

8.16 Southwestern Communities

A. INTRODUCTION

The unincorporated communities of South San Jose Hills, Valinda, and West Puente Valley—referred to here as the Southwestern Communities—are located in the south and southwestern part of the Planning Area. The communities largely consist of subdivisions of single-family homes built in the middle of the 20th century. The need for greater housing type diversity has led to increased housing costs and potentially larger households. There are also adjacencies between industrial and residential uses along Valley Blvd. and near the City of Industry and Baldwin Park that present issues for residential areas, as well as walkability and connectivity. Included below is further detail on each of the communities.

- South San Jose Hills
- Valinda
- West Puente Valley

Southwestern Communities

South San Jose Hills

South San Jose Hills is approximately 1.5 square miles with a population of 22,252 and is characterized by single-family residential subdivisions with multi-family uses. Residential garage conversions are prevalent which can indicate a need for more rental housing, greater need for income generation, and/or a desire for inter-generational homes. Intensive industrial uses are located south of the community in Industry, with some industrial and commercial uses located within the community along Valley Boulevard. The community is bordered by the West Covina on the north and east, La Puente to the west, and Industry to the west and south.

Valinda

Valinda is approximately 2 square miles with a population of 23,702 and is characterized by single-family residential subdivisions with limited multi-family residential. The community contains limited commercial uses on Amar Rd. and Azusa Ave., with proximity to busy commercial corridors, including Hacienda Blvd. and Amar Rd. that continue into La Puente and Industry. Residential areas experience impacts from proximity to industrial uses in adjacent cities. The Puente Creek Channel runs through the southern part of Valinda has the potential to become an amenity with improvements and the proposed connection to the San Jose Creek and San Gabriel River Trail. The community shares boundaries with Industry and La Puente to the west

and south, and West Covina to the north and east. The unincorporated communities of South San Jose Hills and Valinda are located to the east and west.

West Puente Valley

West Puente Valley is approximately 1.9 square miles with a population of 25,061 and is characterized by single-family residential subdivisions. There are limited commercial areas, but they can provide neighborhood serving uses with potential for enhanced pedestrian connections. The community experience impacts from proximity to industrial uses from the shared boundaries with Baldwin Park to the north and west, and Industry to the east and south. The Southern Pacific railroad right-of-way runs along parts of the western boundary and acts as a barrier to mobility. Boundaries are shared with West Covina to the north, and La Puente the east and south. The unincorporated communities of Valinda and Avocado Height are located to the east and south. Walnut Creek and Puente Creek Channels both run through the community and have the potential to become recreational assets.

B. COMMUNITY CHALLENGES OPPORTUNITIES

Southwest Communities

The following presents a summary of challenges and opportunities for South San Jose Hills, Valinda, and West Puente Valley, comprising the Southwest Communities, learned from community feedback and an analysis of existing conditions in the community (see **Table SWC-1, Southwest Communities Challenges and Opportunities**). These challenges and opportunities serve to inform the preparation of community-specific land use, zoning, policies, and programs for the Southwest Communities.

TABLE SSJH-1 Southwest Communities Challenges and Opportunities

1. Residential

- **Lack of Housing Type Diversity.** Similar to other communities in the ESGV, the southwest communities lack a diversity of housing types. This can create pressure on the existing housing stock, leading to affordability concerns and unintended land use outcomes, like overcrowding.

TABLE SSJH-1 Southwest Communities Challenges and Opportunities

- **Residential Garage Conversions.** South San Jose Hills has increased residential garage conversions. Their prevalence in South San Jose Hills may indicate existing instances of overcrowded housing, a desire for intergenerational living, or a need to generate supplemental income. In circumstances in which residential garage conversions are unpermitted, there needs to be a process to update these conversions so meet requirements for the health and safety of the public.

2. Land Uses

Residential Proximity to Industrial Uses. Residential areas interface with or are in the vicinity of industrial uses, both in unincorporated areas and in adjacent jurisdictions. Local industrial properties have negative spillover affects into residential areas or the public realm. South San Jose Hills has industrially zoned property along Valley Blvd. There are existing freight rail rights-of-way and the Valley Boulevard freight corridor. An interface of residential and industrial uses can result in health, safety, and quality of life impacts on local residents.

