



BUILT ENVIRONMENT | NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER & URBAN FORM

INTRODUCTION

While the official boundaries span across two different citywide community areas, Valley Glen remains its own distinguished entity with specific goals and characteristics. The distribution of land uses reflect a small-scale, residential neighborhood within Los Angeles, with an emphasis on single-family housing and vehicle-oriented layouts. There is a grid-like network of major streets as well as commercial strip malls concentrated on intersections and corners. The east side is bounded by the 170 Freeway while the Metro Orange Line cuts through the southwestern part of the area. Notably, a natural feature—the Tujunga Wash—bisects the neighborhood, which is somewhat of an organizing element as it binds together Los Angeles Valley College, Victory Plaza, and the northwestern boundary of Valley Glen. Multi-family housing is prevalent generally along the North-South paths and also along strips of major arterial roads near commercial areas. Located in the center region, Valley Glen Community Park is the primary open, green space, while the rest of the area is quite park poor in terms of land use designation, although there is an abundance of trees. The Built Environment chapter encompasses the urban form of these elements within the context of Valley Glen.

COMMUNITY CHARACTER & URBAN FORM

Valley Glen has a distinct character among other nearby areas within the City of Los Angeles as a quiet, leafy neighborhood, with goals serving to preserve this community identity. There is an abundance of single-family residential homes, as can be seen by the land use pattern above, that are laid out in a network of small, non-contiguous paths in the interior of larger blocks. This planned network of unconventional residential streets functions as a mechanism to protect the residents from negative impacts of external activity. As reflected in the history of Valley Glen, the community aims to serve its residents first and foremost, and detract attention from acting as a regional hub or a highly urbanized environment.

The neighborhood accommodates for vehicles and bus transit well, with high-capacity streets and plentiful parking for those who commute to and from their homes. For the residents who do not leave Valley Glen on a regular basis, there are designated commercial areas featuring main street retail and strip malls for basic amenities, though most high-intensive services and retail are found outside its boundaries. Thus, the neighborhood is very safe and stable with several local schools and concerned residents who make up the local governance to uphold its values.

Valley Glen is known as a tree-friendly city, which is evident along the many complex streets constituting the residential areas. As such, the community prides itself in its well-utilized park--the Valley Glen Community Park--and has recently renovated the Tujunga Wash to include a landscaped pedestrian walkway running alongside its path. Another significant landmark distinguishing Valley Glen is Los Angeles Valley College which features architectural and academic excellence during its long history in the City. The campus attracts a diverse mix of students and provides ample parking, as does the rest of Valley Glen, for its enrollees. Relatedly, there is mixed-income housing embedded within the major paths and multi-family housing available for those who seek to rent.





