

**Racial Equity in Planning for
Unincorporated Los Angeles County**

**Building
Justice**

A brief study of the histories, legacies, and impacts at the intersection of systemic racism and planning in Florence-Firestone

Dr. Dana Cuff, Rayne Laborde, and Roya Chagnon



CONTENTS

This report is the result of an exploratory, pro bono partnership with cityLAB UCLA initiated by the Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning. Research was made possible through the time and generosity of community stakeholders, whose interviews frame our recommendations.

INTRODUCTION SECTION 00 p2

CONTEXT SECTION 01 p4

HOUSING-CENTRIC ISSUES SECTION 02 p10

CASE STUDIES SECTION 03 p16

PILOT PROJECT SECTION 04 p23

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00 INTRODUCTION

As measured by the LA County Department of Regional Planning's Equity Indicators Tool,

99% of residents are people of color

91% of renters are housing burdened, paying over 30% of income to rent

8 of Florence-Firestone's 13 Census Tracts are "High Segregation and Poverty"

32% of households are overcrowded, with greater than one person per room

Median income of **\$34.4K** is nearly 1/2 that of county-wide residents (\$64.3K)

School quality ranks **Below Average**

BACKGROUND

In 2020, American cities, states, and counties are staring down four centuries of systemic injustice, particularly anti-Black racism, as they try to determine the best path toward a more equitable future. There are as yet no clear directions; there are only determined explorations like this one, a collaboration between the County of Los Angeles Department of Regional Planning (County DRP) and cityLAB-UCLA. To untangle the insidious knots of segregation, redlining, discriminatory legislation, and other forms of injustice, we pulled on one thread --housing-- to gain some clear focus on the larger, thornier questions. Because housing is entangled spatially, economically, and structurally with public space, this demonstration project carefully considers them together. The work is a lens that brings into focus a critical analysis of existing legislation, a close understanding of everyday life in Los Angeles County, and the possible futures that creative thinking might open up. If it is effective, this report will show that further work along these lines is necessary, fruitful, and demonstrates a model that can be applied to other geographies with their own problematics.

As in most American jurisdictions, the County of LA's Zoning Code and related practices include legacy policies rooted in segregation, exclusion, and systemic racism. The County DRP seeks to re-examine its zoning and related practices through the lenses of racial and spatial justice, in order to (1) evaluate the impact of these policies on the built and lived outcomes of various communities, and (2) to eliminate inequitable legacy policies and practices. In particular, the County DRP hopes to evaluate and make more effective its recently developed Equity Indicators (EI) Tool. Beginning in summer 2020, cityLAB-UCLA (cityLAB) looked to the historically Black and now majority Latinx neighborhood of Florence-Firestone to better understand the existing conditions and needs of one unincorporated, highly segregated community.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

KEY QUESTION How and where can we undertake equity planning? That is, how do we begin to address systemic inequality and racism within planning codes, processes, and legislation?

FOCUS Housing --along with its associated public spaces and infrastructure-- is the focus since it is a driving socioeconomic and equity factor in communities, paying particular attention to "sore spots."

SORESPOTS In Florence-Firestone, a particularly disadvantaged unincorporated community, residents identified these interconnected sore spots: housing overcrowding, parking, homelessness, and pollution.

BEST PRACTICES To roadmap catalytic change, the project uses existing data and the County's Equity Indicator Tool to complement community interviews, site analyses, and current transformative programs like the Florence-Firestone Transit-Oriented District Specific Plan.

PILOT The report concludes with a proposal for a pilot project, called the Demonstration Depot, based on generalizable conditions that will test equity planning concepts, drawing conclusions about equitable, anti-racist planning practices.



COVID-19 Context:

This research was conducted during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. Regulations enforced during this period to ensure public health, including an order from the County of Los Angeles and State of California to shelter-in place impacted cityLAB's ability to collect primary data on certain dynamics in the neighborhood. In place of this primary data, cityLAB conducted extensive phone interviews with neighborhood stakeholders.

01 CONTEXT

SITUATING FLORENCE-FIRESTONE

Frequently described as “resilient,”¹ framing Florence-Firestone as a socioeconomically challenged yet vibrant Black (13%) and Latinx (86%) community reflects both its many longstanding issues and its invested residents. This description fails to reflect the active role of regional governance in shaping these inequities. Community planning documents for Florence-Firestone acknowledge the profound impact of deindustrialization and the ensuing demographic shifts on this neighborhood. Deindustrialization, though devastating for a community built around major automotive factory uses, only tells part of the Florence-Firestone story. Many of the disparities identified through the Equity Indicators Tool - ranging from “below average” school quality, prevalence of high segregation and poverty zones, extreme housing burden, and low median household income - stem from racist housing policies endorsed by federal, state, and local governments from the 1930s until the passing of the Fair Housing Act (FHA) of 1968. Side and after effects remain in the visible segregation and inequity of American cities and counties.

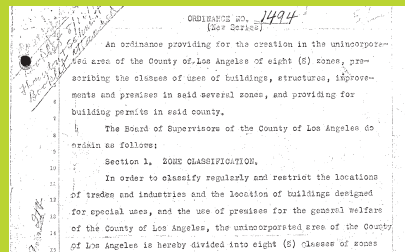
In 1910, 40% of Black Angelenos owned their homes - then one of the highest Black homeownership rates in the country, and one that included working-class Black families. Despite rising foreclosures during the Great Depression, Black homeownership fell only 4%,² but that was soon to change. Beginning in 1935, Congress created the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC) to selectively provide low-interest mortgages. As part of HOLC and the Federal Home Loan Bank Board’s mandate to manage outstanding loans, the “City Survey Program” was born to analyze local real estate trends. In reality, this program and the resulting “residential security maps” of graded neighborhood zones were a way to reinforce a “state-sponsored system of segregation” through forced disinvestment in mixed-race (particularly Black) neighborhoods and active encouragement of suburbanization for White families. Neighborhoods were classified into four zones, ranging from Green “A” (predominantly single-family, all-White suburbs safe for investment and offering favorable mortgages for properties with racially restrictive covenants) to Red “D” (mixed-race, multifamily, or industrialized areas, as well as any neighborhood with Black residents, where mortgages were routinely denied). Referred to as “redlining,” these practices ensured that residential development, and the ensuing socioeconomic benefits, were directed away from Black and mixed-race neighborhoods while limiting the ability to cross neighborhood

An Abridged Timeline of Planning in Florence-Firestone

Note: This land is the unceded territory of the Gabrieliño-Tongva Tribe, from 1480 BCE



1919-1921 - establishment of the Goodyear Tire factory adjacent to F-F established the industrial + mixed-use character of the area. Several blocks of adjacent housing were built as subsidized workforce housing



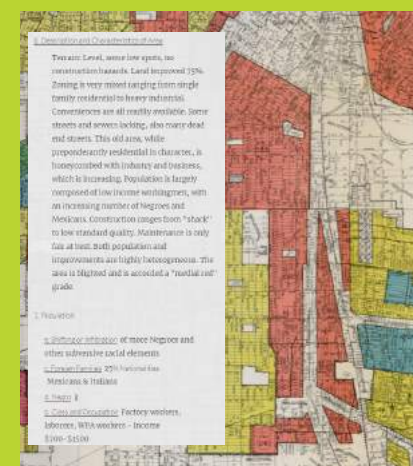
1927 - Initial Los Angeles County Zoning Code is adopted



