

BACKYARD HOMES & LOCAL CONCERNS

How Can Local Concerns Be Better Addressed?

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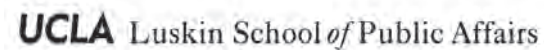
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Executive Summary

Accessory dwelling units, granny flats, garage apartments, alley units, carriage flats, companion units, elder cottages, mother-in-law suites—all backyard homes by other names—are receiving increased attention from cities, affordable housing activists, and homeowners. For a wide array of economic, sociological, and environmental reasons, a robust market demand for backyard homes exists in Southern California. Coupled with the complications of obtaining legal permits for their construction, demand has led to an estimated 42,000 to 100,000 illegal secondary units in Los Angeles County alone. The wide range of the estimates is in part due to the inherent hidden nature of this form of housing, since it exists in backyards and is, for the most part, out of sight. The basic lack of information about secondary units has led to a seeming paradox: while most residents can imagine a positive use for a backyard home of their own, widespread opposition to backyard homes prevails. This study examines local concerns about secondary units and how those concerns might be addressed.

At the state and regional level, the potential advantages of backyard homes have long been recognized. Starting in 1982 and more recently in 2003, the State of California passed

“granny flat” bills to address the need for more affordable housing by enabling legal units to be added to single family houses. There have been loud claims that the State’s one-size-fits-all policy is inappropriate; local municipalities should determine their own policies for backyard homes. While there are in fact strong bases for customized policies, this research also found common ground. The following pages document our understanding of local concerns about secondary dwelling units to determine how those concerns might be better addressed. The investigation is undertaken through multiple methods: a literature review about innovations in backyard home solutions and policies, a close examination of a model backyard home policy, an examination of secondary unit regulations across Los Angeles County, a study of site feasibility for secondary units, and action research comprising a series of workshops with neighborhood councils to assess concerns, opinions, and preferences related to backyard homes. These varied sources of data are described and analyzed in the following pages, constituting the first systematic source of information related to local concerns about secondary dwelling units in Los Angeles County.

The research team discovered that many presuppositions about backyard homes are in fact inaccurate. Among the surprising findings: strict regulations about secondary units can be readily communicated to the public; neighborhood opposition can be attributed to concerns that are only imperfectly related to backyard homes; the concerns of neighbors do not coincide with the concerns of neighborhoods with regard to secondary units; infill housing opportunities are difficult to predict based on residential lots and development types; standardized or prefabricated housing solutions are unlikely to be effective means of providing backyard homes; and there are solid areas of agreement among different neighborhoods that could be the grounds for incentivizing backyard housing. This is not to detract from relatively widespread opposition to secondary units, but instead, the study’s findings suggest that there are unexpected ways to respect local concerns while at the same time increasing the supply of more affordable, more flexible housing through the addition of legal backyard homes.



INTRODUCTION

1.1 Problem Statement

The City of Los Angeles and its surrounding region reinvented urban living in the twentieth century. Its model of individual housing privacy through single-family lots is now copied and cherished all over the world. Previous research by UCLA's cityLAB indicates that single-family zoning accounts for about 85% of the city's residentially zoned land.¹ Many urban designers, urban planners, and environmentalists, however, argue that the single-family model of living needs to adapt to changing demographic, economic, and environmental imperatives. They also suggest that single-family lots can be easily transformed for the twenty-first century by allowing interested property owners the opportunity to add secondary units. However, these secondary units, which we prefer to call backyard homes, are controversial. Many neighborhoods and communities, including many in Los Angeles, oppose them. In this research project we examine the seeming disconnect between the ideas of environmentalists, transit advocates, urban planners, and advocates for the elderly and the perceived conventional opposition attributed to residential neighborhoods by developing an in-depth understanding of the concerns of local communities about backyard homes. We also test the potential of creative design-based policy

solutions to address local concerns through structured surveys and collaborative workshops with interested neighborhoods in Los Angeles.

The academic literature suggests that backyard homes offer numerous social, economic, and environmental benefits. Scholars argue that the demographics of the country, particularly the increases in the median age and decreases in family size, are changing how we live within our homes. Backyard homes potentially allow seniors to live independently with their caregivers in close proximity, permit extended families to live together, and provide options for families with adult children.² Others make the economic argument that these secondary units allow for middle class households to own single-family homes in good locations, and that backyard homes can provide affordable rental housing.³ Scholarly estimates of informally constructed backyard homes without planning permits suggest that there is a strong market demand for this housing typology.⁴ Furthermore, neighborhoods with backyard homes are denser. The literature suggests that they are more environmentally sustainable as they use existing infrastructure optimally and are likely to be more walkable, and cities with

such housing are likely to have less driving and more public transit opportunities.⁵

California's state government recognizes these potential advantages and has repeatedly passed enabling legislation to make it easier for local governments to legally permit backyard homes. The first state legislation specifically addressing backyard homes was approved in 1982 – Senate Bill 1534.⁶ More recently, in 2003, state legislative action – Assembly Bill 1866 – modified the statute to prevent local governments from administering discretionary reviews of secondary unit applications.⁷ But most of the local governments in the state remain skeptical of the value of the idea and resist its implementation. They assume that their residents are strongly opposed to backyard homes. Yet no systematic analysis of the city-level and neighborhood-level concerns exists, and the existing literature neither adequately explains the resistance to backyard homes, nor assesses the effects of policies that seek to address real and perceived concerns. Consequently most jurisdictions regulate backyard homes through regulations designed for multifamily housing. However, the unintended consequences of applying multifamily regulations to control and manage backyard homes are unclear.

Our research attempts to fill these gaps. To comprehensively understand the local concerns about backyard homes, and to identify strategies that are politically acceptable, we conducted a mixed methods research project with four key components:

1. Review of past policies, regulations and innovative precedents,
2. Analysis of local concerns, including a survey of neighborhood councils in Los Angeles
3. Typological and demographic analysis of single-family lots and zones in Los Angeles, and
4. Action research with interested neighborhoods.

We conducted the research in two stages. In the first stage, we conducted more conventional social science research. In the second stage, we built on our findings, by conducting collaboration-based action research with interested neighborhoods.

Our research indicates that opposition to backyard homes is neither unanimous nor absolute, and some neighborhoods are more open to their development than others. Some cities are also creatively addressing the concerns of their communities through

innovative planning and urban design, and there is an opportunity to learn from them. We see the need and potential for regulatory changes, support through technical assistance and design manuals for interested homeowners, pilot projects that demonstrate the value of backyard homes, and nuanced, place-based approaches to enabling the development of backyard homes.

Californian cities are ideal sites for this research, and among them Los Angeles provides an exemplary case. Single-family lots dominate both the physical landscape and emotional image of the city. Los Angeles, like California and the United States, has an aging population, and access to affordable housing continues to be a challenge for many in the city. Support and opposition for backyard homes is further complicated in the city because of numerous unpermitted backyard homes. In 1987, the Los Angeles Times, on the basis of a field-based, random sample survey, concluded that Los Angeles County had around 42,000 unpermitted garage apartments.

The underlying premise of our research is that any implementable policy on secondary units requires local cooperation. The prospect of such support is likely to vary from city to city, and neighborhood to neighborhood, depending on local demographic and built environment conditions. Our research contributes to an understanding of the

lack of connection between well-meaning theoretical ideas and local living conditions and incentives. We suggest that these differences are surmountable and creative design-based policy can help address the tradeoffs. Through our research we identify politically viable strategies for addressing the concerns of communities about backyard homes.

After this brief introduction, we elaborate on the significance of this research. Next, we describe the research design, including the questions, our approach, and key tasks. The research methodology is followed by a concluding note, which also explains the layout of this report.

Significance and Contribution of Research

In most planning ordinances, backyard homes are referred to as accessory dwelling units. In everyday language, backyard homes are also known as granny flats, mother-in-law apartments, garage apartments, carriage units, companion units and second/secondary units. These additional housing units are typically small backyard cottages, converted garages, or units built over garages. We refer to all of them as backyard homes. They are created within single-family lots, and include independent kitchen, bathroom, and sleeping areas, but are expected to be subordinate in their appearance, size, and location to the

main house. In addition to providing a unique housing typology, the literature claims that backyard homes have several other promising advantages. The prevalence of secondary units without permits and the overwhelming, but mostly anecdotal, evidence suggest that the housing market appreciates these advantages, and there is a likely to be a strong demand for easily attainable, legally permitted backyard homes. To address such a demand and facilitate the legal supply of backyard homes, California's state government has approved a number of enabling initiatives. But most local governments, with a few notable exceptions, have responded with caution and concern about the potential adverse effects of backyard homes.

There is, however, a strong imperative in cities like Los Angeles, with a large stock of single-family homes and a strong need for affordable housing, to be more active, bold, and entrepreneurial in facilitating the development of formally approved backyard homes. As we noted earlier, single-family zoning accounts for about 85% of Los Angeles's residentially zoned land.⁸ In San Fernando Valley neighborhoods like Tarzana, Encino, Chatsworth, and Woodland Hills/Warner Center, land zoned for single-family use constitutes more than 90% of all residentially zoned land.⁹ In the past, many of these single-family homes were affordable to households with modest incomes. To illustrate, according to the 1939 Federal Housing Administration (FHA) Annual Report, 31% of new homes accepted for mortgage insurance in Los Angeles were

valued below \$4,000 – the upper limit to be considered an “affordable” home at that time.¹⁰ By comparison, of the twenty largest metropolitan regions in the country at that time, only St. Louis, with just over 10% affordable homes, came anywhere close to approximating Los Angeles's percentage of low-cost homes.¹¹ The contemporary housing market in Los Angeles, however, is very different, and the city has a serious shortage of affordable homes. The Los Angeles metropolitan region, with the highest rentership rate of 52%, may be the least affordable region in the country.¹² Similarly, a recent report by the California Housing Partnership Corporation indicates that Los Angeles County is the least affordable housing market for extremely low-income renters.¹³

Broader Impact and Contributions of the Research

Urban single-family living is usually associated with Los Angeles and California, but it is an aspiration across the globe. However, single-family lots are also remarkably versatile, and they can be easily transformed with backyard homes for changing needs and imperatives. This transformation, nonetheless, faces resistance from local communities wary of sacrificing their privacy and quality of life associated with single-family living. Our research aims to comprehend and address local concerns about backyard homes, and has the potential to reveal creative urban design and planning strategies that will

help reinvent single-family living for the twenty-first century. Although our research focuses on the City of Los Angeles, the findings are relevant for policymakers in Southern California and beyond. Los Angeles is a world city, one most strongly associated with the idea of single-family living. Any changes in the single-family paradigm in Los Angeles are likely to have tremendous influence in urban living all over the world.

More specifically, our research is one of the first to systematically examine the concerns communities have about permitting backyard homes. This is an important contribution to the academic literature. Second, the project emphasizes the importance of a place-based and context-specific approach to policymaking. It also highlights the importance of creative urban design as a strategy for addressing conflicting positions while avoiding tradeoffs. Finally, this project combines conventional social science research with unconventional action research based on collaboration and active engagement with interested communities. This methodological innovation has the potential to alter how policy-oriented, community-based research is conducted. We elaborate on the methodology next.

1.2 Research Design

Our preliminary literature and policy review indicate that in spite of the academic consensus on the significance of backyard homes and the state policy support to facilitate their approval, most of the local governments in California remain unconvinced of their value and have resisted their development. Although there is no robust research on the concerns of neighborhoods against backyard homes, local-level policymakers assume that their residents were strongly and collectively opposed to backyard homes. We decided to systematically examine the concerns, and explore opportunities for innovative policymaking by focusing on three overarching research questions:

1. *What are the local concerns about backyard homes?*
2. *How are real and perceived concerns addressed in policy and practice?*
3. *How can creative design and planning solutions help mitigate the concerns?*

We answered these queries specifically in the context of the city of Los Angeles, and use the questions to explain our methodology below. Figure 1.1 summarizes our research strategy and key tasks.

1. How are real and perceived concerns addressed in practice? (Review of past policies, regulations and innovative precedents)	2. What are the local concerns about backyard homes? (Analysis of local concerns)	3. How can design and planning better address the concerns? (Action Research)
i. Review of academic literature	i. Survey of attitudes and concerns of Neighborhood Council members in City of Los Angeles	i. Typological analysis of single-family housing in City of Los Angeles
ii. In-depth case study: Santa Cruz, California		ii. Demographic analysis of neighborhoods in City of Los Angeles
iii. Survey and analysis of BYH-policies in all 88 cities of Los Angeles County		iii. Collaborative public workshops in three Los Angeles neighborhoods to test innovative urban design and planning ideas

Figure 1.1 Research strategy and key components

Review of Past Policies, Regulations, and Innovative Precedents

We were interested in researching how local-level concerns about backyard homes are addressed in policy and practice. We conducted three research tasks to address this. First, we conducted a detailed and comprehensive review of the academic literature on backyard homes, with an emphasis on the policy experience in California. The detailed review assisted us in organizing and conducting the subsequent two tasks.

Next, we conducted a fieldwork-based, in-depth case study of Santa Cruz, California’s award-winning program promoting the development of backyard homes, to analyze and learn from its experiences. Beginning in 2003, the City of Santa Cruz implemented a widely acclaimed, citywide program to promote the construction of new backyard homes. The program has helped increase the supply of formally permitted units by four to five times, and has won the city numerous awards and accolades for its leadership.¹⁴ Our case study helped us understand how local political actors (elected officials and community-based, neighborhood representatives) overcame concerns about backyard homes, and under

what conditions they support policies to allow secondary units. We were particularly interested in comprehending how cities find a fine balance between allowing backyard homes and limiting or regulating their development.

Finally, we surveyed all 88 cities in the County of Los Angeles to research how different local governments frame policies and regulations for backyard homes. We included the City of Santa Cruz, because of its notable achievements, in this analysis too. We also compared regulations in different jurisdictions with the regulatory framework in Los Angeles to assess variation in the strictness of regulations across cities.

Analysis of Local Concerns

Our focus was on comprehending and analyzing the concerns and attitudes of local stakeholders in the City of Los Angeles. Primarily, we surveyed all the neighborhood councils in the city. We assumed that the attitudes and perceptions of local neighborhood councils on backyard homes in their neighborhoods are likely to affect the policy options and directions in the City of Los Angeles. We also assumed that these attitudes varied from neighborhood to neighborhood. Different attitudes from diverse neighborhoods, because of differences in their underlying demographics or physical form and layout of single-family housing, we assume, open up the

possibility of a neighborhood-specific policy instead of a uniform, citywide approach.

There are 96 neighborhood councils in Los Angeles. We administered a short, online survey instrument and requested the Presidents or Chairs of all neighborhood councils to participate. The survey included space for open-ended comments, and the option to contact us to discuss the issue of backyard homes in more detail. We followed-up with emails to improve the response rate to the survey. As we expected, community concerns consisted of doubts about existing infrastructure capacity, including street parking; worries about absentee-owners and irresponsible tenants; fears of backyard homes subverting the single-family character of neighborhoods; and the apparent lack of viable policies for addressing existing but unpermitted backyard homes. However, we also found variations in responses across the neighborhoods.

The analysis helped us understand the differences in concerns, including their magnitude, across different neighborhoods of the city. The analysis also helped to reveal some neighborhoods willing to explore the possibility of allowing backyard homes, provided the secondary units met certain planning and institutional conditions.

Action Research to Identify Creative Solutions

Finally, we were interested in assessing the potential of creative design and planning solutions in addressing the concerns about backyard homes. During the second stage of our project, we built upon the previously discussed data collection and analysis components to conduct collaboration-based action research with three neighborhood councils. Through public workshops with interested neighborhoods, we engaged key stakeholders to test and identify creative urban design and planning policies that might be acceptable in some neighborhoods of the City of Los Angeles.

We used our survey of neighborhood councils as the primary strategy for determining neighborhoods interested in considering the possibility of backyard homes in their communities. In addition, we conducted a detailed typological analysis of single-family lots in the city to develop a profile of single-family housing types in each neighborhood. We assumed that neighborhoods with certain kinds of single-family lots (for example, large lots with opportunities for privacy of neighbors, deep lots with the possibility of additional parking on the driveways, lots with alleys and secondary access, etc.), there might be less concern about the development of backyard homes, and some willingness to consider them. We also conducted a census-based demographic

analysis of the city's neighborhoods. We assumed that certain demographic conditions might generate more support for backyard homes. For example, neighborhoods with a larger proportion of seniors might have more interest in backyard homes. Thus, although our final selection of the three neighborhoods for collaborative workshops followed from our survey findings, we also analyzed and considered the housing typologies and population demographics of neighborhoods to prioritize between interested communities.

For the neighborhood-based workshops, we also drew on our research of innovative precedents to develop and present initial design and planning strategies to interested communities. Given the history of contention about backyard homes in the City of Los Angeles, and the city's large expanse, we did not expect to find a citywide strategy of secondary units through this research. We are, however, optimistic that our workshops with neighborhoods suggest neighborhood-specific policies, or a willingness by communities to consider scattered demonstration projects. Moreover, we are hopeful that successful small-scale efforts have the catalytic potential to lead to further interest in backyard homes within other neighborhoods of Los Angeles.

1.3 Conclusion

Backyard homes, as we argue, offer numerous social, economic, and environmental benefits, and have the potential to reinvent urban single-family living for the twenty-first century. But backyard homes, are controversial and face opposition from many community members. Our research analyzes and addresses local concerns about backyard homes. It is based on the principle of engaging interested neighborhoods in collaboration and developing design and planning strategies that are locally acceptable. We find that opposition to backyard homes is neither unanimous nor absolute, and some neighborhoods and neighbors are more open to their development than others. Our research also suggests the need and potential for nuanced, place-based approaches to enable the development of backyard homes.

This introduction is followed by four research-based chapters and a concluding chapter. In Chapter Two, we share our review of the literature and innovations in practice, including a detailed case study of Santa Cruz. In Chapter Three, we analyze the framework of regulations in the City and County of Los Angeles, and share the results of our survey of the city's neighborhood councils on their concerns about backyard homes, and the

conditions under which they would consider backyard homes in their neighborhoods. Chapter Four presents our spatial and typological analysis of single-family lots in the city of Los Angeles, and our demographic analysis of residents of the city. In Chapter Five, we share our action research based on collaborative policy workshops with three of the city's neighborhood councils interested in discussing with us the potential and possibility of backyard homes in their neighborhoods. Finally, in Chapter Six, we reiterate our findings and share our conclusions to this project.

Notes

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REVIEW OF LITERATURE & INNOVATIONS IN PRACTICE

Introduction

Historically, backyard homes and other secondary units have been associated with housing for domestic help. For example, the mews houses in Britain were built on mews (or alleys) as stables with living quarters for staff on the second level. Along with their U.S. counterparts of carriage houses or coach houses built on alleyways, they are among the best known historical examples of accessory units.¹ In the U.S., with its troubled history of slavery, such units were also used for housing urban slaves.² Two-family homes, nonetheless, were a common feature of the turn of the century streetcar suburbs.³ Nationwide, exclusive single-family neighborhoods “were quite rare until the 1940s”⁴ and only the very wealthy could afford to live in them.⁵ Culturally, the privacy of these homes was touted as necessary to protect children from inappropriate role-models, but their shortcomings are by now well-recognized in the literature.⁶

As early as the 1930s, federal institutions discouraged two-family homes through prejudiced mortgage underwriting regulations.⁷ The Federal Housing Administration feared that the rental incomes from backyard homes were unpredictable, and it demanded higher insurance rates from homebuyers of two-family

homes. At the local level, single-family neighborhoods were seen as unstable and vulnerable to the risk of redevelopment at a higher intensity. Initially they were protected by private covenants organized by homebuilders, but subsequently zoning regulations enforced by local governments became the norm. While early zoning had focused on height and bulk controls – driven by concerns of fire and inadequate light and ventilation – as tools to protect the “health and safety” of citizens, it was more difficult to outlaw duplex houses in exclusive single-family neighborhoods. As Martin Gellen has pointed out in his masterful study advocating accessory apartments in single-family homes, there is no good planning-based justification for preventing two-family homes on single-family lots that are twice the size of a typical lot. Nonetheless, zoning regulations do not typically allow this flexibility. Local governments have been able to justify zoning restrictions by mandating residential use districts that separate housing of varying densities as a necessary control to protect the “welfare” of their citizens. In the conventional, often conservative, social construction of the single-family ideal, backyard homes and accessory units are perceived as an indicator of a neighborhood’s decline.

2.1 The Potential Advantages of Backyard Homes

The growing urban studies literature, however, suggests that backyard homes have tremendous potential as an additional and underappreciated dwelling typology in the housing market.

For property owners of single-family homes, a second unit can present the possibility of independent housing for elderly parents, grown children, extended family, care providers (including nurses, housekeepers, and au pairs), and guests. Many scholars emphasize changes in demographics and attitudes of the American household, and argue that such multigenerational needs are growing and will continue to increase in significance.⁸

In particular, scholars from a diverse field of disciplines, including architecture, public policy, urban planning, and gerontology, point to evidence of an aging population in the United States and argue that there is a demographic imperative for a liberal zoning policy on backyard homes.⁹ Phoebe Liebig, Teresa Koenig, and Jon Pynoos, for example, emphasize that an increasing proportion of older adults now live with relatives other than their spouses.¹⁰ Zoning changes, they argue, that allow for legally permitted backyard homes would make it easier for interested seniors to live in proximity of their caregivers. Some planning and public policy scholars also speculate that the needs of the elderly are the most likely

to resonate with communities, and have the potential to generate broad political support for regulations permitting backyard homes.¹¹

Backyard homes can also contribute to housing affordability. The additional and modest-sized housing that backyard homes provide are particularly important for residents with low incomes.¹² For many middle income households, the possibility of creating and renting out a secondary unit can make the dream of homeownership more accessible and feasible.¹³ Similarly, rents from backyard homes during economic downturns might also help some households to hold on to their homes and avoid foreclosure. Permitting secondary units with tenants can also help create diverse and mixed-income neighborhoods.¹⁴ Advocates of backyard homes also argue that the strategy not only increases the supply of affordable housing, but it can do this without promoting sprawl and by using the existing urban infrastructure more efficiently.¹⁵ Although neighborhoods are likely to be denser due to backyard homes, if the extra density can be layered in within the existing built fabric of single-family homes, it might be possible to accommodate it without significantly altering the visual character and appearance of neighborhoods.¹⁶

2.2 Market Demand for Backyard Homes

Research conducted by the AARP (formerly known as the American Association of Retired Persons) suggests that many of the advantages of backyard homes are valued in the housing market. More specifically, the AARP's "consumer preference surveys of seniors indicate that 80% or more of older households would like to remain in their current homes," and "over one-third would consider modifying their home to include an accessory dwelling unit if they needed assistance."¹⁷ In addition, the Wall Street Journal noted that in the experience of KB Homes, the Los Angeles based homebuilder, "generally a third of its new homebuyers want a granny flat."¹⁸ The newspaper article also reported that in one of KB Homes' developments, Sycamore Villas, in Hercules, California, more than two-thirds of buyers asked for backyard homes.

In spite of these indicators of robust market demand, legal permits for backyard homes are difficult to obtain. As a consequence of the lack of a legal avenue of supply, market demand is more likely to be met by illegal backyard homes. A rare and comprehensive survey of illegal garage units in Los Angeles County by the Los Angeles Times in 1987 suggested that there were almost 42,000

unpermitted units in the County.¹⁹ More recent estimates of backyard homes are informed guesses and claim up to 100,000 units in Los Angeles – attributed to the Central City Association (CCA).²⁰ Because such housing is unregulated, it is likely that some of the units are unsafe and unfit for habitation. There have been very few citywide efforts in the U.S. to successfully legalize and upgrade unpermitted backyard homes and other secondary units. The successful examples of local jurisdictions with such initiatives include Babylon, New York,²¹ Marin County, California²² and, perhaps most significantly, Daly City, California.²³ Daly City is in San Mateo County, just south of San Francisco. In the 1990s, it established minimum conditions for regularization and upgraded over a thousand units.²⁴

2.3 Common Regulatory Constraints in Developing Backyard Homes

Zoning, the typical regulatory approach used by local governments in the U.S. to manage and permit land use often does not allow backyard homes to be built in single-family designated neighborhoods. Although U.S. zoning has European precedents, particularly in Germany and England, the purely residential zoning district and the purely single-family residential district are largely U.S.-based practices.²⁵ Where zoning allows for backyard homes on single-family lots, local governments usually grant planning permission after administrative hearings through discretionary reviews, or conditional use permits (CUPs). The process for obtaining CUPs is more complicated and time-consuming than the process for acquiring by-right permits, and typically involves more bureaucratic steps, including input from neighbors. Because of the high cost and uncertainty associated with receiving CUPs, it often discourages homeowners from trying for formal approval for backyard homes. Even when backyard homes are permitted by-right, the minimum required standards are often too demanding to allow for feasible projects. Table 2.1 notes some of the key regulatory constraints in zoning codes allowing backyard homes. In particular, the literature suggests that minimum lot size requirements, minimum setbacks, and parking standards can be the most difficult to address.²⁶ For example, some jurisdictions, concerned about the additional density from secondary units, only allow for backyard homes on single-family lots that are one-and-a-half times the size of regular lots.²⁷

Owner occupancy	Property owner must live in the main house or backyard home
Minimum lot size	Cannot build backyard home on lots smaller than the specified minimum lot size
Maximum lot coverage	Combined areas of main house and backyard home cannot exceed a certain percentage of the lot
Maximum unit size	Maximum allowed size of backyard home (minimum unit size may also be specified)
Maximum height of unit	Maximum allowed size of backyard home (may depend upon type of structure and its location on the lot)
Setbacks	Minimum distance from property lines along front, back and side yards
Detached or attached	Determines if unit needs to be attached to the main house
Minimum distance between dwellings	Specifies minimum distance between detached units
Main entry	Location of backyard home's main door in relation to street and the main house
Interior amenities	Second bedroom may not be allowed
Parking	Specifies parking requirement for backyard home, implications for the main house's parking requirements, and location and attributes of off-street parking
Exterior finish	Details of how backyard home relates to the main house
Safety-related	Codes to protect health and safety of occupants

Table 2.1 Common zoning constraints in developing formally approved backyard homes. *Source: Based on Litchfield 2011.*

2.4 The Institutional Framework in California

California has been one of the leaders in considering backyard homes with single-family housing as a viable option for affordable housing. The state's Second Unit Law – California Government Code Section 65852.2 (i) (4) defines a second unit or backyard home as “an attached or a detached residential dwelling unit which provides complete independent living facilities for one or more persons. It shall include permanent provisions for living, sleeping, eating, cooking, and sanitation on the same parcel as the single-family dwelling is situated.”²⁸

The state's first initiative in 1981, Senate Bill 1160, was geared towards seniors and allowed cities to grant variances from regular zoning restrictions for backyard homes.²⁹ The following year, the state approved legislation, SB 1534, proposed by State Senator Henry Mello and also known as the Mello Act, to leverage backyard homes as a source of affordable housing. It enabled local governments to develop ordinances allowing backyard homes in single-family neighborhoods. The Mello Act noted that “Second units provide housing for family members, students, the elderly, in-home health care providers, the disabled and others at below market prices within existing neighborhoods. Homeowners who create second units benefit from added income, and an increased sense

of security.”³⁰ Subsequent minor amendments were approved in 1986, 1990, and 1994, but the law remained largely similar to the original Mello Act.³¹ Following the state's initiatives, many local governments made it possible for second units to be approved in single-family neighborhoods through discretionary reviews. However, the discretionary process was time-consuming. Cities continued to enforce high standards and permits were rarely granted.

To facilitate a greater supply of legal backyard homes, the state government modified the Companion Unit Act successively in 1986, 1990, and 1994.³² Around the same time, there were some noteworthy federal responses too. In the early 1990s, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) started a small demonstration program for backyard homes: Elder Cottage Housing Opportunity (ECHO). The well-intentioned pilot program, however, lacked sufficient federal funding and local responses were muted. In 2000, the AARP and the American Planning Association collaborated to draft “Accessory Dwelling Units: Model State Act and Local Ordinance” as a constructive resource for local governments.³³ Permits and legal supply of backyard homes, nonetheless, continued to be rare.

To counter the reluctance of local governments and address the lack of progress in granting permits for second units, the State of California approved Assembly Bill 1866 in 2002. The bill was proposed by South Los Angeles area Assembly Member Roderick Wright, and took effect in July 2003. AB 1866 had wide-ranging support. Its advocates on the right included the California Association of Realtors, and on the left, the California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation. It mandated against the discretionary process, recommended lower standards, and directed cities to allow second units by-right, noting:

It is the intent of the Legislature that any second-unit ordinances adopted by local agencies have the effect of providing for the creation of second units and that provisions in these ordinances relating to matters including units size, parking, fees and other requirements, are not so arbitrary, excessive, or burdensome so as to unreasonably restrict the ability of homeowners to create second units in zones in which they are authorized by local ordinance.³⁴

Most cities, however, were not pleased by the new law. While many of them now allow

backyard homes by-right, the standards mandated for approval, particularly parking requirements, are so stiff that permits are still difficult to come by. To overcome local government resistance to backyard homes, Assembly Member (subsequently President pro tempore of the California State Senate) Darrell Steinberg proposed AB 2702 to impose maximum standards for second units. The state legislature approved the law in 2004 but it was vetoed by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. The Governor argued that AB 2702 ignored infrastructure inadequacies in cities, and restricted local governments and communities from making informed, place-based decisions.

2.5 The Case of Santa Cruz, California

One of the few jurisdictions in California to follow both the letter and spirit of the state law is the City of Santa Cruz. Its revised Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) program, first approved in 2002 and subsequently amended in 2003 to be consistent with AB1866, has received significant media attention and noteworthy awards from the American Institute of Architects (AIA), the American Planning Association (APA), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the League of California Cities, and the Environmental Design and Research Association (EDRA).³⁵ The city successfully built support for its more liberal backyard homes policy, including smaller setbacks and lower parking requirements, through extensive public outreach and workshops. Its noteworthy innovations include two step-by-step manuals, a design guidebook with prototype concepts and plans, a technical assistance program, and access to affordable construction loans through the Santa Cruz Community Credit Union.³⁶ The Santa Cruz case study is elaborated below. The case narrative draws from both secondary sources and primary research conducted in Santa Cruz in February 2014.

The Planning Context in Santa Cruz

The City of Santa Cruz is located about 75 miles south of San Francisco, occupying a picturesque and narrow coastal shelf of land between the Santa Cruz Mountains and Monterey Bay. It has grown from a small beach resort community to a modest-sized city of about 60,000 residents. The University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC), with over 17,000 students has been a key catalyst in Santa Cruz's growth and is the city's largest employer. Santa Cruz is known as a center of liberal and progressive activism and has been admirably called the "Leftmost City."³⁷ Environmental issues are important to many Santa Cruz residents, and in the late 1970s, after a referendum, the city established a clearly defined growth boundary and a commitment to compact development to guide its future growth.

With a land area of about 12.7 square miles, Santa Cruz has a moderate density of about 4,700 people per square mile, and few high rise buildings. While the supply of housing is constrained by the city's growth boundary and local preference for low-rise developments, demand for housing continues to grow

proximity to Silicon Valley, and high quality of life. Consequently, housing can be very expensive in Santa Cruz and unpermitted housing units, particularly backyard homes on single-family lots, are fairly common.

Broad-based Support for Backyard Homes

One strategy that has emerged to increase the supply of housing, while maintaining Santa Cruz's low-rise character, is the policy of promoting backyard homes. Although the city has had an accessory dwelling program since 1983, it was significantly amended in the early 2000s. This research suggests that there was broad-based support for the revised approach, including a political champion, grassroots advocacy, and leadership from the city's planning department.

According to several sources, Mark Primack, a former city council member was the crucial champion of the program.³⁸ Primack, an architect, has served on Santa Cruz's zoning board and planning commission. He was elected to serve on the city council from 2001 to 2004. With two other council members, Ed Porter because of its excellent location, including its

and Scott Kennedy, he formed the accessory dwelling subcommittee and pushed for changes to Santa Cruz's second unit policy. There was also grassroots-based community support for change. David Foster, current executive director of Habitat for Humanity, Santa Cruz, along with other affordable housing advocates, formed a group called Affordable Housing Advocates – AHA!, which lobbied for a more liberal backyard home policy through concept papers and op-eds in the Santa Cruz Sentinel, the local newspaper.³⁹

At about the same time, with growing concerns over housing prices, the city's planning department was conducting a study of the housing options available in Santa Cruz.⁴⁰ UCSC was among the key stakeholders worried about housing prices in Santa Cruz given its concern about its ability to recruit faculty to the university. The housing options study was designed to provide input for updating the city's Housing Element, and among other approaches, identified backyard homes as an infill strategy for increasing the supply of housing. It noted that a majority of the city's residential land was zoned for single-family housing, and backyard homes on these almost 18,000 lots could help in addressing Santa Cruz's housing affordability crisis.⁴¹

Santa Cruz's Revised Ordinance

Following the housing options study, the city council revised Santa Cruz's rules for backyard homes in 2002, and made it easier for homeowners to build such units.

The key changes are described below:

- Although Santa Cruz's revised accessory dwelling ordinance maintained the off-street parking requirement of 2 spaces for the main house and one space per bedroom for the backyard home, it removed the requirement of covered parking. It also relaxed the on-site location restrictions for the parking and allowed for up to three parking spaces to be provided in tandem, and permitted the spaces to be located in the front and side yards.
- For single story detached backyard homes, the ordinance reduced the side and rear setback requirements to three feet. It also mandated that attached backyard homes had to follow the same setbacks as the main house.

- Previously, a homeowner adding a backyard home was required to add fire sprinklers to both the new unit and the main house. The revised ordinance limited the fire sprinkler requirement to the backyard home.

While the city council liberalized some crucial regulatory constraints, to preserve political support for the program it maintained the owner-occupancy requirement, mandating that owners have to live in the main house or the backyard home. In Santa Cruz, with its large population of students, the owner-occupancy requirement was seen as indispensable. The new ordinance also maintained the requirement of an administrative hearing and a discretionary review for permitting backyard homes. This procedural requirement, however, was dropped through another revision in Santa Cruz's ordinance in 2003, in response to the state government's adoption of AB1866, which legislated against discretionary reviews for secondary units. Consequently, single story backyard homes with three feet setbacks and two-story backyard homes with five feet side setbacks and twenty feet rear setbacks can now receive by-right permits without an administrative hearing.

a. Cover of Accessory Dwelling Unit Manual (ADU)



b. Cover of Garage Conversion Manual



c. Cover of Accessory Dwelling Unit: Prototype Plan Sets



Figure 2.1 Selected City of Santa Cruz Design Manuals: (a) Santa Cover of the Accessory Dwelling Unit: Manual, Source: City of Santa Cruz 2003; (b) Cover of the Accessory Dwelling Unit: Garage Conversion Manual Source: City of Santa Cruz 2006; (c) Cover of the Accessory Dwelling Unit: Prototype Plan Sets. Source: City of Santa Cruz 2003.

Santa Cruz's Innovations

The City of Santa Cruz applied for and received a competitive grant from the California Pollution Control Financing Authority's Sustainable Communities Grant and Loan Program to facilitate education and outreach for the revised backyard homes ordinance. With the grant support, the city held five public workshops, developed manuals and sample plans, initiated a loan program, and launched a technical assistance and training initiative. The key innovations are briefly described below.

