

Our Skid Row



A resident-driven neighborhood vision for a vibrant and equitable Skid Row.



Our Skid Row is a collective vision that redesigns Skid Row and imagines new ways that a city can develop to prioritize people and place. Our Skid Row celebrates the history and residents that call this neighborhood home.

Over a year and a half, residents gathered, taught lessons on the struggles of the neighborhood, shared stories about the importance of Skid Row, and designed solutions to improve the area and enhance the community in which we would like to continue to live.



Our Process

The planning process for Our Skid Row was rooted in the expertise of the existing resident community. We implemented a spectrum of participatory activities with multiple points of entry for engagement to ensure there were several and varied opportunities for participation.

PARTICIPATORY VISIONING

We held over 15 design workshops to meaningfully engage residents. Through drawings, model making and collage, residents generated design solutions to neighborhood challenges. Working with community partners, participatory design workshops took place at various locations, including the Our Skid Row Community Design Studio, the Star Apartments, Downtown Women's Center, the Midnight Mission, Lamp Community, Los Angeles Community Action Network, the Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Festival for All Skid Row Artists in Gladys Park.

MOBILE PARTICIPATION STATION

Our Skid Row designed and built a Participation Station, a mobile design cart that we pushed through the streets and public parks of Skid Row to solicit input from individuals currently experiencing homelessness whose voices may have otherwise gone unheard. This was an opportunity to remove additional barriers to participation and actively outreach to neighbors while embracing the culture of Skid Row's street life.

COMMUNITY-ENGAGED ASSET MAPPING

Over 40 volunteers guided by Resident Block Leaders, went block by block through Skid Row to map the entire community, identifying existing infrastructure, green space, healthy food options, affordable housing, services, and more.

DESIGN RESOURCE WORKSHOPS

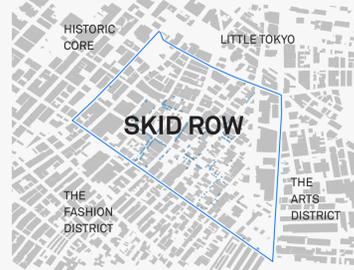
We organized a series of workshops where community experts worked alongside design experts to refine the community vision. Urban planners, landscape architects, architects, and artists shared technical input to further develop the community plan.

Timeline

- May 2014 Our Skid Row Community Design Studio opens
- July 27-28, 2014 Museum of Contemporary Art: Design Workshops at Mike Kelley's Mobile Homestead
- Aug 1, 2014 Los Angeles Community Action Network Design Workshop
- Aug 14, 2014 Our Skid Row Design Studio Open House
- Aug 19, 2014 Lamp Art Workshop
- Sept 2, 2014 Participation Station at Gladys Park
- Sept 11, 2014 Downtown Women's Action Coalition workshop at Downtown Women's Center
- Sept 11, 2014 Participation Station at 5th and Wall
- Sept 14, 2014 Los Angeles Poverty Department Workshop
- Sept 18, 2014 Participation Station at San Julian Park
- Sept 23, 2014 Participation Station at 6th and San Pedro
- Sept 29, 2014 Skid Row Housing Trust Join in Health Fair
- Oct 11, 2014 Volunteer Mapping Day 1
- Oct 14, 2014 Midnight Mission workshop
- Oct 18-19, 2014 Festival for All Skid Row Artist, Design Creativity Station
- Oct 24, 2014 Volunteer Mapping Day 2
- July-04 On-going asset mapping on Tuesdays
- Nov 19, 2014 Open Workshop
- Feb 19, 2015 Open House
- March 25, 2015 Design Resource Workshop
- May 12, 2015 Design Resource follow up intensive workshop
- May 19, 2015 Design Resource follow up intensive workshop
- May 20, 2015 Design Resource follow up intensive workshop
- June 15, 2015 Blue Book, Silver Book, the Next Book: Discussion at Skid Row History Museum
- June 19, 2015 Celebrate Skid Row and Juneteenth!
- July 1, 2015 Draft review and discussion
- July 23, 2015 Draft review and discussion
- Sept 3, 2015 Draft review and discussion
- Sept 17, 2015 Final Review and approval

We held 27 opportunities for involvement that ranged from sidewalk interactions to 4 hour-long design workshops. Attendance and participation was measured at over 600 engagements, with over 380 unique participants with many participants returning for several events. Many of the participants were from the Skid Row community but also included attendees from over 40 different communities across Los Angeles County, representing county-wide support for Our Skid Row.

