

An Examination of Development in Boyle Heights and The Community's Recommendations to Support Artists and Build a Healthy Community



**RAICES: Residents and Artists Investing
in Community Development and
Empowerment Strategies**

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I. INTRODUCTION

This report provides an overview of the RAICES initiative in Boyle Heights. RAICES, Residents and Artists Investing in Community and Economic Development Strategies, is an artist and community-led group that has been monitoring the development of an arts corridor in Boyle Heights, a low-income neighborhood on the eastern border of Los Angeles. In addition to an overview of RAICES' activities, this report describes the landscape of development in Boyle Heights, offers case studies of arts districts in other cities, and lays out recommendations on the priorities that leaders in Boyle Heights should institute to develop an arts district that does not displace existing artists and residents, while supporting the health and wellbeing of all stakeholders.

RAICES began in 2012 with the emergence of a new initiative by Councilman Huizar to create an "arts corridor" on First Street in Boyle Heights. Inspired by the Arts District in Downtown Los Angeles, the Council Office was interested in bringing the same level of economic vibrancy to Boyle Heights.

Over the course of several months, the Council Office began engaging artists to paint utility boxes, design street furniture, and brand the corridor the "Boyle Heights Arts Corridor."

For some constituents, the new focus on an arts corridor in Boyle Heights raised eyebrows. The Arts District in Downtown Los Angeles, often used as a local model, has seen a dramatic economic turnaround, but with it has come an escalation in housing costs that has out-priced artists themselves. For some Boyle Heights leaders, this was not the type of investment they wanted to see in their community. Instead, they wanted to see investment support all the different stakeholders within the community, many of which contribute to the rich artistic and cultural history of Boyle Heights.

RAICES was born out of these concerns, with a vision to ensure that new investment supported the overall health and wellbeing of all community residents, especially artists. Soon after the mobilization of public resources around an arts corridor in Boyle Heights, artists, community-based organizations, and resident leaders began

convening to discuss the changes, share information on new and upcoming developments, and strategize on how arts & culture in Boyle Heights can attract investment that would not displace people but support a healthy and sustainable quality of life. Leaders were interested in the development of an “alternative plan” for an arts corridor in Boyle Heights that represented their priorities.

This report includes recommendations that inform an “alternative” plan for the development of a Boyle Heights Arts Corridor. This document was developed by Self Help Graphics & Art (SHG) with facilitation and research assistance from Leadership for Urban Renewal Network (LURN). It is informed by many one-on-one and group meetings with artists, community-based organizations and residents.

II. ANALYSIS OF LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANS

The focus of this research is Boyle Heights, a neighborhood on the Eastside of Los Angeles. Nearly all of its residents, 94%, are Latino. Half of Boyle Heights residents are native-born while 35% are non-citizen residents. The dominant language in the neighborhood is Spanish, with a majority of residents originating from Mexico.

Boyle Heights’ median income is \$33,250, significantly lower than LA County’s median income of \$55,000. About 76% of Boyle Heights residents are renters; 24% are homeowners.¹

While it is now known as a predominantly Latina/o community, Boyle Heights has historically been a home for a diverse array of ethnic groups. In the middle of the 20th century, Boyle Heights had large Jewish, Japanese American, African American, Armenian, and Russian populations. This diversity was catalyzed by racially restrictive covenants on land that made Boyle Heights one of the only places in

¹ US Census 2010

² “The People’s Plan for Boyle Heights (El Plan del Pueblo).” East LA Community Corporation, 2015. Web.

Los Angeles where people of color were allowed to purchase property. After WWII, this diverse population began to leave due to a dwindling housing supply and low employment opportunities in the industrial sector.

One of the causes of the diminishing housing supply in Boyle Heights was the development of the East Los Angeles Interchange, currently comprised of four Southern California freeways and highways (I-5, I-10, US-101, and CA-60). Because of its construction, Boyle Heights experienced a severe loss of housing (-10%) and a drop in its residential population (-20%).² In addition to these population changes, the East LA Interchange has also produced high levels of air pollution that are disproportional to the rest of Los Angeles.

Boyle Heights, nestled in the greater “East Los Angeles” area is also the home to Self Help Graphics & Art, a historic arts institution that was founded in a garage by Sister Karen Boccalero. Sister Karen, recognizing the inherent artistic talents of youth on the Eastside, began sharing her skills in screen-printing. Over time, SHG became a renowned producer of fine art screen prints, and an incubator of artists, many of whom are from Boyle Heights and other low-income areas of Los Angeles.

In addition to Self Help Graphics & Art, Boyle Heights has become a bastion of creativity for local residents in the region. Corridors like First Street has experienced an increase in art galleries and community collectives, as well as formal institutions like CASA 0101, a playhouse founded by the acclaimed playwright Josefina Lopez. Murals are prevalent in various places along the neighborhood, and public gathering spaces like Mariachi Plaza on First Street and Boyle Avenue serve as a congruence of musicians and other creatives.

This amalgamation of art in all its forms has no doubt contributed to Boyle Heights’ recent emergence as an “up and coming” neighborhood. After decades of disinvestment, the community has received a variety of public, private, and philanthropic dollars that are changing the social and economic dynamics of the community. With these investments, coupled with a burgeoning creative culture and its relative affordable housing close to Downtown Los Angeles, many

² Boyle Heights Community Plan: Planning, LA City. Web.

residents fear that Boyle Heights will soon succumb to the negative effects of gentrification.

The following section will provide an overview of some of the key development projects that are influencing the physical and socio-economic variables in Boyle Heights:

Boyle Heights Community Plan

The Boyle Heights Community Plan is one of the 35 community plans that make up the land use element of the City's General Plan. The Community Plan is Boyle Heights' official document that promotes a vision of the community that sets goals, objectives, policies, and implementation programs.³ It establishes a framework of how the City's physical and economic resources will be managed throughout time in the community.

The community plan is updated every ten years, but due to the shortfall in the city budget in 2009, the Plan has not been updated since 1998.