Design Manuals:

The city developed two manuals, the "Accessory Dwelling Unit: Manual"⁴² (Figure 2.1a) and the "Accessory Dwelling Unit: Garage Conversion Manual" (Figure 2.1b).⁴³ Both manuals are richly illustrated and are designed to provide interested homeowners with comprehensive guidance by walking them through the planning permission, design, construction, construction loan, and tenant selection processes. The manuals also discuss various design prototypes (See Figure 2.2 and Figure 2.3 for an example of a single story backyard home prototype), show how garage conversions can help reduce the costs of developing a backyard home,⁴⁴ and include a sample residential lease agreement.⁴⁵

Prototype Plan Sets:

The City of Santa Cruz also engaged seven architects to develop sample plans and construction documents, which could serve as off-the-shelf blueprints (Figure 2.1c).⁴⁶ Six of the seven firms were selected through a design competition and included 1) David Baker + Partners, San Francisco, 2) Boone/Lowe Architects and Planners, Santa Cruz, 3) CCS Architecture, San Francisco, 4) Peterson Architects, San Francisco, 5) Mark Primack, Santa Cruz, 6) Eve Reynolds Architects, Los Angeles, and 7) SixEight Design, Santa Cruz and Germany. Mark Primack, the city council member, was added to the group after the design to provide a set of plans for converting garages to backyard homes. Although the original idea was that the designs and construction documents in the prototype plan sets could serve as pre-approved prototypes, because of rapid changes in building codes and requirements, the plans became more significant as educational and informational documents.

Subsidized Construction Finance:

With the support of the Santa Cruz Community Credit Union, the city also initiated a program of subsidized construction loans for homeowners willing to house low-income residents in their backyard homes. The credit union's loans were available at a low interest rate of 4.5% per year

(the market rate for mortgages in 2003 was about 6.0% per annum), and required a fifteen year, affordability deed restriction. However, borrowers could remove the deed restriction before fifteen years by paying the difference in the subsidized loan and its market value.

Technical assistance program: The city also offered a technical assistance grant program which allowed interested homeowners to meet planning department officials to understand the zoning requirements, and outside design professionals to get guidance on design prototypes for their sites.

Key Achievements of the Program

Although, the number of formally built backyard homes in Santa Cruz has increased since the city revised its backyard homes program, and the revised program has received several state and national awards, the actual production of homes through the program is relatively modest (Table 2.2). As Table 2 indicates, the number of homes built through the program peaked in 2007 at 36 homes, and the subsequent production of backyard homes was adversely hurt by the recession.⁴⁷ But planners for the city indicate that interest in the program is reviving, increasingly more permits are being issued, and they expect the number of backyard homes built through the program to increase.⁴⁸

Prototype: Single Story Alternative Construction Method

Key Features:

- Uses composite panel system that is fast to assemble.
- Provides generous sitting porch.
- Dining, bed and living rooms flow together.
- The plan can be rotated to accommodate utility connections or different methods access and yard patterns.

Site Plan

The ADU is designed to be located in a rear yard. The porch design encourages a social orientation of the ADU towards a shared yard or alley. Raised up about 12", the porch creates a private space that is reached by steps and ramp. The porch elevation is also best suited for southern exposure.

Floor Plan

This prototype uses a four-foot grid as a basic organizational element. The panel system provides discipline to the plan making room proportions and window placement rational. The bedroom has a rolling door that opens it into the living and dining area. Windows paired in the corners provide views out, but away from neighbors.

Context Issues

The site illustrated is in a traditional single-family neighborhood with a variety of traditional and post war houses. The block has evolved to include secondary structures that fill in the rear yards. Most yards have six-foot tall privacy fences. A single story ADU fits the 1 and 1-1/2 story neighborhood.

Potential Variations

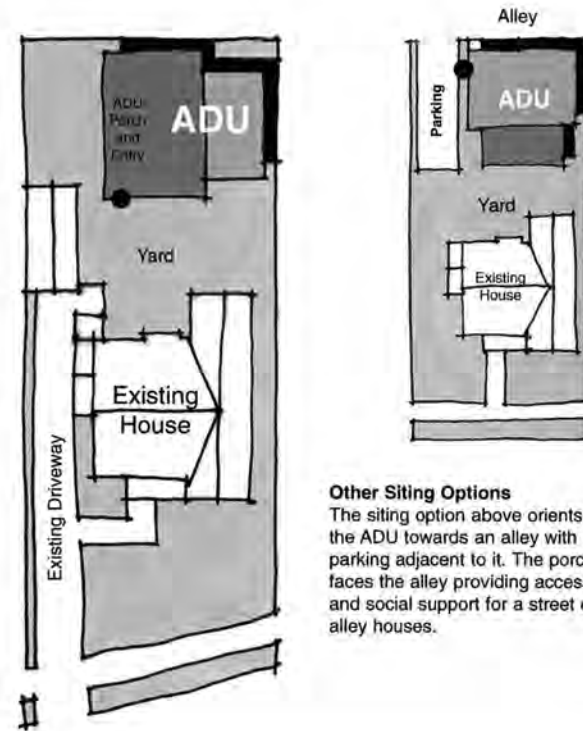
The construction technology reflects the emerging interest in prefabricated construction—trading off factory prices and quality for faster and less labor-intensive erection. The composite panels can be designed to incorporate a variety of performance and design features. The planning grid provides opportunities to develop layouts that are efficient and responsive to your site and program. Different roofing, door and window systems can be incorporated into the design.

"Green" Features

The plan demonstrates a high level of attention to energy efficiency and integration of green finish materials. The design can be adapted to include solar panels.

Site Plan

The plan for the site orients the ADU towards the shared rear and the south. Parking is accommodated in the existing driveway and carport.



Other Siting Options

The siting option above orients the ADU towards an alley with parking adjacent to it. The porch faces the alley providing access and social support for a street of alley houses.

Figure 2.2 Single story backyard home prototype. Source: City of Santa Cruz 2003a, p. 29.

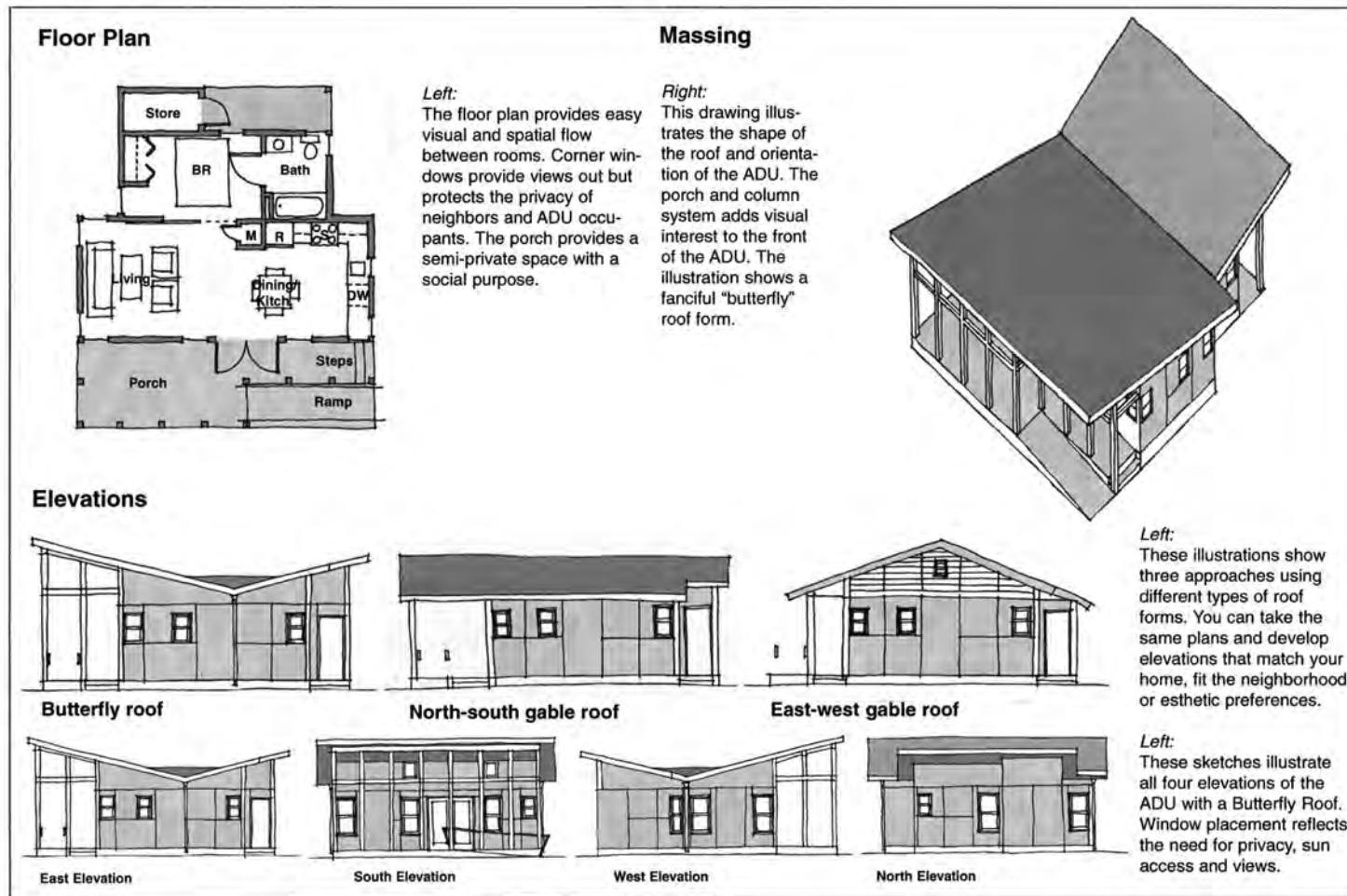


Figure 2.3 Single story backyard home prototype. Source: City of Santa Cruz 2003a, p. 30.

Conclusion

Single-family zoning has a privileged position in the U.S. For almost a century, it has received federal support and is locally cherished. But there is growing evidence that single-family zoning and single-family housing do not adequately meet the diverse and changing housing needs in the country. There is also evidence that backyard homes, because of their many unique advantages, are slowly being accepted across the country. The state of California has been a leader in proposing changes to the rigidity of single-family zoning to allow for easier development of formally permitted backyard homes. In the state, the City of Santa Cruz has received widespread recognition for its attempts to make it easier for homeowners to build backyard homes, and its experience suggests several lessons for other jurisdictions. This research indicates that the key lessons from Santa Cruz include reforms in parking and setback requirements, and educational and technical assistance for homeowners, particularly through easily accessible design and planning manuals and guidebooks.

Year	# of Backyard Homes Built
2000*	5
2001	6
2002	7
2003†	13
2004	22
2005	25
2006	33
2007	36
2008	26
2009	15
2010	13
2011	12
2012	10
TOTAL‡	205

* Prior to the initiation of the ADU Plan

† After the initiation of the ADU Plan

‡ Since 2003, after the ADU Plan

Table 2.2 Formally approved Backyard Homes built in Santa Cruz, CA. Source: Interview with Carol Berg, February 13, 2014.

Notes

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45 City of Santa Cruz, *Accessory Dwelling Unit: Manual*, (2003a), pp. 65-70.

46 City of Santa Cruz, *Accessory Dwelling Unit: Prototype Plan Sets*, (Santa Cruz: Housing and Community Development Division, 2003b).

47 The actual number of permits issued through the backyard home program tends to be a little higher, but there is a time lag between the issuing of permits and the actual construction of homes, and all the permitted housing units are not built. To illustrate, Jane Berner and her colleagues note "In 2003, 36 permits were issued, in 2004, 40 permits were issued, and in 2005, 44 permits were issued," (Berner et al. (2006), p. 16, quoting Carol Berg, Housing and Community Development Manager, City of Santa Cruz).

48 Carol Berg, interview with author, February 13, 2014.



ANALYSIS OF LOCAL REGULATIONS & CONCERNS

3.1 Framework of Regulations in Los Angeles

In this chapter, the framework of regulations in Los Angeles is discussed, and local concerns are empirically examined about backyard homes at the neighborhood level. We draw from both primary and secondary sources to comprehend and elaborate on the institutional context for the development of backyard homes in the City of Los Angeles. First, we assess the strictness of backyard home regulations in the City of Los Angeles by comparing them with regulations in other jurisdictions. Next we share the results of our survey of the city's neighborhood councils on their concerns about backyard homes. We also asked the councils about the planning and institutional conditions under which they would consider more liberal regulations for backyard homes in their neighborhoods.

Framework of Regulations in Los Angeles

The following research compares municipal codes regulating backyard homes in the City of Los Angeles with statewide guidelines, as well as with Los Angeles County regulations, regulations in the City of Santa Cruz (which we discussed in the previous chapter as a

notable case of promoting backyard homes as a housing solution), and regulations in all the other 87 cities of Los Angeles County. We use the comparison to understand the differences in regulation of backyard homes, to reveal regulatory innovations, and to find approaches for how the City of Los Angeles can better promote backyard homes as a housing solution, while addressing the concerns of neighbors.

To perform the comparison, first a matrix was created of the regulations associated with various topics found in each city's municipal code (as well as the Los Angeles County planning code and California's statute enabling backyard homes). The topics found to be most relevant or widely varying after this initial process were added to a larger matrix used to compare each city. These topics, of which there are eleven total, fall into three main groupings: size constraints, parking requirements, and permitting process. Specific topics include: minimum lot size, maximum backyard home height, setback requirements, minimum and maximum floor areas, number and location of parking spaces and whether the spaces were required to be covered and allowed to be tandem, and permitting process. The regulations comparison matrix was filled out

to notate whether each city's municipal code, with regard to each topic, was more or less strict, or the same as, the City of Los Angeles. In general, a city was scored as being stricter in a particular topic area if the regulations make it more difficult to build a backyard home than those in the City of Los Angeles.

Specifically, when a city had regulations that were stricter than the City of Los Angeles, it was given a score of 1, when equally strict a score of 0, and when less strict a score of -1. Then, an overall strictness score was created by adding up the scores for each city across all eleven variables or topics. On the next page are the guidelines for how each city was scored by topic (Tables 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3). The scoring tables are broken into the three main topics: Size, Parking, and Permitting.

Limitations of the Data

There are some limitations to this data; most significantly it only considers regulations found in municipal (and zoning) codes. This means that specifics required by a city's department of building and safety or any other relevant department that may make backyard homes

more or less difficult to build are not included. (As discussed later, requirements from the City of Los Angeles’ Department of Building and Safety are an important constraint in the city). Furthermore, innovations outside of the municipal code (such as user-friendly websites, step-by-step manuals, design guidelines to instruct residents regarding permitting and building processes, as in Santa Cruz) are not captured by this methodology. Therefore, it is possible that in some cities, where strict municipal code regulations make building backyard homes appear difficult, websites or city staff can make information easier to obtain, and thus in reality are better facilitators for building backyard homes than the City of Los Angeles. This is the case in the City of Santa Cruz, which has more detailed requirements in its municipal code than the City of Los Angeles does, but with a program of technical assistance, user-friendly website, and manuals and guidelines, has made the process for building backyard homes significantly less daunting.

Additionally, for sixteen out of 88 cities in the County of Los Angeles we were unable to find information about backyard homes (or accessory dwelling units) in the zoning or municipal codes of the cities. In some cases we were unable to find any zoning or municipal codes online, and there were some cities without residentially zoned areas, and in turn without any documentation on backyard homes. These sixteen cities were excluded from the overall

Strictness Compared to LA	Min. Lot Size	Max. Backyard Home Height	Min. Backyard Home Size	Max. Backyard Home Size attached	Max. Backyard Home Size detached	Setbacks
More Strict (1 Score)	City places a specific lot size restriction	City places a specific height restriction	Minimum size stated	Less than 30% of existing floor area	Less than 1,200 sq ft	Specific setback stated
Less Strict (-1 Score)	None stated	None stated	---	Greater than 30% of existing floor area, or none stated	Greater than 1,200 sq ft	None stated
Equally Strict (0 Score)	City requires backyard home lot size to comply with min. zone requirements	City requires that backyard home complies with maximum height applicable zone	None stated	Maximum 30% of existing floor area	1,200 sq ft	Meets requirement of zone

Table 3.1 Guide for Comparing and Scoring Backyard Home Regulations: Size Constraints

Strictness Compared to LA	Parking Spaces	Parking Tandem	Parking Location	Parking Cover
More Strict (1 Score)	More than 1 off-street space required	Tandem prohibited	May not be in a required yard	Must be covered
Less Strict (-1 Score)	0 off-street spaces required	Tandem prohibited	May be located anywhere on property	None stated
Equally Strict (0 Score)	1 off-street space required	Tandem is permitted, if zone allows	May be in a required yard	May be either covered or uncovere

Table 3.2 Guide for Comparing and Scoring Backyard Home Regulations: Parking Requirements

Strictness Compared to LA	Permitting Process
More Strict (1 Score)	By right in only specific zones, or never by right
Less Strict (-1 Score)	By right in any zone, if all requirements are met
Equally Strict (0 Score)	By right in single family zones, if all requirements are met

Table 3.3 Guide for Comparing and Scoring Backyard Home Regulations: Permitting Process

strictness score graph in the findings section, but were included as “blank/NA” in the tables throughout this report. The cities without such information are: Bell, Cudahy, Diamond Bar, Hidden Hills, Industry, Inglewood, La Habra Heights, Lakewood, Lawndale, Manhattan Beach, Maywood, Montebello, Paramount, Pico Rivera, Signal Hill, and Vernon.

Furthermore, there are some additional issues to consider with the simplified notation method outlined in the methodology section above and our stylized scoring for a few of the topic areas.

Parking Location: If a city’s regulations state nothing in regards to parking location for backyard homes, this is scored as 1 (stricter than the City of Los Angeles). This is because the City of Los Angeles explicitly allows parking in the required yard for a backyard home, even if it is not typically allowed in the zone. Thus for another city to be 0 (equally strict as the City of Los Angeles), they also would have to explicitly allow such parking, even if not typically allowed in the zone. If a city’s regulations do not state that parking is affirmatively allowed in the required yard, then it is considered “more strict” than the City of Los Angeles and marked 1. This methodology, however, could make cities that have no or very little zoning barring parking in the required yard appear stricter than they are in effect.

Maximum size of attached backyard home:

Our methodology only takes into account sizes of attached backyard homes as proportions of the primary unit. If the backyard home is allowed to be a flat, specified number of square feet, as opposed to a proportion like in City of Los Angeles, it is scored as 1 (or stricter than the City of Los Angeles). This is potentially problematic as there are times where this flat or maximum square footage could allow the construction of a larger unit than a proportion-based maximum size; however we consider and score it as “more strict,” in that some amount of flexibility is lost.

Parking Covered or Uncovered: There is also a potential problem in the way we have defined the variable for less strict parking to be uncovered as “none stated.” Even if the requirement is not stated with respect to backyard homes, the zoning code for the specific zone may prohibit uncovered parking, and then this would actually be “more strict” than the City of Los Angeles.

Finally, another significant problem with the scoring strategy and a potentially misleading aspect of it, is that all eleven variables are weighted equally in the analysis. In practice, however, some variables, for example, parking requirements, may be more important.

Summary of Findings

Several cities had interesting innovations in structuring requirements for backyard homes, primarily pertaining to incentivizing the utilization of the backyard home for affordable housing. For example, Santa Fe Springs requires that the backyard home must be rented to low or very low-income households with a 50-year deed restriction. Sierra Madre requires that the backyard home be affordable, and in Duarte, the maximum floor area increases if the accessory dwelling unit is deed restricted as affordable housing.

Most cities tended to be stricter overall than the City of Los Angeles. The graph on the following page (Figure 3.1), “Regulation Strictness Score” places all 71 cities throughout the County of Los Angeles in comparison with the City of Los Angeles, in terms of overall strictness (a sum of strictness scores by topic). The score for Santa Cruz and the County of Los Angeles are also included for comparison in red. (As noted earlier, there were sixteen cities throughout the County of Los Angeles for which data could not be collected and they are excluded from the graph).

As Figure 3.1 shows, only five cities are less strict overall than the City of Los Angeles: El Segundo, Hawthorne, Glendale, Baldwin Park, and Irwindale. Cities scoring the strictest score (score 9) include: Bell



Figure 3.1 Regulations Strictness Score Comparing the City of Los Angeles with Other Jurisdictions

Gardens, Carson, Downey, Redondo Beach, Rosemead, and South Pasadena.

Santa Cruz, while known as a city that promotes accessory dwelling units as a housing solution, scored moderately stricter than the City of Los Angeles. As mentioned earlier in the Limitations of the Data section, however, the strictness scoring is based solely on zoning and municipal codes and does not take into account guidance from staff, websites, or manuals that cities may provide to assist residents through the process of building backyard homes.

Overall, Los Angeles County also scored as moderately stricter than the City of Los Angeles. The next section will provide more details in terms of how cities scored in comparison to the City of Los Angeles within the specific regulation variables.

Comparison between Los Angeles and All Cities in Los Angeles County

The Regulations Strictness Score graph shows that there are only a few cities that are less strict than the City of Los Angeles overall. The following tables illustrate some of the nuances in the scorings.

Comparison with LA City	Min. Lot Size	Min. Backyard Home Height	Min. Backyard Home Size	Max. Backyard Home Size attached	Max. Backyard Home Size detached	Setbacks
Less Strict	0	1	0	8	4	0
Equally Strict	28	30	43	12	9	54
More strict	42	39	27	46	55	16
Blank n/a	17	17	17	17	17	17

Table 3.4 Summary of Number of Cities in Comparison with the City of Los Angeles: Size Constraints

Comparison with LA City	Parking Spaces	Parking Tandem	Parking Location	Parking Covered
Less Strict	9	8	5	22*
Equally Strict	32	35	3	20
More strict	29	27	61	27
Blank n/a	17	17	18	18

Table 3.5 Summary of Number of Cities in Comparison with the City of Los Angeles: Parking Requirements

* Note: A quarter of the cities in the County score as Less Strict than the City of Los Angeles in terms of Covered Parking requirements. However, 13 out of the 22 cities scoring as less strict in this regard had nothing stated under Covered Parking requirements for accessory dwelling units. As noted in the Limitations of Data section, the Covered Parking scoring for these 13 cities without specification in this regard may be somewhat inaccurate because it does not account for areas where the zoning code mandates that covered parking spaces be provided. Given this, we can say with confidence that 9 of the 22 cities are less strict in their covered parking requirements than the City of Los Angeles, and that the remaining 13 need more research to determine definitively whether they are more or less strict.

Comparison with LA City	Number of Cities
Less Strict	9
Equally Strict	32
More strict	29
Blank n/a	17

Table 3.6 Summary of Number of Cities in Comparison with the City of Los Angeles: Permitting Process

As Table 3.4 shows, nearly two-thirds of the cities in Los Angeles County are as strict as the City of Los Angeles in terms of setback requirements. This means that these cities all require that setbacks meet the minimum requirements of the regulations set in the zoning code.

To reiterate a caveat from the data limitations section, the methodology only takes into account sizes of attached backyard homes as proportions of the primary unit. If the backyard home is allowed to be a flat, specified number of square feet, as opposed to a proportion like in City of Los Angeles, it is scored as 1 (or stricter than the City of Los Angeles). However, there are times where this flat maximum square footage could allow the construction of a larger unit than a proportion-based maximum size. Nonetheless, it was scored as “more strict,” in that some amount of flexibility is lost. There were twenty cities which had a specified number of square feet for the maximum backyard home size. Four cities had mixed regulations regarding maximum backyard home size, in which a proportional regulation was set, up to a specific square footage limit. An example of this is Torrance, in which the maximum backyard home size can be up to 30% of the primary unit’s floor area, or 1,200 square feet, whichever results in a smaller backyard home.

Given this, we can anticipate at least several of the twenty-four cities with either flat or mixed maximum accessory dwelling unit size that

Area	Min. Lot Size	Min. Backyard Home Height	Min. Backyard Home Size	Max. Backyard Home Size attached	Max. Backyard Home Size detached	Setbacks
County of LA Score	More	More	More	More	More	More
Santa Cruz Score	Equal	More	Equal	More	More	More
HCD Regulations Score	n/a	n/a	n/a	Equal	Equal	Equal

Table 3.7 Summary of Comparison between LA City, Los Angeles County, Santa Cruz, and State HCD Guidelines: Size Constraints

are currently coded as stricter than the City of Los Angeles would actually be equally or less strict than the City of Los Angeles in effect.

There are more cities with regulations that are less strict than the City of Los Angeles for parking topics than for size variables (Table 3.5). As Table 3.5 shows, over two-thirds of the cities within Los Angeles County are stricter than the City of Los Angeles regarding parking location requirements. In the City of Los Angeles, parking for backyard homes may be in a required yard, while most cities restrict this. Over a third of the cities were equally strict as the City of Los Angeles in their parking space (one off-street space required) and tandem parking requirements (tandem is permitted if zoning allows).

Table 3.6 shows that over two-thirds of the cities in the County of LA are as strict as the City of Los Angeles in terms of the permitting process. By definition, this means that over two-thirds

of the cities in the County of LA allow backyard homes by-right in single-family zones if all requirements are met. This scoring, however, does not uncover nuances between the types of requirements that are necessary to meet.

Comparison between LA City, Los Angeles County, Santa Cruz and State HCD Guidelines

As Table 3.7 shows, the State of California’s Department of Housing and Community Development’s (HCD’s) guidelines related to size, when applicable, are equally strict as the regulations within the City of Los Angeles. To reiterate what these requirements are for backyard homes attached to the main house: the maximum size is no more than 30% of the existing floor area; for detached backyard homes, the maximum size is 1,200

square feet, and setbacks are required to meet the minimum requirements of the zone.

According to the scoring system, the County of Los Angeles’s regulations related to size are consistently stricter than the City of Los Angeles. This is largely because the County of Los Angeles specifies square footage in terms of minimum lot size and minimum and maximum backyard home size, along with specific heights for detached and attached backyard homes, and minimum footage for setbacks. In contrast, for minimum lot size, maximum backyard home height, and setbacks, the City of Los Angeles defers to the requirements of the zone, and has no specified requirements regarding minimum backyard home size.

Santa Cruz’s regulations related to size are also stricter than the City of Los Angeles in this analysis. Again, this is largely because the City of Santa Cruz specifies square footage in terms of maximum backyard home size, and provides very specific height requirements in terms of maximum backyard home Height. For example Santa Cruz requires that a one story detached backyard home be no taller than 13 feet, two-story detached backyard home be no taller than 22 feet, and attached backyard homes meet the height requirement of the zone. To reiterate, this analysis may be misleading. For example, there could actually be very few (or no) areas in the City of Los Angeles where the zone permits two-story detached backyard homes to be taller than 22 feet. This would then

Area	Parking Spaces	Parking Tandem	Parking Location	Parking Covered
County of LA Score	Equal	Less	Less	Less
Santa Cruz Score	Equal	Less	Equal	Equal
HCD Regulations Score	n/a	n/a	n/a	Less

Table 3.8 Summary of Comparison between LA City, Los Angeles County, Santa Cruz, and State HCD Guidelines: Parking Requirements

mean that Santa Cruz would not be stricter than the City of Los Angeles in this regard.

As shown in Table 3.8, the state HCD regulations relating to parking are generally unavailable. The regulations are coded as less strict than the City of Los Angeles in terms of covered parking because they do not state anything, whereas the City of Los Angeles specifies that parking may either be covered or uncovered.

In comparison to the City of Los Angeles, the County of Los Angeles is generally less strict in terms of parking regulations. The County explicitly permits tandem parking, whereas the City of Los Angeles defers to the requirements of the zone, and the County does not provide requirements in terms of parking location or covered/ uncovered parking.

Santa Cruz has similar requirements in terms of the number of parking spaces and parking

Area	Strictness compared to LA
County of LA Score	Equal
Santa Cruz Score	Equal
HCD Regulations Score	n/a

Table 3.9 Summary of Comparison between LA City, Los Angeles County, Santa Cruz, and State HCD Guidelines: Permitting Process

location as the City of Los Angeles, but is less strict regarding tandem parking.

Los Angeles County permits backyard homes in all residential zones, except those in environmentally sensitive or noise zones. As Table 3.9 shows, this is scored equally strict with the City of Los Angeles. While the City of Los Angeles allows backyard homes by-right in single-family residential zones, making it less strict than the County, the County is more permissive and allows backyard homes in all residential zones. Due to this, we score the City of Los Angeles and County equally.

In Santa Cruz, backyard homes are also permitted in single-family residential zones by-right. Due to this, Santa Cruz is scored as being equal in strictness to the City of Los Angeles.

Conclusion

Our analysis of regulations suggests that the City of Los Angeles has some of the more progressive or supportive zoning regulations in the county. However, as we have repeatedly highlighted in this section, our analysis is limited by our access to data and our simplified methodology. For example, our research shows that in addition to zoning requirements, Building and Safety standards can also limit the development of backyard homes, but these standards are not included in our analysis. (We elaborate on the City of Los Angeles's Department of Building and Safety constraints, particularly a passageway requirement for fire safety, in the next chapter). Santa Cruz's stricter score in our analysis also emphasizes the limits of our methodology. It also highlights the value of non-zoning based support, such as design guidelines and technical assistance programs, in creating successful backyard home programs. The City of Los Angeles can still learn important lessons from Santa Cruz. There may also be lessons to learn from the five cities in the county – El Segundo, Hawthorne, Glendale, Baldwin Park, and Irwindale – that have lower strictness scores, and we recommend additional research on them. Finally, the analysis suggests that most of the cities in Los Angeles County have strict regulations for permitting backyard homes, and we recommend that they consider adopting a more supportive regulatory framework.

3.2 Local Concerns

In this section, we build on our analysis of the broader institutional context by surveying the neighborhood councils in the City of Los Angeles to better comprehend their local-level concerns, and to understand the conditions under which they would consider backyard homes in their neighborhoods. We were keen to see if there was variation in concerns and support for backyard homes across the neighborhoods. We also use our survey to develop a list of neighborhood councils willing to collaborate with us in interactive workshops on backyard homes. Below, we first explain our methodology, and then share our findings.

The following analysis is based on this survey of neighborhood councils in the City of Los Angeles. A directory of email addresses was obtained from the Los Angeles Department of Neighborhood Empowerment (DONE). The directory contained over 1,400 email addresses, which we narrowed down to the addresses of 372 board members. We emailed the board members, who represented 90 neighborhood councils through Survey Monkey, a web and cloud based survey platform, on July 5, 2012. Before launching the survey, we piloted the survey instrument with two members of the East Hollywood neighborhood council. A

Response	Count	% of Total
Rare (<1%)	3	9%
Somewhat rare (1-5%)	7	21%
Not uncommon (6-10%)	7	21%
Somewhat common (11-15%)	9	26%
Common (>15%)	6	18%
Unsure	2	6%
Total	34	

Table 3.10 Perception of prevalence of unpermitted backyard homes in the neighborhood.

copy of the survey instrument is included in Appendix A. After a reminder in mid-July, we closed the survey on August 8, 2012.

Although only 41 responses were received, which suggests a low response rate of 11.02%, we got responses from 34 of the 90 neighborhood councils we contacted, which suggests a healthy response rate of 37.77%. In follow-up emails with board members of the neighborhood councils, it was made clear that only one response per council was expected. From the 41 responses, the seven duplicate responses were removed, retaining the responses from

Response	Count	% of Total
No	24	71%
Yes	9	26%
Unanswered	1	3%
Total	34	

Table 3.11 Formal requests to address unpermitted backyard homes in the neighborhood. *Source: Neighborhood Council Survey 2012.*

more senior board members, typically the presidents of the neighborhood councils. Thus, the analysis is primarily based on an examination of the feedback from 34 respondents representing 34 neighborhood councils.

Perception of Prevalence of Unpermitted Backyard Homes

We were curious to find out how our respondents perceived and estimated the prevalence of unpermitted backyard homes in their neighborhoods. Table 3.10 shows their responses, and indicates that nearly 45% of the

respondents estimated that more than 10% of the single family homes in their neighborhoods had unpermitted backyard homes. Surprisingly, as Table 3.11 shows, in spite the significant perceived presence of unpermitted backyard homes, in the overwhelming majority of neighborhood councils there were no formal requests at the neighborhood level for addressing the unpermitted backyard homes.

Top Concerns and Positive Attributes of Backyard Homes

We also surveyed the respondents to comprehend their concerns and perceptions of positive attributes of formally permitting backyard homes. They were asked about concerns and attributes in an open-ended manner, and their responses were coded into common and overlapping categories. Table 3.12 shows respondents’ top concerns, and Table 3.13 shows their top positive attributes. Somewhat unsurprisingly, the top concern for almost a third of the respondents is parking and the potential adverse effect of backyard homes on the availability of street parking (Table 3.12). On the other hand, almost a quarter of the respondents felt positively about backyard homes helping to house extended families (Table 3.13). However, we also note that while only three respondents did not name a specific concern, nine respondents had trouble in coming up with positive attributes of backyard homes.

Top Concern	Count	% of Total
Parking	11	32%
Density and overcrowding	8	24%
Disorder and crime	3	9%
Infrastructure capacity	3	9%
Renters, low-income residents	2	6%
Safety	2	6%
Decline in property levels	1	3%
Changes in single-family character and form	1	3%
None or unanswered/blank	3	9%
Total	34	

Table 3.12 Perception of prevalence of unpermitted backyard homes in the neighborhood.

Top Attribute	Count	% of Total
Housing for extended family	9	26%
Higher property value or rental income	5	15%
Housing supply and affordability	5	15%
Housing for elderly parents	3	9%
More dense and efficient way to use land	2	6%
Other/unclear	1	3%
None or unanswered/blank	9	26%
Total	34	

Table 3.13 Perception of prevalence of unpermitted backyard homes in the neighborhood.

Conditional Support for Backyard Homes

Although the majority of respondents were not supportive of backyard homes and were more concerned about potential negative effects, when asked to consider backyard homes under certain conditions, particularly design and community consent, we found a majority of respondents willing to consider such units (Table 3.14). As Table 3.14 indicates, over 60% of respondents would consider allowing backyard homes with strict design standards. And, almost 60% of respondents would consider allowing backyard homes if the majority of residents on a street supported the approach. Similarly, almost 53% were willing to consider backyard homes if adjacent neighbors did not have an objection.

Willingness to Work with our Team

Finally, more than half of the respondents indicated a willingness to work with a team of UCLA architects, urban designers, and urban planners to explore innovative policies and designs to address the need and demand for backyard homes in fair and context-specific ways. Table 3.15 summarizes these responses, and Table 3.16 lists the neighborhood councils with the positive responses.

Conclusion

We had a healthy response rate to our survey. More than a third of the neighborhood councils completed the survey. Many of our survey respondents were concerned about the adverse effects of backyard homes on the availability of street parking. The majority, nonetheless, were willing to consider more supportive policies for developing backyard homes under appropriate planning and institutional conditions, including strict design standards for backyard homes, large lots, and willingness of adjacent neighbors, particularly if all property-owners on a street agreed. The survey findings indicate the potential opportunity for a more decentralized and place-specific policy for regulating backyard homes. We also found that more than half of our respondents were open to collaborating with us to explore appropriate policies for backyard homes in their neighborhoods. In the following chapter, we use typological and demographic analyses to narrow down the list of interested neighborhood councils to three neighborhoods for collaborative workshops.

