

Determining Appropriate Growth: Slowing the Process
of Gentrification with L.A. Department of City Planning
Zoning Tools

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Executive Summary

This report demonstrates that the Los Angeles Department of City Planning (LADCP) has tools to slow the process of gentrification and displacement, and promote appropriate growth. I conducted this research after working on multiple projects documenting the effects of displacement within Los Angeles and determined that the Planning Department could play a pivotal role in preventing the harmful effects of gentrification. To better situate a discussion of the planning tools available to the LADCP, I provide a scholarly account of gentrification, displacement, local and equitable development, and zoning in Los Angeles.

In order to evaluate the Planning Department's role as a vehicle for equitable, organic, and appropriate growth, I interviewed 6 community planners as well as leaders of community organizations and officials from other city agencies. Through my interviews, I determined that the tools did, in fact, have potential to promote appropriate growth, but various elements and specifications within the tools inhibited their best implementation. The planners I interviewed were optimistic regarding the future of the tools, specifying that there is room for improvement.

These findings provide a resource for planners and community organizations by establishing and facilitating an extended discussion of the planner's role in slowing gentrification and inappropriate growth.

Through this research I have compiled a list of recommendations for both planners and community groups:

- The planning department must conduct new research determining the unintended consequences and turning them into intended consequences.
- Planners must use the toolkit approach intelligently.
- Planners must reach out to constituents and community organizations.
- Communities and planners must work together to carefully craft CPIO's, Strategic Plans, and Q-conditions. Planners must work more closely with other city agencies.
- Find a way to implement a mixed-income housing ordinance in Los Angeles
- Help negotiate Community Benefit Agreements between communities and developers.

I. Introduction

This research aims to situate the specific planning tools available to the Los Angeles Department of City Planning (LADCP) within the larger context of gentrification and displacement. Traditionally, city planners have not explicitly addressed planning tools through the lens of the negative effects of gentrification, but this research documents their opinions, experience, and perspectives on the subject. Previous to this research, planner's perspectives had not been documented in any city, increasing the relevance and importance of this study's findings. Both sides of the contentious debate may find this information valuable in determining the next steps to slowing the process of gentrification and displacement by promoting livable, affordable, and economically sustainable communities throughout the city. These findings provide a resource for planners by establishing and facilitating an extended discussion of the planner's role in slowing gentrification and inappropriate growth. Community groups can also use the findings to prepare strategies for anti-displacement and gentrification campaigns. In this report I frame the current political, demographic, social, and economic dynamics in Los Angeles within the discussion of gentrification and displacement. I then thoroughly define the multi-faceted relationship between gentrification, displacement, economic development and zoning. This discussion leads into my primary research, where I delve into the interviews I conducted within the LADCP. From my findings, I distill recommendations that apply to the work of active community organizations and city planners in L.A.

II. Project Development

The roots of this project grew from an internship I had with Strategic Actions for Just Economy (SAJE) in the fall of 2008. I was working on a burgeoning campaign designed to open up the world of urban planning – land use jargon and zoning ordinances—to the local community in South L.A. The project aimed to help residents understand how urban planning affects their community negatively: why auto-related uses are next to schools, a liquor store on every corner, no parks, and few to no crosswalks. Most importantly, the campaign taught community members about the threat of displacement generated by impending gentrification. The economic investment in the Figueroa Corridor, extending from Downtown Los Angeles and the expansion of the University of Southern California posed a major threat to the non-student, majority renter population and SAJE was there to organize the neighborhood to protest the changes they were witnessing and preserve the existing community in South L.A.

While actively protesting gentrification in South L.A., the community understood the value of improving their neighborhood in order to eradicate the incompatible zoning, the nuisance land-uses, and create local services to build a thriving, healthy, and sustainable community. Unfortunately, as a consequence, improving the neighborhood also increases land values, invites speculation, and beckons development—all tell tale signs of gentrification and displacement. Through this research I define the tools that improve and preserve existing communities.

Urban renewal

Gentrification and displacement in Los Angeles are decidedly embedded in its history of urban renewal. Early housing trends delineate an exodus from the city during one of the greatest population booms since the mid 19th century. Post-World War II, the Federal Government promoted housing for returning veterans, giving them no-interest loans for cheap suburban housing. Other Angelenos fled the inner cities, flooded by African American workers from the South. Racist sentiments and coding policies drove white homeowners to the suburbs, relying on exclusionary housing, restrictive deed covenants, redlining and the power of Homeowner's associations to keep lower classes and minorities out.¹ Shortly after WWII, once vibrant factories located downtown with largely unionized African American workforces closed. Deindustrialization created a state of urban poverty and the separation of the upper and middle classes in the suburbs from lower income and jobless minority groups in the inner city.

The conditions leading up to urban renewal solutions are manifold. Los Angeles followed national trends as it began reinvesting in urban renewal programs. Blighted areas were bulldozed to make way for reinvestment in the form of Dodger Stadium, the financial district, and the Coliseum. Although these investments still bring revenue to the city today they were once vibrant immigrant communities in Chavez Ravine, elderly immigrant tenement residents in Bunker Hill, and jobless ex-engineers in South L.A and these communities are now completely destroyed; blight is a subjective word.

While communities in other cities, such as New York, were fighting this unfair displacement and documenting the injustices Angelenos' plight went relatively unnoticed

¹ Mike Davis, *City of Quartz* (London: Verso, 1990). 181

and redevelopment plans were executed.² The combination of cheap land in the inner city created a climate of unrestricted development and growth in Los Angeles and pushed an agenda of a gentrifying and displacing growth machine.

Deregulated Planning: Gentrification and Neo-liberalism

Unregulated urban renewal unquestionably fits the definition of neo-liberalist urban policy and gentrification. Tom Angotti³ provides a definition of neo-liberalism in the context of urban policy in his book, New York for Sale. “Neo-liberal urban policy is based on the classical notions of individual liberty, an unfettered marketplace, and a noninterventionist state.” This highly deregulated state provides an environment where “communities ... confront local governments that are both less aggressive in leading land development and more dependent on hegemonic real estate interests and the pro-growth civic coalitions they are able to assemble”.⁴ Neo-liberalism is also defined as “the prevailing trends towards deregulation, commercialization, privatization, labor-market flexibility, public-private partnerships, and the downsizing of those parts of government that help the poor, racial or ethnic minorities, and other groups marginalized by market processes”.⁵

² Community groups in New York have successfully resisted gentrification and displacement pressures: see Fifth Avenue Committee’s Displacement Free Zone, for example.

³ Tom Angotti is a Professor in the Hunter College Department of Urban Affairs & Planning in New York City. He is renowned for his progressive planning views as well as the founding of the Planners Network.

⁴ Tom Angotti, *New York For Sale: Community Planning Confronts Global Real Estate* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2008). 12

⁵ Loretta Lees, Tom Slater and Elvin Wyly, *Gentrification* (New York: Routledge, 2007). 164.

By definition, gentrification fits right in to this characterization of neo-liberalism. In fact, “gentrification is the leading edge” in “the fabric of neoliberal urbanism.”⁶ In this sense “the struggle against gentrification [is] intimately tied to struggles to protect public space and the commons from neo-liberal urban policies.”⁷ The state reflects gentrification and neo-liberalism as they have “willingly [walked] away from the provision of ... services, and [look] to the community-based sector to fill the holes it has left behind.”⁸ This is evidenced by the lack of basic services in the poorest communities in Los Angeles: full-service grocery stores have been replaced with convenience stores; libraries have been replaced by auto-related industries. Instead of proactively providing vital services, the government relies on the market to determine where economic activity occurs leaving the provision of these services to understaffed and underfunded community organizations. In this way, “the state is now the agent of, rather than the regulator of, the market... and neoliberal urban policy now expresses the impulses of capitalist production rather than social reproduction.”⁹

While it is objectionable and unsavory that the political structure has de-regulated to the point where communities are being violently displaced, communities now have the impetus to step in and demand that reinvestment and redevelopment are slowed to prevent gentrification and the certainty of displacement.

⁶ Loretta Lees, et al. *op. cit.*, pp. XVII, 165.

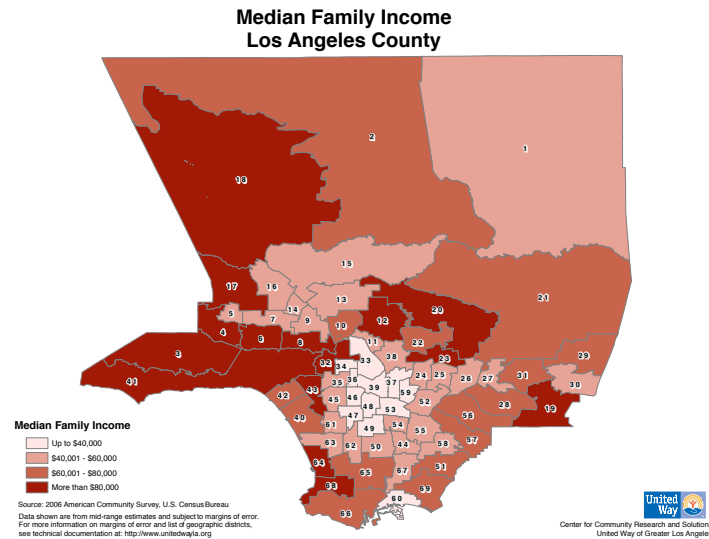
⁷ Tom Angotti, *op. cit.*, pp. 31.

