

# Community Plan Also Seeks to Remove School

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Steps to reverse deterioration in the old Lankershim Blvd. business district must get top priority in planning for North Hollywood, declared the Community Citizens Plan Advisory Committee.

The committee recommendation to remove the Lankershim Elementary School as a first step toward the cure may well become the most controversial issue in the community plan under preparation by the city Planning Department since December, 1970.

After preliminary testing for reaction and input at 14 meetings conducted in the community, the plan is due to be taken up by the Planning Commission at 7 p.m. Monday at the Department of Water and Power auditorium.

## School Issue Hit

Removal of the Lankershim Elementary School for expansion of the business district was the only issue generating organized opposition during the series of community meetings, city planners said.

They attribute this to the "nostalgic" feeling of the many graduates, teachers and parents who attended the school, which is almost as old as the community itself.

"The school has over the years become more of a hindrance than an asset to the community," said city planner Robert Sutton. "School enrollment has been decreasing and has to be bolstered by busing of students and boundary adjustments.

He emphasized that "the key to rejuvenation of the center area" is replacement of the under-utilized school with a complex of retail stores, senior citizen housing, business offices, parking and service facilities.

## Seriously Blighted Area

"The eastern section of North Hollywood is already seriously blighted and improvement of the center will contribute significantly to overall community rehabilitation and preservation of stable residential neighborhoods," he asserted.

A district spokesman said one of the school's five buildings, constructed prior to 1933, was vacated in June because of earthquake damage, resulting in a loss of seven classrooms, but the other buildings, with a total of 12 classrooms, were built later and are still serviceable. Enrollment has dropped to less than 450, he said.

Planning director Calvin Hamilton said he expects another controversy over plans for rezoning the industrial Hewitt Dump site near the Hollywood Freeway for a future community park or golf course.

"There is absolutely no justification for the industrial zone in this area in light of the need for additional community parks," asserted Hamilton. "This is a landfill site inappropriate for development other than as a park because landfills are prone to sinking."

Professional city planners have been recommending relocation of the school for 10 years. The school, at 5252 Bakman Ave., is "in a poor environment, surrounded by community shopping facilities and heavily used highways," they claim.

Use of the 4.3 acre school site, conservatively valued at \$800,000, "could be the key piece of land" in providing parking and office buildings for revitalization of the business district, they explain.

## Pedestrian Walk Planned

It would be packaged into a 10 to 14-acre development site by closing a short section of Weddington St. A pedestrian way is proposed along Weddington St. linking both sides of Lankershim Blvd. with North Hollywood Park.

"Portions of it could be developed into a shopping mall," say the planners. "The financial hub south of Magnolia Blvd. could then develop with the commercial core north of Magnolia Blvd. This would include banking and insurance interests as well as other offices."

The citizens committee, appointed by district councilmen, disagreed on some issues but was unanimous in its final report on the need to close the school for revitalization of the business district.

The report stressed that this is vital if North Hollywood is to reverse the trend toward blight that is plaguing older communities.

## Business Area Dull

"At the heart of the problems facing the community is the lack of vitality in the business district," the report says. "If it is allowed to further deteriorate, it will have a continued negative effect on the rest of the community."

"The Lankershim school site must be vacated to allow adequate growth of commercial or other community development. The presence of the school has hindered growth and development in this area for more than 30 years.

"The business district must be able to expand geographically in order to provide multi-use shopping facilities and additional off-street parking.

"The school removal is a vital first step."

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# COMMUNITY PLAN

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The committee also emphasizes that improvement of Tujunga Ave. from the Ventura Freeway to Burbank Blvd. must get top priority to provide better access to the business district.

The committee feels that the business area is the only place where replacement of commercial with more residential zoning is warranted. The city planners also propose concentrating future population growth around this business hub.

Existing North Hollywood zoning could accommodate a population of 241,000. City planners say the 1970 census showed 94,177 persons. They project a population growth to 113,000 by 1990.

In analyzing results of a questionnaire, planners concluded that "a vast majority" of the people like North Hollywood as a place to live and work. Prime reasons they gave were the climate, access to shopping and proximity to downtown Los Angeles.

## Top Complaints

Major citizen complaints are high taxes, air pollution, airport noise and deteriorated housing and poor parking in the business district.

Planners said that generally the community supports preservation of single-family homes, expansion and improvement of the business district, balanced transportation and bicycle routes.

Respondents to the questionnaire also indicated they opposed an increase in taxes for park acquisitions.

In planning for better traffic circulation, the plan proposes a future rapid transit station where the former Pacific Electric train station was along Chandler Blvd. between Lankershim Blvd. and Tujunga Ave.

Reconstruction of multiple intersections along Lankershim Blvd. is also proposed. The citizens committee propose upgrading Coldwater Canyon Ave. to major highway status but the city planners fear that this would be difficult with existing development.

The plan also proposes more parking and some one-way streets to improve traffic circulation in the major Valley-Laurel Plaza shopping center area.

## One-Way Couple

It is suggested that St. Clair and Billingham Ave. S. become one-way collector street couplet between Kittridge St. and Victory Blvd.

It is also suggested that properties south of Kittridge St. and east of St. Clair could be used for additional parking which would be more convenient to the shopping center.

This, planners claim, would alleviate some of the traffic problems created by construction of the Hollywood Freeway on the western edge of the Valley-Laurel Plaza Center.