Condition	% Yes	Yes	No	Blank
backyard homes that meet strict design standards to help preserve the visual character of single family neighborhoods	62%	21	11	2
backyard homes on very large single family lots	59%	20	11	3
backyard homes on streets in which all property-owners agree to allow such units	59%	20	11	3
backyard homes that are attached to the main house	53%	18	13	3
backyard homes on properties with large driveways for parking cars	53%	18	12	4
backyard homes that receive a sign-off from adjacent neighbors?	53%	18	13	3
backyard homes on single family properties adjacent to multifamily properties or commercial properties	50%	17	14	3
backyard homes within a quarter mile of a light rail or subway stop, where residents might use public transit more frequently	44%	15	14	5
backyard homes that are spaced far away from one another to limit their total number in the neighborhood	41%	14	17	3
backyard homes on lots with back alleys that buffer the impact of the secondary units on neighbors behind them	38%	13	17	4
backyard homes on corner lots that provide an opportunity for parking on two streets	35%	12	17	5

Table 3.14 Under what conditions should it be easier to build backyard homes in the neighborhood? *Source: Neighborhood Council Survey 2012.*

Response	Count	% of Total
Yes	19	56%
Maybe	8	24%
No	5	15%
Unanswered/blank	2	6%
Total	34	

Table 3.15 Willingness to cooperate with a UCLA team to explore appropriate policies for backyard homes in the neighborhood. *Source: Neighborhood Council Survey 2012.*

1	Atwater Village NC
2	Central San Pedro NC
3	Del Rey NC
4	East Hollywood NC
5	Encino NC
6	Granada Hills North NC
7	Greater Griffith Park NC
8	Harbor Gateway North NC
9	Historic Highland Park NC
10	Mar Vista Community Council
11	Mid City West Community Council
12	NOHO West NC
13	Northridge South NC
14	Pico Union NC
15	Reseda NC
16	South Robertson NC
17	Studio City NC
18	Van Nuys NC
19	Westside NC

Table 3.16 List of neighborhood councils willing to work with a UCLA team to explore appropriate policies for backyard homes in the neighborhood. *Source: Neighborhood Council Survey 2012.*



TYPOLOGICAL &
DEMOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

Introduction

Despite the concerns about backyard homes discussed in the previous chapter, there has been support for their permissibility and utility in the City of Los Angeles. In this chapter we apply knowledge about house and neighborhood development patterns in Los Angeles alongside an analysis of neighborhood demographics to identify 1) housing “types” that are likely to accommodate a second unit under current regulations, and 2) neighborhoods whose demographics increase the potential for backyard home support. Presumably, concerns about backyard homes will diminish in neighborhoods with a high volume of lots that can architecturally accommodate a second unit, in addition to demographic characteristics (e.g. high volume of older adult residents) that might make second units desirable. This chapter tests whether houses constructed during particular eras are more or less likely to accommodate a backyard home, given variations in lot coverage, setbacks, and garage placement, among other factors. Utilizing this information, the latter half of the chapter offers an analysis of neighborhood demographic factors, such as proportion older adults, proportion large lots, and proportion single-family lots near transit, to ascertain which City of Los Angeles neighborhoods are most likely to support backyard homes. The chapter

concludes by identifying three Los Angeles neighborhoods that present ideal sites to test creative solutions to backyard home concerns (see Chapter V for a discussion of workshops conducted in each neighborhood). Beyond their methodological value, the typological and demographic analyses also reveal strategies that can help reinvent planning and policy for backyard homes at the lot and neighborhood scale.



Figure 4.1 Tony Linck, for LIFE magazine, Workmen and the materials to construct a house gathered in a lot before construction, June, 1948.

4.1 Research Questions and Hypotheses

This stage of the research considers how design and planning can better address concerns about backyard homes (research question 3) by identifying and understanding where backyard homes will be assets. Far from a one-size-fits-all approach, this research acknowledges that backyard homes are neither feasible nor appropriate on every single family lot in Los Angeles. Instead, we seek to identify those communities in Los Angeles where backyard homes will add value to urban life, and develop policy and design solutions that respond to local concerns while ensuring a range of design options for homeowners. Given our understanding of housing development in Los Angeles, we ask:

Are there types of homes and neighborhoods that are more optimal for backyard homes than others?

In the case that such types exist: What specific site characteristics limit or enable construction of a backyard home?

Lastly, if we apply this information to Los Angeles, what neighborhoods will emerge as optimal sites for broader implementation of secondary units?

This chapter will examine the physical characteristics of a single-family lot and house alongside demographic qualities of a neighborhood, while the next chapter explores these issues in relation to the opinions and perspectives of neighborhood residents and leaders.

We explore the aforementioned questions through a two-pronged approach: a typological analysis of a sample of Los Angeles single-family lots and a demographic analysis of all neighborhoods in the City of Los Angeles. For the typological analysis, we assume that neighborhood-level characteristics such as topography, lot location within a subdivision, and alley configurations will influence backyard home feasibility in addition to lot-level characteristics such as lot dimensions and house size. For example, we anticipate that large lots with opportunities for privacy and additional parking, and corner and alley lots with opportunities for secondary access will encounter fewer concerns from residents about backyard homes. Further, we hypothesize that older houses, built prior to 1945, will possess the optimal house-size to lot-size ratio and garage placement (detached from the main house) to accommodate a backyard home.

Regarding the demographic analysis, the literature suggests that particular characteristics, such as a high population of older adults or proximity to transit, might diminish opposition to backyard homes at the neighborhood scale (see Chapter II). We hypothesize that neighborhoods with large concentrations of single family housing, such as those in the San Fernando Valley, are most likely to perceive backyard homes in policy terms, and thus are optimal areas to test creative policy solutions. In short, we anticipate that Los Angeles communities with a high concentration of particular housing types and certain neighborhood demographics will constitute ideal testing grounds for a localized backyard home ordinance, demonstration or pilot projects, or other creative policies.

4.2 Typological Analysis of Single-Family Homes in Los Angeles

Characteristics of Single-Family Homes and Suburbs

Despite its predominance in Los Angeles's residential landscape, the single-family home is neither monolithic nor homogenous. Throughout U.S. history the form and design of both the single-family house and the single-family neighborhood have followed distinct trends closely mirroring not only home-building conventions, but the economic, social, and philosophical currents of the historical moment in which construction occurred. David L. Ames and Linda Flint McClelland have surveyed the history of American home-building and identified five distinct epochs of single-family home construction in the U.S. from 1838-1960 (Figure 4.4).¹

This work builds upon Dolores Hayden's studies of suburban development, in which she classifies different phases of the residential subdivision from the 1820s-1990s (Figure 4.5).²

Employing Ames and McClelland and Hayden's typologies as a starting point, we can identify types of neighborhoods and houses with the material characteristics that enable greater feasibility for backyard home construction.



Figure 4.2 Present day view across one of Radburn's interior parks. Photo by Paula Reed, courtesy of National Historic Landmarks Survey, NPS

From Ames and McClelland and Hayden's classifications, this study is primarily concerned with housing and residential typologies from the 20th century (Figure 4.6). Though housing from the Borderlands and Picturesque Enclaves development phases (and corresponding Rural Architecture and Home Grounds type) was built in the Los Angeles region, very little remains



Figure 4.3 1936 Mesa Journal-Tribune FHA Demonstration House in Mesa, Arizona. Photo by Shirley Kehoe, courtesy Arizona Historic Preservation Office

today. In fact, only 73 structures built before 1900 in single-family zones currently exist in the City of Los Angeles, with fewer than 10,000 such structures (about 2%) dating before World War I. When we examine the City of Los Angeles' current housing stock by built year, we see three major "waves" accompanied by several smaller waves, which correspond with national building

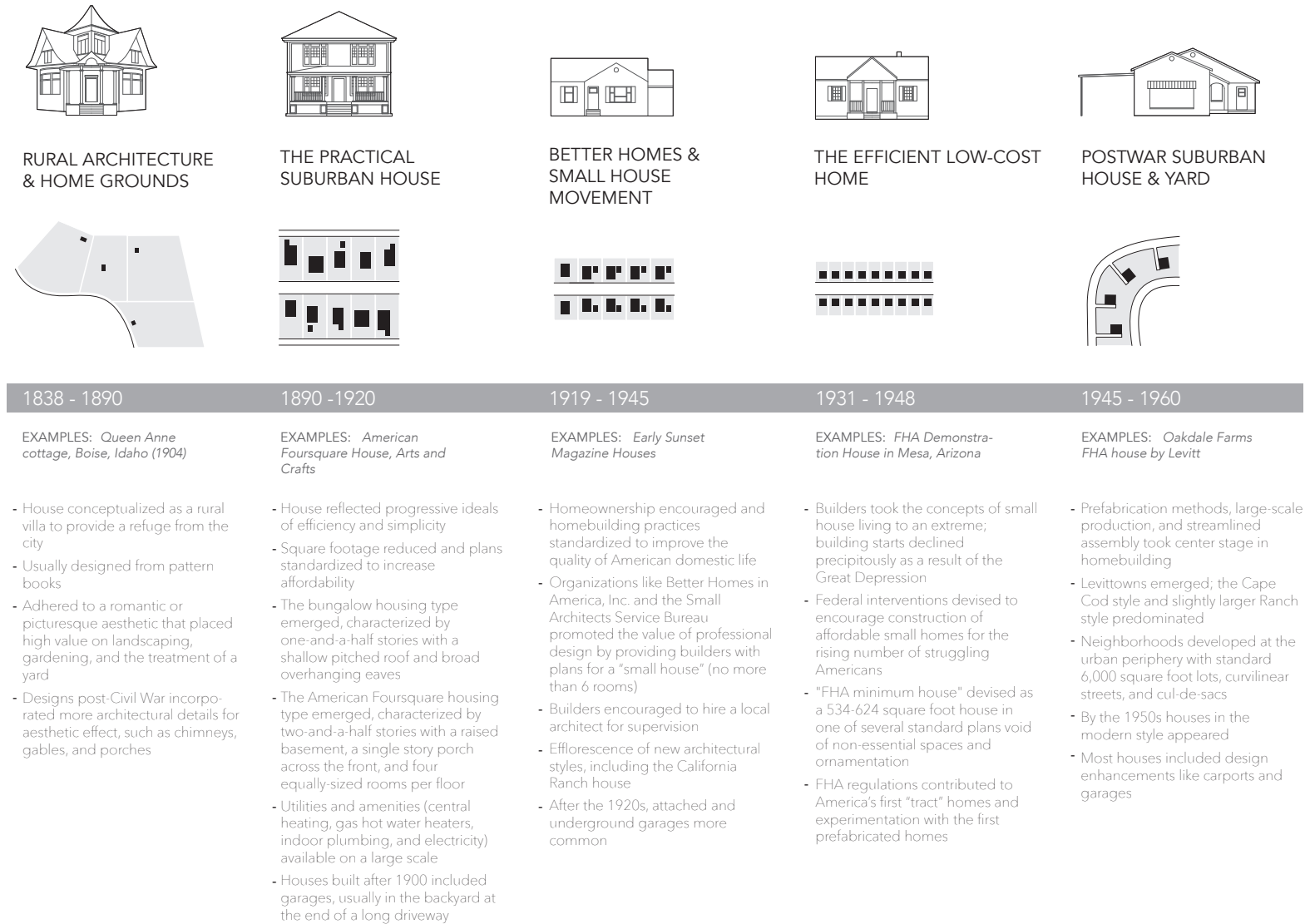


Figure 4.4 Ames and McClelland's typologies of single-family home design from 1838-1960. Illustrations by Kara Moore



BORDERLANDS

PICTURESQUE ENCLAVES

STREETCAR BUILDOUTS

MAIL-ORDER & SELF BUILT SUBURBS

1820 - 1860s

EXAMPLES: *Cambridge and Somerville (Boston)*

- 1-2 miles from city center
- Picturesque transitional ground between city and country
- Pastoral charm
- Inhabited by mix of social classes

1850 - 1920s

EXAMPLES: *Llewellyn Park (West Orange, New Jersey); Riverside, Illinois*

- Built around curving roads that followed irregular topography
- Housing constructed around shared open space
- No fences
- Lots not standardized
- Home + nature + community (triple dream)

1870 - 1910s

EXAMPLES: *Sunset District (San Francisco, California); Fair Haven area (New Haven, Connecticut); Grossdale, Illinois (now Brookfield)*

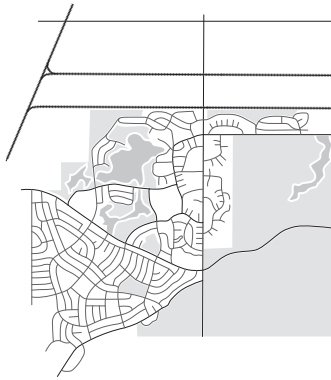
- Built around omnibus and streetcar lines
- Housing often built by owners or several small builders (seldom a single builder for an entire subdivision)
- In the West there is a preference for bungalows and single-family cottages
- Small front and rear yards

1910s -1945

EXAMPLES: *Santa Monica, California; Chagrin Falls Park (Cleveland, Ohio); Eight Mile-Wyoming neighborhood (Detroit, Michigan)*

- Marked by entrepreneurial spirit
- Resulted in hodge-podge of architectural styles
- Constructed further from city center
- Targeted to mass audience
- Do-it-yourself spirit
- Often found in African-American suburbs
- Often resulted in garage suburbs (only a garage was built on the lot)

Figure 4.5 Hayden's typologies of single-family subdivision design from 1820-2003 (For more detailed information see Appendix C) Illustrations by Kara Moore

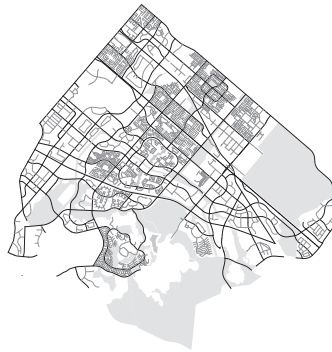


SITCOM SUBURBS

1940s - 1970s

EXAMPLES: Levittown, New York; Lakewood, California (Mark Taper, Ben Weingart, and Louis Boyar); Park Forest, Illinois; Mar Vista, California (Fritz Burns-1939)

- Homogenous in terms of age, race, and income
- Driven by need for war worker housing
- Shift to private sector for home construction marked by large developer-builders
- Emphasis on rapid construction to meet demand
- Standardization in design and production
- Restrictive covenants regarding race
- No master planning



EDGE NODES

1950s - 1990s

EXAMPLES: Tysons Corner (Virginia); Orange County, California (South Coast Mall); Irvine, California; Columbia, Maryland; King of Prussia, Pennsylvania

- City marked by more jobs than bedrooms
- Perceived by population as one place
- Evolved from automotive building types
- Rooted in roadside commerce (fast food restaurants and gas stations, for example)
- Commercial development beyond the edge of existing development
- Aided by development of interstate highway system
- Resulted in rise of the shopping mall and big box retail



RURAL FRINGES

1980s - 2003

EXAMPLES: Tracy, CA (outside San Jose); Tuxedo Park, New York; Park City, Utah

- Appeared just outside metropolitan counties
- Rejection of industrial city and crowded suburb
- Desire to escape cities and return to small town feel
- Marked by long commutes to work
- Encouraged by telecommuting
- Mix of new residents in old places
- Mix of housing types including trailers, tract homes, retirement communities, and tract mansions

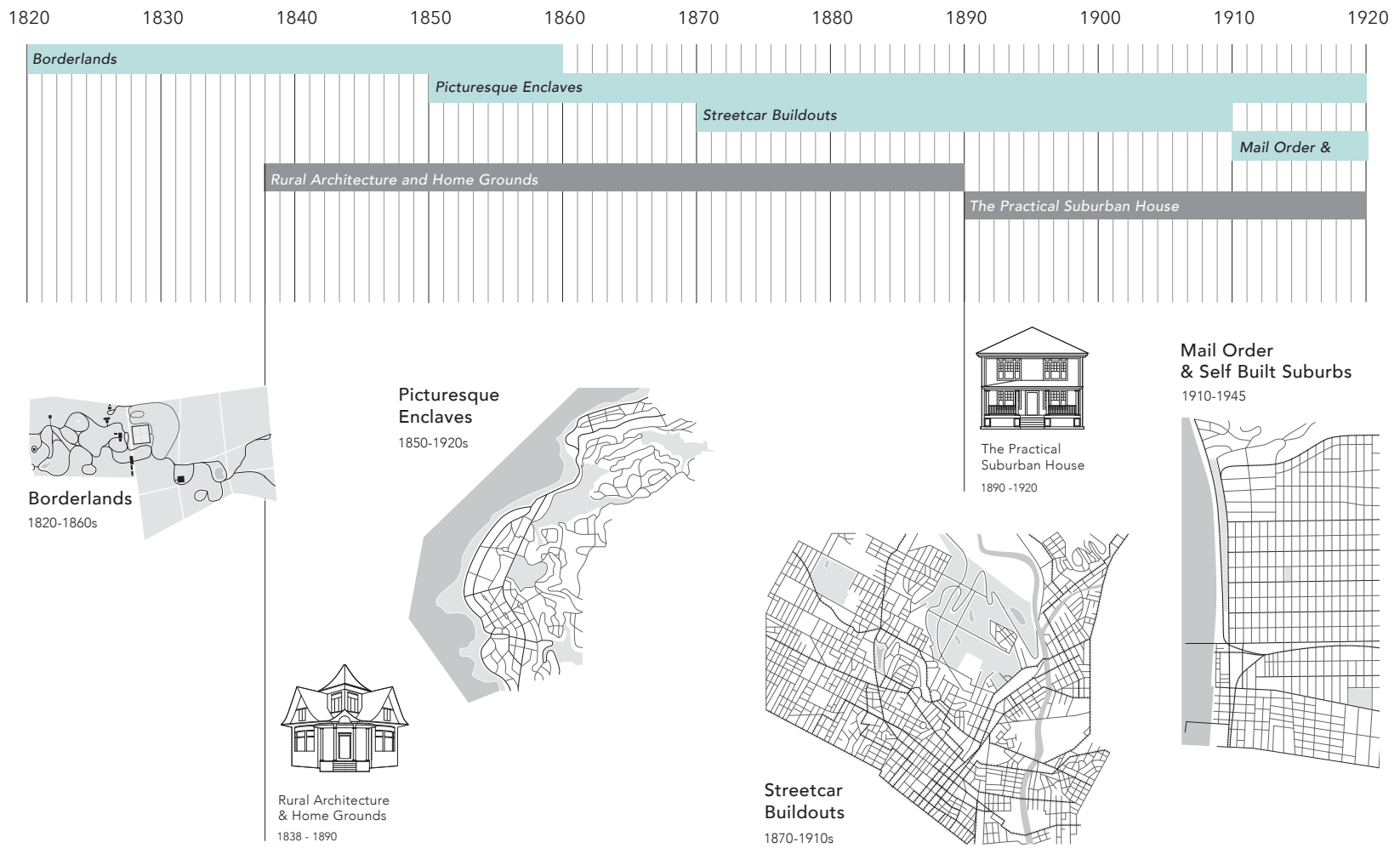
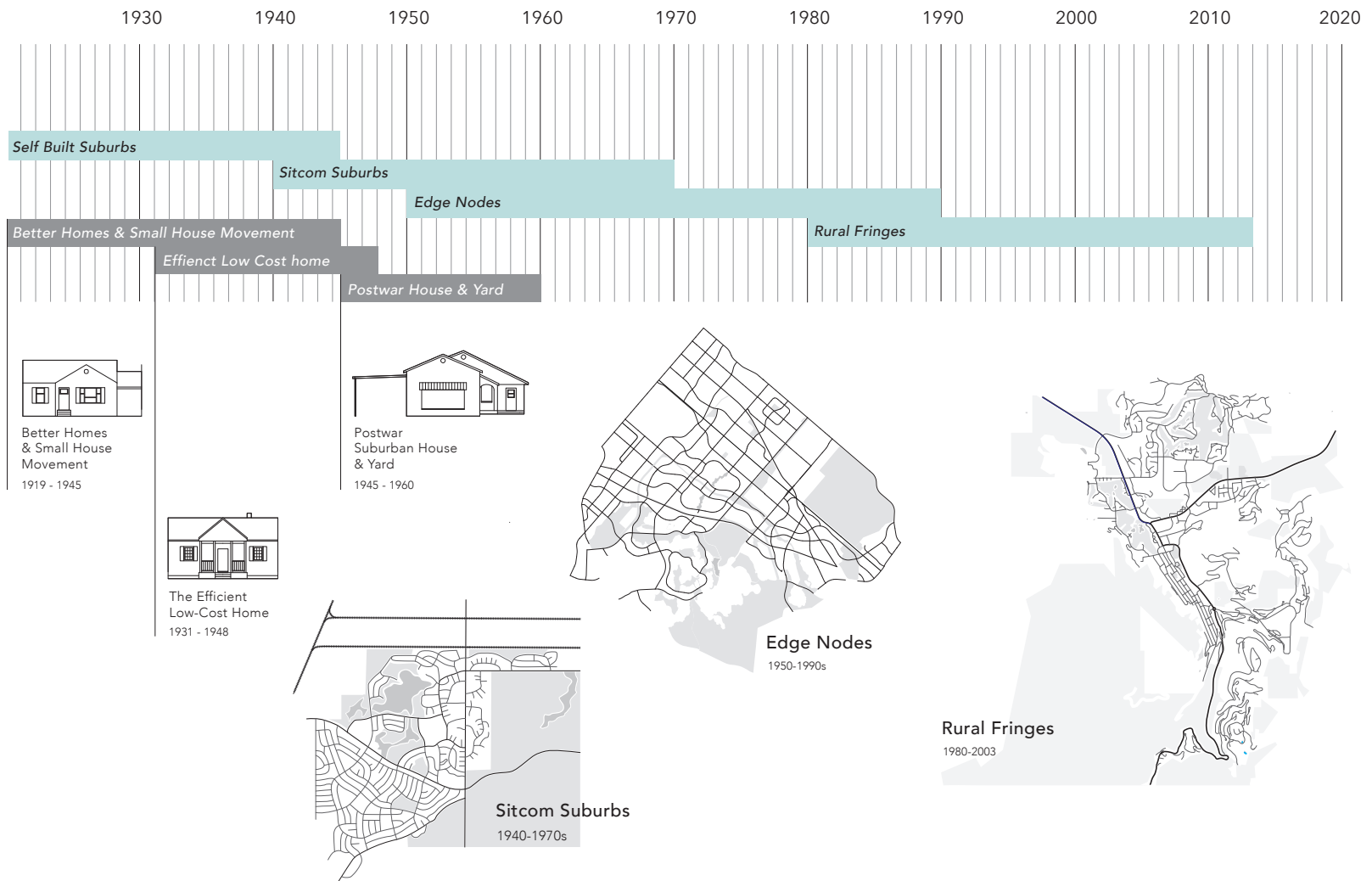


Figure 4.6 Timeline of Ames and McClelland and Hayden typologies. Illustrations by Kara Moore



epochs identified by Hayden and the National Parks Service (Figure 4.7).³

There is a steady drop off in existing homes constructed post-1965, reflecting the fact that the City of Los Angeles largely had achieved build-out by that time. Developing large tracts of land for single-family housing was no longer viable within city limits, resulting in infill and smaller development projects through the end of the century (Figure 4.8).

Interestingly, the number of existing homes built post-1980 mirrors the proportion of pre-World War I homes: about 30,000 or 7%.⁴ For the purposes of our study, this data demonstrates that the majority of existing housing stock in the City of Los Angeles corresponds to the Better Homes and Small House Movement and Postwar Suburban House and Yard phases, with some examples of Practical Suburban Houses. We expect these housing typologies to cluster in neighborhoods characteristic of the Mail Order and Self-Built Suburbs and Sitcom Suburbs phases of development, with a scattering of Streetcar Buildouts.

Single Family Housing Construction by Year

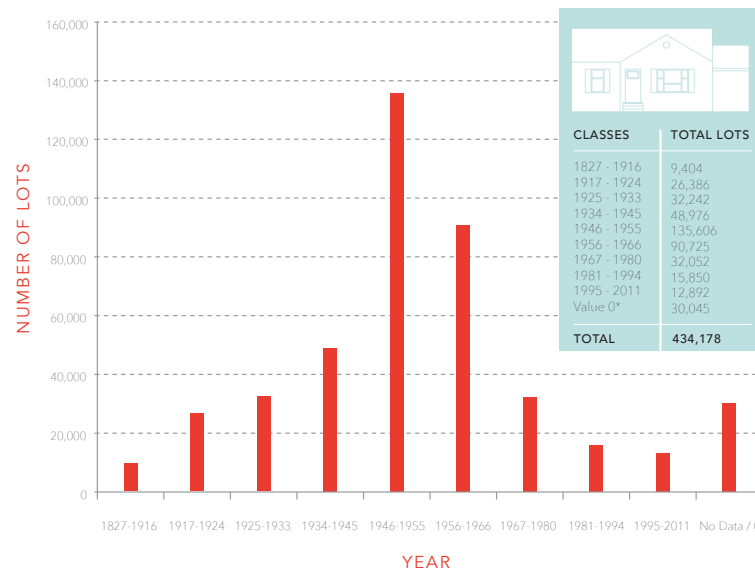


Figure 4.7 Number of existing single-family parcels in City of Los Angeles classified by structure built year

Methods

Using the aforementioned typologies, we conducted site analyses of six single-family lots in different Los Angeles neighborhoods to test whether optimal housing types for backyard home development exist, and to determine what design and regulatory constraints have the greatest impact on backyard home building potential. First, we identified neighborhoods that represent different phases of home construction. With Ames and McClelland's typologies as a guide, we located neighborhoods with single-family homes from 3 periods: the Better Homes and Small House Movement (1919-1945), the Efficient Low-Cost Home (1931-1948), and the Postwar Suburban House (1945-1960).⁵ In identifying neighborhoods for study we selected only those on relatively flat land, as hilly geography adds considerable complexity to backyard home construction (removing from study contention neighborhoods like Pacific Palisades and Hollywood Hills). We also narrowed our search to include neighborhoods that were not part of a Historic Preservation Overlay Zone (HPOZ), as these planning districts include detailed design requirements for backyard homes that will inhibit their implementation on a broad scale (removing from study contention neighborhoods like Country Club Park). After considering these exclusionary factors we narrowed our analysis to the following six neighborhoods representing three design epochs (Figure 4.9).

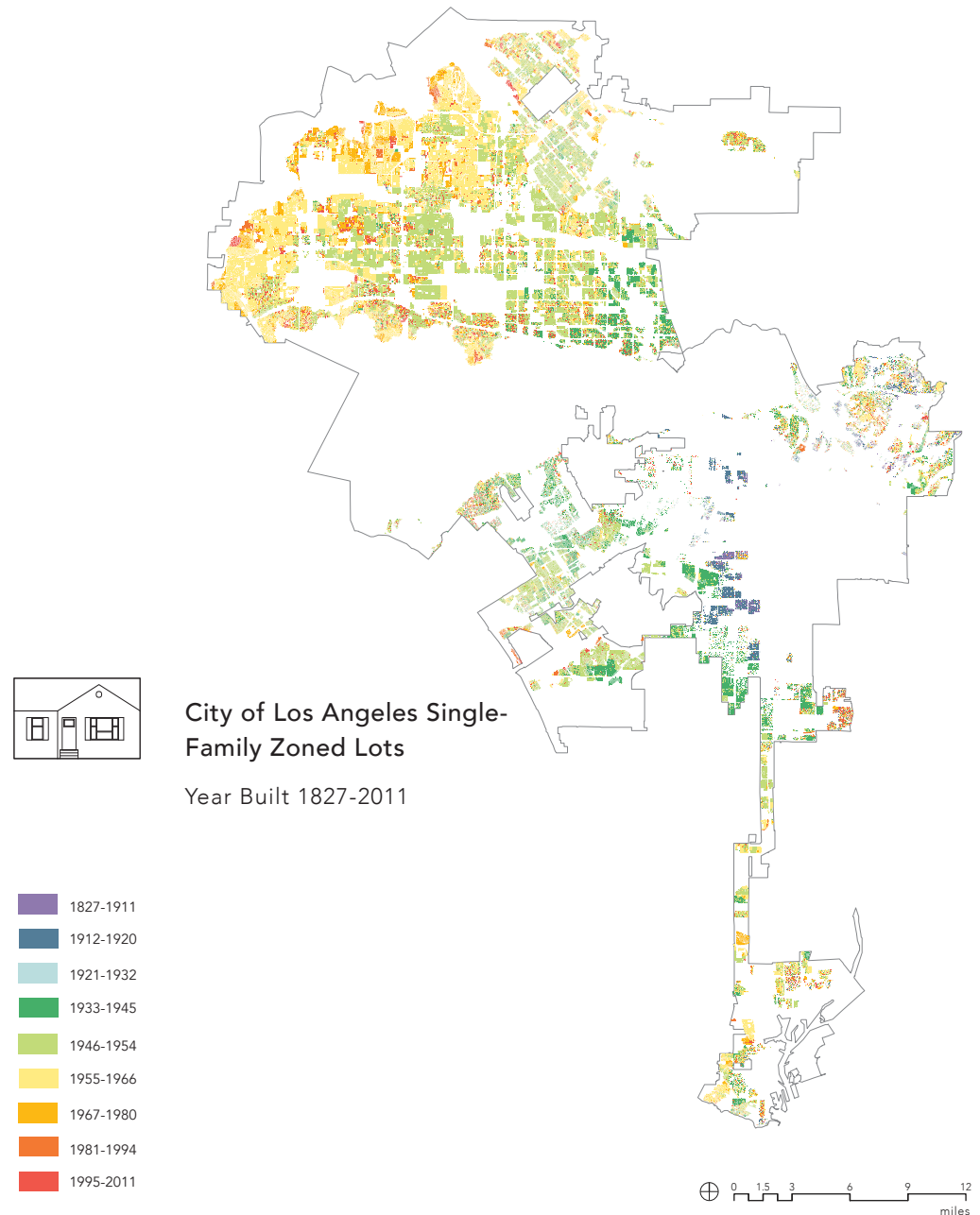


Figure 4.8 Single-family parcels in Los Angeles classified by structure built year, 1827-2011

- Better Homes and Small House Movement: Leimert Park and Van Nuys
- The Efficient Low-Cost Home: Hollywood
- Postwar Suburban House: Westchester, Panorama City, and Mar Vista

Once study neighborhoods had been determined we used GoogleEarth and Zimas to conduct an in-depth examination of a square-mile single-family residential area within each neighborhood, noting lot and alley configurations, lot dimensions, and lot locations. We then identified a single lot that was typical of the neighborhood for closer consideration. Next, we diagrammed each of the six selected lots and developed schematic architectural drawings to visualize potential configurations of a backyard home with parking on each lot. To develop these visualizations we used AutoCAD and GoogleEarth software, while adhering to Los Angeles Building and Safety Code requirements for accessory dwelling units (see Appendix B). Finally, we assessed whether a backyard home could be constructed according to existing planning regulations and building codes, and identified which site configurations or regulations limited development. Full compliance with existing regulations was not a mandate of this research; we were most interested in identifying those constraints most limiting and liberating to backyard home construction, in order to develop policy recommendations.

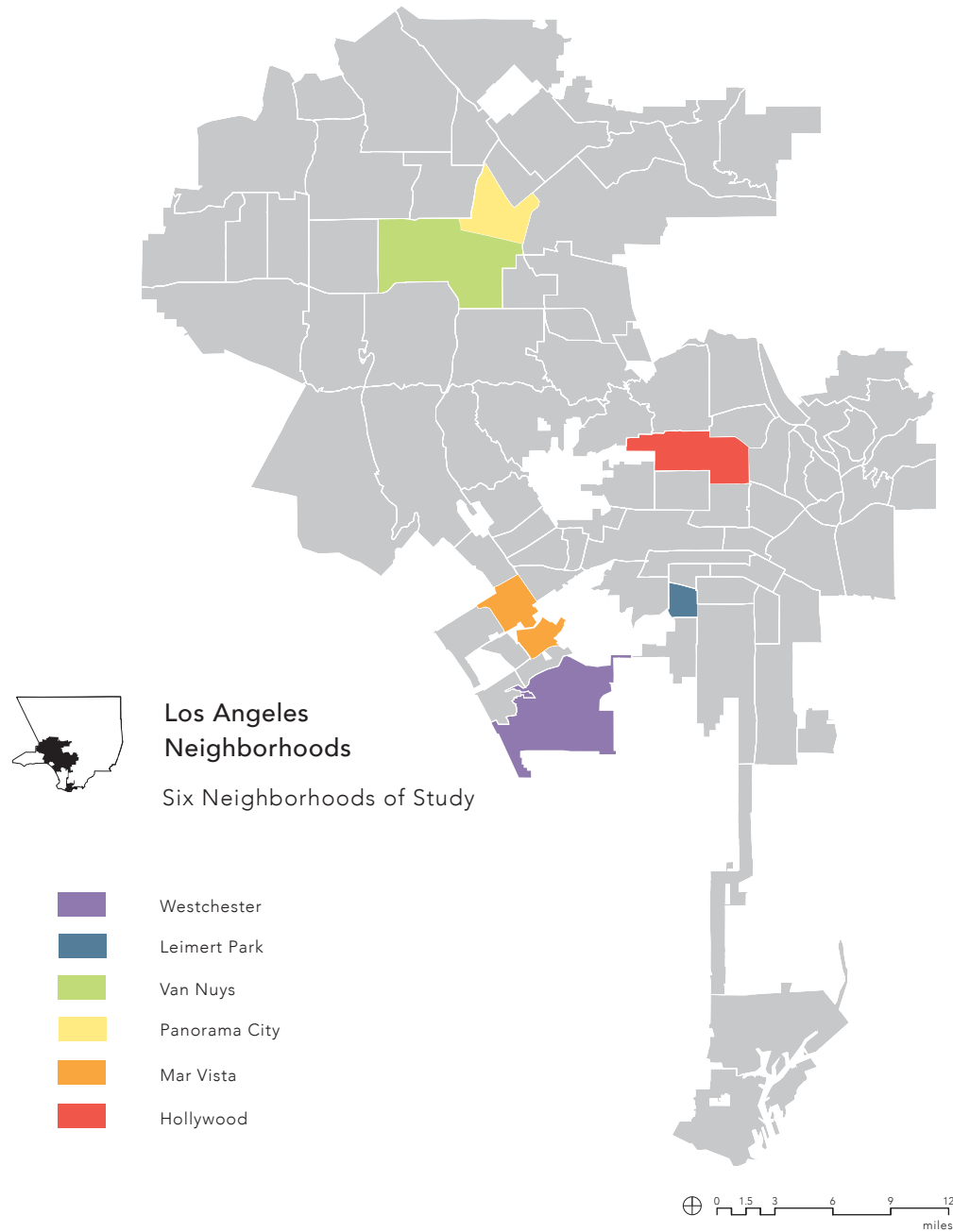


Figure 4.9 Map of City of Los Angeles study neighborhoods

Study Neighborhoods: Context

LEIMERT PARK

Beginning as soybean fields, the land currently known as Leimert Park once belonged to the daughter of land baron “Lucky” Baldwin and was part of Rancho La Cienega O Pao de la Tijera. Bought by San Francisco developer Walter Leimert in 1928, the land was subdivided and became one of the first comprehensively planned communities in Southern California.⁷ Leimert, who was also responsible for developing Baldwin Hills, Beverlywood, Cheviot Hills, and parts of Hollywood, Glendale, and East Los Angeles, conceived of Leimert Park as a community for low and middle-income families.⁸ The neighborhood includes a range of architectural styles that were typical of the Small House Movement, including Spanish colonials and postwar bungalows, as well as homes designed by notable architects Roland Coate, Richard J. Neutra, and Sumner Spaulding.⁹ Here, houses and lots are quite small with detached garages, while residential blocks are long and punctuated by a semi-regular street grid (Figure 4.10).

VAN NUYS

Named after Dutch banker and farmer Isaac Newton Van Nuys, this neighborhood was first developed for residential use in 1911.¹⁰ Van

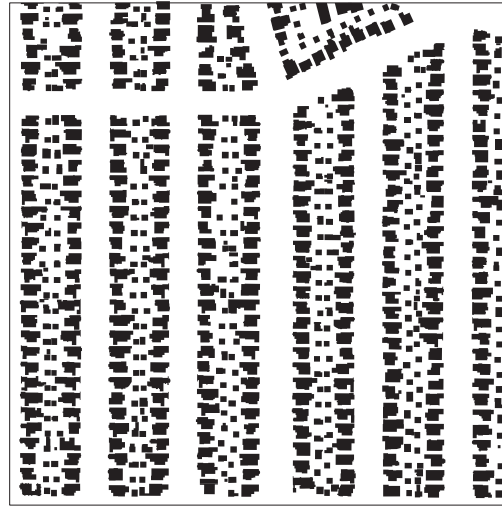


Figure 4.10 *Leimert Park*

Nuys purchased the land when he moved to California from Long Island in 1865 but did not begin developing it until 1896 with the construction of the Van Nuys Hotel.¹¹ Residential development took off after Van Nuys began selling individual lots in 1911, resulting in several stages of housing development. Like Leimert Park, residential blocks are long and structured around a regular street grid, yet housing here shows greater variation (Figure 4.11). Most lots are narrow and long, producing ample backyards that occasionally support a detached garage.