1938 - Land Use Survey mapped by WPA shows similar conditions to today



By 1938 - Alameda St is known as the "cotton curtain," a racial dividing line between the suburbs, which Black Angelenos could not safely cross



1939 - In HOLC maps, F-F is entirely redlined. By 1965, 57% of residents are Black



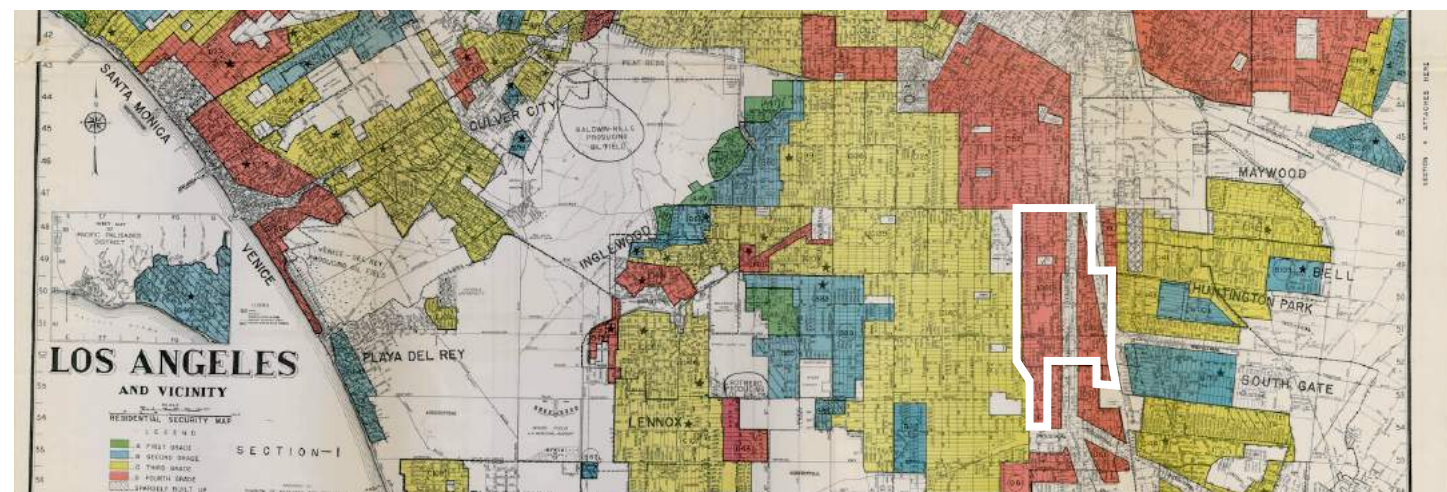
racial lines.³ Florence-Firestone was among the neighborhoods that were entirely redlined. For its southern portion, which was grouped with the community of Watts, HOLC surveyors reported

“no deed restrictions and zoning is mixed... It contains one of the largest concentrations of Negroes in Los Angeles County.... Construction is preponderantly substandard and much of it is of the shack variety. Maintenance [sic] is of poor character. Population and improvements are highly heterogeneous and, while slum conditions do not as yet prevail, the trend is definitely in that direction.”⁴

The northern portion of Florence-Firestone received a “medial” grade and was labeled “blighted,” reportedly characterized by a shifting population comprised of “more Negroes and other subversive racial elements.”⁵

The HOLC maps solidified and justified existing patterns of exclusion, such as the use of Alameda Street in Florence-Firestone as a physical racial barrier. By the late 1930s, Alameda Street was referred to as the “cotton curtain”: the dividing line between Black and White Los Angeles County, which Black residents could not safely cross.⁶ When Florence-Firestone residents organized to be included in the “Four Cities” School District in the late 1950s, representatives from Maywood, Bell, Huntington Park, and Vernon asserted that “the Florence-Firestone Park area has nothing cultural or social in common with the Four Cities.” By then, Alameda Street’s role as a racial barrier was cemented: “Alameda Street was already set as an attendance border by the LAUSD, & with the train tracks...[representing] a considerable obstacle that many Florence-Firestone students would have to traverse.”⁷ Train tracks were far from the only obstacle, as this interconnected history between discriminatory economic policy, housing segregation, spatial policing, and school choice reveals.

Ending explicitly segregationist federal housing policy and racially restrictive covenants through the FHA were hard-won Civil Rights victories during the “Long Hot Summer” of 1967 and related urban uprisings. The Watts Rebellion of 1965 significantly impacted businesses in Florence-Firestone, and is recognized by the County DRP as “stemming from racial injustices, discrimination, and economic hardship.”⁸ A 1965 California Governor’s



Civic Loop Opposes New School District

By LEWIS O. WILLIAMS



Late 1950s - the F-F community fights against South LA school segregation



1965 - The Watts Rebellion extends into F-F. Some sources claim this jumpstarts the area's deindustrialization and economic decline

**VIOLENCE IN THE CITY--
AN END OR A BEGINNING?**

1965 - In both the Watts-McCown and Kerner Commission reports, quality of housing is implicated as a crucial concern across Black inner-cities, including F-F



FLORENCE-FIRESTONE COMMUNITY



1970 - County of LA produces a Community Background Report focused on deindustrialization, housing stock, infrastructure, and education concerns

FLORENCE FIRESTONE COMMUNITY GENERAL PLAN

1971 - County of LA produces a Community General Plan for F-F. It is never adopted



1980s - as more businesses close and long-term residents lose jobs, the population shifts: by 2016, F-F is 91% Latinx

Commission report, “Violence in the City -- An End or a Beginning?”, reflected on the role of segregated, inferior housing on development and opportunity for Black Angelenos.⁹ In an infamous federal-level follow-up report, Lyndon B. Johnson’s Kerner Commission warned of the increasingly polarized state of the nation:

“Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white--separate and unequal... Segregation and poverty have created in the racial ghetto a destructive environment totally unknown to most white Americans. What white Americans have never fully understood but what the Negro can never forget--is that white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it.”¹⁰

In the report, grievances of inadequate housing were rated at the “First Level of Intensity,” alongside police practices and under/unemployment.¹¹ The findings and recommendations were rejected by President Johnson, one month before widespread riots swept across American cities.

While the FHA curtailed overtly discriminatory practices, it failed to meaningfully rectify over 30 years of targeted disenfranchisement in Black and mixed-race urban communities. The long shadow of redlining remains unaccounted for. In fact, redlining and its ramifications are not mentioned in any of the County’s previous Florence-Firestone community planning documents. By focusing solely on deindustrialization without examining the underlying housing policies, which made this explicitly racist shift both economically viable and lucrative, local and regional leadership has failed to recognize the role of government policy in creating segregated communities and concentrating poverty. Inability to access mortgages led to the decay of an already dated housing stock, lowering of property values and thus lowering of investment in public education, commercial, and public service programs. Black families who were denied mortgages were left with few alternative housing options. Though Florence-Firestone families could theoretically access mortgages post-1968, after three decades of state-sponsored disinvestment, few had the means to pursue ownership. Today, only 21% of Black households in the Los Angeles area own their homes, compared to 44% of White and 51% of Asian households.¹²

Incarceration also continues to strip Black and Latinx communities like Florence-Firestone of equal opportunity. According to the Million Dollar Hoods project, Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) made over 40,000 arrests between 2012-2017 in the Eastside South Central area, which includes Florence-Firestone. This area had the highest number of arrests, and second highest overall cost of incarceration: a shocking \$64,000,000. Incarceration disproportionately affects Black residents: 37% of those incarcerated in the 5-year period were Black, despite Black residents now making up under 10% of Florence-Firestone's population.¹³ The removal of tens of thousands of individuals from the community contributes to instability that disempowers individuals and their families from breaking the cycle of inequity.

