

## The Redevelopment Story of the City of Santa Clarita

The saying first impressions are everything holds true in just about every part of life – and certainly when it comes to neighborhoods where a community shops and spends time with family and friends. Old Town Newhall, a historic neighborhood in the City of Santa Clarita struggled for decades with its first impression. Nestled a few miles off Interstate 5 and serving as one of the main gateways into the City, Old Town Newhall is home to some of the region’s most exciting history dating back to the 1870s - from silent film stars like William S. Hart and the region’s Western film industry to Indian settlements and America’s quest for gold and oil. Despite the area’s historic appeal, Old Town Newhall began to decline as new subdivisions in the Santa Clarita Valley emerged in the late 1980s.

Old Town Newhall, and specifically Main Street, lacked the charm and polish residents and visitors expect from a historic point of interest, and instead offered deteriorated and dilapidated buildings and public spaces, a high vacancy rate, and many struggling businesses that were not a fit with Santa Clarita’s needs. Elements of charm and appeal were present, but didn’t blend well with Main Street’s 40 mile per hour thoroughfare setting, which did not invite pedestrian traffic or special events. Recognizing these challenges, the Santa Clarita City Council formed the Redevelopment Agency (Agency) in 1989 and the Newhall Redevelopment Project Area (Project Area) in 1997 to revitalize this part of town. When the Agency was originally formed, the City loaned funding to start the operation, until tax increment started to generate. Then in 2008, the Agency issued bonds to be utilized for financing all the large-scale capital improvement and infrastructure enhancements that we have seen in Old Town Newhall.

Since the inception of the Agency significant changes have taken place on Main Street. It has become home to two reputable performance theaters, several signature restaurants, and the City has continued to highlight the famed Walk of Western Stars (which is a tribute to the men and women of film, the arts, and entertainment who honor the West).

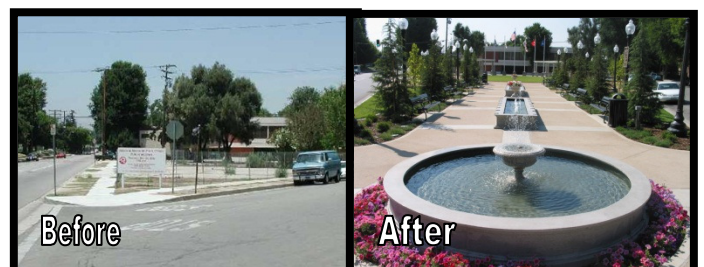
### PUBLIC SPACES FOR ALL TO ENJOY

The heart of any successful downtown is great public places for the residents and visitors to enjoy. The Redevelopment Plan for the Newhall Project Area outlined a goal to provide public improvements and public facilities where they are missing or inadequate and enhance the role of Newhall as a center for the entire community to enjoy. Since adopting the Project Area, the Agency has completed a number of significant enhancements for the area.

Construction is currently underway on the **Old Town Newhall Library**, a 30,000 square foot, two story public library designed to serve a community that has historically been lacking adequate public library resources. In addition to being a state-of-the-art facility with specialized programming designed to welcome over 500,000 visitors on an annual basis, the library is expected to be certified as Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Silver.

The construction of the **Newhall Community Center** brought significant improvements to the local residents and continues to provide many enhanced amenities to the Newhall community that desperately need access to these services in a fun and safe environment. Today, approximately 2,500 community members use this facility on an annual basis. This center features a full gymnasium for numerous youth sports and recreation programs, as well as a professional boxing gym for child and adult boxing program. Additionally, the Newhall Community Center hosts a toy library where kids can check out games and toys, like a library, a teen group, a Ballet Folklorico program, after school programs, and summer programs.

Redevelopment thrives on the assembly of oddly-shaped and underutilized parcels. An example of this principle in action is the **Veterans Historical Plaza** located in the center of a residential neighborhood. This one-of-a-kind park is a beautiful gathering place to celebrate all of the branches of the armed forces and serves as a tribute to those who have



lost their lives while serving our country. The park includes a water feature, flag poles, a Victorian pergola, walkways, lighting and landscaping on a lot that was previously vacant and bounded by unsightly fencing. It provides a unique connection between a residential neighborhood and public spaces.

