PropX

inventing the next LA

lessons learned

*edited by Dana Cuff, Roger Sherman,
Mott Smith and Bianca Siegl*

PropX

Garcetti welcoming PropX Summit participants, 9.22.06

organizers with winners of First Prize, Team YIMBY

organizers

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LA City Council President

Throughout its history, Los Angeles has been defined by a native courage that other places lack. Cutting forward to today, we can see the importance of a project like PropX in relation to our recent crisis of confidence. In a city once defined by its optimism, we feel a change in tone. Our dinner-table conversations or the way we speak to our neighbors have begun to reflect a feeling that we cannot really solve the problems that this city faces.

At the same time, we can see a restored capability of success in Los Angeles. We have more of the necessary ingredients than almost any other city in the world. We combine the wealth of the developed world with the growth rate of the developing world. These two things together give us the ability to think and to plan in a way that we haven't before.

I submit that we are suffering the effects of a failure of imagination. We have failed to imagine what can be, what will be and what we, commonly, can work upon together. We've tested slow-growth, we've tested no-growth, and we've tested low-growth. The traffic hasn't gotten any better. The air hasn't improved. Our quality of life is markedly worse. So now, let's try a different thesis. Let's re-imagine what we can do with creative regulation. Let's use small-lot ordinances. Let's use adaptive re-use. Let's use the PropX proposals! Some of these projects will become legislation in this city, because we are crying out for exactly what they represent. And let us ask the question: Can we step up? Can we imagine, can we plan, and most of all, can we execute?

The teams did an excellent job of creating very big ideas that are both pragmatic and possible. For me, this distinguishes PropX from many competitions and exercises. As a policy maker, I always want to find the best solutions to problems, but sometimes there are simple and elegant solutions that intelligent, fresh eyes can see best. If we have open minds and are willing to move in new directions, the PropX teams have shown us that we can find entirely new, and perhaps better, approaches to complex urban problems.

–Jane Blumenfeld
Citywide Planning Manager
LA Dept. of City Planning

Los Angeles, along with many American cities, stands at the edge of the next wave of city building. The second-generation growth in this coming era will not be located on vacant sites, as in the past, but situated on property previously occupied or currently in use. With a number of extra-large projects in the making and many more small and medium-sized projects underway across the basin, the question is how to best guide this development so that LA becomes a better city as a result. Grand, visionary planning has proven incapable of contending with the messiness of urban growth, but adequate alternatives have yet to replace it. PropX is an experiment into better ways to move our cities into the future.

The X in Proposition X stands for innovative regulation that will trigger the kind of design and development that will make LA a leader in 21st century city-making. Two fundamental assumptions underlie the PropX proposals in the following pages. First, planning must be more agile—responsive, flexible, dynamic, and incremental, in contrast to utopian master planning models. Agile planning requires an emergent vision of the city. And second, to solve big urban problems design professionals must work in constructive collaboration. Homelessness, traffic, environmental degradation, affordable housing—these issues are not owned by any single discipline. Planning, architecture, policy, and real estate development must be braided together in order to create necessarily innovative, viable solutions.

In the summer of 2006, over forty young professionals working in five cross-disciplinary teams were competitively selected to undertake the PropX experiment. They were guided by three dozen professional advisors from across the Los Angeles building industry. The summer-long competition required teams to think creatively and pragmatically, at both small and extra-large scales, seeking feasible outside-the-box solutions to one of LA's greatest challenges: how to provide more affordable, market-rate housing.

Los Angeles is home to a widely acknowledged housing crisis, stemming from an undersupply of moderately priced for-sale housing. Statistics show that only 15% of those who want to become homeowners in Los Angeles can reasonably afford to do so. The five PropX proposals integrate policy, development, and design with the goal of stimulating more and better affordable housing without public subsidy. The most convincing projects are replicable on numerous sites in the city, well-designed, and profitable. In addition, the best PropX proposals accomplish related goals as they produce entry-level housing. They demonstrate multiple positive effects on the quality of urban life: reduction in traffic congestion, more pedestrian-oriented experiences, more usable open space, increased economic vitality, and the ability to respond to neighborhood concerns.

The book in your hands is organized around what was learned from all five PropX projects and the conversation they generated. Those lessons, highlighted in magenta on the following pages, are our conclusions. The projects illustrate those lessons, but they can also stand on their own. Whether focusing on the wasted space of surface parking or the underutilized backyards in the suburbs, participants sought to infill new housing amid old on a specific demonstration site. Moreover, each solution could be applied to any number of similar sites throughout Los Angeles.

PropX considers X in the mathematical sense of an unknown, as in "let X equal some value." It stands for the idea that we must implement creative planning ideas if we are to find new ways to address the housing crisis in our city. The projects in the following pages have solved for X. They suggest a range of approaches, from tinkering with the planning process in ways that might have tremendous implications for encouraging small housing developments, to redesigning oversized boulevards so that high-density housing could be sited alongside them in the space created by removing median strips. But beyond the models of regulation and site-specific projects, the PropX proposals outline a new form of planning—one that is more agile yet still guided by a vision of a better Los Angeles, one that is not undertaken by planners alone, but by all of us within the building industry thinking creatively about our common goals of a more beautiful, more affordable, more sustainable Los Angeles.
- *Dana Cuff*

Each of the five teams took up the PropX challenge in a specific proposal that could be replicated on numerous sites across the city. Here, team concepts are summarized, and their case study projects are located on the map of LA. These projects are illustrated in the following pages. The color assigned each team below remains consistent throughout this book.

Excess LA

Los Angeles is a city of excess. This observation may seem to contradict the commonly held notion that Los Angeles is running out of space. We suggest that the conditions needed to increase density in Los Angeles have always been present; it exists in the excess.

We propose to streamline the city by utilizing this waste and allowing Los Angeles to reach its fully planned potential. Unlike density transfers in which buildable square footage is bought and sold, we propose that the difference between the actual parcel area and the required minimum area per dwelling unit be made available to increase density on any parcel within a specified collection zone.

pp 8, 9, 18, 19

YIMBY

Everyone agrees. Los Angeles is in the midst of a severe housing crisis that serously threatens its economy and future. But where to put that new housing the city so desperately needs? YIMBY looks at the single family neighborhood—the site of greatest opposition to densification but also the greatest opportunity for new housing.

The challenges are creating housing that incorporates those qualities residents of these neighborhoods value most while still generating the needed new units. But one must also tackle LA's permitting and zoning regulations, designed for a time where land was limitless and individual projects created new neighborhoods. In the current LA, those sites no longer exist, and the future of densification is the scattered, infill development and the accessory dwelling unit. YIMBY proposes small changes in current regulations and practices to achieve big results in these project types.

Shorter, more regular periods of permitting. Tweaking zoning codes to allow innovative design on small lots. It is these small, incremental changes that will spark LA's housing revolution. And it is revolution that is needed if LA is to house its ever-growing polulation. *pp 10, 11, 20, 21*

SuperUSE

To address growth pressures facing the city, Team SuperUSE created the Street Median Reclamation Program (SMRP), which reconfigures large swaths of otherwise underutilized land along transit corridors. Through integration of land use and transportation patterns, the Program enables increased density, improved housing affordability, and the creation of vibrant, mixed-use, linear villages. Corridors meeting established criteria may be reconfigured to fuse underutilized land (e.g., medians and on-street parking) into buildable parcels for development independently or in combination with adjacent parcels. These areas will be rezoned as medium density mixed-use and will be subject to the development standards and design guidelines set forth in the Program ordinance. The Program is capable of producing up to 1,425 dwelling units per mile of roadway and over 60,000 units across the city that will provide diverse, new infill housing opportunities.

pp 16-19

CityCraft

Los Angeles' ubiquitous commercially zoned surface parking lots represent an excess of underuti-lized land. We propose to increase the supply of moderately affordable housing in the city by providing incentives for the construction of residential houing on these sites, while maintaining most or all of the existing uses.