South San Jose Hills Industrial/Commercial Uses and Opportunity Area. General Plan identifies an Industrial Flex District stretching along Valley Boulevard and bordered to the north by low- to medium-density residential neighborhoods, and to the south by heavily industrialized parcels in Industry.

Much of this area is zoned C-M (Commercial Manufacturing), which allows for less intensive industrial uses and other non-industrial uses. Auto repair, auto sales, churches, a mobile home park, and a large self-service storage facility are some of the existing non-industrial uses in the area. There is an opportunity to encourage the development of this area as a supportive commercial use district to the nearby high-employment work sites south of Valley Boulevard in the City of Industry.

West Puente Valley Industrial Island. A cluster of industrial parcels noncontiguous with the rest of the West Puente Valley is located west of the community boundary and east of the Planning Area boundary. This cluster is bounded by I-605 to the west and Walnut Creek to the north.

Jobs/Housing Balance. There is a deficit of jobs available in the area compared to the population. This means that most residents must travel outside of the community for work.

Parking Impacts. There is concern over the number of parked cars in the community, and the lack of available street parking. Higher utilization of street parking in single-family neighborhoods may also correlate to overcrowded housing or high rates of intergenerational living. There are also spillover parking issues near commercial areas.

Senate Bill 535 Disadvantaged Community Designation. The central and southern portions of Valinda, central and western portions of South San Jose Hills, and much of West Puente Valley are classified in the top 25% of CalEnviroScreen 3.0 scores, which is defined as “disadvantaged” under Senate Bill 535. This score indicates a high need for mitigation of relevant hazards in the community, and a need for funding for projects in the community to relieve environmental inequities.

TABLE SSJH-1 Southwest Communities Challenges and Opportunities

3. Commercial Areas

Commercial Area Use and Design. Commercial developments often consist of commercial structures pushed to the back of the lot with parking in the front. This design style is car-oriented and does not prioritize the needs of pedestrians or bicyclists, which creates access barriers for these users. Retail options are limited, with little orientation toward a singular walkable environment for pedestrians.

Commercial Façades. The façades of the commercial properties in the community need enhancement. Upkeep of façades often comes at a significant cost to property owners and tenants, who usually have little influence on the physical structure their business occupies.

Food Markets. There are limited small markets and few stores that serve healthy food within walking distance to residents.

Third Places. There are few “third” places—spaces other than the workplace and the home where people congregate—within the community. The Southwest Communities lack shared places where community members can gather and socialize.

Street Vending. Street vending is a common occurrence and causes a perceived impact on brick-and-mortar stores. This may be a sign that there are not enough commercial properties/establishments in the community to support consumer demand. Street vending is common in parts of communities where there are few traditional retail alternatives, or the alternatives are too costly or inefficient for their needs.

South San Jose Hills - Nogales Street/La Puente Intersection. There are major land uses at this intersection. Nogales High School is located to the west of the intersection, while a commercial shopping center is located east of the intersection. Northeast commercial parcels are in the city of Walnut, which presents an opportunity for cross jurisdictional partnership for redevelopment.

Valinda - Hacienda Plaza. Hacienda Plaza is a substantial shopping center located in La Puente, across Hacienda Boulevard from the Valinda community boundary. The arterial is in County right-of-way and is complete with a frontage road on the Valinda side. Commercial parcels are located on the Valinda side, and some of the properties appear to need enhancement. This area could be a candidate for a significant revitalization project that mixes housing and community amenities.

West Puente Valley - Sunset/Amar Neighborhood Center. The intersection of Sunset and Amar Roads in the community could be enhanced as a neighborhood gathering space. Commercial parcels exist on all four corners of the intersection, with three located in unincorporated West Puente Valley. Commercial parcels at this intersection should be designed and oriented to pedestrian activity. Commercial parcels in West Puente Valley are limited but can provide neighborhood-serving uses with the potential for enhanced pedestrian connections.

TABLE SSJH-1 Southwest Communities Challenges and Opportunities

4. Community Character and Identity

Wayfinding and Community Identity. The communities are surrounded by incorporated cities, and because of the similar nature of development in the surrounding area, the boundaries of the community are difficult to discern. The location of neighborhood amenities and resources are not centrally marked, meaning that finding these locations requires familiarity with the community layout. The communities do not have a sense of place or identify compared to surrounding areas.

