

Montebello General Plan



Interview Notes

As part of the General Plan and the Downtown Specific Plan process, the consultant interviewed a diverse cross section of community stakeholders. The purpose of the interviews was to engage stakeholders in an open and candid discussion to better understand existing visions, barriers to implementation, and opportunities.

In November 2020, the consultant interviewed property owners, tenants, business owners, and civic and community leaders. This memorandum summarizes the key themes and comments heard during that process. The memorandum focuses on identifying patterns among the comments and does not attribute any comments to specific individuals.

The responses are noted as is with light editing for reader's ease and to maintain confidentiality of respondents. It is possible that some of the responses from different individuals may be contradictory. The purpose of this report is to report all responses gathered during the interview, without fact checking or passing judgement on any comment received.

Q1. Describe a place you like in Montebello and what you like about the place?

The City has many major destinations such as a 18 hole golf course, a regional mall, popular parks, access to natural areas with splendid views, and a variety of shopping and dining opportunities in the Downtown area.

Grant Rea Park

The Grant Rea Park is expansive and popular park for variety of youth sports. The popular park attracts lots of people from the area.

The Shops at Montebello

A center for community engagement and relief from the stresses of the day. There is a rich variety of shopping and dining options with ample parking for customers.

Montebello Hills

“The Montebello hills bring back great memories: as kids, my brother and I had a treehouse in one of the trees on that property. We enjoy the tranquility of the open space and the native plants and birdlife in the area.”

Golf Course

The golf course cafe is where friends come together after mass at Miraculous Medal Church to have a meal and enjoy time together. The golf course conference center has always been a center of activity for family celebrations (*we have reserved large rooms for anniversary and birthday celebrations*) and for major public events such as the *Sayonara* event for the Montebello-Ashiya Sister City Association, every August.

The Golf Course is a wonderful resource in the City for large formal gatherings.

Downtown Montebello

The historic Whittier Boulevard and its historic buildings are remarkable. The Downtown area should be improved while maintaining its historical ethos, supporting existing businesses and attracting new investment.

Sanchez Adobe Museum

This is the oldest building in Montebello. The home belonged to several residents and was eventually given to the City. The place is peaceful and quiet and the wrap-around porch offers stunning views. The small native and drought tolerant garden at the Adobe Sanchez Museum is a quaint and delightful place. Locals enjoy having photo-shoots at the Adobe.

Q2. Describe a place you think needs improvement and describe how it might be improved?

Grant Rea Park

This widely popular park can become a major passive and active recreation destination in the City. The park needs:

- Improved restrooms;
- Improved picnic areas with BBQ facilities;
- A Recreation Center;
- Site design improvements — specifically, abandon the north south access road to expand the park area; and maintain access to the park from the north and south side; and
- more sports and amenities

Link the adjacent Rio Hondo River to the Grant Rea Park with equestrian/biking/hiking trails. The 16 mile long Rio Hondo channel connects the San Gabriel River to the Los Angeles River. An enhanced linkage between the river and the Grant Rea Park would open a range of recreational amenities along the regional Emerald Necklace: an interconnected loop of parks and greenways along urban waterways.

Downtown

The 20 to 40 year is the largest population cohort that make \$10K to \$15K more than the average resident and want a higher engagement and better experience overall. For this population segment, “there is nothing to do here.” Younger people are drawn to places that offer a vibrant and bustling lifestyle with a vibrant restaurant and arts scene and a reputation for both safety and walkability.

The downtown presents the best opportunity to provide diverse housing types in a mixed-use and walkable setting.

Streets

Streets throughout Montebello are in need of repair and improvement by means of mill and overlay or remove and replace processes. Greener streets that incorporate water wise plantings could beautify Montebello corridors.

Whittier Boulevard can be improved by providing new outdoor dining opportunities, retail outlets, and big chain grocery stores.