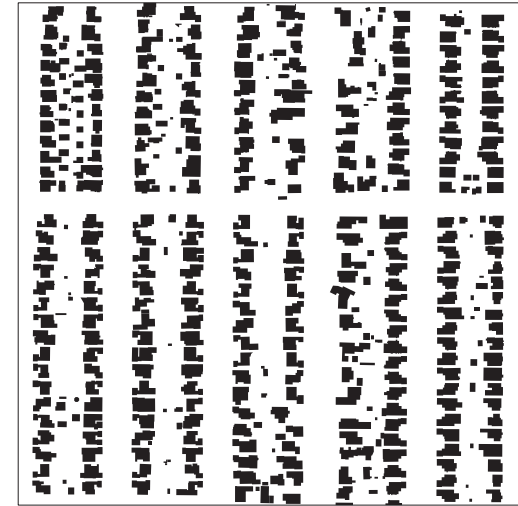


Figure 4.11 *Van Nuys*

Houses vary in size and lot coverage, indicating modern renovations and the mixed nature of original construction in self-built suburbs.

HOLLYWOOD

Sensing a land boom in the late 1800s Henry and Daida Wilcox, who were known for barley farming, purchased land in 1887 and named the area Hollywood.¹² Unfortunately, the real estate market went bust the same year, and Daida and her second husband struggled to sell lots and

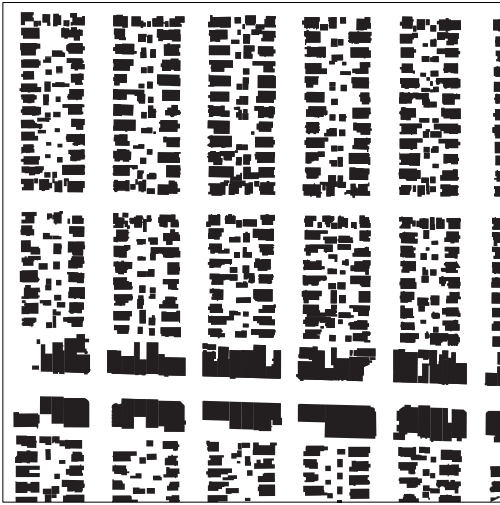


Figure 4.12 *Hollywood*

develop the land for several decades. By 1903 the community voted to incorporate as a city, only to realize by 1910 that their ongoing water struggles could only be resolved by annexation to Los Angeles. In 1907 the film industry began relocating to Los Angeles, and Hollywood again appeared on the edge of a boom. By 1911 over a million dollars in new homes went up, largely because of C.E. Toberman's knack at taking over other people's failed residential subdivisions and reviving them.¹⁴ Despite protests from Hollywood's original residents, the arrival of the film industry launched a housing and commercial development boom that continued even during the Great Depression in the 1930s. Homes and



Figure 4.13 *Westchester*

lots here tend to be compact, with detached garages, and are usually subdivided into small blocks in a regular grid pattern (Figure 4.12). Lots along transportation corridors tend to support commercial uses, while some have been renovated to accommodate small multi-family housing.

WESTCHESTER

Developed in the 1930s by Fritz Burns, president of Kaiser Community Homes, and Fred Marlow, the Westchester district supported more than a thousand homes by 1945.¹⁴ Burns and Marlow strategically transformed former beanfields

in the Westchester area into middle-income housing for workers affiliated with nearby Mines Field (present-day Los Angeles International Airport), Northrup Gruman, North American Aviation, and Loyola Marymount University.¹⁵ Postwar demand spurred Westchester builders to complete 10,000 new homes by 1947. Burns, along with Henry Kaiser, deployed production line techniques that Kaiser perfected in wartime ship-building. They established a home-building factory for every component of housing, from roof trusses to plumbing and cabinetry. The result was a landscape of small, bare bones houses which have since undergone all forms of expansion and transformation.¹⁶ Though lots in Westchester are small, most houses are slightly larger than those found in Hollywood, Leimert Park, or Van Nuys, and many have detached garages. Blocks tend to be long and irregular, although cul-de-sacs are not yet a major feature of neighborhood design (Figure 4.13).

PANORAMA CITY

Like parts of Westchester, Panorama City was developed by Henry Kaiser and Fritz Burns as a post-war Levittown-type of development.¹⁷ Previously known as Panorama Ranch, one of the largest dairy farms in Southern California, Kaiser and Burns again put into practice mass production and standardization techniques.¹⁸ Two thousand workers labored in synchrony to build this 2000-unit self-contained community where housing was integrated with schools, recreation

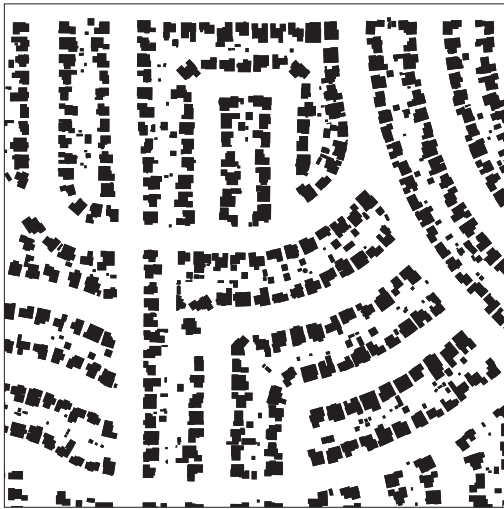


Figure 4.14 *Panorama City*

sites, healthcare facilities, churches, and a commercial center.¹⁹ The prefabricated “City in Itself” was so popular that salesman Herb Lightfoot was able to sell 23 homes on a single Sunday.²⁰ Curvilinear streets and irregular blocks predominate in this neighborhood of medium-sized houses on medium-sized lots, with a mix of detached and attached garages (Figure 4.14).

MAR VISTA

Mar Vista has a long, colorful, and well documented history. Though the area had originally been occupied by the Tongva tribe, the King of Spain granted it to the Machado and Talamantes

families for cattle ranching in 1819. Known as Rancho La Bayona, this land was parsed and ceded to other individuals throughout the 1800s, including Los Angeles’ first mayor Benjamin D. Wilson, either through land sales or to settle debts. By 1924 a chamber of commerce had been organized in the slow-growing Ocean Park Heights community, which changed its name to Mar Vista. Civic leaders in neighboring communities of Santa Monica and Venice attempted to annex Mar Vista on several occasions, but the community ultimately chose to become the 70th annexation to the City of Los Angeles in 1927. At the time of annexation, most of Mar Vista was still farmland and became known as the “Lima Bean Belt” of the nation. Mormon real estate developer George McCune is often credited with the development of Mar Vista, naming many of the streets after Mormon religious figures and lobbying for the Los Angeles Latter-Day Saint’s temple to be constructed on Mar Vista Hill (it was later constructed in a more central location). During the 1940s the community saw extensive growth associated with nearby defense industries such as Douglas Aircraft Company. Several housing developments were constructed, including the Westdale Trousdale Estates (developed by Paul Trousdale) and architect Gregory Ain’s innovative Modernique homes, now a historic preservation overlay zone. The Westdale development was founded in 1947 with the construction of 450 single-story tract homes while the Gregory Ain tract comprises 52 structures of a planned 100.²¹ Parts



Figure 4.15 *Mar Vista*

of Mar Vista are marked by irregular blocks and curvilinear streets, including some alley-adjacent lots (Figure 4.15). Homes range from small to large with a few detached garages, while lots are generally spacious.

Findings: A Game of Inches

In keeping with our hypothesis, neighborhoods characterized by small homes on large lots are conducive to building backyard homes. However, contrary to our hypotheses, the typological analysis demonstrated that backyard home building potential is highly dependent upon post-occupancy homeowner modifications and vestiges of land use regulations. For example, a small Postwar Suburban Home built in 1950 on a large lot is frequently the target of remodeling and expansion by the homeowner, leaving little site area for construction of a backyard home. While certain neighborhoods have all the conditions conducive to backyard homes (e.g. sufficient lot size, flat topography, well positioned existing home), each lot must be evaluated on a case by case basis. The variety and configuration of homeowner additions (room extensions, patios, garages, storage sheds, etc.) and the many complex requirements for accessory dwelling units in the building code (passageways, parking, setbacks, etc.) make backyard home construction a game of inches. In short, although “types” may be discernible among single-family homes in Los Angeles, these types are imperfect predictors of backyard home development. Rather, specific characteristics of individual lots hold the final key to determining whether a property is buildable. By extension, neighborhood typology is an insufficient marker for backyard home development since a particular property in a Postwar

Suburban Development may be just as likely to support a backyard home as a house characteristic of the Small House Movement.

Thus, four basic conclusions can be drawn from this part of the analysis. First, neighborhood development types function as the first gateway to possible backyard home construction. Second, a more stringent gateway concerns post-occupancy home remodeling, which can usurp formerly buildable site areas. Third, the prevalence of home remodeling reduces standardization of backyards in residential developments. Therefore backyard homes must be more customized (rather than standardized) than originally hypothesized. As an extension of these three findings, the study team further concludes that neighborhood development type is unlikely to be correlated with political acceptance or opposition to backyard homes. This conclusion leads to several new hypotheses about backyard home politics. If development-type is independent from backyard home acceptance, any neighborhood could support or oppose their construction. Moreover, lot-by-lot variation may effectively challenge the value of community-level politics and decision-making. This second hypothesis is potentially profound, and is discussed further in later sections.

Policy Implications

Despite the limited utility of a typological analysis, our study produced several key findings that are instructive for backyard home policy citywide. In the course of testing different configurations and architectural solutions for backyard homes we discovered certain trends, regulatory issues, and minimum standards that enable or influence backyard home development. These findings are outlined below using illustrative examples from our study.

Regulatory Challenges: Passageway Requirements

As a lingering remnant of 19th century anti-tenement fire safety provisions, the Los Angeles City Zoning Code requires that every dwelling unit on a single-family lot has a ten-foot wide passageway, clear to the sky, from the front door of the unit to the street (Buitrago, 2005). In the majority of cases the only available ten-foot wide path between backyard and street is the driveway serving the primary unit. A driveway could serve as the requisite passageway, however not all Los Angeles driveways are that wide. The six cases we examined each satisfy this requirement (the minimum driveway width in our sample is ten feet), but many driveways in Los Angeles were constructed prior to citywide formalized codes and may be only eight or nine feet wide. In addition, overhangs, port-cochères, or any other kind of overhead extension into the ten-foot

wide right-of-way would have to be removed. In the case of a passageway less than ten feet wide, the homeowner must request a modification from the city, which includes gathering signatures from all adjoining neighbors indicating their approval of the proposed project.²² Lots located along an alley are not immune to this provision. The code requires a passageway “to the nearest street,” and an alley is not considered a street. Since residential lots with alley access locate garages off the alley, almost none have driveways to meet the passageway requirement. Instead, houses are positioned across the width of the lot with only the minimum side yard setback (Figure 4.16). Therefore, a secondary unit that might be easily located above an alley garage must still have a ten-foot path all the way to the front of the lot, past the original house. This single regulatory provision is the most prohibitive aspect of the building code for construction of backyard homes.

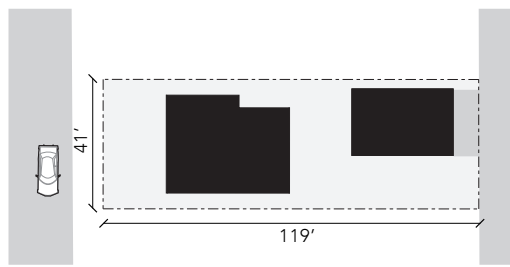


Figure 4.16 Diagram of alley-adjacent lot in Mar Vista; existing condition

Regulatory Challenges: Parking Requirements and Setbacks

As in many commercial and residential developments, parking can make or break a backyard home project. A backyard home addition requires a single uncovered or covered parking space on the property, in addition to spaces required for the main house.²³ We discovered that the accommodation of a second unit depends upon parking configuration. To maximize the construction of backyard homes, admissible parking configurations can include tandem parking, parking below a two-story backyard home, and parking in the rear yard setbacks (applicable only to lots adjoining an alley). In most cases, however, these parking solutions require the demolition of an existing detached garage and relocating it elsewhere on the property. In the case of our Westchester study lot, 1,037 square feet of buildable area is achieved by demolishing the existing garage and crafting a two-story structure with all three required parking spaces below the unit (Figure 4.18b). If two parking spaces are situated below the unit with a third uncovered space located in the rear yard setback, the lot still offers 890 square feet of buildable backyard home area (Figure 4.18c). In this case, retaining the existing garage would be possible, although the backyard home would be much smaller (on 550 square feet buildable area) and require tandem parking (Figure 4.18a). This example demonstrates the general advantage of removing

existing rear yard structures in order to build a backyard home. However, there are two potential disadvantages: first, additional costs in demolition and construction, and second, older garages that were located on or near the property line must conform to current setbacks when reconstructed. The latter can undermine the advantages of a given property for backyard home construction.

Lots adjoining alleys appear to offer more backyard home parking options than standard lots, but in fact face additional requirements that limit their potential for backyard home development. In Los Angeles alleys provide vehicle access to a lot, removing the need for a street-facing driveway. In this configuration houses may be larger and garages are located along alleyways, within the rear and side yard setbacks. If constructing a backyard home on such a lot, the alley may be used for vehicle access, but

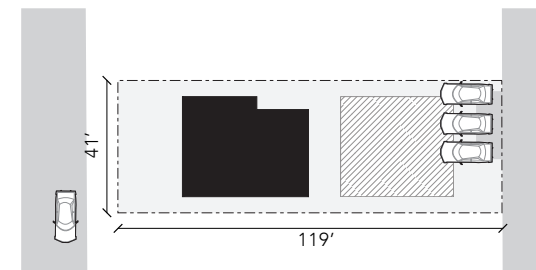
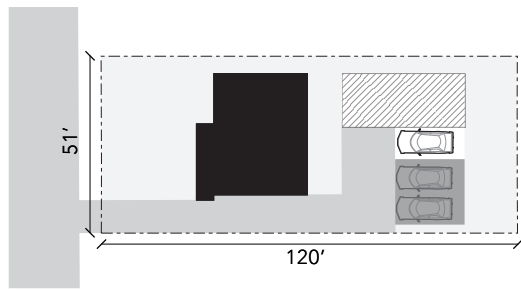
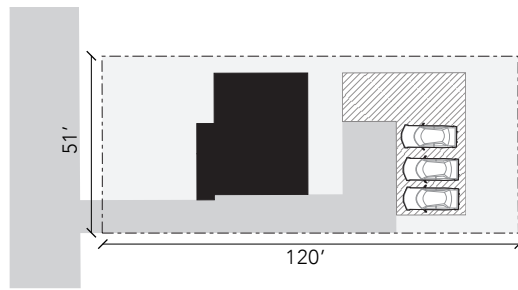


Figure 4.17 Diagram of buildable area on Mar Vista lot when existing garage is demolished

a. Garage Parking Option



b. Demolishing Garage



c. Demolishing Garage

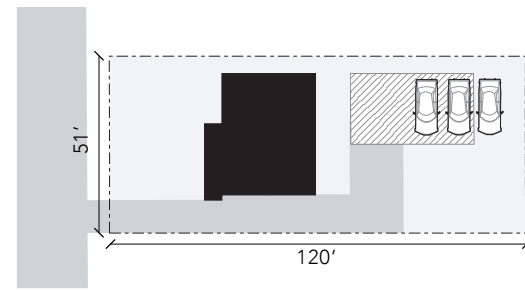


Figure 4.18 Diagram of buildable area and parking configurations on Westchester lot, with existing garage (a) or without existing garage (b) & (c).

the Building and Safety Code requires a twenty-six foot eight-inch (26'-8") space from the rear of any 90 degree parking stall, the most viable parking option for a single-family lot modified with a backyard home.²⁴ Since the standard Los Angeles alley is only twenty feet, alley-adjacent backyard homes require parking stalls and/or a garage to be set back at least six feet eight inches from the rear of the lot line, further reducing buildable backyard area. The Mar Vista case study illustrates that this parking requirement can still allow for a sizable backyard home if the lot length is sufficient (in Mar Vista the lot length is approximately 120 feet) (Figure 4.17).

Minimum Standards: Lot Size

Another key finding of our study is that minimum lot width matters more than lot length in determining backyard home building potential on standard mid-block lots. We initially accepted conventional wisdom that standard dimensions for a single-family lot in Los Angeles are 50 x 150 feet and that any dimensions above and below these measurements are irregular. Instead, we found that the 50 x 150 foot lot is large by Los Angeles standards, and in fact most lots are smaller (see Figure 4.19 in relation to other study lots). Among our study sample, we observed that mid-block lots with less than 45 feet of street frontage are least likely to have sufficient buildable backyard area for a second unit Figure 4.20a-b). However, some narrow lots may still hold the potential for a backyard home

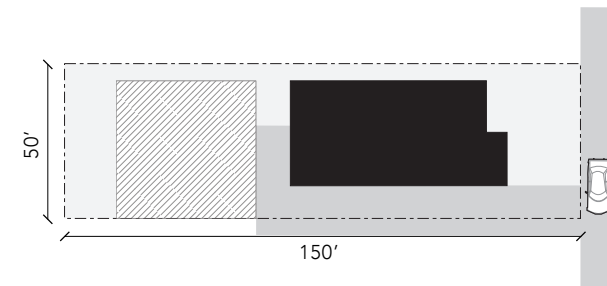
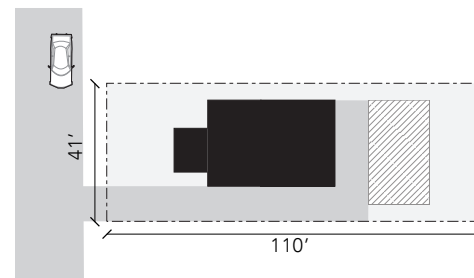


Figure 4.19 Diagram of buildable area on Van Nuys lot when existing garage is demolished

a. Garage Parking Option



b. Demolishing Garage

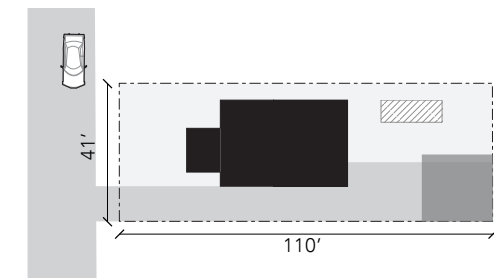


Figure 4.20 Diagram of buildable area on Leimert Park lot with existing garage (a) or without existing garage (b).

if they are adjacent to an alley or positioned on a corner. For example, both the Leimert Park lot (mid block) and the Mar Vista lot (alley adjacent) have widths of 41 feet, but the Mar Vista lot supports more viable options for a backyard home because of vehicle access and parking options off the alley (Figure 4.17). Though the Mar Vista lot is also nine feet longer than the Leimert Park lot, the Leimert Park site is constrained by the driveway access that subtracts from its already limited width. When we compare the Leimert Park lot with another mid-block lot from Panorama City, whose length is only 102 feet, we do not find the same limitations on buildable backyard area as we do among lots with narrow widths. In Panorama City the lot is wide enough (60 feet) that a sizeable backyard home (729 square feet) could be accommodated even without demolishing the garage (Figure 4.21). We see this trend because nearly all lots in Los Angeles are deeper than they are wide. Thus, any subtractions from width (including side yard setbacks, driveways, etc.) effectively deduct a higher percentage of buildable area than subtractions from length (including rear yard setbacks, front yard setbacks, etc.).

Trends: Corner vs. Mid-Block lots

Corner lots show some of the greatest diversity among single-family lots in terms of dimensions, lot coverage, and parking configurations. Given this diversity corner lots are feasible sites for backyard home construction, and may not

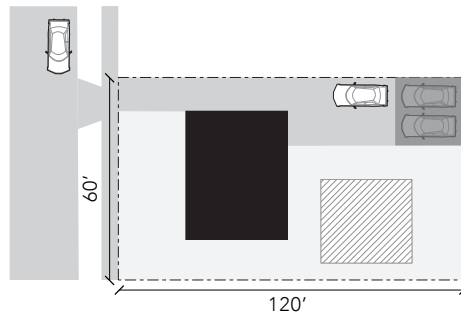


Figure 4.21 Diagram of buildable area on Panorama City lot, without demolishing existing garage

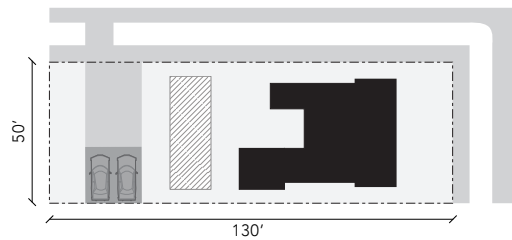
necessitate garage demolition. Corner lots offer some of the most versatile and various parking configurations because they include driveways and vehicle access along the front or side of the lot, whereas standard mid-block lots can only be accessed for parking along their front. According to the Department of Building and Safety, this side access triggers no additional requirements unless the driveway fronts a major or secondary highway. In this case a turnaround must be added because vehicles are not permitted to “back” onto the street.²⁵ As the Hollywood site study demonstrates, a corner lot location offers varied parking options and configurations that may include keeping or demolishing a garage to allow for different sized backyard homes (Figure 4.22a-b).

Implications for the City of Los Angeles

Given the current code complexities surrounding accessory dwelling unit construction in Los Angeles it is no surprise that a large number of illegal units exist (see Chapter 2). Our study suggests that a few, strategic changes to existing requirements could ease the regulatory process associated with adding a backyard home. This might take the form of amendments or alterations to the building code, or a broad, permissive backyard home ordinance. In either case, such regulation should remove the current ten-foot passageway requirement for additional units. Though originally intended to guard against fire danger in overcrowded urban settings, a number of other requirements (fire-rated walls, setbacks, ten foot building gaps, etc.) currently exist to ensure safety provisions. In its current form the passageway requirement inhibits backyard home development unnecessarily, since its safety provisions could be handled in a different manner.

Beyond the elimination of the passageway restriction, the current alleyway parking requirements should be reevaluated. In contemporary house development, alleys are considered an amenity when they are designed carefully. They tend to be narrow, intimate, slow, and even green.²⁶ In addition, when alleys are present, residential streets are unbroken by driveways and garages, giving the neighborhood a pedestrian

a. Garage Parking Option



b. Demolishing Garage

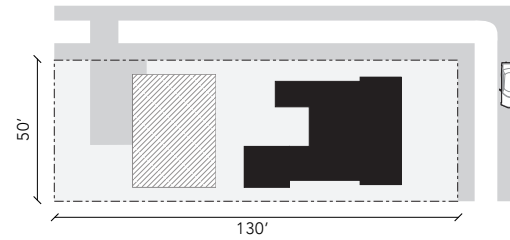


Figure 4.22 Diagrams of buildable area on Hollywood lot, with existing garage (a) or without existing garage (b).

rather than car-oriented face. Reducing the twenty six foot eight inch alley setback to twenty feet would return a significant amount of buildable area to backyards for secondary unit construction.

Perhaps the most significant deterrent to backyard home construction concerns parking. If the city wishes to enable more secondary units, it might consider a reduction in the required spaces for parcels in proximity to public transit. Following current thought that parking is a problem rather than a solution in urban areas, backyard home construction may be an opportunity to begin to challenge Los Angeles' auto-dominated development regulations.²⁷

4.3 Demographic Analysis of Neighborhoods in the City of Los Angeles

Methods

We identified neighborhood councils to test support and concerns about backyard homes through a spatial analysis of single-family lots in the City of Los Angeles. At the outset, the research team identified three demographic variables of importance in determining the relevance of backyard homes for a neighborhood governing body: total number of single-family zoned lots, proximity to transit, and willingness to participate in a workshop. The rationale for selecting and prioritizing these variables is discussed in the next section. Our analysis pointed to five neighborhood councils that met all three demographic criteria. We then gathered additional descriptive data about each council area that might influence opposition or support for backyard homes. These descriptive data points included percent older adult population, single-family residential character, number of large lots, percentage of lots on buildable topography, median building age, and median home values. Each of these variables is discussed in greater detail in the next section, accompanied by a justification for study and methods for gathering and analyzing data.

After collecting the aforementioned data points and creating demographic profiles of each neighborhood council that met our study criteria, we compared the councils and selected three to invite to workshops. In order to best understand how concerns might differ between neighborhoods, we narrowed our selection from six to three based upon variations in median home value, percent older adult population, single-family residential character, and proximity to existing vs. proposed transit. After selecting the councils, we collected additional data on resident race and ethnicity, average household size, and percent owner-occupied units, to better understand how these three neighborhoods compare to one another. Our hypotheses about each of the three selected councils, Westside Neighborhood Council, Harbor Gateway North Neighborhood Council, and Mid-City West Community Council, are discussed in section 1 of Chapter V.

In order to conduct the aforementioned demographic analyses, we acquired parcel-level data (through June 2011) from the LA County Assessor, block-level zoning data from the City of Los Angeles Planning Department, census tract-level demographic characteristics from the US Census (2010) and American Community

Survey (2005-2009), and neighborhood council boundaries from the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment. All data was aggregated to the neighborhood council geography and was computed using Geographic Information Systems software.

Variables of Interest

Total Number of Single-Family Zoned Lots

The number of single-family zoned lots within a neighborhood council is important to this study as a matter of practicality: neighborhoods without single-family zones, such as Downtown Los Angeles Neighborhood Council, have little utility for discussions of backyard homes. Further, neighborhoods lacking a substantial number of single-family zoned lots (which we set at 2000 or more parcels) also have less need to discuss backyard homes as a matter of policy. In these neighborhoods we hypothesized that local leaders would perceive accessory dwelling unit policy as an issue for the few homeowners within their district but not the wider council body.

In order to construct this sample of residential lots, we narrowed a dataset of parcels in the City

of Los Angeles using geographic data on single-family zones, including R1, RU, RS, RE, RA, RZ, and RW zones. We then overlaid these single-family zoned parcels with neighborhood council boundaries to identify the council areas with the largest number of single-family zoned lots. Any council containing fewer than 2000 single-family lots was excluded from further analysis, eliminating a third of the city's 96 councils.

Proximity to Transit

Proximity to transit is an important demographic variable because single-family areas surrounding transit stations offer the most logical sites for intensification of accessory dwelling unit construction in terms of increased density, affordability, traffic and parking reduction, and reduced neighborhood impacts.²⁸ Also, given the City of Los Angeles' current efforts to reshape the city via rail investment and transit-oriented development (TOD) zones, transit is likely one of the strongest factors impacting the permissibility of backyard home development in neighborhood or city policymaking.²⁹

For this analysis we identified neighborhood councils with the highest proportion of single-family lots within a half mile of proposed or existing fixed rail transit. We define fixed rail transit as any light rail or bus rapid transit station within or immediately bordering the City of Los Angeles such that its catchment area includes single-family lots within city boundaries. Existing

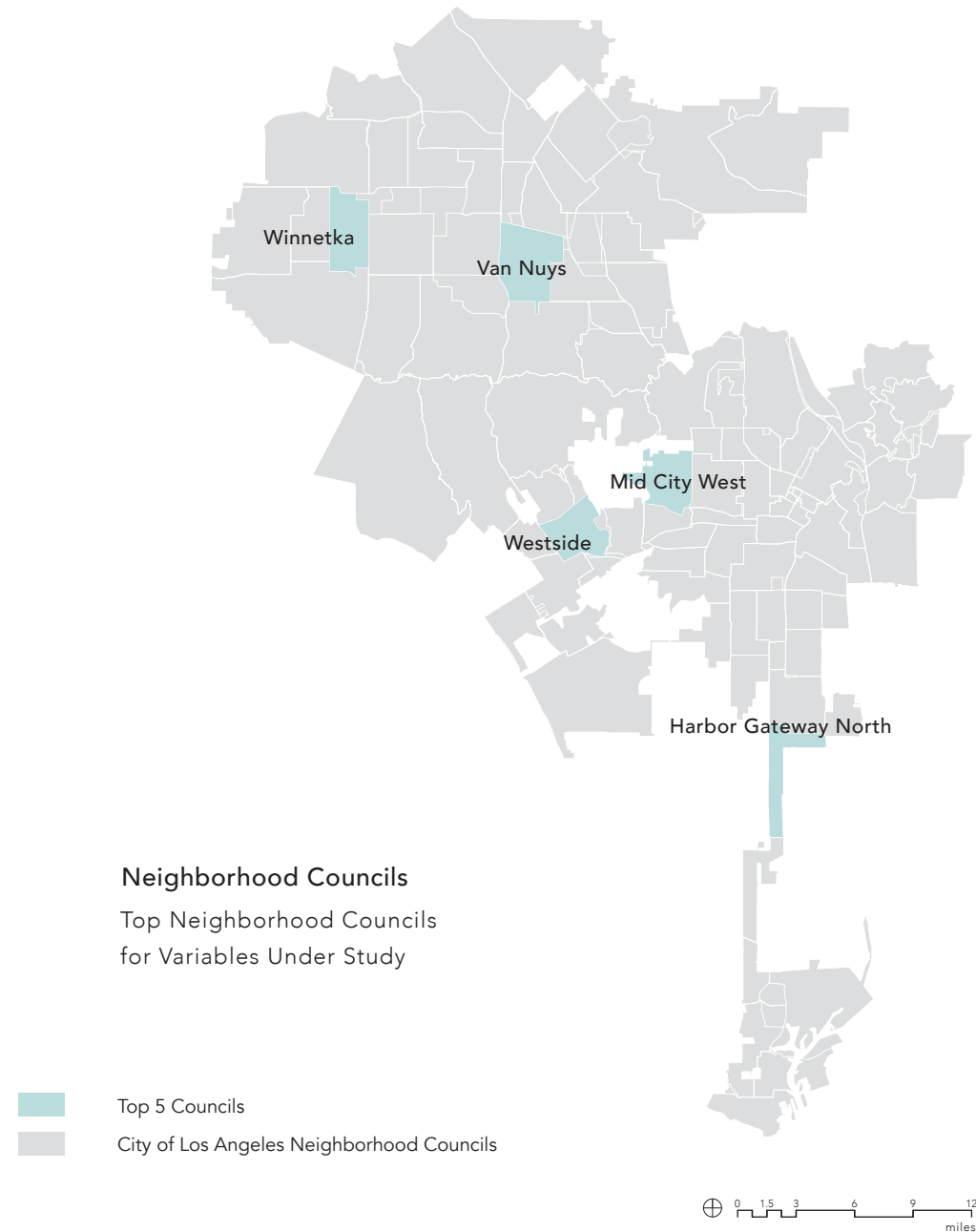


Figure 4.23 Map of City of Los Angeles neighborhood councils selected for study

fixed lines include the Blue, Purple, Red, Green, Gold, Orange, and Exposition lines. Proposed fixed lines include the Exposition extension, Westside subway, Purple line extension, Crenshaw line, and Orange line extension.³⁰ Among proposed lines for which final alignments have not been settled, we selected the station alternative that is currently favored. We examined the number of single-family lots within a quarter, a half, and one mile of each station, but ultimately used the half mile radius (approximately ten minute walking distance) as a barometer of transit proximity (Figure 4.24).³¹ We then aggregated the number of single-family transit proximate lots to the neighborhood council level and excluded those councils with less than 500 lots. This stage of sorting removed an additional 47 neighborhood councils from study consideration.

Interest in a Workshop

This variable is important because councils lacking interest in backyard homes and their associated issues are not ideal sites to test politics and concerns. Willingness to engage is critical to productive conversations that address local concerns and lead to policy solutions. Using responses from the Survey of Neighborhood Councils (Section 3.2 of this report) we identified nineteen neighborhood councils that indicated willingness to participate in a workshop. We overlaid this list of councils with the list produced using the first two variables

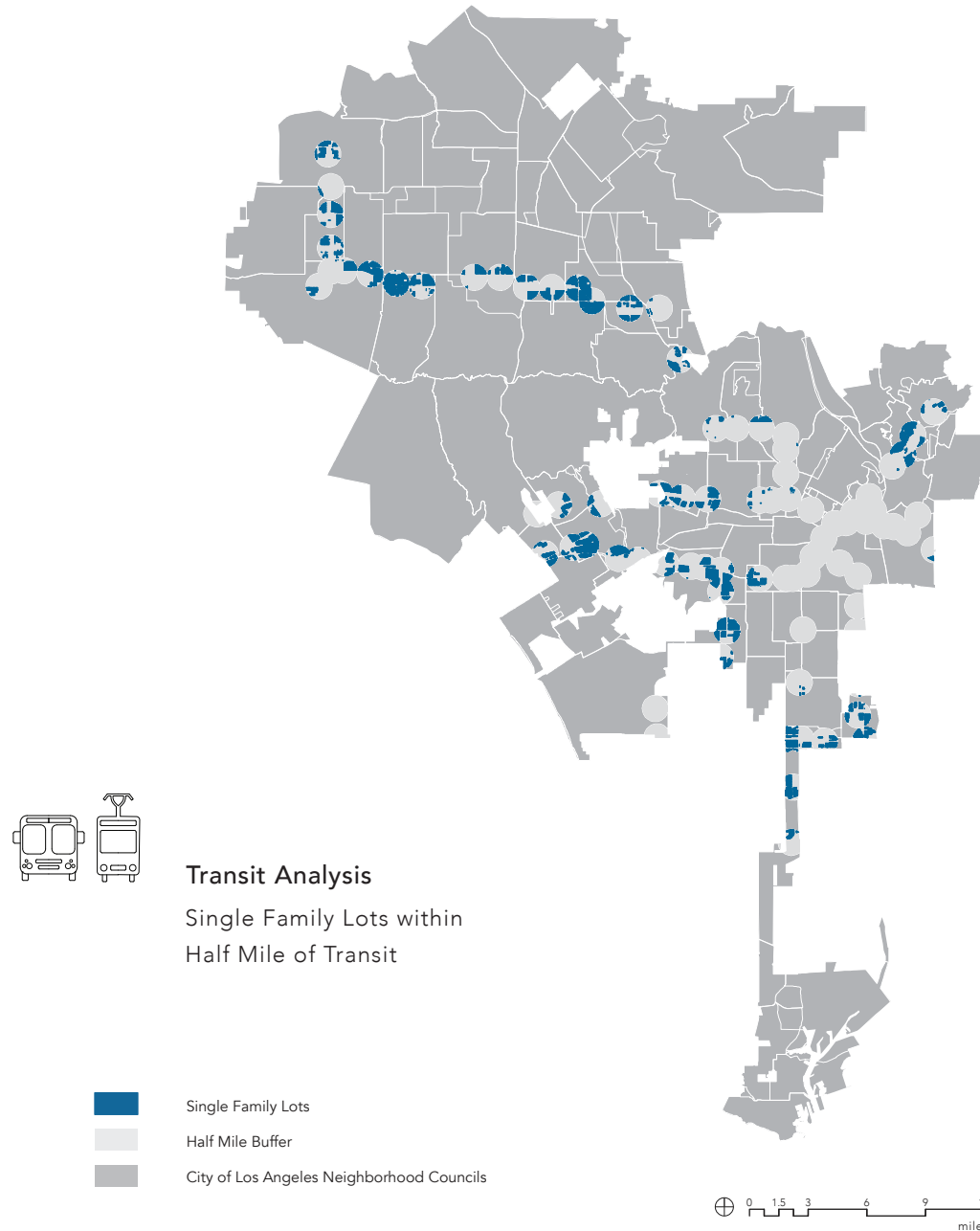


Figure 4.24 Map of City of Los Angeles single-family zoned lots within a half mile of existing and proposed fixed rail transit stops

and identified six councils that met all three of our top demographic criteria.

