

Chapter Two:

Existing Conditions

2 Existing Conditions

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the existing conditions in the Downtown Village Specific Plan area. This chapter is organized as follows:

- 2.1 Specific Plan Area
- 2.2 Regional and City Context
- 2.3 Existing Development and Land Use
- 2.4 Existing Zoning
- 2.5 Economic Context



Figure 2.1: Specific Plan Area in the City of La Cañada Flintridge

2.1 Specific Plan Area

The Downtown Village Specific Plan consists of approximately 95 acres located near the center of the City of La Cañada Flintridge (Figure 2.1). The Specific Plan area is bounded by the Foothill Freeway (Interstate 210) to the north, Foothill Boulevard to the south, La Cañada Boulevard to the northwest, and the Crown Avenue/freeway off-ramp intersection at Foothill Boulevard to the southeast. The Specific Plan area also includes all non-residential properties fronting on the south side of Foothill Boulevard (Figure 2.2).

Two sites within the Specific Plan area offer unique opportunities to help initiate the creation of a Downtown Village:

- La Cañada Properties, Inc. owns approximately 12 acres along Foothill Boulevard at Angeles Crest Highway. This is the largest property under single ownership in the Specific Plan area. It is currently being used for residential and commercial purposes, including the Sport Chalet retail store and headquarters office.
- Vons Companies owns approximately four acres on Foothill Boulevard between Oakwood Avenue and Rinetti Lane. This site contains Vons within the Plaza de La Cañada.

These sites are significant due to their prominent size and location on the Boulevard at the western and eastern ends of the Village Center. Equally important is the readiness of the property owners to redevelop and improve the retail businesses on their sites. Both locations offer potential for mixed use development and for open space or civic uses on portions of the sites through public-private partnerships and cooperative opportunities.

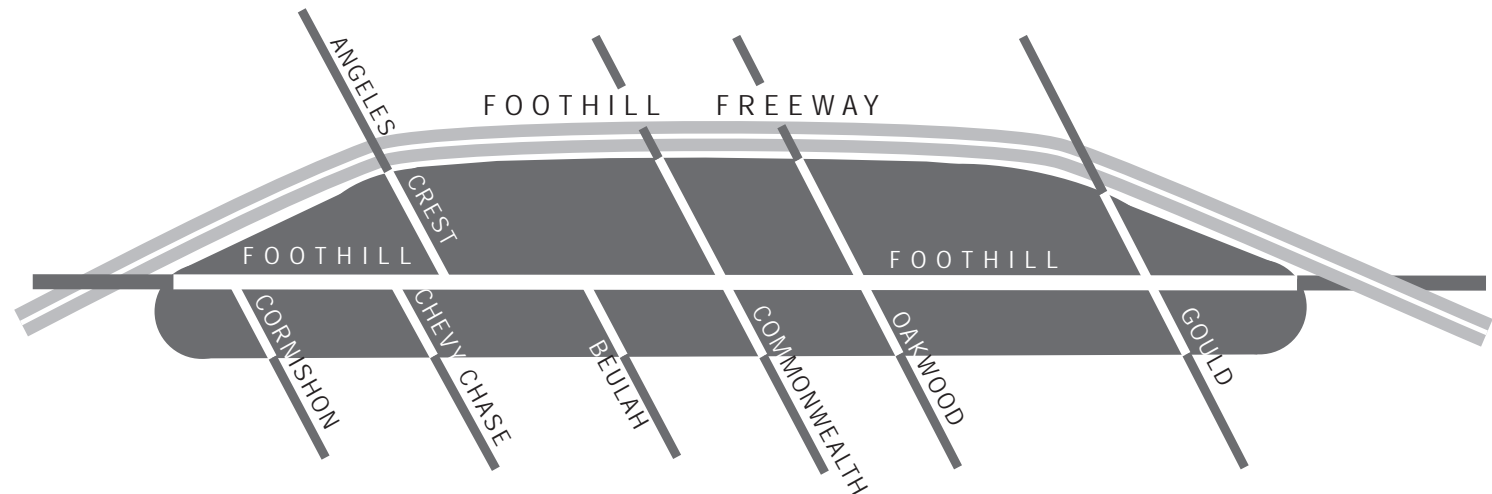


Figure 2.2: Specific Plan Area

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2.2 Regional and City Context

The City of La Cañada Flintridge is located in the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains, adjacent to of the cities of Pasadena and Glendale. The low-density residential community maintains a small town atmosphere while being relatively close to downtown Los Angeles and other urban centers, such as Pasadena, Burbank and Glendale. Commercial development within the City is almost exclusively limited to frontage along Foothill Boulevard, the major east-west arterial that bisects the Specific Plan area.

