



2017

Altadena Library District  
Community Conversations  
Project Report

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## Purpose

- To provide residents of Altadena the opportunity to share their hopes and aspirations for the community in an engaging manner.
- To enable them to use their voice to guide decision-makers and community groups to make more informed choices during planning processes.
- To build community by creating a safe space for neighbors to share ideas and feelings by taking time out of their busy lives to participate in a conversation.
- To stimulate action, both individual and collective, so that the ideas generated are converted into practical realities.
- To provide the Library with data and perspectives that will enable it to design programming and services that meet the needs of the public.

The Library spearheaded this initiative as part of the Libraries Transforming Communities (American Library Association initiative), which seeks to strengthen libraries' roles as community leaders and change agents using the Harwood Institute's Turning Outward approach to community engagement. The Turning Outward approach involves asking the right questions to find out what the community really wants, and bringing together the right teams to help make those dreams a reality. Libraries around the country are using the approach to better understand their communities and to bring about positive change. For more information visit:

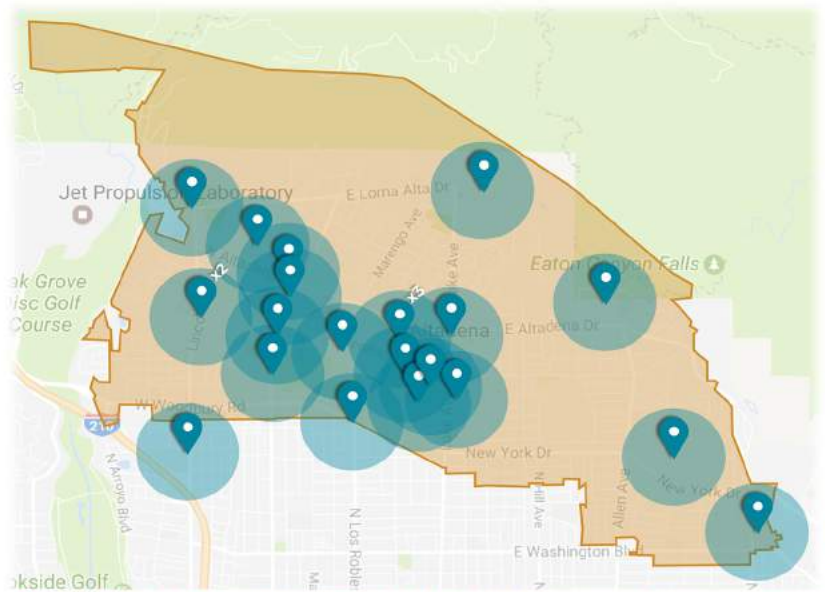
<http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/libraries-transforming-communities/turning-outward>

## Meeting Coordination Background

The idea was to provide as many Altadenans with the opportunity to participate and to be conscious of a balanced demographic representation of the public, i.e. age, location, gender, race/ethnicity, etc. To this end, conversations were held in all sectors of the town with a wide range of stakeholders and community members.

The location with the greatest number of conversations was in living rooms at private residences. The reason for selecting homes as a meeting location was twofold: first, to create an atmosphere of friendliness and trust and, second, to be able to ask the host to invite his/her neighbors so that the invitation came from a known person. When sharing such personal stories and ideas it is best to be in an environment where one is welcomed and appreciated.

In addition, several other types of friendly sites were used for the conversations, including: senior living community, child care center, schools, libraries, places of worship, bar, and restaurant. Conversations were held with students who are Altadena residents at Muir High School and Eliot Middle School and with their parents at Eliot Middle School and the Altadena Christian Children's Center. The Pasadena Jewish Temple hosted a conversation for its Altadena members and local businesses including the Altadena Ale House, El Patron, and Sidewalk Cafe all provided space for conversations. And the senior living facility MonteCedro Altadena also provided space for a conversation for its residents. The Library itself hosted three conversations, two at the Bob Lucas Branch Library in Spanish and one at the Main Library for the general public.



**Above:** Map showing the locations of the 23 Community Conversations across Altadena (circular radii of reach around each location are approximated)

## Meeting Facilitation Methodology

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The objective here was to ensure that participants felt safe about sharing their opinions. In addition, to help them to meet someone who they didn't know before and to learn a little about that person. To form relationships with their neighbors by sharing personal stories about their lives.

