

Final Report

# Duarte Town Center

Ad Hoc Committee



Presented to City Council March, 12 2013

## Committee Members

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*Vice-Chair, Tony Molina*

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## City Staff

*Craig Hensley, AICP, Community Development Director*

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## Committee Background

In March 2012, the City Council adopted a Resolution to establish the Town Center Ad Hoc Committee. The Committee included the seven members of the City's Economic Development Commission (EDC) and two citizen appointments from each of the five Councilmembers. The Committee met on the first Wednesday of each month and was organized so that the chairperson and vice-chair person of the EDC held the same role for the Committee.

The mix of EDC and citizen involvement was an important element of the Committee. The EDC is regularly tasked with addressing the City's economic development plan and in July 2011, the City Council adopted an Economic Development Strategy to guide the City's economic development goals for the next several years. One of the main goals of that plan was to "Implement Smart Land Use." Included in that goal was a task to address the Town Center area and to develop a plan for a mixed use development approach to the area.

Citizen involvement that came from the appointed members of the committee was also vitally important. For several years, the community has desired new development in the Town Center area. The Ad Hoc committee provided a great advantage having a good cross section of the community involved in studying the Town Center issue. The Committee and its work ensured that voice of the entire community was being heard.

## Committee Goals

The primary goal for the Town Center Ad Hoc Committee was to consider the potential for the Town Center area and prepare a recommendation to the City Council on a vision of the area and a plan to implement that vision.

The Committee set out to accomplish the following:

- Establish a study area on which to focus.
- Conduct an in depth study of the study area.
- Consider the feasibility and scope of a Duarte Town Center specific plan or other zoning document to allow more dense development in portions of the study area.

- Consider past activity and community studies of the area.
- Investigate existing property, use, ownership and maintenance.
- Consider development potential, short term and long term.
- Receive input from real estate professionals.
- Include the public in the process by holding a community workshop on the topic.

In general, the Committee felt that Duarte lacks a community gathering place, a place where pedestrians can shop, dine, walk, be entertained and enjoy; a place that helps define Duarte. The Committee understands that implementing this vision may take many years, but that the path to success is a unified community vision that the entire city can embrace. So the main goal of the Committee was to recommend to the City Council a path that will lead our City in the right direction.

## Setting of the Area

Duarte has never had a traditional downtown or city center area. Commercial development in Duarte has centered around strip center development along Huntington Drive and freeway oriented development. As Duarte developed, location of local important places such as City Hall, Community Center, Senior Center, School District Offices, Teen center and the Los Angeles County Library in the same area brought an increased focus on a specific area as the city's center.

The Town Center area has been developed over a period of years. There is a mix of older and newer development as well as a variety of property conditions. Some of the older and poorly maintained properties are impediments to a strong Town Center. There are many absentee landlords that own property in the study area and in too many cases these owners have done little to maintain and strengthen the properties that they own. Two of the prime examples of the negative impact of the negligence of absentee ownership, the Mike's Foods center and the Big Lot's center are located at the prime intersection in the study area, Huntington Drive and Buena Vista Street.

While the area has its share of negative influences, there are positives. The Andres Duarte Terrace senior apartments, the Ralph's shopping center and Andres Duarte Plaza are all newer and well maintained examples. This Town Center area has great potential for a variety of reasons. It is easily accessible from the 210 Freeway with access on Buena Vista Street; there are several underutilized properties that allow reasonable opportunities for redevelopment; the many civic buildings provide a strong community focus for the area; and there are many important local places nearby such as Duarte High School, Northview Middle School, the Performing Art Center and Santa Teresita.