⁸ James DeFilippis, *Unmaking Goliath: Community Control in the Face of Global Capital* (New York: Routledge, 2003). 53.

⁹ Loretta Lees et al. *op. cit.*, pp. 163.

Affordable/ Segregated

With its history of neo-liberal urban planning and relatively unrestricted development, the urban landscape in Los Angeles is bleak. Los Angeles is one of the most segregated cities in the country: highly segregated geographically based on income and race in terms of housing. There is a \$13-\$1 ratio between the richest and the poorest in Los Angeles.¹⁰ The poorest are concentrated in communities in the South and on the East side, closest to the inner city while affluent white communities thrive in the more removed North and West.¹¹



Map: Los Angeles by Median Family Income¹²

With respect to the job market, jobs are unequally located throughout the city as well. Some neighborhoods, downtown especially, have an extremely high concentration of

¹⁰ Robert Gottlieb, Mark Vallianatos, Regina Freer and Peter Dreier, *The Next Los Angeles: the Struggle for a Livable City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

¹¹ Ibid

¹² United Way L.A., *Get Informed*,

<http://www.unitedwayla.org/getinformed/rr/Pages/GeographicDividesinLosAngelesCountyDemography,IncomeandHousing.aspx>

jobs whereas South L.A. has very few jobs corresponding thoroughly with the income data reported above. Even then not all downtown jobs are created equal: a strong bifurcation of the job market in the late 1980s created many very high paying jobs (categorized by international corporate positions in high rises) and even more extremely low paying jobs (categorized by the non-unionized service sector jobs such as janitors and security guards who work in the high rises). The number of Angelenos making more than \$150,000 a year rose 79% from 1990-2000, whereas the number living below the poverty line grew by 650,000.¹³ These numbers are illustrative of the inequalities present in Los Angeles.

What is the Goal?

As we see from these statistics, Los Angeles is a highly inequitable city with an urban renewal-centric neo-liberal planning strategy that has negative effects throughout many communities. The historically anti-community approach to planning in Los Angeles has produced a trend of inorganic growth best couched within the definition of gentrification. How can we tame current planning strategy to better serve all of the city's communities? In order to answer this question we must first precisely define gentrification and displacement.

¹³ Gottlieb et al. *op. cit.*, pp. 90-91.

III. Gentrification

Coined by sociologist Ruth Glass, the first use of the word gentrification referred to a 1964 London neighborhood. Glass wrote,

One by one, many of the working class quarters of London have been invaded by the middle-classes—upper and lower. Shabby, modest mews and cottages—two rooms up and two down—have been taken over, when their leases have expired, and have become elegant, expensive residences.

The gentrification that Ruth Glass examined began as a way to mitigate the cycle of disinvestment and depreciation that was widespread in American and Western European cities throughout the 1970's and 1980's. This cycle is thoroughly described by Lees, Slater, and Wyly in their book entitled, Gentrification: as “new development undermines older investments, and ongoing depreciation forces owners to consider carefully before sinking more capital into aging land uses.”¹⁴ This process is further defined as a cycle of (dis)investment of those who physically inhabit the neighborhood:

People with the money to do so will leave a neighborhood, and financial institutions will ‘redline’ the neighborhood as too risky to make loans. Neighborhood decline accelerates, and moderate-income residents and businesses moving away are replaced by successively poorer tenants.¹⁵

As a way to mitigate the negative impacts of disinvestment and depreciation urban neighborhoods, the government created legislation and provided funding to “encourage reinvestment in ‘rundown’ neighborhoods.”¹⁶

The definition since Glass in 1964 has altered slightly. The 1980 Oxford American Dictionary defined gentrification as the “movement of middle class families into urban areas causing property values to increase and having the secondary effect of driving out

¹⁴ Loretta Lees et al. *op. cit.*, pp. 53.

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Loretta Lees et al. *op. cit.*, pp. 23.

poorer families.”¹⁷ Most generally, according to Lees, Slater, and Wyly gentrification is “an economic, political, social, and institutional phenomenon” directly related to “the transformation of a working-class residential and/or commercial use.”¹⁸ Lees, Slater, and Wyly’s definition hints at the negative effects but is mostly unbiased and general.

Gentrification, despite its most basic definition is a highly politicized and loaded term. Even in Ruth Glass’ original definition, the British sociologist included the negative ramifications of the process of gentrification. Glass states, “once this process of 'gentrification' starts in a district it goes on rapidly until all or most of the original working-class occupiers are displaced and the whole social character of the district is changed.” Lees et al. also allude to these negative repercussions of gentrification in another of their definitions: “The well-to-do people who move into revitalizing neighborhoods value both land and accessibility, and can afford to pay for them both. They thus outbid all other groups for land close to the urban core.”¹⁹

This definition suggests the inherent inequalities between the revitalizers and those who currently lived in the revitalizing neighborhood. The gentrifiers have the upper hand, both financially and politically, to revitalize a neighborhood through redevelopment. As a development strategy, gentrification can also be defined as a market process of profitable and unfair development.

Gentrification occurs when the gap is wide enough that developers can purchase shells cheaply, can pay the builders’ costs and profit for rehabilitation, can pay interest on mortgage and construction loans, and can then sell the end product for a sale price that leaves a satisfactory return to the developer.²⁰

¹⁷ Loretta Lees et al. *op. cit.*, pp. 9.

¹⁸ Loretta Lees et al. *op. cit.*, pp. XV, 3.

¹⁹ Loretta Lees et al. *op. cit.*, pp. 47.

²⁰ Loretta Lees et al. *op. cit.*, pp. 53.

Those who participate in revitalizing a community, and thus gentrifying it, are in the game to maximize profit and have “incentives to use a particular land parcel for the most profitable function possible.”²¹ In most cases, the most profitable use of a parcel is not low-income housing or a local business, but rather a large development complex with high-end retail and condominiums.

These definitions only begin to show the negative implications of gentrification in low-income communities. “The most traumatic aspect” of gentrification, as John Betancur points out “is perhaps the destruction of the elaborate and complex community fabric that is crucial for low-income, immigrant, and minority communities – without any compensations.”²² The “complex urban fabric” that Betancur underlines refers to the social capital and dependence on each other for services and general well being. Lees et al. even go so far as to describe gentrification as a form of colonization.

At the neighborhood level itself poor and vulnerable residents often experience gentrification as a process of colonization by the more privileged classes. Stories of personal housing dislocation and loss, distended social networks, ‘improved’ local services out of sync with local needs and displacement have always been the underbelly of a process, which, for city boosters, has represented something of a savior for post-industrial cities.²³

The definition most grounded in social justice comes from Kalima Rose who defines gentrification as a three-step process. The first stage “involves some significant public or nonprofit redevelopment investment and/ or private newcomers buying and rehabbing

²¹ Loretta Lees et al. *op. cit.*, pp. 47.

²² Loretta Lees et al. *op. cit.*, pp. 215.

²³ Loretta Lees et al. *op. cit.*, pp. 221.

vacant units.”²⁴ This stage causes very little displacement, but fluently leads to increased displacement “as housing costs rise and landlords begin to evict long- time residents in order to garner greater revenues by renting or selling to the more affluent.”²⁵ In the third stage “rehabilitation becomes more apparent [and] prices escalate.” In full force, the third stage of gentrification displaces “original residents ... along with their industries, commercial enterprises, faith institutions and cultural traditions.”²⁶ Rose’s statement best reflects the sentiments of the displaced and lays a framework for tenant’s rights and anti-gentrification campaigns.

While it is very important to discuss the genesis of the cycle of gentrification and its multitude of definitions, Lees et al. point out that “in the end, the ‘why’ of gentrification is less important than the ‘how’ and the repercussions of the process.”²⁷ Gentrification is a reality in our urban communities; we have to document these repercussions. The most insidious of these repercussions is that of displacement.

These negative elements of gentrification are reinforced by a study I conducted in 2008 with Occidental College in the Wyvernwood housing development of Boyle Heights. The owner made plans to tear down the development, which houses approximately 10,000 people, mainly immigrants, making way for condominiums and commercial improvements. The Occidental College team conducted over 400 surveys with Wyvernwood residents to qualitatively gauge social capital within the development and prove to developers that Wyvernwood was in fact a thriving community. We wanted to show the developers that

²⁴ Kalima Rose, "Beyond Gentrification: Tools for Equitable Development," *Edward J. Blakely, Planning Local Economic Development: Theory and Practice* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002).