The 1 mile stretch of Lincoln Avenue needs:

- Power poles to be under-grounded — number of grant opportunities can be pursued to carry out this task;
- Gateway feature to welcome people into Montebello;
- Improvements to parking lot for bikes;
- Re-design to eliminate illegal dumping;
- Connection to bikeway;

- Verdant canopy of street trees;
- To Eliminate guard rails and install boulder treatment instead;
- Habitat restoration; and
- Elimination of invasive plants.

Some segments of Montebello Boulevard look better than others — specifically, the east side of Montebello looks tired, old, and needs revitalization.

Need traffic lights near school district.

South Montebello

Montebello needs to come to terms with and address the racial and economic divide that has separated Southern Montebello apart from the north. An important way to bridge the divide is to bring people together and begin rebuilding stronger, more equitable communities with investment in public space.

The Chet Holifield Library building is very dated and not welcoming. The library, park, and street condition “gives an impression that the city doesn’t invest in the lower-income areas of Montebello.” By contrast, the new Pico Rivera Library offers variety of amenities, latest technology, and unique landscaped courtyards. Investment and care towards the Chet Holifield Library and Park would play a critical role in renewal of Southern Montebello.

The Streets in South Montebello are in bad shape — particularly Bluff Road has big potholes.

History & Culture

Montebello can maintain and preserve its unique historical and cultural context, and develop businesses and social areas that reflects its unique past.

Q3. Describe the changes you would like to see in Montebello?

Streets

The major business streets such as Whittier Boulevard and Beverly Boulevard must be improved and developed.

- Attract new businesses and revitalize or repurpose the current underperforming shops;
- Revitalize Whittier Boulevard;
- Enhance gateways at the various entries into the City;
- Identify the key commercial nodes in the City and create both an enjoyable pedestrian and vehicular experience at these nodes; and
- Businesses along major streets could benefit from standardized plans which encourage similar presentations themes.
- More walkable paths in business areas could increase business and decrease emissions. Bike and walking path that circulate up Montebello Boulevard to the Shops at Montebello would provide a similar benefit.

Main gateways into Montebello need to be more modern, welcoming, and consistent for visitors.

Focus on clean, safe and complete street environments.

Parks and Open Spaces

- Provide a variety of public spaces in each neighborhood;
- Make the Montebello Civic Center inviting for the public to access;
- Provide more parks/more recreational opportunities;
- Enhance linkages to the Emerald Necklace;
- Improve safety and access at Montebello City Park for families and their children on weekends;
- Build a well-lit walking trail around the Montebello Hills; and
- The north-south Edison Easement is a great opportunity for trails to connect the different neighborhoods to adjoining cities.

History

Montebello historically was known as an agricultural community. The community can celebrate this agricultural heritage with:

- A farmer's market, which could continue the historic access to healthy and nutritious food.
- Branding the Broguiere's Farm Fresh Dairy's Montebello roots. The dairy has served the area for 100 years and provides some of SoCal's most talked about chocolate milk and eggnog in their retro glass bottles.

The agrarian roots of Montebello are evident in horse stables located on Bluff Road near the intersection at Roosevelt Avenue. There's also a ranch along the block, and the homes along bluff have large lots.

Cultural Identity

Celebrate the City diverse cultural identity:

- Showcase the culture, food, festivals of the Hispanic, Armenian, and Asian population.

South Montebello

- Establish stronger connection/transition between north and south Montebello;
- Improve quantity, quality, and access to parks and open space, affordable housing, and markets, south of the railroad tracks;
- Explore possible joint agreement with the Applied Technology High School for use of their open space;
- South side lacks quality retail and commercial development;
- The De Paul Center site along Bluff Road (and the Rio Hondo corridor) is a potential opportunity for reinvestment in South Montebello; and
- The southern end of town has larger horse properties — this presents an opportunity to plan equestrian trails that can add to open space and recreational opportunities.

Parking

- Street parking is tight. Overcrowding in homes has poured out into the streets in the form of parking problems;
- Street parking (the cement) around the Chet Holifield Park in South Montebello is of poor quality;
- More parking is needed in the City, perhaps one or more parking structures; and
- A citywide parking study is needed to identify supply and demand and locations for possible structures.

