

8.9 Rowland Heights

A. INTRODUCTION

The Rowland Heights community is approximately 13 square miles and is located in the southern part of the Planning Area. The community has a population of 48,231 and is characterized by scenic hillsides and residential uses. Rowland Heights has varied topography rising from the valley floor at the northern edge of the community to the slopes of the Puente Hills bordering Orange County. The community is surrounded by the cities of Industry on the north, Brea (Orange County) on the south, Diamond Bar on the east, and La Habra Heights on the west. In addition, the unincorporated communities of Hacienda Heights and South Diamond Bar are located to the west and southeast.

B. COMMUNITY CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The following presents a summary of challenges and opportunities learned from community feedback and an analysis of existing conditions in the community (see **Table RH-1, Rowland Heights Challenges and Opportunities**). Several outreach events and a visioning workshop were conducted where residents shared what they value, their concerns, and desired improvements. In addition, DRP met monthly for over a year with the Rowland Heights Planning Advisory Group, a group that was convened by the Rowland Heights Community Coordinating Council to discuss updates to the Rowland Heights Community Standards District and the ESGVAP. The group consisted of several members of the Rowland Heights Community Coordinating Council and other interested community members.

Major themes the community identified at the engagement events related to housing affordability, fear of displacement, improvements to commercial areas, increasing retail options, proximity to local industrial uses, traffic congestion, road safety, and access to transit. These challenges and opportunities, presented in Table RH-1, serve to inform the preparation of community-specific land use, zoning, policies, and programs for Rowland Heights.

TABLE RH-1 Rowland Heights Challenges and Opportunities

1. Residential

Housing Options. A lack of diverse housing options leads to long term impacts, including housing unaffordability, increase in traffic congestion, unpermitted additions, and a lack of community reinvestment.

Residential Development Pattern. Residential areas are often oriented inward, with few connections to nearby amenities and services. While this beneficially limits through traffic, it unfortunately also limits walkability and community connectivity. The nature of the existing development pattern, which includes cul-de-sacs, wide rights-of-way without landscaping, narrow sidewalks, lack of transit options, and lack of services and amenities, has increased automobile reliance, exacerbating air quality, pollution, congestion, and noise issues (particularly on Colima Road).

Short-Term Rentals. Housing units rented out for short-term housing can lead to issues with parking, noise, and limit the availability of long-term rental housing.

VS-1, Sustainable Growth Patterns, and VS-2, Diverse, Walkable Communities, address the above by providing diverse housing options near major commercial corridors that enhance the existing character of the community and preserve the existing HMAs and SEAs.

2. Commercial

Commercial Areas. Commercial areas are primarily located along Colima Road and Gale Avenue. Lack of commercial uses outside of these areas results in residents traveling outside of the community to find work, goods, and services.

Commercial Design. Commercial properties are generally car-oriented, with large, often inefficiently designed parking areas fronting roads, limiting pedestrian connectivity and vibrancy of commercial areas.

Revitalization. Major corridor and intersection revitalization opportunities exist on Colima Road, between S. Azusa Avenue and Fairway Drive; there are various vacant and aging parcels along this corridor.

VS-2, Diverse, Walkable Communities, address the above by revitalizing existing commercial uses along Colima Road and adding commercial uses that create attractive, accessible, and community-serving centers.

3. Industrial and Employment Uses

Industrial Areas. Existing land uses north of SR-60 between Nogales Road and Fairway Drive share boundaries with the City of Industry and heavily industrial areas that run along the railroad lines.

Residential/Industrial Interface. Residential and other sensitive uses are proximate to industrial uses in the north part of the community with potential negative impacts. Additional residential uses should be avoided in this area.

TABLE RH-1 Rowland Heights Challenges and Opportunities

Employment. There are not enough employment-generating uses in the community to employ the current population, forcing residents to travel outside of the community for employment.

VS-2, Diverse, Walkable Communities, and VS-4, Thriving Economy and Workforce, address the above by focusing on industrial uses and enhancing and increasing employment opportunities within Rowland Heights.

4. Community Spaces and Parks

Downtown Gathering Space. Enhanced commercial uses along Colima Road could include mixed-use development, a restaurant row, night markets, gathering spaces, plazas, placemaking elements, neighborhood serving stores, and mom-and-pop establishments to promote a “vibrant downtown center” as a center of activity and community gathering.