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Kalima Rose. *op. cit.*, pp. 3.

teardown would likely cause the displacement of most, if not all of the residents. Plans to raze the historically affordable development have not changed.

IV. Displacement

As we can discern from the definitions of gentrification above, “the sunny view of ‘revitalization’ and ‘renaissance’ ignored the harsh reality of poverty, displacement, and chronic shortages of affordable housing.”²⁸ Displacement is one of the most tangible and visible consequences of gentrification. I have selected three definitions of displacement to highlight in order to begin understanding its effect on communities. The first definition is from famed political theorist Herbert Marcuse:

When one household vacates a unit voluntarily and that unit is then gentrified... so that another similar household is prevented from moving in, the number of units available to the second household in that housing market is reduced. The second household, therefore, is excluded from living where is would otherwise have lived.²⁹

A more modern definition comes from, urban scholar Richard LeGates and concerns the social and cultural implications of displacement on urban communities:

The term displacement describes what happens when forces outside the household make living there impossible, or hazardous, or unaffordable. The fact of displacement is a grotesque and spreading feature of life for lower-income people in the United States. It also means a process by which they are engineered out of their traditional neighborhoods, to make way for new occupants deemed more ‘desirable’ because of the color of their skin, the taxes they will pay, or the ‘life style’ they lead.³⁰

²⁷ Loretta Lees et al. *op. cit.*, pp. XVII

²⁸ Loretta Lees et al. *op. cit.*, pp. 44.

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Tom Angotti. *op. cit.*, pp. 2.

The experience of displacement is a “shattering” and at worst “leads to homelessness, at best it impairs a sense of community. Public policy should, by general agreement, minimize displacement and encourage growth that is appropriate for each community. Yet a variety of public policies, particularly those concerned with gentrification, seem to foster it.”³¹ Similar to gentrification, displacement is highly politicized concept. Lees et al conform this politicization with their resolved statement that

Moving people involuntarily from their homes or neighborhoods is wrong. Regardless of whether it results from government or private market action, forced displacement is characteristically a case of people without the economic and political power to resist being pushed out by people with greater resources and power, people who think they have ‘better’ use for a certain building, piece of land, or neighborhood. The pushers benefit. The pushees do not.³²

Displacement is the clear manifestation of the inequalities inherent in the process of gentrification. Since a return to unregulated growth in Los Angeles, gentrification has again “[become] a widespread phenomena,” and low-income communities face the harsh reality of displacement. Rather than sit back, “we should be thinking about how to manage the process to help us achieve a more equitable and just society.”³³ Collecting data that effectively reflects displacement trends is “extremely difficult” and almost impossible “to quantify persuasively.”³⁴ Often, victims of displacement do not notify authorities or necessarily understand injustices of their predicament.

³¹ Loretta Lees et al. *op. cit.*, pp. 44.

³² Loretta Lees et al. *op. cit.*, pp. 246.

³³ *Ibid*

³⁴ Loretta Lees et al *op. cit.* pp 218.

V. Gentrification as an Economic Process

From the definition of gentrification, we can infer that gentrification is an economic process and merits an examination through the field of economic development. What are the economic development tools we can use to prevent and slow the process of gentrification? From the history of development and its fragmented pro-growth nature, we realize that an alternative approach to neo-liberal planning is necessary to keep our communities both livable and affordable. The dilemma is that we want growth, but we want a very specific type of growth that does not harm communities. Previous growth strategies in developing communities have been “to reinvent the private sector in these communities and to stimulate corporate private capital to reinvest”³⁵ But, unfortunately, these strategies have very negative side effects for local residents including “gentrifying the area, displacing former residents, and crowding the poorest residents into even more unhealthy living arrangements in the city or in nearby inner-ring suburbs.”³⁶ This has been the trend in Los Angeles, a trend that desperately needs to change.

There have been several alternative approaches to economic growth that do not promote gentrification, including advocacy planning and equitable growth strategies. The latter strategy has been widely implemented through the Policylink’s equitable development toolkit and includes approaches such as preserving and expanding the supply of affordable housing, controlling land for community development, income and asset creation, and finance strategies.³⁷ The most recent scholarship in the field of progressive

³⁵ Edward J. Blakely, *Planning Local Economic Development: Theory and Practice* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2002). 23.

³⁶ Blakely, *op. cit.*, pp. 24.

³⁷ Kalima Rose. *op. cit.*, pp. 1.

economic development strategies builds off the equitable growth strategies and explores local economic development as a solution to inequitable growth and gentrification.

VI. Local Economic Development

Local Economic development is an alternative approach to “conventional” neo-liberal economic development planning. As Joan Fitzgerald et al. state, the

Conventional approach errs in seeking economic growth over economic development... Economic growth is more development, more business, more jobs, and more taxes, whereas economic development is raising standards of living and improving the quality of life through a process that specifically lessens inequalities in metropolitan development and improves the metropolitan population’s standard of living.³⁸

Economic development focuses on creating organic community initiated growth rather than developer driven growth – which will spur gentrification and imminent displacement for community members. Edward Blakely best delineates the main tenets of local economic development planning in his book entitled Planning Local Economic Development. Among his list are building community-level institutions for development (i.e. community organizations, non-profit housing developers, etc.), expanding local ownership, which use local resources, building quality jobs, achieved by linking employment and economic development policies and programs, and a combination of public and private venturing – combining the public interest with private funding.³⁹ Fitzgerald et al. add commercial revitalization to this list but includes that it must be paired with an assessment of what “goods and services the community needs and which

³⁸ Joan Fitzgerald and Nancy Leigh, *Economic Revitalization: Cases and Strategies for City and Suburb* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2002). 223.

³⁹ Edward Blakely. *op. cit.*, pp. 91.

businesses can operate successfully in the community.”⁴⁰ She also clearly notes that realizing successful local economic development is highly dependent on cooperation of “grassroots support and community building” efforts.⁴¹ Blakely also argues that in order to achieve successful local economic development, communities “must market their resources intelligently and gain competitive advantage to create new firms” while at the same time working to sustain and preserve local institutions such as “schools, colleges, hospitals, recycling centers, churches, day cares centers, youth programs, housing projects, county fairs, and ethnic organizations.”⁴² While this balance becomes increasingly difficult to maintain when large-scale development proposals are made, local institutions “have a stake in the local economy” and are necessary in sustaining appropriate growth in every community.⁴³ Local economic development relies heavily on community participation and ownership, which in the current economy and political atmosphere have decreased. We have seen that most private investment leads to gentrification and displacement, a higher degree of transparent government regulation is necessary to promote local economic development— cities should look to the power of zoning to counter the negative effects of gentrification and displacement.

⁴⁰ Joan Fitzgerald. *op. cit.*, pp. 160.

⁴¹ *Ibid*

⁴² Edward Blakely. *op. cit.*, pp. 53.

⁴³ *Ibid*

VII. Economic Development through Zoning

Organic community driven growth in a neighborhood can indeed be achieved through local economic development strategies. As grassroots organizations face myriad financial setbacks in the current economic climate, are there other entities that have the power and may be better suited to combat and prevent gentrification and displacement? Michael Schill and Richard Nathan wrote in 1983, “local governments are in the best position to recognize the complexity of a displacement problem within their housing markets and to devise anti-displacement strategies.”⁴⁴

As we look to the built environment to solve many other problems that plague our communities such as poor health, health inequalities, urban crime, and transportation in what respect, if any, can we look to the built environment, and specifically zoning and land-use to slow the process of gentrification and displacement and promote equitable growth? More explicitly, in what ways can we promote the tenets of local economic development through the way we zone our cities and the way our land is used? The planning department is a powerful local entity in terms of regulation of development.

In its most basic form zoning establishes that the “interests of private property owners must yield to the interests of the public.”⁴⁵ This meaning has been slightly lost in Los Angeles, visible through the uninhibited growth and concessions to major developers and inequitable development since the 1960s. From the same equitable growth perspective,

⁴⁴ Michael H. Schill and Richard P. Nathan. *Revitalizing America's Cities: Neighborhood Reinvestment and Displacement*. New York: SUNY Press, 1983.

⁴⁵ Charles M. Haar and Jerold S. Kayden, *Zoning and the American Dream: Promises Still to Keep* (Chicago: American Planning Association, 1990). ix.