Older Adult Population

The proportion of older adults residing in a neighborhood council is important to consider because accessory dwelling units can provide housing solutions uniquely tailored to the specific needs of this demographic. As the number of multigenerational households increase, backyard homes can provide independent housing for elderly parents or accommodate a home health worker for an aging resident in the main house.³² According to a 2000 Consumer Preference Survey of Seniors by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), "over one-third of seniors would consider modifying their home to include an accessory dwelling unit if they needed assistance."³³ Some public policy scholars also speculate that the needs of older adults are most likely to resonate with communities, and have the potential to generate broad political support for regulations permitting backyard homes.³⁴ Given this body of existing research, we hypothesized that the proportion of older adults residing in a neighborhood council may impact concerns about backyard homes.

Since we could not match the age of residents to single-family parcels we sorted census tracts within LA County according to the highest percentage of older adults, defined as those age

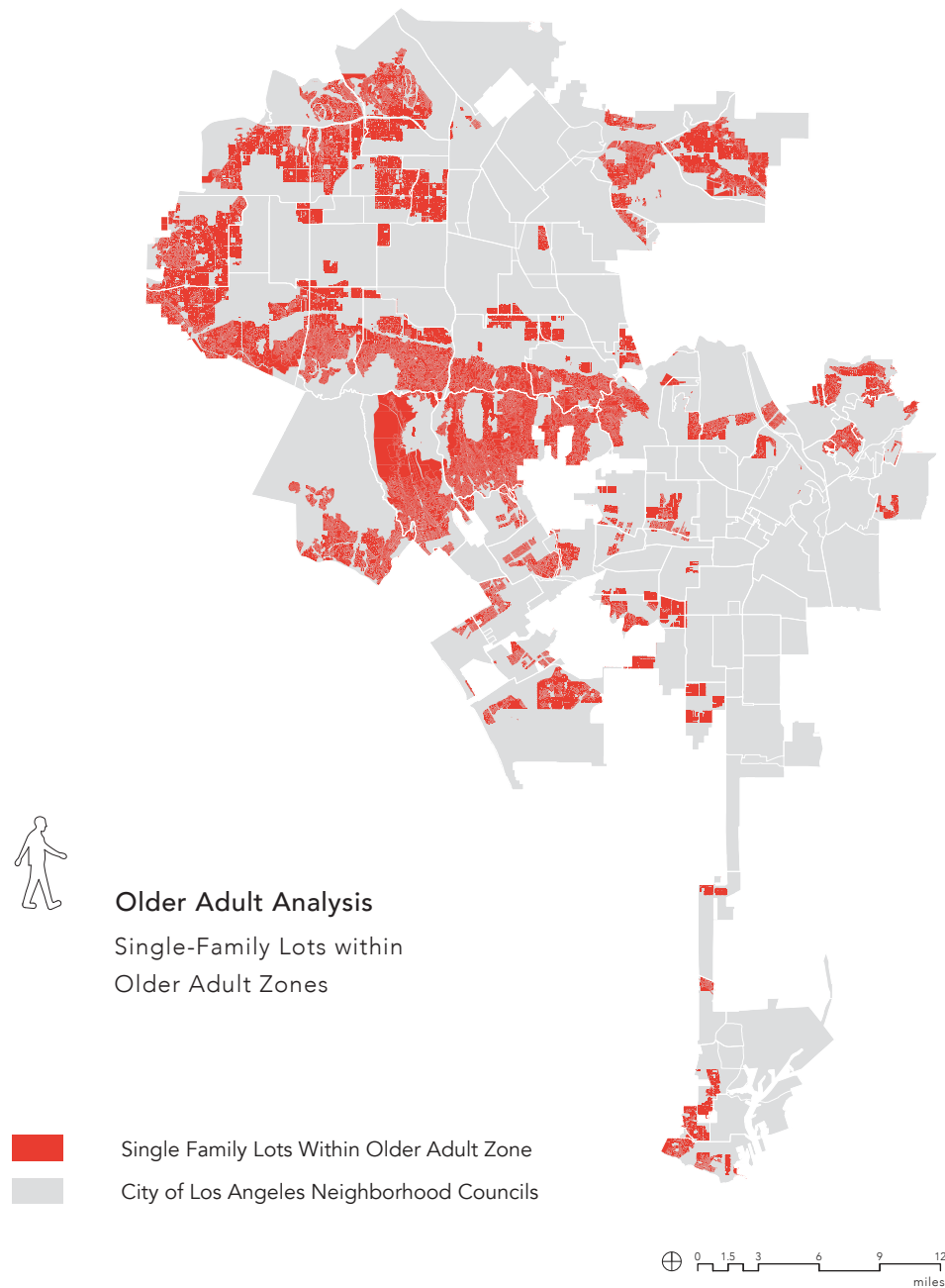


Figure 4.25 Map of City of Los Angeles single-family zoned lots within older adult zones

50 or older. We then isolated the top quartile of tracts for percentage older adults and limited our selection to those tracts that fell all or partially within City of Los Angeles boundaries. Within these “older adult zones” the percentage of the population over the age of 50 ranges from 34-70%. We then identified neighborhood councils most likely to contain older adult residents by determining the percentage of single-family lots within a neighborhood council that also fell within an “older adult zone” (Figure 4.25). Thus, councils with a higher percentage of single-family lots in older adult zones are most likely to house older adult residents.

Single-Family Residential Character

We hypothesized that the degree to which single-family uses dominate a neighborhood will impact concerns about backyard homes. For example, greater exposure to heterogeneous housing types (apartments, condominiums, duplexes, etc.) might demystify the negative externalities associated with higher density living and contribute to greater receptivity for backyard homes. On the other hand, such exposure might exacerbate differences between single-family homeowners and their multi-family neighbors, thus contributing to entrenched opposition to any perceived threat to a neighborhood single-family character.

We measured single-family character by calculating the percentage of residential land zoned for

single-family use.³⁵ This value was determined by calculating the area of single-family zones as a percentage of all residential zones. After the release of 2010 Census data, we augmented the residential character analysis with estimates of the proportion renters versus homeowners within the three selected neighborhood councils—a better gauge of residential heterogeneity in a neighborhood. This data was computed by overlaying census data on homeowners and renters at the census tract geography with neighborhood council boundaries.

Lot Size

As demonstrated through this study’s typological analysis of single-family lots (see Section 4.2: Findings), lot size is a key variable to backyard home feasibility. Neighborhoods with a high proportion of large lots are more likely to experience widespread backyard home construction than neighborhoods with fewer large lots. Using the parcel-level data from the Assessor’s office we divided our single-family sample into small (less than 5,000 square feet), medium (5,000 to 7,500 square feet), and large (greater than 7,500 square feet) lots. We devised these categories after initial analyses determined that 50’ x 150’ (totaling 7,500 square feet) lots are large by Los Angeles standards. We then determined the percentage of large single-family lots within each neighborhood council.

Buildable Topography

Topography is an important variable when studying backyard home concerns among neighborhoods, because uneven terrain is harder to build upon and may pose greater risk to occupants. Using the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection’s fire hazard severity zones (FHSZs) as a proxy for topography, we identified those areas of the City of Los Angeles in very high, high, and medium risk of wildfire damage. In Los Angeles, these zones generally indicate mountain or hillside areas, whose topography and undeveloped land places them at greater risk for both wildfires and mudslides (Figure 4.26). We also identified lots that fell within historic preservation overlay zones (HPOZ), because these special districts involve strict design guidelines that intensify the already complex process of backyard home construction. For the purposes of the present study, we define HPOZs and FHSZs as un-buildable areas for backyard homes. To determine the proportion of buildable single-family lots within a neighborhood council, we calculated the percentage of single-family lots within each neighborhood council that did not fall within an FHSZ or HPOZ.

Median Building Age

Median building age is a helpful descriptive variable for approximating when a neighborhood was developed, and what type of housing stock exists. As shown in section 4.2, when few

post-occupancy modifications have taken place, a home's "year built" implies important typological qualities that impact backyard home building potential, such as garage type, house size, and lot coverage. By examining the median building age of structures on single-family zoned lots, the research team could theorize about which neighborhoods are most likely to accommodate backyard homes. Researchers calculated these values using parcel level data from the LA County Assessor, aggregated to the neighborhood council geography.

Median Home Value

Finally, median home values are important to consider because they tell us about the housing market in a given area. Where values are low, backyard homes may garner greater support because they offer the prospect of increased income as a rental property.³⁶ Conversely, where home values are high, backyard homes may encounter greater opposition or lukewarm responses because they are perceived as threatening or detracting from neighborhood character. To determine the median home value for a neighborhood, the researchers extracted data from the LA County Assessor on the values for all homes sold within each neighborhood council within the previous year (July 2010-June 2011). This process was repeated for the City of Los Angeles. Median home values for each neighborhood were then compared to values for

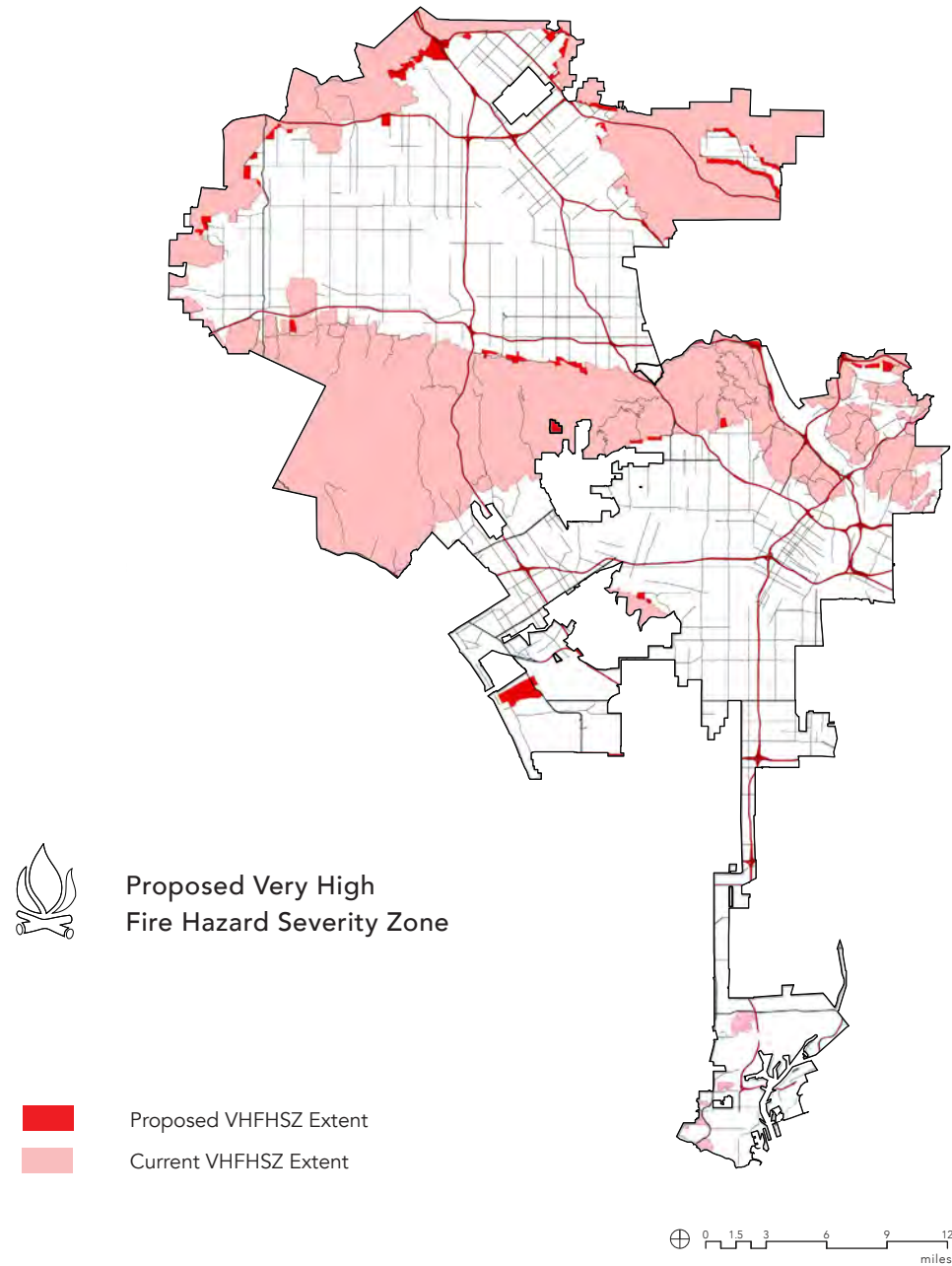


Figure 4.26 Map of fire hazard severity zones (FHSZs) in City of Los Angeles (source: California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection)

Neighborhood Council	Total Single-Family Lots	Total Lots within Half Mile of a Fixed Transit Route	Transit Lots as Percentage of Total	Number of Lots within Half Mile of Existing Stations	Number of Lots within Half Mile of PLANNED Stations	Interest in a Workshop	Percentage Lots within Older Adult Zone (Age 50+)	Percentage Single-Family (sq. ft. of all residential)	Percentage Large Lots (>7,500 sq ft)	Percentage Lots on Buildable Topography (NOT within FHSZs or HPOZs)	Median Building Age	Percentage of City of LA Median Home Value (2010-2011)
Harbor Gateway North	3,890	2,530	65%	2,530	0	Yes	0%	65%	24%	100%	1948	59%
Mid City West	4,359	1,239	28%	0	1,239	Yes	34%	46%	17%	82%	1926	216%
Van Nuys	6,795	1,184	17%	1,184	0	Yes	3%		34%	96%	1950	90%
Westside	5,815	2,356	41%	0	2,356	Yes	62%	79%	21%	100%	1938	239%
Winnetka	8,903	863	10%	863	0	Yes	6%		53%	100%	1956	90%

Table 4.1 Characteristics of neighborhood councils generated through demographic analysis. *Data Source: LA County Tax Assessor Local Roll A, 2010-2011*

the City (\$350,000), and reported as a percentage above or below the city median.³⁸

Findings: Selected Councils

The aforementioned demographic analysis of neighborhood councils in the City of Los Angeles pointed to three communities ideal for focused workshops to test and assess local concerns about backyard homes: Westside Neighborhood Council, Harbor Gateway North Neighborhood Council, and Mid-City West Community Council. All three areas support a sufficient number of single-family homes to merit closer study. Westside has the most single-family zoned lots at 5,815, which places it in the top third of Los Angeles councils for most single-family zoned lots (for this and subsequent data in this section Table 4.1).³⁸ Transit

penetrates each of these neighborhoods, capturing between 28% and 65% of single-family zoned lots within a half mile of a station. Harbor Gateway North boasts the highest total number (2,530) and one of the highest percentages (65%) of transit proximate single-family lots in the City, and is the only selected neighborhood with existing transit: the Blue and Green lines. Mid City West and Westside Neighborhood Councils will soon support fixed rail transit: the Purple Line Extension and Exposition Line, respectively. Additionally, board members from all three councils indicated their openness to a workshop on backyard homes.

These councils are also interesting to study because they differ in demographics and building typologies. While two-thirds of Westside's lots are likely to support an older adult resident, very few of Harbor Gateway North's

lots house older adults. In Westside, single-family zones encompass 79% of residential land, while single-family lots comprise less than half of residentially zoned land in Mid City West. Large lots are rare in each neighborhood (ranging from 17-24%), but median built year data suggests that a variety of housing types occupy these lots. Mid City West houses the oldest structures (half were built before 1926) while Harbor Gateway North supports the newest (half were built after 1948). Mid City West is the only council area with some "un-buildable" lots (18%), due to historic preservation overlay zones. Finally, the selected councils range in home values, from twice the median value in Los Angeles (Mid City West and Westside) to half that same value (Harbor Gateway North).

Policy Implications

Coupled with findings from the typological analysis, this demographic study demonstrates that the diversity and complexity of Los Angeles' single-family fabric limits the number of sites for permitted backyard home construction, reaffirming that current policies are incompatible with the formal qualities and characteristics of neighborhoods. For example, our typological analysis revealed that lot size is a key determinant for backyard home building potential. However, our demographic analysis indicated that neighborhoods with qualities that make them logical for increased backyard home construction, including a critical mass of single-family homes, proximity to transit, and openness to discussion of backyard home policy, support only a handful of lots large enough to accommodate a second unit. Conversely, those areas with many large lots frequently fall within fire zones or hillside areas. In Porter Ranch, for instance, 96% of single-family lots are large enough to support a backyard home (the highest percentage for any neighborhood), but only 35% are located on buildable topography. As another example of these kinds of inconsistencies, we find more than half of the City's single-family homes in one of the least transit-friendly parts of the city: the San Fernando Valley. Here, the potential sustainability benefits of co-locating backyard homes and transit cannot be realized, despite the ample stock of single-family homes.

In lieu of existing regulations, a permissive ordinance that takes account of Los Angeles' existing housing stock is likely to un-lock the benefits that permitted construction of backyard homes can offer, without causing rampant, uncontrolled densification in every single-family neighborhood in the city. Our typological analysis demonstrates that reduced parking requirements would increase legal accessory dwelling unit feasibility on many mid-block lots. From a policy perspective, parking reductions are most logical within close proximity of existing transit. If such a parking reduction were adopted, the impact would be targeted to only those areas most optimal for densification, rather than entire neighborhoods. Within Los Angeles, San Fernando Valley neighborhoods would remain largely unaffected by this change, while other Los Angeles neighborhoods would experience change only where transit station infrastructure is already embedded.

Implications for the City of Los Angeles

In order to test or pilot conditions for a new accessory dwelling unit ordinance (or neighborhood-specific ordinances), the city should look beyond the obvious neighborhoods with high concentrations of single-family housing and look instead to those with demographic and land use characteristics optimal for increased permitted construction of backyard homes. In short, the

Los Angeles neighborhoods with the highest number of single-family zoned lots are not ideal sites for "Phase 1" of new accessory dwelling unit regulations. If we looked to test aforementioned parking reductions on single-family lots within proximity of transit, we would be unwise to test them in the San Fernando Valley, even though this region supports half of all single-family homes in LA. Given this dominance of single-family housing, the Valley might be an ideal location for backyard home proliferation at a later phase, after infrastructure investments in fixed rail transit have spread throughout the region. Some neighborhoods may never be ideal sites to encourage backyard home development. Bel Air/Beverly Crest Neighborhood Council, for example, has the second highest number of single-family lots in the city (15,296), yet its hillside topography places 91% of these lots in fire hazard severity zones (FHSZs). Though this neighborhood supports a large number of single-family lots, public safety dictates that the vast majority should not densify by adding an accessory dwelling unit. Instead, the City should look to test policies in neighborhoods with demographic qualities that hold the potential to amplify the benefits obtained from building a backyard home. Such a targeted approach holds greater promise for meeting the market demand for backyard homes legally (see section 2.2), while realizing the affordable housing and sustainability benefits that these units can provide the city.

Notes

- 1 David L. Ames and Linda F. McClelland, "Historic residential suburbs: Guidelines for evaluation and documentation for the National Register of Historic Places." *U.S. Department of the Interior: National Park Service*, 2002, <http://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/suburbs/index.htm>.
- 2 Dolores Hayden, *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth: 1820-2000* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2003).
- 3 Los Angeles County Assessor, *Local Roll A*, 2010-2011.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 We did not select any examples of Rural Architecture and Home Grounds because no such structures remain on a large scale in the City of Los Angeles today. Similarly, Angelino Heights constitutes one of the only neighborhoods in the city with remnants of the Practical Suburban House phase (1890-1920), but is too small and unrepresentative of current housing stock to warrant detailed analysis.
- 6 Lots were selected both for their representative qualities of all lots in the surrounding subdivision and for visibility with GoogleEarth imagery (for example, lots heavily obscured by trees were not selected).
- 7 Elise Thompson, "Neighborhood Project: Leimert Park," *Laist*, July 15, 2008, accessed December 2, 2012, http://laist.com/2008/07/15/neighborhood_pr_11.php.
- 8 Myrna Oliver, "Walter Leimert Jr., 82; Southland Developer," *Los Angeles Times*, January 30, 2004, accessed October 1, 2012, <http://articles.latimes.com/2004/jan/30/local/me-leimert30>
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Jeremy Oberstein, "Neighborhood Project: Van Nuys," *Laist*, July 27, 2007, accessed December 2, 2012, http://laist.com/2007/07/27/neighborhood_pr_7.php.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Gregory P. Williams, *The Story of Hollywood: An Illustrated History* (Los Angeles: BL Press, 2011).
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Kevin Starr, *Golden Dreams: California in an Age of Abundance 1950-1963* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
- 15 See, for example: Dana Cuff, *The Provisional City: Los Angeles Stories of Architecture and Urbanism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), or Greg Hise, "Home Building and Industrial Decentralization in Los Angeles: The Roots of the Postwar Urban Region," *Journal of Urban History* 19, (1993): 95-125.
- 16 Dana Cuff, *The Provisional City*, 2000.
- 17 David L. Ames and Linda F. McClelland, "Historic Residential Suburbs," 2002.
- 18 Kevin Starr, *Golden Dreams: California in an Age of Abundance*, 2009.
- 19 See, for example: Greg Hise, "Home Building and Industrial Decentralization in Los Angeles," pp. 95-125, or Kevin Starr, *Golden Dreams: California in an Age of Abundance*, 2009.
- 20 Kevin Starr, *Golden Dreams: California in an Age of Abundance*, 2009.
- 21 See, for example: Glen Howell, "History of Mar Vista: 1771-1929," Mar Vista Historical Society, January 30, 2005, <http://www.marvistahistoricalsociety.net/history/timelines/timeline.htm>; or Claudia Luther, "Elevated But Still Within Buyers' Reach," *Los Angeles Times*, October 14, 2007, <http://articles.latimes.com/2007/oct/14/realestate/re-guide14>.

22 Hector Buitrago, *City of Los Angeles Zoning Code Manual and Commentary 4th Ed.*, (Los Angeles: City of Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety, 2005).

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 See: Jennifer Wolch, et al., "The Forgotten and the Future: Reclaiming Back Alleys for a Sustainable City," *Environment and Planning A*, 42(2010): 2874-2896.

27 For example, see: Donald Shoup, *The High Cost of Free Parking*, (Chicago: APA Planners Press, 2005).

28 See: Greater Minnesota Housing Fund, *Building Better Neighborhoods*, 2001; Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberck, and Jeff Speck, *Suburban Nation*, 2000; City of Santa Cruz, *Accessory Dwelling Unit: Manual*, 2003; Friends of San Diego Architecture, *Accessory Dwelling Units Design Competition*, 2005; "Granny Flats Add Flexibility and Affordability," *New Urban News*, 2001.

29 Ethan Elkind, "Rail Alone Can't Reinvent LA," *Los Angeles Times*, January 27, 2014, <http://articles.latimes.com/2014/jan/27/opinion/la-oe-elkind-los-angeles-rail-transit-20140127>.

30 Other proposed lines such as the Gold line extension were considered but their stations and catchment areas fell outside the City of Los Angeles' boundaries.

31 We chose the half mile geography instead of a quarter and one mile because the half mile is generally considered a walkable radius to fixed rail transit. This half mile geography is also being used by the LA County Department of Regional Planning to define the extent of transit-oriented districts in which density bonuses, parking reductions, and other incentives are permitted.

32 See: Peter Calthorpe, *Next American Metropolis*, 1993; Dolores Hayden, *Redesigning the American Dream*, 1984; Dowell Myers and Elizabeth Gearin, "Current Housing Preferences," pp. 633-59.

33 AARP and APA, *Accessory Dwelling Units: Model State Act and Local Ordinance*, 2000.

34 See, for example: Patricia B. Pollak, "Rethinking Zoning to Accommodate the Elderly in Single-Family Housing," pp. 521-539.; or Patricia B. Pollak and Alice N. Gorman, *Community-Based Housing for the Elderly*, 1989.

35 In addition, we initially calculated the proportion of land within a neighborhood council zoned for single

and multi-family uses, but found minimal variation across study councils. With a few exceptions, residentially zoned land ranged from 45-55% of total council area.

36 See: Anthony Downs, "The Advisory Commission on Regulatory Barriers to Affordable Housing," pp. 1095-1137; Edward L. Glaser and Joseph Gyorko, "The Impact of Zoning on Housing Affordability," pp. 21-39.

37 In addition, we calculated the median rents for each council as a percentage of the median rents for the City of Los Angeles, but determined that this variable did little to augment our analysis.

38 Woodland Hills-Warner Center Neighborhood Council boasts the most single-family zoned lots in the City of Los Angeles, with 17,929. Of the top 10 councils for most single-family zoned lots all but two are located in the San Fernando Valley, reinforcing this area's history of single-family housing development.



ACTION RESEARCH

NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL WORKSHOPS

Introduction

Given the controversy (Chapter 1), diverse concerns (Chapter 3), and building code complexities (Chapter 4) associated with constructing a backyard home, this research team asserts that localized, neighborhood-scale demonstration projects and other creative policy solutions hold the greatest potential for unlocking the benefits backyard homes can provide to the city, without the negative externalities. In a recent public event, City of Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti reflected this exact sentiment, stating that backyard homes are “the best way, I think, to provide a lot of affordable housing quickly...I think we need to find a good neighborhood or two to be the pilot...[to] show that the world didn’t fall apart, it didn’t densify, it wasn’t adding new cars.”¹ As the mayor astutely articulates, where code-compliant backyard homes can be constructed with relatively little red tape, residents may see that their concerns about these structures are unfounded. Chapter 4 offered recommendations for increasing code-compliant backyard home construction through strategic modifications to existing regulations, while this chapter investigates neighborhood leaders’ responses to a variety of backyard home design possibilities through collaborative workshops. This work lays the foundation for future pilot projects by examining

specific attitudes, concerns, and preferences related to backyard home construction and policy in Los Angeles neighborhoods with the kinds of demographic and typological qualities that make them ideal sites for localized, innovative backyard home policies.

5.1 Research Questions and Hypotheses

This stage of the research explores how design and planning can better address concerns about backyard homes (research question 3) by working directly with neighborhood leaders to understand their preferences and perspectives about various innovative backyard home policy and design possibilities. As a continuation of the demographic research discussed in Chapter 4, this community-based work also serves to “test” hypotheses from the literature about neighborhood demographic characteristics that might make secondary units amenable to certain communities (see Chapter 2). We ask: what do neighborhood council leaders perceive as the primary issues or opportunities associated with backyard homes in their neighborhood? Do these perceived issues and opportunities differ between neighborhoods, and how? Also, what types of policy change or design strategies, if any, will make backyard homes more amenable to neighborhood leaders? This chapter will explore these questions through qualitative analyses of written comments and discussions from collaborative workshops in three Los Angeles neighborhoods identified by our demographic study: Westside Neighborhood Council, Harbor Gateway North Neighborhood Council, and Mid City West Community Council.

We set out to investigate local concerns about backyard homes through workshops with neighborhood council leaders, because we anticipated that residents would perceive regulation of accessory dwelling units as a matter requiring neighborhood or community-wide policy. As bodies that communicate local needs to government, neighborhood councils are the best sites for neighborhood-specific policy-oriented discussions. During the workshops, we expected parking and density concerns to dominate the discussion and serve as a key source of opposition to backyard homes. We also hypothesized that Mid City West and Westside might share similar concerns about backyard homes, owing to their higher-than-average home values. With its lower-than-average home values, we anticipated that residents in Harbor Gateway North might perceive backyard homes as valuable generators of additional income and sources of affordable housing for renters or additional family members. In Westside we hypothesized that residents might be supportive of backyard homes for caregivers, given the high ratio of older adult residents in the community.

5.2 Collaborative Policy Workshops

Workshop Methodology

During July and August 2013, we held three workshops consisting of a short presentation, an interactive survey, and an open-ended discussion with neighborhood council members in Westside Neighborhood Council, Harbor Gateway North Neighborhood Council, and Mid City West Community Council. We contacted a representative from each council to request a one-hour workshop separate from regular monthly meetings, to ensure we would have the council's focused time. In each case, the only time available for a workshop was during a full council or Planning and Land Use Committee meeting. The date, location, meeting type, and number of attendees for each workshop is listed in Table 5.1.

Each workshop began with a 15-minute presentation by study personnel detailing the study's research goals, reasons for selecting the neighborhood council, and a brief summary of regulations governing backyard homes. Following this introduction, we conducted an interactive survey, which included closed-ended and open-ended questions. The survey was correlated with photos to illustrate the

Council	Date	Location	Meeting Type	Number/Type of Participants
Westside	July 11, 2013 7:45pm	Westside Pavilion, Community Room A 10800 W. Pico Blvd., Los Angeles, CA	Regular Full Council	18 Board Members
Harbor Gateway North	August 3, 2013 9:30am	Gateway Community Center 802 W. Gardena Blvd. Gardena, CA	Planning and Land Use Committee Meeting	14 Board Members and community representatives
Mid City West	August 20, 2013 7:15pm	National Council of Jewish Women 435 N. Fairfax Ave. Los Angeles, CA	Planning and Land Use Committee Meeting	18 Board Members and community representatives

Table 5.1 Overview of neighborhood council workshops

types of backyard homes to which the survey questions referred. The survey was intended to be interactive, similar to a critique of a painting, to maximize our ability to gather quantitative and qualitative data related to form, scale, size, and design of backyard homes.

The survey instrument was constructed with the goal of revealing the council members' preferences and opinions about the form of backyard homes, their impact on neighborhood character, transportation and parking, and

current permitting processes. Based on feedback received during the Westside Neighborhood Council workshop, we altered the survey significantly for the Harbor Gateway North Neighborhood Council and Mid City West Community Council workshops. We maintained the survey structure with thematic categories: Backyard Home Form, Neighborhood Character, Transportation and Parking, Permit Process, and General Comments. These categories provide a framework for discerning between issues that make backyard homes more or

less amenable to neighborhood leaders. We modified the survey instrument by clarifying some questions, adding more closed-ended and open-ended questions, and beginning with a free-writing activity. During the interactive portion of each survey, the presenter clarified and answered questions related to the questionnaire. Both survey instruments can be found in Appendices D and E.

The degree to which researchers adhered to the workshop format varied between councils due to time availability and the participants' willingness to engage in discussion. In Westside, participants were very animated and vocal throughout the survey process, but terminated the workshop before the open-ended discussion section. Participants in Harbor Gateway North reserved their comments and discussion until everyone had completed the survey, then engaged in vigorous dialogue with one another and the researchers. Participants in Mid City West engaged in some discussion during the survey process, but had very few comments during the round table discussion section. Workshop activities were captured via audio recording, participant surveys, and hand-written notes by the researchers.

External Factors Influencing the Workshop

Various external factors may have impacted the opinion data captured in this report. For example, the interactive survey method might have allowed vocal personalities to sway participants who were impartial or ambivalent about backyard homes. In Westside, one participant implied during the survey process that other board members were attempting to influence the opinions of others. In Harbor Gateway North, one participant attempted to quash contrary perspectives by suggesting that the council bypass the survey process completely and adopt a statement to represent the council's singular position on backyard homes. We attempted to mitigate bias by vocal personalities by recording and reporting discussion data separate from written survey data. In other words, by providing space for comments and free-writing on the survey questionnaire, we enabled less vocal personalities to share their perspectives, which they may not have been as comfortable doing verbally. We then compared both written and spoken comments to identify whether the discussion was reflective of the diverse opinions of council members. In each case, the private written comments proved very helpful in rounding out the public verbal discussion, and providing greater nuance to the issues. Despite potential bias, we chose the interactive survey method to ensure we

captured quantitative and qualitative data that would allow us to gain a deeper understanding of the unique political dynamics surrounding second units in each neighborhood.

Workshops may also have been influenced by ongoing neighborhood issues of which researchers were unaware. For example, the workshop with Westside Neighborhood Council followed a presentation from the Los Angeles Police Department on recent increases in property crime within the neighborhood. Since the discussion during the workshop reflected a heightened preoccupation with safety and security, we hypothesize that recent neighborhood events and/or temporal proximity to the theft discussion with LAPD representatives might have influenced our data. During the Mid City West workshop participants alluded to a recent "process" that the neighborhood council went through to address the city's "anti-mansionization" ordinance that would limit floor to area ratios in single-family dwellings. Though board members did not describe the nature of this process, they indicated that mansionization is a controversial issue in their neighborhood and that the board and community had recently explored some of the same issues that we asked about in our survey.

Finally, workshop participants may not proportionally represent the demographics of the neighborhoods in which they serve, though they likely represent local political power. For

example, concerns about renters as occupants of backyard homes emerged as a major concern in Westside but were not mentioned in Mid City West—two neighborhoods with similar racial, age, and economic demographics, but different ratios of renters to homeowners. In this case, it would be helpful to examine the break-down of homeowners and renters among participants in each workshop, but we did not collect that data. If available, this data would help us understand whether a) renters and homeowners are under or overrepresented in council leadership, and b) whether the renters vs. homeowners make-up of council leadership correlates with general trends in opposition vs. support for backyard homes. Similarly, participants in Harbor Gateway North indicated that occupants of backyard homes in their neighborhood tended to belong to a particular newly-arrived ethnic group, none of whom were represented among council leadership. In this case, it was clear how neighborhood leaders felt about backyard homes, but it appeared that neighborhood leadership did not represent community demographics. In short, the opinion data gathered in Harbor Gateway North may represent an empowered minority, rather than the majority of the neighborhood.

Westside Neighborhood Council

Neighborhood Description

The Westside Neighborhood Council encompasses a pocket of residential communities, commercial corridors, and a small industrial band on the western periphery of the City of Los Angeles, within the LA basin. The council is bounded on the north by Santa Monica Blvd., on the west by the 405 freeway, on the east by Century Park East/Motor Avenue/Castle Heights Avenue and on the south by National Boulevard and the 10 freeway (Figure 5.1). Westside's single-family fabric is by no means homogenous, with discreet communities like Century City, Rancho Park, Cheviot Hills, and a southern portion of Westwood nestled within its boundaries. These single-family neighborhoods are stable and nearly built-out, with 99% currently supporting a structure (Table 5.2).² Regarding its residents, Westside has the highest percentage of owner-occupied housing units (58%) among councils selected for a workshop.³ The neighborhood is also home to a disproportionately high number of Non-Hispanic Whites relative to the City of Los Angeles, with 73% of the population in Westside versus 29% of the population in the city.⁴ Average household size is comparable to the City of Los Angeles at 2.18 persons per household.⁵

Workshop Description

From the outset, the workshop was rife with controversy, which impacted our ability to have a constructive, complete conversation. The challenges began with misrepresentation of the topic: the Chair introduced the workshop as an attempt by UCLA researchers to bring backyard homes to the Westside neighborhood. As a consequence, a general tone of hostility pervaded the conversation and some council members expressed concern about funding sources for the research, implying we had a hidden agenda. Although the presenter clarified the goals, funding, and intention of the study, some participants remained skeptical.

Moreover, the council's preoccupation with and misperception of existing policy complicated our ability to move forward with the survey. For example, several council members did not seem to capture the idea that homeowners can build a backyard home "by-right." One council member was compelled to reiterate the concept during heated conversation, which seemed to finally bring broader understanding and lead to more productive discussion. Other council members communicated misunderstandings of backyard home regulations. For example, one participant inaccurately assumed that renting was not allowed in an R-1 zone. Another suggested that homeowners might attempt to meet backyard home parking requirements by parking on the front lawn, within the front

Geography	Housing Characteristics					Resident Characteristics			
	Total Single-Family Lots	Total Vacant Single-Family Lots	Percent Single-Family Lots with a Structure	Percent Owner Occupied Housing Units	Average Household Size	Percent Non-Hispanic White	Percent Latino or Hispanic White (of any race)	Percent Non-Hispanic Black	Percent Non-Hispanic Asian
Westside	5,815	73	99%	58%	2.18	73%	8%	2%	13%
City of Los Angeles	434,151	30,044	93%	39%	2.85	29%	49%	10%	11%

Table 5.2 Westside Neighborhood Council summary statistics

yard setback. Others made subtle attempts to thwart the survey process and/or influence fellow board members in their survey responses. For example, one particularly vocal council member insisted that they could not and should not complete the survey because the questionnaire was biased. Based on the general tenor of the conversation, one would assume that the majority of the council leadership was antagonistic to backyard home construction. However, the data gathered from the survey reveals a significant number of neutral council members, and a more complex array of circumstances under which backyard homes are or are not palatable. The workshop conversation was dominated by vocal opposition, but the survey results demonstrate shades of gray in participants' feelings about backyard homes.

