and vacation homes, and subsequent housing growth
- Establishment of a citywide street grid, and railroad expansion
- Growth of neighborhoods and tract development
- Explosion of automobile use and freeways
- Evolution of neighborhoods and commercial districts

The LUCE conserves the best components of this existing urban fabric and carefully improves upon it by:

- Designing the City with the pedestrian in mind and reducing auto-orientation of streets and buildings
- Making streets more walkable with wider sidewalks, landscaping and amenities
- Increasing connections with a grid of green streets
- Repairing the linkages across the I-10 Freeway with increased open space
- Maintaining the City's beachfront charm
- Weaving the Expo Light Rail line and stations seamlessly into the City



- Capitalizing on the light rail connections to create complete neighborhoods served by active, local-serving uses within walking distance

CITY FORM AS SHAPED BY THE PAST

Santa Monica's most defining feature is its proximity to the Pacific Ocean. The City is perched on a dramatic bluff overlooking Santa Monica Bay and a wide stretch of sandy Pacific Ocean beach. While the Bay is the most prominent of the form determinants, other geographic features such as Santa Monica Canyon and the Palisades Bluffs have also shaped Santa Monica's growth over the years.

The City rests mostly on a flat plain that slopes in a southwest direction toward the ocean, providing views from many vantage points and inviting cooling breezes off the Pacific Ocean.

Human habitation around the Bay can be traced back over 10,000 years. The area was home to Native American settlements prior to the arrival of Europeans in the 16th century. It became a Mexican territory in 1822. In 1828, Don Francisco Sepulveda took possession of a tract of land called "Santa Vicente," which included the original Santa Monica town site stretching from Santa Monica Canyon on the north, Pico Boulevard on the south, to Westwood on the east.

1895



1935



2010



Santa Monica's street pattern and its important boulevards linking the City to the Los Angeles Basin were established shortly after its incorporation as a city. The LUCE reestablishes the boulevards as important transit, pedestrian and vehicle streets.

A year after California became part of the United States in 1850, a Board of Land Commissioners settled the argument of who owned Santa Monica. The Board deeded more than 35,000 acres, including the land known as "Boca de Santa Monica" to the Reyes-Marques family. The first structure constructed in Santa Monica was an adobe built in 1839 by Sedro Reyes near the current intersection of 7th Street and Adelaide Drive. By 1860, parts of what is now Santa Monica, particularly the canyons, had become popular summer campgrounds for Los Angeles area residents seeking escape from the inland heat.

As with most areas of the West, railroads and land speculators shaped early Santa Monica. In 1872, Colonel R. S. Baker bought the Sepulveda Rancho and two years later, with John Percival Jones, formed the Santa Monica Land and Water Company. These men laid out the original town site with the intention of selling lots on speculation to the highest bidders. The streets were laid out in a uniform grid; however, the long side of the block was parallel to the coast, rather than the more typical north-south/east-west orientation. This original plotting was bounded by Colorado Avenue on the south, the Pacific Ocean on the west, Montana Avenue on the north and 26th

Street on the east. North-south streets were numbered and east-west streets were named for the states of the Union. One year later a thousand people had taken up residence and eleven years later, in 1886, Santa Monica was incorporated as a city.

The Santa Monica Land and Water Company envisioned a city on the ocean as the terminus of a Southern California rail system that would fuel the industrial, trade and recreational success of their landholdings. To that end they founded the Los Angeles and Independence Railroad Company which began passenger service to and from Los Angeles in 1875.



The construction of the I-10 Freeway created a permanent division between the north and south sides of the city.

The company also constructed a wharf to provide shipping traffic for the rail; however, the shipping and rail operation proved to be unprofitable. The line was sold to Southern Pacific Railroad in 1877, and the wharf was removed.