Specifically, we propose the following: (1) By-right development of multi-family residential housing on any C-zoned parking lot; (2) a height limit on said development of 75 feet; (3) no change in FAR, but a provision that FAR may be calculated using the square footage of the entire parcel prior to any subsequent subdivision for use under the Parking Lot Redevelopment Ordinance; (4) no additional statutory parking requirement beyond that which is already on the site.

As the costs of further outward expansion become too great, Los Angeles must look inward and reexamine old land use and development choices. Only repurposed land in the urban centers can provide the space for the next generation of inevitable growth. Fortunately, the city was built in such a sprawling manner that opportunities for creative infill abound. *pp 12, 13, 26, 27*

P.A.D.

PAD (Points Allocated Development) makes for-sale housing in Los Angeles more affordable by increasing the potential supply of housing units and lowering the cost of development. Through a performative and incentive-based system, points are allocated to projects based on distance from amenities, provision of a mix of uses, general design criteria and community endorsement of benefits. Developers use points to reduce parking, increase FAR, and modify other factors that contribute to an individual project's feasibility. The PAD system directs development to pacels with latent potential for densification and "pads" existing zoning through incremental increases. *pp 22-25*

residential zoning must evolve

agile planning shifts the focus from project impacts to new forms of infrastructure

density is not enough

process: one size does not fit all

existing conditions offer radical solutions

new ideas must confront old boundaries

residential zoning must evolve

The most inflexible region of Los Angeles, and the suburbs of all American cities, is residentially zoned. Transforming this zone of single family houses is necessary to achieve more intense land use, and necessitates politically sensitive solutions.
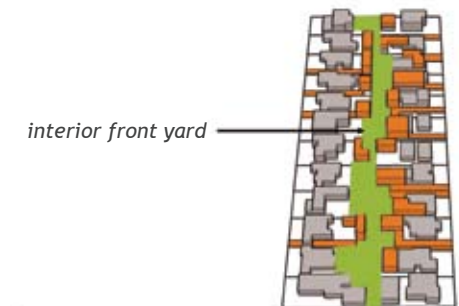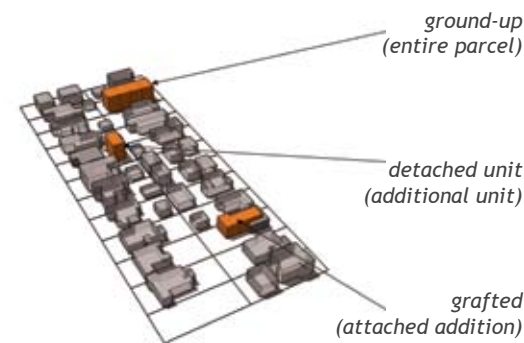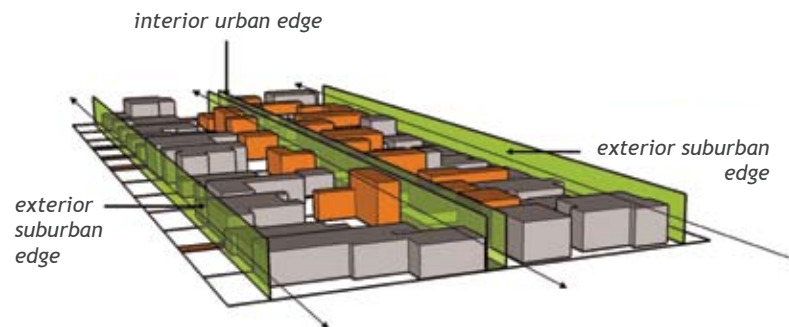
Project: Excess LA

Excess LA explores underutilized residential sites, where lot size almost allows additional units, but not quite. It collects that "excess density potential" to add housing, block by block, without increasing the current allowable density. It massages the current zoning, rather than changing it.

interior urban edge

exterior suburban edge

exterior suburban edge

ground-up (entire parcel)

detached unit (additional unit)

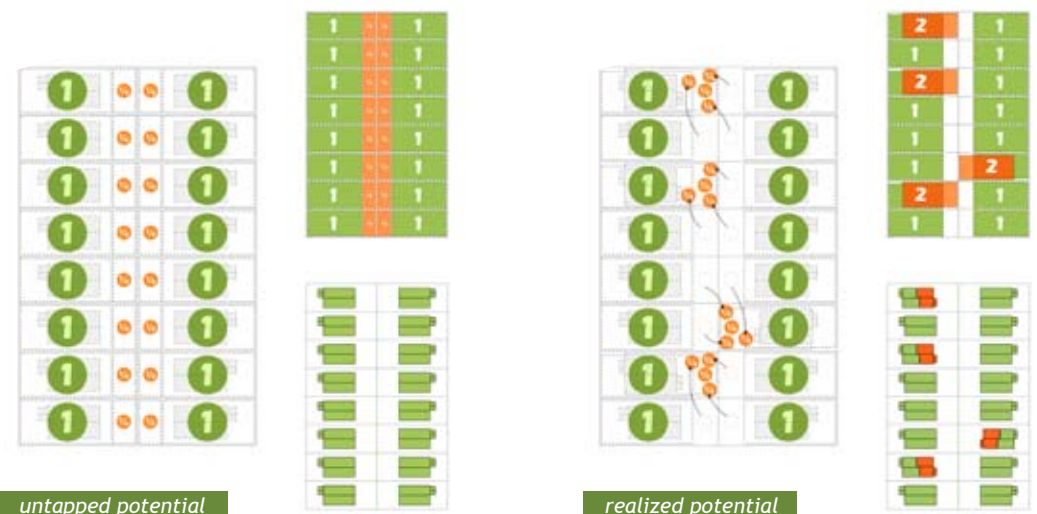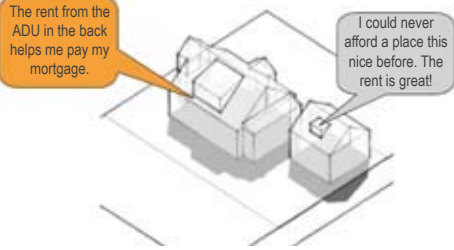grafted (attached addition)

interior front yard

Adam Sinclair
PAD team member

Current residential zoning promotes a luxury model. For multifamily housing, limits to the number of units that can be put in the allowed building envelope (e.g., to satisfy on-site parking requirements) have encouraged developers to build large, expensive condominium units or to not build at all (because only luxury units will "pencil"). This luxury model is out of touch with the changing tastes of Angelenos. People are willing to give up their cars, commutes, and parking spaces if they can walk to quality public transportation and places to work/eat/play. A zoning model that is more friendly to density will present the option to choose smaller, less expensive units in the city. It will encourage better public transit, less traffic, and more healthy, walkable communities.

Valery Augustin
Excess LA team member

Residential zoning must become more flexible. The crises facing Los Angeles—rapid population growth, shifting job centers, traffic congestion and skyrocketing housing costs, are exacerbated by current zoning laws that essentially function solely to restrict change in the residential sector. The strategy of restricting change through increasingly prescriptive zoning is flawed because changes are often unpredictable and history has proven that cities that do not accommodate change are doomed to fail. Residential zoning codes must evolve in pace with the unpredictable nature of the Los Angeles, the 21st Century metropolis.

untapped potential

realized potential

The rent from the ADU in the back helps me pay my mortgage.

I could never afford a place this nice before. The rent is great!