It is also significant that the majority of discussion about backyard homes took on a hypothetical tone, suggesting that participants have not had extensive first-hand experience with these dwellings in their neighborhood.

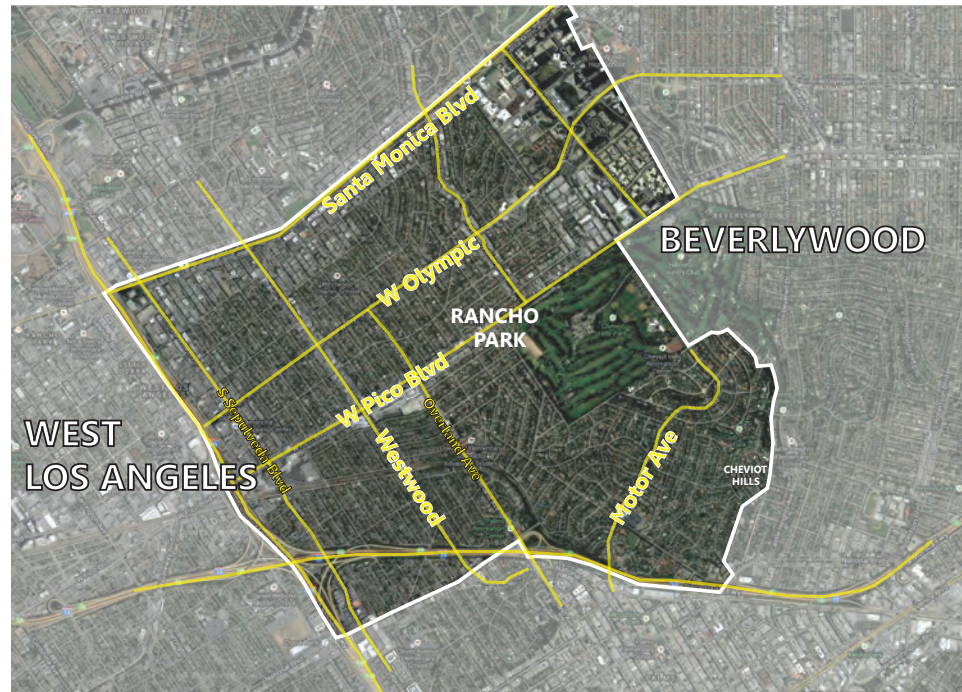


Figure 5.1 Aerial of Westside Neighborhood Council boundaries

When asked about the prevalence of backyard homes (permitted or unpermitted) in their neighborhood, Board members indicated that less than 10% of lots currently support such a unit. In both written and spoken comments, members often described what backyard homes “should” or “should not” do, rather than reacting to things that they currently are or are not doing in Westside. In other words, this was largely a normative discussion about the possible impacts and concerns related to backyard homes and their potential proliferation within the Westside Neighborhood Council area.

Observations and Analysis

Our analysis proceeds in the order in which data was captured in the survey according to four subsections: Backyard Homes Form, Neighborhood Character, Transportation and Parking, and Permit Process.⁶ The analysis includes quantitative survey data, written comments and verbal comments by participants, and observations made by researchers during the workshop.

Backyard Homes Form

Broadly speaking, council members perceived issues of form as lot-specific and were concerned about scale and size of a backyard home only inasmuch as these factors impact privacy and neighborhood green space. When asked about “types” of backyard homes that would

be more or less desirable (e.g. attached to the main house, detached from the main house, above the garage, or above the main house), respondents did not exhibit a clear preference. In fact, ten of the eighteen participants did not answer the question. This high non-response rate might reflect the initial discursive turmoil and hostility surrounding survey procedures. However, since it is inconsistent with the response rate for other questions, the low number of responses also suggests that, for this audience, it is difficult to generalize about preferred types of backyard homes. Participants’ written comments reinforce the challenge of generalizing, suggesting instead that their typological preferences are dependent on and subordinate to specific lot characteristics. For example, one participant wrote, “[it] depends on...property size, adjacency to neighbor’s property line, [and] access other than driveway/side yard.” Similarly, when discussing the size of backyard home that would be appropriate for the neighborhood, one respondent said, “Because this is an older neighborhood it kind of depends on whether your house has been upgraded. Where is it on your property? Is it a two-story house? Does it abut an alley?” These comments suggest that respondents perceive typological considerations as lot specific, depending on qualities such as lot size, the location and size of the main house, the presence or absence of upgrades, and location within a neighborhood (for example, on an alley). Absent these lot conditions and constraints,

it is difficult for most participants to indicate a desirable or undesirable form of backyard home.

When asked about the scale and visibility of backyard homes, respondents tended to prefer short buildings that were not visible from the street, largely due to privacy concerns between neighbors. Eleven of sixteen respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that a backyard home should be short and not visible from the street: a clear majority opinion. In both written comments and discussion, backyard home height emerged as a critical issue because of the potential to infringe upon the privacy of a neighbor’s backyard (Figure 5.2). Regarding this topic, several respondents wrote that a backyard home “should not reduce privacy for neighbors” nor should it be “intrusive to affect neighbor’s privacy.” Another stressed that key backyard home issues include “impact on adjacent yard [and] shade/shadow privacy to neighborhood.” This same respondent, when discussing height considerations, emphasized that “balcony placement should be done to preserve privacy of neighbors’ houses and yards.” Yet another participant affirmed that a backyard home should “not be visible to backyards,” presumably suggesting that one neighbor’s secondary unit should not be visible from another neighbor’s backyard. These comments, as well as the group’s discussion, suggest that privacy, of both the adjacent house and backyard, is a strong value for Westside Neighborhood



Figure 5.2 Small house adjacent to large redeveloped house under construction. Photo: Cecilia Huber

Council leaders, which undergirds most height concerns and preferences.

Regarding backyard home size, respondents tended to be most concerned with lot coverage and preserving “green space” (Figure 5.3 a-b). One respondent indicated that a property “needs to have backyard and green space, can’t be just two houses.” Another wrote that he or she would prefer “very small if at all. Need to be careful of lot to development ratio.” In other words, the footprint of a backyard home should not swell to such a size that it dwarfs or obliterates a backyard space. Several council members further correlated size and lot coverage with qualities of neighborhood character, which will be discussed in the next section.



Figure 5.3 (a - b) Apparent lot coverage and front yard greenspace for a small (a) and medium (b) unit in Westside neighborhood. Photos: Cecilia Huber

Neighborhood Character

The second section of the workshop addressed participant opinions about community character, including concerns about density and concepts of the “single-family” neighborhood. Most participants implicitly, and on occasion explicitly, preferred maintaining the neighborhood status quo in order to preserve a kind of perceived homogeneity of neighbors, uses, and styles.

As previously mentioned, backyard home size was often discussed in relation to lot coverage and preservation of backyard green space. However, a significant number of participants also correlated the size of a backyard home to increased density and potential incompatibility with single-family uses. One person stressed that when a backyard home is “1200 [sq ft], there’s no backyard; you’re taking away the



single-family qualities.” A different respondent suggested that a backyard home “should be built only if a certain square footage of land is still open so the home still appears to be a SFR [single-family residence]. You should also have to get comments from adjacent property owners to address concerns.” In other words, covering a backyard with a secondary unit not only problematizes privacy and creates other concerns for neighbors, as demonstrated in the previous section, but also threatens the very essence of what defines a single-family neighborhood: possessing backyard space.

It is possible that opposition to increased lot coverage reflects a general concern about increasing density in the neighborhood. For some, the number of bedrooms in a second unit signals potential overcrowding in the neighborhood, while others relate an increase

of built space with a rise in density. One person wrote, “size should not tremendously add to density of the neighborhood.” A second council member flatly indicated “I do not agree with this concept in general. I don’t want additional density in my neighborhood.” Although these written comments do not distinguish between built and population densities, others are more explicit. For instance, one council member foresees a slippery slope of decline that an added population density could bring to the neighborhood, writing that one of the greatest obstacles to building a backyard home is the “added density that negatively impacts infrastructure. Our elementary school is full. More density will cause boundaries to change which will have a very negative impact on our whole community.” Another offered an opinion on behalf of the group, writing that “we object to backyard housing as a growth industry (and commercial enterprise) in R1 housing areas.” From this comment we might infer that potential proliferation of backyard homes in the Westside Neighborhood Council area is associated with undesirable growth and densification, as well as malevolent commercial forces.⁷ These comments demonstrate that, when associated with population growth, backyard homes will be met in Westside with a “not in our backyards” attitude.

In addition to impacting backyard green space and population density, council members were concerned about backyard homes changing

the balance of homeowners and renters in the neighborhood. We observed a near-unanimous preference for family member occupants of backyard homes in lieu of unrelated renters, in significant part because the concept of renting is perceived as quintessentially opposed to the intended uses for the single-family R1 zone. During the discussion one member questioned whether renters, such as college students, would share the same values as homeowners in the neighborhood: “If [the backyard home] is for students then you have to re-examine. Well, are we talking about a high rise dorm and that same sort of occupant is now going to translate the lifestyle, the proximity, the needs, the social life, the engagement in community? What does the higher population of renters as opposed to owners do to the school system?...There are a lot of issues.” This comment portrays a perception of renters as lacking the lifestyle, social, and community engagement qualities that homeowners share, and the idea that their increased presence in single-family neighborhoods may erode cornerstones of community value, such as the school system. Implicit within this comment, and others like it, is a perception of homeowners as a homogenous group possessing inherent qualities that differentiate them from renters, even when both groups live within proximity in the same community.

Westside Neighborhood Council leaders demonstrated a clear preference for family

members as backyard home occupants, and were less hostile to the concept of secondary units when discussed in these terms. During the conversation, one member commented, “Now that you’re saying single-family members, that’s different than renting it out to someone else. If I have my grandchildren grow up and want to live back there or parents of children that they don’t want to leave home...that’s different than building it to rent out to tenants.” Similarly, a participant wrote, “definitely opposed to renters; less opposed to family members living in [the] backyard home.” When members were asked what would be the best reason to build a backyard home, nearly everyone wrote “for family use.” One respondent indicated that family member use was preferable because such use is in keeping with the constitutive elements of the single-family zone. They wrote, “for family member use only because single-family residential should mean a single-family use, not for rent to a third party.” When discussing the family member scenario, participants were able to envision these potential occupants in diverse ways: as children, parents, disabled family members, etc., each with a unique circumstance that might be aided by construction of a backyard home. In discussion, one participant eloquently demonstrated this broad-based thinking, stating “In my opinion, I think the best reason to build a backyard home is solely for family members, like my mother who is going to need some assistance very soon... having her in a backyard home would help

everybody a lot. Alternatively, a disabled sibling, which we also have, could really have some independence...and I think that's a really great thing...The problem that I see is using it for income-producing purposes." While the issue did not arise explicitly, the general acceptance of a backyard home for non-income producing, family uses would suggest that caregivers would also be acceptable occupants. However, even within the "family-member-occupant" frame of thinking, one respondent highlighted potential neighborhood issues. This individual wrote that the best reason to build a backyard home would be "to provide a housing option for family members—elderly, grown kids, etc. But that creates a huge enforcement issue—how to monitor/enforce, register, and verify unit occupants." Even though it is clear that Westside Neighborhood Council members prefer family occupants to renters (in keeping with their perception of the definition of R1 or single-family zones), the complexities of such occupant-based distinctions are evident.

Though discussions of neighborhood character were dominated by these preoccupations with density, green space, occupants, and the nature of the single-family zone, a few participants addressed architectural and stylistic elements of backyard homes in their responses. Based on quantitative survey responses, there is no consensus on whether a secondary unit should be similar or different from the architectural style of the main house. However, qualitative

respondent comments suggest that most council members would prefer a unit that is relatively similar to the main house so that it fits with the property and neighborhood. One respondent wrote, "You should have to blend in the granny house from a design perspective with the single-family residence." A second respondent indicated that backyard homes should be permitted "only if [it] blends with [the] architecture and character of [the] main house and neighborhood," while a third participant felt that the unit "should be built with [the] same material as [the] main house." Still another suggested that "style should be within a range of neighborhood norms. Backyard homes should not be out of character with [the] neighborhood." For a few, architectural congruence between units was of paramount concern. One person indicated that it is "most important that [the] backyard home would be in keeping with existing architecture, character of neighborhood and compliant with CCR's [covenants, conditions, and restrictions—usually found within homeowner associations]." During discussion, participants clarified that none of the residential neighborhoods within Westside are subject to Community Design Overlays or specific design guidelines. For one participant "...that's what the biggest fear is. You could have a house where a pre-fab [backyard] home goes up and it doesn't look right." While stylistic components of a backyard home do not emerge as a dominant concern for Westside Neighborhood Council members, we

see some preference for sameness, blending, and consistency. Based on prior discussion, these preferences are secondary or potentially insignificant if the backyard home is not visible from the street or adjacent properties.

Transportation, Parking, and Traffic

The survey and discussion did not reveal a high level of concern for issues related to transportation, parking, and traffic. While sometimes considered the top priority among Angelenos (see Chapter 3), participants did not discuss parking or other transportation issues at length, and seldom raised these topics as concerns without being prompted by the survey. Though transportation and parking do not emerge as stumbling blocks for backyard home construction in this neighborhood, they are still important issues to council members. For example, fifteen of seventeen respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that it is very important for backyard homes to meet current parking requirements. A majority of respondents also agreed or strongly agreed that only those lots where it is easy to include parking onsite should be granted permission to build a backyard home. Half of the respondents who offered written comments on this section of the survey reiterated that providing onsite parking is a must for owners constructing backyard homes. One respondent specifically mentioned that "backyard homes should not lead to over-parked streets." However, this was the only written or

spoken concern related to congestion, traffic, or parking. Furthermore, when asked about the greatest obstacles to building a backyard home, only two of the eighteen participants referenced parking in their response. One respondent even expressed flexibility on parking requirements, suggesting that these requirements “should be [on] a case to case basis depending on current neighborhood parking.” The absence of parking or transportation-related concerns may indicate that this neighborhood is not currently experiencing parking or traffic problems, and thus council members are not preoccupied with these issues worsening.

Permit Process

In the final section of the survey we asked participants to indicate their opinions about the permitting process for backyard homes. Several of the quantitative questions had high non-response rates and thus will not be discussed in this analysis. However, the discussion, written comments, and responses to the remaining quantitative questions suggest that a majority of participants favor tailored policy solutions rather than a “one-size-fits-all” city ordinance. Some also expressed that the permitting and construction processes should be less costly, consider or involve neighbors, and involve professional expertise where possible.

Throughout the conversation, several council members reiterated the idea that accessory

dwelling unit policies should be uniquely tailored to neighborhoods. One person asked, “instead of creating policy that doesn’t fit all, how can the city allow communities to either implement it or not?” When asked about specific types of solutions that might aid the permitting process, another respondent felt that “to work these must be tailored to unique aesthetics, character, density, etc. of individual neighborhoods.” Two others stressed that “one size fits all would not be great for the character of a neighborhood” and “this is not a one size fits all solution.” The implied meaning underlying these statements is that backyard homes might be acceptable in other communities, but not Westside Neighborhood Council. One lone respondent expressed the contrary opinion that “they [backyard homes], should be allowed anywhere.” Interestingly, this comment is the only written feedback this specific respondent provided during the entire survey process.

Beyond this general preference for tailored policy solutions, several respondents highlighted tangible aspects of the current permitting process that are undesirable, or offered suggestions to improve the process. In line with the aforementioned preference for localized solutions in lieu of “one-size-fits-all” approaches, one respondent suggested that “if the city code allowed for community plans to create a framework for their areas that would be helpful.” In other words, neighborhoods

should have greater autonomy and local control over what type of backyard home ordinance is adopted. A different participant stated that the greatest obstacle for constructing a backyard home in Westside Neighborhood Council is the “size of [the] lot and SB 1866 minimum requirements for ‘by right’.” Most of our lots are under 7000 square feet.” This respondent saw provisions of the state law, especially minimum lot size, as barriers to construction, implying that permitted backyard home construction might be encouraged by loosening some of these requirements. Interestingly, three other participants cited cost as the greatest barrier to building a backyard home, including one respondent who specifically referenced the cost of the permit as an issue. Cost, of building, permitting, designing, etc. was not discussed at any point during the conversation, nor was the issue raised elsewhere in the survey.

In addition to citing issues and challenges with current policy, we asked participants to identify solutions that might ease the building and permitting process for a backyard home. Given several options, half of respondents agreed that customizing a backyard home online might ease the process. Respondents also ranked, in order of preference, hiring someone, choosing a pre-fabricated model, and calling a “hotline” to answer questions as potential aids to the current permitting process. One participant highlighted the value of involving professionals, such as an architect,

in the construction process, stating “There is a very prominent house in this neighborhood that has, I believe, a granny flat that was done by a very well-known architect, which I think many people actually identify as...a positive thing in the community in terms of who the architect was and what it did.” This statement also served as a counterpoint view during the discussion, highlighting the potential benefits or opportunities that backyard homes could offer to a neighborhood. In their written comments, several respondents also emphasized that neighbors should be consulted or considered during the permitting and construction process.

Interpretation

Neighbors vs. Neighborhood

At the outset of this study, we anticipated that communities would conceive of backyard homes as a neighborhood-level issue, creating neighborhood-level problems, necessitating neighborhood-level solutions. Instead, we observe that the majority of Westside Neighborhood Council members conceive of backyard homes as neighbor-level issues, creating mostly neighbor-level problems, which likely necessitate neighbor-level solutions. We note this distinction between “neighbor” and “neighborhood” perspectives, because the way in which residents think and talk about the problems or opportunities associated with backyard homes determines

the kinds of approaches policymakers should take in their regulation of such units.

We characterize Westside Neighborhood Council as having a “neighbors” perspective, because council members prioritized impacts on adjacent property and focused on character of individual lots and homes. For example, participants’ oft-cited concern for privacy of homes and yards is clearly an issue between adjacent neighbors. Whether or not a neighbor’s backyard home will infringe upon the privacy of other neighbors (and the thresholds for what is and isn’t private) is not a matter that this neighborhood council sees fit to dictate. Most, however, see it as a critical issue to highlight and think such privacy should be protected and prioritized highly. Participants’ references to lot specificity as a key determinant of their design preferences harkens back to a perspective toward the individual rather than the collective. The design of a backyard home would be acceptable or unacceptable based upon its placement, lot coverage, height, etc. within a specific lot. What some would find acceptable on one lot, might not be acceptable on a neighboring lot on the same street. In short, council members discussed design not as something that should be dictated at a neighborhood level, but something that is highly site-specific and lot-dependent. Even when discussing “green space” (tree canopy, landscaping, shade coverage, etc.), which some might consider a neighborhood concern, we

observe participants engaging in a neighbor-level debate. These issues and concerns are raised within the context of impact on adjacent neighbors with the implication the visible open space or trees in an adjacent yard is part of the caché associated with single-family home ownership in this area. Absence of “green space” is presented as an issue because it creates a potential eyesore for neighbors. This issue, as well as other concerns relating to neighborhood character, might be classified as neighbor-level because they have the potential to directly impact adjacent neighbors more powerfully than the entire neighborhood.

Participants referenced some neighborhood-level concerns (e.g. density and infrastructure burden), but these were infrequent and secondary to concerns about impacts on adjacent neighbors. In fact, one of the most common neighborhood-level issues associated with accessory dwelling units, parking, was hardly addressed. Its cousins, traffic and congestion, were not discussed at all. One respondent highlighted the critical importance of neighbor-to-neighbor relationships and indicated their own neighbor-level perspective by writing that the greatest obstacle to building a backyard home is the “opinion of neighbors.” Possibly, council members discuss backyard homes in this way because few of these dwellings presently exist in the area. Since few residents have chosen to construct backyard homes to date,

their impact on the community is not felt to such a degree that council leaders perceive neighborhood-scale policies, discussion, or treatment as necessary. Policymakers, planners, and housing advocates should consider the various levels at which residents think about backyard homes, in order to best craft processes and regulations to address their impact.

Homogenous Single-Family Neighborhood

The desire to preserve neighborhood character undergirds nearly all concerns and opposition relating to backyard homes in Westside Neighborhood Council. When prompted to discuss the form, style, and design of backyard homes, the Westside Neighborhood Council members focused on issues they believed would degrade the single-family character of the neighborhood. Increased density, lack of backyard space, and the presence of renters were the core issues raised by participants antagonistic to secondary dwelling units, all because these changes were perceived as inconsistent with single-family neighborhood character. Through discussion, it became clear that participants understand the single-family neighborhood in Westside as homogenous. In this neighborhood, all of the residents on a lot should be family members. Whether they live in two houses or one is not critical, but lots certainly should not support renters or associated commercial activity. If multiple structures exist on a lot, they should

appear stylistically similar and blend with the neighborhood. A range of stylistic norms apply, and deviance from these norms would be met with antagonism from neighbors. Further, the neighborhood should remain low-density, a goal which is best maintained by ensuring ample backyard space on each lot. Other behaviors, such as accommodating onsite parking needs for the second unit by parking on the front lawn, are abhorrent explicitly because they threaten Westside's neighborhood character. This finding suggests that backyard homes would not be acceptable as an affordable housing strategy in single-family neighborhoods like Westside, and family-based implementation would be a more effective strategy.

Private vs. Public Opinion

As noted in the Workshop Description (page 80) section, several Board members created a hostile environment during the workshop and challenged our ability to have a productive conversation. While only a few vocal women in the group were antagonistic, it appeared initially that the council was not open to the idea of accessory dwelling units. However, based on the survey data collected, it is clear that council members hold various opinions about backyard homes. Even some skeptical council members engaged in the conversation once the notion of family members as potential occupants surfaced. Although the conversation was often antagonistic, and impartial members

were not as vocal, the survey was instrumental in gathering a variety of opinions. While some dominant leaders may have biased the discussion, respondents were not prevented from contributing contrary opinions in writing.

Harbor Gateway North Neighborhood Council

Neighborhood Description

Situated in South Los Angeles, the Harbor Gateway North Neighborhood Council consists mostly of residential neighborhoods with small commercial pockets and several industrial areas straddling the 110 and 105 freeways. The council boundaries form an inverted L-shape, with north-south and east-west oriented legs (Figure 5.4). The north-south segment is bounded by Figueroa Street on the east, Vermont Avenue on the west, 110th Street on the north, and the 91 Freeway/Artesia Boulevard on the south. The east-west segment is bounded on the north by Imperial Highway, on the south by 120th Street (the council area extends to parcels on both sides of the street), and on the east by Central Avenue. The council area is unique, in that both legs are only a half mile wide. Given its elongated configuration, Harbor Gateway North shares boundaries within a myriad of cities and neighborhoods, including Watts, Willowbrook, Athens, Gardena, and Compton. For ease of governance, Harbor Gateway North

Geography	Housing Characteristics					Resident Characteristics			
	Total Single-Family Lots	Total Vacant Single-Family Lots	Percent Single-Family Lots with a Structure	Percent Owner Occupied Housing Units	Average Household Size	Percent Non-Hispanic White	Percent Latino or Hispanic White (of any race)	Percent Non-Hispanic Black	Percent Non-Hispanic Asian
Harbor Gateway North	3,890	152	96%	44%	3.65	2%	59%	32%	5%
City of Los Angeles	434,151	30,044	93%	39%	2.85	29%	49%	10%	11%

Table 5.3 Harbor Gateway North Neighborhood Council summary statistics

divides itself internally into 8 districts, each with single-family residential areas represented. These single-family areas are subdivided into 3,890 parcels, of which 96% currently support a structure (see Table 5.3)⁸. Though a majority of residential land in Harbor Gateway North supports single-family uses, less than half of housing units are owner-occupied.⁹ Persons of Hispanic or Latino origin are the dominant ethnic group in the council with 59% of the population, followed by Blacks at 32%, Asians at 5%, and Non-Hispanic Whites at 2%. Lastly, average household size is somewhat higher in Harbor Gateway North than the City of Los Angeles at 3.65 persons per household.¹⁰

Workshop Description

Though some workshop participants were initially resistant to the topic of backyard homes, conversation was generally constructive. At the start, one council member expressed confusion and frustration about the utility of discussing backyard homes, since the city

already has an ordinance in place to govern such matters. The council member felt that the existing ordinance runs contrary to public opinion about backyard homes, yet did not see value in exploring the ways in which existing regulations are supposedly unpalatable to Los Angeles residents. Later, two vehemently-opposed members attempted to dominate and curtail open-ended discussion of backyard homes issues. One council member prepared a personal statement of opposition in advance of the workshop and a second council member repeatedly suggested that the council should adopt, by vote if necessary, that statement of opposition as the council’s official position on backyard homes in Harbor Gateway North. The Chair of the meeting was instrumental in re-directing these attempts to halt the workshop and often intervened to ensure that discussion remained open to a plurality of voices, opinions, and perspectives. Though oppositional voices were often loudest, a significant minority expressed openness to the possibility and

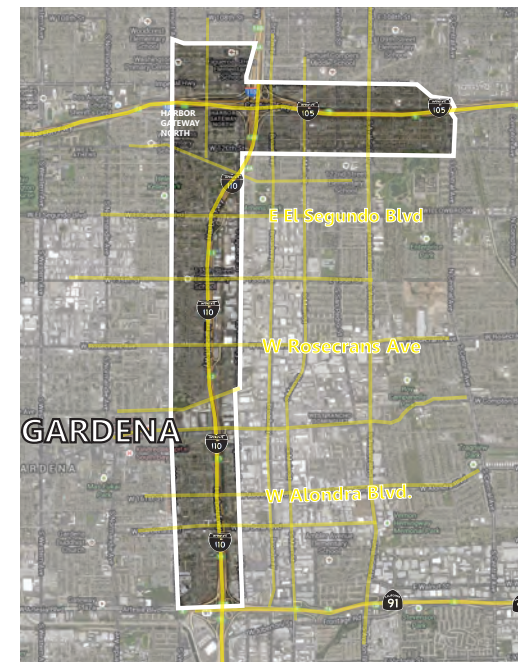


Figure 5.4 Aerial of Harbor Gateway North Neighborhood Council boundaries

utility of backyard homes in Harbor Gateway North through both the survey and discussion.

Interestingly, the way in which participants discussed backyard homes suggests that there may already be a number of unpermitted accessory dwelling units in the neighborhood. Participants highlighted enforcement of backyard home code violations by the Department of Building and Safety as a key issue in Harbor Gateway North. Further, several respondents asked clarifying questions about the definition of a backyard home, such as: Does a converted garage “count” as a backyard home? If a parked mobile home is being used as an accessory dwelling unit, does that “count”? When pressed, participants indicated that they asked these questions because they had seen these different uses within their community, and weren’t sure whether they fell under the same rules and definitions as backyard homes. As will be discussed in detail in the interpretation section “Us Vs. Them: Unwanted Neighborhood Change,” participants tended to discuss backyard homes as something that others built or lived in. Participants used words like “they,” “them,” and “those people” to describe backyard home users, in addition to active, present tense verbs. This suggests that council members perceive backyard home use as current and ongoing, but simultaneously as something in which non-council members participate. In other words, the tone and tenor of discussion suggests that participants

may be reactive to backyard homes in part because they are experiencing negative externalities associated with a high proportion of unpermitted accessory dwelling units.

Observations and Analysis

Backyard Homes Form

Though opinions about form are naturally nuanced, we observed several themes in Harbor Gateway North, including concern with bulk and scale of backyard homes and a preference for visual uniformity. Participants emphasized in both their survey responses and discussion that backyard homes should not be tall or visible from the street, likely for visual and aesthetic reasons (Figure 5.5). When asked about height and visibility, participants were near unanimous that smaller is better. One respondent cited aesthetics as an issue with visible backyard homes and recommended, “[a backyard home] should not be seen from the street. I’ve seen them and it looks ugly.” Another person suggested that their opposition to tall backyard homes related to impacts on neighbors, writing “[backyard home-builders] disfigure the community by putting in large homes (upstairs), blocking next door neighbor’s view.” In both these comments, we see concern with backyard home height linked to visual qualities: view obstruction and aesthetics, rather than issues like privacy. This preoccupation with height might explain



Figure 5.5 Backyard units visible from street in Harbor Gateway North. Photo: Cecilia Huber

why attached and detached backyard homes were more popular among respondents than backyard homes above a garage or main house.

For many participants, height and scale are intimately related concerns about backyard home form. Specifically, several participants indicated that backyard homes should be of a scale appropriate to the neighborhood. One respondent suggested, “There should be design guidelines to blend the addition into [the] neighborhood and to make sure it does not stand out or overwhelm the neighborhood.” Another respondent complained about out-of-scale backyard homes in the neighborhood, saying, “they were building ‘mansionian’ structures. How they got their permits I have no idea, and that doesn’t blend in with the community.” Both comments share a preference for backyard home forms that blend with the

neighborhood, and imply that oversized or mansion-like buildings are undesirable because they stand out and overwhelm the community.

During these discussions, so-called uniformity emerged as a value for several participants, which may be linked to maintenance more than architectural style. In an animated dialogue, several participants associated backyard homes with degrading the visual appeal and character of the neighborhood:

Speaker 1: *"You know what I dislike most about these add-ons is that it disfigures the community. You can go into a community where all the houses don't look alike, but they're [still] uniform. But when they come in building all these different little rooms and things--they're up, they're down, they're flat, you know, they're attached to the house and spread out—then the community looks...I don't know if you understand what I'm saying... the community looks lopsided, you know. There's a block that's close to El Segundo, a side street that I drive down sometimes to miss traffic, [and] all the homes are uniform there. I mean, it just looks...it looks nice. But then you come into a community where one [structure] looks like a hotel and your little house is sitting down [next to it]. They come in and they build and when you look out*

your window you look straight at a wall. To me that's just..."

Speaker 2: *"...it's called a shantytown. It's making us look like a shantytown."*

Speaker 3: *"Third world country. It's ridiculous."*

Speaker 4: *"Looks like Jamaica."*

Speaker 1 touches on previously discussed issues of scale and describes the potential for a large backyard home that "looks like a hotel" to disrupt the uniformity of a neighborhood. This speaker also mentions that the presence of many backyard homes makes the neighborhood "look lopsided." Perhaps correlations are made between lots with backyard homes and shantytown or third world conditions by Speakers 2 and 3, because these lots are associated with real or perceived neglect. In written comments "maintaining of backyard homes" was the first concern mentioned. Others wrote that backyard homes should be "neat and trim," implying that lack of care or maintenance might be a concern.

Neighborhood Character

Though some participants expressed concerns about architectural style, the vast majority of neighborhood character discussion and comments revolved around density,



Figure 5.6 Harbor Gateway North garage units in backyard.
Photo: Cecilia Huber

perceived overcrowding, and tensions with the presumed occupants of backyard homes. For one participant, the relationship between rental activity in a backyard home and single-family living is problematic. This participant wrote, "I think [backyard homes] undermine the integrity of the R1 zoning... Rental of such units is common, including to non-family members. The result is increased density." Here, it is unclear whether increased population density or building density is the issue, but other comments throughout the workshop suggest that population density is likely the greater concern. During the workshop another participant expressed frustration about the possibility of income-generating activities occurring within backyard homes, stating "And I don't doubt that they probably have incomes within their properties, because they're extremely large."

And it's...it's legal?" For this participant, the prospect of using a building on a single-family property for economic gain is incompatible with single-family residential character.

Related to density and uses, many workshop participants cited overcrowding as a major concern, but closer examination suggests that there is a latent concern with demographic change undergirding this preoccupation with overcrowding. As previously mentioned, one participant found overcrowding in backyard homes so compelling as to prepare and bring a written statement to the workshop. In part, this council member wrote, "these dwellings flood dense neighborhoods and worsen such already-pressing problems as overcrowding and parking shortages. Generally, Granny dwellings are being rented out to non-family members, acquaintances and strangers. Some having three or more different families within the same dwelling. Very seldom is there a 'Granny' occupant... Overcrowding has negative impacts in terms of health, education and family relationships. The original homes were meant to house a family of three or four. The garages were made to actually house one car with the additional space for storage." This participant indicates that using secondary units for originally unintended purposes is a serious problem in Harbor Gateway North. The participant sees direct links between this re-purposing of single-family space and neighborhood overcrowding and parking

shortages, which adversely impact community health, education systems, and families. Another respondent echoed these concerns about overcrowding, writing that their primary concern about backyard homes is "no regulation of the number of people or kinship of tenant in backyard home." A different participant stated, "I'm not in agreement with [backyard homes]. It's changed the whole demographic...There are about three or four houses on my street that have these two or three different families living in them." Here the concept of multiple families living together in a structure designed for a single family signals undesirable neighborhood change. Another respondent, sensing this same wave of change, wrote: "I do not wish to change my backyard...or have unattractive buildings in my neighborhood. It will change the whole structure of the community."

Throughout the discussion, participants explicitly and implicitly correlated these overcrowded dwellings with immigrant occupants. When asked about the current residents of backyard homes, one respondent wrote "illegal residents" and indicated that backyard homes "provide unlimited housing for those not legal residents of the U.S." Another respondent, in defense of these multi-family occupants, countered "I realize there's congestion but a lot of these places where there are three or four families living in one unit, they come from countries that have nothing. And when they come here, they come here for a better life. Maybe it's better

than where they came from. It's better for them, so they don't mind living [with] a whole bunch of people together." In addition to these explicit identifications of backyard home residents as immigrants, and in some cases undocumented immigrants, we see implicit references as well. Owners and occupants of backyard homes are almost always referred to as "they," "them," or "those people," and are frequently described as newcomers to the community. For example, one respondent mentioned "they come in and they build..." and another indicated "... if they build something, more houses in your community..." In both statements, backyard home-builders and occupants are described as newcomers to the neighborhood who "come in" and build things in a community that is not theirs to begin with. These individuals are imagined to be different from the participants, an "other" in relation to more longstanding residents of the community. Considered collectively, we can infer that the implicit comments refer to the same groups referenced in the explicit comments.

Despite the aforementioned concerns, the group is not universally convinced that backyard homes alter neighborhood character in a detrimental fashion. Some describe backyard homes not as the harbinger of unwanted neighborhood behaviors, but as a welcome form of housing relief in difficult economic times and circumstances. According to one speaker, "They call it a granny home...but these places are places because people, young

people, even getting out of college cannot afford to buy their own homes. [Since] people cannot really afford to buy a home and rents are so high, [they] build something small that they can live in. People just have nowhere to live. And there are no jobs, there's no money. So that's one reason I think they have to build these: they have nowhere else to live." Another respondent wrote, "[backyard homes] are much needed. Many young adults cannot afford rent. College graduates do not make enough money to buy a home; they have student loans to pay. Since manufacturing has been taken out of the U.S. there are uneducated relatives that have no work. Living with a relative in a back house is better than being homeless." A third individual echoed this perspective: "Many lots in our neighborhood are amenable to backyard homes. In these days and times of the tough economy, adult children are coming back home [and] extended family living is virtually necessary. Returning soldiers are living at home again, etc., etc., etc." These respondents share the perspective that backyard homes have utility in Harbor Gateway North, for a variety of reasons and a variety of residents impacted by a strained economy. The potential occupants of backyard homes are described in both familial (adult children, relatives, and extended family) and non-familial terms (soldiers returning from war, young adults, and recent college graduates). Unlike the speakers concerned with changing demographics in the neighborhood, other council members see backyard home

construction or conversion as viable strategies to mitigate current issues of joblessness and the high cost of home-ownership.