At the turn of the century, the City continued to be a destination for people attracted to the beach and the mild climate, and early entrepreneurs began transporting people from Los Angeles by horse and wagon. An 1895 map shows a horse car line running the length of what is now Wilshire Boulevard. Later, transit lines in the form of the Pacific Electric Railway (Red Car) provided visitors with convenient



The dream of Santa Monica emerging as a major industrial port did not materialize. However, today Santa Monica continues to thrive as a world-renowned visitor destination and as a center for the creative arts industry.

access to the City, supplementing the Southern Pacific Railroad. The desire for access to Santa Monica and the ocean is demonstrated in the number of east-west boulevards that emanate from Los Angeles and terminate at the ocean on the west side of Santa Monica. The dream of Santa Monica becoming an industrial center and a major trade port diminished over time—primarily due to other cities (such as Long Beach) having more desirable port locations. However, the legacy of the trolleys, railroads and industries remained in the east-west boulevard pattern, the large land parcels independent of the street grid and the active and relinquished railroad rights-of-way that typically followed geographic contours and ran

diagonally to the established street pattern.

Prior to World War II, the impact of the automobile on the planning of Los Angeles began to take effect. It was not until the end of the war that auto-oriented planning and design began to take over the Los Angeles Basin's urban pattern. The Red Car passenger system and all other rail transit systems were dismantled in the 1950s in favor of the bus, which was thought to be a more flexible and economical transit vehicle. Perhaps an even more critical movement that affected the urban form was the overlaying of a new Interstate Highway System. The implementation of the Interstate-10 (I-10) Freeway from Los Angeles west to Santa Monica and the Pacific Coast

Highway brought a dramatic physical and social change to the City. This multilane freeway located in a former arroyo, physically, aesthetically and socially divides the City and limits north-south circulation. Typical of freeways in Southern California, I-10 has not been able to meet the east-west traffic demand. And importantly, memories of this injustice remain today among residents of the adjacent neighborhoods.

Consistent with increasing mobility provided by the automobile following World War II and the desire for housing near the ocean, stately homes, beach cottages and courtyard units gave way to nondescript, three-story apartments. Moreover, planned as a speculative venture capitalizing on the extensive beaches and vast ocean, the City still does not have as much active and passive open space as desirable.

EXISTING URBAN FORM

Santa Monica's urban form is shaped by its past. The creation of Palisades Park served to preserve open space and protect panoramic views, underscoring the importance of the ocean, beach and bluffs to Santa Monica. The length and breadth of the City-operated state beaches, the Santa Monica Pier, with its iconic gateway arch and ferris wheel, and the carefully controlled resort hotels demonstrate the commitment to tourism and the sharing of the national resource to which Santa Monica has been entrusted.

The Downtown

Adjacent to the City's primary natural resources, the Downtown appropriately includes the City's largest structures in height and mass. The regional transit services augmented by the City's own transportation system and a sophisticated public parking program support development in this most dense and pedestrian-oriented portion of the City. Within the Downtown, streets are important parts of the public realm providing both vehicular and pedestrian routes, as well as defining the historic urban block pattern. The streets provide most of the Downtown's open space, and direct and frame ocean views and northerly mountain views. The Third Street Promenade, built during a prior redevelopment effort, creates a pedestrian precinct in the heart of the Downtown. The Santa Monica Place mall is being redeveloped and upgraded in an open format with open access between the Civic Center and the Promenade. Today, the Promenade is one of the nation's premier pedestrian spaces and is an important part of the Downtown's open space pattern, bringing vitality to the Downtown throughout the day, seven days a week. Recent market-rate and affordable housing has added to the skyline of the Downtown and brought new life and energy.



The intersection of 4th Street and Santa Monica Boulevard, with City Hall, and commercial and bank buildings in 1926.



The intersection of 4th Street and Santa Monica Boulevard today, looking north toward the Santa Monica mountains.

The Civic Center

Containing the City's primary complex of civic buildings, the Civic Center lies to the south of the Downtown and is largely separated by the scar of the I-10 Freeway. Through the preparation and adoption of the *Civic Center Specific Plan*, the City has recognized the need to revitalize and update the civic buildings and add new residential units to create vitality and develop open space that will link the Civic Center with the Downtown, the Pier and the Beach.