Untangling the roots and racially explicit nature of these inequities offers paths forward, based in rebuilding community connections and opportunity. Today, the demographics of Florence-Firestone have shifted once more: now heavily Latinx, the neighborhood still faces severe housing, income, and public health challenges. Overcrowding, substandard housing, concentration of poverty, pollution and contamination from industrial neighbors, and lack of universal digital access in the midst of a COVID-19-driven digital shift are just a few of the many issues community members raised in interviews. And yet, in so many ways Florence-Firestone represents the kind of community County DRP officials are striving to achieve: as Jeannene Przyblyski writes in "A Paseo through Time in Florence-Firestone,"

"the first thing Florence-Firestone reminded me is that it is already a place... something different happens when you ask people what they like about their neighborhood, rather than what's wrong with it or what needs fixing... We are invited to confront the depth of commitment to public space; it should come as no surprise that the people of Florence-Firestone are fiercely devoted to their libraries and parks."

There is much to celebrate about Florence-Firestone. The neighborhood is rich in transit, history, and community activities, which combined create

1992 - Riots in response to systemic racism again shake LA

2009 - The County of LA returns to a F-F Community Plan

2015 - County of LA adopts the General Plan Update

2018 - Second Supervisorial District sponsors a team to document community histories in F-F

2019 - County of LA adopts the F-F Community Plan

2020 - County of LA begins a Florence-Firestone TOD Specific Plan

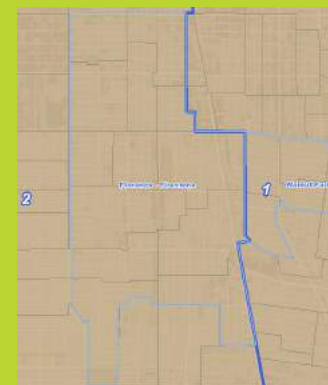
2021 - County of LA will initiate the Metro Area Plan, which includes F-F

a sense of place; has broad commercial corridors able to accommodate neighborhood-serving retail and strategic increased density; is scattered with schools and parks that create an array of walkable zones; and is anchored by two beloved libraries, which provide a vast array of social services. In many ways, the needs of Florence-Firestone remain the same as the ones identified in the community's earliest planning documents: improved housing conditions, greater investment in local schools, and improved mitigations between industrial and residential uses.

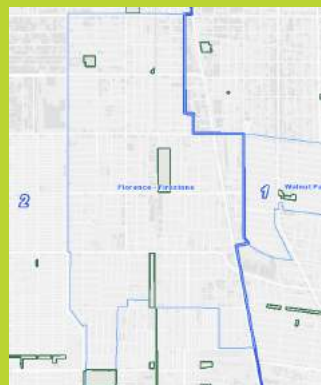
So how does a neighborhood overcome ingrained challenges of inequity? Florence-Firestone needs attention that builds equity, in the form of aspirational and actionable interventions to uplift current and future residents. Interviewees representing long-term Black residents and undocumented Latinx residents expressed feelings of underrepresentation and neglect by the County. Displacement, concentration of low income housing, overcrowding, and lack of community participation were of extreme concern to the interviewees, who are also skeptical of meaningful change given the community's long history with disinvestment and extractive development practices primarily benefiting other, usually wealthier and White, neighborhoods. Financial equity is needed, too: both in terms of increased investment as well as providing greater access to financing and banking tools to community members, who say their voices and local buying power are often ignored. Their own ability to drive change is limited by access to capital, time, credit, and appropriately situated professional expertise. In the midst of a renewed call for racial justice and a pandemic which is disproportionately affecting Black and Brown communities, the need for change is starkly visualized in ways that go beyond the EI Tool's metrics: Florence-Firestone's incarceration rates, COVID-19 deaths, the number of RV dwellers parked along industrial boulevards, and students who are not attending school as the digital divide leaves families behind. In addressing the long-standing racial inequities in Florence-Firestone, the County DRP stands to develop more equitable practices for addressing systemic racism in Los Angeles County, which can serve as a national model at a critical moment in history.

POLICY SPOTLIGHT: EQUITY INDICATORS TOOL (EI)

The County of Los Angeles Department of Regional Planning launched the Equity Indicators Tool in 2018, as part of the 2015 Board of Supervisors-initiated Equitable Development Work Program. The EI Tool is "a web-based mapping tool that displays socioeconomic, demographic and other information to identify areas that are experiencing greater degrees of challenges," including educational attainment, income, unemployment, homeless counts, housing cost burden, pollution burden, overcrowding, school quality, high segregation and poverty, and park need.



School Quality: Below Average



Park Need: Very High



High Segregation & Poverty: Yes



Housing Burdened: 91%



Median Housing Income: \$34.4K



People of Color: 99%

02

HOUSING-CENTRIC ISSUES

POLLUTION

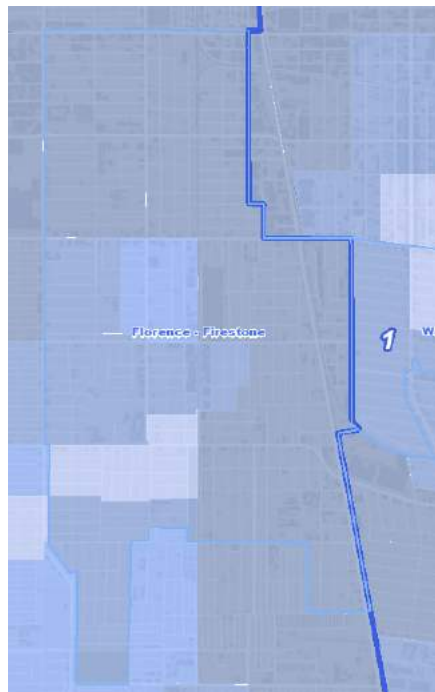
For the last century, Florence-Firestone has been a center of industry. Los Angeles's booming oil and automotive industries plus Florence-Firestone's proximity to the rail line between Downtown LA and the port made the neighborhood ripe for industrial development.¹⁴ First Goodyear and then Firestone Tires opened plants in the area in the 1920s, bringing thousands of jobs to the neighborhood. Formerly agricultural land surrounding the factories was converted into housing for workers. Decades later, Florence-Firestone residents are still affected by the repercussions of heavy industry. Despite the closure of the Goodyear and Firestone plants in 1979 and 1980, Florence-Firestone and in particular the Alameda corridor are still home to many industrial businesses.