Walking Areas. Sidewalks are often built to a minimum width. Portions of walking paths lack shade trees, shade structures, and sufficient plantings. This lack of sun protection, combined with uninterrupted residential walls along major arterials, create an uninviting environment for pedestrians. The ESGV will see disproportionately higher temperatures in the future related to climate change, which will disproportionately affect communities without a tree canopy adequately sized to protect pedestrians.

Safety. Community members indicated that several public spaces including parks, are perceived as unsafe. Environmental design features, including pedestrian-scale lighting and clear sightlines, may be needed in areas that feel unsafe.

5. Parks and Open Space

Park Needs. Based on the 2016 Park Needs Assessment, approximately 78% of residents of these communities live in neighborhoods with high and very high parks needs, with only an average of 0.7 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents, far below the County average of 3.3 acres. Strategies need to be considered to meet the significant need for recreational space in these communities.

Walnut Creek and Puente Creek Channel. Walnut and Puente Creek Channels connect to some portions of the communities. These channels contain unutilized pathways that could be enhanced to improve pedestrian connections. Walnut Creek connects to the San Gabriel River, and Puente Creek connects to San Jose Creek, which in turn connects to the San Gabriel River. Where feasible, pathways along these channels should be revitalized into pedestrian greenways. This has the potential to become a community amenity with beautification and improvements.

Multi-use School and Church Sites. Several school and church properties in West Puente Valley consist of playing fields and open space amenities. To satisfy the need for additional access to open space, multi-use agreements could be forged between the County and local school districts or churches to allow for community use of school amenities outside of traditional school hours.



TABLE SSJH-1 Southwest Communities Challenges and Opportunities

6. Mobility

- **Connectivity.** Consisting of non-connecting streets and large arterial corridors, the residential areas are primarily designed to prioritize auto-use over other methods of transportation. In addition, railroad tracks, busy roads, and other barriers act as obstacles for pedestrians or bicyclists to travel to parts of the community. As a result, it can be challenging for residents to walk, bike, or take transit to nearby amenities.
- **Transit Access.** Transit access and usage in the community is minimal. Residents have expressed interest in expanding transit access in the community to reach local destinations. These local destinations are often centralized, walkable areas with opportunities for leisure and shopping. These amenities are lacking in Valinda, so residents must seek them elsewhere.
- **Street Maintenance.** Community members would like more frequent street maintenance.
- **Car Congestion.** Traffic congestion is high in the community, with traffic pushed onto local streets from the freeways.
- **West Puente Valley - Puente Avenue and Amar Road Frontage Streets.** Arterial streets in the community, including Puente Avenue, Sunset, and Amar Road, have segments with frontage roads that run parallel to them. These streets serve as a “membrane” that transfers arterial traffic to residential streets. Much of the frontage road space, including the median, is underutilized, and can be repurposed as a pocket park or bioswale to improve groundwater recapture. Underutilized areas can also be populated with street trees. These streets are part of the Los Angeles County Vision Zero Action Plan collision concentration corridors. If feasible, these frontage streets could provide room for additional safety infrastructure.

Land Use

The **South San Jose Hills, Valinda, and West Puente Valley Land Use Maps**, found in Appendix E, *Land Use Maps*, present land use designations and establish the general location and diversity of each land use in the Southwestern Communities.

C. COMMUNITY-SPECIFIC POLICIES

The following provides the policies for the Southwestern Communities, organized to implement each of the six elements of the Area Plan and address the community-specific issues and opportunities presented above. Each policy is linked to a relevant vision statement (referenced as “VS”), as presented in Chapter 1, *Introduction*, of this Area Plan.

VS 1 – Sustainable Growth Patterns

Policy SWC-1: Complete Communities. Enhance community access, connectivity, services, and amenities within walking distance of schools and residential neighborhoods with multi-use pathways. Focus amenities and services along the communities’ primary roads leading to community centers and amenities—Amar Road, Azusa Avenue, Nogales Street, Sunset Avenue, and Temple Road.

See Land Use Policy LU-1.2.