Downtown

- Repurpose vacant and underperforming buildings in the downtown area;
- Support the City's efforts towards making Downtown Montebello more walkable, and enjoyable destination for entertainment and commerce;
- Support existing restaurants so they can remain open during the pandemic; and
- Downtown needs more outdoor eating places, and casual and upscale night-life opportunities.

Safe Routes to School

- Fast moving traffic, distracted drivers, and lack of safe and comfortable walking and biking environment are barriers to students walking or biking to school. The School District would be interested in partnering with the City to pursue a grant to carry out a Safe Route to School Study that will recommend infrastructure improvements, enforcement, tools, safety education, and incentives to encourage walking and bicycling to school.

Q4. Where are the key development opportunities in Montebello?

- Attract a major business to the old Costco facility and the old Sears building. The new homes being build on the Montebello Hills should be a huge incentive to attract quality shopping and entertainment uses.
- The mini-malls that anchor commercial intersections throughout Montebello's corridors need renewal. These sites are located on highly visible and accessible sites. Some of the underperforming buildings may be suitable for adaptive reuse.
- Local residents go to other cities for dining, late entertainment, and for outlet shopping. Older commercial retail structures on Whittier Boulevard (east and west) and throughout the entire stretch of Beverly Boulevard should be reimagined to facilitate vibrant, equitable, and sustainable places, with a mix of uses and a variety of transportation options. These initiatives will lower emissions, improve air quality, encourages spending thereby boost City's revenues, while also providing a very walkable and healthy condition for residents.
- Capitalize on assets and existing identity, and leverage those assets to draw visitors to these corridors. Build up the entrepreneurial ecosystem of the commercial corridors in Montebello by expanding business development opportunities, and promoting and featuring local businesses.
- Encourage denser housing development on corridors by allowing and streamlining the permitting process for multiple-family units. Encourage accessory dwelling units to increase housing supply and allow rental income for property upkeep.
- Reverse decades of disinvestment in South Montebello, particularly along I-5 corridor. Create a more inclusive and equitable city. Provide the southern half of Montebello with the same opportunities and economical investment.
- Invest in the public learning spaces like the Chet Holifield Library and community space next to the library, which used to host Zumba classes.
- Montebello Intermediate School will be rebuilt in 5 years (\$60 million project) — plans will be available in January 2021. This presents an exciting opportunity to reshape a significant frontage of Whittier Boulevard, while addressing safety issues for students.
- To comply with Title IX requirements the softball and baseball will be built at the Montebello High School (\$2 million project).

Q5. What kind of retail would you like to see more in the City?

- Several residents miss having the Costco in Montebello — recommend another big box store be attracted to fill the old Costco location.
- The City should encourage more restaurants; attract organic and eco-friendly markets like Trader Joe's and Sprouts; and big box retailers such as Target, Wal-Mart, and Lowe's.
- Plan shopping areas so the daily needs can be met within a short walk within each neighborhood.
- Any shopping, dining, and entertainment uses would be an improvement. Many residents feel that there is not much to do in Montebello and are going to neighboring cities for retail, entertainment, and dining needs. A unique attraction like the Anaheim Packing District would be desirable to have in Montebello.
- The Kalaveras Restaurant in North Montebello is nice because it caters to Mexican food and trendy drinks. The restaurant location on Garfield Boulevard, a busy/fast street makes access difficult. Having another restaurant like Kalaveras on Whittier Boulevard would be desirable.
- There are many people in the late 20s-40s demographic who are looking for a casual/nice place to eat and drink. Driven by busy lifestyles and a quest for balance between work and family, one of the key drivers for this demographic is a fun, relaxed atmosphere. They generally care less about the scene, but look for a relaxed, sociable backdrop for enjoying a restaurant experience. Dining places that offer games and drinks with the periodic food-truck option seems to cater to a younger demographic and would be nice for Montebello.
- Retail outlets like the ones in City of Commerce would be great.
- South Montebello needs a hispanic market.