An important aspect of community revitalization is providing the transportation related infrastructure to maximize access to public transportation and provide for a walkable community. With the principle in mind, the **Newhall Metrolink Station** was constructed serve to as a hub for transit activity in the Project Area. It is estimated that 530 riders board and 400 riders exit City of Santa Clarita buses at that station for both local and commuter services. Additionally, the Newhall Metrolink Station accommodates more than 240 train riders each weekday. As an added bonus to the Project Area, the Metrolink Station and the Community Center collectively offers over 250 parking spaces for public use.

At the Southern entrance to what is now Main Street, **Hart Park** is a fantastic historical resource for the local community. This 265 acre estate, where the silent film star William S. Hart resided in the 1920, is now maintained by Los Angeles County and includes a number of interesting artifacts from that period in history. The Agency, the City and the County are currently collaborating to improve the frontage of Hart Park by removing the existing chain link fence, installing wrought iron fencing, providing new entry way signage, and enhancing the landscaping to match the new streetscape along Main Street. This project is expected to be complete by the end of 2012.

### **INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS**

In addition to the public facilities and amenities, the Redevelopment Agency spearheaded efforts to create an attractive environment that expresses Newhall's history and character while creating a Main Street environment to attract new shoppers and businesses and create a vibrant downtown.

The first step in this process was the **restriping of Main Street (formerly San Fernando Road)**. Formerly a major thoroughfare with a speed limit of 40 miles per hour, these traffic and circulation improvements took San Fernando Road and created what we know today as Main Street, a pedestrian friendly corridor that is safe and inviting to the community. The 5-block corridor also received angled, on-street parking. The street that runs parallel, Railroad Avenue, was expanded from two to four lanes to accommodate additional traffic flow.



After the road was realigned, the Agency completed a 5-block, award winning **Streetscape Enhancement** program to improve the aesthetics of the area. This included new landscaping, street lights, seating areas, enhanced crosswalks and decorative elements to the five blocks of Main Street. More than just a physical transformation, the streetscape enhancement has given the community a new sense of pride and created a palette for future development that honors the area's unique history and heritage.

The new look on Main Street provided the perfect opportunity to allow for restaurants to provide for **outdoor dining** and create a lively downtown atmosphere. In 2010, outdoor dining was allowed along Main Street and staff has been working with existing restaurants to take advantage of this opportunity.

In addition to the enhancements on Main Street, the Agency looked at ways to improve the gateways leading in to Main Street. As a result, **improvements along Newhall Avenue and Railroad Avenue** were completed in 2011. These enhancements provided safety and beautification improvements along heavily used pedestrian corridors. This includes the construction of sidewalks and access ramps and the construction of curb and gutters. Additionally, landscaped parkways and trees were installed along Newhall Avenue to separate the sidewalk from the traffic lanes. Along Railroad

Avenue, lodge pole fencing and shrubbery was installed to shield and protect pedestrians and motorists from the railroad tracks.

The Old Town Newhall Library will serve as an anchor to the north side of Main Street with beautiful landscaping and an iconic piece of art that further reflects the history and charm of this area. On the south side, staff is currently in the design phase of a **modern roundabout**. The Roundabout is an integral component to reconfiguring traffic flow to accommodate the pedestrian friendly area and provide access from Main Street to Hart Park. Due to the elimination of Redevelopment, this project is on hold for the foreseeable future until another funding source can be identified.

### **SPURRING BUSINESS SYNERGY**

In addition to the public investments in infrastructure and public places, the Agency focused on spurring private investment. To do this, the Redevelopment Agency adopted a number of plans to help to establish and encourage the vision for Main Street, Old Town Newhall, and the rest of the Project Area.