Project: YIMBY

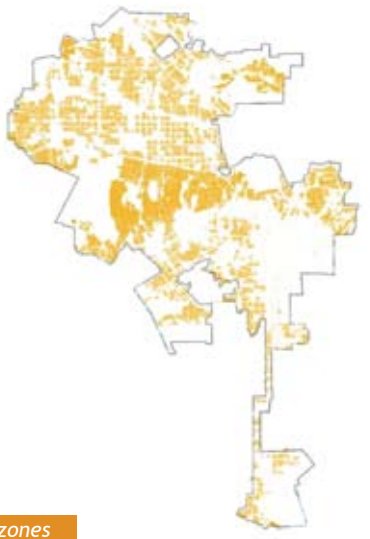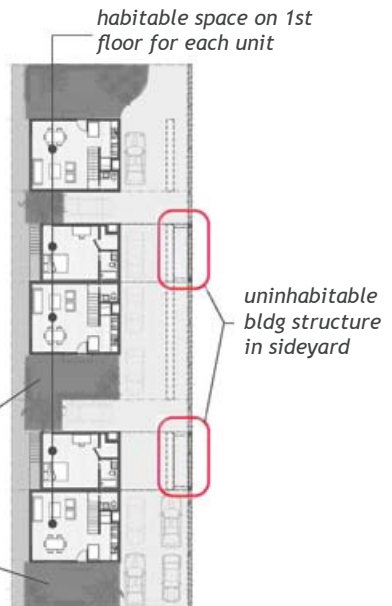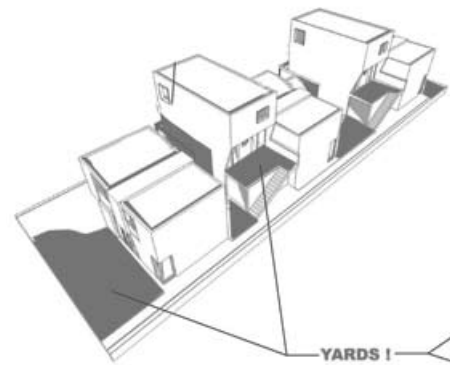This project transforms current R-1 zoning in order to permit accessory dwelling units, while still retaining parking and yards.

several small projects are more acceptable than one big project
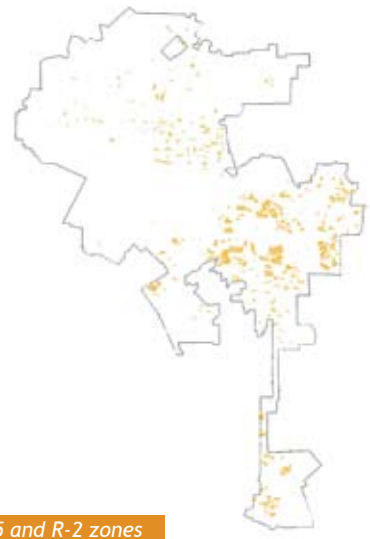
habitable space on 1st floor for each unit

uninhabitable bldg structure in sideyard

YARDS !

R-1 zones

R-1.5 and R-2 zones

habitable space on 1st floor for each unit

mechanical lifts, two car stack

YARDS !
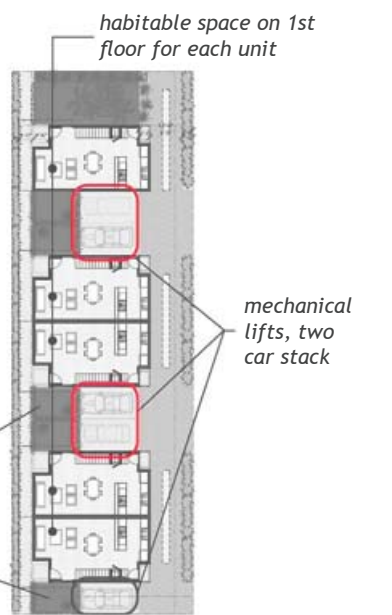
agile planning shifts the focus from project impacts to new forms of infrastructure

Thinking about the city's future without grand, visionary schemes means inventing new forms of infrastructure to serve as the backbone for subsequent development. Along with transit systems and zoning codes, both traditional forms of infrastructure, we need ideas like parking lots and median strips that double as housing sites, and planning processes that vary by the scale of the project.

Project: CityCraft

This project capitalizes on surface parking as underutilized infrastructure across LA, and proposes to add a dense supply of housing above.

Jennifer Wolch
Director
USC Sustainable Cities Program

Imagined differently, urban infrastructure offers a multitude of unique opportunities. Existing urban infrastructure typically involves lots of concrete and impermeable surfaces. If these paved spaces can be thought of as potential green infrastructure, we can see how green systems could be introduced even in high-density urban spaces. For example, there are 900 miles of alleys in Los Angeles. If we instead converted these asphalt paths into permeable, planted surfaces, we could weave a significant green matrix throughout the city.
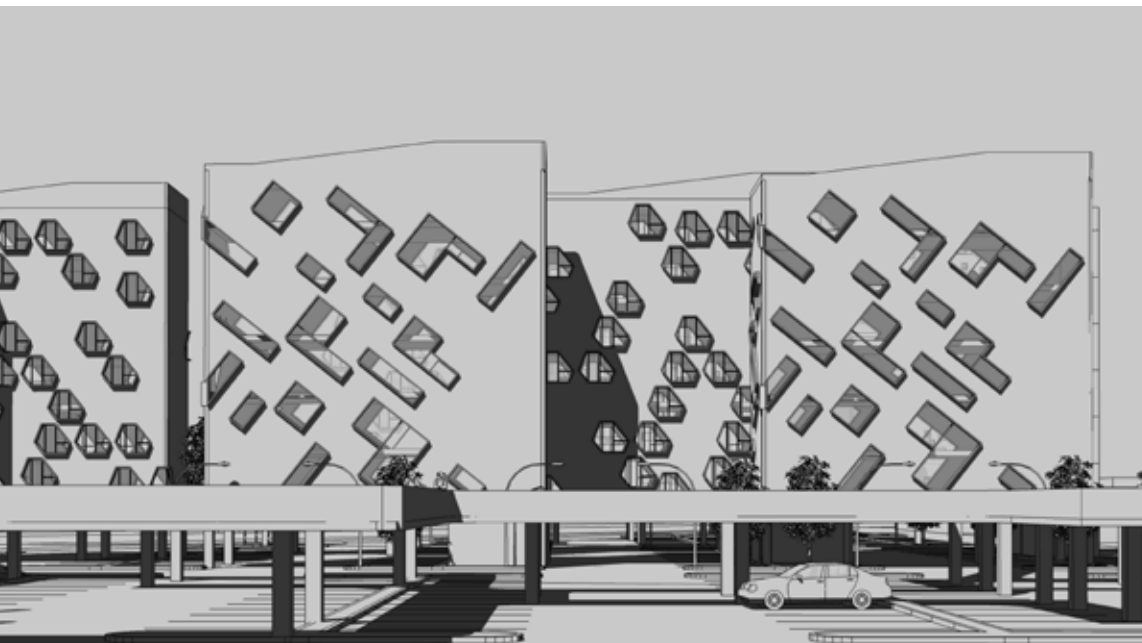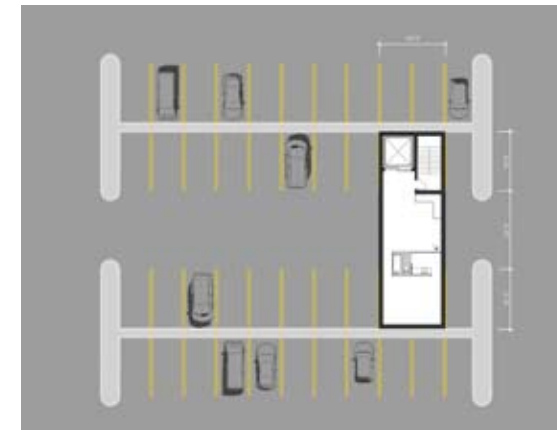
infill housing over existing parking at 75 ft height
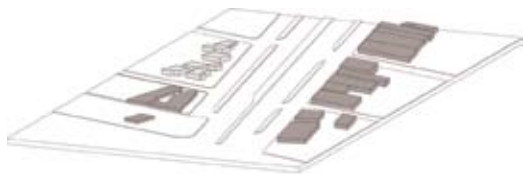
current condition
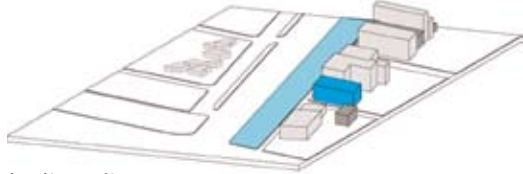
lot line adjustment
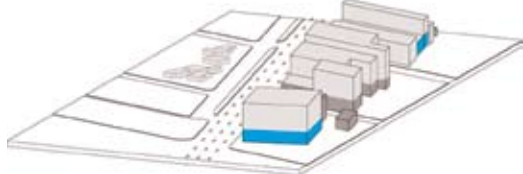
new development

artery (major class II)

arteries similar to test site (divided major class II lined with commercial)

test site (Venice Blvd. between Genesee & San Vicente)
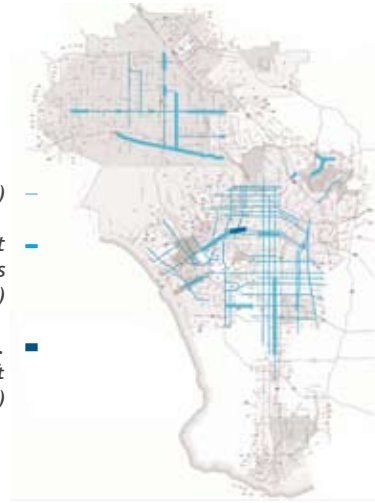
"There is a certain radical quality to this project in its willingness to challenge the dominant visual landscape of Los Angeles."