The Residential Neighborhoods

The most important drivers of Santa Monica's form and character, the neighborhood's distinct roadway grid and traditional neighborhood attributes have roots in the original 1800s town layout. Despite the early pioneering efforts in the 1800s to expand the commercial attributes of the City, more than 80 percent of the



City's land is devoted to low-scale residential neighborhoods. The sheer magnitude of the residential neighborhoods within the City will continue to shape the future form and character of Santa Monica.

The Boulevards

With their legacy of the horse drawn and electric trolley routes, the boulevards remain key elements of the City's form as they reach out from the Downtown and link Santa Monica to the Los Angeles Basin. The boulevards with their well-known names including, Wilshire Boulevard, Santa Monica Boulevard and Olympic Boulevard are important not only for their historic relevance, but also for their functional transportation role in connecting Santa Monica to the region. Notably, while Santa Monica has at least ten east-west boulevards or major streets, there is only one north-south boulevard: Lincoln Boulevard (8th Street).

The Industrial Lands

Distinctly different from the rest of the City, the industrial lands development pattern reflects the history of lands reserved for large-scale industrial use. The Santa Monica Airport occupies many buildings and the runways of the former McDonnell Douglas aircraft manufacturing facility. Other large industrial sites are underutilized, lie vacant, or have been



The east-west boulevards that terminate at the ocean provide the spines uniform grid around which the city has been historically organized. In contrast, the rail lines and relative isolation of the industrial lands resulted in large parcels of semi-rural land that eventually found use in the postwar industrial boom and as suburban-style office parks in the 1980s.

converted to creative arts uses. Still others were redeveloped in the 1970s and '80s into large-scale, inward-looking office complexes more typically found in a suburban auto-dominated locations. During this "garden office" period of the City's development, new buildings on former industrial sites were allowed to rival the height and mass of the Downtown buildings and little attention was paid to the interface of large structures with the lower-scale surrounding community.

LUCE AND THE FUTURE OF THE CITY'S FORM

The Land Use and Circulation Element (LUCE) is a conservation plan. Land Use designations for more than 96 percent of the City's land are allocated at, or lower than, development requirements outlined in the 1984 General Plan. Changes in form from the existing regulations are limited to approximately



4 percent of the city's total land area. The LUCE policies focus on the conservation of residential neighborhoods, neighborhood and specialty retail streets, the beachfront, education and healthcare institutions and related open space assets.

The Downtown

As described in the LUCE policies, the Downtown remains the heart and soul of the community with its strategic location at the edge of the bluff and dramatic views of the

ocean. The LUCE calls for the preparation of a specific plan for the Downtown with the boundaries expanded to embrace Wilshire and Lincoln Boulevards, thus establishing mixed-use neighborhoods on the edge of the Downtown that aid in transitioning the development intensity of the Downtown to the scale of the adjacent neighborhoods to the north and the east. The specific plan guides the evolution of the Downtown and ensures that its character will remain as a thriving, vital mixed-use urban place for people to live, work, be entertained and culturally enriched. The specific plan capitalizes on the opportunities provided by the existing Promenade, new housing, hotels, a revitalized Santa Monica Place open mall, state-of-the-art cinemas, new or replaced parking and the light rail station. The plan policies recognize the importance of the Downtown's form and its function as the center of the City's transportation, commerce, entertainment and celebration of community life.

The Downtown today is alive and vital, but is not resting on its laurels. Key to the Downtown's future is the new Expo Light Rail line from Los Angeles that terminates at a new Downtown Light Rail Station on the southeast corner of 4th Street and Colorado Avenue. The station provides the opportunity for a grand, welcoming plaza as an introduction to the City, along with an enriched and inviting pedestrian



Downtown continues to be the commercial hub of the city and, with some exceptions, has remained the same scale. In recent years, the form has been defined by new mixed-use buildings.

passageway extending along Colorado Avenue to Ocean Avenue and a new bridge to the Pier. East of the light rail station, on the balance of the City-owned site, is the potential for a new joint-development. The new station combined with additional surrounding retail/commercial potential provides the impetus to deck over the I-10 Freeway from the 4th Street Bridge to Ocean Avenue, providing new options for access to the Civic Center and the Downtown. These same improvements will reduce traffic entering the Downtown via 4th Street from the freeway. The three-block-long Third Street Promenade is a pedestrian retail and open space that provides vitality to the Downtown and serves both a local and regional market.



