

OUR RESILIENT COMMUNITY

Over the years, South Pasadena downtown has endured suburbanization, economic recessions, and more recently competition from online shopping. Downtowns that failed to successfully respond to the changing trends continue to decline. Resilient downtowns have been able to successfully adapt to these changes and to even develop the capacity to overcome future hardships.

Resilience in Downtown South Pasadena means tackling systemic, interdependent challenges, such as allowing contextual infill development that preserves the small town character, with thriving retail, access to affordable housing and transit, and vibrant infrastructure to better prepare us for shocks like earthquakes and stresses like climate change.

By leveraging our collective resources and fostering a culture of responsive government centered around residents' needs and robust, green infrastructure development we can address any weakness today and become strong and well prepared for any future adversity. This section considers the resiliency challenges in the eight General Plan focus areas.

1. Our Natural Community

Majority of new growth will be directed to the Downtown Area. New development provides an opportunity to enhance the natural environment. Walkable mixed-use development could reduce the need for driving thereby improving air quality. Green roofs, planters, swales, rain gardens, and sub surface drains can constrain, disperse, and reduce the quantity and increase the quality of stormwater on and off-site, and replenish groundwater. Downtown streets can reconnect rainfall to the environmental life of the city.

The threats of drought, disease, and pests will pose a challenge on maintaining the aesthetic and environmental benefits gained from the tree cover. New insect and disease resilient trees planted by the public and private sector would keep South Pasadena “The Tree City” well into the foreseeable future.

Policies and Actions

P.5X Incorporate natural systems into the Downtown built environment to promote healthy and resilient ecosystem.

A.5X Integrate green infrastructure into Mission Street and Fair Oaks Avenue alongside transit infrastructure and providing safe places for people walking and biking.

A.5X Adopt an Urban Forest Management Plan that prescribes resilient and drought tolerant trees to plant and maintain on Downtown public and private property.

2. Our Prosperous Community

A focus on the unique features of Downtown, building on existing assets, and using them to attract new investment and strengthen existing businesses offers benefits that extend far beyond enticing visitors, entrepreneurs, small businesses, and corporations. Downtown South Pasadena can harness the power of place-making to give local amenities a dual purpose: enhancing quality of life for all residents and attracting investment. Place-making is a method for capitalizing on existing strengths for the purpose of developing a resilient economy.

Policies and Actions

P.5X Preserve, enhance, and build on existing downtown assets to harness the power of place-making.

A.5X Evaluate the potential for incentives together with a developer-supported fund to assist with preservation activities in the Downtown area.

A.5X Support restoration and adaptive reuse of the historic Rialto Theater.

A.5X Enhance creative and cultural uses, including affordable live-work space for artists, and consider development of an “Art Center” in the Downtown area.

3. Our Well Planned Community

The economy changes quickly. To better respond to changing market conditions flexible land use and zoning policies and regulations in the Downtown area will allow the City to better capture demand from emerging industries, providing opportunities to enhance its tax base.

Affordability

In South Pasadena, 72% of low income renters and approximately 91% of extremely low income homeowner households pay more than 30% of their household income in rent. The Downtown area presents the greatest opportunity to provide transit-supportive affordable housing.

Infrastructure

The Water distribution system serving the Downtown Specific Plan Area lies entirely within the “Central” water system. Water is provided to this system by the Wilson Reservoir in San Gabriel, the Graves Reservoir in San Marino, the Garfield Reservoir on Garfield Avenue north of Hardison Street, the Grand Reservoir at the north end of Floral Park Terrace, and a connection to the Metropolitan Water District (MWD) line at Kollé Avenue south of Monterey Road. A comprehensive analysis of the overall system conducted previously identified a series of system-wide modifications required to improve the operation of the distribution system.

The analysis indicated that during peak use hours, water pressure within the Specific Plan Area averages about 45psi, with the lower pressures occurring on the easterly side. Water pressure of 50 to 70 psi is desirable. Along El Centro Street, the pressure averages about 38 psi with the lower pressures also occurring on the easterly side. These pressures are low but unavoidable given the current system equipment and configuration. Future development may encounter problems associated with the low water pressure which can only be remedied on a system-wide basis.

