



From the City Manager's Desk

a weekly report from Scott Ochoa, City of Monrovia



August 31, 2007

Is summer over yet?!?

It is too hot. To quote Neil Simon's *Biloxi Blues*, "This is Africa hot...Tarzan couldn't stand this heat." Thank goodness that autumn is just around the corner.

Food, Wine & Jazz Festival Getting Ready to Kick-off

Please scroll down to the Community Services Happenings section of this report to get detailed information on the upcoming Food Wine and Jazz Festival on Sunday, September 9 in Library Park. This promises to be a great event and it's for a great cause, the Monrovia Library Foundation. See you there!

City Council Agenda Preview

The September 4 City Council meeting will be marked by the Council's consideration of several very important items.

We will start the evening at 6 p.m. with a special presentation to recognize the "graduation" of the YES! Program interns. As you will recall, this summer 27 Monrovia youth participated in the Mayor & City Council's Youth Employment Service program, or YES! Program. These young people gave up the chance to have fun with their friends this summer in order to learn about real-world work experiences, and to earn money. This program is both a job development initiative and an opportunity to open young peoples' eyes to the possibilities that exist -- for their lives and careers -- if they are able to continue with their formal education. It was a tremendous summer, and I hope you'll be able to join us for the commencement program prior to the City Council meeting.

We will begin the Council meeting with the presentation of four new Police Department employees – our new Police Services Supervisor Bonnie Paredes, Animal Control Officer Rhonda Reynolds and Police Officers Jose Pacheco and Alex Galindo. Ms. Paredes takes the place of retiring Services Supervisor Carmen Acosta, while Ms. Reynolds is the first of two highly-experienced animal control officers that the City is hiring, as we bring those services back in-house. Officers Pacheco and Galindo are both academy recruits who are filling spots within the Department that opened due to normal attrition. We will continue to see, I believe, an ongoing decrease in the median age of our Police Department personnel as more and more Baby Boomer-aged officers and staff reach retirement. This makes our recruitment efforts all the more critical, as every other police agency in California is wrestling with the same dilemma. I'm sure all four of these new employees will continue to uphold the excellent tradition of the Monrovia Police Department.

Under Public Hearings, item PH-1 is a continued hearing from the August 7 City Council meeting. This item concerns an amendment of the Municipal Code, Title 17 (Zoning), pertaining to permitted uses in the commercial and industrial zones. Specifically, this item deals with a change in the definition of allowed uses in the Historic Commercial Downtown (HCD) district along Myrtle Avenue.

Currently, the HCD zone allows for retail uses, restaurants, financial institutions, service commercial uses, administrative and professional uses, and other miscellaneous uses that are determined to be compatible. This amendment would exclude from the definition of "service commercial", beauty salons, nail salons, barbershops, and dog grooming uses. The rationale behind this recommendation is that there are currently quite a number of beauty salons on Myrtle Avenue, and while it is not envisioned or recommended that these existing uses be removed, staff does believe that there should be a curb on their proliferation. In other words, it is in the long-term best interest of Myrtle Avenue to be anchored by retail and restaurant uses, and other commercial applications that tend to spark ancillary business activity.

This is not a new concept for Old Town's Myrtle Avenue, as there is today an overlay zone that precludes certain uses on the street, such as doctor's offices. By the same token, beauty salons, et al, would still be allowed in the planned development zones along the side streets that intersect with Myrtle Avenue (such as Colorado Boulevard and Lemon Avenue). Staff is recommending this amendment as part of an effort to ensure Myrtle Avenue's long-term economic viability and vitality as a shopping and dining destination.

Under the Redevelopment Agency, we have one public hearing and two administrative items. MRA-PH-1 is a joint public hearing between the City Council and Agency Board of Directors to consider the Disposition and Development Agreement (DDA) with 820 South Magnolia Avenue, LLC, regarding property located at 820 S. Magnolia Avenue.

In November 2006, the Agency Board authorized the acquisition of property located at 1675 S. Primrose Ave, from Azteca Milling with the intention that this property (which is adjacent to the Gold Line right-of-way) would be incorporated into the proposed Station Square development. As part of this negotiation, the Agency was obliged to purchase Azteca Milling's warehouse – the subject property at 820 S. Magnolia Avenue – as well. At the time, it was uncertain how the Magnolia property would ultimately be disposed of by the Agency.

After a number of community meetings regarding the proposed Station Square project, it became obvious that there were many local businesses in the Station Square project area (specifically, the Hamby Park industrial condominium complex) that could be displaced by the project, yet want to be relocated somewhere else in the City of Monrovia. As time is of the essence in this matter, Agency staff began working with the Station Square developer to cultivate a project at the Magnolia property that would be used as a relocation site for businesses from the Station Square area. For several reasons, however, it quickly became apparent that the Agency would have to take a lead role in the redevelopment of the Magnolia site.

In creating a site plan and assembling costs from local builders, the Agency was approached by the principals of the development group that would become 820 South Magnolia Avenue, LLC, with an offer to buy the property at the Agency's cost and develop the property as a relocation site for Station Square businesses. Thus, the proposed DDA not only allows the Agency to fully recoup its initial investment in the property, but also creates 10 industrial condominium units that will be available for displaced businesses from the Station Square area.

Staff recommends approval of the proposed Disposition and Development Agreement between the Monrovia Redevelopment Agency and 820 South Magnolia Avenue, LLC.