For many longtime residents, living near industry is just a fact of life in Florence-Firestone. However, these industries' effects on air, noise, water, and soil are becoming increasingly clear. LA County's Equity Indicators Tool ranks Florence-Firestone between the 82nd and 97th percentiles of pollution burden. Many businesses around the neighborhood deal with metals from recycling plants and auto dismantling, which can contaminate soil, air, and water. According to two interviewees, residents in Florence-Firestone know to avoid drinking the tap water for fear of contamination. Many reported knowing neighbors or groups of neighbors with cancer or tumors and children with asthma. Industrial businesses within and adjacent to Florence-Firestone have impacted the health of residents. For example, trucks coming and going from the former Central Metals site cause disruptive noise at night; contaminated soil and illegal storage of hazardous materials have also been an issue at that site.¹⁵ The Exide battery recycling plant in neighboring Vernon has put thousands at risk of lead and arsenic poisoning.¹⁶ The County's ongoing Green Zones ordinance seeks to address many of these concerns, and should be both supported and regularly analyzed for efficacy post-implementation.

"One side of the block is factories and the other is houses, so there's a lot of people who might get sick but think it's the weather or their DNA. Or just bad luck."

INTERVIEWS

This exploratory study was shaped by interviews with community constituents representing different viewpoints and lived experiences. Particularly as COVID-19 limited our ability to observe site conditions, interviews were essential in understanding the day-to-day dynamics of the study area.



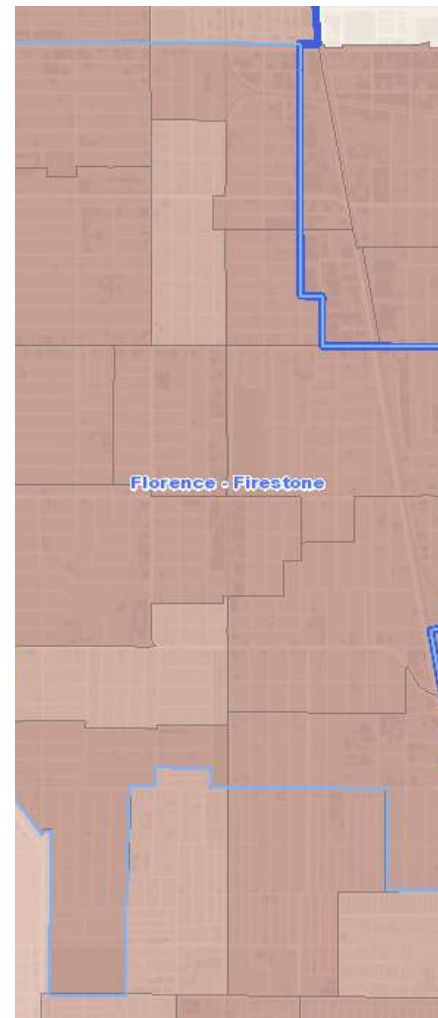
"We have no more room, and we have [said] year after year that we're overpopulated here. And they still let developers come in here and put in more low income housing."

OVERCROWDING

According to the LA County Equity Indicators tool, an average of 32% of Florence-Firestone residences are overcrowded (using Census definitions of more than one resident per room). Most of the housing in Florence-Firestone was built before the 1950s, and can be traced back to the neighborhood's industrial boom.¹⁷ These small bungalows on narrow lots initially provided White factory workers with an affordable, often subsidized opportunity to own property. As segregation and disinvestment driven by redlining and deindustrialization compounded over time, the area was seen as substandard yet affordable for Black and later Latinx families. Today, despite widespread concerns of housing stock decay, 91% of renters are housing burdened, paying over 30% of income to rent.

The rising cost of housing has resulted in overcrowded living situations. For many low-income residents, including those who have lost work due to COVID-19 or undocumented immigrants who cannot rely on government assistance, living in these crowded conditions is the only way to keep a roof over their head. Overcrowded housing can indicate that neighborhood resources are being stretched and infrastructure is operating beyond capacity.

New (affordable) housing is being built in Florence-Firestone, especially around the Metro stations. However, many residents feel that this added density is exacerbating overcrowding rather than solving it, and compounding the problems of an already low-income community. Since current housing-burdened Florence-Firestone residents do not have priority for new units, and the neighborhood's median income of approximately \$34K means only "extremely low income" (30% AMI units) are affordable for many households,¹⁸ these new developments potentially fail to alleviate the current community's overcrowding problem. Thus, many interviewees see additional affordable housing - particularly developments with reduced parking requirements - as continuing to concentrate poverty and resource strain, limiting community support.



"There was an instance where 2 RVs were parked and one of them caught fire... a lot of RV people have relocated to Alameda, south of Firestone...there's a whole community there just of RVs. I've gone through the area and the numbers have quadrupled compared to a few years ago. Before there would be maybe 5-6, now 25-30 RVs on that street."

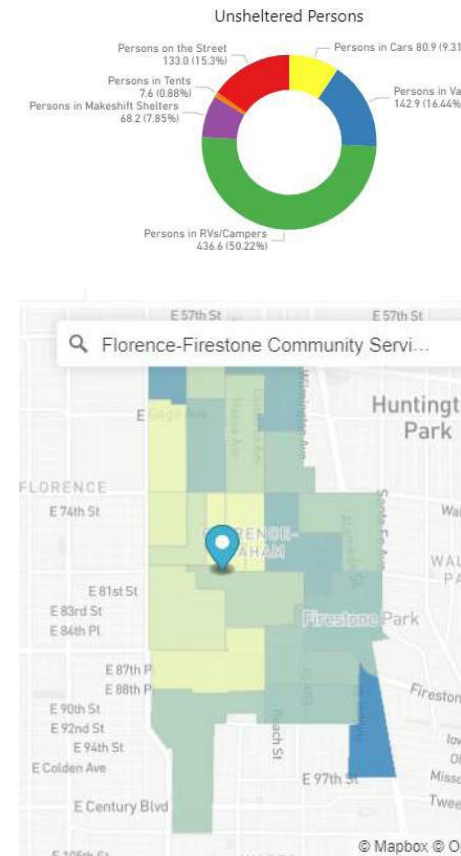


PARKING

A foremost concern for residents and business owners in Florence-Firestone is the lack of street parking, which further compounds fears and frustrations around overcrowding. Though Florence-Firestone is served by both Metro rail and several bus routes, most residents own vehicles. In addition, the frequent overcrowding means that many households are made up of multiple families, who could potentially have multiple cars. On commercial corridors, few businesses have onsite parking, which also causes some customers to seek parking on residential streets. According to interviews with residents, the lack of parking on neighborhood streets has led to cars that are double-parked, or parked on lawns and sidewalks. Spaces on commercial corridors are frequently (illegally) reserved with trash bins or traffic cones. Residents have noted that there is not sufficient parking enforcement in the neighborhood, and that inoperable cars or cars without valid registration are taking up limited space. The demand for parking has led to numerous confrontations between neighbors, which sometimes turn physical. According to one interviewee who mediates neighbor disputes, fights over parking have many times ended in hospitalizations or arrests.

The problem of parking is not only an everyday burden for Florence-Firestone residents, it also plays into planning for the future of the neighborhood. Several new multifamily housing projects are being built, and residents are concerned that they will not provide parking, thereby increasing competition for spaces even more. Though the new developments are not required to provide parking based on their proximity to transit, residents are wary that new housing can be added without adding more cars to the already crowded streets. This concern is especially prescient given that empty cars are not the only vehicles crowding Florence-Firestone's streets: a rapidly growing number of unhoused Angelenos living in RVs and cars are also parking in the area.

