

# Visitor & Retail Development

Money contributed by the visitors and patrons of Morningside Park's commercial area creates employment in other sectors. Two key factors make Morningside Park unique, its built environment and its strong cultural identity. The area should make an effort to observe and market this heritage. The Visitor and Retail Development element of the MPEDS focuses on enhancing the visitor, pedestrian and patron experience of Morningside Park by developing strategies to improve the physical environment celebrate the area's historic resources and develop cultural opportunities. It also recognizes and recommends specific development opportunities that will encourage residents and visitors to stop and shop, creating a catalyst for continued growth. As with the previous Chapter, the following goals are prioritized by the number of times the recommendation was made each of the student groups. The value or feasibility of each is not recorded by the MPEDS.

# Goals

## HIGH PRIORITY

✓ *Improve physical environment.*

## MEDIUM PRIORITY

✓ *Celebrate historic elements.*

## LOW PRIORITY

✓ *Develop opportunities for arts and cultural events.*

✓ *Develop catalyst projects.*

## Improve Physical Environment



Morningside Park Sign In the Median of  
Manchester Boulevard, Heading East

Planners such as Wesley Skogan and James Q. Wilson have advocated that the physical environment affects the social cohesiveness of a community. When residents see a neighborhood filled with trash and businesses with steel bars around their windows and doors, they sense that the area is dangerous and unkempt. However, when they are in areas where the environment is clean and people are around, either shopping or eating in the restaurants, visitors feel comfortable and are more inclined to spend time in that area.

The residents of Morningside Park want to improve their community. They would like to eat at local restaurants and spend time shopping along Manchester Boulevard. Currently, the commercial corridor does not appeal to either residents or visitors. People traveling in the area are not aware of the vibrant residential and business community. The only indication of a community comes with blue Morningside Park signs in the Manchester Boulevard median. Since our vision is

to re-create Morningside Park as a destination, the area will need to improve its physical appearance and image.

This section of the development strategy for Morningside Park will focus on implementing that vision from a physical design perspective. Using site visits, interviews with business owners and a physical survey of the area, this strategy evaluates what physical and streetscape improvements are necessary to revitalize the commercial corridor. The following recommendations for Morningside Park address design elements of the commercial corridor that will establish a sense of place and community for the area.

## **PUBLIC SAFETY**

Feeling safe in an area is one of the main determinants of whether a visitor will spend time there. Creating a “safe” place means that residents and business owners both feel comfortable in the area. As discussed in the demographic profile, the perception of crime can be a more powerful deterrent to neighborhood activity than actual crime. Currently, the commercial corridor along Manchester looks bleak with



One of the many archways in Chinatown, Los Angeles, California.

prison like bars along the doors and windows of the local businesses and few people on the streets. One possible solution is to recommend through the implementation of Design Guidelines the elimination of grid-like bars and roll top security gates. Security can be integrated into the design of storefronts in an artful way, either by using distinctive exterior fencing or hiding the security features inside stores.

Another short-term remedy should include the addition of lighting in the alleys. Many business owners enter and leave

their businesses through the alleys and have reported feeling unsafe. The alleys could be a place for the Inglewood Police foot and bike patrols to monitor through a community policing strategy. Since there is a police sub-station in the area, the officers that are assigned to that sub-station can use foot or bike patrols to monitor the activity in the area. Being on the street and outside of the car will allow the business owners, residents and visitors to visually sense the police force and feel protected by them. The Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services offers grant and training opportunities for community policing projects. Their web address is [www.usdoj.gov/cops/home.htm](http://www.usdoj.gov/cops/home.htm).

In addition, homeowners should consider forming a neighborhood watch that would also keep an eye out for the businesses in the area. The intrinsic connection between these two groups will help facilitate a lasting relationship by working together to improve their shared environment.

## CREATION OF A GATEWAY

One of the easiest ways to distinguish a community is to construct a gateway. Gateways introduce visitors to the area and create a visual representation of the community. Having a focal entrance at the intersection of Manchester Boulevard and Crenshaw Boulevard is the most logical location due to the heavy traffic at the intersection and its central location to Morningside Park.

In the long run, a permanent gateway should be constructed. Often, archways are feasible long-term solutions for a gateway. These archways function like doorways into the areas they are placed. Chinatown in Los Angeles has wonderful archways throughout the area that are memorable and distinctive to that area. A large-scale project in the area can be required to integrate a gateway plan into their design or the city can create the gateway itself.

