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There’s no doubt about it. Lancaster is changing.
As one of the nation’s fastest growing cities, the new growth is readily apparent. New subdivisions and shopping centers can be found all over town.

Transformations of a more subtle, but no less substantial nature are taking place as the very fabric of the community is changing, thanks to the work of the City’s Department of Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization.

Comprised of three key units, Housing, Code Enforcement and Community Neighborhood Building, this dedicated team is helping local residents and the private sector to make the investments required to sustain neighborhoods and create a sense of community for all its citizens.

As a part of the City’s Redevelopment Agency, the Department uses tax increment funding, municipal codes and citizen involvement to help spur improvements that raise overall property values and make life in Lancaster more enjoyable.

This holistic approach to creating a stronger community is what the Department of Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization is all about.

The Department invests in public/private partnerships that improve local housing stocks and make home ownership more obtainable.

It is helping neighborhoods to control their own destiny by setting common ground rules that protect everyone’s property values.

The Code Enforcement staff works with residents to ensure that City statutes designed to defend property rights are honored. When financial situations preclude some from making necessary repairs and improvements on their own, the Department may be able to provide assistance through special grant and loan programs.

In the coming pages, you’ll discover more ways Lancaster’s Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization Department helps improve the fabric of our community. Find suggestions on how you and your family can help. Join in! Make Lancaster an even better place for all its residents.

Elizabeth Brubaker
Director
Department of Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization
A Metamorphosis for Downtown Lancaster

Downtown Lancaster is known for its distinctive boutiques and great restaurants, impressive civic structures and key financial institutions.

Today, thanks in large part to Lancaster’s Department of Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization, Downtown Lancaster is also becoming a very attractive place to live, particularly for older adults and those with special needs.

The North Downtown Transit Village and the Downtown Specific Plan are two important projects that have been instrumental in this transformation.

The North Downtown Transit Village Project was initiated to bring new life back to a declining area, just off Lancaster Boulevard, between 10th Street West and Sierra Highway.

Predominantly an area of older homes and rentals, many properties have fallen into disrepair. The Department of Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization stepped in to help change things for the better. Working closely with urban planners, a new vision for the area was developed.

Focusing on the importance of the City’s Metrolink Station as a key access point, the plan envisioned a cluster of public services, new housing, schools and parks to revitalize the area.

The housing component focused on providing those most dependent on public transportation, seniors and the disabled, with safe, modern and attractive places to live.
The first project completed was Arbor Gardens, a $9 million, 116-unit senior apartment complex, just off Lancaster Boulevard in the heart of downtown. This was followed by Arbor Grove, a $12 million, mixed-use development along 10th Street West that incorporates senior housing and retail elements, making shopping, dining and services more accessible to residents. Most recently, the Essex House Hotel has been transformed into Arbor Court, a full-service senior complex featuring studio apartments and a complete adult day-care program. All three projects were created by InSite Development in cooperation with the City’s Department of Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization.

As a part of improving access to public services, the City has been instrumental in helping to create new homes for The Children’s Center of the Antelope Valley, the Mental Health Association and other social service providers. The new Mental Health Association complex includes residential units for the developmentally disabled and fully-functional adults.

Another key aspect of the North Downtown Transit Village Project has been the revitalization of existing single-family homes within the project area. Homeowners and landlords can apply for grants and loans to help repair and improve their properties to bring them into compliance with local codes.

To date, over $100 million in public and private investments have been made to transform this aging area into a beautiful and functional new district for public services and private residents.
A New Approach for Downtown Development

While the North Downtown Transit Village Project focused on the residential areas surrounding Lancaster Boulevard, the City’s new Downtown Specific Plan addresses the revitalization of the heart of the City’s urban core, a block or two south of Lancaster Boulevard.

While most of this area has traditionally been commercial in nature, the new plan calls for upwards of 3,500 dwelling units in the project area over the next 20 plus years.

Using a new model of form-based codes, the emphasis changes from specifying land uses to specifying building types that are appropriate within a given area. This approach promotes mixed-use development and creates a richer, more vibrant neighborhood.

For example, a new pedestrian-oriented center located along Lancaster Boulevard between Elm and Fig has received a conditional use permit. This mixed-use project will include restaurants, shops and a public plaza in addition to 140 housing units.