Under the MRA's Administrative Reports, item MRA AR-1 is the authorization to acquire real property located at 1714 S. California Avenue from Foodmaker's Equipment Sales and Service, LLC, for the total consideration of \$5.1 million.

Again, reflecting on the proposed Station Square project, the Agency has begun to aggressively assemble property within the entire 80 acre site. Already, the Agency has obtained in interest to purchase property immediately adjacent to 1714 S. California Avenue and this acquisition cements the Agency's holdings in this area. Under the proposed terms, Agency would acquire title to the property for the total consideration of \$5.1 million. Of this amount, \$2.1 million would be due at the close of escrow and the owner would take back a fully amortize five-year promissory note for the balance, at a 7% interest rate. The Agency has the option to pre-pay this note at any time without penalty. Staff is recommending approval of this acquisition based on the terms, the Agency's certified appraisal and the need to consolidate land holdings in this area for proposed future development.

Item MRA AR-2 is the authorization to amend the Old Town Business Development Assistance program. Nearly two years ago, the Agency Board authorized the appropriation of \$100,000 from the Economic Development Fund to be used as a revolving loan program by downtown businesses looking to expand their operations. In the intervening time, however, it has become apparent that a missing ingredient in this business development strategy was that it did not have a component feature for attracting new business to the downtown area. Thus, staff is recommending the augmentation of the existing program – both in scope and in funding – to maximize our opportunities to attract the strongest retailers and restaurants to Old Town Monrovia.

Under the new program, prospective businesses for Old Town that meet certain criteria would be eligible for a matching grant. It would basically mean the Redevelopment Agency paying for that business's City permit and entitlement fees, up to a maximum of \$35,000.

The only way that the prospective business could achieve the grant (let alone the maximum grant) is by continuing to progress through the City's entitlement process from architecture review to plan check to pulling building permits, etc.

Intensive projects that would trigger the expenditure of the full \$35,000 grant would also, in all probability, trigger a reassessment of the property that the business would occupy. This would result in increased property tax dollars being paid to the City, as well as the sales tax revenues that would be generated by the business activity. Thus, the "matching grant" would ultimately be repaid by the business that benefits from the program.

An additional component piece of this program is a "broker bounty" element that contemplates a maximum \$1,000 bounty to duly-licensed commercial real estate brokers who are able to secure in Old Town retailers, restaurants and other tenants that meet a certain business profile that the City desires. All of these components of the proposed expanded program are the net result of surveys of other agencies in the region, consultations with downtown businesses and property owners, the real estate brokerage community and incoming retailers to the Old Town district.

As stated above, there is \$100,000 in the current fiscal year budget appropriated for downtown business development; under this proposed program. Staff is recommending that the Agency Board appropriate an additional \$20,000 for a total of \$120,000 to be available through this program. Grants and bounties would be allocated on a first-come, first-served basis.

Under reports of City Council members, Councilman Adams has asked for a discussion among the Council regarding the study and potential creation of a revolving loan program for owners of multifamily property in the city. The idea would be to make available moderately priced loans to be used for building and property rehabilitation.

Lastly, under Administrative Reports, item AR-1 is an amendment to the agreement with Bernards Bros. to include program management services for the Monrovia Public Library as a Multi-Prime Construction project in amount not to exceed \$1.428 million.

On April 3, the City Council approved entering into a contract with Bernard Bros. for construction management services for the construction of the new Monrovia Public Library. While researching library construction projects in California, staff has become very supportive of the construction model known as "multi-prime construction." The difference between multi-prime construction and traditional general contracting program construction is that it essentially eliminates the role of the general contractor. Another way to look at it is that it brings the role of the general contractor in-house – on a flat fee – and makes the relationship between the City and the general contractor collaborative, as opposed to adversarial.

Under the multi-prime scenario, the City will have the ability to phase the project in terms of bidding, have direct control over individual "trades" contractors, and help ensure fewer change orders on the project. Because the multi-prime scenario revolves around a fixed-price contract for the project manager (in this case, Bernard Bros.) there is less incentive and zero markup for change orders and other unforeseen circumstances. Although the multi-prime program is more expensive than the original project management contract originally awarded to Bernard Bros., if the Council amends the existing contract, the City does figure to save an estimated \$600,000 that would have otherwise been part of a general contractor's profit margin. Bernard Bros. has extensive experience in multi-prime contracting, and their references among cities, schools and other institutional clients are impeccable.

Staff is recommending that the Council amend the contract and move toward the multi-prime construction program.

No doubt this will be an intensive City Council meeting, but it will be interesting and noteworthy, and I encourage you to tune in. As always, if you have a question about any item that is on the agenda, please go free to contact me directly.