Banners hang along  
Crenshaw Boulevard in  
Compton

For an immediate gateway, Morningside Park should consider hanging banners along major streets. These banners are used in many neighboring cities like Los Angeles and Culver City to announce weekly events or an ongoing community activity. The banner should welcome visitors to Morningside Park and are a relatively simple addition to streets. The banners will reinforce the image of Morningside Park as being an active community. Nearby Leimert Park has used simple street signs with a City of Los Angeles logo. Culver City has used a community generated and city approved logo to display on street poles. The picture to the right are banner signs that Compton has begun to place throughout its city. Morningside Park should use similar banners as a way to identify itself.

One way to integrate the community into this revitalization strategy is to solicit a neighborhood contest for residents, businesses or local artists to design a community logo. These banners can be changed every few years or the city could sell sponsorship of these banners to local businesses to promote the area and the businesses simultaneously. As

discussed in the following section, the City may also want to incorporate Morningside's historic elements into the design of these banners.

## FAÇADE IMPROVEMENT

When people chose a store at which to shop, they often make their first impression based on the exterior of the business and the perception of the area. Many businesses cannot upgrade their businesses without assistance from outside resources. In other cities and in other parts of Inglewood a Façade Improvement program has been implemented. Currently, the Office of Economic and Business Development is working with an architecture firm to carry out a block-by-block façade improvement project along Market Street. The same concept may be studied for the Morningside Park community. The business owners may upgrade the outside of their buildings with the assistance of funding.



## **STREET FURNITURE**

Street furniture takes many shapes and is a fundamental part of a flourishing commercial corridor. One example of a vital element to a clean environment is trashcans. Pedestrians waiting for the bus, or people leaving stores, may need trashcans. In Morningside Park it is difficult to find any, thus people may litter the streets. A quick short-term fix to this problem is to add more basic plastic trashcans. Over time, permanent trashcans should be placed in the area. The trashcans can be designed to fit in with the future design of the area.

Another important type of street furniture are benches placed in public areas. Benches are believed to create a level of social interaction in communities. For example, benches have been successfully incorporated into Santa Monica's Third Street Promenade. People are more likely to stay and socialize in an area if there are places to sit or rest. During site visits to Morningside Park, it was noted that there were very few benches. In some cases there were indications that benches had been removed. Most people socializing in the area

congregated around the Rally's Restaurant, since they have outside seating. If the long-term goal is to attract more people to Morningside Park, there will need to be more places for those people to meet and socialize.

## Celebrate Historic Elements

An initial survey of Morningside Park indicates that approximately 75 percent of the existing structures in the project area have one or more historic elements.

Morningside Park is also home to two venerable historic theatres, the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Theater and the Academy Theater. However, overall disrepair and the existence of several vacant lots, distract pedestrians from noticing this rich architectural environment. This section of the MPEDS suggests ways to celebrate the historic features of the Morningside Park commercial area. Shining a spotlight on the area's historic character will provide a theme for renovation, rehabilitation and new construction, highlighting both the historic nature and future opportunities for residents, patrons and passersby.

As redevelopment progresses, the MPEDS recommends that historic elements should be restored in existing structures. Historically sensitive façade and public improvements can be effective tools in the economic

revitalization of the area. Many successful revitalization projects, began as efforts to preserve neighborhood character, including Old Town Pasadena, the Los Angeles Downtown Historic Core, Hollywood Boulevard and the Santa Monica Promenade.

To ensure long-term success, it may be necessary to create a Morningside Park Specific Plan or amend the City of Inglewood's General Plan to create a Design Overlay Zone or Historic District. These actions will ensure that development standards are clearly articulated and long-lasting.

The initial Vermont Slauson Revitalization Plan suggested building upon an Art Deco element that exists in Morningside Park. A more appropriate and inclusive architectural characterization, would be to refer to the buildings as Streamline Moderne. Streamline Moderne, or Moderne, is the primary architectural style of Depression-era buildings and beyond. Architectural historians are

divided as to whether Streamline Moderne is a movement unto itself, or merely an extension of the 1920's Art Deco aesthetic. Although somewhat different in their overall appearance, Art Deco and Streamline Moderne styles share stripped down forms and a geometric-based ornamentation. In general, Streamline Moderne is distinguished from its predecessor by the following characteristics:

- Horizontal orientation (as opposed to Art Deco's vertical orientation)
- Rounded edges
- Corner windows
- Glass block walls
- Mirrored panels
- Ribbon or band of windows with metal frames
- Flat roof
- Curved canopy
- Smooth wall finish
- Aluminum and stainless steel used for door and window trim, railings and balusters.