According to the City's Public Works Department, the sewer system is adequate to handle the current needs of the Downtown Specific Plan Area and should be capable of handling the projected future development. A previous analysis of the overall system concluded that the existing system could sustain a population of 30,000, along with intensification of commercial land uses, including development in the Downtown Specific Plan Area.

Stormwater System

The watershed contributory to the Downtown Specific Plan Area is approximately 113 acres and is roughly defined by Arroyo Drive to the west, Grevelia Street to the north, and Fair Oaks Avenue to the east. Storm water runoff generally flows in a southerly direction through the Specific Plan Area where some is intercepted by storm drains located in Orange Grove Boulevard, Mission Street, Fremont Avenue and Fair Oaks Avenue. The remainder flows to the south. Storm drains on Orange Grove to Mission Street and westerly along Mission Street to the Arroyo Seco channel and on Fremont Avenue from Hope Street south to Mission Street, east along Mission and south along Marengo Avenue, are designed to handle flows generated by a 10-year storm event. On Mission Street, between Orange Grove Boulevard and Fremont Avenue, no storm drains exist. Water flows from a high point at Meridian Avenue to the east or west to the storm drain lines.

The Downtown Specific Plan Area is substantially developed at this time. Proposed development would not include construction over large unpaved areas. As a result,

there should not be any large increases in runoff quantities. According to the City's Public Works Department, there are no major flooding problems in the Downtown Specific Plan Area. The existing storm drain system appears to be adequate to handle most storm water runoff with only minor modifications.

Stormwater System Improvement Recommendations

There are a number of rainwater interventions that could be integrated into the infill/redevelopment plans to help to alleviate pressures on the storm drain system, enhance the livability, and replenish the aquifer. These procedures are often called LID (Low Impact Development) or Green Infrastructure. Below are some recommended rainwater treatment practices for the corridors.

- Tree Pockets can be installed between parking spaces in the parking lanes on streets. Simply sawcut the tree pocket, scoop out a hole, and fill it with soil and a tree. Leave the existing curb and gutter in place, and leave openings so the gutter rainwater can flow into and fill up the tree pocket, and then flow out at the lower end.
- Tree Zippers can be installed in parking lanes by sawcutting the entire strip of parking, scooping it out and replacing with soils, trees, and pervious pavers. Rainwater enters the pervious pavers from the street surface and gutter flow and is absorbed by the trees and soils.
- Tree pockets and zippers help to define the outdoor room of the street, help to shade and cool the paving and parked cars and sidewalks, and absorb rainwater for tree evapo-transpiration while allowing for infiltration that will help replenish the aquifer.
- The Simple Green Street is a slight modification of an existing street curb and adjacent planting area. A portion of curb can either be replaced with a depressed top-of-curb section, or the curb face can be simply core-drilled. Both modifications allow rainwater to pass to the adjacent planting area; which has been slightly excavated and re-landscaped to accept the rainwater run-off. This landscaped area can be planted with indigenous, drought-tolerant landscaping and a permeable surface to allow the rainwater to re-enter the aquifer.
- Pervious pavers and other permeable materials can be used on parking lots and streets as an enhanced surface that provides filtering, infiltration, and storage of rainwater runoff from the site.
- In-Street Detention Storage can be used to detain rainwater runoff and release it slowly after the peak flows in order to reduce flooding downstream. Some infiltration can also be accomplished. Depending on utility locations, some streets may have room in the center of the street and may be conveniently located for this rainwater treatment.
- Car and people parks can be created by designing parking lots as plazas by replacing the usual sea of asphalt with trees and pervious pavers - providing a place for cars and people

while reducing pressure on the storm drain system and helping to recharge the groundwater aquifer.

Policies and Actions

P.5X Support the production of new affordable housing projects through standards and process incentives.

A.5X Adopt flexible regulations that can respond to market changes in emerging industries, and attract contextual development.

A.5X Leverage Gold Line Station for walkable mixed-use development opportunities on nearby catalytic sites to provide variety of affordable housing types, local employment, community benefits, and application of extensive TDM measures.

A.5X Provide contextual reductions in building mass for properties that abut existing residential districts.

P.5X Ensure continuity of critical services.

A.5X Require developers to pay their fair share for water, wastewater, and stormwater system upgrades beyond what is currently in place.

P.5X Support the inclusion of energy efficient design and renewable technologies in all new downtown public and private projects.

A.5X Require solar panels on all new buildings.