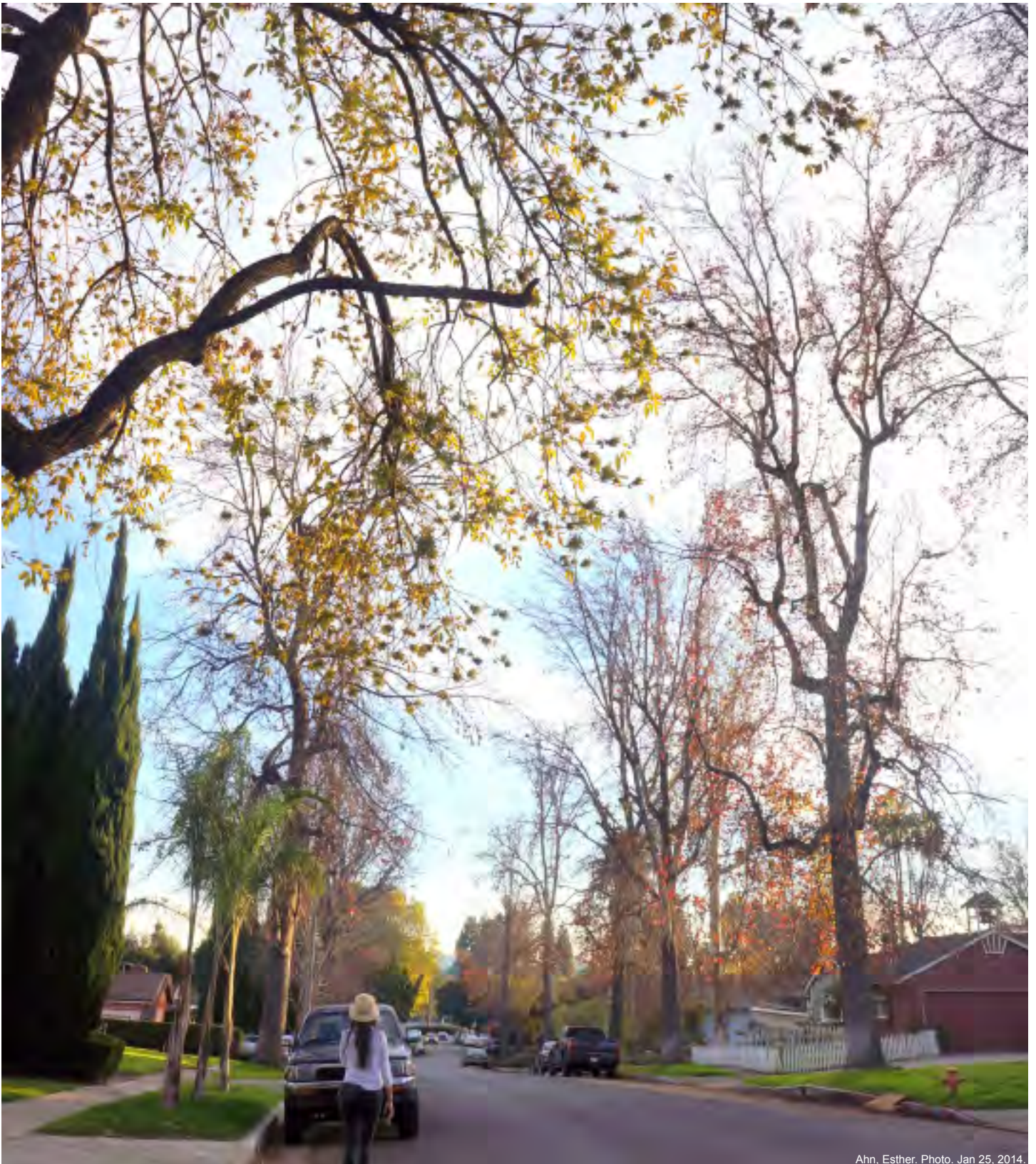
Ahn, Esther. Photo. Jan 25, 2014.

Valley Glen Community Park with residents gathering around the park's amenities. Receptacles for dog waste and plastic bags are also available for those who bring their dogs.



Ahn, Esther. Photo. Jan 25, 2014.

The recently completed Tujunga Wash Greenway and Streamwater Restoration Project, serving to reconnect the neighborhood to the Los Angeles River. Also, home to the monumental Great Wall of LA which celebrates the City's history.



Ahn, Esther. Photo. Jan 25, 2014.

A residential street with both a multitude and diversity of tree types lining the sidewalks. Many single-family homes within these areas have front yard landscaping with plentiful off-site parking available.



Kaili Liu . Photo. 18 Jan. 2014 19 Feb . 2014

LANDMARKS AND NODES

While much of Valley Glen is residential areas, the neighborhood has prominent landmarks and nodes embedded within the commercial areas. The largest landmark is Los Angeles Valley College which attracts many people from both within and from outside the community. With its rich history and architectural excellence that defines it, Valley College is a salient feature, both functionally and visually, that people often associate with Valley Glen. A minor visual landmark that defines Valley Glen is the welcome sign located on the intersection of Coldwater Canyon Avenue and Burbank Boulevard, which simply indicates to visitors that they have entered the Valley Glen boundaries. The other minor landmark is Victory Plaza, the main center for local amenities and services located in the center of Victory Boulevard. It is important to note this site because it will be redeveloped in the future to serve as an even more powerful landmark than it does at present. When analyzing where the largest number of people gather, the major node, currently, is Valley Glen Community Park. It is located quite centrally and near Valley College, and is used heavily by local residents. The next major node is the Starbucks located on the intersection of Coldwater Canyon and Victory Boulevard as it seems to be a popular place for both residents and visitors to meet at during the weekdays and weekends. A minor node is the newly constructed Orange Line Station since it is the major entrance and exit of Valley Glen for those traveling by Metro. More local to Valley Glen, the Cinemark movie theater is another minor node because it is convenient for those close-by to go to a place of entertainment. Overall, these landmarks could be improved upon to include more distinguishing features and prominence to help define Valley Glen's identity.



Starbucks

This worldwide chain establishment is the most popular place for people to gather, based on our observations. This situation is less than ideal for defining the identity of Valley Glen. A potential problem could be that Starbucks has a competitive advantage over other local stores, preventing their growth, but more locally rooted places for people to gather are needed, especially in locations of high traffic and exposure such as commercial corners.