Zoning must continue its attempt to strike that elusive balance between preservation and growth. While protecting our quality of life, it must not become a regulatory straitjacket making economic revitalization [growth?] impossible. It should tie itself ever more closely to comprehensive planning ... if it is to continue providing meaningful guidance to growth and change.⁴⁶

Land-use and zoning regulations are highly specific to each city, but most cities have a standard set of zoning tools. Using these tools efficiently and effectively can “promote economic and commercial development” in neighborhoods by “setting aside a sufficient amount of land for industrial and commercial use,” which allow for certain types of growth.”⁴⁷ Even with sufficient foresight, these tools may be too lenient and may lack specificity in terms of preserving neighborhood character, streamlining pedestrian access, standardizing solutions to incongruous uses, or integrating different uses in a particular neighborhood. Creative planning tools are then created to mitigate these problems. In Los Angeles, most of the creative planning energy has been put into supplemental use designations that are classified as overlay districts. Overlay zoning can promote certain kinds of economic development by relaxing

Static traditional zoning that assigns specific uses to particular land tracts. Instead, overlay zones are a special modification to the existing basic land use provisions. An overlay zone may contain regulatory provisions that designate land uses, height and bulk as a standard zoning ordinance, or it may have unique features such as historic preservation.⁴⁸

The flexible nature of the overlay zone tools available to the LA city planners sparked my initial interest in zoning as a solution to gentrification and

⁴⁶ Haar. *op.cit.*, pp. xi.

⁴⁷ Blakely. *op. cit.*, pp. 185

⁴⁸ Blakely. *op. cit.*, pp. 186.

displacement. Before I delve into my research, I have documented progressive planning in other large urban centers.

VIII. Case Studies

Can Los Angeles look to other cities that have implemented progressive city planning policy? Both New York City and Chicago have had instances where the city has utilized progressive planning processes to work to improve communities in an way that encourage *appropriate growth*.

New York City and the 197a Plans

In 1991, New York City finalized city charter reform to allow for community based planning initiatives. The 197a Plans, named for the city charter section that created them enables “communities... to submit official plans for approval by the City Planning Commission and City Council.”⁴⁹ While plans only trickled in initially, several plans have been initiated since. The 197a plans have given a voice to communities facing threats of gentrification and displacement and have acted to “[challenge] the conventional development scenario reinforced by the existing zoning regime.”⁵⁰ The 197a plans have been instrumental in promoting *appropriate growth* through “preservation of a mix of industry, retail, and housing ... defined as ‘mixed-use development’.”⁵¹ The 197a plan, proposed and developed completely by grassroots community organizations in turn, are working to help the City tailor planning decisions to fit the community’s needs and goals.

⁴⁹ Angotti. *op. cit.*, pp. 154.

⁵⁰ Angotti . *op. cit.*, pp. 163

⁵¹ Ibid

Chicago: Mayor Harold Washington

In 1984, Harold Washington, a progressive democrat was elected Mayor of Chicago. Similar to the current situation in Los Angeles, Chicago was in a state of “economic and social dislocation” where “the rift between the relatively poor segments of the city and the middle and upper class grew wider exacerbated by race and geography.”⁵² Previous to the election of Washington “the challenge of urban problems was [great] and the capacity of city governments to respond seemed to dissolve in political and social polarization.”⁵³ Washington’s successful election in 1984 was due, in great part, to the immense power of community organizations throughout the city. Washington’s economic development and urban planning approach reflected an era of “new political terrain” in Chicago, ending an age when the city “let developers take maximum advantage of very generous zoning ordinances.”⁵⁴⁵⁵ The City Planning Director under Washington stated in an interview

The first step to changing the lives of the poor of the city was making their issues a part of the debate. As the mayor had said to me, putting homelessness on the agenda was the key. It was only in retrospect that the city began to understand how the nature of the agenda had changed. Groups representing every segment of the city... had all been built into the agenda- making process. The vehicles included appointments to boards and commissions, task forces, funding of delegate agencies, city-staff appointments, and community forums... community-based organizations were partners in every endeavor, whether combating gangs or building housing. Major private development projects routinely provided amenities in exchange for building rights, even though the zoning ordinance had not been changed.⁵⁶

The tactics used during Washington’s three years in office integrated many constituents from the community organizations that supported him through his

⁵² Pierre Clavel and Wim Weiwel, *Harold Washington and the Neighborhoods: Progressive City Government in Chicago, 1983-1987* (Newark: Rutgers University Press, 1991). 2.

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ Pierre Clavel. *op. cit.*, pp. 2

⁵⁵ Pierre Clavel. *op. cit.*, pp. 136

⁵⁶ Pierre Clavel. *op. cit.*, pp. 144

campaign and during his time in office. Involving communities in the planning process ensured that projects reflected the vision of the people and not the economic goals of developers. Progressive urban and economic policies progressed smoothly under Harold Washington until his unexpected death in 1987. Washington's progressive policies were not preserved after his death, political momentum died along with him.

How Does this Apply in Los Angeles?

While these case studies may provide inspiration for Los Angeles, they cannot necessarily serve as models. In the case of the 1970s plans in New York, the Los Angeles has an exceedingly different government structure and political ideology from that of NYC, one that doesn't currently support a similar community generated plan strategy. In the Case of Chicago, community groups played a large role in shaping the urban policy during the progressive Harold Washington administration. While Los Angeles has an extensive network of community organizations and coalitions working toward social, economic, and environmental justice, these community groups do not necessarily have the same political clout that the groups in Chicago did.

Furthermore, there is no research specific to Los Angeles that addresses the issues of zoning, economic development, progressive politics and the efforts of grassroots community organizations collectively. Herein lies a dilemma, these four devices contradict each other in that zoning and economic development traditionally promote growth in the form of gentrification and displacement while progressive politics and community groups opposes inappropriate growth. This dichotomy exists in Los Angeles, but we cannot deny that communities and neighborhoods across Los Angeles need some form of growth

investment to survive. This growth can come in the form of simple infrastructure such as lights, evenly paved streets, and continuous sidewalks. At the height of its complexity, this growth comes in the form of affordable housing, retail, and green space. Historically any form of growth or redevelopment in Los Angeles results in gentrification and displacement. In what ways can Los Angeles promote growth without promoting gentrification and displacement? How can the city you promote appropriate growth?

IX. Appropriate Growth

I developed the term appropriate growth through my conversation with planners. Essentially, it builds on the idea of equitable growth and development strategies, outlined above, but loses the grassroots connotation that equitable development carries. Initially, planners were hostile to the use of equitable development because traditionally these ideals opposed the work in the formerly neo-liberal LADCP. Through my interviews with LADCP staff, I wanted to be able to engage the planners in a discussion of a type of growth that opposes inorganic and displacement instigating growth. Appropriate growth recognizes economic development strategies but adds urban planning strategies in line with the organic development of a community. The elements that compose appropriate growth are essentially unlimited and different for every community, but include the creation and preservation of affordable housing, local land ownership strategies, building job markets, increased community participation, ecological sustainability, etc. Appropriate growth is about building communities for the people who live in them and not building based on speculation or development pressures. Appropriate growth defines and builds

livable communities expanding on the tools and work of L.A. City Planners (discussed below). Appropriate growth, in this way, is also limited to the scope of tools that the LA City Planning Department uses throughout the city.

X. Methodology

My main research question aims to test the potential for planning tools from the Department of City Planning to slow the process of gentrification and displacement in developing communities. I knew previous to the commencement of this project that there was no language that would *formally* slow gentrification– no legislation that directly prohibits gentrification and displacement as economic growth strategies– and promote appropriate growth. For my research, I wanted to assess planner’s opinions on the matter and better understand the steps to actualizing appropriate growth. I spent over 3 months in the planning department chin-deep researching these tools, from the community plan, to the municipal code, to Q-conditions in order to generate a list of questions that the planner’s themselves would relate to. The questions morphed into an interview tool with the feel of a survey – I asked the exact same questions to all 6 of the planners I interviewed in order to gain qualitative knowledge rather than quantitative data on the effectiveness of select planning tools. Every quote, unless specified, is the view of an L.A. City Planner. All of the planners work within the Community Planning Office. Many of the planners I interviewed chose to remain anonymous, so I have not listed any of the planners by name. Instead, I present their answer by themes and categories based on their responses. Not

only do my findings show the potential in the tools I have chosen to combat gentrification and displacement, these findings also show the attitudes of the planners towards the issue of gentrification and their willingness to stray from the literal city policy language. While the research highlights the opinions of select individual planners, it gives a reasonable overview of the potential and limits of each of the tools and *next steps* the city can take to guarantee appropriate growth in communities that face the threat of gentrification and displacement. Before I delve into findings from my interviews, I will examine and outline all of the tools I selected based on their definition and legal intentions in the municipal code and City Planning Department documents (See Appendix I).