Mapping Skid Row



Skid Row is formally and historically defined by 3rd street to the north, Alameda Avenue to the east, 7th street to the south, and Main street to the west. Skid Row is a 50 block and 0.4 square mile neighborhood in downtown Los Angeles that has an estimated total population of 11,000 residents. (2010 Census) Over two-thirds of the population is male. Approximately 60% are African-American, 14% Caucasian and 11% Latino. The median household income is just over \$11,000 (2011 City Data). Approximately, over one-third of the population is homeless, with over 3500 people living in temporary beds in shelters or on the streets (2014 Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority), making Skid Row the site of the highest concentration of homeless individuals in the United States.

Although originally a transient community, Skid Row has grown into a place of permanence with long-time residents that have created a strong social fabric that supports extensive grassroots organizing efforts to strengthen the neighborhood. The physical infrastructure does not appropriately support the equitable growth of the community and the perceived narrative of Skid Row does not reflect the culture of resiliency and innovation.

Findings

We documented the existing conditions of the neighborhood. The people, the community efforts, and programs are the greatest assets of the community. There are strong social ties and culture, along with programs whose mission is to alleviate poverty for its low-income residents. The neighborhood lacks comprehensive amenities that most other communities have including recreation, arts and culture, and economic development possibilities. There is tremendous opportunity in the neighborhood if the human and social capital is leveraged with sustained resources that commit to the permanent improvement of the area.



LAND USE
Majority of the area is zoned for industrial usage, limiting the amount of residential and commercial development. A majority of the vacant buildings in the community are located in industrially zoned areas.

HOUSING
There is a range of existing housing options from market rate lofts to subsidized permanent supportive housing in Skid Row. There is not enough low-income housing to adequately support the 3500+ un-housed residents.

COMMUNITY PROGRAMS
The number of community based organizations and social service providers in the area are a great strength to the neighborhood. Organizations range from primary health care and mental health providers to community activism and urban agriculture programs.



COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY
There is a narrow range of food options in Skid Row, a recognized healthy food desert. There are very few affordable restaurants and no affordable grocery stores in the community. The majority of the retail outlets are not catered to the existing low-income residents living in the area.

PUBLIC HYGIENE
There are only 2 locations of public showers and 6 locations of public toilets that serve the entire unhoused community. There are only 97 trashcans in the entire 50 block area.

ARTS AND CULTURE
There are several arts organizations and activities, along with street art in the community. There are a large number of resident artists but there are no permanent spaces open to the public that exhibit or support the arts.



BIDS
The Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) in the area do not cover all areas in the neighborhood. Most notably, San Julian Street is not maintained by a BID. There are existing grassroots efforts to clean the streets and provide trashcans informally, providing the services currently unmet by city agencies.

MOBILITY
Only two major bus routes service the area with limited stops almost a quarter mile apart. There are no formal bike lanes in the community and secure bike racks are scarce, although bike ridership is higher than most neighborhoods.

WELCOMING SPACES
In general, Skid Row residents felt welcomed in areas along the core of the neighborhood- but in places along the boundaries especially along Main Street, the spaces and amenities did not feel accessible to low-income residents.

Redesigning Skid Row

During the participatory design workshops, residents discussed issues in the community, while providing possible solutions to alleviate the problems. Highlights from some workshops are outlined below.

Places of Potential



Residents identified locations within the community that needed attention- whether it was to amplify an existing asset or improve and activate an existing location that was not fully utilized to its greatest potential. From the activity, areas for improvement identified by a majority of the residents include (1) 5th and San Julian, (2) 6th and San Pedro, (3) 6th and Gladys. There was a lack of amenities or programs for the Skid Row Community along Main Street and north of 4th Street.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

From the design solutions workshops, a series of guiding principles emerged that outline a thriving and equitable neighborhood. Six major categories of improvement were identified as:

- Fundamental Human Needs**
 - All residents should have the option to permanent housing
 - Everyone needs to be able to access public hygiene facilities, including showers, bathrooms, clean water and a place to store belonging while accessing services, 24 hours, 7 days a week
 - All residents should have sustained access to healthy food
 - Ensure residents are involved with decisions related to the community
- Community Safety**
 - Ability to move, live, play and work with security and a sense of dignity and independence.
 - Equal rights for all residents
 - Reinforce cultural competency
 - Prioritize pedestrians over vehicles
 - Support more community-led initiatives
- Healthy Living**
 - Access to physical healthcare, mental health, and substance abuse counseling 24 hours
 - Wellness resources that encourage an active lifestyle with exercise and spiritual well being
 - Access to healthy food options
 - Everyone should live in a sustainable neighborhood supporting energy, water, and material efficiency and conservation
- Recreation and leisure**
 - High quality open and green spaces accessible for all residents for extended periods of time
 - Social programs and amenities that holistically support growth, recovery, and rest
 - Ensure residents have the ability to rejuvenate and grow
- Economic Development and Education**
 - Accessible educational resources to support professional development
 - Ample job opportunities for local residents
 - Sustained resources to support the development of local businesses
 - More opportunities for outside investment for community-supporting enterprises
- Creativity and self-expression**
 - Resources to develop existing artist network and creative economy of Skid Row
 - Public venues to share the arts
 - Skid Row residents tell their own stories
 - Promote neighborhood identity and social connections

Recommendations

All the design workshops generated the foundation for Our Skid Row community vision. The ideas and solutions discussed are incorporated and synthesized into the following

- IMMEDIATE PHYSICAL IMPROVEMENTS**
 - Create Rest Stops with mobile showers, bathrooms, drinking fountains and storage facilities.
 - Create Safety Zones that have 24/7 programming in conjunction with partner organization. No drug or alcohol use permitted.
 - Pop-up farmers markets with EBT
 - Urban agriculture gardens in under-utilized lots and rooftops
 - More trashcans and daily sanitation services
 - Improve the physical quality of public space in Gladys and San Julian Parks and provide consistent maintenance and hours. Support existing and on-going community programs
 - Invest in community wayfinding signage and cultural banners
 - More funding for art festivals, arts programming, and art institutions.
 - Bike Share Program
- COMMUNITY PLANNING PILOTS**
 - Welcome Stations
 - information kiosks for neighborhood resources and services, tourist information and general orientation information.
 - Social Enterprise Incentive Zone- for local hiring and community supporting businesses.
 - Subsidized rents and leases
 - Funding to support local start-ups and informals
 - Training and resources to support local informal economies to formal businesses.
 - "The Row"
 - Establish 6th street as a corridor of economic and cultural development along 6th St. Major retail and commercial avenue linking the 6th St viaduct, Arts district and Historic Core with Skid Row.
 - Skid Row Community Improvement District
 - Develop community-supporting and area maintenance organization while providing local job opportunities with tax funding from local businesses.
 - Skid Row Neighborhood Council
 - resident led advocacy group recognized by the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment.
- NEW COMMUNITY PROGRAMS**
 - Offer low-cost rent and distribute art materials to existing network of Skid Row artists
 - Provide services 24/7, including urgent care in the neighborhood
 - Increase spirituality and mediation resources
 - Intensify the development of recreational programs and cultural centers
 - Develop a Community-driven Safety Initiative
 - Mitigate health impacts of industrial uses and limit truck pollution.
 - More System-wide Mental Assessment Response (SMART) Teams in Skid Row and more non-law enforcement based mental health emergency response teams
 - Educate all professionals with racial and cultural competency trainings
- PERMANENT INFRASTRUCTURE**
 - More Low Income and Permanent Supportive Housing
 - More rental subsidies for low income housing
 - More capital for construction for affordable housing
 - Fast-track affordable housing projects
 - More sources of community benefits funds
 - Establish Dash lines and accessible bus stops
 - Implement Complete Streets and Slow Zones: multi-modal transit and pedestrian safety
 - Designate San Pedro as a Great Street and invest in transformation
 - Support People Streets: transform under-utilized streets for public space, shared streets, parklets, and green alleys.
 - Create more parks, trees and shade in the area for unlimited and welcome use for all people.