The process of developing the Community Plan consists of a few phases that are meant to gather significant community input, engage urban planners in processing that feedback, and then begin the pathway to the plan's official adoption. The Boyle Heights Community Plan begins with three separate phases of outreach and community input, followed by a "technical phase" where urban planners transcribe the data gathered in the first three phases, followed by an adoption process that involves the community, the planning department, and the city's planning commission.

The Community Plan is one of the most important planning efforts currently underway in Boyle Heights. The way it is drafted can have significant implications on the health of the community and how artists, residents, and small businesses play a role in the evolution of the built environment over time.

⁴ "Joint Development Program." Joint Development Program. Metro. 2014. Web. http://www.metro.net/projects/joint_dev_pgm/.

- **A resident-centric development process.** Future developments should prioritize the needs of existing residents especially amid fears of gentrification and/or displacement.
- **Affordable housing.** Emphasis should be placed on meeting the increasing demand for quality and affordable housing options in low-income communities.
- **Street vending.** To support low-income, micro-entrepreneurs, a path to legalization and an economic development policy that addresses the needs of low-income entrepreneurs such as street vendors who help bring revenue to their communities.

Metro

The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) is one of the largest transportation agencies that works to present efficient and effective transportation across the county. They work as transportation planners, coordinators, designers, and operators for LA County.

Because of the property it owns, Metro has been a significant stakeholder in Boyle Heights. They own parcels of land that can influence the future development of the neighborhood.

Two of Metro's current initiatives include the Joint Development Agreement Program and the East Side Access Project.

1

Joint Development Program (JDA)

The Joint Development Program is a real estate management program that collaborates with qualified developers to build transit-oriented developments (TODs) on Metro-owned properties.⁴ The program consists of a five-step process for developers to complete that begins with community outreach, the selection of a developer and an eventual decision at the Metro Board. (See Exhibit A)

In Boyle Heights, Metro has begun a JDA process on a few of its parcels by the Mariachi Plaza Gold Line Station, the 1st and Soto Gold Line Station, and two adjoining parcels at the corner of Cesar Chavez Avenue and Soto Street.

In November of 2014, Metro selected proposals from the following developers:

- Bridge/ELACC was granted the two adjoining parcels at the Corner of Cesar Chavez Avenue and Soto Street. They proposed to construct affordable housing for senior and family households and use about 16,400 square feet for street level retail.
- Abode Communities will focus on building 80 family apartments (16 units at market value, and 64 affordable housing units at below market value), as well as 6,000 square feet of commercial space on the parcel on First and Soto's Gold Line Station.
- Primestor proposed the development of two buildings, one three-story and one eight-story, with a total of 120,570 square feet of commercial space at Mariachi Plaza, a historical and cultural space in Boyle Heights

Aside from these three Metro-owned parcels, 80 affordable housing units are being developed on an adjacent parcel on First Street and Boyle Avenue by McCormack Baron Salazar. Although it was approved in 2009, it recently became the source of controversy because of a perceived lack of community engagement that was largely due to a multi-year delay in the development's construction. Although the JDA was approved in 2009, community members felt the recent activity on the parcel was another example of a lack of community feedback on the part of Metro and the developers. To advocate for more community engagement, youth and artists conducted a direct action on the site, tying ribbons along the fence with descriptions of the types of development they would like to see in the neighborhood. As a result of that action, the developer has prioritized a youth driven entity to occupy the future commercial space on the property, as well as the hanging of art banners around the site during construction. Additionally, the completed development will feature a public art project.

Similarly, A Community of Friends, a nonprofit housing developer, is working on restarting their project that was accepted in 2007 by Metro's JDA program. The project proposes to build affordable housing on the Corner of Lorena and First Street. A Community of Friends has actively been participating in Boyle Heights Neighborhood Council meetings to receive feedback from residents. The project seeks to reconstruct a four and five-story building comprised of 49 apartment units and approximately 10,000 square feet of retail space. Approximately 50% of the apartment units will be targeted for people with special needs. Self Help Graphics & Art played a role in making sure that community residents knew about this project and that the RFQ process for public art on the site was accessible to local artists.

2

Eastside Access Improvement Project

In addition to putting together the joint program, Metro is managing the Eastside Access Project, part of the \$12 million improvement investment project to help revitalize the following streets along Metro's Gold Line:

- 1st Street and Cummings Street Plazas
- Mott Street and Bailey Street
- Evergreen Edge on 1st Street
- Pico/Aliso Streetscape
- Mercado Streetscape
- Echandia and Lorena Street

The project's key improvements are to provide: decorative sidewalks, mural projects, and more bike lanes along the Metro Eastside Gold Line Route. Other proposed projects can be found in Exhibit B.

Sidewalk Repair Initiative

On April 1, 2015 the City of LA agreed to repair sidewalks all throughout Los Angeles following the Willits Class Action Lawsuit. The lawsuit derived from resident, Mark Willits, who sued the City of Los Angeles in 2010 after arguing that L.A.'s broken sidewalks impaired the rights of disabled city residents under the Americans with Disability Act (ADA).

This lawsuit was made into a class action eventually winning a 30-year agreement that will spend about \$31 million per year for the next 30 years to fix broken sidewalks. Approximately 20% percent of the project, as mandated by the settlement, will be devoted to addressing the specific needs and requests of disabled persons.

While this initiative is in its initial stage, it is a plan that will impact the future of the built environment in Boyle Heights.⁵ The City is also working on creating a position to monitor the work and draft reports on progress of sidewalk repairs and improvements at least twice a year.

Los Angeles Neighborhood Initiative's (LANI) Sidewalk Project in Boyle Heights

In addition to the sidewalk repair initiative, LANI used a grant from Wells Fargo Bank's LIFT program to repair sidewalk landscapes in Boyle Heights. LANI will be coordinating its efforts with Metro to avoid duplications on projects.