Supplemental Use Designations

Pedestrian Oriented District (POD): The Pedestrian Oriented District creates a place for pedestrians in the auto-dominated urban landscape. In order to qualify for the POD, a community must be commercially zoned, must have buildings of similar size or linked architecturally, or must have outdoor “amenities” which are “conducive to pedestrian activity.” The POD restricts development in that they may have no blank walls exceeding 10 feet, at least one entrance for pedestrians on the ground floor, 75% of the front of the building on the ground floor must be devoted to pedestrian access – display windows, non-reflective glass, etc., the building must have a ground floor, uses are limited to “neighborhood retail” which includes neighborhood services such as child-care facilities, dry cleaners, blueprinting, etc. (no major retailers or big box stores). The POD has a very low height restriction of 40 feet for new construction and parking must be located out of the path and view of the pedestrian. Design guidelines are also included in the

development restrictions but are specific to each district. Generally, the POD increase pedestrian access to commercial uses under the authority of the Los Angeles Department of City Planning (LADCP), but requires some collaboration with the office of building and safety and final sign off by the City Council.

Community Design Overlay (CDO): The Community Design Overlay is a much more flexible tool that can be tailored to an individual community and aims to create/preserve neighborhood character. The CDO ensures “accordance with community design policies” and “promotes distinctive character” within a particular neighborhood. Out of character for most zoning regulations the CDO enhances “attractiveness” of the housing stock for “all social and economic groups within the community.” I will further discuss this peculiarity in language in the findings section. Community Design Standards that the CDO must comply with are articulated within the Community Plan and determined by the planning department and an appointed Citizen’s Advisory Committee (CAC). While the initiation of a CDO will always come from a decision-making entity within the city, the CAC guarantees some level of community participation in the formal process.

Mixed Use District (MUD): The mixed-use district encourages ‘land uses that combine commercial uses and dwelling units in order to reduce vehicle trips and vehicle miles traveled by locating residents, jobs, and services near each other’ and is applied to high density Residential zones and most commercial zones. By collocating all of these different uses, the MUD supports transit, economic vitality, and “revitalization of areas of special need. The Municipal Code requires that any MUD be “consistent with the intent and purposes of the applicable Community Plan” to ensure appropriate design standards and accordance with long-range planning policy. Unfortunately, the MUD is one of the most

restrictive overlay zones in terms of development requirements and regulations. The language in the municipal code describes over 11 development requirements regarding only fence regulations! Development requirements also apply to signage, height, Floor Area Ratio (total floor area of buildings on a certain location to the size of the land of that location), pedestrian orientation, parking, façade treatment, enhanced paving materials, street trees, and visible rooftop appurtenances (ventilation, heating, and air conditioning ducts). The stringent restrictions the MUD places on development have somewhat hindered proliferation of the Mixed-use district designation which I will also speak to in my findings.

Transit Oriented District (TOD): Transit Oriented Districts integrate “transit planning, development, urban design, streetscape improvements, and reinvestment”. In Los Angeles, these components contribute to creating livable neighborhoods, linking residents to jobs, and stabilizing low-income communities.⁵⁷

Other Tools

Historic Preservation Overlay District (HPOZ): The HPOZ was created to preserve buildings that meet the city’s requirements for historic preservation. The HPOZ “protects and enhances” the use of “buildings, structures, landscaping, natural features...having Historic, Architectural, cultural or aesthetic significance.” One of the purposes of the HPOZ is to “stabilize neighborhoods and/or communities,” which is what makes the ordinance so appealing in terms of its potential to slow gentrification.

⁵⁷ Reconnecting America, *Center for Transit Oriented Development*, April 5, 2007, <http://www.reconnectingamerica.org/public/tod> (accessed February 22, 2010).

Community Plan Implementation Overlay (CPIO): The Community Plan Implementation Tool is a new tool developed to implement the policies and guidelines developed in the Community Plan Update programs.⁵⁸ The West Adams/Leimert Park/ Baldwin Hills Community Plan Area will launch the first CPIO.

Q Conditions: Q Conditions are footnotes that can accompany any land-use designation. Q condition examples include but are not limited to restricting Alcohol Licenses (used widely in South L.A.), managing riparian habitats, mandating multi-family housing in Elysian Valley, etc. Countless Q conditions exist to preclude specific elements from a project.

Specific Plan: The Specific Plan is a planning tool that allows planners and communities to work together to define and create the most *specific* plan for the chosen neighborhood. In the LAMC, the specific plan is defined as a “regulatory [control] or [incentive] for the systematic execution of the General Plan” and shall provide for public needs, convenience and general welfare” (See Appendix II). The specific plan has one of the most comprehensive tool as well as one of the best tools for engaging the community. Consequently the Specific Plan is one of the most staff and time intensive tools on this list.

⁵⁸ Per the LADCP definition the “community plans are intended to promote an arrangement of land uses, streets, and services which encourage and contribute to the economic social and physical health, safety, welfare and convenience of the people who live and work in the community.” The plans are a policy document and therefore are not directly enforceable.

XI. Do Real Planning!

In an attempt to situate the planning tools I have chosen, I will describe the existing environment and the mindset in the Los Angeles Department of City Planning. The current mantra within the department rings: Do Real Planning! Brought on by the current planning director, Gail Goldberg, in 2006, *do real planning* implies a shift from planning on paper riddled with bureaucratic decision-making to actual planning in the field influenced by the neighborhoods themselves and by principals of sustainability and livability. *Real planning* is a direct move away from neo-liberal, developer advanced projects in the city. While many of the tools I have selected were created previous to this shift in planning department doctrine, they broadly support the drive to get down to the streets and implement progressive urban planning policies. From my interviews I extracted a couple of trends; I have grouped them all together here.

All planners agreed that *real planning* is about trying to create a better place and seeking excellence in projects. These objectives have certainly been challenged in the current economy, subjects I will discuss further later in my findings, but persevere against fast and easy development pressures. “To streamline a project does not necessarily mean you have to forfeit excellence of development that you put in place,” with the 14 principles of *do real planning* incorporated into their everyday work, planners feel that the integrity of projects is not being compromised. Rather, with this mantra in place planners are listening and serving “the public interest and in serving the public interest [keeping] public trust and trying to instruct this positive change.” The tools I have chosen to analyze create a combination of strategies that will help achieve the goal of *real planning*.

Part of *real planning* is about enforcing the “intent of the overlay districts to make sure [their] vision comes to fruition;” this implementation must be executed on a case-by-case basis in order to be successful. In order to assure that the city implements *real planning* policies, planners must “[stay] true to” the tools available and “[work] with the communities” to ensure “a balanced vision for the area.”

While there is quite a bit of friction between the planning department and a wide range of communities throughout the city (both higher-income and lower-income communities), the planning department claims to be “their friend” and “power source.” Part of *doing real planning* is feeling empowered, realizing that the planning department does have “authority and influence” over the physical changes that are made to the city, physical changes which also have very strong social and political implications for neighborhoods across the board. Doing *real planning* means that planners can “assert some kind of good plan policies,” and it’s about having the “training, the respect, [and] the marketing” skills to be able to make good assertions and good plans. While some communities have been in conflict with planning department decisions, *real planning* means working with the community until “we get it right.” Planners really feel that since the *real planning* policy has been in place “the city has been changing.”

XII. The Tool-kit Approach

Cities have certain standard zoning codes – in Los Angeles there are four basic zones: residential, commercial, industrial, and agricultural zones. Each of these zones has several sub-specifications that determine the height, square-footage, how many families can live there, as well as other development regulations. In addition to these standard zones, Los

Angeles Department of City Planning has generated several other tools, which include those I have specified as part of my research – as well as several others which I do not discuss here—as supplemental tools to help implement and enforce certain standards in the city.

Overall, the toolkit approach to planning in Los Angeles has been “very successful” in terms of “generating positive change in communities.” The tools are relatively new (since the 1990’s) and create “more livable, more walk-able, more transit friendly environments,” but may need to be refined. For example, an evolution of sign-offs and approvals must occur in order to streamline implementation.

Process improvement (planners are constantly bogged down with paperwork) may be tedious but at least attainable. Other kinds of alterations require a little more persistence. Many planners spend countless hours developing these tools, but in the end it’s a “popularity contest.” Some tools will inevitably be used and some will not. The tools that “deliver the goods” will get chosen and the others will be left unused. The fact that the tools are “confined to the physical development” of Los Angeles is also somewhat of a shortcoming, “sometimes you need to go beyond physical development in order to change a neighborhood.”⁵⁹

The “unintended consequences” of these tools are quite risky – “sometimes a community grows, property values go up and people get displaced;” refining these tools and using them in conjunction with other policies can safeguard communities from the threat of displacement. My research aims to tease out the potential for these tools to slow the process of unhealthy and inappropriate growth, which will inevitably cause displacement.

⁵⁹ Physical development refers to the physical attributes of the parcel as well as the land-use.