Los Angeles Valley College

This is a major landmark and educational institution in Valley Glen. Many people from other places know Valley Glen for housing this well-regarded community college.



Kaili Liu. Photo. 18 Jan. 2014 19 Feb. 2014

Valley Glen Community Park

This well-maintained open, green space is the primary node of local activity and place for neighbors in the residential areas to meet and spend time. More places like this are needed to nurture the community identity in the neighborhood.



SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL

Residential areas constitute most of Valley Glen, but more specifically single-family homes, which lend to its small-town character. A majority of these single-family homes are located on secondary streets, rather than main streets, in order to protect these families from the nuisance caused by busy streets and high-intensive activity. The building ages for these homes range from 1940 to 2012, but most of the houses were built between 1950 and 1970. It is difficult to categorize the single-family housing stock by style because there is little consistency within visual character based on age; however, homes with higher real estate value and aesthetically attractive are located in the southwest corner of Valley Glen, relative to the other single-family homes in the neighborhood. In regards to the public realm, residential streets are fairly narrow and, at times, lacking sidewalks for pedestrians. Where sidewalks are existing and desired, streetscaping efforts could improve the consistency and conditions of the sidewalks, which would provide safer walking environments for children while also adding to the visual quality of these homes.



Northwest Corner of Valley Glen.
Houses in Picture were built between
1960 to 1970.





Northeast Corner of Valley Glen.
Houses in these photos were built in
the 1940s and 1970s.





South Corner of Valley Glen.
Houses in Picture were built between
1950 and 1970.



Kaili Liu . Photo. 18 Jan. 2014 19 Feb . 2014

Sidewalk and Street in Residential Area

This photo captures well-maintained landscaping seen frequently in the neighborhood. There are large and mature trees in the street while front yards sometimes have personal gardens.



Kaili Liu . Photo. 18 Jan. 2014 19 Feb . 2014

Missing Sidewalk in Residential area

While some areas have spacious, private sidewalks, others have narrow or unpaved sidewalks. This photo shows an example where the sidewalk is missing entirely, rendering the street incomplete and inconsistent with the rest of the residential areas.



Yuan Yuan, Bian. "Multi-family buildings", Photo, Jan. 17, 2014

MULTI-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL

Multi-family residential neighborhoods are located along the main east-west streets, such as Oxnard Street and Woodman Avenue, and on large north-south streets. In general, the building age of multi-family structures within Valley Glen range from 1950 to 2010. While some of the physical infrastructure is kept in good condition, others may not be as well-maintained but have facade improvements or repainted surfaces. As such, we found it very difficult to distinguish building types in accordance with building age. The landscaping and sidewalk maintenance in front of multi-family residential neighborhoods also vary in Valley Glen; however, we found that the landscaping and visual quality are the most appealing in the southwest corner, providing a strong connection with the natural environment. These parts of the multi-family housing areas in Valley Glen are most representative of the larger community's identity. Thus, they provide some guidance for further opportunities to improve the visual character of the built environment and the transitions connecting the multi-family housing to other areas of the neighborhood.



Kaili, Liu. "Multi-family buildings", Photo, Jan.17.2014

In front yards, trees can provide enough shade for pedestrians and residents of the building. Children also can play on the lawn, creating a friendly natural environment for the community.



Ahn, Esther " Sidewalks ", Photo, Jan.17.2014

The sidewalk in front of the building is wide enough to provide for the daily foot traffic. Also, the sidewalk is in the middle of grass, creating a beautiful visual character for the public eye.



Yuanyuan Bian. Photo. 18 Jan. 2014 19 Feb. 2014



Yuanyuan Bian. Photo. 18 Jan. 2014 19 Feb. 2014



Yuanyuan Bian. Photo. 18 Jan. 2014 19 Feb. 2014



Yuanyuan Bian. Photo. 18 Jan. 2014 19 Feb. 2014



Yuanyuan Bian. Photo. 18 Jan. 2014 19 Feb. 2014



Yuanyuan Bian. Photo. 18 Jan. 2014 19 Feb. 2014

Along the Oxnard Street
Houses in Picture were built between
1960s and 2000s





Along the Coldwater Canyon Ave
Houses in Picture were built between
1960s and 1980s