To this end participants were asked to share about their favorite book as a child, the story about how they moved to Altadena and what they love about living here. In order for significant social or political change to occur it is necessary for the people involved to build trusting and honest relationships. Once those bonds are in place then project or action teams can be formed to move forward with priorities. Without trust it will be difficult for those entities to achieve significant success.

Another aspect of the creation of a 'safe space' was the utilization of some simple ground rules. Founded upon the practice of council circles, these 'agreements' made it easier for participants to feel at ease in the group. Ensuring that all knew that everyone has a voice, that all ideas have value, that listening authentically brings out the best responses, and that having fun would be a part of the experience, made for a very comfortable and caring process. Looking back it is difficult to recall any of the participants, except for a couple of teens, who were reticent or shy about offering their opinions. Everyone participated fully and this was due to the 'safe space' that was created and thus appreciated by all.

The conversations in and of themselves were wonderful experiences as community building activities and listening sessions. In addition, a thread of taking action was woven into the activity, both from a collective sense as well as an individual one. So participants were asked what are some ways in which the community might be able to overcome the barriers that block progress. They came up with many creative ideas that are quite actionable and exciting. And the last request was for each person to write down an action step that they will take as the result of the conversation. They were asked to review it in a week to see how much progress they have made. It will be interesting to hear how successful they were with their commitments.

## Summary of Conversation Outcomes

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Clearly and emphatically the message is that people love Altadena! For better or worse, folks who live in Altadena are extremely loyal about the community and particularly interested in maintaining its unique character. Comments about the 'beauty' of the place, the 'distinct character', the 'diversity' of its residents and the 'hidden gem' of L.A. were raised at just about every conversation. To give one an idea of the passion that folks have, here are a couple of emblematic statements:

*"Once we moved here, I can't imagine being anywhere else. There is something about Altadena that grabs you and won't let you go."*

And,

*"...[Altadena] has a great sense of community, small town friendliness - people wave as they go by...[we are] in the country, but close to the city; this quality of living is very rare!"*

Particularly in a megalopolis like Los Angeles, where else do you feel a closeness with your neighbors and yet have the conveniences of city life!

Nevertheless, even with this excellent reputation, there are a few areas where Altadena could use some improvement to make it an even better place to live. The next section lists what are the top priorities that were captured from the aspirations section of these Conversations. Here is a description of how this section is formatted and what each category refers to:

- **Priorities:** These are the top 11 areas of importance as defined by the participants of the Community Conversations. Each one has a brief description of the topic or a summary of that priority and gives some background on why it was identified by residents as a significant issue of concern.
- **Community Input:** These comments were made by attendees of the Community Conversations and are their ideas for how to improve Altadena. **They have not been altered in any way so as to maintain the original intent of the author.**
- **Library Action Items:** The Altadena Library is committed to implementing the 'action items' listed here and has, in fact, already started to create change by incorporating a few of them into its day to day operations.
- **Library Recommendations:** In addition to the numerous suggestions made by participants, these are additional ideas developed by the Library team to help catalyze improvements around the community. It is the hope and desire of the Library that the community partner with the Library and other community organizations to build upon these recommendations and adapt them as needed.
- **Action:** By using existing resources and organizational structures these are ideas that will provide options for moving forward with some of the recommendations. By analyzing where work is being done already and where there are existing resources to be leveraged, some of the recommendations can be addressed and acted upon right away.
- **How will we know that it is working?:** All community initiatives need a mechanism to be able to evaluate how much progress has been accomplished in 6 months to a year. This is a feedback loop that will enable stakeholders to be able to assess effectiveness and whether or not changes need to be made to the system. How will the community measure success for each project? And how will the community be different in 6 months to a year?

## Community Priorities

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### 1. Maintain Altadena's Unique Character "Keep Altadena Funky"

One of the most powerful reasons for people to want to move to Altadena is its original character. And certainly once someone has lived in town for a few years the feeling of being a bit independent and almost 'off the grid' permeates one's psyche to the point of no return. Many participants stated how they loved being slightly out of step with the rest of society and could not imagine living in Pasadena with its layers of regulations and bureaucracy. For them then the idea is how to maintain this unique charm and to celebrate the town's diversity in all sectors.