-Christopher Hawthorne
-PropX Juror

Project: SuperUSE

On excessively wide streets across the city, the SuperUse team reclaims and batches together existing median strips to form housing sites. This linear zone constitutes a new form of street-oriented, mixed-use urban infrastructure.

before
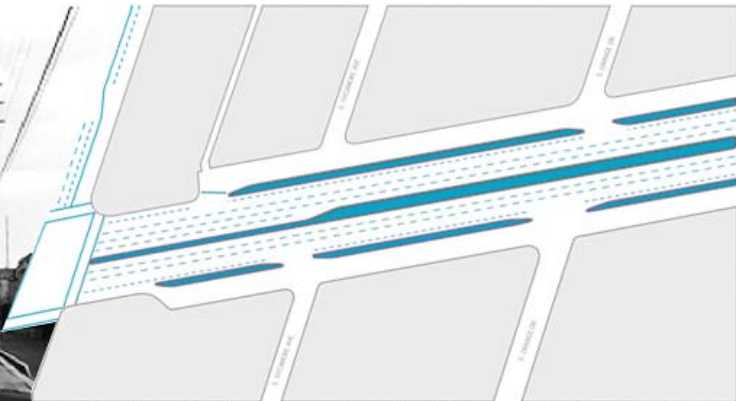
after

25 years:
live / work / visit community
development buildout
intensity-specific venues
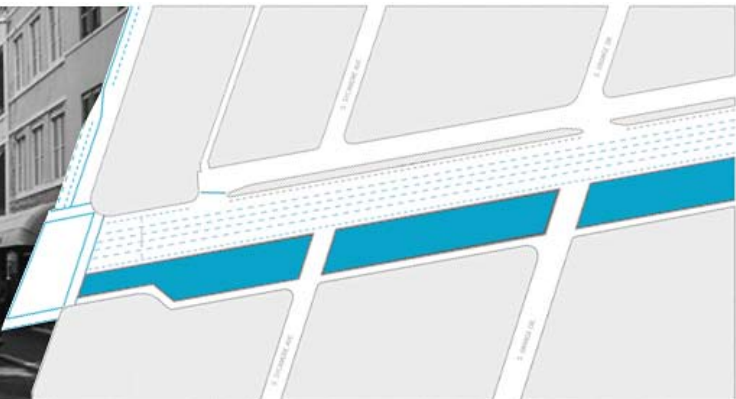
15 years:
secondary development
relocate existing development
land sales finalized

10 years:
boulevard reclamation
street retrofit
small increases in density
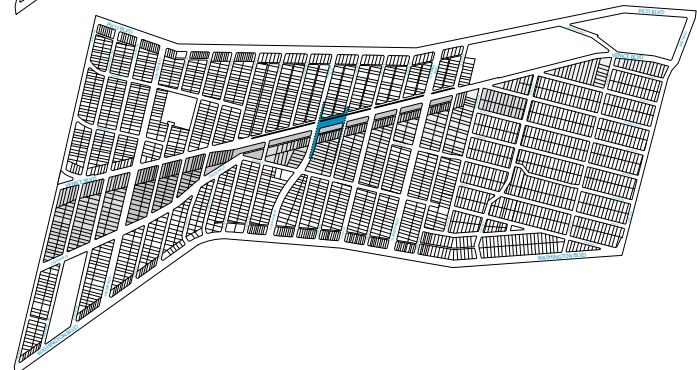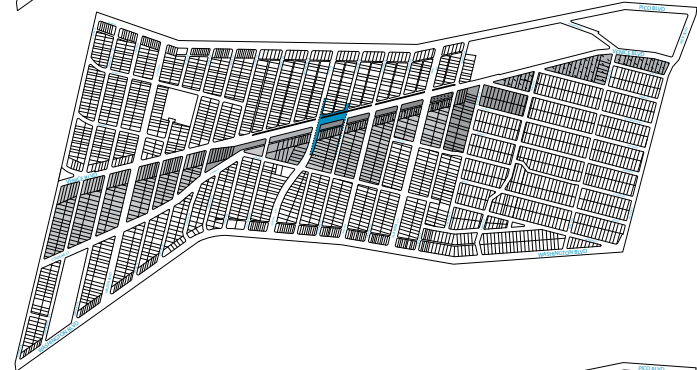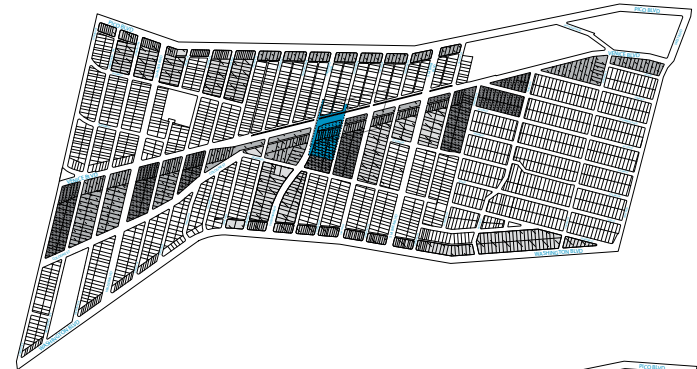
density is not enough

development type A: brownstone

Project: SuperUSE

The SuperUse idea of adding linear housing along existing, extra-wide boulevards requires careful phasing and design of the added density, in order to address adjacencies to heavily trafficked streets, and to older, existing commercial uses. Prototypes of the paseo and the brownstone are two possible models.
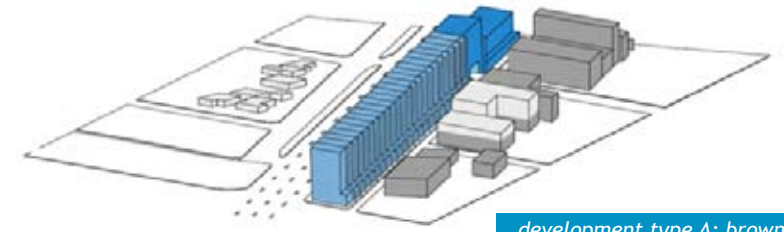
"We have to start a paradigm shift here in Los Angeles. It's going to take beyond urban planning. It's going to take a mentality shift and a marketing shift"