LANI's notable community engagement process recruits a group of 8-12 stakeholders that typically includes residents, neighborhood council members, community organizers, business owners, and other community influencers around the target project who help outline community priorities, select an urban designer and oversee construction. LANI's most recent project is focused on repairing the sidewalk adjacent to Benjamin Franklin Library on First Street.

LANI is also working with Metro to help in the Evergreen Street Enhancement Project. The project proposed to clean up streets,

⁵ Boyle Heights Neighborhood Council Meeting, 4 April 2015.

revitalize and create better streetscape throughout 4th Street, 1st Street, Soto Street and Lorena Street.

Mayor Garcetti's Great Streets Initiative

The Office of Mayor Garcetti has also prioritized the design and development of streets to cultivate cultural vibrancy and thriving business corridors. The program calls for “interdepartmental cooperation between LADOT, Engineering, Planning, Cultural Affairs, Public Works and Street Services to work together to create a unified calendar for street planning and programs.”

Still at its beginning stages, The Great Streets Initiative is meant to aggregate multiple resources on one street: searches for community stakeholders to create a vision that reflects thriving neighborhoods. Boyle Heights' Cesar Chavez Avenue (Evergreen and St. Louis Street) was one of the 15 streets chosen to begin this project. Since Cesar Chavez Avenue is so close to the Gold Line Metro Station, the project hopes to strengthen the linkages between the station and the surrounding community.

In search of stakeholders, the City put forth a Challenge Grant application in June of 2015 and Multicultural Communities for Mobility (MCM), along with From Lot to Spot (FLTS), and CALO YouthBuild Charter Academy in Boyle Heights, were announced as winners for Cesar Chavez Avenue. Their project, Nuestra Avenida: Cesar Chavez Reimagined, is a community-led street activation event on Cesar Chavez Avenue, between St. Louis Street and Evergreen Avenue, which aims to demonstrate how the community can be an integral part of the planning process in implementing pedestrian and cyclist safety infrastructure improvements, along with the creative of more public space. The project aims to take an innovative engagement approach that will result in a demonstration project that is by the community and for the community.

The Sustainable City pLAn

Aside from the Great Street Initiative, Mayor Garcetti released the Sustainable City pLAn on April 8th, 2015, a long-range plan to create

sustainable landscapes throughout Los Angeles. This initiative seeks to address inequity and fulfill the needs of Los Angeles via three important categories:

- **Environment:** through a focus on local solar power, local water, energy efficient buildings, carbon and climate leadership the city hopes to create sustainable patterns all throughout Los Angeles;
- **Economy:** through preparedness and resiliency, the city is committed to providing housing and development, mobility and transit, prosperity and green jobs; and
- **Equity.** through establishing a sense of collective ownership of the future of all Angelenos, this initiative seeks to provide better air quality, promote environmental justice, create great leaders and sustain livable neighborhoods.

In order to prioritize the City's needs, The Sustainable City pLAN was developed through "consultation with hundreds of subject-matter experts, community activists, and sustainability advocates, along with extensive quantitative analysis."⁶

USC Capital Construction and Development (CCD)

Recently, a \$1 million investment was put towards improvements at Hazard Park. This investment was made through the USC Health Sciences Campus Beautification Plan and the USC Capital Construction and Development initiative. The securing of these funds was in large part due to the organizing of residents and the work of the Boyle Heights Neighborhood Council. Starting June 1st and continuing through October 30th, 2015, USC has notified Boyle Heights that there will be a closure beginning April 1st through the intersections of San Pablo/Norfolk and Alcazar/Playground. Additionally, pedestrians will not be able to use sidewalks in the work area. The closure is a necessary action in an effort to widen a section of Norfolk Street that connects to Soto Street.

The Sears Building

The Sears product distribution center located at the South West corner of Olympic Boulevard and Soto Street has been sold to DTLA developer Izek Shomof who has promised a multi-use makeover. Current plans include retail, office spaces, and 1,000 residential units comprised of studio, single and 2-bedroom apartments--none of which are low-income.⁷

The Sears site was placed on the market in 2007 by Mark J. Weinstein Investments, but they had difficulties selling the property. Eventually the 23-acre site captured the attention of various agencies, including Oscar De La Hoya's real estate company, Golden Boy Partners. However, those agencies that sought out re-development have been unable to move forward with projects.

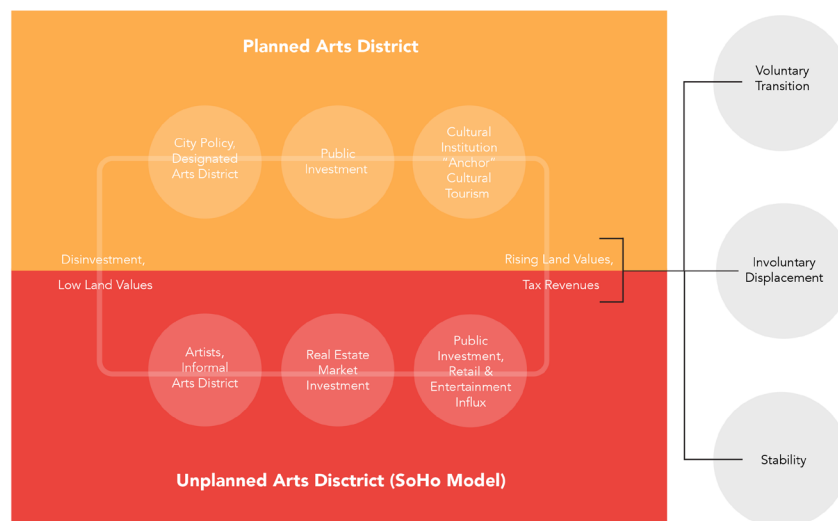
Clearly, there is an tremendous amount of development taking place in Boyle Heights that will have a substantial effect on local residents. For those projects where there are significant community concerns, discontent most often arises from a lack of communication and engagement on the part of public agencies and developers.

III. LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS OF "ARTS DISTRICTS" IN THE U.S.

The following case studies describe the development of five art districts around the United States: South of Houston Street (SoHo) in New York City, the Downtown Los Angeles Art District, the Dallas Arts District, and the Art Murmur District. These districts were chosen based on demographic similarities to Boyle Heights (primarily city and neighborhood population as well as ethnic make-up) and for their unique economic development policies. The goal of analyzing these case studies is to highlight community-based policy practices and to examine the histories and progression of some of the most renowned arts districts in the United States.

To preface the case studies, the image below⁸ describes two primary forms of arts districts development projects: planned/formal and unplanned/informal. While these models are not exclusive, and the histories of many arts districts reflect a combination of both models, they generally represent different economic development policies:

- **Planned Arts Districts:** These arts districts usually begin with top-down approval, with municipal leaders deciding to begin an arts district as a means to catalyze economic development. They often attempt to manufacture an identity for the neighborhood, including the recruitment of specific art, artists, art institutions, businesses, and developers to the district.
- **Unplanned Arts Districts:** These arts districts represent more “bottom up” developments. An unplanned arts district may emerge through the relatively organic process of artists seeking affordable work and living space in a specific neighborhood. Overtime, a large concentration of artists can create a critical mass of arts capital and arts institutions.



From the following examples, we hoped to understand “best practices” that could be applied in Los Angeles and in Boyle Heights specifically:

CASE STUDY 1: SOHO, NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK

In *Neighborhood Change in New York: The Loft Conversion Process*, author Peter Jackson presents a detailed history of SoHo’s development as an arts district. SoHo, a 0.75 square mile neighborhood located in Lower Manhattan, currently has a population of about 13,000 with an annual median income of over \$100,000. This art district serves as one of the most widely referenced case studies.

During the first half of the twentieth century, SoHo experienced an economic downfall that left many large manufacturing buildings empty. Illegally occupying industrial lofts (not zoned for living), artists saw it as an opportunity for inexpensive rent and large combined living workspaces. Due to the lack of demand from the manufacturing industry, landlords were willing to rent out their spaces to artists.

In response to the growing presence and demand of artists in SoHo, New York City the city enacted multiple policies, including:

- ◆ An Artist-in-Residence (AIR) program. Established in 1961, this the program “legalized the residential use of formerly industrial buildings for artist.,”⁹ however, AIR’s definition of art has been extended throughout the years.
- ◆ Rezoning SoHo. Beginning in 1976, rezoning the SoHo neighborhood allowed developers to build “mixed-used” spaces intended for both residential and commercial purposes in the same area.
- ◆ J-51 tax incentive program. Introduced in 1975, this program provided a “real estate tax incentive for owners who converted non-residential buildings into multiple dwellings.”¹⁰

By 1973, the reputation of SoHo led its designation as a “Historic District by the City Landmarks Preservation Commission.” With this title, the popularity of the neighborhood exploded, bringing in a deluge of outside attention and interest from both private individuals as well as developers. The culmination of the eased policies around loft conversions and higher demand led to large private development projects, new businesses, and new residents. Soon, many restaurants and businesses that cater to higher-end consumers began to populate the neighborhood, before eventually becoming a mainstay of SoHo.

During this process, artists found themselves priced out of the neighborhood; unable to afford rent, many artists were forced to relocate from SoHo.

⁶ “Sustainable City pLAn” Office of Mayor Eric Garcetti. Web.

⁷ “Sears Building in Boyle Heights Sells to Developer for \$29 million.” *Los Angeles Times*. November 23, 2013.⁸

⁸ Figure 1. Planned and Unplanned Arts District Models Flow Chart. Reprinted from *Building Arts, Building Community* (p. 3), by A. Wodsak, K. Suczynski, K. Chap-ple, 2008, Berkeley, CA: The Center for Community Innovation.

CASE STUDY 2: LOS ANGELES ARTS DISTRICT, DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

The Los Angeles Arts District is located in northeast Downtown Los Angeles, and is a small 0.6 square mile neighborhood with a population of about 1,500 and annual median income of over \$100,000.¹¹

The District dates back to the early 1900's.¹² Back then, Downtown Los Angeles boomed economically as a manufacturing center for the city with railroads providing easy access and transportation.

However, by 1922 "the city had officially re-zoned downtown to eliminate all residential housing in order to make room [for] more offices and retail [spaces]."¹³ By re-zoning this working class residential neighborhood, what is today the Arts District, became an industrial area.

Additionally due to technological advancement in transportation, trucking took precedent over railway as trains become more cumbersome to navigate and therefore obsolete. Eventually manufacturing companies began to relocate to other areas around Los Angeles, leaving an economic gap in the downtown area.

Here, the development of Downtown Los Angeles began to parallel that of SoHo: with an abundance of unused manufacturing buildings, artists began to relocate in the 1970s into the Arts District for both its low-cost rent and the opportunity to live and work in the same space.

The City crafted policies to relax housing restrictions in the Arts District, implementing an AIR program, similar to SoHo. The City also passed the Adaptive Reuse Ordinance (ARO), described as a policy that "relaxed zoning codes for the conversion of pre-1974 commercial and industrial buildings into residential uses for non-artists."¹⁴ In addition, Arts District residents successfully campaigned to have the neighborhood officially recognized as an arts district by the City.

The combination of these policies coupled with publicity of the area steadily renewed interest in the Arts District: bringing in more businesses, private individuals, and developers. Like SoHo, the neighborhood began as a low-income area, but now boasts one of the highest median incomes in the city, if not the state. Artists were heavily displaced; so much so that L.A.'s Department of Cultural Affairs applied for and successfully received \$75,000 from the Los Angeles Housing Department to subsidize artist housing in the Arts District. In addition, other organizations such as ArtShareLA, have been working to offer permanent affordable housing to artists--such as ArtShareLA, an organization offering artists below-market-rate housing.¹⁵

CASE STUDY 3: DALLAS ARTS DISTRICT, DOWNTOWN DALLAS, TEXAS

Downtown Dallas' arts district is about 0.8 square miles with a population of 5,200. Unlike the Los Angeles and New York arts districts, Dallas' district resulted from a top-down model. In the 1970s, the Dallas municipal leaders wanted to centralize their "arts and cultural institution" in an area close to "freeways, local streets, hotels, restaurants, and coffee shops."¹⁶ To determine the best location, the city first hired

consultants Carr-Lynch to pinpoint a location. The city then held a competition for planning firms to design a framework for the development of the district.