The **Downtown Newhall Specific Plan** was the first plan formally adopted to provide a comprehensive land use and infrastructure plan to make development easier and encourage investment in the area. The DNSP was created following a public participation process, which evaluated the history of Newhall, current conditions, and revitalization strategies in other communities. The Plan is the community's roadmap for success as it focuses the efforts of the City and the Redevelopment Agency. To ensure the Plan is working for residents and businesses located in the area, the City is consistently soliciting feedback and modifying the code to ensure that it is user-friendly and meeting the needs of the community.

In 2006, the City and Agency initiated efforts to develop a specific plan for the 213-acre **North Newhall Area** in order to stimulate development and redevelopment activities in the area north of Downtown Newhall. This study area included both the vacant 95-acre property north of 13<sup>th</sup> Street, as well as the developed 118-acre portion of the North Newhall Area. Following various stakeholder and community meetings, the planning effort eventually evolved into the Compass Blueprint Concept Plan that was prepared for the developed portion of the site. In 2011, the City Council adopted the Compass Blueprint Concept Plan, which consists of a conceptual land use and circulation plan that the City will use to guide future development in the Concept Plan Area. Additionally in 2011, as part of the new General Plan, the City adopted a set of policies and objectives that will govern future development and redevelopment in the entire 213-acre North Newhall Area.

Also in 2006, a **Mixed Use Overlay Zone** was adopted to encourage a mix of residential, commercial, employment, and institutional uses along the Newhall Avenue (formerly San Fernando Road) and Lyons Avenue corridors. The Mixed Use Overlay Zone provides a mechanism to revitalize older commercial corridors, increase opportunities for infill housing, and encourage development that creates pedestrian-oriented neighborhoods.

### **ENCOURAGING ECONOMIC GROWTH**

As the physical transformations began to take shape, the Agency put an emphasis on the creation of various economic engines in and focused on business attraction, retention and development.

In 2007, the City of Santa Clarita received a 15-year designation as a **California Enterprise Zone**. In 2010, the City applied for and was granted conditional designation for a larger expanded Enterprise Zone known as the Santa Clarita Valley Enterprise Zone. This new Zone designation is anticipated to take effect retroactively to January 1, 2011 and provide tax credits to businesses located in the Zone through December 2026. The Enterprise Zone program promotes business growth and job creation in the Santa Clarita Valley. As the qualifying area for Enterprise Zone eligibility, the Newhall area is a primary focus of development to attract quality jobs in proximity to area residents. The integration of

Enterprise Zone benefits along with land use designations in the Downtown and North Newhall Specific Plans provides incentives for developers and businesses to invest in the downtown Newhall area.

In 2009, during the height of the Great Recession, the Agency allocated \$100,000 for **grants up to \$5,000 for eligible small businesses within the Project Area**. A total of 20 small businesses received these grants and took classes on marketing and customer service at the local Small Business Development Center. The grantees used their funds to increase their marketing, sponsor local events, provide upgrades to their business operations, complete physical improvements to their place of business and purchase inventory.

Also in 2009, the City obtained \$300,000 of Federal Reinvestment and Recovery Act funds to offer grants to eligible Project Area commercial building owners to **upgrade structural and aesthetic conditions in Old Town Newhall**. Grants were limited to \$55,000 per building and a total of 5 buildings received funding, representing façade improvements to

over 11 businesses. In addition to this current program, past façade enhancement programs included five façade improvements and two screening projects, all of which occurred on properties along Main Street. The Agency also began a voluntary chain link fence removal program to encourage property owners to remove their chain link fencing and install wood or rod iron fencing as a means to enhance the appearance of the area. To date, a number of properties have made



significant and voluntary enhancements to their property by removing their chain link.

In an effort to spur private investment in to the area and maintain communication with local real estate professionals, Agency Staff conducts **ongoing networking events** for local brokers and property owners to promote the overall revitalization of Old Town Newhall. Additionally, as a result of the public funds invested, more and more private dollars began being invested in the area. This includes privately funded façade improvements, property maintenances issues were addressed, and businesses were enhancing their signage and street presence.