- Tibby Rothman
  PropX Juror

development type B: paseo
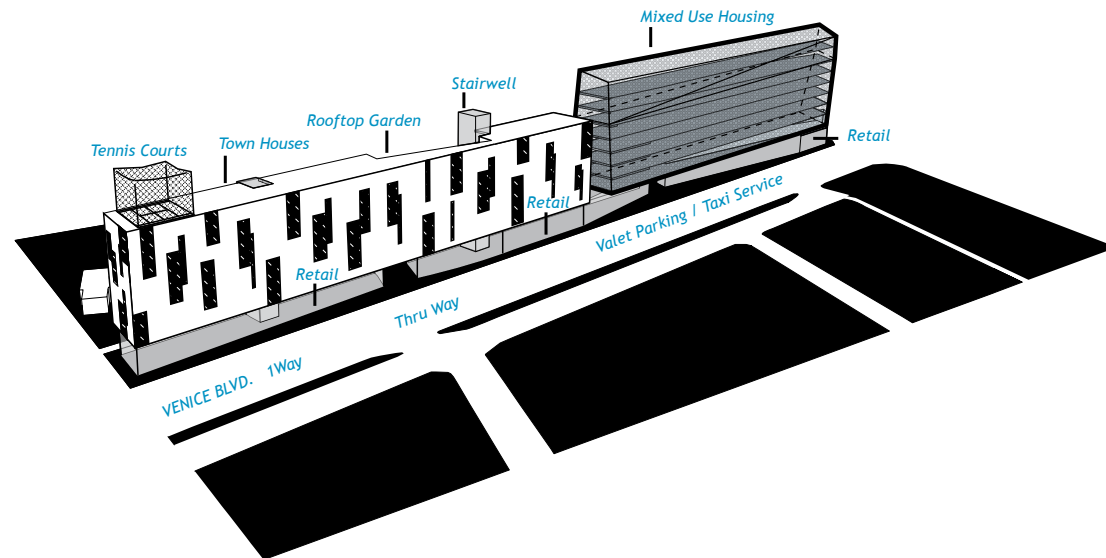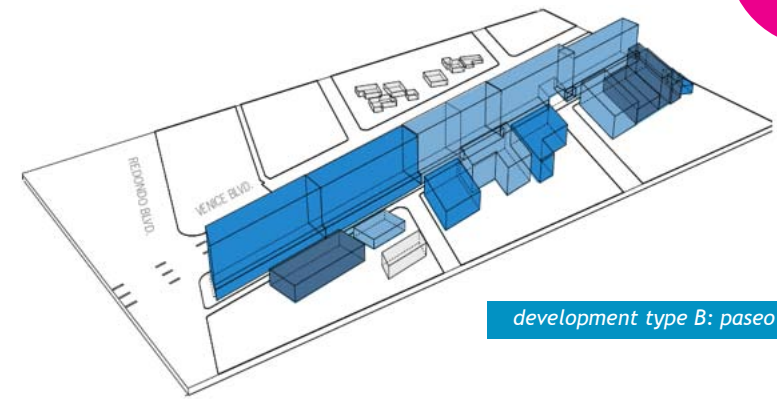
John Chase
Urban Designer
City of West Hollywood

Los Angeles isn't as dense as its going to have to be in order for all the people that are already here to have decent housing, let alone housing for all of the people who will be born or move here in coming years. Given a city that already stretches from Indio to Ventura, the ecological and social cost of sprawl—of separating housing from work—and the ecological cost of paving over more wildnerness and farmland, the central task for planners, architects, developers and elected officials is how to fit more people into the same cityscape in a way that creates the most benefit for the most people. Many citizens fear change, believing that increased density means less vegetation, less sunlight, more unwanted building bulk, more traffic and a loss of familiar landmarks and institutions. Any solutions that accommodate density have to be both ingenious and politically acceptable, or else they simply won't happen.

David Freeland
PAD team member

The challenge of densifying the urban fabric of Los Angeles derives from the promise that formed the city itself, that each family should have its own house on a generous plot of land. It is both an issue of subdivision, parsing out each property to more families, but also one of social practice requiring a profound revaluing of living space in the city. Essentially, it is growing a new urban condition out of a suburban ideal. The City, understood as a porous collection of communities, holds great potential for spawning a new urbanity from within that is related neither to conventional center-edge cities or new sprawling megaburbs, but is instead constantly plugging its own holes in a successive (what is next?) evolution towards density. A planning strategy crafted in this environment must be responsive to existing conditions while maintaining openness to new urban situations and housing typologies that make density desirable.

Mixed Use Housing
Stairwell
Rooftop Garden
Retail
Town Houses
Tennis Courts
Retail
Valet Parking / Taxi Service
Retail
Thru Way
VENICE BLVD. 1Way

$$\left(\text{524,787} \times \text{1700 SQFT} \right) = \text{892,137,900 SQFT EDP}$$

$$\left(\text{892,137,900 SQFT EDP} \div \text{5000 SQFT} \right) = \text{178,427 SURPLUS} \quad \text{OR} \quad \mathbf{34\%} \text{ SURPLUS}$$

Project: Excess LA

In this project, when "excess density" is transferred, it is reinserted in the residential fabric in compatible ways in terms of massing and siting as the three test sites demonstrate.

4. The funds generated by the sale of the EDP units go directly to the neighborhood council where the funds are used to pay for desired public improvements.

3. The developer purchases EDP from the pool to be used locally for density increasing development.

Developer

Developer

$$$

Local Public Improvement

Density Catchment Area

(EDP)

Density Bank

2. EDP is placed in pool and made available for purchase.
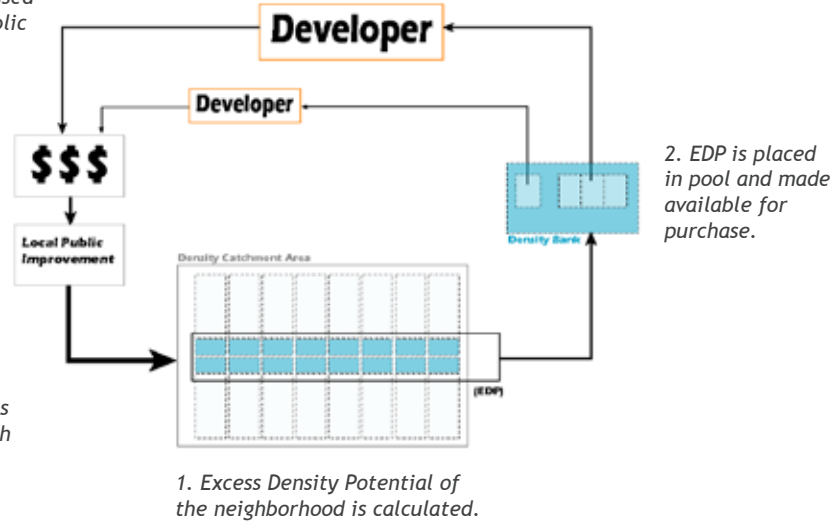
5. The neighborhood is the beneficiary of both increased density and much needed public improvements.

1. Excess Density Potential of the neighborhood is calculated.

excess density transfer protocol for R-1 and R-2 zones

Test Site: Van Nuys

Zone: R1-1
No. of parcels: 22
Existing dwelling units: 22
Total square footage: 156,334 sf
Specified square footage per zoning: 110,000 sf
Excess density potential: 46,334 sf
Maximum dwelling units gained: 9
Density increase: 41%
Public improvement fund: $241,670

Test Site: Cheviot Hills

Zone: R1-1
No. of parcels: 48
Existing dwelling units: 48
Total square footage: 337,930 sf
Specified square footage per zoning: 240,000 sf
Excess density potential: 97,930 sf
Maximum dwelling units gained: 20
Density increase: 41%
Public improvement fund: $485,150

3. Payment is given directly to the owner of the lot from which it was purchased.
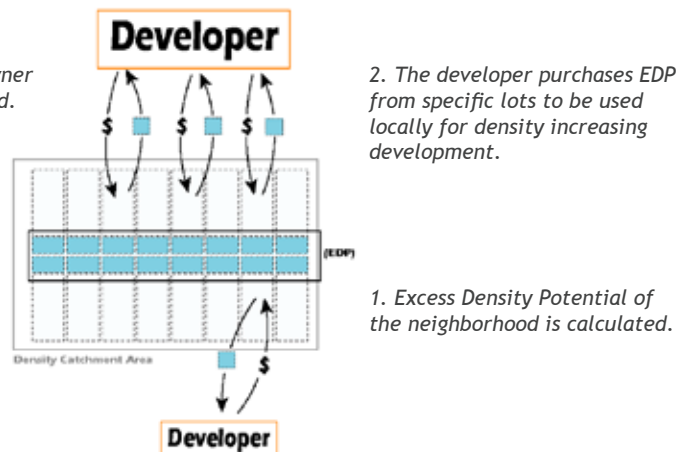
2. The developer purchases EDP from specific lots to be used locally for density increasing development.