Articles Attached

- **Foothill Cities Gearing Up for Gold Line.** This is a good discussion of the type and intensity of development that cities all in the Foothill Corridor are planning in coordination with the construction of the Gold Line light rail project. Looking at the potential for jobs and value creation alone, the Gold Line project is a tremendous business proposition that cannot be overlooked either in Washington or downtown Los Angeles.
- **Housing Sales Plummet.** As the saying goes, "you can prove anything with statistics." As you review this article (which would lead you to believe that property values and Monrovia have tumbled by 9.7%), I encourage you to remember that the sales prices they are quoting for Monrovia are for transactions largely in the central and southern part of the City. That is, we are not seeing nearly the volume of housing sales in the northern part of the City over the last few months and, thus, the sales that do get recorded are in the moderately-priced mid and southern neighborhoods. This skews the median downward, as reflections of where the transactions are actually taking place. All of the builders that we talk to and economists that we consult continue to say that 2008 will be a flat year at best, and that we won't see significant economic activity until after the presidential election next November – which is a pretty standard phenomenon. Therefore, in the interim, we must be careful not to talk ourselves into recession in an effort to convince ourselves that we know and can control everything that goes bump in the night.
- **We're "Pasadena-izing."** Some folks may not want to hear it, but Pasadena actually has done a remarkable job of putting together a long-term community vision for the development of their town and then executing the plan. Kudos to them for being held up as an example of responsible and well thought out urban planning. However, I will say that Monrovia, on a smaller scale, is every bit as focused and responsible as our neighbors to the west. I know that folks often don't like change, but in Monrovia – especially – we have seen what complacency and a desire to "just keep

it the same" can do to an entire city. The doldrums of the 1960s and 70s are not so long ago that we can easily forget the lessons that were learned by the last generation of community leaders.

- **Schools chief seeks end to learning gap** This an interesting take on education and really was the focus of the presentations that were made at the U.S. Conference of Mayors meeting where the YES! program was originally developed. No doubt this is a sensitive subject – and great thought must be given not just to the subject matter, but also how to discuss the subject matter. Still, the consequences of doing nothing out of "politeness," or fear of upsetting folks, or not wanting to sit through an uncomfortable discussion on who is succeeding in our community and who is not and why, are simply too great. Ms. Russlyn Ali, principal at the Education Trust of the West, crystallized the point at the U.S. Conference of Mayors meeting when she remarked that more funding, while helpful, won't solve the problem. Something is wrong with the way we are spending resources and thus, if you are an advocate for more funding for education and social services, then you must be an advocate for reforming education and social services. We will continue to monitor this dialogue, as its touches all over the State.

COMMUNITY SERVICES HAPPENINGS

RECREATION DIVISION

Biodiversity Fair at Canyon Park. On August 25, Community Services hosted the Second Annual Biodiversity Fair in Canyon Park. Approximately 400 visitors to the park enjoyed 12 exhibitors focusing on the environment. A variety of plants and animals were available to educate and entertain visitors, including a golden eagle, an owl, a monitor lizard, skunks, opossums, native plants, snakes, ferrets, turtles, raccoons and a variety of fascinating insects. Visitors were given the opportunity to learn how they can volunteer and get involved in conserving natural resources along with wildlife habitat.

Don't Miss the Sixth Annual Food Wine & Jazz Festival. The final days are approaching to buy your Sixth Annual Food, Wine and Jazz festival tickets. Enjoy a leisurely evening under the stars sampling menu specialties from area restaurants. Sample wine and spirits from California vintners and spirit producers, while enjoying classic jazz entertainment performed by Kay Martin. Tax deductible tickets are \$50 per person and \$60 at the door, with special group pricing – 10 tickets for \$350 – and all proceeds will benefit the Monrovia Public Library Foundation. Order tickets on line at www.cityofmonrovia.org or at one of the following locations:

Monrovia City Hall
415 S. Ivy Avenue
Mon – Thurs 7am to 6pm
Fri 7am to 5pm

Monrovia Community Center
119 W. Palm Avenue
Mon – Thurs 8am to 9pm
Fri 8am to 5pm

Monrovia Public Library
321 S. Myrtle Avenue
Mon – Tue 10:30 a.m. to 9 p.m.
Wed 10:30am to 6pm
Thurs – Sat 10:30am to 5pm

California Wine & Cheese
115 W. Foothill Blvd
Monday – Saturday 12pm to 6pm

FROM THE FIRE DEPARTMENT

Personnel responded to 59 emergency calls from 0800 hours on August 22 to 0800 hours on August 29. Significant incidents include:

Smoke in a Structure. On Thursday evening, firefighters responded to a report of smoke coming from an equipment room of the apartment complex in the 1200 block of South Alta Vista. Firefighters located an overheated swimming pool pump in the equipment room. Power to the motor was shut off and smoke removed.

Smoke in a Structure. On Friday morning, firefighters responded to a report of smoke coming from one of the apartment units at 150 West Colorado. A resident at the location had left food cooking on the stove, filling the apartment with smoke. The fire was quickly extinguished and smoke removed from the unit.

Natural Gas Leak. On Saturday afternoon, firefighters responded to a report of the smell of natural gas inside a home in the 1100 block of south Magnolia. Firefighters located the leak and shut the gas to the home off. The Gas Company was notified and responded to the scene to repair the problem.

TRAINING AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

The Fire Department training division has recently completed its annual Wildland/Brush Fire preparedness training. Over the past few months the Fire Department has been conducting Wildland refresher and brush fire "basic training" evolutions. With the expectation of an extremely dangerous and intense brush fire season, this type of training will prove to be timely and effective. In addition, the Monrovia Fire Department training division is busy making plans for the upcoming "Live Burn" training evolutions planned for the "Expanded Management Basic Fire Academy" volunteer fire recruits. Basic fire training evolutions will be conducted in Santa Fe Springs on September 12. We're very excited to have the opportunity to expose our fellow city employees to a few fundamental and entry level fire ground tactical evolutions. It will definitely be a day packed with fun and excitement!

FIRE PREVENTION AND NEW CONSTRUCTION

Hydrostatic testing and rough inspections were completed for Buildings 2 & 3 of the Colorado Commons project.

