



# STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

*Summary of Feedback*

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May 22, 2020



# Introduction

From September to December 2019, the General Plan Update Team conducted 22 stakeholder interviews, intended to touch generally on aspects of Culver City's character and vision, and 14 specialized stakeholder discussions focused on arts, culture, and the creative economy. The results from these 36 stakeholder interviews are summarized in this report.

## Who did we interview?

The 22 broad-reaching interviews included industry leaders, educational entities, political representatives, and organizations:

- Amazon Studios
- Antioch University
- Ballona Creek Renaissance
- Boys and Girls Club, Mar Vista Gardens Branch
- City of Culver City
  - Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee
  - City Council
  - City Council GPU Subcommittee
  - Disability Advisory Committee
  - Committee on Homelessness
  - Parks, Recreation, and Community Services Commission
  - Planning Commission
- Culver City Chamber of Commerce
- Downtown Business Association (DBA)
- Exchange Club of Culver City
- Hackman Capital Partners
- HBO (Network)
- Leadership Culver City
- LOWE Enterprises
- Mayme Clayton Museum
- Senior Citizens Association Board
- Sony Studios
- Sotheby's Institute of Art, Los Angeles
- Upward Bound House
- Walkers n' Rollers
- Wende Museum
- West LA Community College
- Westfield Mal

The 14 arts, culture, and creative economy report interviews included architects, City stakeholders, and others:

- Several architecture firms in Culver City
  - Abramson Architects
  - Cuningham Group
  - Eric Owen Moss Architects
  - Ehrlich Yanai Rhee Chaney Architects
  - KFA Architecture
  - wHY Architecture
- A few artists living/working in Culver City
- City of Culver City Council and Departments
  - City Council
  - Cultural Affairs Commission
  - Cultural Affairs staff
  - Economic Development Division
  - Parks, Recreation, and Community Services Department
  - Planning Division
- Culver City Arts District
- Culver City Arts Foundation
- Culver City Historian
- Culver City Historical Society
- Culver City Symphony Orchestra
- Culver City Unified School District
- Jazz Hands for Autism
- Kirk Douglas Theatre
- Lowe
- Mayme A. Clayton Library and Museum
- The Actor's Gang
- Vox Femina Los Angeles
- Wende Museum

## What did we ask?

Four key questions guided the broad-reaching interviews:

- I. What makes Culver City unique and special?
- II. What are the things you like best about Culver City that you would like to stay the same?
- III. What are the things you like the least about Culver City that you would like to change?
- IV. Imagine yourself living or working in Culver City in 20 years. What do you want to see?

Three additional questions, focused on arts, culture, and the creative economy:

- I. What are the current efforts, policies, and studies on the topic?
- II. What are the key considerations and concerns for the planning process?
- III. What are the arts, culture, and creative economy assets and opportunities?

## Summary of Findings

### What did we hear from general interviews?

Comments received at these meetings are consolidated thematically into four major categories: Uniqueness, Characteristics to Celebrate, Opportunities for Change, and Vision + Cross-Cutting Themes.

#### Uniqueness

- Small-town feel
- High quality of public services
- Family-oriented and safe streets
- Many community events year-round
- Community knows elected leaders
- Good public schools
- Everyone knows each other
- Arts and movie history
- Accessible public agency staff
- Central in the region, "meet in Culver"

#### Characteristics to Celebrate

- Small-town feel
- Quality of public services
- Downtown as the core of the city
- Diversity of small businesses
- Suburban residential vibe
- Differentiation from Los Angeles

#### Opportunities for Change

##### Development

- Pace of growth and development is too fast
- Missed opportunities for community benefits and cohesion in the public realm
- Housing and commercial should go hand-in-hand in new developments
- Assembling land for large-scale change requires developers to be patient
- Developers should be able to choose from a community benefits menu
- Encourage businesses to hire locally
- City is at a critical juncture between becoming a playground for the super-rich or a super-dense urban environment – or something else entirely!
- Focus on truly affordable housing
- Develop a mechanism to require feedback from the community in redevelopment

##### Economic Growth

- 10,000 new employees in the next 5-10 years
- Fear of commercial gentrification but unsure about commercial rent stabilization
- Concern over automation and technology
- Concern over the high turnover rate of restaurants and uncertainty of labor costs
- Creative economy will continue growing
- Mall may no longer have commercial viability

##### Changing Demographics

- More newcomers are higher income
- More residents without community roots
- Hourly wage workers are priced out
- An aging population, with 10% over age 90
- Young people want different things and do not get involved with local politics
- Youth do not have many places to hang out, could benefit from programming