Finally, it is important to note that workshop participants were not homogenous in their opinions about backyard home architectural styles, though a majority prefer similar styles between buildings. Eight of eleven respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed that the architectural style of a backyard home can be different than the main house, suggesting a general preference for sameness. Of the few respondents who offered written comments, one individual affirmed that "[a backyard home] should conform to the homes in the neighborhood." Even though three of eleven respondents agreed that styles could be different, one respondent's written comment suggests that sameness might still be the ideal. This respondent wrote "in most cases, the style should be similar. If really different, a design review should be necessary."

Transportation, Parking, and Traffic

Interwoven issues of transportation, parking, and traffic emerged as dominant concerns among council members and residents in Harbor Gateway North. Several participants expressed concern that parking required for backyard homes will intensify on-street parking demand, further burdening already over-parked streets. One respondent wrote "primary concern:

parking of vehicles on public street" and another cited "excessive crowding of streets for parking" as a first reaction to backyard homes. Several respondents indicated that including onsite parking with a backyard home is a top priority, because "this keeps cars off the streets." One respondent wrote, "This is one of the critical issues. [Parking] must be adequate for number of people living there, in the granny flat, and easily accessible from the driveway so that [they] park in the onsite parking site. Street sweeping becomes an issue." For this participant, it is important not only to require onsite parking, but to provide sufficient spaces for the number of occupants and easy ingress/egress to further encourage use of onsite parking in lieu of street parking. For another respondent, "backyard homes bring more traffic to a community by bringing in more cars." Similarly, a different participant emphasized that backyard homes make it both difficult to find parking and contribute to congested streets: "Parking becomes an issue. Granny occupants begin to park their vehicles in front of their neighbors' homes, on that street and on surrounding streets. [This] causes congestion, leaving their neighbors and their neighbors' guests to park further down the street or on surrounding streets." This concern with having to park far from one's home is shared by other council members and residents. One participant shared in discussion, "I'm not in agreement with [backyard homes]. I can't find a parking place. If I have a function at my house they have

to park in another community pretty much to get to my house. Can you imagine if they build something, more houses in your community, you [are] going to have to catch a bus to get to your car! That's unacceptable." This participant clearly has strong opinions about backyard homes, which trace back to negative experiences with parking that were perceived as a by-product of others' existing backyard homes. Though parking at a distance from one's home is a serious concern, the speaker's level of exaggeration about the issue suggests that her anxieties are also tied to fear of neighborhood change that she perceives will accompany backyard home conversion and construction. Other participants intimate that neighbors' concerns about not being able to park in front of their own properties are intimately related to safety and neighborhood crime. For example, a respondent shared that, "It's unsafe for you to drive around the corner. This gentleman had to drive almost two or three blocks to get a place to park and got killed walking back to his home." These comments suggest that parking may be a high priority to respondents because neighborhood crime makes distant parking a serious risk to personal safety.

Despite the frequency with which parking and occasionally traffic were mentioned as concerns, survey questions about parking had very high non-response rates and thus will not be discussed in detail. We might attribute the high non-response rate to a preference for

engaging with these issues verbally in lieu of written comments, or as evidence of survey fatigue. However, those who did respond to parking questions consistently affirmed that backyard homes should provide onsite parking.

When asked which sites or areas within their neighborhood would be appropriate to allow backyard homes, participants favored building on a large lot and building near a light rail station or other transit stop.¹¹ Building on a lot adjacent to an alley was also a popular response, although respondents were divided about whether building on a corner lot is appropriate. Generally the least popular areas for backyard home construction were adjacent to multi-family properties and adjacent to commercial properties. This aversion might stem from previously discussed associations between backyard homes, overcrowding, and commercial activity. Co-locating these structures with other high-density residences and commercial buildings might be perceived as contributing to these already problematic conditions. In sum, participants indicate that building a backyard home on a large lot, within proximity of transit, or adjacent to an alley will be met with less resistance than building adjacent to multi-family or commercial properties.

Permit Process

The conversation about permitting processes was significantly impacted by participants'

negative experiences with unpermitted accessory dwelling units in the neighborhood, in addition to the economics of backyard home-building. When asked whether they would build a backyard home if they could, the majority of respondents answered in the negative, while five did not respond, and two answered in the affirmative. One of the "no" respondents indicated "my lot is not large enough to accommodate one. If it were larger, funding would be an issue." Another participant indicated that financing determined their support for backyard homes, asking "is [the] city willing to help homeowners with extra funds to build? If there were assistance with financing it would be O.K." In addition to the importance of financial support or incentives to build, we asked respondents to indicate other strategies that they might pursue in the construction process, if such options were available. Hiring someone or simply using the existing process were the most popular responses, followed by choosing from pre-designed models, ordering a custom unit online, and choosing a pre-fabricated unit. The response rate for this question was low, likely because the majority of respondents are not interested in building a backyard home and do not want to make the process easier within their neighborhood.

A slight majority of respondents (five of eight) think that the process of building a backyard home in Harbor Gateway North should be harder, likely due to aforementioned negative

experiences with perceived overcrowding, parking shortages, and out-of-scale structures. A desire to make the process harder may also be related to poor enforcement of current unpermitted units in Harbor Gateway North. According to one respondent, “There is already a problem of inspection on...how these buildings [are] constructed.” Another council member affirmed the presence of existing unpermitted units, writing “backyard homes conceptually are good, but the enforcement of development standards are/have been poor.” For one participant, the City of Los Angeles’ “accessory dwelling ordinance has legitimized the proliferation of garage conversions. There are not enough building and safety inspectors to monitor those conversions.” When asked about permitting processes another respondent offered the common sense notion that “construction should be permitted so that it is safely done.” In each case poor enforcement of unpermitted units has reduced participants’ confidence in the city and its current enforcement capabilities, and may help explain why some council members would like to see the permitting process become harder.

As a component of the permitting process, we asked participants who should be consulted if a resident desires to build a backyard home. Four respondents indicated that no one should be consulted (the homeowner could build “by right”), while six respondents favored both “adjacent neighbors” and “property owners

on the same block.” No one felt that the neighborhood council should be required to approve backyard home construction. During discussion, one respondent addressed the peculiarities of having others intervene in construction and permitting, stating “Since this is your property why would you have to get permission from someone else to build? It’s unfortunate, but if the neighbor doesn’t like it it’s just too bad because it’s your property. It’s unfortunate.” Though neighbors might not like what is built on another resident’s lot and desire to thwart its development, there is still a reluctance to dictate or meddle in another neighbor’s affairs on their private property. Despite the number of respondents who indicated “no one” should be consulted, the majority of respondents are interested in making it harder to build and having others intervene in the decision to construct a backyard home. This suggests that the city should make and enforce stricter rules about backyard homes.

Interpretation

Neighbors vs. Neighborhood

As previously discussed, residents can perceive regulation of backyard homes as an issue between neighbors or as an issue for the neighborhood. In Harbor Gateway North we observe mixed perspectives, with council members agreeing that problems associated with backyard homes occur at

the neighborhood scale, but disagreeing on whether neighborhood-level solutions are appropriate. We note this distinction between “neighbor” and “neighborhood” perspectives, because the way in which residents think and talk about the problems or opportunities associated with backyard homes determines the kinds of approaches policymakers should take in their regulation of such units.

Participants in Harbor Gateway North tended to discuss negative impacts associated with backyard homes at the neighborhood level, while correlating positive impacts of backyard homes to homeowners only, not neighbors or neighborhoods. Participants characterize problems like increased population density and overcrowding as having adverse impacts on neighborhood quality of life, because they strain health and education systems.¹² Further, in discussion with one of the researchers after the workshop, one participant related that population growth in the community is straining already limited municipal services, such as emergency services (fire and safety), trash collection, and building inspection. Parking is characterized as impacting both neighbors and the neighborhood, although the greatest negative externalities seem to accrue to the neighborhood. When backyard home residents park in front of neighbors’ homes, they impact neighbors by limiting the availability of parking. According to participants, when density increases in a neighborhood,

the additional residents create neighborhood transportation problems like traffic and over-parked streets. Even when discussing the scale, bulk, and height of backyard homes, participants tended to perceive the negative impacts of these structures as neighborhood problems. For example, where backyard homes do not “blend” with the community or are “out of scale”, their presence produces visual blight in the neighborhood and contributes to “shantytown-ism.” In only one instance, when discussing view obstruction associated with tall backyard homes, do participants correlate backyard home form as impacting neighbors directly. Further, participants’ concerns about demographic change associated with backyard homes, whether by undermining the integrity of the R1 zone or by the proliferation of undesirable occupants, implies negative impacts on neighborhood character. Such impacts will ultimately affect neighbors, but we see this issue as primarily neighborhood-level because the negative externalities accrue first at the community scale. Interestingly, when participants discuss the benefits of backyard homes, these impacts occur at neither the neighborhood nor neighbor scale, but only at the level of the homeowner. Being able to house family members (adult children, recent college graduates, older adult relatives, etc.) and augmenting household income through rental property are described as beneficial for families, households, and individuals. Given that residents and council members seem

to perceive backyard homes as generally benefitting a single homeowner at the expense of the community first and neighbors second, it is unsurprising that a majority of participants take issue with these structures. Policymakers and analysts who address backyard home impacts at the neighborhood scale should take note of this divide, and direct further research toward understanding both the negative and positive impacts of backyard homes for neighbors and neighborhoods.

Though participants generally perceive backyard homes negatively impacting neighborhoods, they are divided on the scale at which interventions should occur to address these problems. For example, some hold the view that the city should intervene to make the process to build harder.¹³ On the other end of the spectrum, when asked who should be consulted in the building process, the most popular response was “no one,” reflecting widespread advocacy of individual property rights. Several participants supported localized, neighborhood-level governance of backyard home issues, suggesting that the group adopt a statement about backyard homes as the council’s official position. From the collective workshop experience it is clear that respondents are aware that existing backyard homes are creating issues for the neighborhood, but are divided on the scale and strategy from which to address such issues.

Us vs. Them: Unwelcome Neighborhood Change

In order to better understand council members’ insistence about neighborhood crowding associated with backyard homes and their characterization of occupants in “othering” terms, we conducted additional research about the community’s population over time. This research, when aligned with the demographics of the participants, suggests that overcrowding may be a perceived rather than actual issue, although a community-level survey would be necessary to validate such suppositions. Furthermore, this follow-up research suggests that key voices may be missing from the discussion in Harbor Gateway North, and some of the negative issues cited by participants could merely be proxies for resistance to unwelcome change in neighborhood demographics.

In order to test the assertion that overcrowding associated with backyard homes is a prime issue in this neighborhood, we investigated population change in census tracts all or partially enclosed by the boundaries of the Harbor Gateway North Neighborhood Council (Table 5.4). We learned that in the 20 years between 1990 and 2010, total population increased by only 11.8%.¹⁴ This is slightly higher than the rate of population growth for the City of Los Angeles for the same period, which was 8.8%.¹⁵ Interestingly, the majority of this growth for both the city and neighborhood council

occurred between 1990 and 2000. Since 2000, Harbor Gateway North’s population has grown by only 2.2% (growth between 1990-2000 was at a rate of 9.3%), which is slightly lower than the City’s growth rate of 2.6% for the same period.¹⁶ Though the overall rate of population growth has slowed in the last ten years, major shifts have occurred in racial/ethnic populations within the council area. Since 1990 the Hispanic/Latino population has grown by nearly 75%, while the White population has decreased by 61% and the Black population has decreased by nearly 23%.¹⁷ The Asian population, for which we do not have data in 1990, also saw a 12% population loss between 2000 and 2010.¹⁸ In other words, Hispanics/Latinos are the only group that has experienced population growth in Harbor Gateway North in the last 20 years, while all other groups have lost population. On the ground, these population shifts have likely had the greatest tangible impact on Black residents. In 1990 Blacks were the largest racial group in the council area by population, followed closely by Hispanics/Latinos. In the neighborhood there was roughly one Black resident for every one Hispanic/Latino resident. In 2010, Hispanics/Latinos held a clear population majority with roughly two Hispanic/Latino residents for every one Black resident. Though the White population has experienced the greatest percentage loss, this group (in addition to Asians) has been a minority in the area for at least 20 years and thus has not experienced recent population displacement.¹⁹ Blacks, on

Harbor Gateway North Population by Race	2010	2000	1990	% Change 2000-2010	% Change 1990-2000	% Change 1990-2010
White Alone	815	1,200	2,124	-32.1%	-43.5%	-61.6%
Hispanic or Latino*	21,162	17,613	12,123	20.1%	45.3%	74.6%
Black Alone	11,543	13,894	14,929	-16.9%	-6.9%	-22.7%
Asian Alone	1,877	2,137	n/a	-12.2%	n/a	n/a
Total	36,054	35,264	32,258	2.2%	9.3%	11.8%

Population	2010	2000	1990	% Change 2000-2010	% Change 1990-2000	% Change 1990-2010
City of Los Angeles	3,792,621	3,694,820	3,485,398	2.6%	6.0%	8.8%

*Values of all years are for Hispanics or Latino of any race

Table 5.4 Harbor Gateway North Population Change 1990-2010

the other hand, have dropped from nearly half the population (46%) in 1990 to approximately a third (32%) in 2010.²⁰ These statistics suggest that a Black resident who has lived in the community for ten or twenty years might perceive overpopulation occurring, because his or her relative position vis-à-vis other racial/ethnic groups in the neighborhood is changing.

Considering these trends alongside the demographic make-up of the Harbor Gateway North workshop participants, it is likely that the group does not represent the demographics of the neighborhood. The majority of participants in the workshop appeared to be Black, with

no Hispanic/Latino residents in attendance. Since Hispanics/Latinos constitute a majority of the council area and have become the majority recently, their input in discussion of neighborhood issues is important. This input is particularly important when we consider that Hispanic/Latino residents are implicitly and explicitly identified as the occupants and/or owners of existing backyard homes in the neighborhood. Previously cited comments by participants suggest that many backyard home occupants are immigrants and/or newcomers to the community. Given the recent growth of the Hispanic/Latino population in this area and broader immigration trends in Los Angeles and

California generally, we hypothesize that these neighborhood newcomers are predominantly of Latin American descent, and may be recent immigrants.²¹ Census data further bolsters this assumption. If we examine language spoken at home as an indicator of assimilation, we can look at the percentage of English speakers versus non-English speakers as a marker, albeit imperfect, for immigrant presence (see Table 5.5).²² In Harbor Gateway North in 2010, 58.6% of residents spoke a non-English language at home and the overwhelming majority of these individuals (93%) spoke Spanish.²³ In total, 54.5% of the population in Harbor Gateway North speaks Spanish at home, and approximately 58.7% of the population is Hispanic/Latino.²⁴ This data tells us that language retention is very high among Hispanics/Latinos in Harbor Gateway North, which suggests a significant presence of immigrants and new Americans. When we couple this data alongside participant comments about backyard home occupants coming from “third world countries” and being “not legal residents of the United States,” we can conclude that workshop participants are likely describing immigrant Latinos, undocumented or documented, and their family members as the “others” using backyard homes.

By coupling these statistics and hypotheses, a new frame emerges from which to consider and evaluate the comments, suggestions, and opinions of the Harbor Gateway North workshop participants. Considering the

Language Spoken at Home 2010**	Total Population (age 5+)	Non-English Language	% Non-English Language	Spanish Language	% Spanish Language	Spanish as % of Non-English Speakers
Harbor Gateway North	32,326	18,948	58.6%	17,627	54.5%	93.0%

**Values based on an estimate sample

Table 5.5 Harbor Gateway North Language Spoken at Home

comments of the predominantly Black council toward the “others” in the community who build and occupy backyard homes (presumably Hispanics/Latinos and immigrants), one wonders whether opposition to backyard homes is masking deeper concerns about the changing racial/ethnic/cultural composition of the neighborhood. In other words, living with extended family on a single lot, building a large or tall accessory dwelling unit, and other behaviors may not be problematic as a rule in Harbor Gateway North, but are discussed in negative terms by members of one group because they represent the threat of change and displacement by a different group. Perhaps parking shortages, increased density, and traffic are not the “real” issues here, or at least are not as significant as expressed by workshop participants. Perhaps the underlying issue is fear of neighborhood change and becoming culturally or literally displaced by a group that doesn’t seem to share one’s values.

Bounds of the Law

Comments from workshop participants also suggest that opposition to backyard homes may have more to do with their perceived existence outside the law, rather than with their real impacts on neighbors and neighborhoods. Throughout the discussion, participants correlated backyard homes with negligent behavior and illegal activities. As one member wrote, “neighbors who tend to rent these dwellings are the same neighbors who break other build[ing] [and] safety codes, parking codes, set up illegitimate businesses on their property, and just have a general lack of respect for their neighbors [and] neighborhood.” It was evident during discussion that a number of participants felt dismayed by the behavior of existing backyard home occupants. When responding to a question about whether a backyard home increases property taxes, one participant countered, “do you think these people are actually declaring that on their taxes?” This statement suggests

perceived chicanery on the part of backyard homebuilders and relates to aforementioned concerns about occupants, namely “those not legal residents of the U.S.” As we see here, participants seem to be conflating “illegal” activities, “illegal” occupants, and “illegal” units. Though illicit activities, undocumented individuals, and unpermitted units are all likely present in this neighborhood, participants discuss these discrete conditions as though they are predicated upon one another.

This perception of illegality may also stem from the mystery of the backyard, and potential alienation between neighbors because of demographic and/or cultural factors. The backyard holds a degree of mystique between neighbors; one can often hear and smell activities occurring within its limits, but can seldom see exactly what is going on. As a benign example, the smell of briquettes and the sound of laughter suggest that the neighbors might be having a barbeque. However, if you cannot see into the neighbor’s lot, it is hard to know exactly what is happening there. When activities are less easily interpreted (e.g. different people coming and going, strange noises, unusual smells, etc.), suspicions arise and questions about legality can emerge. These concerns can intensify when neighbors speak different languages, behave differently as a matter of custom, or have had previous negative experiences with one another. In sum, the mentality that backyard home occupants

engage in social elements outside the law (whether real or perceived) might undergird a significant portion of the opposition we encountered in Harbor Gateway North.

Mid City West Community Council

Neighborhood Description

Mid City West Community Council is centrally located within the City of Los Angeles. The Community Council district shares extensive borders with the cities of West Hollywood and Beverly Hills on the west, in addition to bordering Los Angeles neighborhoods like Hancock Park and Pico-Robertson (see Figure 5.7). The Mid City West neighborhood comprises several residential zones of single and multi-family housing, as well as key commercial corridors along Wilshire Boulevard, Melrose Avenue, La Brea Avenue, Fairfax Avenue, and Beverly Boulevard. Administratively, the council divides itself into 7 zones, which include discrete residential neighborhoods like Park La Brea, Melrose Village, Carthay Square, and Miracle Mile, alongside large-scale commercial hubs like the Beverly Center. Mid-City West’s single-family neighborhoods are subdivided into 4,359 lots, of which 98% currently support a structure (see Table 5.6).²⁵ Despite this number of single-family lots, only 20% of housing units are owner occupied, suggesting a majority renter population in

the district.²⁶ Regarding population, Mid City West has a higher representation of Whites and lower representation of Hispanics/Latinos relative to the City of Los Angeles, and is 67% White, 15% Asian, 9% Hispanic/Latino, and 6% Black. Average household size is small relative to the City of Los Angeles, at just 1.86 persons per household.²⁷

Workshop Description

Participants in Mid City West did not engage in lengthy discussion about backyard homes, and instead provided mostly written feedback about concerns and preferences. In contrast to the other workshops, most board members expressed neutral or supportive attitudes toward backyard home construction/conversion. The conversation here may have been less reactive because participants did not discuss backyard homes as currently creating major problems in the neighborhood. They tended to describe backyard homes in hypothetical terms; what these structures should or shouldn’t do instead of what they are currently doing.

Observations and Analysis

Backyard Homes Form

We observed several themes in conversations about the form of a backyard home, including concern with scale, setbacks, and mixed feelings about size. When considering the “type” of

Geography	Housing Characteristics					Resident Characteristics			
	Total Single-Family Lots	Total Vacant Single-Family Lots	Percent Single-Family Lots with a Structure	Percent Owner Occupied Housing Units	Average Household Size	Percent Non-Hispanic White	Percent Latino or Hispanic White (of any race)	Percent Non-Hispanic Black	Percent Non-Hispanic Asian
Mid City West	4,359	96	98%	20%	1.86	67%	9%	6%	15%
City of Los Angeles	434,151	30,044	93%	39%	2.85	29%	49%	10%	11%

Table 5.6 Mid City West Neighborhood Council summary statistics

backyard home that might be appropriate in Mid City West, scale and avoiding overbuilding is very important. Respondents demonstrated a clear preference for detached backyard homes in lieu of alternative solutions, because attached and above the garage or house options are perceived as increasing the scale and bulk of the main house. One respondent indicated, "if the house is already a two-story, [then above the main house] is a 'mansionization' complaint in the community." According to another participant, "I like the idea of achieving this in a separate building behind a main residence (instead of creating one large continuous building)." Both respondents suggest that secondary units above or attached to the main house are less desirable than detached units because they add unwanted size.

When asked about related issues of visibility and height, participants demonstrated a preference for small units that are not visible from the street, which is likely related to aforementioned concerns about scale (see Figure 5.8). All but

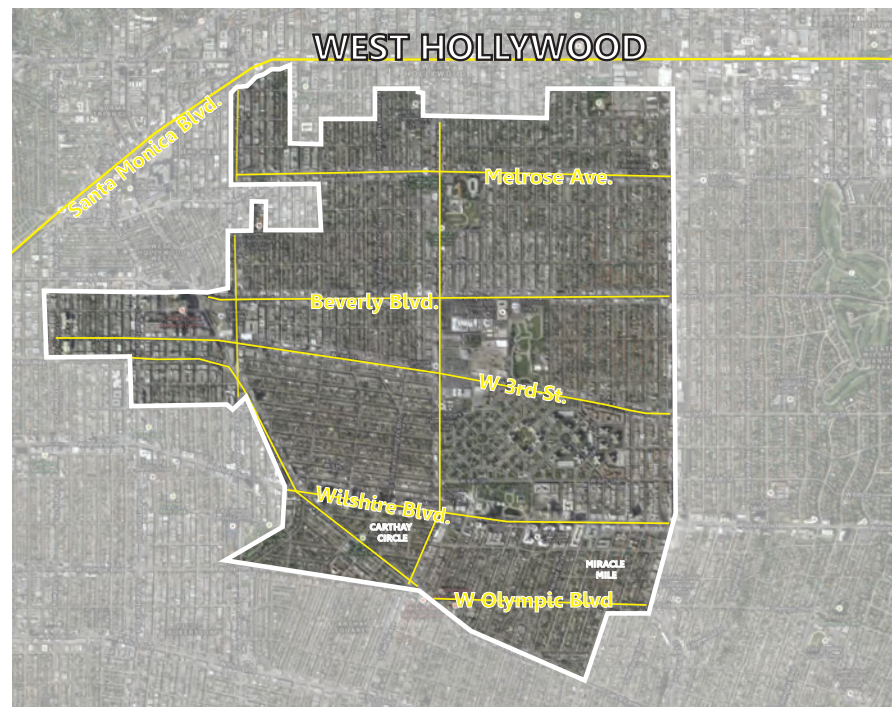


Figure 5.7 Aerial of Mid City West Community Council boundaries

two participants (who indicated “no opinion”) agree or strongly agree that a backyard home in Mid City West can be short and not visible from the street. However, four of twelve participants also indicated openness to taller structures that are visible from the street. These quantitative responses suggest that a majority of council members and residents would prefer backyard homes to be short and not visible, but some are also not opposed to tall backyard homes. One participant wrote that “as long as it meets height and setback and lot size regulations, and percent of lot in use, it’s OK.” For another, if the unit is built “in a historic preservation overlay zone like Miracle Mile North, backyard homes should be of compatible scale.”

When discussing square footage rather than bulk, participants demonstrated slightly more variation in their opinions about the appropriate backyard home for their neighborhood. The majority, eight of eleven, were equally split between small and medium units, while the remaining three felt that units should be very small. Several respondents suggested limiting square footage anywhere from 300 (very small) to 1,000 (medium or less) square feet. One respondent indicated that “allowable square footage for second dwelling units should be large.” Another simply felt that “backyard homes should be smaller than the front residence,” indicating that scale (the relationship of one building to the next) is more important than square footage. Defining

secondary unit size by its relationship to other structures is echoed by another respondent, who writes, “size should be proportional to lot size and/or primary dwelling size, with limits on overall lot coverage.” For another respondent, backyard homes should be “very small, provided there is appropriate front, back, and side yards.” Another respondent’s comments imply that maintaining setbacks is critical because residents may be concerned about a backyard home covering too much open space in the backyard. This individual writes, “I think [backyard homes] are a good idea, within reason, depending on size of lot. If lot is small and they’re just cramming one in - not good!” This participant does not describe why a “crammed in” backyard home might not be good, but we can look to other respondents’ concerns about overbuilding as one possible explanation.

Neighborhood Character

Mid City West board members and residents indicate that backyard homes should be compatible with community character, while also envisioning these structures as architectural solutions that might contribute to neighborhood vitality and help accommodate growth. Architecturally, participants seem to prefer styles that are compatible with neighborhood character, but not necessarily uniform with the main house or other structures. When asked whether the architectural style of a backyard home can be different from the main house,



Figure 5.8 Added height of unit behind main residence in Mid City West neighborhood. Photo: Cecilia Huber

responses were mixed. When we consider participants’ written comments, we might interpret this data as representing a range of tolerance for different styles, depending on conditions such as visibility. For example, on the more permissive end of the spectrum, one participant suggests that “backyard homes should be compatible in style but can read as different from original, but I think it’s important to maintain consistency with community character.” For another respondent, “if unseen from front of street...then fine.” In other words, so long as the unit cannot be seen from the street, then neighborhood character is not an issue; homeowners’ design preferences should prevail. Others offered more vague advice that the unit “should complement” or “should match!” Some also indicated that architectural

compatibility is more important in the historic preservation overlay zones of the neighborhood.

In contrast to other neighborhood councils, Mid City West participants generally discussed backyard home-building as a “unique way to meet demand for growth while not demolishing/altering existing residences.” In other words, backyard homes might offer a solution to preserve and maintain single-family neighborhood character in light of population growth and trends toward “mansionization.” One respondent writes, “[backyard homes] provide an interesting opportunity for accommodating growth. Consideration should be given to ensuring compatibility with existing community character. I think this is a better solution to completely demolishing an existing residence to build a larger ‘McMansion.’” Another respondent writes “I love this idea” and comments that granny flats provide a preferable alternative to densification via new apartment building construction, because they do not require as much height. A different respondent foresees that “backyard homes can add housing capacity to help in housing shortages.” Another participant affirms, “I think they are great for community members who could actually use the extra space.” Additionally, “[backyard homes] have the potential to be an attractive, practical part of the housing mix, especially for extended family.” In thinking about alley-adjacent lots, one participant writes that “this could be a nice way to activate alleys.” Throughout,

participants envision backyard homes adding value to the community and having utility in the neighborhood, whether to address city-wide problems (housing shortages), local problems (overbuilding and under-used alley spaces), or individual problems (a need for extra space or to accommodate extended family).

Though the majority of respondents discuss backyard homes as a strategy for preserving neighborhood character, there are several minority voices that express concern about changing neighborhood character. One respondent harbors concern about redefining the single-family zone, suggesting that backyard homes “should be available only to family members in an R1 zone. If not family then it’s an R2 or greater zone.” Here we see a theme that emerges in other neighborhood councils: the notion of non-family occupants as incompatible with the single-family, R1 zone. Others imply that construction of backyard homes should be strategic because “placing new housing at highly visible corner lots could alter community character.” This concern about visibility suggests that backyard homes might not be beneficial on every lot in a neighborhood. When offering first reactions to backyard homes, another respondent simply states, “not in my backyard.” Despite these minority opinions about potential negative impacts of backyard homes on community character, respondents generally perceive backyard homes and their impacts as positive.

Transportation, Parking, and Traffic

Respondents are concerned about backyard home impacts on parking and generally agree that lots should accommodate parking on-site, but are not concerned about traffic and congestion. When asked whether backyard homes should meet current parking requirements, nine respondents agreed or strongly agreed that this was very important (the remaining two strongly disagreed and one did not respond). Put simply, “parking should be on-site as there is generally a lack of available parking on streets.” Respondents emphasized that backyard homes “must have on-site parking,” and that “stacked (tandem) parking should be acceptable.” In addition to these clear preferences for onsite parking, several participants highlighted issues with current parking requirements for backyard homebuilders. One board member stated, “I looked into this for my property and I couldn’t do it because I didn’t have enough parking... that makes it undoable.” Another board member discussed differential parking needs, particularly among elder residents, stating “It’s a little more complicated because every driveway around here is just a single driveway, so some interpretations would be [that] you can’t have people having to park around [when] everybody needs to come and go as they please, and I think that’s a little inappropriate... especially with multiple generations in the family.” Both participants point to the

challenge of accommodating parking for an additional vehicle on-site, in addition to problems with tandem configurations (see Figure 5.9 a-b). The second comment implies that, if the unit is being used for a member of the family who does not own or require a vehicle (for example, an elderly relative), the parking requirement is inappropriate.

In addition to offering feedback about parking, participants indicated areas of the neighborhood where backyard homes might be appropriate. Nine of twelve participants favored large lots, followed by lots adjacent to an alley, and adjacent to commercial properties. Half of respondents favored near light rail or transit stops and on corner lots. The least popular option was adjacent to multi-family properties. Participants did not offer any comments to illuminate why they ranked these options in this fashion. In sum, the responses from this section of the workshop reveal that even though participants are concerned about parking, they are interested in solutions to make backyard homes buildable in a variety of conditions.

Permit Process

Regarding permitting processes for backyard homes most respondents were enthusiastic about the prospect of building their own backyard home and think the process should be easier. When asked whether respondents would build a backyard home if they could,



Figure 5.9 (a - b) Two approaches to parking in lots with nearly identical structures. Photos: Cecilia Huber

an overwhelming majority (seven of nine) agreed. Several respondents indicated that they “would walk it through planning, building and safety, etc.” or “would design and build myself according to code.” These statements align with other expressed preferences for an easier permitting process. In their written comments, many participants cite bureaucratic processes affiliated with permitting as the greatest obstacle to building a backyard home. These responses include “[the] code,” “red tape,” “permits...and review,” and “the city.” One respondent argued that the “building code makes no sense. If you have an existing garage but can’t access it you cannot use it for storage or granny flat legally.” Another person noted, “In my experience the city of LA is not a big fan of [the backyard homes] ordinance and they put some other things on top of it that, in my opinion, make it more difficult than

necessary and prevent really good construction from going forward.” When discussing these obstacles to building, most participants point to permitting or approval processes and no responses relate to perceived negative impacts on the community (e.g. parking, privacy, etc.).

Though respondents generally desire more streamlined building processes with less red tape, they are somewhat divided about who should be consulted in the approval process. Four respondents indicate that adjacent neighbors should have a say, three indicate that no one should be consulted, and three others feel that “others” should get approval authority, including “Historic Preservation Overlay Zone Board (if applicable), Office of Historic Resources (if home is Historic-Cultural Monument or has a Mills Act Contract),” and “the Planning Department.” One respondent’s

refreshing candor may shed light on this range in responses: “I’m conflicted as I wouldn’t want to ask permission, but would want a say if a neighbor wanted to build one.” This sentiment may underlie other participants’ responses, and explain why it is difficult to mandate who should and should not be involved in the approval process. In fact, two other respondents cite “neighbor approval” and “neighborhood councils” as two of the greatest obstacles to building a backyard home.

Interpretation

Neighbors vs. Neighborhood

In Mid City West, neighborhood council members generally discuss backyard homes as a topic with neighborhood impacts, but are mixed about the scale at which such units should be regulated. Participants describe concerns about backyard home scale, bulk, and overbuilding as issues that garner community complaints, as opposed to issues that generate inter-neighbor disputes. When describing concerns about backyard homes on corner lots being overly visible, one respondent cited impacts on community character as the issue, but did not register concern about direct neighbor impacts such as privacy or view obstruction. Discussions about parking also reflect preoccupation with collective impact on neighborhood streets, not individual properties. Finally, respondents’ comments about positive impacts from backyard

homes on housing supply and accommodating neighborhood growth reflect a “neighborhood” rather than “neighbor” lens. Though discussion generally relates to community impacts, participants are divided about how backyard homes should be regulated. About half of respondents feel that backyard home-building should be by-right or require approval of adjacent neighbors (a neighbor-scale approach), while a few suggest that broader regulatory bodies should have a say (a neighborhood-scale approach). One possible explanation for this complexity is that council members are less inclined toward neighborhood-scale regulation and control of backyard homes because they generally perceive these units having positive neighborhood impacts.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Given our in-depth conversations in three Los Angeles neighborhood councils, we can draw several preliminary conclusions about local concerns and politics surrounding backyard homes, which may apply to other neighborhoods in the city. First, council members are generally more concerned with the type and number of occupants residing in a backyard home than with most formal qualities of the unit. Mid City West is a notable exception in this case. Second, council members are more open to the idea of family members residing in accessory dwelling

units than renters, although even this possibility is questionable for some in Harbor Gateway North. Third, the scale, height/visibility, and bulk of a backyard home is significantly more important than the architectural style of the unit, whether because of impacts on privacy and neighborhood green space (Westside) or neighborhood character (Harbor Gateway North and Mid City West). Fourth, though parking and transportation concerns are a prevailing theme associated with backyard homes, we observed minimal concern about increasing traffic and congestion from backyard homes and only see anxiety about parking in neighborhoods where street parking is already scarce (Mid City West and Harbor Gateway North). Future research should be directed toward closely investigating links between backyard home construction or conversion and increased demands on street parking to assess whether and to what degree these impacts are real or imagined. Finally, closer study should be directed toward the ways communities define or conceive of neighborhood character. The constitutive elements of “community character” emerged as a major discussion point in all three neighborhoods, yet the definition for this amorphous term was not always clear, nor was it the same across neighborhood councils. One element that seems to be critical in determining community character is how residents perceive the single-family zone. In each council we heard, to varying degrees, concern about maintaining the integrity of the single-family

zone as an area in which single families, and usually single dwelling units, occupy a lot. This sentiment was weakest in Mid City West. Council members there demonstrated broader thinking about the R1 zone and were able to conceive of this zone absorbing neighborhood growth through backyard homes, without threatening the constitutive elements of what makes their neighborhood a community. On the opposite end of the spectrum, participants in Harbor Gateway North perceived backyard homes as enabling growth that runs contrary to neighborhood character and the intended purpose of the single-family zone. In the former case, backyard homes offer a solution to accommodating inevitable growth while preserving single-family neighborhood character. In the latter case, backyard homes attract undesirable growth and threaten single-family neighborhood character. In many ways, these contrary reactions to backyard homes tell us more about how neighborhood leaders perceive growth, neighborhood change, and the single-family zone than they tell us about residents' concerns about backyard homes.

Notes

1 Eric Garcetti and Chris Hawthorne, *A Conversation with Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti*, (Urban and Environmental Policy Institute, Occidental College, February 13, 2014), <http://www.oxy.edu/news/mayors-designs-city>.

2 Los Angeles County Assessor, *Local Roll A*, 2010-2011.

3 U.S. Census Bureau 2010, <http://factfinder2.census.gov/>

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 In some instances, we note that two vehemently opposed participants (outliers) are removed from the analysis, because their cited opposition to backyard homes prevented them from engaging with particular questions.

7 It is unclear whether the “commercial enterprise” described in this comment refers to the home-building industry or the commercial activity of a homeowner renting a backyard home to a non-family tenant. Both issues were discussed by the council at length, with some members concerned that the researchers represented pre-fabricated home-building interests.

The association of secondary dwelling units with pre-fabrication is an interesting, serendipitous finding that will be discussed in Chapter 6.