"I want to say 75% of my mediations have been with parking issues, neighbor to neighbor disputes. 25% of those have resulted in arrests and people put in the hospital because it got violent."



HOMELESSNESS

The 2020 Los Angeles County Homeless Count found that 66,436 people in LA County are experiencing homelessness, up 12.7% from 2019.¹⁹ Homelessness is an ongoing countywide crisis worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, and Florence-Firestone is no exception. Residents were especially concerned about the increasing number of people living in RVs, which represent a majority of the people experiencing homelessness in Florence-Firestone. In LA County, 43% of unsheltered residents are living in vehicles, with about half living in RVs or campers. In Florence-Firestone, vehicle-living is even more prevalent, with 75% of unsheltered residents living in vehicles. Half of these individuals are living in RVs or campers.²⁰

Interviewees report that RVs contribute to the shortage of parking in residential neighborhoods. This leads to conflict, with instances of harassment and vandalism causing people with RVs to seek parking elsewhere. Currently, a growing number of RV-dwellers are concentrated along the Alameda corridor. Though they are out of sight from most residences, neighbors are still concerned about the RVs, as they are seen as unsanitary and a safety risk to neighbors. Business owners in industrial areas are also frustrated by RV encampments near their property. Residents cited issues with cleanliness; in some places, debris from encampments has spread across sidewalks making them inaccessible for pedestrians. Others mentioned that they felt uncomfortable with their children walking to school past encampments, and were concerned that adequate resources and mental health services for people experiencing homelessness were not available. At the time of this writing, we had not interviewed RV occupants, but this will be a necessary next step should the project progress.

POLICY SPOTLIGHT: MEDIATOR CERTIFICATE COURSE

The County of Los Angeles Department of Consumer and Business Affairs (DCBA) offers a 30 hour workshop on mediation skills training in both Spanish and English. Community members learn skills to "mediate community disputes including landlord-tenant, neighbor, consumer-merchant, billing, property damage, workplace, and interpersonal conflicts." This course has enabled Dominique, Martha, and others to safely address tension in their neighborhoods with limited law enforcement intervention, but must also be supplemented with efforts to address the root issues.

Mediator Certificate Course

"Learn valuable skills for resolving disputes, in the community, workplace, neighborhood, and home."

Mediators help people solve problems and resolve disputes by helping them communicate and negotiate more effectively.

The Los Angeles County Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) is offering a 30-Hour mediation skills training workshop in January to train mediators. You will learn how to mediate community disputes including landlord-tenant, neighbor, consumer-merchant, billing, property damage, workplace, and interpersonal conflicts. This course, plus 10 hours of subsequent practical training and assessment meets the DRPA requirements.

The course will be taught by Talin Bahadarian, a mediator, arbitrator, instructor, speaker and consultant in the field of alternative dispute resolution. Talin has been recognized for her creativity and commitment to

MAPPING FINDINGS



not pictured
Ana M. Montenegro, Florence-Firestone/Walnut Park Chamber of Commerce



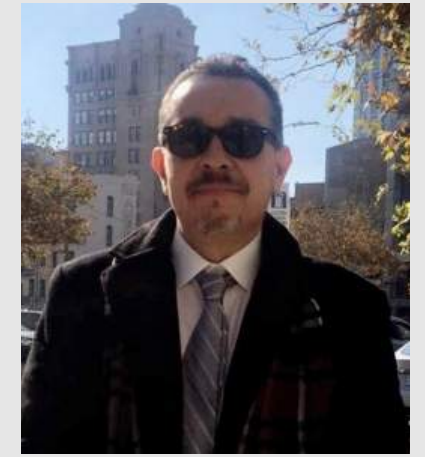
Sally Prescod, Florence-Firestone Community Leaders



Martha Escobedo, Resident and SELA member



Edgar Campos, TRUST South LA Executive Director



Dominique Medina, Florence-Firestone Community Leaders



Edwin E. Hernandez, Florence-Firestone/Walnut Park Chamber of Commerce Executive Director

03

CASE STUDIES

LA County can learn from some of the successes of other programs, but should also consider going beyond the requirements of state legislation in order to most effectively solve the issue of vehicle dwelling in Florence-Firestone.

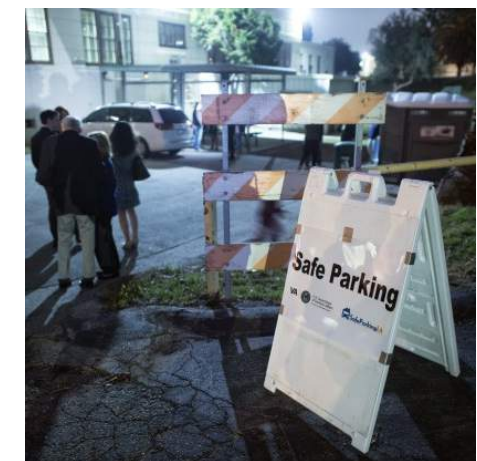
SAFE PARKING & BEYOND

In 2019, the state of California passed AB891, requiring cities or counties with a population of 330,000 or more to implement a safe parking program by June 2022.²¹ A safe parking program in accordance with the legislation must provide a bathroom facility and onsite security. Jurisdictions must also establish an enrollment process for the program, and are encouraged to coordinate with nonprofits or other agencies to provide access to social services leading to long-term housing. Several cities around the state have already implemented such programs, including LA County.

Currently, LA County has a safe parking program with 20 lots run by various operators.²² All lots in LA County are open overnight only, though the hours and scope of services vary - for example, some lots also provide meals for participants. The County program allows families, requires that the vehicle be operable, and limits the lots which may accommodate RVs.²³ The Board of Supervisors is currently reviewing an Interim and Supportive Housing Ordinance, which includes guidelines for safe parking and proposed standards consistent with those set forth in AB891. The ordinance waives planning fees for safe parking lot applications, and permits RV living on single-family residential lots. While these measures may widen the availability of safe parking, the overnight limit and lack of proposal for services beyond those required by the state suggests there is room to improve. Service Planning Area 6, which encompasses Florence-Firestone and 7 other communities, only offers 100 total spaces spread across three lots.²⁴ LA County can learn from some of the successes of other programs, but should also consider going beyond the requirements of state legislation in order to most effectively solve the issue of vehicle dwelling in Florence-Firestone. In particular, the following jurisdictions' programs have unique characteristics that LA County should consider.

The City of Oakland, whose homelessness crisis has made national news, has three lots open as part of a program that began in 2019.²⁵ The safe RV parking program is modeled after the already implemented Community Cabin program, which features small cabins on designated lots with access to restrooms, water, secure storage, food, and social services. Oakland's three lots have targeted existing encampment clusters, serving as a safe replacement while allowing residents to stay in the same neighborhood. Unlike many other cities' programs in which lots are for overnight parking only, the Oakland lots are open 24/7. This alleviates the problem of forcing RVs to find daytime parking in already parking-impacted neighborhoods. However, Oakland's lots do not allow children, so families living in their vehicle are unable to participate in the program.

Santa Clara County is one prominent example of a county-wide program.²⁶ Many cities in the county initiated safe parking programs prior to the County's intervention, but the County's partnership allows pooling of resources and needed flexibility. While many cities are unable to provide 24-hour lots, state code exempts county agencies from this restriction, allowing more around-the-clock sites. However, it should be noted that Santa Clara County has very little unincorporated land in urban areas, so these lots are still primarily run by cities and supported by the County.



BUILDING TRUST

All of the residents interviewed expressed some level of distrust or frustration with the County, and called for better communication, transparency, accountability, and follow-through from both the supervisorial office and County departments. In communities of color such as Florence-Firestone that have endured decades of disinvestment, these sentiments are common. The following are examples of how local agencies and initiatives have made proactive efforts to highlight racial justice in their planning processes.

PORTLAND: HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF RACIST PLANNING

CONTRIBUTORS

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"the City of Portland has a responsibility to not just prevent further harm and discrimination, but to also actively address past harms of segregation and racist policies, intentional or not.

This report provides an overview of racist planning practices in Portland that will provide grounds for framing the City's obligations to affirmatively further fair housing. We acknowledge that fair housing discrimination takes many forms; for the scope of this report, we will look specifically at how planning practices, primarily around zoning, have led to racial segregation and other discriminatory impacts on communities of color in Portland."²⁷

EAST OAKLAND NEIGHBORHOODS INITIATIVE

PARTNERS

City of Oakland, East Oakland Building Healthy Communities, East Oakland Collective, HOPE Collaborative

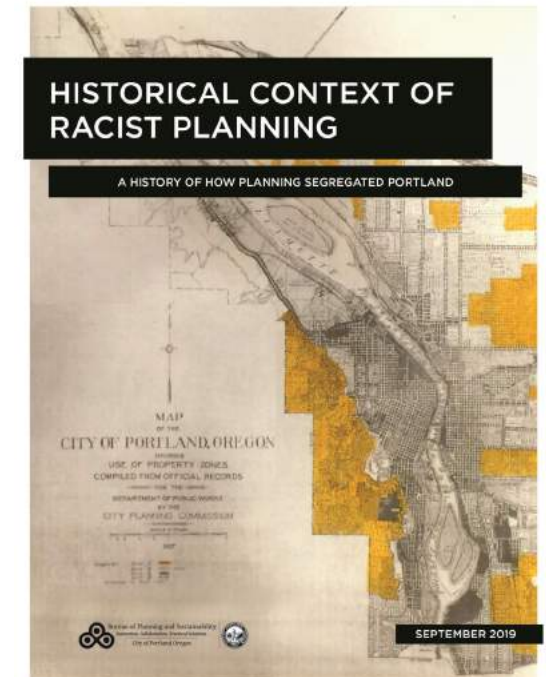
"Given the historical distrust between city government and the community, as a result of traumatic and biased but legal planning practices, this EONI collaboration between East Oakland CBOs and the City of Oakland's Bureau of Planning is groundbreaking. Currently left without a comprehensive specific plan, Deep East Oakland is considered the "last frontier" subject to the rapid gentrification across Oakland. EONI is a real opportunity for the City of Oakland and community to learn from one another's planning culture, establish trust, and deepen partnerships in order to formally memorialize and implement resident goals and priorities."²⁸

LIFE LANES SAFE PASSAGE PROGRAM

PARTNERS

East Side Riders, LASD, Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition, Watts Labor Community Action Committee

A long-standing local partnership, the Life Lanes program offers an inspiring example of how to think through public safety and opportunity while expanding community expectations and trust. Life Lanes expands bicycle access for youth in Watts who were formerly vulnerable to gang violence by creating shared community agreements with gang members and the neighbors at large, which provides an alternative to policing and also emphasizes the positive impact of biking.²⁹ The Life Lanes program changed the landscape of biking in Watts, which stands to affect community connectivity, feasibility of alternative transit models, and public health in an area with high rates of asthma and diabetes.



DESIGN INVESTMENT, LIGHT

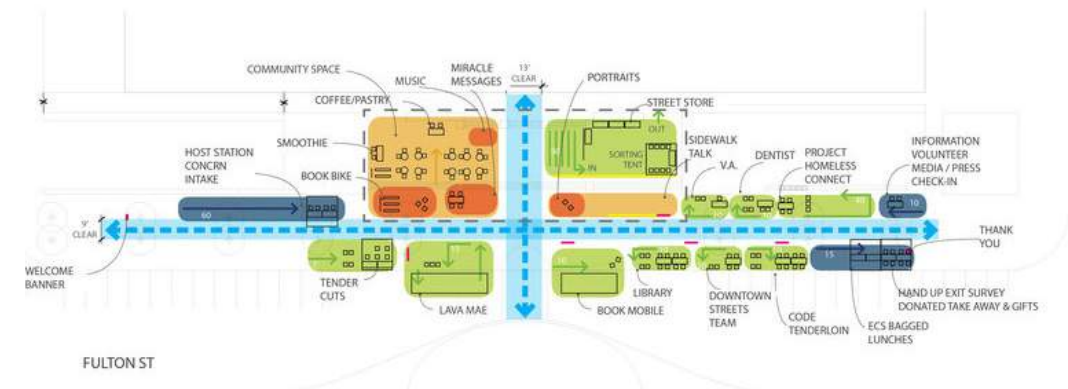
As LA County recognizes, there are many ways to invest in place and space. When paired with compassionate staffing and neighborhood-appropriate programming, thoughtful design - that is, design that embodies dignity, spatial justice, and addresses multiple concerns and constituencies at once - can transform even the most challenging public spaces. Each of these case studies use "light" levels of design to quickly and relatively inexpensively enhance public spaces, attracting greater public attention and appreciation.

LAVA MAE CARE VILLAGES, SAN FRANCISCO & LOS ANGELES

PARTNERS

Lava Mae, Project Homeless Connect, SITELab, San Francisco Public Library, City of San Francisco, Misc. Community Partners

Building off the success of a weekly shower service program at Civic Center locations, Lava Mae partnered with a number of local organizations and services to create "Pop Up Care Villages." An expansion of services, hosted in central public spaces, was made possible through a collaboration with the San Francisco Main Public Library. These Villages manifest as day-long events where unhoused residents are able to access services ranging from personal care (showers, hair cuts, physical therapy) to career counseling. The Care Villages are laid out by an urban design firm that combines graphics and temporary infrastructure to create dignified spaces.³¹

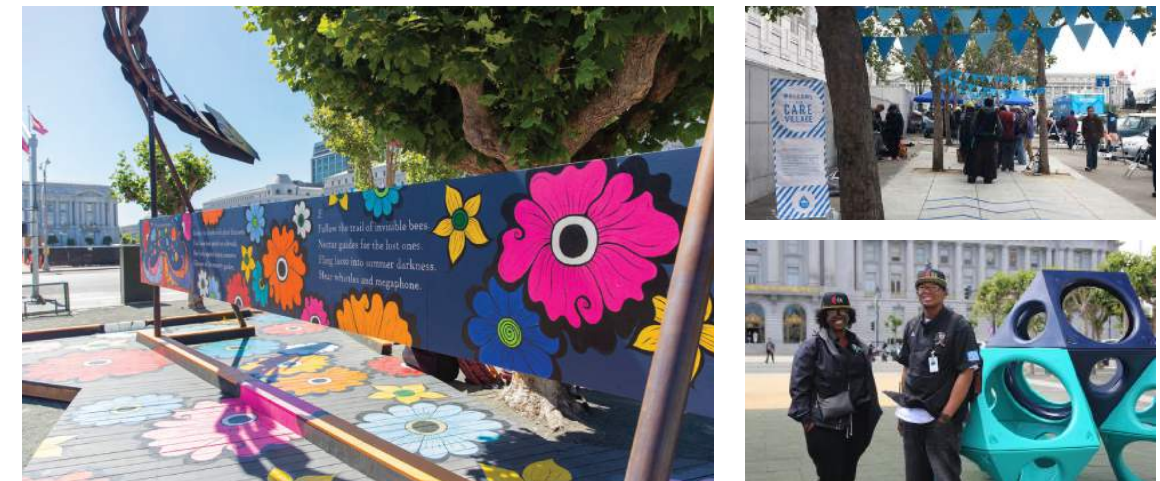


SAN FRANCISCO CIVIC CENTER COMMONS

PARTNERS

City of San Francisco, Exploratorium Museum, Urban Alchemy, Asian Art Museum, Another Planer, Misc. Community Partners