#### Community Input:

- a. Promote the 'farmer's market' since it creates community
- b. Identify public spaces for artists/musicians to exhibit/perform
- c. Encourage young families to get involved in the community
- d. Hold craft fairs around town
- e. Plan an annual parade
- f. Develop an art center
- g. Organize an 'art walk' as a community-wide event
- h. Organize a car show

*"We all want to keep Altadena's character and diversity while making these improvements."*

### Library Action Items:

- a. Increase participation in Second Saturday events by adding opening acts using local talent between the ages of 16-25
- b. Continue to serve as host for Open Studios events
- c. Expand Library events and activities to include more opportunities for local musicians/writers/poets to perform, including Open Mic nights
- d. Increase the number of cultural programs provided by the Library

### Library Recommendations:

- a. Develop a PR campaign to "Keep Altadena Funky"
- b. Organize an annual event that honors Altadena's character (ex. parade, art show, festival, musical celebration, etc.)
- c. Support and attend the current 'art walk' named Open Studios Tour Altadena/Pasadena

### Action:

A community volunteer will form a committee designed to protect the character and uniqueness of Altadena. At one of the Community Conversations a participant suggested forming a committee dedicated to this vision and calling it: "Keep Altadena Funky". He even started recruiting members at the CC and committed to fighting to maintain the special charm of the community that "we all love" for as long as he lives in town.

### How will we know this is working?

In six months the committee will be organized and meeting regularly to plan several of the activities listed above and will be actively promoting the 'funkiness' of Altadena. Through that committee a public relations campaign will have been initiated to raise awareness about maintaining Altadena's character. More Altadenans will identify with the campaign and wear t-shirts, place bumper stickers on their cars, buy magnets for the refrigerator and have their pets wear collars with "Keep Altadena Funky" on them.

## 2. Community Cohesion / Center / Volunteerism

An unfortunate aspect of living in this community is that there is no 'civic center' nor an obvious central government structure. Nevertheless, with a multitude of organizations like Altadena Heritage, Altadena Coalition of Neighborhood Associations (ACONA), Altadena Town Council, Chamber of Commerce, Neighbors Building a Better Altadena (NBBA), Altadena Historical Society and many others, it is obvious that this is a caring community which has a significant spirit of giving back, volunteering and dedication to making this an even better place to live.

### Community Input:

- a. Plan events to rotate to different houses in the community
- b. Develop a central meeting space in the neighborhood to congregate
- c. Conduct productive workshops in people's homes and around the neighborhood
- d. Share stories with your neighbors - in person or on social media
- e. Support the Altadena Farmers Market
- f. Plant more community gardens
- g. Support park programs/attend concerts in Farnsworth Park
- h. Provide information in other languages, particularly Spanish; be culturally sensitive
- i. Engage the faith community/network of churches
- j. Organize a fundraising/donations campaign for community organizations
- k. Conduct an analysis of who is homeless and on the streets
- l. Assess viability of using 'tiny houses' for a place to live for the homeless in Altadena

*"People are craving human connection."*

- m. Increase the number of volunteer opportunities for the community, esp. for seniors
- n. Provide community service credit for those who volunteer to help make the town better
- o. Conduct fundraiser walks around town for community projects to raise money and increase exercise opportunities

### *Library Action Items:*

- a. Coordinate/promote volunteer opportunities through the Library's volunteer coordinator - example of Reading Partners at Jackson School
- b. Create a database of volunteer options around town; encourage community groups to populate that database
- c. Expand the Library's internal volunteer program
- d. Participate in the community's 'Front Yard Fridays'; schedule a 'Front Yard Friday' at the Library
- e. Collaborate with Heritage, Historical, etc. by providing space, tools and opportunities for them to reach their goals similar to the partnership with Open Studios