Because the City is nestled in the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains, there are views of the mountains in all directions from the Specific Plan area. The views to the north from the Foothill Boulevard/Anges Crest Highway and Foothill Boulevard/Gould Avenue intersections are especially dramatic. The Specific Plan topography gradually slopes down from northwest to southeast.

The Downtown Village Specific Plan area represents the commercial core and serves as the prominent gateway to the City of La Cañada Flintridge. The community wants to see future development in this highly visible area that is economically viable as well as compatible with the predominantly low-density residential character of the area.

2.3 Architectural Context

The City of La Cañada Flintridge contains a diversity of architectural styles in its larger public or semi-public structures, retail architecture and varied residential neighborhoods. Significant structures of a larger scale have been designed in styles encompassing references to Spanish, Mission, Spanish Colonial Revival and Italian Renaissance architecture. For example, Flintridge Sacred Heart Academy is a notable example of Mission style

architecture. Residential architecture encompasses these styles, while also including designs in Craftsman and Monterey styles. The Design Guidelines and Standards established for the Downtown Village Specific Plan are compatible with these existing architectural styles that help define and provide identity for the City.

2.4 Existing Development and Land Use

The existing land uses in the Specific Plan area include a mix of commercial, office, institutional and residential uses (Table 2.1). The majority of land is currently being used for commercial and civic/public uses. The Sport Chalet headquarters office and retail stores are located in the Specific Plan area.

The major institutional uses within the Specific Plan boundaries are located at each end of the planning area. The Foothill Intermediate School property is located on the southwest end of the Boulevard and is currently being leased by two private schools. The Flintridge Preparatory School, Valley Water District and St. Francis High School are located on the eastern edge of the planning area. These sites remain essentially unaffected by the Specific Plan as they are unlikely to change significantly during the planning period. Several other schools, churches and public utilities and facilities are located in the Specific Plan area along Foothill Boulevard.

In addition to the major institutional uses at the east and west ends of the Specific Plan area, there are other developments that are also unlikely to change significantly during the planning period. Towards the east end of Foothill Boulevard, Ralph's market has recently been remodeled, and the adjacent Trader Joe's development is relatively new. Several businesses along Foothill Boulevard west of Angeles Crest Highway have recently upgraded their facades or buildings and fulfill the intent of the Downtown Village Specific Plan. These recent improvements contribute to the fact that the

eastern and western ends of the planning area will be less affected by the Specific Plan than the core of the planning area between Angeles Crest Highway and Rinetti Lane.

Residential uses within the Specific Plan area are concentrated on the north side of Foothill Boulevard, and consist almost entirely of single-family residential development. Twenty-nine of the homes in this area are owned by La Cañada Properties, Inc., which allows significant potential for redevelopment because of common ownership. This residential area is surrounded by the 210 Freeway to the north and commercial uses to the west, south and east. It is considered a transition area as the Downtown changes to a mixed-use environment.

There is minimal undeveloped land available within the Specific Plan area; however, several large buildings on Foothill Boulevard are currently vacant and available for reuse or redevelopment.

Table 2.1
Existing Land Use in the Downtown Village Specific Plan Area

	Land Area (square feet)	Land Area (acres)	Total Land Area
Retail/Service	1,560,177	35.8	38%
Civic/Public	1,495,346	34.3	36%
Residential	626,775	14.4	15%
Office	431,937	9.9	10%
Undeveloped	25,731	0.6	1%
Total Land Area	4,139,966	95	100%

2.5 Existing Zoning

The existing zoning in the Specific Plan area is a mix of primarily Community Planned Development (CPD) and Foothill Community District (FCD). There are also several parcels zoned Public/Semi-Public (PS).

The purpose of the CPD is to provide appropriately located areas for retail, service and office uses in the City, while protecting adjacent residential properties from the adverse impacts of commercial operations with development standards. The purpose of the FCD is to provide for orderly transition of single-family residential uses to commercial uses. The PS zone is applied to all public and semi-public owned properties on a site-specific basis.

This Specific Plan provides new land use districts for the Downtown Village Specific Plan area to replace the existing zoning. The Downtown Village Specific Plan land use districts are designed to assist in the transition from discrete single-family detached residential and Foothill Boulevard-fronting commercial uses to a true mixed-use environment.