Park Needs. According to the 2016 Countywide Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment, 27% of the community’s population lives within a half mile of a park, far less than the County average of 49%. Approximately 33% of the community has a “very high need” or “high need of additional park space.”

Open Space Access. In general, hillside communities are adjacent to open space areas, but the neighborhoods in the northeastern section of Rowland Heights lack access to these amenities and open space uses.

VS-2, Diverse, Walkable Communities, addresses the above by enhancing social gathering places where people can connect and enjoy the community assets, services, and amenities.

5. Traffic, Transportation, and Accessibility

Transportation Infrastructure. SR-60 is located at the northern boundary and SR-57 is located at the eastern boundary of the community. The proximity to freeways and railroads creates air quality issues for adjacent residential uses.

Car-Oriented Patterns. The existing development pattern is car-oriented which increases automobile reliance and contributes to greater greenhouse gas emissions, air pollution, and noise.

Traffic Congestion. The proximity of SR-60 to industrial clusters in the region, as well as limited alternative transportation options, has led to significant traffic congestion on the freeway and major corridors throughout the area.

Goods Movement. The high frequency of goods movement results in truck traffic spilling over into secondary highways to avoid traffic congestion, resulting in impacts to residential quality of life.

TABLE RH-1 Rowland Heights Challenges and Opportunities

Collision Concentration Corridors. Collision concentration corridors are located along Colima Road, at the intersections of Nogales Street and Fairway Drive, and along Batson Avenue. The intersection of Fullerton and Colima Roads has also been voiced as a collision area of concern. Additionally, speeding, road racing, and “donuts” on Pathfinder Road and other major arterials have been observed, causing added safety concerns.

Amenities. Residential areas use arterials such as Fullerton Road, Nogales Street, and Pathfinder Road, which have few amenities for pedestrians and bikers, and are perceived to be unsafe and unpleasant to walk or bike along.

Mixed-Use Development. Increased active transportation can be supported by mixed-use development patterns, through retrofitting the inherited infrastructure, and by incorporating a public realm strategy that prioritizes active transportation.

Transit. There is an opportunity to develop a well-connected, easily accessible, and efficient transit system. This transit system could include an on-demand community shuttle or circulator that serves residents.

VS-2, Diverse, Walkable Communities, and VS-3, Connected and Active Communities, address the above by enhancing connectivity through creating complete streets, increasing active transportation and road infrastructure, and improving commercial access for residents.

6. Public Realm

Walkability. Walkable access to nearby community amenities is often difficult due to the lack of connecting streets.

Public Realm. The public realm is lacking a brand—unified signage, beautification, and distinct public realm amenities—to unify the main commercial corridor and foster a distinct community identity. There is an opportunity to enhance commercial areas with pedestrian-friendly infrastructure, beautification, and landscape design to create a public realm that supports active transportation and community identity.

Wayfinding. There is little to no wayfinding signage to identify community boundaries and amenities.

Shade and Greenery. Tree canopy and greenery can be added to improve major roads with landscaping along sidewalks, medians, and walking paths.

VS-3, Connected and Active Communities, and VS-5, Shared Community Identity and Character, address the above by enhancing public realm amenities that provide community identity, create attractive and safe walkable spaces, and accommodate a diversity of needs.

7. Preservation and Wildlife

Preservation. Growth should be avoided in the hillsides located in the southern and southeastern area of the community, including areas in the Puente Hills SEA and fire hazard areas.



TABLE RH-1 Rowland Heights Challenges and Opportunities

Industrial Areas. The northern portion of the community includes heavy manufacturing near sensitive uses (residential); as such, additional residential uses should be avoided in this area.

Ridgelines. The community contains scenic ridgelines and there is an opportunity to protect this valued local asset with regulatory standards.

Wildlife Corridors and Connectivity. Wildlife corridors connect the Puente Hills eastward to the Chino Hills. Some of this area is designated SEA, but some of the wildlife corridor remains undesignated. Development should be avoided in this area.

Canyon Preservation. Powder and Brea Canyons support diverse habitat and wildlife connectivity by a series of open space corridors that allow animal species to migrate. These canyons should be protected and further habitat fragmentation avoided.