A.5X Explore opportunity to develop a clean energy “micro-grids”.

A.5X Install Electric Vehicle (EV) chargers at public facilities in Downtown area. Encourage property owners to install EV chargers at Downtown business and multi-family locations.

4. Our Accessible Community

Resilience at a community level requires a transportation system that can withstand changes in technology, new options for people to get around, unexpected conditions, or extreme demands from equipment failure or disasters. At an individual level, resiliency could mean being able to get around when the car breaks down, or if their income decreases, or if they are disabled.

Transportation systems evacuate people from danger and emergency services to reach the areas in need. Diverse, redundant, and efficient transportation system can continue functioning if one of its link is broken, and accommodates a wide range of user needs and conditions.

Policies and Actions

P.5X Seek resiliency in transportation investments.

A.5X Evaluate, design, and maintain critical components of the transportation system to be fail-safe, self-correcting, repairable, redundant, and autonomous.

A.5X Develop a well connected multi-modal transportation network that provides multiple options to access Downtown destinations.

A.5X Support development of diverse and competing transportation services, such as ride-sharing, delivery services, use of telecommunications to substitute for physical travel, etc.

5. Our Healthy Community

The actions identified to build a connected and prepared community are designed to result in multiple benefits, including improved physical safety, which will result in reduced loss of life and injury in the event of a disaster; increased social cohesion; increased access to services; improved environmental performance of critical City facilities; and improved ability to minimize economic disruption.

Small local food systems like the farmers market and community garden are better able to withstand shocks than their massive counterparts. Because food travels shorter distances, locally grown produce is able to conserve nutrients better, making it more nutritious and tastier, which encourages people to eat more of it. Better nutrition means better public health—a cornerstone of disaster resilience. By reducing the miles between farm and fork, local food systems also limit greenhouse gas emissions.

Policies and Actions

P.5X Promote mix of uses within a walking and biking environment that encourage physical activity.

A.5X Require active and engaging ground floor frontages to increase visual interest and promote walkability.

A5.X Repurpose Mission Street and Fair Oaks Avenue to include safe and well-connected street networks for walking and biking.

A5.X To increase pedestrian activity and social interaction along Mission Street, and to provide more sidewalk space, provide a series of parklets distributed throughout the street.

P5.X Encourage local food production, processing, and distribution to the greatest extent possible. [SE](#)

A5.X Continue to support farmers' market, fresh food stands, community gardens, community kitchens, and other local initiatives to provide healthy foods, promote food security, and build resilience.

6. Our Safe Community

Over the years, number of unreinforced masonry buildings have been seismically retrofitted. A total of four buildings remain to be retrofitted. The City provides a transfer tax rebate to lower the cost of seismic retrofits and access to Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) financing, which lets owners borrow money with no upfront cost and pay the money back at fixed rates on their property tax bill. The City is developing an inventory of vulnerable apartment buildings with "soft stories," and will draft an ordinance mandating the retrofitting of these structures.

Policies and Actions

P5X Minimize personal and property damage resulting from seismic hazards.

A5X Require structural reinforcement of all inventoried unreinforced masonry structures.

7. Our Active Community

The new infill development Downtown presents the strongest opportunity for integrating natural and built systems. Public and private open spaces can be conceived as multi-functional green infrastructure that makes the downtown area more resilient.

Policies and Actions

P5X Maximize the efficiency and productivity of parks and open spaces to provide multiple benefits.

A.5X Expand the function of parks and open spaces beyond recreation, to store and clean water, filter air, help improve public health, and provide habitat and connectivity to increase biodiversity.

8. Our Creative Community

Downtown is the creative hub of the City. A strong and vibrant arts scene Downtown can be a reliable and durable driver of South Pasadena’s economic growth and resilience. Creative providers should collaborate and effectively partner with business and school district to advocate for City funding for arts and culture; and collectively leverage City funding for private and public support including donors, sponsors and regional and national grants to support more creative endeavors by individuals and organizations.

Policies and Actions

P.5X Link climate and cultural resilience through creative place-making.

A.5X Integrate arts, culture, and creative activities within community development efforts.

P.5X Support funding for arts and cultural groups.

A.5X Document compelling stories supported with facts on economic, social, and environmental benefits of arts and culture in South Pasadena.

A.5X Leverage city funds for private and public sector support including donors, sponsors, and grants.