### *Library Recommendations:*

- a. Coordinate neighborhood clean-up days around the community
- b. Provide opportunities for the various community organizations to come together around positive activities, projects and events
- c. Organize regular 'days of service' around town; which could include tree planting, community garden development, trail maintenance and repair, fire prevention modules, among others
- d. Develop public art projects around town with the assistance of the L.A. County Arts Commission
- e. Identify sites that could be considered 'community hubs' where families can access services and resources (examples could be Loma Alta Park, churches, schools, libraries)
- g. Expand the number of 'Front Yard Fridays' around town

### *Action:*

The Library will create and maintain a database of volunteer activities in Altadena. It will utilize this information to connect residents with local volunteer opportunities. RIPE Altadena and the Altadena Community Garden will identify and plant new community gardens around town, particularly in partnership with churches, schools and parks. All residents will support the Altadena Farmer's Market by increasing the number of shoppers there each week. Community service hubs, a kind of one-stop shop for social services and assistance, are places where families can access the resources they need to strengthen themselves and build resilience. The Council for the Young Child and Collaborate PASadena are identifying sites in Pasadena which could be used for this purpose. Altadena will also identify opportunities for similar entities around town.

### *How will we know this is working?*

Within 6-8 months there will be a new community garden in town. The attendance at the Altadena Farmers Market will increase significantly. Local shoppers will be proud of the fact that they can shop locally for quality foods. The Library will have in place a database of individuals who want to serve as volunteers around the community. It will use this document to match residents with community organizations that need volunteers for their upcoming events and activities. We will see more efficiency in volunteer matching and greater enthusiasm for giving back to your community.

## **3. Commercial Business Hubs / Small Business Development**

Overwhelmingly Altadenans would prefer to shop, eat and play without leaving town. A few participants even talked about never having to go below Washington Blvd., if possible, to shop or eat out. 'Buy local' was commonly heard as a way to not only support town businesses but to also create demand for new ones. Expansion of the local economy was also desired, but in a way to match the character of the

community. So small locally owned businesses are welcome, but large chain stores for the most part are not. There were many challenges, however, to starting new shops, stores, restaurants, etc., particularly with respect to County regulations and its permit process. Several participants shared that they had attempted to open a business in town but had been stymied by the County's process and ultimately gave up. They observed that until the process is improved it would be difficult for residents to open new businesses in town in significant numbers. In a related comment, it was suggested that Altadena attempt to capitalize on its natural resources and develop a local eco-tourism industry. Some of these businesses already exist, particularly bike shops, but when thinking about hiking, mountain-biking, camping and other outdoor recreational activities, Altadena could certainly be a destination point for the region. Another highly emphasized desire was to create business districts where residents might spend several hours walking and shopping much like Old Pasadena or Downtown Sierra Madre, or Old Monrovia. In line with the desire to shop locally if business districts were comfortable, walkable and provided the right mix of services, residents would prefer to stay in town than drive down the hill.

### *Community Input:*

- a. Collect community input about what kinds of businesses they would frequent
- b. Survey folks at events at Farnsworth Park about where they shop and why
- c. Ask neighbors what would bring them to an Altadena business or restaurant
- d. Develop a guide to land use terminology and rules/regulations
- e. Streamline the small business application/permit process (use volunteers) so that new businesses can open more quickly
- f. Bring SCORE to the Library to help community members to learn how to start their own businesses
- g. Buy/shop local - 'spend \$50 in 5 places a month'
- h. Provide helpful feedback to business owners to improve their businesses
- i. Increase Chamber of Commerce membership

*"Who wants to drive somewhere to get something when we can have it here?"*

### *Library Action Items:*

- a. Conduct small business development workshops regularly by the County at the Library
- b. Coordinate the 'Passport' program to inspire residents to shop at local businesses annually
- c. Develop a guide to land use terminology and rules/regulations by the Library
- d. Provide information on how to start a small business including details about acquiring funding from the Small Business Administration or other sources
- e. Provide promotional space for local business events in our resources such as the CONNECT newsletter, Library website and Facebook page.