Wildfire and Safety Risks. Much of southern Rowland Heights falls within the VHFHSZ. In the ESGV, most structures built within the wildland/urban interface are within the VHFHSZ. Increased development at the urban periphery introduces structures, roads, vehicle traffic, and people into previously undeveloped areas, increasing the probability of wildfires, which are largely human-caused. Given the severity of the threats, development in these high-risk areas should be avoided.

VS-2, Diverse, Walkable Communities, and VS-6, Sustainable Built and Natural Environment, address the above by focusing on the protection and preservation of natural and biological resources through preservation and conservation strategies.

Land Use

The **Rowland Heights Land Use Map**, found in Appendix E, *Land Use Maps*, presents land use designations and establishes the general location and diversity of each land use in Rowland Heights.

C. COMMUNITY-SPECIFIC POLICIES

This following provides the policies for Rowland Heights, 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.

All policies in the ESGVAP Elements are applicable at the community-specific level. Refer to Chapter 9, *Implementation Programs and Actions*, for actions and programs that serve to implement the policies below at the community level.

VS 1 – Sustainable Growth Patterns

Policy RH-1: Transportation Options. Increase access to transit and active transportation options throughout Rowland Heights. In coordination with Foothill Transit, expand shuttle services and create on-demand transit options to connect neighborhoods to wider area of services (retail and public facilities) within the community and beyond.

Policy RH-2: Transit Options for Hillside Areas. Support development of on-demand shuttle options to serve aging populations, particularly those located in hillside areas without access to transit.

Policy RH-3: Hillside Housing. Minimize alteration of natural hillsides, water courses, and vegetation; in particular, preserve specimen and native trees. Focus development on land with less natural cover, excluding major ridgelines.

VS 2 – Diverse, Walkable Communities

RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS AND HOUSING DIVERSITY

Policy RH-4: Adequate Parking. Ensure adequate parking in all residential neighborhoods, particularly in the northern and central residential neighborhoods of Rowland Heights between Azusa Avenue and Fairway Drive. Limit the parking of vehicles on public roads in residential neighborhoods.

COMMERCIAL CENTERS AND CORRIDORS

Colima Road between Azusa Avenue and Fairway Drive is identified as the downtown of Rowland Heights.

Policy RH-5: Downtown Corridor. Enhance Colima Road as a pedestrian-oriented downtown gathering area and commercial corridor with amenities, services, and greenways connecting to residential neighborhoods to enhance the sense of community, diversity, and place of Rowland Heights.



Policy RH-6: Downtown Identity and Branding. Create a cohesive downtown identity through a coordinated placemaking program to consider unified and distinct branding, signage, public art, and public realm improvements along Colima Road. Incorporate distinct drought-tolerant, climate-appropriate native trees and landscaping along roadways and medians, unified pedestrian-scale street lighting, and coordinated public realm amenities—such as street furnishings—for Colima Road between Azusa Avenue and Fairway Drive, identifying the area as the downtown of Rowland Heights.

Policy RH-7: Existing Commercial Centers. Strengthen and enhance existing commercial centers on Colima Road, Jellick Avenue, and Nogales Street.

Policy RH-8: Lot Consolidation. Encourage and incentivize lot consolidation in commercial areas, especially vacant parcels, and parcels under different ownership where commercial uses and parking layouts spread over contiguous properties.

Policy RH-9: Driveway Consolidation. For discretionary projects, require consolidation of driveways to limit curb cuts and traffic disruptions.

Policy RH-10: Site Plan Requirements. Ensure that contiguous commercial properties under different ownership prepare coordinated site plans and parking layouts to limit the number of curb cuts and ensure clear and cohesive site layouts with efficient use of parking.

Policy RH-11: Shared Driveways. Facilitate shared driveway access for contiguous commercial properties under different ownership to prevent excess driveway constructions.

Policy RH-12: Limit Curb Cuts. To create a pedestrian-friendly public realm, limit the number of curb cuts along commercial thoroughfares.

MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT AND VILLAGE CENTERS

Policy RH-13: Village Center. Create village centers in the northern portion of the community along Colima Road and its major intersections, where access to amenities, services, and connections through greenways is high.