Q6. What type of housing could Montebello use more of?

- Include a full range of housing types to meet the needs of all income groups.
- Residents should have access to quality housing at a range of prices and rents. Housing is least affordable for people at the lowest income levels, and City resources should focus on this area of need.
- Need transitional Housing (serving homeless individuals), higher density mixed-use housing, affordable and market-rate town houses, senior housing, and single-family homes. Distribute below market-rate housing as evenly as possible throughout Montebello.
- In South Montebello people are converting single-family homes into apartments for multiple families. Apartments should stay along or closer to Greenwood Avenue. Parking is a big issue for multi-family housings when they are located in single-family areas. People who live in the apartments on Greenwood Avenue often park deeper into the neighborhood because of limited parking.
- Encourage and facilitate addition of accessory second units on properties with single-family homes, but not without addressing the limited parking issue.
- The new homes being built on the Montebello Hills area are a step in the right direction.
- Encourage construction of additional new mid- to high-density housing on transit corridors. These areas could benefit from construction of combined commercial and residential structures (first floor for businesses, second and third floor for housing).

Q7. Are you, your organization, or your organization's membership interested in participating in future planning and implementation activities or events?

- Yes. I have lived in Montebello since 1977 and committed to public service and have led organizations that contributed to Montebello.
- Somewhat. I will be retiring at the end of this year. I am interested in improving Lincoln Avenue as a prime gateway into Montebello. Currently it is neglected with lots of illegal dumping going on.
- Yes, as needed.
- I believe so. Chris Vargas, the president of the Montebello Historical Society would be a great person to talk to. He has a background in law, and is a very grounded person, He's a Montebello resident and would welcome his contributions to this conversation.
- I would like to participate in some events and activities.

Q8. What are the greatest challenges and opportunities for business owners in the City?

Business Climate

- Historically, there have been challenges in dealings with the City. City Hall is slow, inefficient, and not well informed. Complacency at City Hall is a big challenge. The departments are self-contained to be helpful to one another. All branches of City Hall are not connected as a result businesses that need to interact with the City get the run around. The problem is mostly flawed system, not necessarily flawed workers.
- Have heard complaints from locals that the city doesn't make it easy for new businesses to establish themselves here, somehow related to taxes or processing of permits. City can streamline its approval and permitting process.
- Opportunity to open and operate business in the City is easy and the rents are affordable. The City is easily accessible from the region.
- The overall business environment of Montebello is marred by certain corridor segments that are struggling and appear to be vacant or underutilized and unsafe.
- Businesses on Beverly and Whittier Boulevards suffer because they do not have adequate parking.

Q9. What share of your patronage is from Montebello?

- About 60% to 85% of clientele is local from Montebello.
- As a service business, 99% of the clientele is from outside the City.

Q10. What public interventions could help your business grow?

Pandemic Response

- Covid-19 related restrictions are an obvious benefit for health and wellness but a definite deterrent to business. It is pertinent that these restrictions be appropriately written for each business so that they do not create inappropriate business burdens (e.g. what applies to one, doesn't apply to all).
- Small business stabilization funds in the form of grants, loans, waivers on permits and licensing fees can inject temporary relief. Technical assistance can help businesses make quick pivots on the line of products and services they develop or sell.
- Encourage/allow retail spaces to become mixed use with residential. This again, lowers emissions and encourages spending which boosts City Tax revenue, while also providing a very walkable and healthy condition for residents.
- Educate citizens on the presence of businesses within the City and their rights under a homeowner's policy.
- Increase overall perception of safety along business corridors in Montebello.
- More local networking opportunities like a small-business expo are needed.
- The City can offer incentives for local businesses to open in Montebello. Funding opportunities may include CDBG funds and micro-loans of \$10k to \$15K. The City could also waive permit approval fees, and leverage public owned lots to attract investment and businesses.
- Need clear and precise development standards with appropriate design guidelines to improve the appearance of the public and private areas along the commercial corridors and promote better circulation. Streets, street trees, and parks need maintenance. Oversight is needed from City Staff to require basic sidewalk and off-site improvements.

Other Comments

- “The City has no destinations that interest me. The City has been mismanaged and has not done anything to move forward. The City is far behind many places.”
- Our city electrical grid must be improved as there are too many electrical shut downs that cause havoc for residents.
- Do not see a pressing need to provide more shopping and dining opportunities to draw Armenian people from the region. Other Armenians from the region are less likely to come to Montebello to shop or dine.
- Slow down traffic on city streets.
- Clean up the mess — some light poles are filthy.
- No growth is anticipated for the school district. There is a 4% decline in enrollment from 31,000 students 8 years ago, down to 24,000 students today.
- The Police and Fire Department partner with the Care and Compassion Program of Beverly Community Hospital along with Rotary Club to provide Homeless patients in need of clean clothes, shoes, and basic toiletries.
- Historically, “Montebello was known as the Mexican Beverly Hills — not anymore.” However, residents are hopeful about the future.
- “Montebello does not have many destinations that bring people here.”
- Homeless people are along railroad tracks, the Rio Hondo corridor, supermarkets, city parks, Metrolink Station, and South Montebello.
- Plans are complete for Beverly Boulevard traffic synchronization with LA County — waiting for Council approval. Construction is anticipated to begin next year.
- The Shops at Montebello Mall is operating at 25% capacity in line with LA County Health Department guidelines. Six tenant spaces are currently empty. The Mall sees opportunities to introduce residential and entertainment uses. A master plan will be ready by January 2021. The Mall has three bus stops and many patrons take the bus to the Mall.
- The City does not look attractive. The City needs more green spaces, and biking and walking paths.
- The Fire Department is doing a lot with the same number of people. The call volume for service at the Fire Department has gone up dramatically. About 80% of the calls are medical calls for paramedics — a small percentage of all calls are fire related calls. Training needs are higher — need a medical director and support staff with various accreditations. Fire Station #56 was built in 1993. However, Fire Station #57 built in 1947 and is out of service — some of the apparatus will not fit. The Fire Headquarter was built in 1964 to last about 30 years. Fire Department trains in empty warehouses or on streets on weekends — a new training center is needed. The Fire Department is operating at a 90% efficiency rate. A fourth Fire Station is needed in the community. Potential

funding sources are grants and impact fees.

- The Fire Department runs the grant funded Montebello Community Assistance Program to work with homeless individuals.
- Feel unsafe at Montebello Park during the weekends. Need more police presence. Roadrider with 20 to 40 people from the area take over the park and end up making the park less accessible for kids and family.
- The Boulevard Market will open in January 2021, and will bring a curated collection of 10 emerging local and semi-local restaurateurs on Whittier Boulevard.
- There are 14 barber shops in the downtown area. What uses get approved for downtown area is important. For e.g.: a manufacturing facility without retail does not add to the downtown vitality.
- It is important to involve all owners on Whittier Boulevard in the Downtown Specific Plan process.
- Historically, the City has struggled with communication with the public. There is a lack of consistent messaging and coordinated marketing. Recent changes in City Hall have made tremendous improvements in listening, communicating, and leveraging new opportunities to shape the narrative.
- Beverly Hospital is a not-for-profit community hospital that has provided high quality care to local residents of Montebello and surrounding communities. In the past, the hospital has not been involved in planning processes because it is taken for granted. A new hospital facility is needed in the future — need to identify \$300-\$400 million to fund the project. The current pandemic has impacted future plans. The hospital wants to recover before planning for its future growth. The hospital is interested in partnering with the City to increase health care access to unhealthy, uninsured, and homeless segment of the community.
- Change at City Hall in the past 12 months has been positive. Planning process 5 years ago was very different and challenging.
- Recent leadership brings a higher caliber of services and approach to city governance.