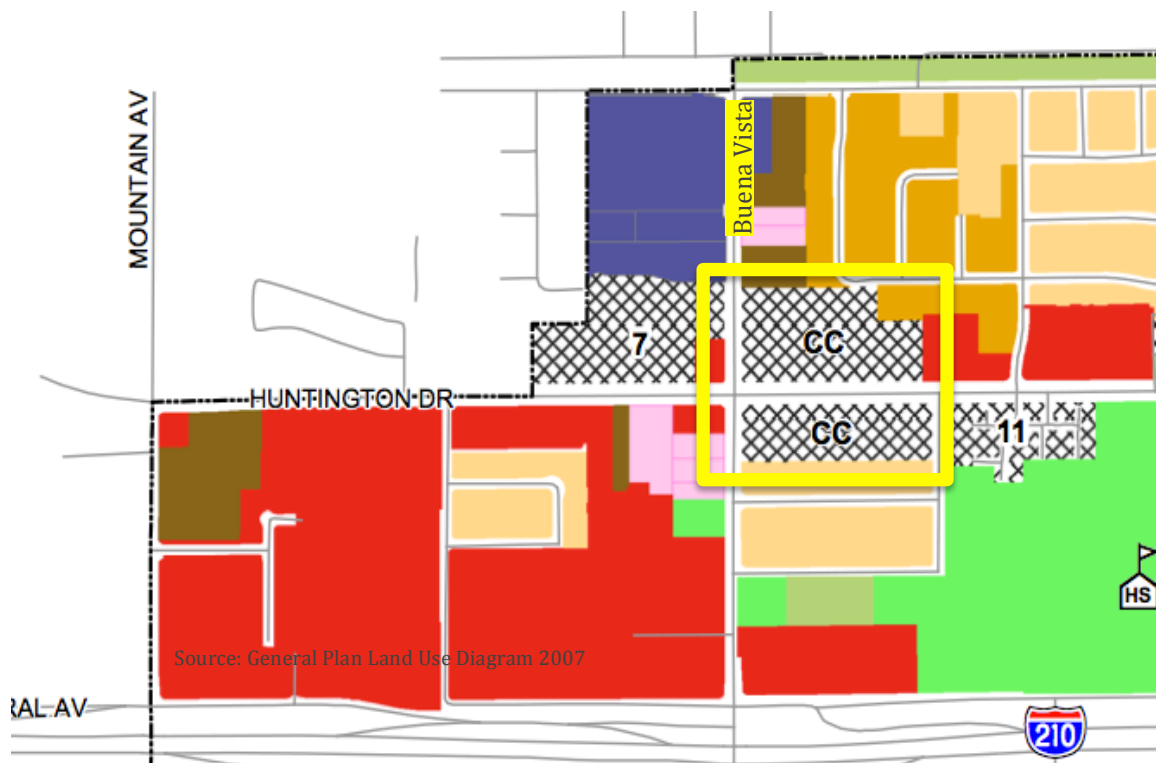
## Data and Studies Reviewed

To assist forming its recommendation, the Committee reviewed past information that was generated about the Town Center area and the community in general. As a part of its initial research the Committee reviewed the following documents:

**2003 Town Center Concept Plan** - Adopted by City Council in 2003, the Town Center Concept plan was a vision for Duarte's future that addressed the same general area that this Committee is addressing. The document was the work of a consultant, Moore Iacofano, Goltsman, Inc (MIG) and a task force appointed by the City Council at that time. The plan called for mixes of uses combining retail and housing, office and housing or office and retail. It encourages infill development over time, a pedestrian friendly environment and streetscape improvements.

**Duarte General Plan** - The General Plan is considered the City's blueprint for the future. It lays out the vision for how the City is to be developed over the next 10 to 20 years and beyond. The plan contains many goals designed to help City officials and the community to preserve the community while building a future that enhances the quality of life for Duarte residents. It was adopted by City Council in 2007.

The Land Use Element outlines the goals for the "City Center" area. This area was generally defined as the Big Lots Center, Romo Automotive and the Burger King site. This was a smaller area than the area outlined in the 2003 Town Center Concept Plan.



**Duarte Economic Development Strategy** - The Economic Development Strategy provides an overview of Duarte's demographic and economic characteristics, retail sales, housing stock, employment and industry overview, and strategies for economic. It was adopted by City Council in 2011.