COMMERCIAL AREAS

Though the designation of commercial areas account for only a portion of Valley Glen's land use, they are concentrated at important pathway intersections and contribute significantly to the overall identity of the neighborhood. Commercial corners are prevalent on all the major North-South and East-West streets, in addition to several sections of major streets dedicated to retail. The primary visual identity which represents these uses consists of strip malls and main street retail. This aspect of Valley Glen's built environment is important because these commercial areas define the entry ways to access the abundant single-family and multi-family residential parts of the neighborhood. Furthermore, aligning the goals of the commercial areas with the overall vision of Valley Glen presents significant implications for the future development of the neighborhood as a flourishing destination for both residents, who may work locally or commute to elsewhere, and visitors who can take away lasting impressions of what makes Valley Glen unique. There is potential to beautify these commercial areas and improve upon the transition between commercial and retail to make a more cohesive and complete image of the neighborhood. In the long-range, the residents may be able to utilize these areas to plan for coordinated community-building and access to amenities, without affecting existing infrastructure and land uses, especially with the incoming large-scale retail redevelopment slated for parts along Victory Boulevard.

URBAN FORM

The urban form of commercial uses in Valley Glen can be categorized as one of two types: strip mall retail or main street retail. There is little aesthetic quality distinguishing one from the other, or visual features that are consistent within each type. Thus, the urban form, including architecture and site design, can be enhanced in order to give a sense of vitality and cohesiveness along commercial areas. Urban form specifically addresses the visual and functional quality of the main street retail and strip malls which constitute the commercial sector of Valley Glen. Important aspects include promoting pedestrian-oriented entryways, balancing the space dedicated to parking with landscaping, and ensuring a diverse mix of businesses to serve the community and occupy the spaces fronting major streets. The latter is significant especially because most of the retail is in the form of low-rise, connected commercial buildings. Emphasizing infill of existing infrastructure and vacant stores with the proper uses and form instead of developing further in a sprawled fashion can assist in meeting these goals. Highlighting structures with modern architecture, articulated entryways, and well-designed signage would also help make the commercial areas look more visually appealing and inviting.



Ahn, Esther. "Strip mall plaza Victory Boulevard." Photo. Feb 25, 2014.

NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT

Within the context of Valley Glen and the needs of this community, it is important to promote goals that will reinforce the character of the neighborhood. As such, promoting pedestrian friendliness, sustainability and economic development would be in line with the larger goals outlined in this action plan. Enhancing the urban form of the commercial areas would constitute one part of these enhancements, while addressing the public realm and capitalizing upon the economic environment are other considerations that have potential for improvement. The wide streets and sidewalks provide for ample space and availability of off-site parking, but these areas could be made more efficient and characteristic of Valley Glen with site-specific landscaping which may also promote rainfall retention, tree-watering and flood hazard mitigation. Implementing smart growth strategies--e.g., denser retail, co-location of businesses, accessible amenities, pedestrian-friendly features--with new and further developments could bolster the community's economic and visual identity without impeding existing residential areas. Such strategies could also improve the perception of public safety in these areas which function as connecting nodes that bind the residential and commercial sectors of Valley Glen.



Ahn, Esther. "Main street retail on Victory Boulevard." Photo. Feb 25, 2014.



Ahn, Esther. Photo. Jan 25, 2014.

A two-story strip mall on the corner of Oxnard Street and Whitsett Avenue with on-site parking and prominent visual character. There is a diverse mix of businesses as well as landscaping adjacent to the sidewalk.

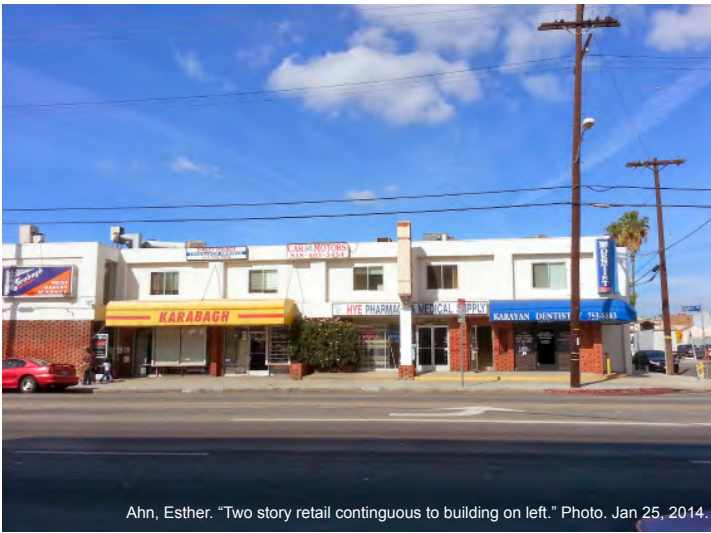


Ahn, Esther. Photo. Jan 25, 2014.