8 Los Angeles County Assessor, *Local Roll A*, 2010-2011.

9 U.S. Census Bureau 2010, <http://factfinder2.census.gov/>

10 U.S. Census Bureau 2010, <http://factfinder2.census.gov/>

11 Participants were provided with a list of sites or areas within their neighborhood that they thought were appropriate to allow backyard homes. Council members could indicate a “yes” or “no” for each type of site. Presumably, those sites or areas with the greatest number of “yes” responses and least “no” responses will be met with the least resistance for backyard homes.

12 The manner in which increased population density and overcrowding impact health and education systems is not discussed by participants in detail, so the veracity of such correlations in this neighborhood cannot be verified here. We cite this correlation merely to demonstrate how neighborhood

residents *perceive* the impacts of backyard homes on systems, not to suggest actual causation.

13 Research shows that over-regulating housing behaviors often leads to greater proliferation of illegal or unpermitted structures, so such an approach may actually worsen the behaviors that council members already experience and perceive as negative. See: Roy, Ananya. (2005). Urban Informality: Toward an Epistemology of Planning. *Journal of the American Planning Association* 71:2, 147-158.

14 U.S. Census Bureau 1990, 2000, and 2010, <http://factfinder2.census.gov/>.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 U.S. Census Bureau 2000 and 2010, <http://factfinder2.census.gov/>.

19 The percentage of Whites in the neighborhood dropped from 7% in 1990 to 2% in 2010. See: U.S. Census Bureau 1990 and 2010, <http://factfinder2.census.gov/>.

20 U.S. Census Bureau 1990 and 2010, <http://factfinder2.census.gov/>.

21 Immigration Policy Center. *New Americans in California*. January 11, 2013. Accessed March 5, 2013 from <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/new-americans-california>.

22 Households where a non-English language is spoken at home more likely include immigrants and new Americans than households where English is spoken at home.

23 U.S. Census Bureau 2010, <http://factfinder2.census.gov/>

24 Though persons who are not of Hispanic/Latino descent may speak Spanish at home, it is likely that the vast majority of those using the language are of Hispanic/Latino descent. Source: US Census 2010.

25 Los Angeles County Assessor, *Local Roll A*, 2010-2011.

26 U.S. Census Bureau 2010, <http://factfinder2.census.gov/>

27 Ibid.



CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions

Accessory dwelling units, granny flats, garage apartments, alley units, carriage flats, companion units, elder cottages, mother-in-law suites --all backyard homes by other names-- are receiving increased attention from cities, affordable housing activists, and homeowners. In American cities, rent as a proportion of income has increased dramatically over the past twenty years making affordable housing alternatives important not only to low income but middle income households.¹ Moreover, as patterns of daily life within and around the single family dwelling change to reflect contemporary household structures, the need increases for more flexible, more economical, and more sustainable residential solutions. A robust market demand for backyard homes coupled with the complications of obtaining legal permits for their construction has led to a large number of illegal secondary units, with rough estimates ranging from 42,000 to 100,000 in Los Angeles County (see Ch 2).

In 2003, the State of California passed Assembly Bill 1866, referred to as the “granny flat bill” to address the need for affordable housing. AB1866 requires municipalities to approve second dwelling units on single and multi-family lots that meet broad, general requirements.

But cities across the state instituted their own additional, restrictive requirements that in effect, prevent or substantially reduce the construction of second units on single family lots. There have been loud claims that the State’s one-size-fits-all policy is inappropriate; local municipalities should determine their own policies for backyard homes.² This research increases our understanding of neighborhood concerns, how these concerns have been addressed, the characteristics of neighborhoods where backyard homes might be advantageous, the various reasons for support or opposition to backyard homes, and how backyard homes might be better designed to respond to concerns. This information in turn serves as the basis for preliminary policy recommendations.

Anecdotes suggest the wide range of positive uses for a backyard home: homeowners seek rental income to help pay the mortgage; parents imagine their college graduates returning to live at but not within the home; adult children wish aging parents had a caregiver residing on the property; young parents imagine a nanny flat that could later become a home office; older adults hope to age in place, living in a backyard unit while renting out their larger, original home. Even if each single-family

household has a backyard home narrative, this does not equate with political support. Instead, opposition to accessory dwelling units and ordinances that permit them has cropped up in neighborhoods of varying economic status, geographic location, social and ethnic characteristics, and density. This research set out to understand the discrepancy between need and support for backyard homes. We asked three questions: What are the local concerns about backyard homes? How are real and perceived concerns addressed in practice? How can design and planning better address the concerns? Our conclusions regarding each of these questions are summarized below.

Local Concerns About Backyard Homes

According to popular media and this research, opposition is based on a wide array of concerns.³ In order of importance, the study found the top concerns are: parking (particularly the availability of street parking), increased density and overcrowding, potential crime and disorder, inadequate infrastructure, increase in renters and low-income residents, safety, decline in property values, and changes

to neighborhood character (see Ch 3). On the other side of the equation, the same respondents voiced conditional support for backyard homes when (in order): occupied by extended family, rents and/or property values increase, more affordable housing is available, and land use is more efficient.

The study team hypothesized that formal complaints against backyard homes would be a strong indicator of local concerns that underlie opposition. However, a survey of neighborhood councils showed that few formal requests were made at the neighborhood level to address unpermitted backyard units, even though such units were widely thought to exist. Along with content analysis of neighborhood council meetings, a preliminary explanation is unexpected: although backyard homes are regulated at the municipal level, and heatedly discussed at the neighborhood council level, they are primarily of direct concern to adjacent neighbors. In other words, for the neighborhood councils studied here, perceived problems did not materialize in direct action against backyard homes and when asked, participants at neighborhood meetings were primarily concerned about

maintaining backyard privacy on adjacent lots, parking, and the visibility of secondary units.

Perhaps it should come as no surprise that local concerns are primarily based on perceived and even imagined threats, since the secondary units are literally hidden in backyards. Without direct information or reliable data about the number of units, size, occupancy, parking, or impact on infrastructure, both local opposition and support are without empirical basis. It is possible that neighborhood meetings not only generate shared perceptions and attitudes, but reinforce misperceptions about the prevalence and impacts of accessory dwelling units. Indeed, this conclusion is corroborated by the underreporting of minority views in public conversation when compared with individual survey results from participants at neighborhood council meetings. This research assumed neighborhood councils were the appropriate opinion-shaping entities that would represent relatively uniform acceptance or opposition to backyard homes. Instead, we discovered that neighborhood councils were sites of established residents and public agreement; in other words, minority views were unlikely to be articulated aloud. Similarly, neighborhood councils were not necessarily

representative of neighborhood residents but instead made up of more established, longer term residents. The populations of renters, low-income tenants, or recently-arrived neighbors were less likely to influence the opinions voiced publicly at neighborhood council meetings.

Three recommendations result from this research about local concerns. First, hard data about existing backyard homes is necessary if we wish to create responsive local regulation. Data must be gathered and reported about the number of accessory units, their size, who occupies them, their affordability, and the number of parking spaces provided on site. Second, this hard data can be correlated with crime data, infrastructure overloads, property values, and rental rates. Such information would provide corroboration or refutation for perceptions about backyard homes. Third, information about support for or opposition to backyard homes must be gathered from individuals rather than neighborhood groups, and those individuals should be queried about their individual preferences, experiences, and concerns. It is important to ensure that data and opinions are also collected from individuals from underrepresented groups that do not typically participate in Neighborhood Councils and the planning process. Such individual

responses when tallied together will provide a more representative measure against which to evaluate the collective stance of a neighborhood organization. It is this study's conclusion that more robust data about existing backyard homes and individual concerns are necessary to formulate adequate responses and regulations.

Responses to Real and Perceived Concerns

Local municipalities have instituted numerous regulations to address concerns, real or perceived, about backyard homes. The vast majority (66 out of 71) of local municipalities in Los Angeles County have created stricter regulations than the City of Los Angeles to govern construction of backyard homes. Some of these regulations virtually prevent secondary units, such as stiff parking requirements that are impossible to meet on average residential lots. Similarly, although regulations related to setback requirements may have been intended to maintain neighborhood character, insure privacy, or enhance fire safety, these also effectively and significantly reduce the overall number of properties where a backyard home can be added.

This research shows that while the majority of respondents in this study are opposed to backyard homes, there is widespread conditional support of backyard homes under

certain conditions. When the backyard home is occupied by a member of the extended family, a quarter of respondents are supportive. And about 60% of respondents are willing to consider or support backyard homes when adjacent neighbors are supportive, when design standards are imposed, and when community consent is part of the approval process.

A key finding in this work is the lack of understanding about backyard home regulations. There is a definite need for clarity in municipal regulations and for education about laws surrounding accessory dwellings, building permits, allowed uses, and general requirements. Indeed, our own researchers were unable to find legislation about accessory dwellings for some cities, and for others the regulations were difficult to decipher. As communities seek to restrict or customize granny flat legislation to their particular circumstances, the need for transparency and clarity of the legislation increases. Santa Cruz has demonstrated that a complex, strict, and responsive ordinance governing backyard homes can be explained effectively through extensive, illustrative, publicly available, clearly written materials.

Local responses to concerns about backyard homes are primarily related to physical construction matters: number of parking spaces, setbacks, building mass and design, or site coverage. While these address some

concerns (primarily about parking and neighborhood character) they respond only indirectly if at all to what might be called the socio-economic concerns about accessory dwellings: whether they are occupied by family members, whether they are actually affordable, if they are overcrowded, and generally, who occupies the units. Cities like Santa Fe Springs, Duarte, and Sierra Madre that have incentivized backyard homes rented to low income households should serve as models for the creation of responsive local regulation.

This study concludes with three recommendations about local response to concerns about backyard homes. First, local governments should have reasonable standards and regulations for backyard homes that do not prevent their development, or make their development almost impossible. Second, if regulation is the primary response to local concerns, these must be explained in straightforward ways that anyone can understand. The opacity of municipal ordinances must be made transparent and intelligible. Third, responses to concerns over backyard housing must extend beyond building regulations to include concerns about occupancy. Municipal ordinances can incentivize backyard homes occupied by extended family members, particularly elderly householders, as well as for low income residents.

Design of Backyard Homes and Neighborhood Planning

The design of backyard homes and the associated planning of neighborhoods to accommodate them were studied in two different manners. First, historical residential development types were identified in terms of their potential to accommodate a secondary unit, and subsequently, the most feasible types were located within the Los Angeles city fabric to evaluate their present, existing conditions. This evaluation comprised testing potential site designs for varied lot configurations to determine the feasibility of backyard home construction given current building and planning regulations. Second, researchers queried participants of three select neighborhood councils about their concerns and preferences about backyard home design and planning. The conclusions from each part of the design and planning study will be taken in order.

Regarding the design and planning of backyard homes, we began with the hypothesis that certain physical characteristics of residential neighborhoods and lots would play a significant role in the feasibility of backyard homes. For example, older neighborhoods with small houses on large lots would make better sites for implementing backyard homes. In addition, lot types such as alley lots, corner lots, and large lots, would make adding a secondary unit more feasible.

Upon study, three linked conclusions can be drawn from this part of the analysis.

1. Historically identifiable neighborhood development types function as the first gateway to possible backyard home construction.
2. A more stringent gateway concerns post-occupancy home remodeling, which can usurp formerly buildable site areas.
3. The prevalence of home remodeling reduces standardization of backyards in residential developments. Therefore backyard homes must be more customized (rather than standardized) than originally hypothesized.

This study questions the utility of prefabricated housing for backyard homes. In general, prefabricated units are negatively perceived by existing residents in neighborhoods across Los Angeles. Given the lack of standardization among lots and the available space in backyards, affordable construction systems are more likely to rely upon standard means of inexpensive construction, mass customization, or modular systems than on prefabricated units.

If the physical conditions for backyard homes vary more than was expected, there was a surprising level of agreement when it comes to basic community concerns. The three

neighborhood councils studied here represent a wide range of demographics as well as neighborhood types. While the most vocal opinions stand in opposition to backyard homes and participants voice varying concerns, in large part dependent upon existing neighborhood conditions, it is thus all the more significant to find that six positions are shared:

1. There is widespread support for backyard homes for extended families members of existing residents.
2. Small-scale, low-rise backyard homes that do not intrude upon the privacy of neighbors and are not visible from the street are preferable.
3. Backyard homes should not alter neighborhood character, but should rather blend with or look similar to existing homes.
4. Parking for the additional unit should be accommodated on site, to avoid on-street parking problems.
5. If anyone has a say in backyard home construction, it should be the adjacent neighbors.
6. The city should better enforce against unpermitted backyard homes.

These six shared views only partially overlap with the original intents of AB1866, the granny flat ordinance, to increase the supply of affordable housing and maintain neighborhood stability. However, these shared views can form the foundation of a first-step toward implementation, particularly when paired with studies of feasible infill sites.

A primary conclusion of the research is that current opinion about backyard homes is based on two problematic circumstances: a) residents have no experience with well-designed, formally permitted backyard homes in their neighborhoods, or b) they have experience with unpermitted units. Neither is a good basis for understanding the impacts of legal backyard homes and thus for decision-making about future backyard homes in their neighborhoods. This lack of direct experience is magnified by the lack of data about either legal or illegal secondary units in Los Angeles.

Discussion

This research suggests, at a most fundamental level, the need for re-imagining the single-family home and its context, the neighborhood. The kinds of concerns expressed in workshops around neighborhood character indicate that the biggest issues with backyard homes may not relate to the form or structure of any particular building; rather they point to ways that residents

conceive of the single-family zone. Maintaining the integrity of the single-family zone is a priority that cuts across all three workshops. Given that the neighborhoods varied in terms of the current prevalence of secondary units, and thus their literal “integrity” as single-family zones, this priority is more likely to be a fear of additional multi-family development. Thus, what neighborhoods hold in common, regardless of the existing number of secondary units, is concern about additional population density and/or additional building stock. As a result, to garner local support may require re-framing the single-family zone rather than packaging and messaging backyard homes in a particular way. Likewise, it will be important to monitor the ongoing development and impacts of secondary units in neighborhoods.

The vocal concern about community change uncovered in this research was less focused on secondary units than other local issues. Neighborhood council discussions and opinions were tied to the ongoing political concerns of those organizations. In none of the workshops were backyard homes a primary issue. In fact, the workshop sessions in our study appeared to be the first formal discussion about accessory dwelling units. Opinions voiced in these sessions, when hardened, were hardened around other core issues. When backyard homes are viewed as causing more parking problems, bringing more crime, increasing mansionization,

or harboring new immigrants, these depend on a council’s overriding, pre-existing concerns.

As a result, this research recommends careful examination of contingent circumstances that could influence a neighborhood’s support for or opposition to backyard homes. Because of the fluid nature of such contingencies, policies and regulations regarding neighborhood changes including the construction of backyard homes should have built-in review periods or even sunset-clauses, so that ongoing evaluation and discussion is required.

From a broad perspective, this study suggests that urban changes related to secondary units require transformations of not only building regulation, but also current forms of resident participation in the community planning process. New methods of participatory decision making in neighborhoods would ideally be informed by surveys of existing conditions. Ongoing changes would be monitored at two to five year intervals, and with this basic information at hand, a census of household opinions would be surveyed to inform discussion at neighborhood organizations. Planning guidelines would be performance-based rather than created as one-size-fits-all solutions. The initial and continued implementation of backyard homes would depend upon agreed upon performance criteria, such as reduction of rental rates, ability of elderly residents to age in place, availability of on-street parking, and so on.

The study team further concludes that existing neighborhood type is unlikely to be correlated with political acceptance or opposition to backyard homes. This last conclusion holds several implications for backyard home politics. If development-type is independent from backyard home acceptance, any neighborhood could support or oppose their construction. Moreover, lot-by-lot variation may effectively challenge the value of community-level politics and decision-making. This implication is potentially profound since as mentioned above, the discourse surrounding backyard homes has centered on local politics, if not at the neighborhood council level then at the municipal scale. While neighborhood associations are an important part of participatory governance in any city, with regard to backyard homes their views must be augmented with input from individuals and households.

Recommendations

As a result of the study of local concerns about backyard homes, five specific and interrelated recommendations are outlined below. These final recommendations build upon and to some extent reiterate those suggested in the sections above.

Recommendation 1. Planning for the insertion of formally permitted and regulated

backyard homes in Los Angeles will require re-evaluation and rewriting of two important planning regulations regarding passageways and alleys (see Ch 4). Without revisiting these restrictions, a large number of potentially feasible sites are rendered unbuildable.

Recommendation 2. As new, legal backyard homes are built in various neighborhoods, they should be studied in terms of neighborhood impacts, ranging from home prices to street parking. More data about secondary units and their occupants is necessary for the ongoing evaluation of construction and policy.

Recommendation 3. Policy should be created to incentivize construction of backyard homes reflecting the shared preferences listed above: extended family occupants; small units in scale with surrounding structures and consistent with neighborhood character; and units planned with input from adjacent neighbors. Since on-site parking is already required by existing regulation, there is no need for incentives on this count.

Recommendation 4. More reliable and consistent enforcement against newly built illegal units will be a necessary complement to the promotion and regulation of legal unit construction.

Recommendation 5. Clear, easy-to-understand guidelines about backyard homes must be created and disseminated

to the public. These guidelines will include explanations and illustrations about the design, planning, and construction process, as well as the approval process at the level of the city, neighborhood, and neighbor.

Notes

1 Shaila Dewan, "In Many Cities, Rent Is Rising Out of Reach of Middle Class." *New York Times*, April 14, 2014. Accessed 04.15.14: http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/15/business/more-renters-find-30-affordability-ratio-unattainable.html?_r=0

2 Steven Leigh Morris, "Invasion of the Granny Flat." *LA Weekly*, Dec 9, 2009. Accessed Apr 10, 2014. <http://www.laweekly.com/2009-12-10/news/invasion-of-the-granny-flat/>

3 In addition to the research reported in Chapter 3 of this report, see Daryl Kelly, "City-State Clash Looms over 'Granny Flats' Bill." *LA Times*, April 11, 2004. Accessed 04.10.14; <http://articles.latimes.com/2004/apr/11/local/me-granny11>



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Professor Mukhija's past major projects include research on slum upgrading and redevelopment in Mumbai (Bombay), India; research on colonias, infrastructure-poor neighborhoods, and unpermitted trailer parks in California; and an evaluation of inclusionary housing requirements in Southern California.

Professor Mukhija trained as an urban planner (Ph.D., Massachusetts Institute of Technology), urban designer (MUD, University of Hong Kong), and architect (M.Arch., University of Texas, Austin, and B.Arch., the School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi). He also has professional experience as an urban designer and physical planner in India, Hong Kong, and Kuwait with new town design proposals and projects in India, China, and the Middle East. Before coming to UCLA he worked as a post-doctoral researcher for the Fannie Mae Foundation in Washington, D.C., and developed neighborhood upgrading and renewal strategies for American cities.

He is the author of several articles in top scholarly journals (including *Environment and Planning A*, *Housing Policy Debate*, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *Journal of the American Planning Association*, *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, *Journal of Urban Affairs*, *Urban Studies*, and *World Development*), numerous book chapters, a book, *Squatters as Developers? Slum Redevelopment in Mumbai* (Ashgate, 2003), and a co-edited volume, *The Informal American City* (MIT Press 2014).

Professor Mukhija was the Vice Chair of the Department, and the Coordinator of the Design and Development area of concentration. His teaching also contributes to the Community, Economic Development and Housing (CEDH), and the Regional and International Development (RID) areas of concentration. He has won multiple awards for his teaching at UCLA (2007 and 2009).

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Cuff has engaged cultural studies in architecture and the city as a teacher, scholar, practitioner, and activist. Her leadership urban innovation is widely recognized both in the US and abroad. In Sweden, she has served as distinguished professor and an advisor to a range of government agencies concerned with metropolitan development. She was recently appointed by the State of California to oversee the programs funded by Clean Energy Jobs Act (Prop 39). She has published and lectured extensively about the modern American metropolis, the architectural profession, affordable housing, and spatially embedded computing. She has written and edited a number of books, including *Architects' People* (with W.R. Ellis; 1989), *Architecture: The Story of Practice* (1989), *The Provisional City* (2000), a collection of Robert Gutman's writings (*Architecture from the Outside In*, with J. Wreidt; 2010), and *Fast Forward Urbanism* (with R. Sherman, 2011).

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As a socially-engaged scholar, Kimberly has worked with communities from East Hollywood to the Coachella and San Joaquin Valleys on issues such as urban greening and clean water access. Her recent work includes coordination of research activities in Newport Beach and South San Diego-Tijuana for an NSF-funded

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Appendix

Appendix A: Neighborhood Councils' Survey of Perceptions of Backyard Homes/Second Dwelling Units

We are surveying Neighborhood Councils to understand local perceptions about Backyard Homes or Second Dwelling Units. Backyard Homes (also known as Accessory Dwelling Units, second units, granny flats, garage apartments, and backyard cottages) are secondary units in single family housing, and cannot be sold separately from the primary residence. We are keen to identify neighborhoods interested in working with UCLA to explore policies and designs to address the presence of unpermitted Backyard Homes and the demand for legally permitted ones.

1. Please enter your contact information.

Neighborhood Council

Name and position in the Neighborhood Council

Contact information

2. How prevalent do you think are unpermitted Backyard Homes/Second Dwelling Units in your Neighborhood Council? Please select your best estimate:

- 1 - Rare (almost none or less than 1% of single family homes have ADUs)
- 2 - Somewhat rare (1% to 5% of single family homes have ADUs)
- 3 - Not uncommon (6% to 10% of single family homes have ADUs)
- 4 - Somewhat common (11% to 15% of single family homes have ADUs)
- 5 - Common (more than 15% of single family homes have ADUs)
- 6 - Unsure

3. Has your Neighborhood Council been asked to address unpermitted Backyard Homes/Second Dwelling Units in the neighborhood? Please select yes or no, and elaborate.

4. What are your top concerns about permitting Backyard Homes/Second Dwelling Units in your neighborhood? Please list up to five concerns, and elaborate if you wish.

- i.
- ii.
- iii.
- iv.
- v.

5. Similarly, please tell us what you see as the top positive attributes of Backyard Homes/Second Dwelling Units. Please list up to five attributes and elaborate if you wish.

- i.
- ii.
- iii.
- iv.
- v.

6. Should it be easier for property owners to build Backyard Homes (backyard homes) under the following conditions?

Please select yes or no:

- backyard homes on very large single family lots?
- backyard homes on single family properties adjacent to multifamily properties or commercial properties?
- backyard homes that are spaced far away from one another to limit their total number in the neighborhood?
- backyard homes that meet strict design standards to help preserve the visual character of single family neighborhoods?
backyard homes that are attached to the main house?
- backyard homes within a quarter mile of a light rail or subway stop, where residents might use public transit more frequently?
- backyard homes on properties with large driveways for parking cars?

- backyard homes on corner lots that provide an opportunity for parking on two streets?
- backyard homes on lots with back alleys that buffer the impact of the secondary units on neighbors behind them?
- backyard homes that receive a sign-off from adjacent neighbors?
- backyard homes on streets in which all property-owners agree to allow such units?

7. What should be done about existing but unpermitted Backyard Homes/Second Dwelling Units in your neighborhood?

8. Would your Neighborhood Council be interested in working with a team of UCLA architects, urban designers, and urban planners to explore innovative policies and designs to address the demand for Backyard Homes/Second Dwelling Units in your neighborhood?

9. Other comments?

Appendix B: Summary of City of Los Angeles accessory dwelling unit—backyard homes and other second units—requirements and restrictions

Excerpt from Section 12.24W43 Second Dwelling in Single-Family Zone

Type allowed	Second unit is either attached to the existing dwelling and located within the living area of the existing dwelling or detached from the existing dwelling and located on the same lot as the existing dwelling
Permitting process	Ministerial
Zoning	The lot is not intended for sale and must be rented The lot must contain an existing single family dwelling The lot must be zoned for single or multi-family use
Neighborhood density	Minimum of 10' between secondary and primary unit, unless the two units are attached A second unit requested under these provisions is not considered to exceed the allowable density for the lot upon which it is located, and is deemed a residential use that is consistent with the existing general plan and zoning designations for the lot
Parking	An uncovered parking space is permitted in any location on a lot, including within required setbacks (assuming appropriate access is provided). No fire rated wall is required in any structure next to or within any distance of an uncovered parking space. A parking garage can be located on the side lot line, provided it is at least 55 feet from the front lot line. A solid wall (i.e. no openings) along the lot line is required by the Fire Code. A garage containing 2 cars parked in tandem is permitted provided the 2 cars parked in tandem are assigned to a single unit. If the garage contains a 3rd parking space, the additional unused space can be used for storage; no special separation is required and no special permit is required other than one for "garage + storage." One standard sized parking space per unit is required; additional spaces may be compact. Cars cannot back out of a garage onto a major or secondary highway. If fronting on a major or secondary highway, adequate turn-around space is required. 26'8" is required for back-up space for a 90 degree parking space. Less is required for different parking angles, different parking space widths, and for compact spaces. Specifications are in the Code.

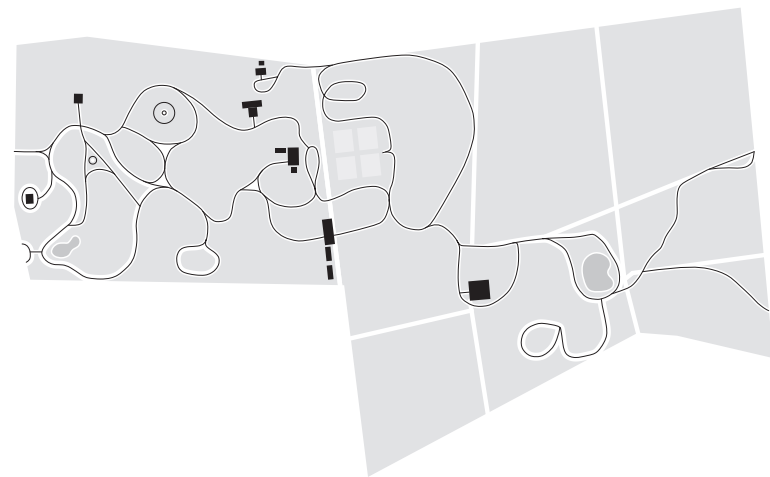
Parking (continued)	Covered parking is required for the main house. "Covered parking" requires only a roof. No walls are required. Parking lifts are permitted for a designated unit (previous discussions indicate that a specific approval is required for the lift and that there is only 1 lift approved as of now).
Bulk & height	The increased floor area of an attached second unit shall not exceed 30 percent of the existing living area The total area of floor space for a detached second unit shall not exceed 1,200 square feet
Entrances and egress	The increased floor area of an attached second unit shall not exceed 30 percent of the existing living area It might be possible to obtain a modification from Building & Safety to permit an 8' or 9' driveway to serve as the required passageway.
Aesthetics	Balconies can project four feet into the rear yard setback and 30 inches into the front yard setback. No projections are permitted in the side yard. A projection is not permitted above a "use" (i.e. no balcony above an uncovered parking space).
Process	Building & Safety may grant a modification for up to a 20% reduction in requirements. Modifications are addressed on a case-by-case basis, require that the applicant have a hardship of some kind, and that the applicant collect the signatures of adjoining neighbors.
Other	The width of curb cuts are determined by the Department of Public Works and/or DOT. The minimum required driveway width is 9 feet. Need to consult with Public Works to determine if the construction of an accessory unit triggers the requirement to dedicate and/or improve a substandard alley.

Code: http://www.amlegal.com/nxt/gateway.dll?f=templates&fn=default.htm&vid=amlegal:lapz_ca

Clarification by LADBS: http://ladbs.org/LADBSWeb/LADBS_Forms/Zoning/zoning_manual.pdf

Appendix C: Delores Hayden's typologies of
single-family subdivision design from 1820-2003

Illustrations by: Kara Moore



BORDERLANDS

1820-1860s

Somerville, MA

1852



PICTURESQUE
ENCLAVES

1850-1920s

Palos Verdes, CA
1924



STREETCAR
BUILDOUTS

1870-1910s

Los Angeles, CA
1924



MAIL-ORDER
& SELF BUILT SUBURBS

1910s-1945

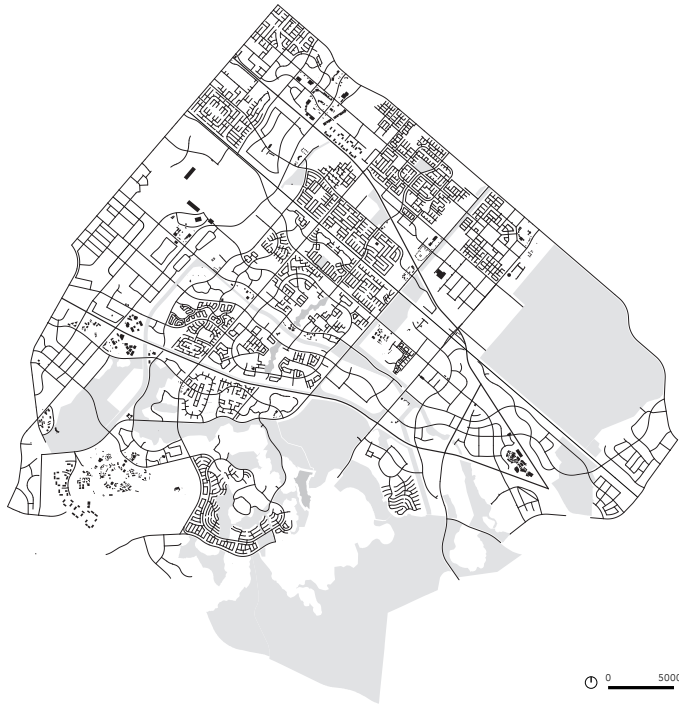
Santa Monica, CA
1938



SITCOM
SUBURBS

1940s-1970s

Park Forrest, IL
1952



EDGE
NODES

1950s-1990s

Irvine, CA
1990



RURAL
FRINGES

1980s-2003

Park City, UT
2000

Appendix D: Westside Neighborhood Council Survey

Westside Neighborhood Council
July 11, 2013

Backyard Home Survey

Backyard Home Form

1. Select the type of Backyard Home that would be preferable in your neighborhood (check all that apply):

- A) Attached to the main house
- B) Detached from the main house
- C) Above the garage
- D) Above the main house
- E) Other: _____

The following questions are on a scale from 1-5 where:
1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = No Opinion 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree

2. On a scale from 1-5, please indicate your level of agreement with the following:
a) The Backyard Home can be tall enough to be visible from the street.

3. On a scale from 1-5, please indicate your level of agreement with the following:
a) The Backyard Home can be short and not visible from the street.

4. Do you have any comments about the scale and visibility of a Backyard Home?

Neighborhood Character

5. On a scale from 1-5, please indicate your level of agreement with the following:
a) The Backyard Home can be different from the style of the main house.
b) Do you have any comments about the style or general appearance of Backyard Homes?

6. Please rank, in your order of preference from 1-3, what size of a backyard home would fit best on residential lots in your neighborhood:
a) Very Small _____
b) Small _____
c) Medium _____

7. Do you have any comments about the appropriate size of a Backyard Home for your neighborhood?

Transportation and Parking

The following questions are on a scale from 1-5 where:
1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = No Opinion 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree

8. On a scale from 1-5, please indicate your level of agreement with the following:
a) It is very important that Backyard Homes meet current parking requirements.

Transportation and Parking (continued)

The following questions are on a scale from 1-5 where:

1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = No Opinion 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree

b) Only those properties where it is easy to include parking with the Backyard Home should be granted permission for a Backyard Home.

9. Do you have any comments about parking for Backyard Homes?

10. Backyard Homes would be best located near public transit stops.

Permit Process

11. On a scale from 1-5, please indicate your level of agreement with the following:

a) My neighbors are already able to build a Backyard Home if they want to.

b) The city's regulatory process is so complicated that it restricts people from building a legal Backyard Home.

12. On a scale from 1-5, please indicate your level of agreement with the following:

a) I would build a Backyard Home if it were easier.

Permit Process (continued)

13. What would make the process easier? (Select all that apply)

- If I could hire someone to manage the whole process, from start to finish.
- If I could choose from Backyard Home models that were already designed.
- I could go online, and customize a Backyard Home for my needs and my property.
- If I could choose from a pre-fabricated Backyard Home (that pre-qualified contractors could assemble easily).
- If there was a "hotline" where I could get answers throughout the process.
- Other _____

14. Do you have any comments about the process of design and construction of a Backyard Home?

15. The best reason to build a Backyard Home is:

16. The greatest obstacle to building a Backyard Home is:

Appendix E: Harbor Gateway North Neighborhood Council Survey

Backyard Homes Survey

1. What is your opinion about Backyard Homes?

2. Who are the current users of Backyard Homes in your neighborhood?

Adult children of the homeowner

Elderly family members

Other extended family

Caregivers, such as nannies or home health workers

Renters (not related to the occupants of the main house)

Other: _____

I don't know

Backyard Homes Form

3. Given that many residents of Los Angeles can build a Backyard Home by right, what type of Backyard Home would you prefer in your neighborhood? (check all that apply):

A) Attached to the main house

B) Detached from the main house

C) Above the garage

D) Above the main house

E) Other: _____

The following questions are on a scale from 1-5 where:
1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = No Opinion 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree

4. On a scale from 1-5, please indicate your level of agreement with the following:

a) The Backyard Home can be tall enough to be visible from the street.

5. On a scale from 1-5, please indicate your level of agreement with the following:

b) The Backyard Home can be short and not visible from the street.

6. Do you have any comments about the scale and visibility of a Backyard Home?

1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = No Opinion 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree

Neighborhood Character

7. On a scale from 1-5, please indicate your level of agreement with the following:

- a) The Backyard Home can be different from the style of the main house.
- b) Do you have any comments about the style or general appearance of Backyard Homes?

8. Please indicate what size Backyard Home would be preferable in your neighborhood (select one):

- Medium
- Small
- Very Small

9. Do you have any comments about the appropriate size of a Backyard Home for your neighborhood?

Transportation and Parking

10. On a scale from 1-5, please indicate your level of agreement with the following:

- c) It is very important that Backyard Homes meet current parking requirements.
- d) Only those properties where it is easy to include parking on site should be granted permission for a Backyard Home.

1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = No Opinion 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree

Transportation and Parking (continued)

11. Are there sites that are more appropriate to allow Backyard Homes? For example:
(Circle Yes or No)

Yes	No	Adjacent to commercial properties
Yes	No	Adjacent to multifamily properties
Yes	No	Within a half-mile (5 blocks) from light rail and other transit
Yes	No	On a lot adjacent to an alley
Yes	No	On a large lot (greater than 7500 sq. ft.)
Yes	No	On a corner lot
Yes	No	Other:

12. Do you have any comments about parking for Backyard Homes?

Permit Process

13. On a scale from 1-5, please indicate your level of agreement with the following:

- e) I would build a Backyard Home if I could.

Permit Process (continued)

14. If you were to consider building a Backyard Home and these options were available, which of the following would you pursue? (Select all that apply)

- I would hire someone to manage the whole process, from start to finish.
- I would choose from Backyard Home models that were already designed.
- I would go online to customize a Backyard Home for my needs and property
- I would choose a pre-fabricated Backyard Home that contractors could easily assemble.
- I would call a "hotline" to get answers throughout the process.
- I would use the existing process.
- Other _____

15. If someone wishes to build a Backyard Home in your neighborhood, they should be required to get approval from (select all that apply):

- a. Directly adjacent neighbors
- b. All property owners on the block or within a radius such as 500 feet
- c. The neighborhood council
- d. No one; they should be able to build it without neighborhood approvals
- e. Other _____

16. To build a Backyard Home in my neighborhood, I think it should be (select one):

- Easier
- Harder

Please explain how this might be done:

17. Do you have any comments about the process of design and construction of a Backyard Home?

General Comments

18. The best reason to build a Backyard Home is:

19. The best reason NOT to build a Backyard Home is:

20. If you wanted to build a Backyard Home, the greatest obstacle would be:
