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## CHAPTER 4 Community Character and Design Element

### 4.1 Introduction

Community character is shaped by a location’s physical and cultural environment, forming a specific identity and sense of place. The 24 unincorporated communities of the ESGV are characterized by quiet residential streets, small scales, and some rural and equestrian areas. The ESGVAP strives to preserve the character of these communities, while fostering and transitioning to more diverse land uses, and open space resources and amenities. For further community-level information and analysis that informed the development of this element, refer to Appendix H, *Existing Conditions Background for the Community Character and Design Element*.

This Community Character and Design Element supports the vision outlined in the ESGVAP by enhancing community identity and high-quality design and aligns with the existing community character and the Vision Statements found in Chapter 1, *Introduction*. This element includes a high-level summary of community character and design challenges and opportunities in the ESGV Planning Area (Planning Area).

**Appendix B, *Design Guidelines***, provides a framework of measurable and quantifiable design guidelines that ensure built-form relationships between older, existing, and new projects.

## 4.2 Challenges and Opportunities

To better understand the community identity of the ESGV, its landforms, housing types, commercial corridors, public realms, and waterways, each of the 24 unincorporated communities were observed and photographed. The community character observations and existing conditions are discussed in detail in Appendix H, *Existing Conditions Background for the Community Character and Design Element*. The following is a summary of existing conditions.

There are three overarching community character and design challenges and opportunities observed in the 24 unincorporated communities in the Planning Area. The first, residential character, pertains to housing types, architectural elements, and neighborhood street conditions. The second addresses commercial character, particularly regarding new development and public realm concerns. The third addresses design in the public realm and along waterways, distinguishing undisturbed land from active and passive recreational spaces and greenways along waterways. The challenges and opportunities outlined in this section inform the goals and policies for community character and design.

- A. Avocado Heights
- B. Charter Oak
- C. Covina Islands
- D. East Azusa
- E. East Irwindale
- F. East San Dimas
- G. Glendora Islands
- H. Hacienda Heights
- I. North Claremont
- J. North Pomona
- K. Unincorporated North Whittier
- L. Northeast La Verne
- M. Northeast San Dimas
- N. Pellissier Village
- O. Rowland Heights
- P. South Diamond Bar
- Q. Unincorporated South El Monte
- R. South San Jose Hills
- S. South Walnut
- T. Valinda
- U. Walnut Islands
- V. West Claremont
- W. West Puente Valley
- X. West San Dimas

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### ESGV Communities



This neighborhood in Covina Islands is a typical example of single-family neighborhoods in the ESGV—single-story detached housing, prominent division of lots with fencing, and a lack of sidewalks.

## A. RESIDENTIAL CHARACTER



Many streets in residential neighborhoods end in cul-de-sacs with no access back to the main road.

Residential conditions in the Planning Area include the following characteristics:

1. The unincorporated communities of the ESGV are predominately residential, with one-story single-family housing being the most prominent housing type. Although some multifamily exists near major roads in the central and southern communities.
2. The streets in single-family residential neighborhoods typically end in cul-de-sacs with no connectivity to adjacent public or private rights-of-way.
3. Fences, hedges, and other landscaping are typical along all parcel lines to divide single-family lots. Many subdivisions are bound by masonry walls along major roads.
4. Parking conditions for single-family homes vary by community, but typically include attached and detached garages, driveways with parking in the front yard, and street parking.
5. Many residential neighborhoods lack sidewalks and allow street parking on both sides of the street, forcing pedestrians and moving vehicles to share the same street space.

## B. COMMERCIAL CHARACTER



Large surface parking areas between the street and existing retail hinder walkability in the ESGV.

Commercial corridor conditions in the Planning Area include the following characteristics:

1. Many of the commercial corridors are aging and are disconnected from surrounding residential communities.
2. There are few commercial and mixed-use projects and limited commercial corridors.
3. Commercial areas are auto-centric and not pedestrian-oriented. The limited access to commercial areas makes it difficult to walk to services and goods. Mobility options such as bicycle infrastructure and high-quality transit access are also scarce, creating an over-dependence on driving and car ownership in the Planning Area.
4. Commercial corridors are underutilized. There are opportunities to enhance and improve existing commercial corridors with new projects before utilizing adjoining areas for development.