Policy RH-14: Social Gathering Area. Encourage and incentivize the inclusion of social gathering spaces in commercial development and near existing schools through enhanced public park and open space amenities. Prioritize locations in the northern portion of the community near Colima Road, where access to existing services and amenities is high. Prioritize areas near Rowland Elementary, Alvarado Intermediate, John A. Rowland High, and Shelyn Elementary south of Colima Road, and Jellick Elementary and Ybarra Academy north of Colima Road.

PUBLIC AND SEMI-PUBLIC FACILITIES

Policy RH-15: Joint-Use Facilities. Explore partnerships with schools in the community, near Colima Road and residential neighborhoods, to jointly use their facilities and resources, including parks, playgrounds, libraries, community centers, daycare facilities, and other resources, to increase access to recreational and other amenities for nearby residents.

See Land Use Policy LU-3.18.

Policy RH-15

PARKS, OPEN SPACES, AND TRAILS

Policy RH-16: Equitable Open Space Distribution. Increase open space amenities and access to existing open space to neighborhoods located in the northeastern section of Rowland Heights, which represent the share of the community that is in very high need or high need of additional park space.

NATURAL, CULTURAL, AND BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

The following policies address how to preserve the natural and biological resources in Rowland Heights through the acquisition of undeveloped lands in the Puente Hills to maintain a critical wildlife linkage and corridor, preserve ridgelines, and prevent expansion of the wildland/urban interface and habitat fragmentation.

Policy RH-17: Paleontological and Archeological Resources. Ensure permanent preservation of Chalk Hill and other areas with paleontological and archeological resources.

Policy RH-18: Native American Sites. Support the study, survey, and recognition of Indigenous American/Gabrieleño/Tongva sites of importance in Rowland Heights.

Policy RH-19: Brea Canyon Road. Prohibit the widening of Brea Canyon Road and maintain the current width as it exists in the county for maximum protection of habitat areas.

Policy RH-20: Equestrian Uses. Support the preservation of agriculture and equestrian uses in the central section of Rowland Heights, south of Colima Road along Desire Avenue and around Native Avenue, north of Pathfinder Road.

Policy RH-21: Protect Migrating Wildlife. Ensure habitat protection for migrating wildlife and preserve habitat areas important for wildlife migration. The Puente Hills are a well-known migration corridor for migratory birds and are important for resident species throughout the year.

Policy RH-22: Threatened Species. Protect and preserve habitat areas used by threatened species outside of designated SEAs. Much of the southern hillside areas are designated as critical habitat by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the California coastal gnatcatcher, whose preferred natural habitat is coastal sage scrub. The coastal cactus wren also has significant populations in the Puente Hills through Hacienda Heights into Rowland Heights.

VS 3 – Connected and Active Communities

See Chapter 7, *Mobility Element*, for additional policies related to complete streets.

Policy RH-23

Policy RH-23: Complete Streets. Create complete streets from neighborhoods leading to Colima Road, commercial uses, and village centers.

Policy RH-24: Connected Pathways. Support the preservation, maintenance, and expansion of heritage agricultural pathways known as cat walks. Use multi-use pathways and trails to connect neighborhoods to schools, retail, services, public facilities, and active transportation routes.

VS 4 – Shared Community Identity and Character

Policy RH-25: Community Gateways. Mark prominent community entrance points with special design and architectural enhancements. Prioritize the entrances on major corridors near commercial and village centers, at Azusa Avenue, Fullerton Road, Nogales Street, and Fairway Drive to the north and south, and Colima Road to the west and east.

Policy RH-26: Preserve Ridgeline Aesthetic. Protect the visual qualities of scenic areas including ridgelines, hillsides, and views from public roads and trails, particularly in the Brea Canyon Cut-Off area and Puente Hills.

VS 7 – Informed, Empowered, and Environmentally Just Communities

Policy RH-27: Permit Application Information. Provide weekly permit application reports to any community member who requests such information.

Policy RH-28: Project Presentations for Community Groups. Require all discretionary permit applicants to present proposed projects early in the application process to the Rowland Height Community Coordinating Council or other community groups that requests presentations. Applicants will be required to present projects on multiple occasions as needed and as the project is revised.

See Community Character and Design Policy CC-1.8.

Policy RH-25