Streamline Moderne was particularly useful for commercial buildings. Its sleek, machine-oriented detailing invoked speed and communicated a modern sensibility to customers. This modern and forward-thinking vision

conveyed the idea that progress was accessible to all, and the future was within view. As historians David Gebhard and Harriette Von Breton noted in their book, *Los Angeles in the Thirties*: "Streamlining and the Moderne were perfect expressions of an automobile-oriented society. In an affirmation of faith in the future, the aesthetics of speed, freedom and mobility were applied to buildings, ocean liners, aircraft, refrigerators, radios--anything."<sup>11</sup>

Southern California is home to some of the most elegant examples of Streamline Moderne architecture, for example, the former Pan Pacific Auditorium on Beverly Boulevard and the Coca Cola Bottling Plant on Central Avenue in Los Angeles.

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<sup>11</sup> David Gebhard and Harriette Von Breton. (January 1, 1989) *Los Angeles in the Thirties*. Hennessey & Ingalls; 2nd/Rev edition.



The following photographs from Morningside Park, clearly illustrate defining characteristics of moderne architecture. On the top left, a store on Manchester Boulevard features a shark fin at the center of the storefront. The store pictured bottom left, also on Manchester, demonstrates a horizontal orientation, flat roofs and use of metal trim detailing.

Storefronts on Manchester Boulevard





Storefronts on Manchester

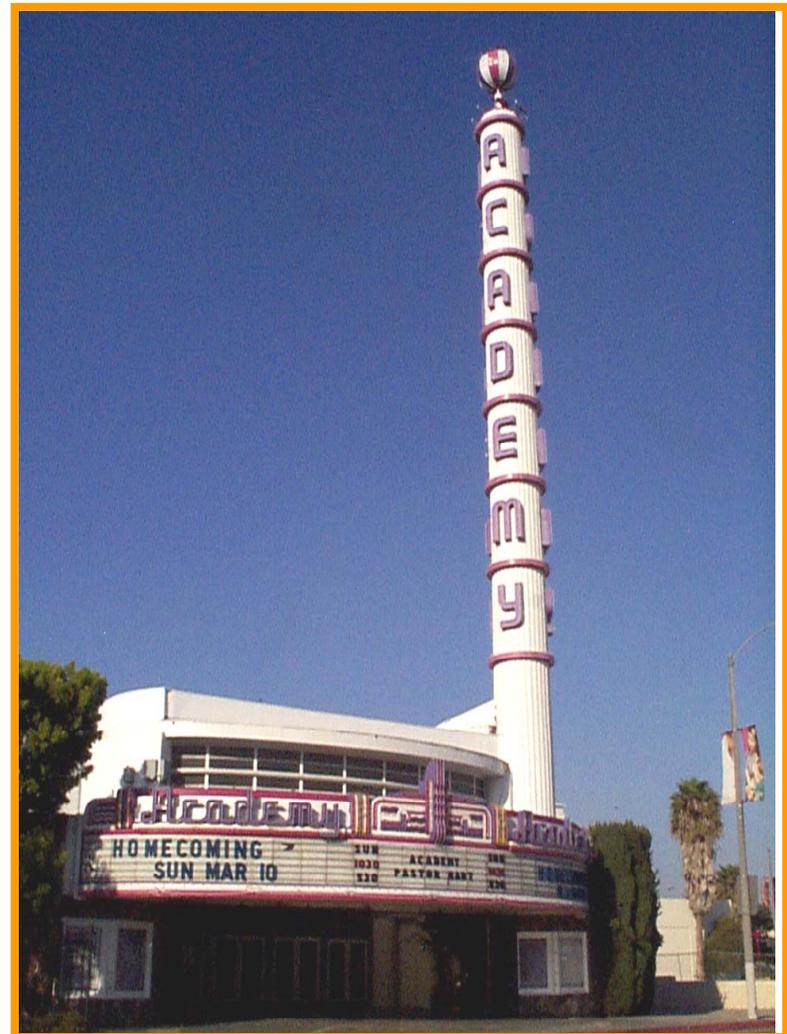
The use of glass block in the two buildings, above and left is a character-defining feature of streamline moderne architecture. Also, note the rounded edges and simple lines. Glass block can be used as a security measure; it is thick enough to obscure outsiders from peeking in, yet is also difficult to break. However, business owners who rely on pedestrian traffic should use this element carefully as merchants may miss customers outside who cannot see inside.