Developer

$ $ $

Density Catchment Area

(EDP)

$

Developer

1. Excess Density Potential of the neighborhood is calculated.

excess density transfer protocol for R-3 and higher zones

Test Site: Arroyo Seco

Zone: RD2-1
No. of parcels: 43
Existing dwelling units: 130
Total square footage: 325,717 sf
Specified square footage per zoning: 215,000 sf
Excess density potential: 110,717 sf
Maximum dwelling units gained: 55
Density increase: 41%
Public improvement fund: $553,585

process: one size does not fit all

Some important barriers to more affordable housing lie in the planning process, which is particularly problematic for smaller developments. The scale of the process for review and approval of housing projects should match the scale of the projects themselves.

existing city review process   proposed city review process

day 0 · Tract Map · Community Outreach
day 90 · Mistakes
day 120 · CEQA
day 180 · Tract Map Circulation
day 240 · Schedule Hearing
day 360

day 0
day 90
day 91
day 103
day 193
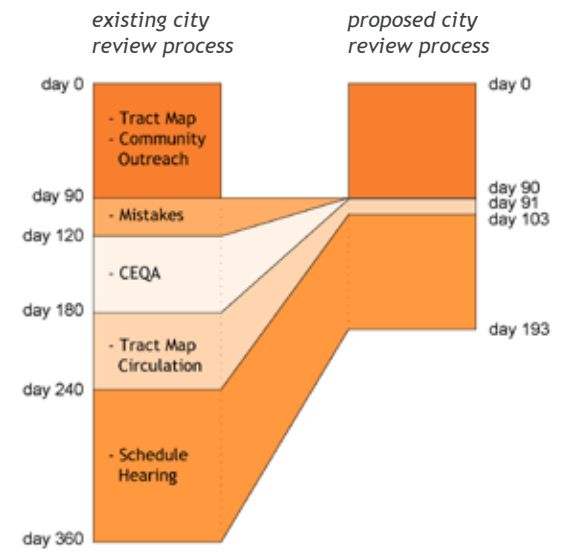
boosts IRR by as much as 6%, and saves estimated $20 per building square ft

Project: YIMBY

Small scale, infill housing can be encouraged by simplifying and redefining the city review process in order to substantially reduce the time to construction, which in turn yields significant financial benefits.

Michael Piper
YIMBY team member

Los Angeles was built with precisely the mentality that one size does fit all. It's a well-known process that uses phrases such as 'cookie cutter' and 'tract home'. Los Angeles' building and zoning codes were designed to make this house-stamping process a piece of cake. Indeed the process worked so well that the codes and regulations that made it possible are still proudly in place today; the only problem is, the huge tracts aren't. What is left, in scattered abundance, are infill parcels, an untapped real estate resource whose small scale and wide differentiation render them unfeasible for profit seeking developers. This is due in large part to our City's building and zoning regulations that are scripted for a tract development Los Angeles of old. To bring these small sites on to the development radar we'd do well to learn this simple lesson: Los Angeles needs regulations that fit today's infill development.

YIMBY's 5 steps to increasing housing opportunities in LA:

1. Size-based project reviews
2. Batch permit processing
3. Neighborhood involvement
4. Regulation modifications
5. Constituent-requested zoning changes

15 units >   small project review

15-50 units =   medium project review

50 units <   big project review

P.A.D. points	[parcel points]	public transit	parcel is within 800 feet of a major public transit stop or corridor with 15-minute head-way	☐
		public facilities	parcel is within 800 feet of a public school, library or city-owned parking opportunity	☐
		commercial	parcel is in or within 800 feet of a commercially zoned parcel	☐
		greenspace	parcel is within 800 feet of public greenspace	☐
	[project points]	mixed use	multiple use projects in commercial zones	☐
		design	use of three or more exterior finish materials	☐
			open space along front yard	☐
			open space on 2 exterior facades	☐
		community	neighborhood council endorsement	☐
			contributions to neighborhood council	☐

Reward	Benefit to Project Feasibility
Lower Parking Requirements	• Lifts constraints on # of units • Reduces need to build expensive subterranean parking
Increased Building Envelope	• Enables more saleable square feet, to offset costs of construction
Expedited Entitlement Process	• Less Carrying Cost of Land
Flexibility	•Allows a project to adapt to the individual contingencies and needs of a parcel whether those be nimby issues, site constraints, or the current housing market.

PAD's rewards enable the develpoer to profitably build housing units on sites which would not be redeveloped without PAD

Mott Smith
PropX Summit Chair and
Immediate Past President, Westside Urban Forum

The title of this section should come as no surprise, but oddly enough the planning tools we use to shape existing cities like Los Angeles are nearly identical to those we use in new towns like the Inland Empire and Santa Clarita, as distinct as these places actually are. By State law, California municipalities, whether old or new, produce General Plans that standardize zoning designations. Then, when more granular detail is needed to address areas within a city, Specific Plans, Community Plans and Overlay Zones are drafted and implemented.

In new growth communities, these tools seem to work just fine. Typically, one master developer creates the zones that constrain future use of the virgin land, then subdivides the land into parcels that it sells to builders who construct the houses. In these instances, master planning and zoning succeed in producing a community with a consistent appearance and tight land-use controls across multiple builders.

By contrast, master planning and zoning typically fail to introduce such consistency of appearance and use in existing urban areas without urban-renewal-style land clearance. Monolithic zoning is too blunt an instrument to control new growth and simultaneously knit it skillfully into a more organic in-place context. Moreover, the sort of consistency that master planning and zoning create in new growth communities stands in stark opposition to the vibrancy—the brilliant messiness—that defines the granular cities we love. As a result, the building professions are hungry for new tools that will succeed in guiding growth while fostering this sort of natural emergence.

We are faced with the realization that urban planning's primary tools have worked against its most basic goals for the last half-century, and one may be tempted to give up on planning entirely. Alternatively, and more hopefully, one could engage a lesson learned from PropX: By introducing appropriate scale to the entitlements process and by building flexibility into land-use regulation, we open the door to far more affordable, modestly-scaled, and contextually-sensitive projects than we have seen for years.

The PropX team YIMBY shows us how L.A.'s one-size-fits-all entitlements process treats two-unit projects almost the same as 2,000-unit projects, thus killing modestly-scaled, moderately-priced projects that would otherwise be feasible to build. YIMBY proposes new small- and medium-sized entitlements processes to go along with the current large-sized one that are right-sized for the projects they address. YIMBY demonstrates how this simple change could increase the returns on such neighborhood-scaled projects so that countless new affordable units could be developed around L.A. without public subsidy.

PAD shows us how our current, rigid menu of zoning options fails to offer planners the tools necessary to define an appropriate envelope for every parcel in a neighborhood. The result is that many projects—including ones community members and planners consider appropriate—require some level of discretionary approval, rendering zoning less relevant and moderately-priced projects harder to finance. PAD's solution provides a systematic way to blur the current hard lines between zones and provide a predictable (i.e., non-discretionary) means of increasing density close to transit and other infrastructure, gradually tapering it off as you move further into residential neighborhoods.

The last generation of suburban land-use professionals had the luxury of creating new communities on vacant sites with single developer-owners. For these efforts, traditional master planning and zoning were excellent tools. But as the next generation of land-use professionals sets out to lay the foundation of our city's future, it must undoubtedly embrace new tools like those proposed by YIMBY and PAD—ones that respect the complexity and emergent qualities of urban places. The alternative is to wish away the natural, human qualities of the places we love.

Project: P.A.D.

This team invents a point system to incentivize projects that incorporate desired qualities like mixed-use, high-quality design, on parcels that have specific characteristics such as proximity to public transit or green space.

existing conditions offer radical solutions

Urban solutions are homeopathic; that is, the answers to urban problems must be found within the DNA of the context. Rather than imposing visionary, external plans, we opt for emergent solutions, radical incrementalism, and visionary ideas built upon existing urban genetics.

existing commercial zone redeveloped as mized use P.A.D.