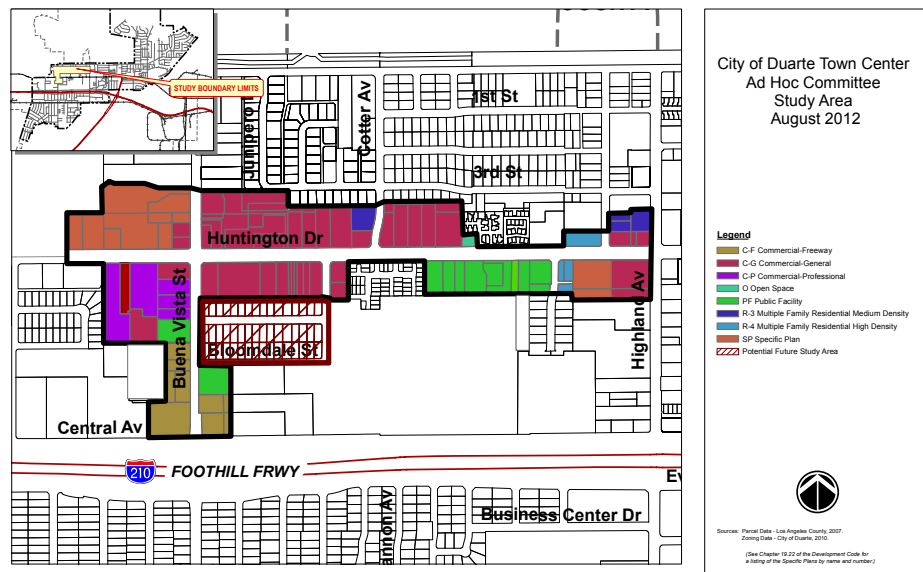
**Duarte Development Code** - The Duarte Development Code (DDC) promotes the public health, safety and general welfare and implements the policies of the General Plan. The DDC establishes land use districts (zones) designated to promote the orderly growth of the community. In addition to regulating use of property, the DDC also provides standards such as building setbacks, height of structures and lot area.

The Committee also reviewed, demographic data, the City's zoning map and detailed aerial photographs of the study area as part of its in depth analysis.

## Defining Study Area/Study Area Boundaries

The Ad Hoc Committee agrees with the general boundaries of the 2003 Town Center concept plan. Starting from this point, the Ad Hoc Committee selected the boundaries indicated in the map below.

Creating a Town Center that would have the chance to grow and change over time was important to the Committee and the Committee felt that a focus on both Huntington Drive and Buena Vista Street was essential.



## Underutilized Properties

At its June 2012 meeting, the Committee selected properties that it felt were underutilized or that it felt warranted major aesthetic improvement in the coming years. The Committee used the following definition to generate the underutilized properties list: *An under utilized property is, generally, a property that can be developed with more density including additional square footage, more stories, increased lot coverage and has buildings that may be in a good or a deteriorated state. It may also be a property where the aesthetic qualities of the buildings are not at a standard acceptable to the community.* This exercise was meant to build consensus on how much change was appropriate in the future. This discussion included understanding property zoning, so the current plan for maximum build out was understood. Table 1, beginning on the next page, is a listing of the properties that the Committee felt were underutilized.

List of Underutilized Properties		Table 1
Address	Description/Comments	
1434 Buena Vista St.	Performance Nissan. Corner parcel should be developed, balance of property car sales.	
1427 Buena Vista St.	Old Spaghetti Factory. Parking north of building should be assembled with east frontage Car Max parking area and developed.	
1131 Central Avenue	Car Max, east frontage parking area (1319 Buena Vista St.) see above row.	
1235 Buena Vista St.	Office. Underutilized property. Should be assembled to create larger development piece.	
1227 Buena Vista St.	Office. Underutilized property. Should be assembled to create larger development piece.	
1219 Buena Vista St.	Office. Underutilized property. Should be assembled to create larger development piece.	
1200 Huntington Dr.	Duarte Inn. Hotel. Underutilized, poorly maintained. Should be assembled to create larger development piece.	
1202-1210 Huntington Dr.	Commercial Center. Underutilized, poorly maintained. Should be assembled to create larger development piece.	
1212 Huntington Dr.	El Pollo Loco. Underutilized, poorly maintained. Should be assembled to create larger development piece.	
1214 Huntington Dr.	Apartments. Should be assembled to create larger development piece.	
1220 Huntington Dr.	Monrovia Convalescent Hospital. Underutilized, poorly maintained. Should be assembled to create larger development piece.	
1230 Huntington Dr.	Office. Underutilized property. Should be assembled to create larger development piece.	
1302-1420 Huntington Dr.	Mike's Food Center and Carl's. Underutilized, poorly maintained. In need of complete renovation or redevelopment.	
1303 Huntington Dr.	Liquor Store. Underutilized, poorly maintained. Should be removed for more appropriate development with positive corner focus.	
1307-1355 Huntington Dr.	Big Lot's Center. Underutilized, poorly maintained. In need of complete renovation or redevelopment.	
1409 Huntington Dr.	Romo Automotive. Underutilized property. Should be assembled to create larger development piece.	
1423-1437 Huntington Dr.	Vacant. Underutilized property. Should be assembled to create larger development piece.	
1475 Huntington Dr.	One West Bank. Building in good shape, could be developed at higher density.	
1430-1440 Huntington Dr.	Bank of America and Offices. Underutilized. Could be developed at higher density or with more up to date building.	
1501 Huntington Dr.	Ranchero. Underutilized. Could be developed at higher density or with more up to date building.	
1515 Huntington Dr.	Rancho Inn Motel. Underutilized, poorly maintained. In need of complete renovation or redevelopment. Could be assembled to create larger development piece.	
1521 Huntington Dr.	Village Restaurant. Underutilized, poorly maintained. In need of complete renovation or redevelopment. Could be assembled to create larger development piece.	
1533 Huntington Dr.	Days Inn. Underutilized. Could be developed at higher density or with more up to date building.	
1701-1723 Huntington Dr.	Auto repair and Sushi restaurant. Underutilized and poorly maintained. Property in need of redevelopment and should be developed at higher density or with more up to date building.	
1735-1745 Huntington Dr.	Commercial Center. Underutilized and poorly maintained. Property in need of redevelopment	