2.6 Economic Context

A market analysis was prepared for the Downtown Village Specific Plan in January 2000 that supplements this Specific Plan. This section highlights the market conditions and opportunities within the three primary market sectors: retail, office and residential.

2.6.1 Retail Market Overview and Opportunities

The Downtown Village Specific Plan area is the City’s primary commercial area and plays a major role in the City’s retail market. Retail development in the Specific Plan area is concentrated at a number of intersections:

- Foothill Boulevard and Gould Avenue - Located at this intersection are two centers that together constitute a significant community retail center which includes Ralph’s Fresh Faire, Trader Joe’s, Starbucks, Super Crown, Petco, Blockbuster Video and other shop space.

- Foothill Boulevard and Oakwood Avenue - Located at this intersection is Plaza de La Cañada, which includes a Vons Supermarket and T.J. Maxx as its anchor tenants.
- Foothill Boulevard and Angeles Crest Highway - Located east of this intersection is the Sport Chalet cluster, which includes a ski shop and sporting goods store. This area is also populated by a number of small retail shops.

Shown in Figure 2.3 are the retail store sales for the City and County. Total per capita retail sales in the City were estimated at \$6,000, compared to \$5,990 in the County. Other cities in the region have much higher per capita sales. For instance, Pasadena generated sales of \$9,930; Burbank, \$9,170; and Glendale \$7,410. Therefore, retail sales in Pasadena were 66% higher, in Burbank 53% higher, and in Glendale nearly 24% higher than in the City.

Each of these cities has a significant mall or regional serving retail center and assorted regional serving retail. Within the City and Specific Plan area there are relatively few regional retail establishments. However, some establishment types do exhibit relatively healthy sales in the City, including apparel stores, specialty stores, food stores and eating and drinking establishments.

Compared to the County of Los Angeles, without regard to income levels, the City is generating adequate retail sales. The Specific Plan area plays a major role in the City’s retail market, as the Sport Chalet complex, Ralph’s complex and Plaza de La Cañada are located there. Of particular importance in the Downtown area are the specialty stores, food stores and eating & drinking establishments.

Overall, retail sales in the City and Specific Plan area are adequate. Per capita sales levels are similar to the County, but the City has much higher income levels than the County. As such, additional demand from City residents is likely not being met by the existing retail inventory in the City. Overall, spending by City residents

could support additional retail space. However, nearly half of this space is in general merchandise and building materials stores, which are typically too large to be supported by the City residents. Potential in the Specific Plan area likely exists for additional specialty store development and full service restaurants.

Based on current incomes, over 200,000 square feet of additional retail space could be supported by City residents, however, as discussed above, only approximately 100,000 square feet represents tenant types that are likely to locate in the City. It appears that City residents could support a well-managed, high quality full-service restaurant. Other potential areas of demand include small-scale specialty stores and home furnishings/interior design shops.

Retail Sales per capita

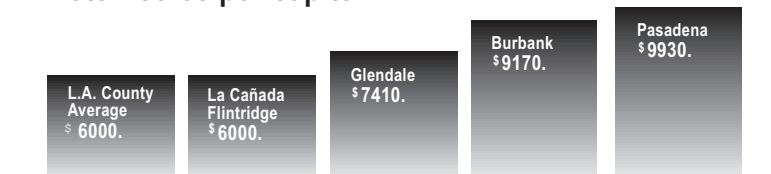


Figure 2.3: Retail Sales per capita

2 Existing Conditions

2.6.2 Office Market Overview and Opportunities

The office market within Los Angeles County has gradually improved since the early nineties. At that time vacancies were extremely high, rents were depressed and new development was nonexistent. Recent improvements in the California economy have spurred new office development throughout the region.

La Cañada Flintridge is considered a part of the Tri-Cities market area, which is dominated by Pasadena, Burbank and Glendale. Within this market area there are approximately 289 office buildings with a total square footage of nearly 18.9 million square feet. At the end of 1998 the estimated vacancy rate was approximately 9.7%.¹ The average full service rent in the region was \$26.95 per square foot per year with the low rent near \$15.00 per square foot and the high rent near \$33.00 per square foot.

With the relatively high rents and reasonably low vacancy rates, the first new speculative office buildings in Los Angeles County since 1992 are in the Tri-Cities market area. Opening at the end of 1998, the Media Studio North office project in Burbank included approximately 215,000 square feet, of which over 60% was pre-leased. In addition, there are two projects in Glendale the 401 Brand Building, which includes 170,000 square feet and Glendale Plaza, which is 520,000 square feet.