A government-led, public-private funded effort to bring new investment and activation to San Francisco's central civic spaces. These public spaces bridge one of San Francisco's most diverse and lowest-income neighborhoods. Four strategies defined the initiative: 1) Create daily attractions that spark curiosity and connection, such as public art installations and new playgrounds, 2) Improve cleanliness and safety through workforce development programs and social service collaborations, 3) Create a cohesive identity that becomes a source of local pride, and 4) Build a strong team to steward the Commons, including City agencies and community partners. Formerly incarcerated individuals are often prioritized for employment as stewards.³⁰



PLAY STREETS

PARTNERS

Kounkuey Design Initiative, LA Department of Transportation

The Play Streets program, which began in 2015, enables LA residents "to temporarily close neighborhood blocks to traffic and convert them into spaces for recreation, exercise, and gathering." A kit of parts designed by Kounkuey Design Initiative provides shade sails, elements that function as both seating and play structures, and a variety of plug-and-play toys for all ages. While these are all designed as temporary components, it is easy to imagine how the strong graphic identity and improvisational nature of the Play Streets kit could inspire longer-term interventions.³²



04 PILOT PROJECT

COMMITMENT The forthcoming County DRP TOC Plan is a compelling opportunity to invest in Florence-Firestone and its most vulnerable residents, particularly as COVID-19 continues to impact both transit ridership and public space needs. Equity cannot be achieved nor trust built via piecemeal approaches in Florence-Firestone or other parts of Los Angeles that have suffered past injustices.. Instead, integrative, cross-departmental efforts must address the complex socioeconomic dynamics at play while centering local voices. A pilot project that is realized will demonstrate that the County listens, makes changes, invests in, and follows through with its commitment to equity.

PILOT PROJECT With this ambitious framework in mind, a pilot in Florence-Firestone will serve as a County-wide model about how existing resources (like parks, libraries, transit, and parking lots) can become a cohesive community hub. "Demonstration Depot" imagines resource-rich public spaces connecting the A (Blue) Line with existing public space, starting with a pilot project at Florence Station & Roosevelt Park. Its name expresses its dual intentions: the depot "demonstrates" both an active, embedded effort by the county to engage with residents and address longstanding challenges while also "demonstrating" new opportunities for partnership, engagement, and imagining a community-driven future for Florence-Firestone. "Depot" reflects the project's rail adjacency and that it is a welcome center full of community resources. These station-adjacent service nodes take into account some of the extreme needs present in Florence-Firestone, and question how disparate needs and groups can be brought together in a cohesive community hub. Precise Depot resources should be determined through a public process with increased community input. Based on interviews to date, desirable components may include any thoughtfully designed mix of:

- free wifi + device charging
- safe parking
- unhoused resources + guidance
- tenant clinic
- headquarter space for community surveys/input
- pollution abatement demonstration projects
- food assistance guidance
- ridership incentive programs
- public health hub

The Demonstration Depot imagines resource-rich nodes connecting the A (Blue) Line with existing public space



COSTS & BENEFITS The Demonstration Depot model offers many community benefits: leveraging public land for public benefit; directly addressing immediate community needs while planning for long-term, systemic change; serving as a positive “face” and place in the neighborhood for the County; reducing stigmatization/othering by bringing together both housed and unhoused neighbors over shared activities/resources; and a testing ground for County initiatives, both in terms of exploring existing policy constraints and community investment. Its costs can be structured with a small initial outlay and building program, gathering community feedback, growing services, and increasing expenditure over time. Resources and participation must come from multiple agencies such as the Supervisorial office, Metro, LA County Library, Parks and Recreation, and Regional Planning.