(e) residential zone

Project: P.A.D.

In response to the specific, existing conditions surrounding every site, a rewards system is created that pushes individual projects in a generally desired direction. This replaces "blanket zoning" with an uneven yet tailored set of development opportunities—a kind of topographic zoning.

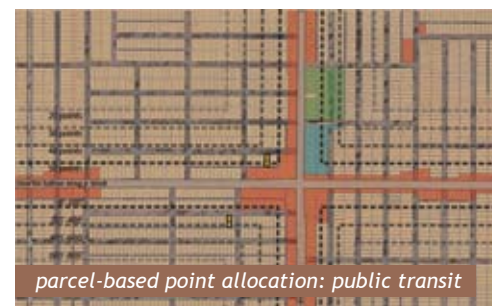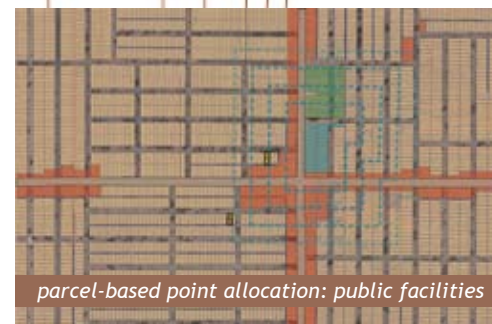### Liz Falletta
PropX Advisor

The Points Allocated Development (PAD) proposal begins to create a market for good design by crafting a system of points that rewards conscientious design and development decisions with greater development rights. This approach suggests other market-based solutions that could balance the true value of good design against the true costs of inferior methods. Turning the PAD proposal on its head, what if developers were required to "buy down" from elevated expectations of city design and development rather than "buy up" from the lowest common denominator currently described in planning and zoning codes? "Bad Design" credits, modeled after pollution credits, could be purchased to give a developer the right to do the minimum in terms design quality, more accurately reflecting the true cost of such a bare bones approach and the negative externalities it creates. As long as there were less credits than bad design potential, these credits could be traded from those who develop more cost effective quality design solutions to those who cannot afford to do so, thus encouraging good design by arbitraging bad.

John Kenyon
CityCraft team member

One of the most important lessons of planning is that everything has a history. Things that seem intractable or permanent in our cities are, in reality, fleeting. The dominance of the surface parking lot in the urban form of Los Angeles is on the wane, doomed by ever-increasing land prices. In the not-too-distant future people will look at images of today's supermarkets and shopping centers and marvel at the amount of real estate we use just for cars. The task for planners today is to foresee this and other changes ahead and to leverage the power of the market so that the results improve rather than degrade our city.
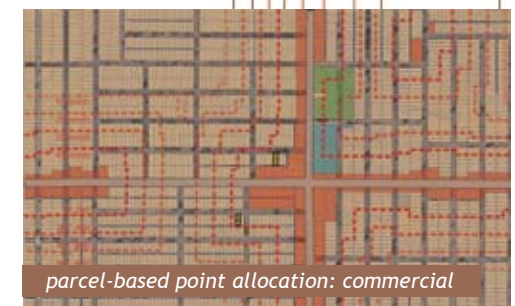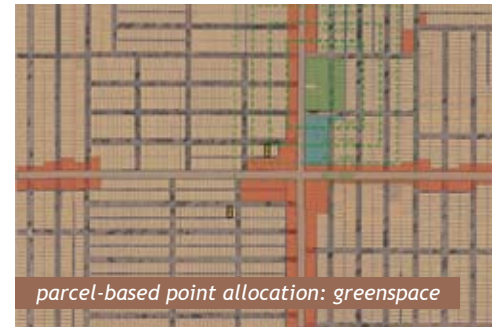
parcel-based point allocation: greenspace

parcel-based point allocation: public facilities

parcel-based point allocation: public transit

parcel-based point allocation: commercial

Acreage		Number of Potentail Units	
Parking	1,007	Total Acreage	5,419
Shopping Centers	1,667	Assumed % Developable	10%
Offices	2,745	Assumed Density	30 du/acre
Total	**5,419**	**Total**	**16,257 units**
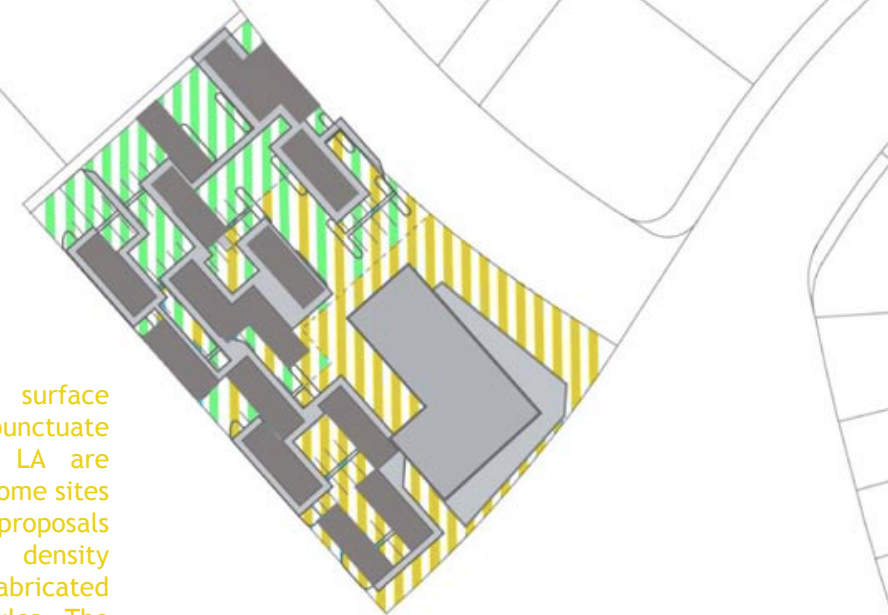
Project: CityCraft

Here, existing surface parking lots that punctuate every street in LA are repurposed to become sites for radical housing proposals that increase density and utilize prefabricated construction modules. The team suggests starting with a city-owned lot as a demonstration project.

parking lot redevelopment ordinance

- *by-right multi-family development on any C-zoned parking lot*

- *75 foot height limit*

- *no change in FAR, but FAR may be calculated using the square footage of the entire parcel, prior to subdivision*

- *no additional parking requirement beyond that which is already on the site*

Housing

Office

parking lots, shopping malls, and office properties

new ideas must confront old boundaries

Process, policy, design, and development have generally kept their own quarters, but this must change. Innovative solutions to intractable problems will come from multi-disciplinary, collaborative, open-ended investigation.

Experimental Collaborations

Rebecca Lyn Cooper
cityLAB Research Associate

Contemporary urban planning has shifted from the heroic to the pragmatic; from an obsession with the aesthetic perfection of the city plan imposed all at once on a tabula rasa, to an understanding of the city as a living organism, experienced primarily from within the labyrinth of its streets. Alongside this transition has come a corresponding shift in the understanding of the image of the planner. The five teams assembled for this competition present an illuminating case study of this shift and their struggle to collaborate across a variety of disciplines.

The competition required that every team be multidisciplinary, including not only architects and developers but also lawyers, urban designers, and individuals trained in public policy and business. It was left to the teams to decide how precisely they would manage the efforts of individuals with divergent and often competing ideas about the task in front of them. This was, in fact the first and in many ways most difficult of the design tasks faced by the teams during the competition.

The most successful collaborations maintained a fluid equilibrium between team members, a shifting hierarchy in which the team representative from a particular discipline who had most to offer at a given moment was allowed to step in and guide the process. Unlike more traditional professional relationships, with a defined hierarchy between team members, this more fluid structure allowed the team to function effectively, and most importantly allowed the projects to develop as a part of an ongoing conversation. Instead of being developed within the protective enclosure of a particular set of disciplinary practices before being passed on, these projects were forced into tension between disciplinary positions, a productive tension which allowed the teams to be simultaneously more daring about their proposals while at the same time grounding even the most startling choices in a realistic series of steps.