One-story main street retail facing Victory Boulevard with a variety of signage and services. There is some articulation of entryways and store frontage, in addition to utilization of the sidewalk for advertising purposes.



Ahn, Esther. "Single story main street on Victory Boulevard." Photo. Jan 25, 2014



Ahn, Esther. "Two story retail contiguous to building on left." Photo. Jan 25, 2014.



Ahn, Esther. "Alley way for parking on Victory Boulevard." Photo. Feb 8, 2014



Ahn, Esther. "Retail attached to strip mall on Victory Boulevard." Photo. Feb 8, 2014.



Ahn, Esther. "Street facing east on Victory Boulevard." Photo. Jan 25, 2014



Ahn, Esther. "High mass main street retail building." Photo. Jan 25, 2014.



FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS:

Neighborhood Character & Urban Form:

- There is an abundance of single-family residential homes that are arranged in small, non-contiguous paths in the Interior of larger blocks.
- Valley Glen is known as a tree-friendly city, but there are few trees in the main street, especially on Victory Blvd.
- According to the zone map, there is little diversity of uses in Valley Glen which limits the economical development that can occur.

Nodes and Landmarks:

- There are relatively few landmarks and nodes which the reason that many visitors cannot easily identify Valley Glen.
- The most major node is Starbucks, a worldwide chain establishment. To some extent, this situation may hurt local businesses.
- Landmarks and nodes are clustered around Valley College and Victory Plaza, which can imply cause of increased traffic in these areas.

Single Family Residential:

- In regards to the public realm, some of the sidewalks are incomplete, which is especially frequent for single-family residential buildings located on collector streets.
- Residential areas usually have well-maintained landscaping with various trees and private gardens.
- Single-family homes in southwest corner have a the most beautiful appearances.

Multi-Family Residential:

- While newly built multi-residential buildings look clean and modern, some older buildings require improvements to physical infrastructure or facades.
- Most of multi-residential buildings are located on the main streets, which subjects them with certain problems such as air pollution, noise pollution and limited private spaces and so forth.

Commercial:

- Commercial corners are prevalent on all the major North-South and East-West streets, in addition to several sections of major streets dedicated to retail.
- The signs in the Valley Glen are randomly arranged on billboards, leading to visual blight and inconsistency. To some extent, it may have an effect on the area's economical health.
- There is little differentiation between the two types of commercial retail which are strip malls and main street retail.

5 BEST OPPORTUNITIES FOR IDENTITY:

1. Build upon Existing Landmarks & Nodes

- Given that Starbucks is the major social node, the community could build more local businesses or stores that provide spaces for people to gather together. This would serve a dual purpose of encouraging local business and residents to walk around the community.
- Creating more prominent landmarks and functioning nodes can attract people to visit destinations and form more solid associations with Valley Glen.
- Adding landmarks and nodes can help establish local identity by bringing residents together where they can specialize and celebrate their values as they seem to do at Valley Glen Community Park.

2. Focus on Commercial as Primary Driver of Identity

- It is important for the community to promote articulated entryways and landscaping, especially along Victory Boulevard, Oxnard Street, and Vanowen Street, which can render store fronts more inviting and pedestrian-oriented.
- The community also needs to ensure integrate consistent signage for strip malls and main street retail with context-appropriate design and scale.

3. Preserve & Enhance Character of Residential Neighborhood

- Maintaining consistent landscaping in the residential area can contribute significantly to Valley Glen's reputation of a tree-friendly community.
- Ensuring complete sidewalks or other forms of pedestrian safety amongst moving vehicles promotes safety, especially for children.

4. Encouraging Multi-Family to be Good Neighbors

- Many multi-family residential buildings are located along the main streets, so clarification of the public space versus private space, or transitions between them, can strengthen Valley Glen's identity..
- Creating a pleasant and improved walking environment for pedestrians can bolster visual quality and safety for the community identity.

5. Tailor Further Infill Development to Capitalize on the Existing Built Environment

- There are various existing components of Valley Glen that define its built environment, such as the Victory Plaza and commercial areas along major streets. Capitalizing upon these establishments with further development can activate the opportunities inherent in those areas.
- Natural features of Valley Glen, including the Tujunga Wash and high prevalence of trees, can serve as focal points of future development. This anchor can serve the identity of Valley Glen as a tree-friendly community.