The Plan’s policies capitalize on the opportunity to cap the I-10 Freeway between Ocean Avenue and 4th Street, remove the blight of the freeway, work with the existing hotel to redevelop the site for use as a full-service facility at the edge of Downtown, create additional Downtown and Civic Center park and open space, integrate the Downtown and the Civic Center, and significantly improve the air quality.

The light rail station and the new pedestrian facilities interface with a newly redeveloped outdoor Santa Monica Place shopping complex

and new Nordstrom and Bloomingdale’s department stores. The Downtown as the focus of City and regional transportation services provides the interface for the Metro Rapid Bus routes, Big Blue Bus routes, the Transit Mall and the Downtown Light Rail Station.

While the intent is for the City to be a generally low-scale community, the Downtown is considered a true urban place; the streets are important pedestrian activity spaces and integral elements of the open space pattern, the buildings are generally the tallest in the City and the intensity of development is higher than in the rest of the City.

The Civic Center

The City will shortly begin the implementation of a key phase of the *Civic Center Specific Plan* with the construction of The Village residential project and the extension of Olympic Boulevard from Main Street to Ocean Avenue. This new residential neighborhood, with ground floor retail businesses, will add new character to the Civic Center by extending the activity during the day and into the weekend. The residential component will provide a valuable community safety asset by providing “eyes on the street” overlooking the future Palisades Garden Walk park. Amendments to the *Civic Center Specific Plan* will recognize recent shared-planning efforts

with the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District to enhance the interface between the Santa Monica High School and the Civic Center. The specific plan amendments will also include more detailed guidance on LUCE policies and City programs including: an enhanced pedestrian environment along 4th Street from the Downtown Light Rail Station to Pico Boulevard, active uses along the southern boundary of the Civic Center to enliven the pedestrian environment along Pico, a new operational program and physical improvements to the Civic Auditorium, a shared public parking program and further guidance to the design and implementation of the Palisades Garden Walk park connecting the Civic Center to Palisades Park and the Pier. The amended specific plan will provide guidance regarding enhancing the interface and connection to the Downtown, the potential redevelopment of the hotel and the capping of the I-10 Freeway.





The Plan focuses incremental change in the Downtown, along the designated transit boulevards, around the Expo Light Rail stations and in defined activity centers at key transit intersections.

The Residential Neighborhoods

Under the LUCE, the residential neighborhoods are protected by a policy framework under which the existing housing stock character is respected, conserved and enhanced. LUCE policies focus on maintaining the desired form of the existing neighborhoods, and adding a series of new planning tools to define the desired unique character of each neighborhood. Enhancing the traditional neighborhood grid of streets is key to establishing a pedestrian realm that provides for streets that are pedestrian/bike friendly, safe and properly illuminated, while minimizing

the impact of the automobile. Paramount is the need to enhance the pedestrian/bike and small shuttle connections from the neighborhoods to retail services and the boulevards. Pedestrians and bicyclists should have parity with automobiles and their drivers.

An enhanced neighborhood streetscape includes a quality landscape environment with front yards designed to mitigate the visual impacts of the auto. New buildings introduced into a neighborhood should be compatible in scale and size with their existing neighbors and architectural elements should be included that visually strengthen the overall neighborhood.

Multi-family housing should provide a transition in scale to adjacent lower-density residencies.