5. Many commercial uses have no connection with and do not contribute to a walkable, human-scaled streetscape. Commercial corridors consist mostly of retail centers dominated by surface parking, which hinders walkability and community vibrancy.
6. Existing commercial centers in the Planning Area do not provide open space and gathering opportunities. Plazas, courtyards, and other greenspaces are necessary to provide opportunities for gathering and placemaking.

## C. PUBLIC REALM AND WATERWAYS

Public realm and waterway conditions in the Planning Area include the following characteristics:

1. Passive and active recreational parks are scarce within ESGV unincorporated communities.
2. Street trees are prevalent along residential streets, but less frequent along the sidewalks of main roads. This affects pedestrian comfort levels and the aesthetics of communities. There are opportunities to provide shade, cooling, and improve community identity through tree plantings on main roads.
4. Frontage roads run parallel to arterial streets in many communities to provide a buffer between residential areas and busy roads, but result in wide rights-of-ways with minimal landscaping or pedestrian treatments.
5. The existing waterways are a collection of channels, creeks, and washes of varying widths that flow through into San Gabriel River and provide opportunities for potential neighborhood pathways and greenways. There are only two greenways that follow waterways in the Planning Area and there is opportunity to expand this experience.
6. Wider open channels, such as Walnut Creek, Big Dalton Wash, Little Dalton Wash, and the San Jose Diversion Channel, flow along the boundary of or through multiple communities and provide potential for connectivity and enhanced areawide public amenities.

## 4.3 Community Character and Design Element Goals and Policies



The Little Dalton Wash cuts through multiple unincorporated communities, including East Irwindale.

The following goals and policies apply globally to all ESGV unincorporated communities and provide the design framework required to incrementally enhance, unincorporated communities' identity and character.

This section strives to take steps toward the establishment of more a climate resilient and equitable ESGV that serves its increasingly diverse constituents. The following design goals and policies will contribute to an enhanced identity, sense of place, and a new definition of high-quality design.

Goals and policies for community character and design are organized to implement relevant Vision Statements as presented in Chapter 1, *Introduction*, and are referenced below as "VS." See Chapter 8, *East San Gabriel Valley Unincorporated Communities*, for goals and policies associated with specific unincorporated communities. See Chapter 9, *Implementation Programs and Actions*, for implementing programs and actions corresponding to each goal and policy.

### VS 4 – Shared Community Identity and Character

**Goal CC-1:** ESGV communities enjoy a strong sense of community, reinforced through placemaking, compatible design, and safe and well-maintained neighborhoods.

**Policy CC-1.1: Placemaking.** Require new development and public realm improvements to enhance the community's sense of place and identity through placemaking by considering the unique or defining elements of the community manifested through its built form, architectural character, building materials, public realm, views, and other defining elements.

**Policy CC-1.2: Rural and Equestrian Character.** Protect the ESGV's rural and equestrian character by fostering it in public design treatments and by preserving equestrian districts, bridle paths, and rural areas.

**Policy CC-1.3: Community, Historic, and Cultural Resources.**

Encourage the identification and preservation of community, historic, and cultural resources through community-led asset mapping.

**Policy CC-1.4: Community Identity.** Create a common design theme that can be reinforced through public realm treatments in all unincorporated ESGV communities to reinforce and foster community identity.

**Policy CC-1.5: Individual Community and Neighborhood Identity.** Foster design themes that highlight the unique characteristics of individual unincorporated communities and neighborhoods, while maintaining a sense of belonging to the greater ESGV.

**Policy CC-1.6: Public Spaces and Facilities.** Design public facilities to encourage creative placemaking and reinforce community identity and pride.

**Policy CC-1.7: Street Beautification.** Beautify and reinforce ESGV identity and character through street trees, lighting, community signage, bike lanes, public art, and other strategies. Prioritize the beautification of commercial streets and community greenways to increase pedestrian and bicycle activity.

**Policy CC-1.8: Community Gateways.** Define unique and prominent gateways at community entrance points for each unincorporated community with special design and architectural enhancements, such as signage, landscaping, public art installation, or distinctive architecture.