	and should be developed at higher density or with more up to date building.
1118-1122 Oak Ave.	Multi-family. Underutilized, poorly maintained. In need of complete redevelopment. Could be developed with adjacent Huntington Dr. pieces at higher density.
1755 Huntington Dr.	Office building. Underutilized. Could be developed at higher density or with more up to date building.
1115-1139 Highland Ave.	Apartments. Not poorly maintained, but could be assembled with Huntington Dr. and Oak Ave. properties for higher density development.
1750-1764 Huntington Dr.	Office building. Underutilized. Could be developed at higher density or with more up to date building.

## Community Meeting

On Wednesday, October 3, 2012, the Town Center Ad Hoc Committee held a Community Workshop to discuss the Town Center area. To announce the community workshop invitations were posted at various locations throughout the City, such as City Hall, Los Angeles County Library, the Senior Center and Starbucks. An invitation was also placed on the City's website and flyers, in English and Spanish, were provided to every elementary school student in all local public schools.

Approximately 15 people attended the community workshop and provided comments on a variety of issues that included: Appropriateness of the Study Area Boundaries; What Type of Development Would You Like in the Town Center area; and Strengths and Weaknesses of the Area.

The following are comments that were received:

### Input on study area boundaries

Big Lots and Mikes Food Centers are unattractive;  
Mike's Food parking lot needs repair;  
Create gathering place in vacant areas, gathering place qualities: nice and upscale, with cafe tables, fountains, comfortable;  
some desire no housing;  
desire for a town center at Goldline stop;  
place to attract fashion retail stores;  
comment made to expand into northerly residential area;  
established boundary heart of the city but not coherent, need right set of stores;  
group stores into shopping centers;  
put in more youth friendly developments.

What type of development would be desired within the project area?

Picturesque gathering area with trees, sitting area, fountain; provides youth activities, food options, cafes, and opportunities for upscale bars;  
 restaurants with outdoor seating;  
 capitalize on Route 66 theme, draw visitors from City of Hope, segment and connect types;  
 bring a variety of retail stores; build on strengths of our successful businesses;  
 safety; warm and fuzzy feeling;  
 mixed use in certain areas;  
 consideration for parking (enough for residents);  
 bring entertainment uses;  
 encourage themed architecture, multi-level developments;  
 consider views and keep feeling of small town;  
 move library into the town center area;  
 set up community services building; transparency in the projects for the community.

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the project area?

*Strengths –*

ordinances are in place to keep up the maintenance of shopping centers but need enforcement of ordinances that are in place;  
 ability to build on cultural and demographic mix of the City;  
 local city operated transit;  
 City of Hope;  
 current landscaping on lots (trees);  
 small town/quiet/rural community;  
 bike/horse trail path.

*Weaknesses –*

multiple ownerships in certain centers;  
 aesthetics of the Mike's Food and Big Lots shopping Centers; marketability,  
 too few pedestrian friendly businesses;  
 Not all businesses people friendly;  
 lack of aesthetics cohesiveness;  
 lack of higher end stores;  
 lack of City of Hope traffic to area;  
 no plan to implement downtown center;  
 bring businesses that attract customers from out of the area;  
 need for more youth and young adult related establishments.