XIV. The Tools Can Help

While I received quite a bit of negative information about how the tools don't always work, I collected some heartening information about the potential of these tools to slow gentrification and promote appropriate growth. Many planners noted that most of the proposed tools were "land-use tools, [they] aren't dealing with any other factors that when taken together result in gentrification or displacement." Land-use is not the only factor that determines the kind of development that occurs in any neighborhood, but considering the uncharted and unexplored scope of the consequences of these tools, they could easily go "both ways" –promoting or preventing gentrification. When implementing a tool, planners never really know if they are encouraging or discouraging development, but really in speaking about trying to slow gentrification, planners must work toward encouraging a "certain type of development."

Also, zoning and land-use determine price in any given neighborhood. Land-use "sets where growth can occur, where it can't, [and] how much can occur," and the extent that land-use can relate to the issue of appropriate growth. Appropriate growth, to the planners, is defined by whether the development is "in of context/in range of a given neighborhood or community" while enhancing "the organic development of the community. The kind of growth that is gentrification "displaces people and is not linked to the neighborhood."

There are two main paths through which zoning can control types of growth: preservation/no growth or well thought out, appropriate development. Many communities, per my interviews with the planning department, push for the former, but the no growth strategy nearly always results in a community like Venice—highly restrictive and very unaffordable. In the short term, no growth works to preserve affordability, but in the long

term a holistic appropriate growth strategy is more suitable and effective in preserving affordability.⁶⁰ While there may be some degree of oversight in terms of enforcing the tools, planners have the power to preserve communities and promote appropriate. Based on my interviews, planners are very concerned with “keeping the development pipeline going,” while also managing and enforcing the tools in a way that promotes this organic and appropriate growth in communities that are facing the threat of unnatural development in the form of gentrification. There are four main tools that planners specified when speaking about promoting appropriate growth in Los Angeles: Specific Plan, Q-conditions, Historic Preservation Overlay Zone, and the Community Plan Implementation Overlay.

The specific plan, a mentioned in the methodology section, is a thorough visioning process. The specific plan is used as a reaction to significant “development pressures,” such as Staples Center, USC, Central City West, Crenshaw Corridor. Technically, the specific plan is an “entitlement that [the planning department] exchanges” with a developer to ensure a certain amenity, service, or land-use for a particular community⁶¹. The planners all agreed that the specific plan is the “most powerful overlay in the city” and that the time and effort put into the specific plan process could ensure that anti-displacement growth strategies were implemented.

Once planners uncover the “complex strategies” of the specific plan, the tool can achieve appropriate growth.⁶²

⁶⁰ By implementing a *no growth* strategy communities prevent demolitions, which simultaneously prevent the construction of any new units. Limiting new construction decreases the total supply of housing in a given area, thus forcing the demand and average price to rise.

⁶¹ Entitlement refers to the right that planners give to developers when they approve a project.

⁶² The Specific Plan has the power to address the problems within a community intimately. Within the language of the specific plan, planners maintain the ability to tackle issues

Unfortunately, specific plans are “unequally distributed” throughout the city primarily in neighborhoods that do not face gentrification and are not threatened by displacement. For example, there is only one specific plan in South L.A., a community facing the expansion of the Figueroa Corridor developments and the growth of the University of Southern California while there are four specific plans that pertain to the West L.A. community plan area, a significantly smaller, financially wealthier, and less threatened community.⁶³ Despite its singular use, significant changes and unforeseeable effects have occurred with the completion of the specific plan in the South L.A. planning area.

One of these effects is the increased public participation in the planning process with the adoption of the specific plan. Community participation is a valuable and effective way for planners to visualize the threats facing the community and therefore build the necessary development guidelines to direct the community toward affordability and appropriate growth. The specific plan “entices a consciousness of a community to go out and watch” what is happening in their community. They “learn how to evaluate each and every project that comes along” and when the LADCP tries to deviate from the specific plan, the community “comes out in droves.” The specific plan definitely “encourages participation” and the ability to be able to thoroughly scrutinize the work of the planning department. In this way appropriate development can be determined by the community and implemented by the planning department.

Another tool that is used extensively and successfully within the planning department is the Q condition. While the Q condition is in fact a footnote to many plans and

besides land use and physical attributes. Working closely with the community, planners use the specific plan to implement drastic and strategic urban planning.

⁶³ L.A. Department of City Planning, 2010, <http://cityplanning.lacity.org/> (accessed February 20, 2010).

parcels, it has “has teeth,” meaning that it is highly enforceable, site-specific (pertains to only one parcel of land), and unique to Los Angeles. Q’s have been used in many communities as a way to limit the uses on a particular parcel. Most parcels have Q’s tacked onto them- they are used to limit unit development for housing, liquor licenses, and auto-related uses, etc. In the Elysian Valley community plan update, part of the last round of updates and completed in 2004, the Q condition became a powerful tool used to promote multiple family housing. In an effort to consolidate land-uses after flipping numerous industrial and commercial properties to residential uses, reflecting major population growth in the area, community members were worried that the new housing would be predominately single-family units or lofts, which would induce inappropriate economic growth and displacement. A Q-condition was implemented on new residentially zoned properties that demanded 20-25% of residential developments must be 2-3 bedroom units. The use of the Q-condition encourages a similar type of demographic that already exists in the Elysian Valley neighborhood. In the same way Q’s can advance appropriate growth through mandating a certain frontage on a commercial building or determining square footage of a parcel that is more appealing for a small local business than a big-box commercial establishment. While the Q has a direct effect on implementing an appropriate growth strategy in Los Angeles, it lacks transparency.

On paper, the Q-condition looks great, but in reality the Q-condition is not a “transparent tool” and some planners even said that the Q condition is one of the biggest nuisances in the department. Since the Q is a footnote, it is by no means user friendly. Before some of the newest technologies in the planning department, you had to go deep into the filing cabinets to find the specific Q designation (there are over 1000 of them). Q’s are hard to read and are not easily accessible- “nobody” outside the department “knows what a

Q is,” yet they are quite important in determining what you can and cannot do with your property. Overall, the Q-condition has been an extremely powerful planning tool for Los Angeles, but unfortunately the tool is quite impracticable and unfeasible in implementation.

In an attempt to minimize the use of the Q-condition and create comprehensive plans for all communities (unlike the discriminatory use of the specific plan tool), LACDP developed the Community Plan Implementation Overlay (CPIO). The CPIO is implemented through the community plan process and was developed to put into practice and enforce the guidelines and long-term policy suggestions developed in the community plan. The Department also felt that “there weren’t enough tools in [their] existing toolbox to create the level of specificity and uniqueness that was needed amongst the 35 community plans.” The CPIO “came out of a practical necessity and [allows] us to tailor standards to the unique needs of particular areas”. Many communities that lack basic resources aren’t ready for more specified tools and overlays like a Pedestrian Oriented District because they don’t even have sidewalks or retail, for example, and need attention to detail. To some extent, the community plan process attempts to address these basic problems through policies and guidelines. The community plans are “policy documents” and “guideline language.” One planner even described the Community Plan as “a wish list” for the community. The Community Plan’s guideline nature allows the department to brainstorm the best solution for each community. But since the Community Plan is only a long-range policy document it is only advisory and can be circumvented. The department realized that they needed a flexible tool that reflected the guidelines in the community plan. From this visioning the CPIO was born; a tool that will help the City Planning Department “be able to enforce” the community plan, something “more than just guidelines, they are mandatory, they are standards”.

The CPIO also essentially replicates both the specificity of Q-conditions and the attention to detail of the Specific Plan. Through the community outreach process of the Community Plan, residents of the areas being updated stated that they “would prefer not to use Q’s because they [had] been confusing.” The CPIO was developed to be more “user friendly” and more “accessible than the Q-conditions”. While Q-conditions are very successful on the micro level, the CPIO incorporates a “purpose statement that talks about the intent.” Planners also gauged from the outreach process that a specific plan was not always appropriate “to handle with the adoption of the community plan.” The CPIO was also created in a similar fashion to the specific plan, but serves rather as a “mini-specific plan,” with a more flexible and much simpler “sign-off” process, reducing the bureaucratic and monotonous work on the part of the planners. Existing zones and overlays were not flexible enough to address the various concerns of all of the different plan areas. While Supplemental designations and standard zones address some of the more regulatory aspects of a parcel, they don’t necessarily allow the Planners to address “use.” The CPIO can “marry the design *and* the more regulatory issues,” it combines “use, density, intensity, bulk, and massing regulations.” The CPIO, in effect can facilitate the intent all of the issues the Supplemental Use Designations aim to resolve and in a much more flexible fashion and in a way that is tailored to each community separately.

Flexibility and adaptability are the most important components of the CPIO, allowing each community plan to modify a different CPIO for each community. The CPIO is the only tool “that is flexible enough to address the range” of needs for every community. “It’s like a shell that’s an ordinance and we can put the particulars in and address anything.” Planners agreed that the CPIO has potential to implement policies that promote “transient oriented area, major corridors, and areas that function as centers for the community.” In West

Adams, the first community plan with the CPIO in the works, the CPIO increases zoning parameters, but also “generates and promotes re-use and improvement of existing structures.” By promoting reuse, communities cut down on development costs while integrating much needed services and amenities into a community, thus limiting the effects of gentrification. Along the same line, the CPIO can be tailored “to serve any purpose,” restricting developments that are not in line with the growth strategy of a given community. One planner stated that, the CPIO can be written in the way that does “not [encourage] physical development, which would result in displacement, but the CPIO encourages development that is relevant to the area.” The CPIO promotes an organic growth that is more in line with what the “community needs”, not necessarily what developers want. Take, for instance, the West Adams Community Plan Update: the CPIO is being used to discourage convenience stores and to promote full service grocery stores and farmers markets. Through the CPIO, the planning department can generate an appropriate growth oriented approach to new development (See appendix III).

LA City Planners specified that the previous three tools, Specific Plans, Q-conditions, and the CPIO have potential to slow gentrification and promote appropriate growth. There is one other tool, the Historic Preservation Overlay Zone (HPOZ) that planners state, “cuts both ways.” The HPOZ can either be used as a tool to prevent displacement and also a tool to protect single-family neighborhoods in an attempt to increase and sustain property values. Sometimes, the HPOZ is used in older parts of the city, but most frequently, it is used to “limit development in general.” Implementation of the HPOZ is not necessarily “tied to the historic integrity of a structure.” The HPOZ “basically stops development” based on State Historic Preservation standards (see appendix IV). The slowing of development is a “reprieve” in certain situations because there is less “development pressure.” As a tool that

prevents displacement, the HPOZ can preserve a building and “[prevent] luxury condos from being built.” Unfortunately, the HPOZ can also promote gentrification by freezing any development. In “more well off neighborhoods that know how to make the government work for them” the HPOZ is used to sustain or increase property values by preventing higher density projects. By blocking new developments these communities are preventing the generation of “enough housing units so that housing *cannot* remain affordable.” Overall, the HPOZ has been used in opposing situations: as a tool to limit growth by stopping displacement as well as a tool to increase property values. In terms of slowing gentrification pressures, planners point out that these areas “[do] deserve some sort of regulation,” but clarify that the HPOZ “may not be the most appropriate tool.”

XV. The Tools are Limited

In this section I categorize the defaults, defects, and consequences of the tools outlined by the planners themselves. The expansive nature of Los Angeles hinders the effectiveness of many of these tools. As I mentioned previously, Los Angeles is a very diverse and segregated city. Each area has an inherently different set of needs and problems – some parts of the city have very basic needs like continuous sidewalks and doors on the street level while other more wealthy communities seek uniform neighborhood character and a hip urban experience. Many of the tools intend to identify the needs of every community and aim to “implement Community Plan Policies,” but since each community is vastly different from the next most of the tools are not equipped with the language, development standards, or implementation strategies to operate successfully in every neighborhood. Any one tool will not necessarily fit every situation.

The physical diversity of the neighborhoods in L.A. makes it difficult to have one tool that caters to every situation and need. Currently, many of the most progressive tools such as Pedestrian Oriented Developments, Mixed-Use Developments, Historic Preservation, and Specific Plans are used in communities where the “urban fabric” already exists.⁶⁴ But, in some communities where they have high crime rates, require more green space, etc.—“their needs are so basic you don’t even get to the level of talking about a POD.” In reality, many of these tools are used more frequently and unequally in more developed and monetarily wealthier communities. There are some tools with the capacity to be tailored to different communities including the Community Design Overlay (CDO), the Community Plan Implementation Overlay (CPIO), and the specific plan tools. But overall, many of these tools are not flexible enough to deal with the different issues in the various neighborhoods of L.A.

Another significant problem lies in the fact that these tools only deal with the built environment and therefore have uncontrolled and unanticipated economic, social, and political consequences. “Every property comes with a unique situation” and each tool reacts in a different and unpredictable way. “You can’t think of every situation, no matter how hard you try.” The Historic Preservation Overlay Zone (HPOZ), for example has been implemented not only to preserve historic buildings but also to preserve Rent Stabilized units. While the intent of preservation is admirable, the unintended consequences of the HPOZ are innumerable. The HPOZ has many requirements in terms of property upkeep and the very concept of preservation implies increases to property value, which in turn make the property unaffordable. The planners agree that the content of the tools and their

⁶⁴ Urban fabric refers to the architectural, landscape, and overall feel of a neighborhood. Older, more established communities often have a stronger urban fabric than newer neighborhoods.

consequences can and must be reviewed in order to make more informed choices when choosing the appropriate tool for a given community.

In terms of implementation of tools, there are two main goals that the planners identified: a) that the tool reflects the vision for the area and the policies of the planning department and, b) that the tool works on the level of its physical implementation (are there loopholes, are the development standards too stringent, are they getting forgotten?). Planners agreed that most of the tools function well, but many need to be more flexible in order to reach both of these implementation goals. Several of the tools are a set of agreements between the planning department and developer and have development regulations that mandate certain development criteria. For the POD, TOD, MUD, and others the planning department and the developer develop a set of agreements and development standards. The “built-in development standards” specific to each tool and outlined in their definitions above are often quite stringent and make implementation of the tools difficult by threatening to restrict the authority of the developer. In the case of the MUD, the laundry list of development standards has decreased its application citywide. These standards and review processes are necessary to execute good planning, but should not slow a project down or completely inhibit development.

The codified tools, namely those with development regulations are inflexible and do not require community involvement, in order to “exact public benefit from the developers.” The non-codified tools (Specific Plan, CPIO, and community plan) are less stringent and have the capability to help in terms of physical land uses as well as issues a particular neighborhood may face. The constructive and staff intense specific plan tool, the Community Plan, the new and enforceable CPIO, and the incredibly tedious Q conditions all have the ability to make prolific and creative changes in a community. When there are

unresolved issues in a community: too many check cashing facilities, liquor stores, not enough grocery stores, too many auto-related uses, whether it is a use that “preys on communities” or a lack of resources these non-codified, site specific, flexible tools can help.

Outside the jurisdiction of the toolkit, the greater context of the planning department and city government inhibit the effective implementation of the tools. The most pervasive and overarching issue in the LADCP is the current state of the economy, both nationally and in the city of Los Angeles. Planners feel especially constrained by the economy with fewer planners on staff and generally lower capacity in city government overall. Planners comment that they “are really spread thin” and cannot properly execute plans with so few staff members. If you don’t have the staff to be able to figure out how the plans “you are not going to get the kind of development that your plan envisions.” All six planners speculated that with more “planners devoted to each project [they would] see much better projects.” Looking directly at the planning staff to population ratio there are only 13 principal planners in the Community Planning office who oversee plans for 3.8 million residents. As compared to smaller cities like West Hollywood and Santa Monica, the sheer number of L.A. residents daunts L.A. City planners. These numbers show the difficulties planners face in creating and managing plans throughout the city.

The L.A. city budget crisis has also discouraged development overall. In this economy, planners strive to “encourage a reluctant development community to come in and invest.” The tools “work very well when the economy is good,” but execution of the tools has decreased severely since the “economy hit rock bottom.”

XVI. The Tools Can Be Improved

From this research, I have learned that LA city planners are legitimately concerned with the effects of gentrification on growing and developing neighborhoods in Los Angeles. They see definite potential in many of the tools they have and the tools they have, namely the developing CPIO, albeit less so, the specific plan and Q-conditions. The other tools support important changes in development and growth like walkability, high density transit oriented and mixed-use development, etc. that communities throughout Los Angeles need. Many of these tools are limited or even counterproductive; whether they are too specific, stifled by the current economy or actually promote inappropriate growth. In conjunction with the planning process in Los Angeles, the tools need to be revisited and revised to increase their potential to promote appropriate growth. Planners specified that the adoption of the tools should be more deliberate, accurately reflecting the needs of each community. Planners also indicated that the tools should incorporate economic development standards so that they were not so specific to only land-use. In some ways, the CPIO addresses many of these issues through its flexibility and ability to form to each specific community. However, the Community Plans are only updated so often and may become incongruous with the vision reflected in the Community Plans. While the formal tools available to the Department of City Planning have some potential for combating and preventing gentrification and displacement, planners believe that ultimately it must be a multi-pronged approach. Combating gentrification and displacement isn't solely under the jurisdiction and scope of the planning department, the solution is better addressed in conjunction with other approaches.