**Policy CC-1.9: Viewsheds.** Protect significant views of the San Gabriel Mountains, Puente Hills, and other prominent viewpoints from points of public access as a defining characteristic of the ESGV.

**Policy CC-1.10: Community Safety.** Require that buildings, centers, streets, and public spaces be designed to enhance public safety by providing street-fronting uses, adequate downward directed lighting, and sight lines.



See Chapter 5, *Natural Resources, Conservation, and Open Space Element*, for policies related to scenic resources.

**Policy CC-1.9**

**Policy CC-1.11: Maintenance.** Ensure that property owners maintain their buildings and properties, for the safety of the residents and tenants, and for the preservation of community character and aesthetics.

**Policy CC-1.12: Neighborhood Cleanup Events.** Encourage neighborhoods to care for and take pride in their environment through neighborhood cleanups and other regularly organized events.

**Goal CC-2:** Ensure that residential, commercial, mixed-use, open space, and public realm improvements enhance the community identity and character of the ESGV.

See Appendix B, *Design Guidelines*, for additional design guidelines that further define high-quality design.

#### Policy CC-2.1

**Policy CC-2.1: High-Quality Design.** Incorporate high-quality site design, building design, and open space design by prioritizing connectivity to the surrounding community and nature, high-quality building materials, and shaded and programmable environments, to create an aesthetically pleasing environment.

**Policy CC-2.2: Sustainable Site Design.** Prioritize sustainable site development and design practices, such as east–west building orientations to reduce heating costs and drought-tolerant plants that are native to the ESGV.

**Policy CC-2.3: Compatible Development.** Ensure that new development is sited, designed, and scaled to relate to the surrounding neighborhood character with respect to height, bulk, orientation, setbacks, access, lighting, landscaping, and aesthetics.

**Policy CC-2.4: Shade Trees.** Incorporate locally native, drought-tolerant, and climate-appropriate shade trees with large canopies into the landscaping of private development sites and public parkways, public streets, sidewalks, and rights-of-way to mitigate heat island effect and minimize cooling costs.

**Policy CC-2.5: Vegetation.** Encourage the use of locally native, drought-tolerant and climate-appropriate trees and vegetation as an integral design component in new development projects, particularly along public sidewalks, landscaped buffers at abutting sites, landscaped parking areas, and passive and active recreational open spaces.

**Policy CC-2.6: Reducing Urban Heat Island Effect.** Support the design of developments that provide substantial tree canopy cover and/or shade structures, incorporate light-colored paving materials and limit heat-trapping surfaces, and include energy-efficient roofing materials to reduce the urban heat island effect.

**Policy CC-2.7: Shaded Access.** Expand shade along and over pedestrian networks through zoning code revisions that encourage shade-providing building features, such as galleries, arcades, and awnings, and permit the encroachment of such features into portions of the right-of-way, where appropriate.

**Policy CC-2.8: Parking Structures Incorporate Shading.** Develop programs to require new and to support retrofitting existing parking structures and surface parking to incorporate shade structures, solar carports, and cooling or green surfaces to limit the urban heat island effect.

**Policy CC-2.9: Splash Pads.** Support the inclusion of splash pads with recirculated water in private developments as another way of providing communities with opportunities for relief during warmer months or during an extreme heat event.

**Goal CC-3: Accommodate households with a full range of multifamily and missing middle residential building types.**

**Policy CC-3.1: Higher-Intensity Types.** Direct higher-intensity residential building types toward high-quality transit corridors and stops as well as major streets, while providing setbacks and built-form transitions to lower-scale communities.

**Policy CC-3.2: Site Planning.** Ensure that new development sites improve connectivity and provide easily accessible public open space.

See Appendix B, *Design Guidelines*, for additional design guidelines that help ensure consistency between existing and new developments.

**Goal CC-3**





*Mansionization* refers to the practice of demolishing smaller, older houses in a neighborhood and replacing them with new ones that occupy the maximum amount of lot space possible on the site.

#### Mansionization

**Policy CC-3.3: Mansionization.** Discourage mansionization by requiring building scale, massing, front façade articulation, and setbacks to be compatible with existing neighborhoods. Incorporate building breaks, roofscapes varying in height and shape, and other building details to ensure new development is in scale with its context.