WORKSHOP SUGGESTIONS AND HIGHLIGHTS

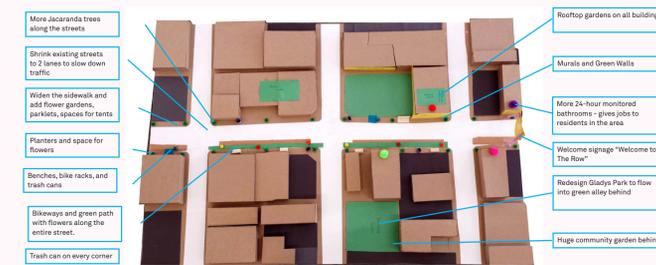
Community Design Activity

Los Angeles Poverty Department, San Pedro between 6th and 7th



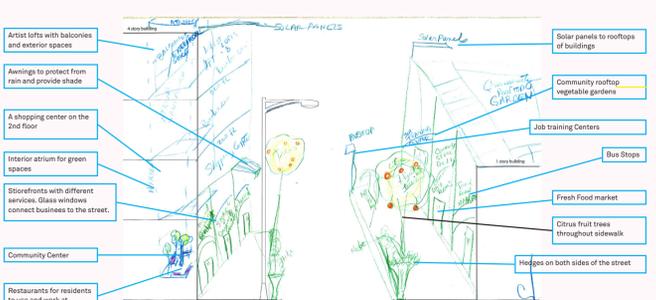
Model-based Workshop

Resident Open Workshop, 6th Street and Gladys Park



Street Section Drawing

Resident Open Workshop, 6th Street



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Our Skid Row Community Vision strengthens Skid Row as a neighborhood that uplifts the existing community, providing a nurturing place of empowerment and sustainability so that all residents will thrive in an environment they can comfortably call home. Building upon existing community assets, especially existing low-income housing and comprehensive social services, community-led organizations and grassroots efforts, Our Skid Row defines Skid Row as a vibrant and equitable neighborhood.

NOTE:
This map illustrates in broad strokes the ideas of the Our Skid Row group. It is not intended to specify exact locations.

KEY

Our Skid Row vision is built around a network of community anchors and urban connections that reinforces a tight knit community and links Skid Row to the larger surrounding neighborhoods, creating a strong downtown fabric.

Neighborhood Wide Strategies

-  Skid Row Neighborhood Council- establish resident representation for the community to specifically address the issues of Skid Row.
-  Social Enterprise Incentive Zone- overlay the entire area with incentives to businesses that hire and train local residents.
-  Skid Row Community Improvement District (CID)- develop street maintenance program and local resident job opportunities as alternatives to the existing Business Improvement Districts.

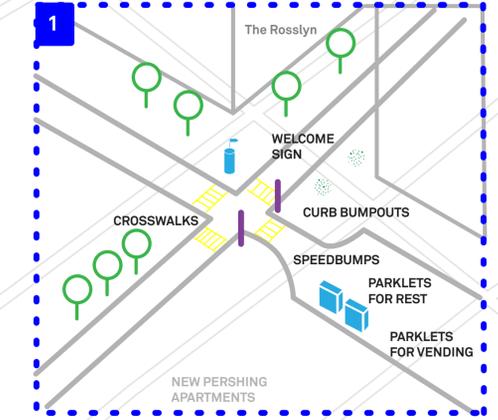
Community Anchors are micro-neighborhood centers and destinations that are focused places of interaction. Community anchors are hubs of amenities and serve as destinations for neighborhood programs and activities.

-  **Safety zones**- in conjunction a community group for programming and support 24/7. No drug or alcohol use allowed. Spaces include Youth-centered area, women safe havens, and a LGBTQ haven. On-site public art installation and green space for open usage.
-  **Welcome Stations**- information kiosks for neighborhood resources, tourist information, and general orientation. Visitors can access internet, phone, cell phone charging stations, and other communication support.
-  **Rest Stops**- provide 24/7 hygiene services of showers and bathrooms, along with storage lockers and cold water drinking stations. Social service outreach areas will be on-site. Green space and areas of respite available.
-  **Open Spaces**- vacant lots will be turned into parks and urban agriculture gardens. Improve Gladys Park and San Julian Park with more seating, performance space, shade and restrooms. Include opportunities for green alleys and rooftop gardens on existing and new construction buildings.
-  **Low-income Housing**- develop and rehab buildings into more supportive housing and low-income housing to provide permanent homes for those living on the streets. Allow for greater density, mixed use and residential uses in industrial zones.