Due to the fact that planners hold their power in determining land use and do not have control over economic development, combating gentrification and displacement must be addressed through several approaches. In their responses, planners stressed the importance of working with non-profits and community-based organizations. In Los Angeles these organizations have a large constituency and the capacity to organize the community the planning department does not. Community participation is integral to gauging community concerns and simultaneously acts as “further control” and a “checkpoint in terms of how a project is approved.” Community involvement is vital to “exact public benefits from developers.”

Of all of the tools the Community Plan and the Specific Plan engage the community significantly more than any other tool and consequently are the tools that best reflect the wishes of the community. As stated before, the wealthier communities know how to best access their government and therefore achieve a Community Plan and Specific Plans that reflect the vision of that particular community. As low-income neighborhoods dominate large swaths of L.A., many communities are lost when it comes to participation in the urban political sphere. Planners, as policy makers, zoning officials, and land-use designators don't have the grounded community connection that many grassroots organizations do. Many organizations like this exist in Los Angeles and are engaged in campaigns to slow the pervasive and insidious issue of gentrification and displacement in their communities. Together, the planning department and community organizations can bolster participation in the planning process ensuring residents a voice in determining what their community looks like and how it functions.

Community organizations are not limited to organizing neighborhoods to participate in the planning process: certain kinds of community organizations can even act as non-profit

developers, which extend community ownership and promote affordability in the housing stock. Community Development Corporations (CDC) and Community Land Trusts are “forms of collective action, collective ownership, and collective control which limit the potential for structured inequities and oppressions.”⁶⁵ While the business structure of the CDC and the Land Trust are slightly different they both work to build up “the stock of community land” so that “neighborhoods can build places that slow or stop the process of dislocation and displacement.”⁶⁶ LA City Planners see immense potential in Land Trusts as a way to “buy land” specifically for the “creation of affordable housing.” Where the LADCP cannot command or enforce affordable housing they can work in conjunction with Community Organizations that both organize neighborhoods and preserve affordability, both key components of appropriate growth.

Working with community groups can help preserve affordability in developing neighborhoods and organize constituents to vocalize their needs, but is just part of the solution. The real problem at hand is that the city has no legal way to preserve affordability. In 2008, the City Planning Department backed by other city agencies and community organizations passed a mixed-income housing ordinance, which would require a certain percentage of all new units built were affordable. Unfortunately, a year later developer mogul, Jeffrey Palmer, successfully had the ordinance repealed. Palmer sued on the basis of the Costa- Hawkins law adopted in 1995 by the state of California, which states, “municipalities cannot set rental rates for rental units.” Due to the ordinance repeal, “every city’s mixed-income requirement is in jeopardy.” Planners voiced their concerns; “we may all try to come together non-profits and affordable housing advocates, but somebody needs

⁶⁵ James Defilippis. *op. cit.*, pp. 32.

⁶⁶ Tom Angotti, *op. cit.*, pp. 21.

to take up the role of trying to change legislation at the state level.” Until State law is changed regarding the Costa-Hawkins Act, “we can’t change anything.”

Planners cite grassroots, street level strategies as well as state-level approaches as solutions to slowing gentrification and promoting appropriate growth. What can happen at the city level, besides the work in the L.A. City Planning Department? Planners concur that some sort of inter-agency cooperation must occur in order for appropriate growth to thrive in developing communities. If the LADCP and the L.A. Housing Department coordinated, the supplemental use designations could be used in conjunction with the Housing Department’s buying power. “Prime location” parcels, like near new train stations, could become preserved affordable housing “before the land gets expensive and before people get displaced.” The Community Redevelopment Agency has their own money for redevelopment projects and can help “embed an economic development element” which the LADCP tools currently lack. Other planners cited coordination with other city department, like Office of Building and Safety and the Office of the City Attorney to help streamline projects and ordinance approvals which would ultimately allow planners to do *real* on the ground, physical planning.

Another tool successfully implemented in Los Angeles is the Community Benefits Agreement (CBA). Technically, a CBA is an agreement between community groups and a developer determining a range of community benefits in exchange for community support for the project. In Los Angeles, the most celebrated and thriving CBA was implemented in the Figueroa Corridor between the L.A. Live/Staples Center Expansion and the relevant community. While the Staples Center displaced many of the Figueroa Corridor residents, the CBA allotted \$1,000,000 for the creation or improvement of parks and recreational facilities, an agreement to comply with the city’s living wage ordinance and to make all reasonable

efforts to reach the goal of ensuring that 70% of the jobs created by the project pay a living wage; an agreement to give priority hiring to persons displaced by the project and to low income individuals residing within three miles of the project, job training programs to be coordinated with community groups, a requirement that 20% of the residential units in the project be affordable, \$650,000 in interest-free loans to non-profit housing developers for the creation of additional affordable housing.⁶⁷ When I broached the subject with the planners, they responded enthusiastically: “There are issues that are so significant to constituents like childcare and workforce housing” that the other tools cannot necessarily address. Planners felt that the CBA should be used more aggressively throughout the city and that they should play a more active role in the CBA process.⁶⁸

XVII. Recommendations

In distilling the responses of the planners, I found a solid set of recommendations and strategies to discourage gentrification and displacement and promote appropriate growth in Los Angeles.

1. *The planning department must conduct new research determining the unintended consequences and turning them into intended consequences.* As we see from the planners comments, there is has not been any formal research regarding the scope of the tools’ consequences. This research must be done in order to exact intentional urban planning as opposed to inadvertently planned neighborhoods. Determining these consequences will help to promote appropriate growth throughout L.A.

⁶⁷ Staples Center CBA (See Appendix V)

⁶⁸ The USC specific plan and expansion project has met great opposition from community groups. The City Planning department will play an active role in developing a CBA for the affected neighborhood.

2. *Planners must use the toolkit approach intelligently.* Not only must planners create tools that are flexible and accurate for the diverse communities of Los Angeles, but the tools must be implemented appropriately based on community need. For example, just because a neighborhood needs pedestrian orientation does not necessarily mean that they need the commercial revitalization that the POD may provide. Using the toolkit approach alongside in depth research and community involvement will develop appropriate growth.
3. *Planners must reach out to constituents and community organizations.* The only way that appropriate growth can be achieved is if the community is involved in the process. Engaging communities and community organizations enables planners to *do real planning* as they can better reflect the needs of the neighborhood. Organizing and outreach potential also lies within communities, helping planners to promote and streamline the planning process. Communities are invaluable to planners since they ultimately determine what appropriate growth means for each diverse area.
4. *Communities and planners must work together to carefully craft CPIO's, Strategic Plans, and Q-conditions.* Even though these plans require a lot of time in order to be completely successful, using the tools to their full capacity will further ensure appropriate levels of growth for each community.
5. *Planners must work more closely with other city agencies.* Every city agency has a range of influence and authority and the planning department could effectively utilize the resources of other departments to achieve appropriate growth. For example, both the CRA and the Housing department have funds for developing housing. If the agencies collaborated, the planning department's zoning tools could more effectively promote affordable housing.

6. *Find a way to implement a mixed-income housing ordinance in Los Angeles.* The thought of reorganizing a mixed-income housing campaign in the current political climate may seem daunting for the planning department and community organizations. Until mixed-income housing becomes a reality, there will be no official affordable housing mandate in Los Angeles. The LADCP must play an active role in promoting a mixed-income housing ordinance. A more appropriate route may be putting energy into repealing the prohibitive Costa-Hawkins state legislation.
7. *Help negotiate Community Benefit Agreements between communities and developers.* CBA's have been highly successful in promoting appropriate growth strategies in Los Angeles, but they could be more effective if the planning department took a more active role in their creation.

XVIII. Conclusion

The discussion of these policy recommendations reveals that there is still much more to be done in Los Angeles in terms of promoting appropriate growth. However, the forward-looking bent of these policy recommendations show that the LA DCP has made great progress in moving toward equitable city planning. In 2005, L.A. began the search for a new planning director. In response to this vacancy, some of the most progressive urban scholars, community organizations, and advocates wrote an open letter to the future planning director, outlining their views on the opportunity for innovative and progressive planning in Los Angeles. The Coalition for a Livable Los Angeles, as the progressive scholars, community organizations and advocates called themselves, demanded healthy neighborhoods based around transit oriented and mixed-use developments, a revised community plan process,

exploration of innovative planning strategies, community planning for safe and livable neighborhoods, etc. ⁶⁹ The parallels between this letter written in 2005 and the information I have discovered within the last year are astounding. Planners outlined most, if not all of these recommendations in the interviews I conducted with them. While the tools may not completely reflect the progressive will of the planners themselves, the discussion between planners and communities can help tease out the potential of the tools to promote appropriate growth. My research provides the context for this discussion by showing the community groups and the planners that the intentions of the *other* may not be so different from their own. Appropriate growth is achievable in Los Angeles.

⁶⁹ http://departments.oxy.edu/uepi/planning_director/open_letter.htm (See appendix)

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