## Transportation, Mobility, and Parking

- There is more neighborhood passthrough traffic
- Micromobility companies have not embraced first/last mile solutions and may not be viable to form long-term partnerships with
- Priced out workers have longer-distance commutes
- Very sensitive topic, some progressive solutions may lead to frustration for

residents who rely on private vehicles for travel

- Need to develop parking standards
- Put in safeguards and considerations for accessibility needs of the aging population
- Increase walk signal timing for seniors
- Ensure construction does not interfere with ADA standards for walkability

## Streetscape

- Not enough lighting, especially on neighborhood streets
- If you are outside of Downtown, it can be hard to feel a part of the city because streetscape and design is so different

- Need engaging and active sidewalks
- Connectivity between the Culver City neighborhoods is poor
- Wider sidewalks near dining to create more space and activate streets

## Arts + Culture

- Increase awareness of institutions, assets
- Develop stronger partnerships between the City of Culver City and arts community
- Rename Washington Boulevard to Louie Armstrong Boulevard
- Look at how public art can be used for cohesive city branding
- Connect art to social issues and solutions
- Standards for land use related to arts + cultural facilities usage and development
- Connect and celebrate local organizations

- Assess the role of the City as events programmer and determine if a shift is needed
- City as a facilitator of funding, resources
- Program Culver City Steps as town plaza
- Partner with local and national arts organizations and institutions
- Maximize joint use of existing facilities, like the Frost Auditorium at CC High School
- Develop a network of new investors as benefactors of the arts
- Enhance Japanese, Oaxacan, Brazilian, and other cultural enclave identities

## Parks + Open Space

- Redo City Hall's "front door" as a park
- Focus on "space between" developments
- Set standards for "quasi-public" spaces in private developments
- Naturalize Ballona Creek
- Cap Ballona Creek to create at-grade parks
- Look at the entirety of watershed for specific points to naturalize Ballona Creek
- Close off Culver Boulevard from Duquesne Ave to Main St to create a 'rambla,' or pedestrian-only street.

- Change policies to allow adult sports leagues to operate on city sports fields
- Review findings from the parks needs assessment and prioritize infrastructure improvements
- Provide scholarships for youth participation in programs and activities
- Big need for facilities to be upgraded for people with disabilities

## Downtown

- A linear downtown of the future
- Preserve storefronts, build towers above
- Increase central business district density, allowing housing development

- Develop opportunities for partnerships across institutions to support changes
- Polish look of Downtown, from City Hall to Media Park

## Commercial Corridors

- Mixed use along boulevards-Washington, Sepulveda, Culver, others

- Corridor planning could be bad if there is no foot traffic to activate the space

- Room for more office and hotel development
- Venice Boulevard currently a highway, not conducive to activity

## Key Neighborhoods + Assets for Change

- Fox Hills
  - A lot of visions for change, need community interest alignment
  - Needs a transportation hub to better connect to the rest of Culver City
  - African American neighborhood annexed from LA and the community feels underrepresented in Culver City politics and decisions
  - Could make a second downtown
- "The Finger" (Costco area)
  - A forgotten area in people's imagination and in practice/effect
  - Need to focus on improving Washington; add more housing
- Antioch University and West LA College are assets with different strengths to offer the City
- Hayden Tract
  - All the buildings turn their back to Ballona Creek, need creek frontages
  - Workers want amenities (daycare, restaurants, dry cleaning, etc.)
  - Sometimes residents of other neighborhoods feel like the Hayden Tract area is not part of the city or like they have things to do there
- Perception that traffic in the neighborhood limits activity or makes it less welcoming
- Ballona Creek Trail
  - There is a perception of lack of safety that does not match the reality
  - Limited access points create a safety trap on the trail for users
  - The City has a limited presence in terms of policing and maintenance
  - More and more motorized vehicles going too fast for other uses
  - Used by students in the morning, walking and biking to school
- Arts and culture institutions and organizations can be better-connected to Culver City brand
- Transit Oriented District /Arts District
  - Jobs, startups, creative businesses
  - Not very good connections to other mobility options or to high-activity places
  - Most receptive to change
  - Residents in other neighborhoods sometimes feel like community benefits in this area are not benefitting them directly

## Fiscal Stability

- Use participatory budgeting process to better engage the community in prioritizing budget
- Get businesses' buy-in for proposed tax increases and revenue policies
- Stabilize cultural economic resources, such as through long-term business leases for small businesses