Typical of moderne architecture, the office building featured on the left uses glazed terracotta tile to give texture to the otherwise simple façade.

Storefront on Manchester Boulevard

One of the most important buildings of the Morningside Park community is the Academy Theater. This building displays many of the fundamental components of streamline moderne architecture: rounded corners, flat roof, ribbons of aluminum or steel. New development may want to carry through on the color scheme and signage elements to highlight this moderne icon. The Academy is on the National Register of Historic Places and will be a significant contribution should the city decide to pursue the development of a historic district.



To garner community and administrative support for the preservation of historic resources, it is necessary to understand the benefits of using historic preservation as an economic development tool. Preservation has a significant and tangible record of results for economic development. For every million dollars spent in rehabilitation, instead of new construction, nine additional direct jobs and nearly 5 indirect jobs are created, providing \$120,000 more dollars to local communities. To date, the availability of historic tax incentives has stimulated more than \$18 billion in private rehabilitation investment.<sup>12</sup>

## ADVANTAGES OF HISTORIC DESIGNATION

Developers and owners of historic properties have a number of economic incentives to preserve and protect their property. Including the following:

- Access to training/technical assistance and grant funds via the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the California Heritage Fund.
- Waivers of some building code requirements, through use of the State Historic Building Code.
- A 20 percent tax credit for developers who rehabilitate income-generating properties. Note: a 10 percent tax credit is also available for older properties that are not specifically designated historic. Properties must be rehabilitated to the Secretary of the Interior Standards.
- Eligibility for the California Technology, Trade & Commerce Agency, Main Street Program.
- Preservation Easements that allow owners engaged in restoration to write off the assessed value of their building.

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<sup>12</sup> Bank of America, Community Development, Community Resource Center

## ASSESSING HISTORIC RESOURCES

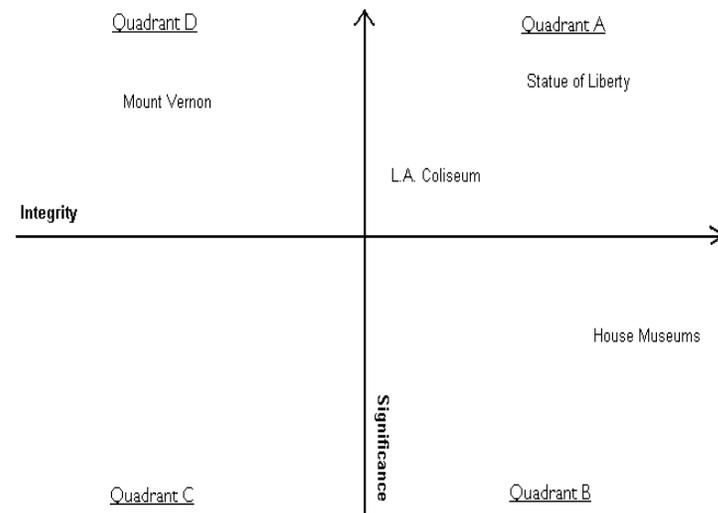
When assessing a community's built environment, it is important to note that not all old buildings are historic. Historic resources have two things in common: historical significance and integrity.

Historical significance is judged according to nationally recognized standards. A resource, which may be a building, a structure, or even a landscape, is determined to be historically significant if it is 50 years old, and meets one of the following criteria:

- a. Represents an important historical event or broad pattern of history.
- b. Is associated with a significant person.
- c. Has significant architectural value.
- d. May yield significant archeological information.

A historic resource has integrity, when most of the character-defining features, (the basic architectural elements, such as façade, molding and interior details) are intact. In general, the intersection of historic significance

and integrity, determine the value of a historic resource (see figure below).



Quadrant A represents historic resources that have a high degree of historical significance and a high degree of integrity. While there may be levels of significance, it is rarely a fixed mark. The term “significance” is subjective and may change according to cultural, geographic or generational attitudes. For example, most Americans would agree that the Statue of Liberty is an important monument in our country. Likewise, most residents of Los Angeles would suggest that the Los Angeles Coliseum, site of two Olympic Games, is significant, even if it may not be as important to persons living elsewhere. Thus, both have significance and should be considered for preservation.

Quadrant B characterizes resources that have a high degree of integrity, but a lower level of significance. For example, a Victorian house with original period furnishings, but no historical connection to an event or person.