### *Library Recommendations:*

- a. Form 'business districts', with the assistance of the Chamber of Commerce, in concentrated commercial areas (Lake/Mariposa, Lincoln/Woodbury, Fair Oaks/Mariposa, Los Robles/Woodbury) and name them
- b. Encourage 'business districts' to develop a presence/brand that folks recognize and identify with
- c. Inspire 'business districts' to coordinate events/activities in their areas to attract clients
- d. Develop an art walk event in 'business districts' which feature storefront activities with patrons and temporary art installations in public spaces

### *Action:*

The Library will continue its 'Passport' program and continue to encourage residents to shop locally. The Chamber will conduct a survey of residents to determine what types of businesses are desired and will share its results with the community. Business districts will be formed and names attached to them so that branding can begin. Community members will investigate the potential of starting an eco-tourism economy.



### *How will we know if it is working?*

Several new locally-owned businesses will have opened in town in the next year. The Chamber will have more members and will have data about residents' preferences on services and needs. A committee will have formed to explore the viability of an eco-tourism economy. Business districts will have name recognition and shopper loyalty. Even more Altadenans will be shopping, eating and recreating in Altadena.

## **4. Library as the Hub / Center of the Community**

A highly desired outcome of this process is to recognize the Library as the 'hub' of the community. With no other significant locally organized and maintained government office, the Library is the natural site to become that entity. What could this structure look like? The Library could provide some additional government services as it is already processing Passport applications, and would also offer expanded educational opportunities so that residents are well informed about government programs and processes. The Library could also be a neutral convener of democratic operations, including supporting local elections by continuing to be a polling place as well as providing information on voting processes and candidates. Seen by most residents as a neutral entity, the Library is positioned well to serve as the center of the town both informationally as well as institutionally.

*"The more I listen to all of this the more I realize that the Library is the main place for all of this to happen."*

### *Community Input:*

- a. Develop speakers series on topics of importance to the community
- b. Craft a guide of land use terminology and rules/regulations
- c. Coordinate volunteer activities/opportunities for the community
- d. Provide workshops/trainings for skill-building activities
- e. Convene stakeholders regularly to discuss current events/issues
- f. Expand Library programs - for example host workshops/trainings on sustainability, water conservation, etc.
- g. Keep the community informed: distribute copies of the County mailer, Library's newsletter, Library's email system, etc.

### *Library Action Items:*

- a. Serve as a polling place for the Altadena Town Council Elections on June 10
- b. Conduct regular future 'Town Halls' with elected officials on legislative issues
- c. Throw regular and frequent 'cultural events' for the community
- d. Provide the opportunity for Altadena Town Council candidates to make flyers (500)
- f. Provide space in the Library newsletter for ATC candidate statements
- g. Implement survey to find out what types of programs and education the community wants the library to provide
- h. Print the ATC application for any person who is considering running for the Council
- i. Continue researching how to increase Library funding and expand Library space so that it can effectively meet the needs of the community

### *Library Recommendations:*

- a. Encourage community organizations to talk about the Library as the town's center
- b. Participate in Library activities, like Second Saturday, 50th Anniversary Celebration, etc.
- c. Utilize/patronize Library resources/services/branches
- d. Develop a section of the Library which provides assistance/information for non-profit and community based organizations (ex. La Pintoresca Library)

### *Action:*

Library staff will meet with key stakeholders in order to move forward with recommendations and devel-

op collaborative relationships with entities around town in order to further develop the 'hub' concept and gather input on expansion and funding. Library will develop a 'speakers series' with community members to provide educational and informational opportunities for Altadena. The 'speakers series' will start with current elected officials who will provide reports on legislation and programs. The Library will continue to seek partnership opportunities with local groups in order to provide support for their activities (ex. Open Studios).

### *How will we know if it is working?*

In six months several ATC candidates will have utilized the Library's resources; the Library will have served as a site for voting for the ATC; the 'community calendar' will be up and running with residents posting on it; there will have been one block party (50th Anniversary Celebration); and a 'Town Hall' will have been planned with either State Senate or Assembly. And the Library will have increased educational opportunities by providing several workshops and speakers on community identified topics; the guide to 'land use' will have been completed; and the Library will be coordinating community service and volunteer opportunities for Altadena.