**Policy CC-3.4: Mass and Bulk.** Design new developments with major and minor massing components and breaks in massing and plane to mimic the existing residential character.

**Policy CC-3.5: Materiality.** Highlight key building components, such as entryways and windows, by using multiple materials, textures, and colors.

**Policy CC-3.6: Sustainable Building Design.** Encourage green building techniques, such as recycled building materials, energy-efficient lighting and appliances, renewable energy, green roofs, and water conservation, in the design, construction, and maintenance of new residential developments.

**Policy CC-3.7: Development and Access.** Design developments to avoid use of cul-de-sacs, gated entrances, bounding walls around developments along public rights-of-way, and other barriers to connected roads, sidewalks, and pathways.

### Goal CC-4: Improve the commercial character of ESGV major streets and centers.

**Policy CC-4.1: Pedestrian-Oriented Design.** Require all new development along commercial corridors to be designed to emphasize pedestrian activity and interest from the street. Building entrances should be located along street frontages and driveway access should be limited to the minimum necessary, including closing unnecessary driveways. Additional features include providing multiple pedestrian access points with clear paths of travel, wayfinding signage, shade structures, drought-tolerant, native landscaping and shade trees, energy-efficient pedestrian-scaled lighting, seated gathering areas, small plazas, public art, open space, aesthetic buildings materials and colors, and transparent ground-level window façades.

**Policy CC-4.2: Building Setbacks and Parking.** Design mixed-use developments at the pedestrian-scale by prioritizing minimum building setbacks from sidewalks, including storefront displays and articulated entryway details on the ground level. Reduce pedestrian and vehicular conflicts by placing parking behind, under, or above active uses.

**Policy CC-4.3: Development and Connectivity.** Design new developments to connect to their contexts and facilitate access to local services and amenities. Ensure that sidewalks, pathways, and roadways connect to existing pedestrian, bike, and vehicular infrastructure and limit or prevent conflicts between different modes of travel.

**Policy CC-4.4: Revitalization.** Rehabilitate existing commercial corridors to prioritize pedestrian accessibility to sidewalks and public rights-of-way and improve visual appearance.

**Policy CC-4.5: Mass and Height.** Ensure that higher-intensity commercial uses and mixed-use projects fit with the lower scale of adjoining residential communities through the use of step-backs, transitional heights, and landscape buffers.

**Policy CC-4.6: Sustainability.** Ensure resilient and sustainable commercial and mixed-use projects that are energy- and water-efficient, more compact or encouraging of compact lifestyles, and connect to everyday activities of surrounding communities.

**Goal CC-5: Foster the design of climate-resilient streetscapes and outdoor public facilities that provide active and passive programmable environments for residents in ESGV communities.**

**Policy CC-5.1: Versatile Open Spaces.** Create multipurpose open spaces and small-scale mixed-use community gathering spaces that are equally dispersed throughout the Planning Area and associated with both public and private facilities.

**Policy CC-5.2: Urban Greenways.** Repurpose the frontage roads prevalent in the northern ESGV unincorporated communities and/or the buffers between arterial and frontage roads into urban greenways by adding landscaping and pedestrian treatments to divide the significantly wide rights-of-way.

**Policy CC-5.3: Light Pavements.** Encourage the use of light pavements for streets, driveways, and hardscaped open spaces to reflect the solar radiation that warms the surrounding environment and cool urban heat islands.

**Policy CC-5.4: Waterway Improvements.** Focus on improvements to storm channels, creeks, and washes, such as addressing flooding issues with low-impact development solutions and providing bicycle trails and walking pathways that connect ESGV communities.



**Policy CC-5.5: Native Landscaping.** Improve existing and future public and private open spaces, greenway, streets, and sidewalks with additional native trees and drought-tolerant native plants to mitigate heat island effects, create comfort for users, and manage water usage.

**Policy CC-5.6: Canopies.** Provide shade along streetscapes at transit stops and in public parks through covered outdoor structures, when possible, to improve the character of streets and open spaces.

**Policy CC-5.7: Public Art.** Integrate public art and creative local expression, such as murals, sculptures, creative signage, into the design of public and private open spaces, greenways, and infrastructure, including but not limited to bus shelters, trash bins, bike racks, and streetlights.

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