Other projects that passed final inspections this week were Monrovia Villas, a four-unit project located at 713 Montana Ave., and an 8-unit project located at 333 Genoa St.

ADMINISTRATIVE ITEMS

The Monrovia Fire Department has been contacted by the Los Angeles County Emergency Medical Services Agency (EMSA) to participate in a State-wide study of Emergency Room patient diversions. The continued closing of hospitals has created an impact on patient care with increased patient loads (more people in the emergency room) and longer wait times to be seen by health care professionals. The same impact can be felt by pre-hospital emergency care providers (such as the Monrovia Fire Department Paramedics) who are experiencing longer wait times at hospitals to transfer patients from the gurney of the ambulance to the bed of the hospital (a term called hospital wall time). For the past 12 months the Monrovia Fire Department has been tracking hospital wall time which has gone from a 25-minute average/patient to a 27-minute average/patient in the past year.

The statewide study, conducted by the Abaris Group and supported by the California Healthcare Foundation, will look at the ER diversions of three hospitals in Los Angeles County. St. Francis Medical Center in Lynwood, Presbyterian Intercommunity Hospital in Whittier and Methodist Hospital of Southern California in Arcadia are target hospitals. As a pre-hospital partner with Arcadia Methodist,

Monrovia Fire Department has been included in the study. Once the study begins, we will be supplying Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) information to the LA County EMSA on a bi-weekly basis related to our hospital wall times. This is a 52-week project that will collect similar data from three regions of the state and provide findings with recommendations to improve the effectiveness of patient care within emergency rooms. Given the on-going closure of hospitals in the region, these findings will be critical in maintaining an effective health-care network and the Monrovia Fire Department is proud to be a select participant in the process.

ON THE POLICE BLOTTER

During the last seven day period, the Police Department handled 579 calls for service resulting in 117 investigations. Following are this week's highlighted issues and events:

Animal Control Update. Effective Tuesday, September 4, at 5 p.m., the Monrovia Police Department will assume responsibility for animal control services from San Gabriel Valley Humane Society. Community residents may now call the Monrovia Police Department for animal control services. We have one of the two full-time animal control officers hired at this time, and we hope to have the second animal control officer hired within the next month. In the meantime, we have arranged for the City of Glendora to provide animal control resources as a backup if needed.

Possession of Concealed Firearm. On August 23 at 12:04 a.m., an officer responded to the report of a possible armed robbery. Two adult males and one 17 year old female, all from Rialto, were in the 1800 block of South Fifth Avenue, where they were robbed by two armed male suspects. The robbery was witnessed and videotaped by a security guard in a nearby business who reported the incident to the Monrovia Police Department. The two robbery suspects fled the scene before officers arrived.

Upon arrival, officers observed the victims' vehicle leaving the scene and entering the 210 freeway. The victims were stopped by Monrovia police officers on the freeway and their vehicle was searched. A loaded .45 caliber pistol was found in the vehicle. The victims were transported to the Monrovia Police Department for further investigation. Through investigation, it was learned the robbery was a failed drug deal transaction which went wrong. The female juvenile was a reported runaway and was returned to her family. All the victims were charged with having a concealed and loaded firearm in their vehicle. Investigation continuing.

Battery with Serious Injury / Drunk in Public. On August 29 at 12:36 a.m., officers responded to a medical assist at the corner of Myrtle and Pomona. On arrival, they found one male subject on the ground with blood on his face. Another subject who had blood on his hands and clothing was detained. The two subjects had been drinking at a local bar, where they apparently got into a fight. The subject who was bleeding was seen by Monrovia Fire Department paramedics and was taken to the hospital. He sustained a broken nose and a laceration to his face. The other subject was arrested for battery and being drunk in public.

THE PUBLIC WORKS **SCOOP**



ENGINEERING:

Caltrans Soundwall Construction. Staff is meeting with Caltrans on Thursday, August 30, 2007 to review engineering plans for the construction of sound-walls along the south side of the 210 Freeway from Huntington to California. Staff is coordinating the work with the proposed Station Square development.

Library Improvements. Staff has begun preliminary review of the building grading and elevations to coordinate overall improvements within the park. Staff is working with the arborists from Land Design Consultants in Pasadena to fully determine the extent of impacts to the trees adjacent to the new building and the specific mitigation measures required to protect trees during construction. In addition, staff has begun the preparation of base maps for the proposed street improvements surrounding Library Park.

The following plan checks were completed:

- 2 Hidden Valley - Single family residence, grading/drainage plans approved, ready for permits.
- Santa Anita Wash Cover - Review of survey for development of construction documents.

The following inspections were performed:

- Colorado Commons - on-site inspection of site drainage underground conduits.
- Sewer Main Replacement Program - completed manhole and paving around manhole.
- 337 Highland Place - retaining wall
- 909 Norumbega - retaining wall inspection
- Duarte Road between 5th and Encino - AT&T cabinet and electrical panel installation, underground conduit inspections

The following projects were finalized by Public Works:

- 305 West Duarte Road, 14 residential units
- 333 Genoa, 8 residential units
- 2005-2007 Street Resurfacing Project, Work completed and scheduled for Council action, September 4.

OPERATIONS – Environmental – Facilities – Parks:

Canyon Park Biodiversity Fair. On Saturday August 25, 2007, Environmental Services staff participated in the Second Annual Biodiversity Fair hosted by Canyon Park, and a new “Green Challenge” trivia game was introduced to approximately 60 participants.