By 1984, the city began to develop an arts district with the company Sasaki Associates along with the opening of the Dallas Museum of Art. For the next 20 years, the Dallas Arts District expanded with the development of multiple art institutions, including the AT&T Performing Arts Center, the Morton H. Meyerson Symphony Center, and the Perot Museum of Nature and Science. In 2009, Dallas officially recognized the district, creating special zoning that would confirm the specific regulations to maintain the neighborhood's artistic and cultural identity.

As a planned Arts District, the City of Dallas did not enact many of the policies compared to the unplanned districts. The project depended on public funding as the means for neighborhood design and public attraction

CASE STUDY 4: ART MURMUR DISTRICT, OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA

Located in downtown Oakland, the Art Murmur is another example of an unplanned arts district. The Art Murmur District (also known as the 23rd and Telegraph District) was built up from the abundance of empty buildings as a result of poor economic health in Oakland. Property owners, excited at the prospect of renting out their spaces, began to convert storefronts and other commercial properties into living/working spaces. Having already been priced out of San Francisco, many artists found refuge in these units in the 1990s, where "dancers, musicians, painters, poets, and others began moving into empty storefront units."¹⁷

As artists began to populate what is now the Art Murmur District. Artists converted commercial spaces into attractive live-in studio and loft spaces. In addition, through the city's Façade Improvement Program, artists and owners were able to renovate the exteriors as well. As the artist community developed, artists and owners recognized the need to attract more attention and business to the area. Pooling in their resources and ingenuity, they organized the Art Murmur in 2006, a free monthly 0.3 mile-long art walk through the district.¹⁸ The event was a success and the Art Murmur became an iconic element to the neighborhood, attracting individuals within and beyond Oakland.

The City witnessed the success of the event and helped institute a program that granted permits to close nearby streets and helped to provide free public transportation to the event. Concurrently, Oakland City also implemented the 10K Downtown Housing Initiative, "with the goal of attracting 10,000 new residents to downtown Oakland by facilitating the development of 6,000 market-rate housing units."¹⁹

Thus, as the artists drew more attention to the Art Murmur District with their art and events, new stakeholders began taking interest in the development of the community. In nearly a decade since the first Art Murmur, hundreds of "high-end condominium units" have been built along with more mainstream businesses.²⁰

⁹ The Arts District: History and Architecture in Downtown L.A. (2013). Los Angeles Conservatory.

¹⁰ Jackson, P. (1983). Neighborhood Change in New York: The Loft Conversion Process. *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie Tijdschr Econ Soc Geogr*, 76(3), 202-215.

¹¹ Artists District neighborhood in Los Angeles, California (CA), 90012, 90013, 90021 detailed profile. Retrieved May 27, 2015. <http://www.city-data.com/neighborhood/Artists-District-Los-Angeles-CA.html>

¹² The Arts District: History and Architecture in Downtown L.A. (2013). Los Angeles Conservatory.

¹³ Ibid.

CONCLUSION

From these case studies, we can expect that:

“If narrow economic approaches continue to dominate planning research, there will be little hope for developing the mutual trust with community organizations and artists so necessary for understanding neighborhoods dynamics. [In fact,] joint projects that educate planners in the practice of artists, and that educate art producers in the practice of planners, creates a sphere of engagement that can demystify worlds that too often misunderstand each other.”²¹

In many examples of arts districts across the country, policies have supported artists occupying industrial spaces, but there have been no policies that ensure that those same artists can stay if they choose. For Boyle Heights, this lack of a clear precedent is an important note as the neighborhood begins to navigate how it can leverage new investments into the community in a way that does not displace the arts and culture that helped attract the attention and investment in the first place. Making it easier for artists to access under-utilized space (both private and public) is a strong step in making sure the creative community can practice their craft, but it is only the first step.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Chapple, K., Jackson, S., & Martin, A., Concentrating creativity: The planning of formal and informal arts districts. *City, Culture and Society*, 225-234.

¹⁶ Art and Culture Districts: Financing, Funding, and Sustaining Them. American for the Arts.

¹⁷ Chapple, K., Jackson, S., & Martin, A.

IV. COMMUNITY INPUT

Self Help Graphics & Art believed early on in the importance of engaging the community to learn and get involved in the development of an “arts district” in Boyle Heights. Community engagement is key to building a sustainable and healthy community. In 2012, Self Help Graphics & Art convened leaders from community-based organizations that represent important constituencies in Boyle Heights. The group included:

- (1) East LA Community Corporation
- (2) CASA 0101
- (3) Brooklyn & Boyle
- (4) Union de Vecinos
- (5) Proyecto Pastoral
- (6) A.R.T.E.S.
- (7) Place It!
- (8) The East LA Society of Film and Arts; and individual artists such as Sandra de la Loza.

Later, organizations such as Mujeres de Maiz, Las Fotos Project, Legacy LA, and Inner City Struggle joined the group.

Initially, the group formed as an organic “brain trust”: a space to share new information on arts-themed development. However, it quickly transitioned into a group focused on ensuring that any new initiatives focused on branding Boyle Heights’ 1st Street corridor was in fact centered on the needs of existing residents and artists.

In 2014, The California Endowment’s support of this momentum (through Self Help Graphics & Art) brought an alternative energy to the group and allowed new stakeholders to come to the table, including local community organizers and artists. In order to brand this work and engage other community members, members named this burgeoning coalition “RAICES”: Residents and Artists Investing in Community Economic Development Strategies. The name is meant

¹⁸ Wodsak, A., Suczynski, K., & Chapple, K. (2008). *Building Arts, Building Community?* Berkeley, CA: The Center for Community Innovation (CCI).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Chapple, K., Jackson, S., & Martin, A

²¹ Chapple and Jackson, p. 487

to represent the importance of engaging residents and artists in not only the beautification of their community through art, but also in the physical development of their community. For RAICES participants, all Boyle Heights residents contribute to the creative economy, therefore all residents should have a voice in the development of an “arts corridor.”