## Political Landscape

- Try to find a way to be innovative and iterative in getting a vision for Culver City
- Many objections are related to loss of street parking or perceived nuisances
- City needs to be more aggressive with developers and new employers to support building a Culver City for all
- Community opposition is intense, but needs must be addressed
- From the outside, Culver City can appear insular and disconnected from the region
- Most racially and ethnically diverse City Council in City history
- Trying to solve the problems of the world
- Tensions between more tenured residents and newer residents
- A disconnect between the Planning Commission and City Council
- 30% turnout in an off-cycle election

## Vision + Cross-Cutting Themes

- A more connected Culver City, physically and emotionally
- Housing stock provides for all levels of affordability

- Embraces and is supportive of its small businesses
- Keeps dynamic services – police/fire/school
- Collaborative environment
- Improves streetscape for all
- Shared histories are used as a basis for shared goals for the future
- Aging in place is made easier
- Accessibility barriers are removed
- A vibrant street life in Culver City
  - Areas with pedestrian-oriented open streets/ramblas
  - More inviting and vibrant corridors
  - Innovations in the movement of people through, to, and from the city
- Planned alignment to the rail stations as hubs of mobility
- Cultural Corridor concept developed into a meaningful district, centered on arts, culture, music
- Shake off smallness and connect to the global creative economy
- Smart, connected Culver City infrastructure systems and services
  - Data used to identify projects of great need
  - Planning for technology and innovation
- A livable and environmentally sustainable Culver City
- A fiscally stable Culver City

## What did we hear from arts, culture, and creative economy interviews?

### Current Efforts, Policies, + Studies

- Change how the outside world sees Culver City:
  - Music in the Chambers
  - Boulevard Music Summer Festival
  - Special Events Grant Program
- High level of support and coordination with City partners
- Art in Public Places Program Ordinance
- Cultural Trust Fund – developers' 1% in-lieu fee plus other contributions
- Creative Economy Report (2014)
- Culver City Arts Foundation

### Key Considerations + Planning Concerns

- Not enough funding and staffing
- Cultural Affairs Division funding suffered with Redevelopment Agency dissolution
- Changing role of City staff and types of services needed to be better integrated
- Staying true to Culver City's cultural identity, partly defined as the "home and workplace" of the film industry, emphasizing "blue-collar" workers (tech, production, etc.) as opposed to "talent"
- Gap between the City's valuing of arts and culture and its actual support
- Creative sector is in transition "from Screenland to Streamland"
- Expansive definition of arts in Culver City includes creativity in architecture, film, digital, culinary, style, etc.
- Traffic and parking issues affect the arts

### Assets + Opportunities

- Be more consistent with Culver City brand
- Tell the story of Culver City as a narrative
- Culver City's creative identity is strong and growing hip, a collecting point for creative industries, more than film and design community now
- Integrate creative economy into more functions and issues, like land use and housing
- Develop the Cultural Corridor, from Veterans Memorial Auditorium to Ivy Substation
  - Succession planning for Cultural Affairs through GPU
  - Opportunity to reassess and improve existing arts programs
- Update the historic preservation inventory and reassess the City's role in preservation efforts/programs

- Address structural public and private funding issues
- Better support through permissions and other non-financial assistance for arts uses, facilities, and projects in the city – create a “culture of yes”
- Explore City partnerships with tech sector companies
- Embrace a role in the global creative community – be a place that welcomes and supports artists and their innovation
  - Appetite for bold, innovative ideas
  - Individual artists and creatives are a collective asset and opportunity
  - Pay attention to the needs of individual artists and creatives
  - Make more strategic use of Culver City’s business, community, and creative individuals
- Increase access to programming, better integrate the arts in people’s daily lives
- Enliven cityscape with programming that engages the public
- Gaps in arts marketing to the community – too much noise in the environment
- Exemplary commitment to arts education in the school district – what is the City’s role?
- There are wonderful arts facilities but also gaps and needs, including the Veterans Memorial
- Opportunity for creativity in urban planning – Culver City as a demonstration of alternatives to undesirable development found elsewhere - leverage small scale and location as regional crossroads

## Conclusion

Stakeholders interviewed in this first phase of public outreach upheld Culver City’s “small-town feel” and its high quality of public services as the characteristics that make it most unique and which are priorities to uphold. Interviewees from both the broad-reaching and focused interviews expressed similar attitudes of appreciation and excitement towards the assets and opportunities to enhance the arts, culture, and creative economy through the GPU.

Many stakeholders identified a tension between residents who are open to versus resistant to change. This tension was most evident in discussions about changes to zoning, transportation priorities, and streetscape design. Nevertheless, the opportunities for change that are identified and grouped thematically in this report show that the stakeholders are collectively excited and eager for a comprehensive update to guide Culver City forward into its next 25 years. At the heart of it, stakeholders expressed a shared desire to enhance the quality of life for all in Culver City.