While the regional office market has improved, it is unlikely to significantly impact the demand for office space in the City. In general, the City does not have a significant presence of office oriented industries. While the percent of overall employment within these types of industries is higher in the City than the County (example industry types include business services and the finance, insurance & real estate industries), the actual employment numbers still indicate a lack of activity.

A common measure of a City's employment base is the jobs/housing balance. Typically, a community will strive for a one-to-one mix; thus for each housing unit, there will be one job. In the City the mix is approximately 0.7 jobs to each housing unit. In contrast, the County of Los Angeles has 1.25 jobs to each housing unit.

While the City is not a large employment center, it does have the potential to attract office development. Oftentimes, owners of small to medium sized businesses prefer to have their business near where they live. The City's attractive living environment and significant percentage of high income residents makes it likely that a number of small to medium sized businesses would consider a City location.

2.6.3 Residential Market Overview and Opportunities

In general, the City is an extremely desirable area to live within the region. Currently, there is a high demand to live within the market area, with a limited supply of housing units. While the area is known to be somewhat unaffordable, this has not limited the demand for housing. Below is a summary of residential statistics in the City:

- Nearly 90% of City residents live in a home they own. This compares to a nearly 50/50 split in the County.
- The median owner-occupied property value is \$500,000 in the City. Comparatively, the median for the County is only \$228,000.
- While there are few rental properties in the City, the median rent is much higher at \$810 compared to \$590 in the County (1990 Census).

Overall, the City is dominated by high value, owner occupied residences. In addition, the La Cañada Flintridge area is relatively built out, therefore the development of new single and multi-family residential product will continue to be limited. Thus, an expanding economy and population, contrasted with a limited supply of new housing will generate a sustained rise in demand for new housing in the area throughout the foreseeable future.

The Specific Plan area is conveniently close to almost all of the major employment centers of the County and the area has good freeway access. Further, much of the area is within walking distance of neighborhood shopping and city services. The majority of the Specific Plan area is likely best suited for commercial development. Residential development is likely to be limited to the area north of Foothill Boulevard behind the streetfront commercial and south of the 210 Freeway between the Angeles Crest Highway and Oakwood Avenue. Currently, this area is developed with older, medium density, single-family homes.

The housing stock in the City has remained fairly steady over the past four years. In fact, there has only been approximately 0.7% growth in total housing stock during the time period. As growth has been constrained, the vacancy rate for the City's housing stock has remained steady at approximately 3%. This nominal vacancy level indicates that the area has pent up demand for units.

In evaluating the citywide housing stock, single-family, detached units dominated the housing inventory in 1999. The data reflects the less significant representation of single-family attached products such as condominiums. Nearly 6,550 units were single-family detached units and 210 units were attached. In summary, 93% of all single-family housing units in the City are detached single-family homes.

The number of multi-family residential units in the City is extremely limited. Of the 7,020 total housing units in the City, only 260 are

multi-family, or 3.7%. The majority of these residences are in 5+ unit developments. Since 1995, no additional multi-family housing product has been developed.

There has been significant fluctuation in the number of single-family home sales in recent years in the central portion of the City that includes the Specific Plan area. In 1995 there were 35 sales, while in 1997 there were only 22. Through October 1999 there were 24 sales. The average sales price showed some fluctuation, but has steadily increased throughout the years. In 1999, the average sales price was \$644,500, which is 47% higher than the average of \$438,300 in 1995. The average size of the house sold in 1999 was much larger than typical, which would have a significant impact on the average sales price. The average price per square foot increased from \$207 in 1995 to \$264 in 1999, nearly 28%.

When compared to the County, these figures indicate a healthy residential market within the Specific Plan area. The average home sales price in the area is nearly two and a half times the County average. In addition, the average sales price in the County only increased 19% during this period.

As evidenced by the high home values, the residential market in the City is strong and significant demand likely exists for new, single-family residential development in the downtown area. There is also likely to be significant demand for multi-family housing in either condominium, townhouse or condominium products. Given the commercial nature of the Downtown, the Specific Plan area is one of the few areas in the City where multi-family housing is likely to be compatible with the surrounding land uses.

It is possible that new development could replace the older housing stock located between the Sport Chalet shops and the freeway. To effectuate any development in this area, it would be necessary to buy-out the current owner of the existing residential stock for

the development of modern, moderate density single-family residential units.

¹ According to Black's Guide Winter/Spring 1999.