Though it raised logistical challenges, this looseness of fit between disciplines allowed team members to constantly challenge each others' biases and expectations. The promise of interdisciplinary work is that immersion within a 'foreign' discipline can help to unsettle standard practices and foster innovation by widening the range of choices available to the design team. The more successful teams made use of this process of alienation, with each team member free to challenge the others to seek creative answers to the problems posed by the contemporary urban environment, but also, and perhaps more importantly, this process of speculative experimentation allowed the teams to work together to find concrete ways that even their most imaginative proposals could be seeded into the planning and development process in order to bring about positive change.

Adam Sinclair
PAD Team Member

Boundaries are big in LA. Angelinos move from the bubble of their house to the bubble of their car to their bubble at work, safe from having to come into contact with too many people different from themselves. It is striking to me whenever I visit other cities, how much more one naturally interacts with people of different races, ages, and socio-economic backgrounds when they have access to quality public transportation, great public spaces, and walkable communities. Times have changed. People have changed. Angelinos are ready and willing to mix. Even Beverly Hills now supports a subway system with stops in its neighborhood. It is time to break Angelinos out of their bubbles and let them interact. They might find that they actually like each other.

John Chase
Urban Designer
City of West Hollywood

A competition like PropX is about allowing ingenuity to flourish, free for the moment of political constraints. Each of the teams had a different take on slipping more population into the city fabric. CityCraft zeroed in on the heinous waste of space that surface parking lots constitute, analyzing strategies that would allow to this land to be much more fully used. Excess LA took a more abstract approach, noting that most lots are bigger than the minimum and the "extra" square footage beyond the minimum in those lots could be added up and sprinkled around the neighborhood in order to permit more units. SuperUSE ingeniously found land where others might not have noticed there was such, namely wide streets with medians like Venice Boulevard, and introduced greater density at a minimum cost. For the YIMBY team, small is beautiful. They focused on the political and contextual advantage that small, scattered developments offer, proposing incentives and improvements to existing zoning, process and regulations that affect these projects. The brilliant thesis behind the PAD team was devising a point system, based on a series of easily defensible social beliefs and city building philosophy that deflects controversy and confusion from decision-making over individual projects and replaces it with sound policy making on a general basis. The point system is a way to pump up the number and increase the breadth of policy objectives that an individual development serves. It rewards good projects by literally making more of them, something that is simply not possible in the same way now.

Roger Sherman
Co-Director, cityLAB

Urban design and planning are practiced today in an environment characterized by rapid change. Cultural, political and economic circumstances fluctuate so much that by the time a plan is realized (if it is at all), it is already obsolete; a mere election can radically alter the viability of a master plan. Rather than assuming stability and explaining change, PropX argues that our plans need to assume change and explain stability. Only those that harness rather constrain the highly unpredictable evolution of the contemporary city will ultimately prove of long-term value.

These agile strategies, as Dana Cuff calls them, hinge on their ability to operate at the cusp between control and disorganization. PropX was conceived in order to explore strategies by which the former, top-down model might engage the tendencies of the latter, with the goal of producing new, unforeseeable urban futures. Heretofore, design professionals have tended to dichotomize these two modalities of city-making, precluding the exploration of looser, more synthetic, emergent planning approaches. As Mott Smith points out in this volume, most zoning ordinances are conceived with this bias (so-called "form-based zoning" is merely the latest version), deploying a "one size fits all" approach that fails to allow for the "brilliant messiness" that characterizes vibrant cities.

Cities, however, are not infinitely complex; their ability to adapt to change is related to simplified, self-enforced rules that already effectively define a plan—albeit de facto. Like medical or scientific experiments (and in many ways the city is not unlike an ongoing experiment), these protocols are sufficiently open as to be contingent upon the feedback/outcome of each stage of implementation. Long before planning existed as a profession, these unofficial rules, or norms—"Retail will only survive on streets where there is sufficient traffic", or "There is an accrued benefit to locating near others whose businesses complement, and even compete with, one's own."—guided the world's greatest cities as they adapted to ever-changing economic or social conditions.

In contrast to the planning profession's characteristic "command-and-control" approach, the PropX proposals begin by identifying a specific change-inducing factor, and then link its cause-and-effect interconnections to other factors. As such, each of the proposals is less about a specific outcome—unlike master plans, which try to shape the future toward a foregone conclusion—than it is a framework of behavior modification which engages the forces of urban development through gaming. Strategically conceived and tested incentives and disincentives are employed as a means of loosely predicting and shaping the density-dependent, use-driven process of neighborhood change. One of them, for instance (ExcessLA), explores how a neighborhood's willingness to grant surplus development rights might be exchanged for a community amenity (e.g. a children's playground, or pocket park). In another (PAD), the desirability gradient of urban lots is fundamentally altered by encouraging density around institutions and facilities that would reciprocally benefit from the additional population. In both instances, a local change is introduced anticipating that it might proliferate across the larger city, one project at a time, in a non-uniform, uncontrollable ripple effect—"radical incrementalism".

Rather than having to choose between, on one hand, containing the future, and on the other, continuously revising the zoning code project by project, planning is best employed as a means by which to instigate and harness change that is waiting to be unleashed. Rather than being defensively positioned against a feared unknown, PropX-style planning takes advantage of the constructive role that change can play in reinventing the city. Like any good player in a game that deals with probability, planners and architects alike need to be more opportunistic, tilting the odds through code as a form of "bait"—specific incentives or deterrents that sow the seeds for a variety of future development options in a non-prescriptive way. Like the children's game of Chutes and Ladders, the best plan is less a template based upon past experience than a valve-like diagram of countless possible choices.

Dana Cuff
Director, cityLAB

A standing-room-only crowd attended the PropX Summit at UCLA in September of 2006 to hear Council President Eric Garcetti's plea for expansive optimism as we plan LA's future, and Planning Director Gail Goldberg's call for innovative thinking. They also came to actively engage the proposals presented in this book. But the Summit was not the end of PropX. Instead, the proposals have sparked ongoing conversations and brought about pilot projects that will have a real influence in Los Angeles. The PropX experiment produced specific proposals for encouraging more affordable, well-designed, market-rate housing. At the same time, PropX generated broader remedies to urban disorders in Los Angeles and beyond.

The six lessons learned from PropX deserve restatement:

- Residential zoning must evolve.
- Agile planning shifts the focus from project impacts to new forms of infrastructure.
- Density is not enough.
- Process: One size does not fit all.
- Existing conditions offer radical solutions.
- New ideas must confront old boundaries.

These maxims comprise the more general medicine that PropX prescribes: abandon old forms of master planning; adopt dynamic, responsive, and collaborative planning strategies in order to invent the next Los Angeles. The proposals flesh out this prescription, to demonstrate that good design, planning, and development together can devise original solutions to established—even seemingly intractable—problems.

We need not be utopians to believe that our cities can grow more vibrant, more sustainable, more beautiful, and more affordable. Radical incrementalism can replace visionary idealism. Nor do we need to rely solely on public subsidy or public policy to move development in a beneficial direction. New infrastructure and flexible incentives can seed ingenious opportunities for well-designed urban growth. To heal urban ills, these principles must begin to seep into the very pores of the land-use and building industry, to transform city-making one project at a time. This is the Rx of PropX.

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The conversation generated by PropX has caused me to think about how it is in this city that we can try new things. It is such a big city and as we talked about each of the proposals, we could imagine wonderful places where they could work really well, but we thought of places where they might not work as well. I think that's the challenge of Los Angeles: trying to come up with things that fit everywhere.

One of the issues that I would really like the Planning Department to think about is that because of the size of the city and its diversity, it would seem that there are a lot of opportunities for us to selectively try new ideas, to be more experimental, to test things in pilot projects in communities that might embrace the opportunity to try something new. In each of the proposals, I found the grains of potential pilot projects. And I would hope that all of us would embrace a bit of experimentation in this city so that we are not following all the time but really providing leadership and solutions. If we can figure out how to take the auto city of the country and turn it into a wonderful, livable, walkable city, it can be a model for cities throughout the world.

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