Quadrant C represents resources that have a low level of significance and a low level of integrity. A

privately owned home that has been remodeled repeatedly, so that few of the original architectural features remain would lie in Quadrant C.

Finally, Quadrant D describes resources of high significance, but low integrity. Mount Vernon, the home of George Washington is an important symbol of our nation’s history, but for many years it was a private home and has been renovated several times. Much of the home seen today has been reconstructed and therefore has little historic integrity.

## **PROCESS FOR DESIGNATING HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE**

Ideally, the Morningside Park Commercial Corridor would be eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. The Academy Theater is already on the Register and the City of Inglewood may want to designate the blocks around the theater a historic district. If this is appropriate, it is recommended that the city develop a historic district as part of a larger Cultural Heritage Master

Plan. There are a number of reasons for a Cultural Heritage Master Plan. It will enable the City of Inglewood to determine an overall preservation-oriented policy, provide guidelines, enable the city to become a Certified Local Government and sponsor a Mills Act program.

The first step in developing a Cultural Heritage Master Plan would be to complete a historic building survey. The survey should assess the integrity of buildings city wide, especially focusing on areas of particular interest, such as Morningside Park. If it is determined that there are enough structures in Morningside Park to designate a district, a National Register of Historic Places Nomination should be prepared. The nomination would require additional research to assess the historical significance of the area. An initial visual survey suggests the presence of a great deal of moderne architecture. However, aside from the Academy and 5<sup>th</sup> Street Theatre, many buildings may not qualify for historic status due to a decreased level of integrity.

If the city decides not to pursue historic district designation for the Morningside Park Commercial Corridor, the MPEDS highly recommends the adoption of a Design Overlay Zone. The Overlay zone will ensure that future development does not obstruct the view of the Academy Theater, create a gateway into the area and improve building facades.

## Develop Opportunities for Arts and Cultural Events

In addition to recognizing Morningside Park's unique built environment, a program to observe the area's rich culture heritage may also be desirable. The primary purpose of arts and cultural activities will be to showcase local talent and offer merchants another venue to sell their goods. Arts and cultural events can also serve as a marketing tool to attract additional visitors to the area.

The overarching goal of arts and cultural programming, such as festivals, is to promote economic development by facilitating the development of a strong community's identity for Morningside Park. The small and large festival are great venues to promote local business and could result in new customers and increased sales. In order for this plan to work open space must be set aside. On a short term basis, the empty lots on the northwest corner at the intersection of Crenshaw and Manchester can be used for this purpose. This lot can be turned into a community-gathering center complete with a stage for performances, open areas for gathering and a small

facility to hold the audio equipment. A more permanent location may be sought, if the development recommended below proceeds or development can provide space for the arts and cultural activities.

A local Festival Board is needed to coordinate activities. There are several options of how this can be run. If the parcel becomes a city park then the Park's and Recreation Department could coordinate the festivals and maintenance of the park. If a private entity, for example a local non-profit or local economic development company, decides to operate the park then they not only use the park as a venue for festivals, but also use it as a reserve parking lot for days when attendance exceeds the normal amount. Easter and Christmas celebrations are example of times when this extra parking area would be needed.

### FESTIVAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The type and size festivals at this location of may vary. For all of these festivals, with the exception of the Hip-Hop

festival, themed marketing could be used to promote the event and emphasize the importance of the Moderne architecture in “The Park”. The following is a list of possible festivals:

Soul Food Festival: this festival would capitalize on the local soul food and fast food restaurants.

Inglewood Bar B Que Cook Off: this festival would feature local restaurants that cook meat over an open flame. The festival would feature carne asada, Korean BBQ, Ribs, and other meats cooked over an open flame. In addition there could be a hot sauce competition.

First Thursdays Car Show: This smaller festival would feature local car clubs. It could be held on the first Thursday of every month so that there it has a constant schedule. In addition it could occasionally featuring cars from the 20’s, 30’s and 40’s that would match the moderne background provided by the surrounding buildings.

Hip Hop: A show case of local talent and a safe place for the youth to hang out. Hip Hop culture crosses cultures, races and ages. This local music festival could be modeled

after Project Blowed, a weekly hip-hop club in Leimert Park that is open to all ages.

Jazz and Blues concerts: These festival/concerts could feature artist and music reflecting the 20’s, 30’s and 40’s. This has the greatest potential for drawing a regional audience.