While RAICES was formalizing, development in Boyle Heights was already taking place, in tandem with a significant amount of “buzz” about the burgeoning Boyle Heights Arts Corridor. In response to this, RAICES set its sights not only on tracking development, but also on generating an “alternative” plan for the up and coming Boyle Heights Corridor.

To begin this process, participants within RAICES began leveraging their own networks to gather feedback from Boyle Heights residents on the art already in their community and the priorities residents have in preserving their neighborhood. To help organize data specific demographic categories were identified as important, including seniors, families, youth, small businesses, and artists. In order to reach these groups, the coalition emphasized the need to meet stakeholders where they live, work, and play. This helped guide RAICES towards thinking creatively about how to gather input on arts-related development and the different ways to leverage non-traditional tactics to obtain data.

The results, as detailed in the rest of this report, also generated important recommendations on the types of policies and procedures that should be put into place to ensure Boyle Heights’ cultural and artistic assets are leveraged in a way that prioritizes existing residents and artists.

RAICES was able to gather community input in the following ways:

Community Surveying in Public Spaces

One of the key questions set forth by RAICES was: “What does art and culture mean in Boyle Heights?” The answer to this question helped

identify the cultural assets that are important to the community, and laid the groundwork for how said assets could be protected and amplified in the process of developing an “arts corridor.”

In order to records responses to these questions, RAICES, in partnership with local youth, constructed a series of large chalkboards that were erected in important public spaces in the community. On the top of the chalkboard, organizers wrote:

“En Boyle Heights, Arte y Cultura es...” (“In Boyle Heights, Art and Culture is...”)

Affixed to the chalkboard was a basket of chalk that individuals could use to complete the sentence. The project was inspired by the work of artist Candy Chang who erected a similar chalkboard in New Orleans and in other cities to complete the sentence, “Before I die I want to...”

The RAICES chalkboards were erected in various public spaces including Mariachi Plaza, Dolores Mission Church, Hollenbeck Park, Mendez High School, and in areas along 1st Street to allow pedestrians to spontaneously observe the board, and use the chalk to complete the sentence. In certain locations the board was erected without permit requirements, and in some cases it was utilized in different spaces, borrowed by community partners to gather their own data.

The data gathered was organic and surprising in many cases. While primarily youth were drawn to the chalkboard, adults of all ages contributed to the boards as well including entire families stopping to participate and taking the time to read answers from other Boyle Heights residents.

The most popular written responses to the question included:

- (1) “Nuestra historia” (Our history)
- (2) “Variety of cultures”
- (3) “Mariachi”
- (4) “Los Vendedores Ambulantes” (Street Vendors)
- (5) “Family”
- (6) “Tacos”
- (7) “La Lucha” (The Struggle)

This data illustrates the broad definition of arts and culture for Boyle Heights residents. Arts and culture is more than just beloved murals and music: it is found in family, in local businesses, in residents' relationship with their community, and even in their struggle for a better life. As one RAICES member said, "Todos somos artistas," ("We are all artists").

Inventory of Community Assets: Las Fotos Project

As data was being gathered through the chalkboard exercises, RAICES began looking for different ways to further document the opinions of community members. Through collaboration with Las Fotos Project, RAICES partnered with a local scholar, Felipe Ocampo, who was interested in employing the "Photo Voice" method with Boyle Heights youth. This method was a creative way to facilitate discussion among young residents on various community assets that residents want to preserve in the midst of a growing fear of gentrification.

Over ten weeks, youth met weekly at Self Help Graphics & Art's offices to learn how to use photography techniques to capture aspects of their community they valued and that could be threatened by future development. After each photographic session in Boyle Heights, youth shared their photos and discussed what they were uncovering through their images and conversations with neighbors.

This project helped formalize the engagement of youth in RAICES' community outreach efforts. The youth who participated not only used art to photograph their community, but they were also able to learn about the nuances of change in their community by interviewing residents and leaders in Boyle Heights through the process.

After ten sessions, Felipe Ocampo uncovered six themes in his discussions with youth including: "undesired change, lost opportunities and friendships, social ties and social support, unaddressed needs, fear[s] and resistance" in the face of gentrification in Boyle Heights. Ocampo concluded that these "themes that emerged [together] tell a clear story about how the youth have a genuine and vested interest in the development of their surroundings."

Mapping Cultural Assets: ACTA

Since its inception, RAICES did not want to “reinvent the wheel,” when it came to community input and community-centric work. Due to the capacity of organizations and various leaders involved, leveraging existing programs and research was a priority. That being said, The Alliance for California Traditional Arts (ACTA), supported by Building Healthy Communities (BHC) Boyle Heights, became an important data partner of Self Help Graphics & Art and RAICES.

ACTA created a map in partnership with the Boyle Heights BHC that would allow communities and outside members to find and utilize central resources in the Boyle Heights community. By being able to use this cultural map, RAICES saw the opportunity to build connections across different organizations and resources that can be used to further engage the arts and the community.

On 1st Street alone, the focus of the emerging “Boyle Heights Arts Corridor,” ACTA documented over 15 cultural treasures in the forms of organizations, individuals, places, and events. But what is also clear is that the community’s cultural treasures were not concentrated only on 1st Street; the map depicts over 80 notable points spread out through the roughly three square miles of Boyle Heights.

For the leaders of RAICES, this data affirms the diversity within the definition of “arts and culture,” and also confirms that Boyle Heights’ unique brand of arts and culture does not reside only on one street. These community outreach efforts shed light on the fact that while a concentration of public and private investment on 1st Street could have its benefits, Boyle Heights’ cultural assets are decentralized and scattered throughout the entire neighborhood. RAICES feels strongly that investment shouldn’t be dedicated to one individual street, rather there should be a widespread and holistic approach to neighborhood revitalization that includes other areas of the community as well.