Form-based codes tend to be more visual than verbal, making them easier to understand and leaving them less open to interpretation and debate. Implementation becomes quicker and less expensive since clear rules are already in place.

Looking east from roundabout at 10th Street West and Lancaster Boulevard
Many people in the community have contributed ideas for the Lancaster Downtown Specific Plan. Using those ideas and others, the City is progressing toward adoption of a proposed plan that includes seven distinct districts surrounding the Downtown area. Each district has unique characteristics and its own appropriate building form.

**Boulevard District**
The Boulevard District forms the core of Downtown Lancaster with a variety of entertainment, retail, service and residential uses within existing and new buildings ranging from one to five stories in height.

**Commerce District**
Just west of the Boulevard District, the Commerce District includes a mix of new and existing office buildings of similar height. The focus here is on financial and professional services and supporting retail and residential uses.

**Transit District**
Running along Sierra Highway, the Transit District serves as the primary gateway to Downtown from the east.

**Gateway District**
At the crossroads of 10th Street West and Lancaster Boulevard, the Gateway District serves as the primary gateway from the west, with a focus on office and retail uses.

**Neighborhood Office District**
Located south of Lancaster Boulevard, the Neighborhood Office District is comprised primarily of detached homes and homes converted to commercial use. This district provides a transition between Downtown residential areas to the south.

**Civic Village District**
North of Lancaster Boulevard, the Civic Village District incorporates many of the public services defined in the North Downtown Transit Village Project.

**Cedar Avenue Arts District**
The Cedar Avenue Arts District brings a new artistic flair Downtown with a variety of public spaces combined with retail, office, studios, lofts and workshops.

Perhaps the best example of public participation in future planning has been the Downtown Specific Plan project. At each step along the way, citizens were invited to participate in creating a new vision for Downtown. Through a series of workshops, walkabouts and visioning sessions, residents, City staff and professional planners worked together to define the future of our urban core.

The City encourages all residents to participate in future discussions and thanks those who have participated in the past.
Northeast Gateway Corridor
New Uses for the Old Antelope Valley Fairgrounds

The City’s Department of Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization has played an important role in redefining how the old site of the Antelope Valley Fairgrounds could be best utilized. In addition to the Redevelopment Agency’s participation in the creation of the City’s new University Center, Phoenix High School and AV Boys and Girls Club, some 73 new single-family homes have been created by the Larwin Company. A shopping center is planned and youth baseball and softball fields are being built.

Lowtree Neighborhood Project
Civic Surgery Helps Heal Hospital Area

The area southeast of Avenue J and 15th Street West, across the street from Antelope Valley Hospital, is undergoing a major transformation, thanks to the City’s Department of Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization.

Once an area of high-density, high-crime apartment complexes, the Department acquired many of these properties, relocating the residents to give that neighborhood a fresh start.

Demolition of the blighted properties is nearly complete and planning for new productive uses for the land is well underway. One option puts the emphasis on redeveloping the property for owner-occupied residential use, while another approach combines residential uses with retail and commercial development in support of hospital activities.
Home Improvements
Investing in Your Home

For most people, owning a home is the single biggest investment they’ll ever make. Ensuring that investment pays off in the long run doesn’t require a financial advisor, just a little common sense and some elbow grease.

According to HomeGain.com, a real estate website run by some of the nation’s biggest newspapers, the single biggest thing you can do to improve your home’s value is to clean it up and get rid of the clutter.

According to their calculations, that simple act can provide a 973% return on investment. In other words, for every dollar you invest in cleaning, you’ll add $9.73 in value to your home.

Another big payback is found right outside your door. Taking care of your lawn and shrubs can add $4.26 of value for every dollar spent.

The website also recommends keeping plumbing and electrical systems in shape. A dollar spent here returns over two and a half times its cost in added home value.

A little paint can also give a big payback. An estimated 148% return on investment can be realized when you repair any holes or cracks and give your home a fresh coat of neutral colored paint.

So to optimize your investment and the enjoyment of your home, take care of the little things. They can pay off in a big way!

There is strength in numbers. What one individual wouldn’t think of undertaking, a group of 10, 20, 50 or 100 neighbors can accomplish with ease.

Neighborhood associations, whether formed for the purpose of assuring property rights or assisting in crime prevention, can be a powerful force for the better.