Annual Storm Water Protection Training for City Staff. Environmental Services provided annual storm water protection trainings as required under the City’s NPDES Permit (National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System). Several city staff were trained on the permit’s required development planning to help protect our storm water quality.

Planned Traffic Signal Outage. On Thursday August 30, a planned power outage occurred at the intersection of Huntington Drive and Monterey Avenue for the purpose of replacing a telephone pole.

Library Park. The Library Park turf areas are on the mend from the heavy use this summer. When the normal irrigation schedule resumes, the turf areas will quickly return to normal.

Realtor Signs. Last weekend, Park staff picked up illegally placed signs in City Parkways. Three signs were picked up on Saturday and two signs were picked up on Sunday.

STREETS:

Dirt removal from the Mountain Avenue Reservoir site continues.

- Dirt removal continues per excavation operations.
- The retaining wall along the saw pit flood channel is scheduled for completion this week.

Construction work continues on Material and Handling Storage Facility at 2655 S. Myrtle Ave.

- The building of the concrete block retaining walls began this week.

Due to their knowledge, skill, and experience, our street maintenance crew in the construction of excavation field, the concrete and masonry work was accomplished economically and efficiently.

UTILITIES:

Customer Service

- 1,600 water meters were read and recorded
- 45 work orders were completed
- 116 shut-off notices were distributed
- 2 water meters were replaced
- 7 water services were reactivated

Water Production

Water consumption is 73.3 millions gallons, a decrease of approximately 2% compared to last week's water usage.

The following weekly water samplings were collected by staff per the requirements of the Department of Health Services:

- 17 water system samplings
- 3 water treatment facility samplings

Utility Maintenance

- 1-1" water service was abandoned
- 1-2" water service valve was installed
- 15 underground service alert's utility location requests were completed
- 12,000 feet of sewer main were cleaned

2006 - 2007 Sewer Main Replacement Project Update - The street restoration (trench paving) at Colorado Blvd., Primrose Ave., and Canyon Boulevard was completed on August 24, 2007. The traffic loop detectors at the intersection of Foothill and Canyon Boulevards were restored on August 29, 2007. The signal's timing was reset by the Facilities Division on the same day.

Have a great weekend!

FOR YOUR CALENDARS:

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 3

LABOR DAY, CITY HALL CLOSED

Tues., Sept. 4, 6:00 p.m.

**YES! Intern Graduation & Reception,
Council Chambers**

Tues., Sept. 4, 7:30 p.m.

Regular Council Meeting

Weds., September 5-8

LCC Annual Conference, Sacramento

Sun., Sept. 9, 5-9:00 p.m.

Food, Wine & Jazz Festival, Library Park

Mon., Sept. 17, 10-6 p.m.

**Boys & Girls Club of the Foothills Golf
Tournament, Via Verde Country Club**

Tues., Sept. 18, 7:30 p.m.

Regular Council Meeting

Thurs., Dec. 6, 7:00 p.m.

Holiday Parade, Myrtle Avenue

CMO ATTACHMENTS:

Foothill cities gearing up for the Gold Line

By Fred Ortega Staff Writer
Pasadena Star-News

MONROVIA - The Gold Line extension to Montclair from Pasadena is a long way from reality, but cities and developers have already spent billions of dollars on projects along the proposed 24-mile light-rail line.

The state budget last week transferred more than \$1 billion away from transportation agencies, dealing a blow to additional funding for the extension.

But Gold Line officials say they were not counting on state money for the project. They plan to obtain federal funds from the Federal Transportation Agency next year.

"(State funds) were never part of the project plan," said Habib Balian, CEO of the Metro Gold Line Foothill Extension Construction Authority. "If we relied on the state or the MTA for our funds, it would never get built."

The precarious nature of the project's funding has not affected planning for transit-oriented developments around yet-to-be-built stations along the extension's route, according to a study commissioned by the authority.

The study, led by the Irvine-based IBI Group, determined that about \$2.1 billion in public and private investment has already gone into developing projects within a half mile of proposed stations in the 11 cities traversed by the Gold Line extension. That includes funds for projects already being built, like the massive Rosedale development in Azusa, as well as those in the planning stages like Monrovia's Station Square.

The figure also includes funds used by cities to update their land use plans to accommodate the future train stops, as well as construction of public parking facilities near the stations.

The study also estimated that the Gold Line extension would spur more than \$36 billion in new private development, generate up to \$6.2 billion in new household spending through 2030 and add nearly \$1.5 billion in property and sales tax revenue for local cities over the next 30 years.

The Foothill extension provides the opportunity to absorb the tremendous growth projected for the San Gabriel Valley, which is expected to add more than a half million residents by 2035, said Patricia Flynn of The Maxima Group, who was involved in preparing the study. About 160,000 new housing units will be needed to accommodate that population growth, she said.

"You have the capacity to build 23,000 new housing units within station areas, as well as enough capacity to absorb 28,000 new jobs," said Flynn. "That is a significant part of the growth coming to the Valley."

The amount of money being spent on developments around the future stations show that cities are counting on the proposed extension in their plans to accommodate that future growth, Flynn said.

"(The Gold Line) is the organizing principle for how these cities are thinking about growth," she said. "Without the train, you don't have that focal point."

In Glendora, that centers on two developments surrounding that city's proposed Gold Line station, located near the intersection of Glendora and Ada avenues just south of downtown.