Policy SWC-1

VS 2 – Diverse, Walkable Communities

COMMERCIAL CENTERS AND CORRIDORS

Policy SWC-2: Existing Commercial Centers. Support efforts to strengthen and enhance existing commercial centers along major corridors, including Amar Road, Azusa Avenue, Nogales Street, Temple Street, and Valley Boulevard.

Policy SWC-3: Commercial Centers and Corridor Revitalization. Support identification of commercial areas where improvements and revitalization can result in multi-use benefits, such as enhanced access, active transportation pathways, aesthetic and community identity markers, urban greening, parks and open spaces, sustainable designs, and public health support. Revitalization along cross-jurisdictional roadways, such as Amar Road, can serve residents of the larger community and increase access to shared resources and amenities.

Policy SWC-4: Healthy Food. Explore opportunities to add small grocery stores along major corridors that are accessible by walking. Prioritize adding healthy food options within neighborhoods with low access to healthy food options, such as some neighborhoods near central corridors of Glendora Avenue, Amar Road, Azusa Avenue, Temple Avenue, and Valley Boulevard.



MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT AND VILLAGE CENTERS

Policy SWC-5: Village Centers and Social Gathering Areas.

Support creation of village centers and social gathering areas to meet community needs for more spaces and opportunities for community gathering. Prioritize options for a new community center in West Puente Valley, where currently none exist. Prioritize social gathering areas along major corridors near residential neighborhoods, commercial corridors, and schools, especially along Amar Road and Valley Boulevard.

INDUSTRIAL AND EMPLOYMENT USES

Policy SWC-6: Strengthen Employment. Strengthen industrial employment and job centers, especially along Valley Boulevard where opportunities exist to enhance the corridor as a pedestrian-oriented employment and commercial corridor.

PARKS, OPEN SPACES, AND TRAILS

Policy SWC-7: Open Spaces. Create new open space areas and enhance existing open space amenities near schools and neighborhoods. Improve access to these areas through connective urban pathways between residential areas, commercial services, and other community amenities along primary roads, including Amar Road, Azusa Avenue, Nogales Street, Temple Street. Prioritize new open space areas within community areas where none exist within a mile for residents, and where access is currently limited.

Policy SWC-8: River Pathways. Explore opportunities to connect the Puente Creek and Walnut Creek Channels to the San Gabriel Valley River Trail with new multi-use trails and greenery to enhance active transportation, expand regional trail connectivity, and provide an attractive pathway and water feature for the local community to enjoy.

Policy SWC-9: New Multi-Use Trails. Promote the creation and integration of multi-use trails, walkways, and bicycle paths throughout the Southwestern Communities—including walking loops along streets that utilize environmentally sustainable surfaces—and connect to community amenities, gathering areas, parks, nearby transit stops, and other local destinations. Ensure multi-use trails are well-maintained in a safe and clean manner.

VS 3 – Connected and Active Communities

Policy SWC-10: Safe Travel Speeds. Support implementation of design interventions to prevent speeding, especially on identified collision concentration corridors.

Policy SWC-11: Transit Connectivity. Seek to provide more transit connectivity along arterials. A community circulator or micro-transit could provide connections to a nearby transit hub and community amenities like parks and trails. This transit/micro-transit should meet Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility requirements.

VS 4 – Shared Community Identity and Character

Policy SWC-12: Concrete Masonry Wall Beautification. Promote visual continuity of private walls that face rights-of-way, and primary and secondary roads and highways. Identify possible options and design strategies to beautify the concrete masonry walls using uniform paint, design, or other devices or decorative materials and landscaping. Engage community members in decision-making, for community input, and participation in the selection and implementation of improvements.

Policy SWC-13: Business and Job Opportunities. Support marketing to top employment industries that match Southwestern Communities resident skillsets, including manufacturing, health care, retail, and transportation. Support industries that provide synergies with businesses located in the community's commercial and industrial-zoned areas. Support training, education, and job opportunities for the advancement of the local workforce.

Policy SWC-14: Retail Industry. Support the growth or addition of local businesses that add to the communities' retail diversity and help revitalize commercial corridors along major roads, including Valley Boulevard, Azusa Avenue, Amar Road.

VS 6 – Sustainable Built and Natural Environment

Policy SWC-15: Sensitive Uses along Rail Lines. Discourage sensitive uses, including health facilities, hospitals, schools, playgrounds, and senior centers, near railroad rights-of-way.