Many newer neighborhoods already have homeowner’s associations in place. Some are professionally managed, others are self-run. They help monitor and manage activities in the neighborhood to make sure public safety and collective property values are maintained.

That same tool can be put to good use in older neighborhoods to help unify residents and empower them to make positive change.

If you don’t already have a community organization in place, talk to your neighbors. Determine interest levels and issues of concern. You may be surprised at how much common ground you’ll find you agree on.

When you’re ready to get organized, the City can help. Whether you want to form an anti-crime Neighborhood Watch program or a more involved neighborhood association that covers a wide-range of community standards, the City of Lancaster has resources dedicated to helping you and your neighbors take better control of your community.

Call the City’s Department of Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization at 661-723-6197 for more information on how they can help.
City Assistance Programs

The City of Lancaster offers a number of special assistance programs that can help finance repairs and rehabilitation of homes.

These programs are designed primarily for residents who have been found in non-compliance with City codes, but lack the financial resources to take care of the issues in a timely fashion. Among these are:

**Homeowner Programs**
The City offers assistance to qualified homeowners to improve landscaping, paint exteriors and make emergency repairs on owner-occupied single-family residences. Typically, these are low or deferred interest loan programs secured by a trust deed. Certain income requirements apply and the property must exist within designated areas of the City. Loan values are up to $20,000 depending on the project undertaken.

**Senior Homeowner Programs**
Similar in coverage to the regular homeowner programs but offering loans and grants to low-income residents 62 years of age or older, these special senior programs can provide the funds required to repair aging housing, even for those on a fixed income.

**Mobile Home Owner Program**
This special grant program is designed to address health and safety issues with low income owner-occupied mobile home owners who have received a Notice of Violation from Code Enforcement. Grants up to $5,000 can be applied to electrical, plumbing or stairway safety improvements.

**Accessibility Improvements**
Funds are available to both low income seniors and other homeowners where at least one of the homeowners is physically disabled. Covered improvements include specific changes that make the home more accessible to the disabled owner.

**Landlord Programs**
Owners of smaller (one to four rental units) and larger (five or more units) rental housing can also seek assistance to improve properties that serve low and moderate income tenants. These low interest loans are designed to help rehabilitate damaged or aging structures that do not comply with current requirements. Rental units must be within designated areas of the City and are secured by a trust deed on the property. Loans up to $40,000 are available for smaller properties, while loans up to $200,000 are available on larger multi-tenant properties. Eligible repairs include painting, landscaping and parking improvements.

For more information on any of these programs, please contact the Department of Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization at 661-723-6197 or visit www.cityoflancasterca.org.

The City of Lancaster has identified 11 “focus neighborhoods” in need of assistance. Five were deemed “primary” and six were deemed “secondary.”
Preventing Foreclosure

The City of Lancaster is working with local lenders and state and federal institutions to assist homeowners who find themselves in the grip of a large ARM (adjustable rate mortgage) or other financial situation that may lead to foreclosure.

This multi-faceted approach to education, fraud prevention and early intervention is designed to preserve neighborhoods and reclaim and rehabilitate foreclosed housing units.

It starts with pre-purchase education that helps first-time buyers and those rehabilitating properties understand mortgage alternatives, proper budgeting, credit management and homeowner rights.

It continues with an early intervention program that helps lenders and borrowers discuss problems and propose solutions before foreclosure becomes inevitable. Through a special hotline program, the Department of Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization staff acts as a first-point of contact with troubled borrowers and refers them to appropriate credit counseling resources.

Another critical aspect is building awareness of predatory practices and fraud that those facing foreclosure may encounter. Scam artists offer “fix-it” schemes that often leave the owner in worse shape than they were to start out.

Through a faith-based outreach program, the City is working with local religious leaders to get the word out about foreclosure fraud.

Finally, the Department is prepared to assure neighborhood preservation by acquiring and rehabilitating foreclosed properties deemed of low value to their institutional owners.

By acquiring these properties via donation or deep discount, then rehabilitating them and reselling them to qualified new moderate income owner/occupants, the City helps to assure that neighborhood integrity is maintained while providing new opportunities for home ownership.

To find out more about this innovative, proactive approach to the issues of foreclosure, contact the City’s Department of Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization at 661-723-6197.
Department of Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization
Housing: 661-723-6197
Code Enforcement: 661-723-6121
Community Building: 661-723-6131

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