The Boulevards

Spanning many miles—from Downtown Los Angeles and the Los Angeles International Airport and terminating in Santa Monica—the boulevards are an important legacy of the past. The boulevards provide structure and form for the City and provide opportunities for a mix of quality transit services, local-serving commerce, new housing and new enhanced pedestrian environments. The LUCE policies enliven the boulevards by encouraging new mixed-use development with ground level, local-serving retail and a variety of residential types on upper floors. Where today the boulevards include primarily one- and two-story commercial uses focused on regional trade and accessed primarily by the auto, the new boulevards will emphasize mixed local-serving ground floor



commercial uses with two to three floors of residential above. No longer will vehicle trips be required to shop for everyday needs and services; the day-to-day needs will be within a comfortable walking distance in a vibrant pedestrian environment. The introduction of pedestrian spaces that feature green landscaping, enhanced paving, coordinated street furniture and lighting—in short, a new streetscape—will combine with quality transit amenities and services to elevate Santa Monica’s boulevards to a grand level, such as can be found in the world’s greatest cities. The boulevards provide excellent opportunities to create walkable retail and residential centers.

Activity Centers

The activity centers are located along key boulevards at a limited number of transit crossroads. The opportunity for an activity center overlay is limited to sites that meet rigid development criteria, offer potential for true placemaking and have the ability to appropriately interface with the adjoining neighborhoods. Activity centers must include a mix of residential and commercial uses, offering goods and services for the neighborhood, convenient transit access and unique urban spaces where neighbors will gather to celebrate their community. The LUCE includes policies that recognize the importance of

scaling the buildings and the sidewalks in a manner appropriate to the boulevard location, the width of the street, the shadow patterns, the pedestrian environment and the adjoining neighborhood.

Districts

With special functions and identities, the districts have always been recognized as important assets in Santa Monica’s palette of forms and character. LUCE policies focus on the special districts such as Montana Avenue and Main Street, Airport and Office Park, Healthcare, Beach and Oceanfront and Civic Center. The LUCE recognizes the importance of the Healthcare District and its importance to the well-being of the citizens and the economics of the community, and to that end, recommends that the City initiate an amendment to the *Hospital Area Specific Plan* for an expanded Healthcare District. However, the policies clearly point out the necessity of assuring the protection of the adjacent residential neighborhoods with any proposals to expand the current facilities. With the exception of the Civic Center, where policies recommend amendments to the existing *Civic Center Specific Plan*, the focus of the LUCE policies is on the conservation of the scale and character of the districts while assuring their continued viability as the City develops.



Bergamot Transit Village and the Mixed-Use Creative District

New mixed-use districts, the Bergamot Transit Village and the Mixed-Use Creative District, capitalize on the new Bergamot Light Rail Station and its location within underdeveloped former industrial lands and surface parking lots. The LUCE policies outline the criteria for new creative arts uses, local-serving retail, commercial and a wide variety of residential uses in a pattern that supports pedestrian travel linked to the light rail transit opportunity. Both districts capitalize on the opportunity of creating parking districts to develop and manage shared parking facilities and to plan and implement Transit Demand Management programs to significantly reduce vehicle trips. The consolidation of parking into common structures facilitates the conversion of surface parking to new open space, roadways and building sites. Building heights are designed

to step down from the existing development to the west and then to the existing residential neighborhoods to the northeast and east. Mixed-use loft, office and residential buildings sited within a newly created extension of the City's street grid and a system of landscaped public open spaces and active pedestrian ways will establish a new urban form for these areas. These two districts encourage and nurture small businesses while providing for additional housing.

Open Space

Throughout the City, open space will increase in size and quality. LUCE policies call not only for the preservation of open space, but for creating new open space opportunities throughout the City. Significant opportunities for new space are created through the proposal to cap I-10 from 4th Street to Ocean Avenue in the Downtown, as well as from 14th Street to 17th Street to expand Memorial Park. Santa Monica has always considered its streets as

key elements of an overall open space system. The transition of key boulevards throughout the City from commercial corridors to mixed-use pedestrian/transit streets will significantly improve the quality of these major streets as open space. The addition of residential uses provide life and activity on the streets and an enhanced pedestrian environment provides opportunities for residents to come together to dine, shop and socialize. Open space and gathering places are integral to the Plan along the City's transit boulevards, at new light rail transit-related neighborhood districts and at activity centers.



The LUCE policies plan for the increase in size and quality of the City's open space and park system.

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