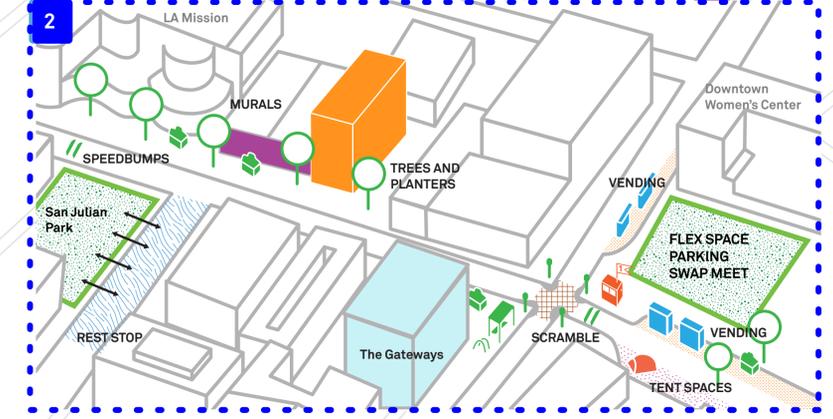
Urban Connections - linear elements that tie together anchors and stitch together the neighborhood and link Skid Row to the Historic Core, the Arts District, Little Tokyo, the Fashion District and beyond.

-  **DASH lines**- frequent buses running along 4th and 7th streets and Central Avenue to increase transit connections.
-  **Bus Stops**- with benches, shade structure, trashcans, bike racks, schedule updates, and cell phone charging stations.
-  **Complete Streets**- all streets shall be "Complete Streets" that support pedestrian, cyclist, motorist, and transit rider safety and multi-modal transit including bike share programs. 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th and San Pedro streets have high priority.
-  **People Streets**- converts underused portions of streets into active and accessible public spaces, plazas, parklets and bicycle corrals with seating and shade. Areas can be blocked off for parties, art festivals, swap meets, farmers markets and other public events.
-  **Parklets** provide opportunities for street vending, micro enterprise kiosks, green space, and recreational areas. Programmatic partners to activate and maintain the spaces.
-  **Great Streets**- acknowledge the importance of San Pedro between 3rd and 7th as a major spine in Downtown LA that connects neighborhoods and invest in commercial, residential and streetscape revitalization.
-  **Slow Zones**- Car speeds are reduced. Extend sidewalks and narrow streets, and install speed bumps to ensure slower travel. Crosswalks with longer timers and safety lights will reinforce the pedestrian-centric area.
-  **The Row**- a mixed use corridor of economic and cultural development. This will be the major commercial corridor linking Downtown LA to the Arts District and 6th Street Viaduct. Social enterprises, job training centers, and cultural spaces that support Skid Row residents will be incentivized along this corridor.
-  **Planters/Trees**- will be planted and maintained throughout all sidewalks.
-  **Trashcans and benches**- will be on every street corner along with cleaning supplies and daily trash pick up.
-  **Public art installations and murals** will be distributed throughout the community. Local artists living in the neighborhood will be given priority to installation.
-  **Signage**- install wayfinding signs that point out local destinations within Skid Row and connections to nearby locations, along with banners that celebrate the history and culture of the area, visibly identifying the Skid Row as a place of interest.

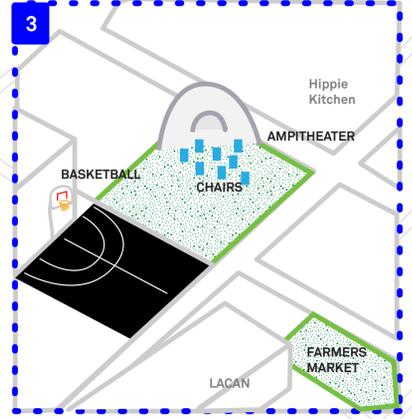
DETAIL: 5TH & MAIN



DETAIL: 5TH & SAN PEDRO



DETAIL: 6TH AND GLADYS



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Community Partners
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