Another focus of the Agency **includes bringing visitors, both local and from outside of the area, to Old Town Newhall** to enjoy the amenities and experience the history of this unique area. A new concept was born just a few short months ago – Thursdays @ Newhall. This event is designed to provide new, interesting and exciting events every Thursday to downtown. This includes hosting a weekly, seasonal Farmers Market, a unique and eclectic monthly Art Walk and the signature event, Senses, a rotating theme based block party. These events have driven thousands of visitors to Main Street on a monthly and ongoing basis which has resulted in new and reoccurring customers in this struggling business district in the City.

To further **spur investment into the area and create a catalytic project** using both public and private funds, the Agency and City assembled a 1.7 acre site at the southeast corner of Main Street and Lyons Avenue, directly adjacent to the Old Town Newhall library. The long-term goal for this property was the development of an integrated mixed use development which would have anchored the north end of Old Town Newhall. With the dissolution of redevelopment, this project is currently on hold.

### **HOUSING OPTIONS FOR ALL FAMILIES**

Redevelopment Agencies also seek to create a variety of housing options for all families. This includes developing affordable housing, promoting the rehabilitation of existing housing units to persons of low- and moderate-income, and providing infrastructure enhancements to these areas.

In 2000, the City used 6.18 million dollars to improve the area of Newhall. **Curbs, gutters and sidewalks** were installed, alleviating flooding, increasing pedestrian and vehicular access, and improving compliance with local community housing standards. **Creekview Park**, a neighborhood serving pocket park was also developed. The park provides much needed recreational opportunities for the residents of East Newhall, whose only other park is located over 1 mile away, across two major intersections.

In 2006, the City issued a Request for Qualifications for developers to assist the City in creating **affordable housing**. The City selected a partnership of The Related Companies (Related) and National Community Renaissance (CORE). CORE/Related worked with the City for a number of years to identify a location and funding for an affordable rental housing project. In 2010 the City acquired the former Caltrans park and ride lot on Railroad Avenue and another adjacent parcel of raw land. CORE/Related developed a proposal, identified funding sources, and designed a 30-unit 100% affordable family development. Planning Commission approvals were obtained on 7/19/11. Due to the status of redevelopment, this project has been placed on hold.

The City receives **Community Block Grant (CDBG)** funds annually from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. These funds are intended to benefit low- and moderate-income families and households by providing affordable housing, a suitable living environment, and expanded economic opportunities. Two CDBG-funded programs, Handyworker and Residential Rehabilitation, provide grants to low- and moderate-income homeowners to make needed repairs to their homes. Since 1997, low- and moderate-income residents have benefited from a wide variety of other CDBG-funded programs, including; senior services, at-risk youth programs, disabled recreation programs, medical services, food pantry, and home-delivered meals.

### **PROJECTS STILL TO BE COMPLETED**

Even with all of the highlights mentioned, there is still work to be done. Without the availability of Redevelopment, there are a number of projects that will be placed on hold, some for the foreseeable future and some indefinitely.

The Agency purchased the block of land adjacent to the Old Town Newhall Library for the purposes of spurring private investment and creating a catalytic project to further the redevelopment efforts. The Agency was alaying some exciting development opportunities for this block prior to the Redevelopment dissolution. Unfortunately, without the tools available to the Redevelopment Agency, this project can not continue.

While the design of the **Roundabout** is secured, the construction of it is not. The project was expected to be funded by three funding sources, one of which was Redevelopment funding.

With Redevelopment being the main source of funding for projects that impact low- and moderate-income people in our community, the proposed **affordable housing development** on Newhall Avenue is currently on hold. The City will continue to work with the developers to locate alternative funding for the project. However, at this time, the status of this project is uncertain.

Furthermore, it is even more challenging now than ever before, without redevelopment and its tools, to further attract new businesses to downtown.

Redevelopment in the City of Santa Clarita exemplifies what the process of redevelopment was created to achieve in the State of California. Public investments towards all the improvements that have been made in Old Town Newhall have dramatically helped to eradicate blight and begin to improve this important area of our City, with the goal of increasing commerce and vitality.