The Morgan Group has already secured approval from the city for a 161-unit, residential development with 11,900 square feet of office space just south of the future station, near Route 66 and Glendora, said Glendora Redevelopment Manager Al Lavine.

"They are getting ready for construction," he said of the two-story, \$45-million project.

The other development, by the Neiman Group, is in its preliminary stages, with a planned 87 condominium units across the street from the station.

"We expect approval by the end of the year," said Lavine, adding that the Gold Line is the centerpiece of the future development scheme in the city's center.

Duarte has come up with a preliminary design concept for a new downtown district around the planned Gold Line station across from the City of Hope on Duarte Road. The plan includes a major hotel, commercial and office buildings, restaurants and retail, as well as parks, residential units and a connection to the Duarte Civic Center under the Foothill (210) Freeway.

"We have an enormous opportunity to create jobs, housing and develop that area to be compatible with the extension of the Gold Line," said Duarte Councilman John Fasana, who is also a member of the MTA board. "If we were to develop that area without a corresponding (mass transit route) then you are just going to have overdevelopment with added vehicle congestion."

Richard Thompson, vice president of facilities for the City of Hope, said his world-renowned hospital and cancer research facility is counting on the Gold Line to accommodate the more than 3,400 staffers, patients and visitors who commute to the campus every day.

"On any given day our parking lots are filled up by 10 a.m. each morning," said Thompson. "If we had a reliable, efficient mass transit alternative, we know a significant number of these people would use it."

He added that development around the station would also benefit the hospital.

"A hotel near the station would have appeal, not only as a place for our visiting scientists to stay but also to use the convention facilities to augment our educational programs," Thompson said. "We also have a large number of nurses who would be very interested in new housing developments near the station."

All of these investments and planning efforts, however, depend on the Gold Line becoming a reality.

The Metro Gold Line Foothill Extension Construction Authority has already completed an environmental study of the project, settled on station locations with all but one of the corridor cities, and owns the railroad right-of-way, Balian said.

In addition, local congressional representatives including David Dreier, R-Glendora, Adam Schiff, D-Pasadena and Hilda Solis, D-El Monte, have inserted language in a federal bill that would allow the authority to leverage the almost \$1 billion spent on the first leg of the Gold Line from downtown L.A. to Pasadena to secure matching funds from the government. The bill has yet to pass the Senate.

That coupled with a ridership projection of 9,500 passenger trips on the extension by 2030 would allow the authority to apply for the federal funds next year, Balian said. But it must get a commitment from the MTA for the \$8 million per year that will be needed to operate the line, Balian said.

"We are going through this huge effort to get the MTA to commit this money, to beg for scraps for the San Gabriel Valley, when it is really a freebie for the MTA," said Balian. "They don't have to spend anything to build it. They just have to drive the choo-choo train in 2011."

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Housing sales plummet

By Kevin Smith Staff Writer
San Gabriel Valley Tribune

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California home sales plummeted 22.7 percent in July compared with the same period a year ago, but the state's median price for an existing, single-family home still rose 3.2 percent, the California Association of Realtors reported. California's median price for July was \$586,030, up from \$567,860 a year earlier.

Los Angeles County saw a less severe annual decline in home sales at 12.4 percent, with the region's median price rising 1.9 percent to \$592,300.

The decline in sales - both locally and statewide - continues to be driven by both tighter underwriting standards since the start of the year and the adverse psychological impact of news surrounding increases in foreclosures and the subprime situation, CAR President Colleen Badagliacco said.

"Although the median price posted an increase statewide, there is a disparity between the lower-priced or entry-level markets where prices generally are soft at best and sales have declined sharply, and some higher priced markets that continue to experience price appreciation along with somewhat smaller decreases in sales," Badagliacco said in a prepared statement.

CAR Deputy Chief Economist Robert Kleinhenz said CAR's newest report includes impacts from credit tightening that's occurred in the wake of the subprime fallout.

Many lenders, he said, are struggling to maintain their operations.

"We've heard throughout the state and in various meetings that lenders just won't fund loans because their sources of credit have dried up," Kleinhenz said. "We're going through some very challenging times right now. But part of this credit crunch is an over-reaction to what's going on."

Even well-qualified buyers are often unable to get mortgage loans in the industry's new credit-cautious environment. But Kleinhenz figures that part of the equation will soon right itself.

"I'm hoping it will last no more than 60 to 90 days," he said. "My understanding is that because of the way some of these loans were packaged or re-packaged, it was difficult to assess the credit risk. That led people to pause across the board because they didn't know what they were holding."

The credit crunch will probably be resolved soon, Kleinhenz said, but the fallout that's hit homeowners who locked into subprime and other non-prime loans is going to be around for a while.

"It will probably be with us through this time next year," he said. In recent months, CAR's newest report reveals that Duarte, Rowland Heights, San Dimas and West Covina all saw their median price decline by 10 percent or more.

Ismael Muniz, a mortgage adviser with Golden Empire Mortgage in Pomona, said Southern California's housing market probably won't pick up significantly for a couple of years.

"It's a cycle," Muniz said. "From what I've read, 2009 will be the year when things will start booming again. It takes time to stabilize."

Kleinhenz said there's already some definite "market traction" going on. "People with homes that were properly priced were still able to sell them," he said.

Several San Gabriel Valley communities have posted annual declines in their median home price index.