Leveraging Existing Art Programs: SOY Artista

SOY Artista is a five-week summer art-training workshop for young artists (12-24 years old) who are recruited from local youth groups, schools, and other community centers in Boyle Heights/East Los Angeles. The five-week course is taught by local, professional artists and consists of various workshops including woodblock printing, etching, and silk-screen mono printing. In some cases, students use the work created in the program for admission portfolios to LA County High School of the Arts or for admission/scholarship consideration for college art programs. SOY Artista's goal is to serve 60-80 local students through the summer. Classes provide in-depth art experiences that culturally connect youth to their community, and create stronger coalitions between community organizations, students and higher learning.

RAICES informed the theme of the program in 2014 and 2015, inviting young artists to adopt the theme of "Mi Barrio" to create art that is reflective of what they love, hope to see and need in their communities. These young artists used art to address issues of health, food access, gentrification, place-making (green space, skate parks), policy making, positive use of the streets as well as other issues important to them, resulting in over 100 works of art that informed this project.

Surveying the Artist Community: Self Help Graphics & Art

While new developments in Boyle Heights were being done in the name of the artist community, Self Help Graphics & Art wanted to better understand the needs of working artists, many whom are long-term residents in the community. Thus, as the convener, it was important that the organization play a significant role in making sure artists were represented in RAICES, and that their opinions about the emerging "Boyle Heights Arts Corridor" were front and center. To inform the development of this report, Self Help Graphics & Art leveraged its long-standing "Artist Roundtable" and its wider network of local artists to identify the needs of the greater artist community in Boyle Heights.

Through an online survey of its artists, SHG found that 90% of its artist network was between the ages of 18 to 45. The data also highlighted an important fact for this report: 80% of the artists considered themselves low-income.

The survey data also collected qualitative data that shed some light on what artists themselves thought could support their local artist community. Overall, the data showed that there was a high demand for:

- **Lesson Plan Development:** Many artists teach their crafts to others. To help support this work, artists surveyed expressed the need to build their skills in lesson plan development so they could be more effective art educators. Many artists supplement their income by facilitating art workshops at schools and even community events such as SaludArte, an event organized by BHC and ACTA to promote healthier neighborhoods and schools through cultural and artistic preventative community practices including dance, theatre, music, muraling and silk screening, to name a few.
- **Professional Development:** The art world is competitive, and in order to be successful, artists on the Eastside recognize the need to improve their skills in time management, business development, contract negotiation, and others areas.
- **Opportunities to Learn More About their Field:** Many of the artists surveyed expressed interest in learning more about their craft and building relationships with other artists and experts who can help expand their practice.
- **Equipment/Technology Support:** Art-related equipment and technology could be expensive and inaccessible to some. Artists expressed a need to obtain the tools they need to produce the best artwork possible.
- **Low-Interest Loan Programs:** Some artists require capital to bid on big public projects or to secure supplies on the front end of a large commission. To meet these needs, artists identified the need for a trustworthy source of capital with low-interest.

- **Affordable Studio Rentals:** Both housing and workplace was an important priority of surveyed artists. In an expensive real estate market, many artists are struggling to find a place in their own community to live and work.
- **Investment in Wellness for Artists:** Artists of color serve as conduits of energy for participants in workshops, activities and events. Often, these engagements, highlight the need for more spaces where participants can support their emotional and physical well being through art.

V. SUMMARY OF NEEDS

The data collected through RAICES efforts over the past year have highlighted important needs of the demographic groups that were outlined earlier: artists, youth, families, seniors, and small business owners. For Boyle Heights residents, arts and culture are engrained into every aspect of life. Additionally, the arts is not confined to traditional mediums, but rather, art is seen in all elements of life in the community. In essence, art influences the community's culture, which influences the quality of life. And because the arts play such an important role in the community, artists need to be supported as they help to maintain the neighborhood's cultural vibrancy.

Informed by the community's feedback, the following priorities of Boyle Heights artists and residents surfaced:

- Boyle Heights prioritizes a shared sense of place and identity. The built environment matters, not only for how it's used, but what it means culturally.
- Gentrification is a big concern, and it should be avoided if at all possible.

- Collaboration with different sectors is important to support the local economy and its existing businesses.
- We need to create new opportunities to support local artists and artist-based businesses.
- Preserving and developing affordable housing for artists and residents is of critical importance.
- Resident engagement must continue to be at the center of any policy or development moving forward.
- Future developments should reflect cultural and historical uses of space but not limited to spaces for gathering, wellness activities, and communal meals.

These priorities were also presented and processed on a number of occasions, most recently with a group of 20 Boyle Heights leaders who convened to discuss development, especially the activity around the Metro parcels in Boyle Heights. The feedback from this group affirmed the need to prioritize development that catered to existing residents, artists, and entrepreneurs in order to truly build and sustain a healthy Boyle Heights.

As seen through the collected data from RAICES outreach work, Boyle Heights needs various forms of community engagement to support constituents in Boyle Heights. Even more, the case studies and the survey conducted by SHG show that affordable homes for families, seniors, and artists are also needed. Young artists from Boyle Heights are consistently seeking affordable housing and/or studios. In the following section this analysis will go further into specific needs and will also offer suggestions and solutions in order to create an inclusive model for the community, the city, and for planners.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the work RAICES has conducted to date, the following recommendations set forth realistic opportunities that can enhance the rich culture and artistic community of Boyle Heights, while also ensuring that existing residents have an opportunity to stay in their community:

Develop a new way to engage the community on development projects.

Although several of the development projects have a required process for community engagement, effective communication and sufficient community vetting seems to be lacking. Thorough community engagement is difficult and could be costly, but it is a worthy investment. Too often, public agencies and development companies have little resources dedicated to community outreach and partnership formation. To remedy this, community meetings should take place on weekends and public agencies should consider partnering with local community-based organizations with trusted relationships in the community that can help spread the word.