## Progress Over in the Past 10 Years

The Committee believes that the 2003 Town Center Concept Plan was a step in the right direction. Many good things have happened in the study area over the past 10 years, such as:

Huntington and Pops Road (SCPH Phase 1) – July 2004, City acquired the property for an 80 senior housing project. Construction of 80-unit senior housing project completed in May 2006.

SWC Huntington and Pops Road – In January 2005, City acquired Evergreen Motel site. The site was cleared is now vacant land.

1565-1605 Huntington Drive – 17-unit residential project completed in 2008. A market study indicated that mixed-use would not work on that site for the following reasons: mid-block location, size and depth of the property, surrounding land uses (per the June 2004 minutes). Options studied included mixed use (including retail, restaurant, and residential) and two that included retail and restaurant with outdoor patio and access to Third Street. Direction was given to incorporate a public plaza into a portion of the development (see Duarte Plaza).

Duarte Plaza – A 9,100 s.f. public plaza located across from City Hall completed in January 2009.

1551 Huntington – Grace Fellowship Church – Remodel and expansion completed in 2011.

Huntington and Pops Road (SCPH Phase II) - The Andres Duarte Specific Plan was amended 2011, to facilitate the construction of a 43-unit senior housing project. Construction is anticipated in mid-2013.

The Committee also believes that the outlook of the area is positive. At the November 7, 2012 Ad Hoc Committee meeting, the Charles Company gave a presentation regarding development in the study area. The proposed development would include a complete renovation of the Big Lot's Center, a new commercial development on the Huntington Drive/Buena Vista Street intersection and a new high density apartment project on the vacant lots between One West Bank and the Big Lots Center. While there are many details still to work out, the proposal is motivated by the 2003 Town Center vision. The Committee unanimously supported the conceptual idea presented by the Charles Company.

## Town Center Vision

The Town Center Ad Hoc Committee believes that the framework of the 2003 Town Center Concept Plan will provide a path to move the city forward and that its work is an extension of that vision. The City has had the vision for a Town Center for some time and although many good things have happened in the area, the vision needs to be restated. Therefore, the Committee recommends the following vision statement:

Duarte's Town Center is an attractive mixed-use activity center that offers a "sense of place" or focal point for the community. The mix of uses includes retail stores, restaurants, housing, civic buildings and central public plazas with open space. These central spaces and the uses around them serve as Duarte's civic and cultural hub – an active, dynamic social gathering space for the entire city. The Town Center is one of many districts that compromise the city, linking other activity areas throughout the community.

Duarte's Town Center is family-oriented and pedestrian friendly, inviting people to stroll along storefronts, dine outdoors at a café, relax with friends on a lawn or bench, enjoy public art and come together for community events. This Town Center provides amenities for people of all ethnicities, ages, orientations and income levels, reflecting and celebrating the diversity of our city's residents.

Duarte's Town Center is economically strong and diverse. It preserves and enhances the City's existing locally owned businesses while attracting some larger, more regionally oriented anchor commercial uses. New stores and services in the Town Center improve the City's retail tax base while complimenting, rather than competing with, established businesses in other parts of town and neighboring cities. Duarte's economic position is also bolstered by its proximity to major transportation corridors, including Huntington Drive/Route 66, I-210, I-605 and the Gold Line.

Duarte's Town Center has a distinctive design that draws upon the City's history while looking forward to modern architectural styles. Influential themes such as Route 66 imagery help to create a truly unique, innovative and vibrant Town Center for residents to enjoy long into the future.

## Final Recommendation to City Council for Action

To fully implement the Town Center vision, the Town Center Ad Hoc Committee recommends the following to the City Council:

- 1) That the Town Center Study Area be established as proposed by the Ad Hoc Committee and shown in Exhibit A.
- 2) Provide budgeted funding to develop a Specific Plan that follows the development principles set forth in the 2003 Town Center Concept Plan. The focus of this Specific Plan will be to: implement the Town Center Vision; encourage and promote mixed-use development in the area; and to set forth a plan for streetscape improvements in the area.

The Committee further recommends that the City Council extend the timeframe for the Town Center As Hoc Committee and utilize the Committee as an “on-call” committee to advise in the development of the zoning document.

## Report Attachments

Exhibit A	Town Center Study Area Map
Exhibit B	Town Center – Underutilized property map
Exhibit C	Community Workshop Flyer (English Version)