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We're 'Pasadena-izing'

By and large, Los Angeles is growing just the way it is supposed to.

By William Fulton

August 26, 2007

New York is not Tokyoizing. Chicago is not Shanghaizing. And Los Angeles is not Manhattanizing.

True, the density of L.A.'s population is increasing, especially downtown, in the Mid-Wilshire district and in Hollywood. But carving out a few thousand condos in old downtown buildings is hardly proof that L.A. is "Manhattanizing." If anything, the city overall is "Pasadena-izing" -- becoming more of a collection of centers around which new housing (condos and apartments) and commercial spaces are being built.

Los Angeles ran out of raw land more than 20 years ago and therefore had to move beyond the traditional suburban ideal of single-family homes on tree-lined streets. So it, along with older suburbs stretching from San Fernando to Westminster, is doing what cities have done throughout history -- building up instead of out to accommodate the housing needs of a growing population and an ever-changing set of construction and space requirements for businesses.

This isn't always pretty. But the end result is what L.A. needs to be -- a more urban city.

Some critics, however, contend that development in L.A. is more out of control than ever. The opposite is the case: New real estate development is not dispersed around the city but is largely concentrated near rail transit lines and busway stations. The resulting centers vary in size and scale: Some are like villages -- as along Ventura Boulevard throughout the San Fernando Valley -- while a few -- downtown and Century City -- are taking on Manhattan-like densities. But together they add up to a Los Angeles-style approach to urbanism, one in line with the basic concepts of L.A.'s planning policies adopted more than 30 years ago.

In the 1970s, when L.A.'s suburbs began sprouting, the city adopted, in 1974, an innovative general zoning plan that called for high-density development around 38 centers in the city, connected by transit, that would absorb most of the growing population. These centers would allow permanent preservation of the vast fields of single-family houses located between them.

The "centers concept," as it was called, was the brainchild of Calvin Hamilton, city planning director from 1964 to 1986. At a time when planning orthodoxy argued that cities had to be "mono-nuclear" -- built around one extremely dense center, like Manhattan -- L.A.'s plan was nothing less than revolutionary. Hamilton's visionary plan acknowledged that L.A. was "poly-nuclear" -- a place with many centers, of varying sizes, all of which had to be strengthened for the city to accommodate new growth.

Over time, L.A. has become more dense. But this hasn't always happened around the centers identified in Hamilton's plan -- Westwood, Century City, Warner Center in Woodland Hills, among them. Oftentimes, developers had the political juice to build tall buildings wherever they wanted, whether their ideas followed the city plan or not, in large part because of the size of the city's 15 councilmanic districts. Each council member effectively serves as the mayor of a city with a population of close to 300,000. Running in that kind of district requires a lot of campaign money, which developers are more than happy to provide.

The growth around the Beverly Center is a good example of what developers used to get away with, general plan or no general plan. The area is not one of the city centers named in Hamilton's scheme. It wasn't targeted for a rail transit station -- and still isn't today, even in the most pie-in-the-sky long-range plans. Yet once construction of the Beverly Center began in the early 1980s, the surrounding area built up with other high-density retail and housing development

This kind of rogue development happens far less today. That's not because L.A.'s politicians have had a spine implant. Rather, it's happening because the construction of L.A.'s rail transit lines has made Hamilton's designated city centers far more attractive places to build. Indeed, in the last decade, more and more large-scale development in L.A. has occurred around rail transit -- especially the Red Line, Los Angeles' subway.

"Manhattanization" is occurring where it can -- mostly downtown and to a lesser extent in Mid-Wilshire and Hollywood -- because these locations can absorb greater density. They are transit-rich and already have a strong backbone of jobs, housing and services. This makes them more attractive to politically powerful developers.

The rest of the metropolitan constellation is densifying too, but at a much different scale. The prototype for most of this growth in Los Angeles and Orange counties is Pasadena, which has a texture of three- to five-story buildings, a fabulous mix of housing, retail, office buildings and cultural institutions, a lot of parking garages and great "walkability." The result, citywide and regionwide, is a rich urban mosaic, with a few extremely dense centers, dozens of smaller-scale downtowns, hundreds of villages and vast swaths of single-family neighborhoods that are unlikely to change.

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Schools chief seeks end to learning gap

Jack O'Connell earns praise for his candor on a sensitive subject.

By Mitchell Landsberg and Howard Blume
August 19, 2007

Jack O'Connell, the state superintendent of public instruction, turned heads in education circles last week with the message that race, not poverty, helped explain why African American and Latino students lagged behind their white and Asian counterparts. It wasn't what he said that was remarkable. It was the fact that he said it at all. "These are not just economic achievement gaps, they are racial achievement gaps," O'Connell said after his annual release of California's standardized test scores. "We cannot afford to excuse them; they simply must be addressed."

That message was old news to many educational researchers, who have been writing about the issue with increasing urgency for years. But policymakers, particularly white policymakers like O'Connell, have generally been reluctant to discuss race as a factor in student achievement for fear of inflaming racial passions and being seen as racially insensitive.

O'Connell's comments were generally applauded by leading educators, who said it was about time that someone in public life took on a crucial, and hitherto muffled, part of the educational debate. But some cautioned that there were dangers in beginning such a conversation -- and that, in any case, talk about race was useless without carefully calibrated action to encourage higher achievement by black and Latino students. "It's tricky to figure out how to introduce it in public," said Ron Ferguson, director of the Achievement Gap Initiative at Harvard University and author of a forthcoming book on the subject. He said he worried that such discussions could lead not to constructive changes but to "blame and responsibility and maybe even genetics."