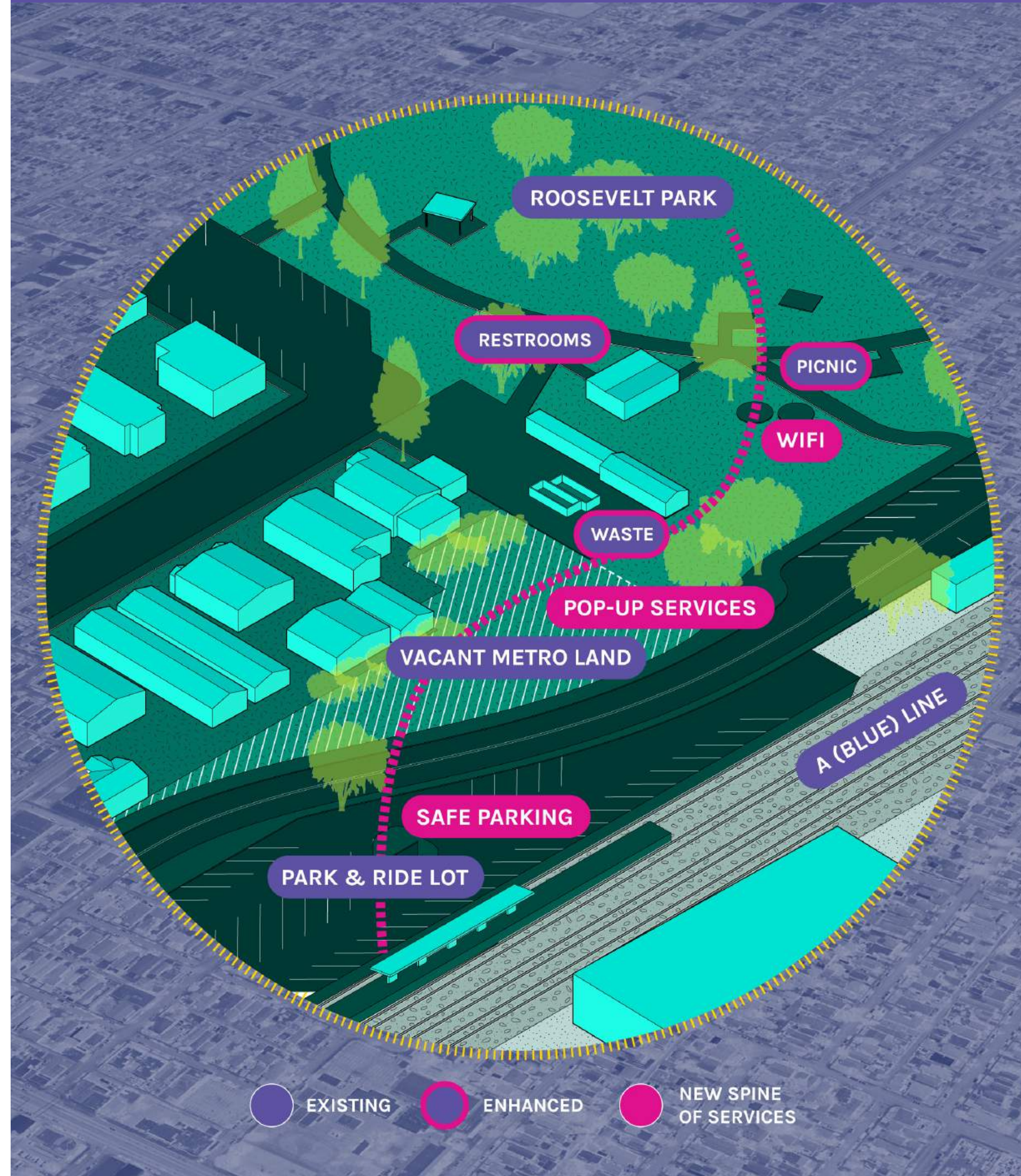
VISION So what, specifically, might a Demonstration Depot look like? Specifics will depend on the neighborhood context, needs, and existing resources. This pilot or “demonstration” investigates one of many potential sites to highlight the opportunities at hand. Here we imagine the pilot Depot at Florence Station & Roosevelt Park, a partnership between LA Metro, community leaders, and the County. The Depot begins by serving two of Florence-Firestone’s most disadvantaged resident groups: unhoused individuals living in RVs and community members (remote workers or otherwise) who have been left behind by the digital divide. RV-dwellers have been at the center of neighborhood concerns about parking, space, and safety. Endeavoring to provide more than a safe parking “lot” alone, part of the Florence Station “Park and Ride” lot doubles as a “Park and Guide” center for Safe Parking, housing, and health resources for the growing number of area RV dwellers. (How long RVs can stay, how many, with what security, and other administrative matters must be determined.) Adjacent to Roosevelt Park, shared restrooms, picnicking, and waste areas encourage familiarity between safe parking and park users along a new spine of thoughtfully organized services. In partnership with Florence Library, an expanded picnic area provides tables, charging devices, connectivity, assistance, and shade for community members. Public wifi throughout Roosevelt Park helps bridge the digital divide in communal public spaces. A regular rotation of pop-up services - tutoring, tenant clinics, food assistance, and ridership incentive events - are initiated on the park edge. When appropriate, siting these on vacant Metro land adjacent to Roosevelt Park softens the boundary between safe parking and park while providing services useful to housed and unhoused residents. These highly-visible spatial accommodations, framed through light infrastructure and graphic interventions, are predicated on developing new forms of community safety, echoing safe passage models that highlight community collaboration and consensus as an alternative to policing. As a result, a wide range of Florence-Firestone residents with diverse needs find the Depot a welcoming and useful space, and also feel safer throughout the park.

OUTCOMES The Demonstration Depot “demonstrates” new, interconnected approaches to community equity and wellness. Creating vibrant, resource-rich, and welcoming spaces near transit hubs further encourages ridership. The County’s engagement with new methods reveals current barriers to interdepartmental collaboration, zoning inefficiencies, and enforcement limitations. Flexible space allows for a flexible schedule, where resources begin as pop-ups to gauge community interest, effectiveness of inter-agency collaboration, and reveal tensions between existing policy and shifting needs. Finally, the Demonstration Depot is designed as a portable and replicable framework: opportunities to echo these built and service moves at Graham Library and through partnerships with LAUSD at Lillian Street Elementary hint at what stands to become a network of community-serving Depots not only across Florence-Firestone, but the County at large.

Creating vibrant, resource-rich, and welcoming spaces near transit hubs also further incentivizes and legitimates ridership.

The Florence Station & Roosevelt Park Demonstration Depot proposes:

- Safe Parking with associated continuum of care housing and health services
- Enhancements to the Roosevelt Park restrooms, picnic, and waste areas to service both Safe Parking and park visitors
- Wifi and charging station for Roosevelt Park, bridging the digital divide in communal space
- Space for pop up programming either inside of or adjacent to Roosevelt Park, depending on community and service preference



IMPLEMENTATION & POLICY OBJECTIVES

The forthcoming Florence-Firestone Transit Oriented District Specific Plan is the principal means through which the Demonstration Depot can be implemented. A feasible implementation plan can start with a “light intervention” designed as an inexpensive framework to which later services and structures can be added. Successful implementation requires creating magnets and even mandates for services to come together, and reevaluating existing policies and programs to best serve Florence-Firestone. Several models and options are listed here.

PUBLIC BENEFIT ZONE

Based on the City of LA Public Benefit Zone policy, this would create a new zone within the FFTOD establishing standards and conditions for the Demonstration Depot as a “public benefit use”. The Public Benefit Use is exempt from the discretionary process involved with Conditional Use permitting. This would enable efficient development and a myriad of services to occur by right at a proposed Demonstration Depot; for example, safe parking, food assistance, internet hotspots/library resources, after-school programs, bike-share, and county services.

24-HOUR SAFE PARKING

LA County’s forthcoming Interim and Supportive Housing Ordinance limits safe parking lot operation between 6pm and 7am. This means that RVs will still need to find street parking during the day. The County should consider amending this ordinance to allow for 24-hour lots on publicly owned land in addition to privately-run overnight lots.

SAFE PARKING AMENITIES

Current Safe Parking standards set forth by AB 891 and LA County’s Interim and Supportive Housing Ordinance require security and restroom access. To expand the potential of safe parking lots, the County should consider requiring additional services such as showers, food pantries, and internet access at 24-hour sites, and outlining options for privately-run sites to provide them as well. The County should also consider making these services available to the public, not just those who are part of the safe parking program.

LIBRARY SIDEWALK SERVICE

During COVID-19, the County Library has set up a “Sidewalk Service” system where residents can pick up books and digital hotspot kits at certain branches. The County should add Florence-Firestone’s two libraries to this program and additionally consider opening “Sidewalk Service” stations outside of library branches (schools, transit stations, county offices, etc) to ensure more equitable access to digital resources during and after COVID-19.

CONSTITUENT SERVICE CENTERS

The Demonstration Depot can be viewed as an expansion of the current model of supervisorial Constituent Service Centers to pay specific attention to vulnerable populations, such as unhoused residents and underserved school-age children

NEXT STEPS

The next steps should be undertaken collaboratively and in phases, gathering necessary information, resources, and political support over time.

PHASE I: CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

- Report/proposal revisions
- Identify necessary interdepartmental and inter-agency partnerships
- Gather resources
- Multi-staged research engagement of community and leadership focus groups
- Conceptual schematic for pilot(s)

PHASE II: PILOT "DEPOT" DEVELOPMENT (POLICY & DESIGN)

- Feedback from community and leadership
- Develop departmental, agency, and community partnerships; identify parties responsible for operation
- Pilot(s) refinement with policy and design recommendations

PHASE III: IMPLEMENTATION & TOOLKIT

- Gather political support and further resources
- Policy and design implementation
- Create Toolkit for Demonstration Depots elsewhere in LA County and beyond

FOOTNOTES

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