Community engagement should also not end at a project's groundbreaking. Where possible, community stakeholders should be organized on "advisory boards" that can help monitor progress of developments and who are responsible for updates their neighbors on what is taking place.

Artists should also be brought in at the initial stages of a project, not only to advise on the potential creative components of a development, but also to contribute their ideas on how a project can support the cultural vitality of the neighborhood.

Build housing for artists and low-income workers.

Artists and low-income workers contribute a great deal to a community, and housing should be developed to ensure they have an opportunity to stay in the neighborhood they work in.

Unfortunately, building housing in Los Angeles is often difficult and expensive, but policies can be put in place that help streamline the process and also mobilize capital to support the development of projects that meet the needs of specific demographics like artists.

In New York City, Mayor De Blasio recently prioritized the building of artist housing in an effort to nurture New York's reputation as a creative capital. In addition to aiming to build 1,500 affordable housing units by 2025, the Mayor is also committing to build 500 workspaces on city owned property. Political will to support artist housing is very valuable and can set the tone for future policies and development behavior, even in the private sector.

There are also best practices that could be looked at in smaller cities like Nashville, the country's "Music City." Here, nonprofit organizations are launching initiatives to help artists purchase, rehabilitate, and even construct live/work units for artists. The Housing Fund, a local CDFI, recently was awarded a grant from the Surdna Foundation to do work along these lines.

Where possible, home ownership should be a priority to help protect artists and residents from future development that could leave them in a vulnerable state if they are renting. Since many artists in Boyle Heights are low-income, there may be an opportunity for decision-makers to encourage the development of cooperatives and land trusts that can help residents with limited capital and opportunity to own property.

Invest in educational initiatives for youth.

To realize long-term sustainability in neighborhoods like Boyle Heights, leaders need to invest in youth. Boyle Heights, compared to other neighborhoods in Los Angeles, is a very young community. While local schools are slowly improving from years of dismal performance, there is an important opportunity to reinvest in the arts programming that is proven to help young people focus their energy on productive endeavors.

As seen through RAICES, youth can also play a role in informing the development of their community. While they may not be formally trained in urban planning, their use of the community and the observations they make everyday can help city leaders make better decisions about the built environment and the programs that are invested in.

One doesn't have to look too far to see the impact that art programs can have on youth. Self Help Graphics & Art has expanded its youth programs significantly over the years, as it has seen how art programs focused on youth have helped uncover artistic talents that would have otherwise have gone unnoticed. Popular artists like Shizu Saldamando and Favianna Rodriguez were once participants in the organization's youth programs.

Other local programs like Inner City Arts have also done a tremendous job of investing in the health and well being of youth. In their case, their state of the art facility has become an important space for youth to learn from experienced artists who often serve as mentors and a gateway to mainstream success in the art world.

Youth can also be an important avenue to engage more community residents in public processes. In immigrant families, youth are often the best vehicle for new information. Their parents often look to them to populate and translate documents and interact with authorities.

Launch programs that support entrepreneurs and provide the capital and assistance they need to stay in their community.

The successful revitalization of a neighborhood must be done in conjunction with existing entrepreneurs. Small businesses in neighborhoods like Boyle Heights are often long-term stakeholders with important networks that add a lot of value to a community.

As Boyle Heights enters a new chapter in its history, we believe it is important Boyle Heights' native entrepreneurs have an opportunity to stay, compete, and thrive in a changing economic landscape. To do this, small business owners need to have access to capital to invest in

their businesses and relationships within public agencies that can help them understand new developments and engage them in the process.

Artists need to be recognized as entrepreneurs as well. And in the midst of a growing creative economy in Los Angeles, they too need to have an opportunity to compete. A recent study from the Martin Prosperity Institute describes the direct connection between an area's creative class and the region's economic strength.

But to fully leverage the potential of Boyle Heights' creative community for a greater benefit, the City needs to invest in artists development. For example, the organization "Artists as Entrepreneurs," helps New York City's artists find the necessary business and management skills to market their work much like Self Help Graphics & Art is beginning to do in Boyle Heights. Programs like this demonstrate that we do not take our creative community for granted.

In conclusion, RAICES believes that in the midst of change in Boyle Heights, there is an opportunity to do something that has not been done before: develop an arts district that incorporates the entire community and ensure that indigenous artists and residents are not displaced. Successful implementation of such ambitions can have important contributions to the health of the community, engaging the entirety of Boyle Height's community in promoting a vibrant neighborhood where its residents have a stable place to live, work and play.

But to do this, community-based organizations have to continue to work together, and public leaders need to recognize that not all development is good development and the only way to verify that it's helpful is to engage and invest in the community that already exists.

Logic Model

Assumptions

- (1) Artists lack technical assistance to apply for large sources of funding
Centralization of arts and resources along 1st St. corridor
 - (2) Disconnect between community and process and value of art (lack of education on value of creative spaces)
 - (3) Lack of resources for art projects for the community at large
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Inputs

- (1) Boyle Heights residents artists + orgs
- (2) Steering committee

Activities

- (1) Community Surveying
- (2) Chalkboard
- (3) Org based surveys
- (4) Tracking and Documentation
- (5) Larger Community Meetings
- (6) Research on other "arts districts"
- (6) Research on "alternative" tools for responsible community development
- (7) Standing group meetings

Outputs

- (1) Specific data on resident and artist needs
- (2) Art piece that documents the RAICES process
- (3) Formal report/recommendations that can be used for advocacy/education about the arts and responsible community development Boyle Heights

Outcomes

- (1) Build awareness of art beyond 1st St.
 - (2) Collective community voice to address local community development issues
 - (3) Shifting the perspectives of funders & city agencies in supporting local artists and resident driven community development projects
 - (4) Balancing the competitive landscape for local artists to gain access to resources for local art projects
 - (5) Develop framework for technical assistance for residents and local artists
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