Jeannie Oakes, a professor in the graduate school of education at UCLA who has sometimes been critical of O'Connell, praised him for raising the issue. "It's a new level of candor, I think, about the combination of factors that seem to relate to low achievement," she said. But Oakes added: "When you go down this path, then we have to be very careful about what we choose to talk about and examine, because it's very easy to fall into stereotypical views, and historical views, of people with darker skin being less intelligent . . . or people from immigrant families and African Americans not valuing education."

O'Connell drew his conclusions from the latest round of standardized test results for California schools. They showed, once again, the stubborn persistence of an achievement gap -- the difference in academic performance separating African American and Latino students from their white and Asian American counterparts. All groups have been making dogged upward progress, but at such similar rates that the gap has not budged.

In the past, the differences between groups have sometimes been "explained away," O'Connell said, by the fact that black and Latino students are more likely to be poor. "The results show this explanation not to be true," he said. The test results reveal that, in math, poor white and Asian students outperform black and Latino students whose families are not poor. In English, non-poor Latino students barely outperform poor whites, and non-poor African Americans lag further.

The findings are based on fairly crude measures of poverty. "Poor" students are those who have applied for free or reduced-price meals at school. "Non-poor" students are those who haven't applied, even though some of them might, in fact, come from low-income families.

Nevertheless, the data are in line with various studies over the last decade showing that African American students in particular fare worse than whites or Asians on various measures of achievement, even when they come from middle-class families.

Simply raising the issue brings up several uncomfortable questions: Are there cultural reasons why African Americans and Latinos lag? Do they come from families, or communities, that don't value education highly enough? Do they learn differently from white and Asian students? Are they more likely to go to bad schools with less-experienced teachers? Do teachers hold them to lower standards?

"If you don't acknowledge a problem, there's no way to address it," said Abigail Thernstrom, a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute in New York and coauthor, with her husband, Stephen, of "No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in Learning."

But, she said, "Once you say that and once you mean it, then you have to ask yourself what is going on with these kids and you've got to address not only the problems of reading, writing and arithmetic, but all the habits that make for an absence of internalized discipline when it comes to schoolwork, and . . . all the habits of life that make for the possibility of social mobility."

Thernstrom, who is white, has long been willing to suggest that educators and minority families need to confront their own attitudes and habits that, she concludes, are undermining academic achievement.

Kimberly Bush, the white mother of six biracial children, said she witnessed parent attitudes transform as Bunche Elementary, a nearly all-minority, all-low-income school in Compton, became a high-achieving school under Principal Mikara Solomon Davis. Initially, Bush said, some parents complained about having to sign their child's homework every day. They also objected to mandatory suspensions when a student was rude to a teacher, part of the school's efforts to ensure that classroom time was not wasted on discipline. Teachers also worked after school to provide tutoring to students, among other strategies.

Solomon Davis, the former Bunche principal, put blame for the achievement gap squarely on poverty, combined with the subtle racism of low expectations. She acknowledged that multigenerational poverty, among African Americans, for example, might lead to counterproductive attitudes about education. But this should not be misread as a fundamental characteristic of black culture, she said.

As to needed remedies, she put responsibility squarely with educators. "It is what we are doing as adults incorrectly that is resulting in these students not learning," she said. "The parents want the best for their children. What we brought to Bunche is showing them the picture of what the best can look like, providing college as the goal. Everybody jumped on the bandwagon, but it was a first for a lot of people in our community."

In raising race, O'Connell spotlighted his own inability to narrow the achievement gap during nearly five years as the state's top education official and raised expectations that he will propose a plan of action. He has called a summit on the issue in November.

O'Connell said he had tried to tighten the gap with policies that included a high school exit exam, an emphasis on "rigor" and "relevance" in education and increased funding for impoverished schools. However, his spokesman, Rick Miller, said of last week's shift in emphasis to race: "Part of this is an acknowledgment that what we've been doing at the state level isn't working."

In an interview, O'Connell added that part of the problem is "institutional bias or racism" in the public school system. "The system does treat some people differently, and race does have a role to play," he said. O'Connell added he will wait to hear from an advisory body he created before deciding what changes in policy are needed. Asked if he will advocate differentiated instruction and learning materials for different racial groups, he said, "I think so." He also said he intended to "look at strategies that go beyond just education" and involve businesses, churches and the community.

David L. Brewer, superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District, said he welcomed O'Connell's heightened attention to the issue, and said that he, too, has been looking for ways to raise the performance of African American and Latino students.

There are strategies that are known to be effective, and schools, some in his district, can be used as case studies of what works, he said. "The key is personalized instruction and teachers who don't allow students to fail," he said. "And then you get the results you expect to get. We know what works; it's making everybody do what works."

In that respect, he said, he'll talk to employee unions about modifying work rules to allow for longer school days and more flexible schedules within the school day.

Brewer said that although L.A. Unified had made strides in academic achievement at elementary schools, "after the fourth grade, something is happening with African American and Latino students." And the solution does not entirely lie in the schools, Brewer said. Responsibility also lies with the family: "We're going to have to make sure parents understand this is a problem," he said. "Our black and brown children can do math and science: We want that message loud and clear in your homes. We want parents to make sure they're holding their children accountable."

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