## 5. Public Safety

In some neighborhoods residents are highly concerned about public safety, particularly in light of the shooting incidents that occurred at the beginning of the year. While overall the town is a safe place, there is still worry about gang and drug activity being resurrected and placing neighbors in harm's way. With this in mind, a positive relationship with the Altadena Sheriff's Station was highly desired, even though on some blocks there was still a feeling of friction between neighbors and deputies. Part of this also stemmed from residents who were concerned about how their documentation status would be viewed by the L.A. County Sheriff. Nevertheless, there was a consistent call in those neighborhoods for the formation of Neighborhood Watch groups or the strengthening of existing NW groups. Residents also made regular comments about speeding vehicles on most major streets and some arterials and were worried about pedestrian and cyclist safety. These observations led to a call for traffic calming measures and greater enforcement. The other area of focus for the community is the value of emergency/disaster preparedness. Certainly recent years of wind storms and heavy rains have shown the need for thinking about how well prepared you are for an emergency. Even so, several neighbors encouraged others to become trained in CERT, Map My Neighborhood and to add emergency preparedness to their Neighborhood Watch objectives.

### *Community Input:*

- a. Organize a Neighborhood Watch/CERT group on your block
- b. Attend a CERT training and participate in Map Your Neighborhood Program
- c. Build a phone tree of your neighbors for regular communication
- d. Increase speed enforcement/implement traffic calming measures
- e. Form a joint crime task force between the Altadena Sheriff and surrounding cities to improve safety

*"There is safety  
in knowing  
your neighbors."*

### *Library Action Items:*

- a. Provide information to community members on how to form a Neighborhood Watch or CERT group
- b. Serve as a site for CERT trainings in conjunction with the L.A. County Fire Department

### *Library Recommendations:*

- a. Coordinate Curbside Coffee and Chats with the Altadena Sheriff's Station
- b. Develop 'Drive Like Your Kids Live Here' campaigns on streets with speeding traffic
- c. Connect individuals being released from incarceration to utilize the services of the Pasadena/Altadena Reintegration Council which is hosted at the Flintridge Center
- d. Encourage the support of prevention/intervention programs so that youth and young adults have opportunities for growth and development

- e. Utilize 'Map My Neighborhood' as a mechanism to connect neighbors and prepare for disasters/emergencies

#### *Action:*

The Altadena Sheriff's Station will share what resources are available to organize new Neighborhood Watch or Block Clubs around town. Deputies will work with neighborhood representatives to set up meetings with neighbors to begin the process of forming these groups. Once formed, deputies will provide support to them for the meetings and communication not only with the Altadena Sheriff's Station, but with each other through the Station's web site. Neighbors will also connect with the L.A. County Fire Department to schedule a CERT training for all of the new NW/BC groups around town. Each group will have a cohort of neighbors who will attend the training together. Neighborhood Watch groups will bring the 'Drive Like Your Kids Live Here' campaign to all of Altadena to encourage motorists to slow down as they drive through town. Map My Neighborhood Altadena will conduct at least 4 more facilitator trainings in the next 6 months around town.

#### *How will we know if it is working?*

The Altadena Sheriff's Station web site will have numerous new NW groups listed there by the end of the year. There will be several dozen block parties this summer all over the community. Neighbors will see an abundance of 'Drive Like Your Kids Live Here' fields of signs in many neighborhoods around town. More Altadenans will be certified in emergency preparedness techniques and strategies and over 100 more residents will be trained by 'Map My Neighborhood Altadena'. Community members will feel safer. There will be an improved relationship between the L.A. County Sheriff's Station and the community.

## 6. Neighborliness / Building Community

During the course of the Community Conversation process many participants commented that while they really enjoyed living in Altadena, they didn't really know their neighbors. At nearly all of the conversations someone remarked that they met new neighbors during the event, some of whom they had never seen before. Nevertheless, participants felt that their quality of life would improve if they had a better relationship with their neighbors. They also recognized that it would be beneficial to be better organized and form some type of neighborhood group so that they could come together on a regular basis and work on common issues/needs.

#### *Community Input:*

- a. Be friendly/talk to your neighbors
- b. Improve the bonds of community with your neighbors
- c. Host block parties/pot lucks around town
- d. Create a data base of skills/needs of the residents of your neighborhood in order to share them throughout the neighborhood
- e. Coordinate Halloween activities for families

#### *Library Action Items:*

- a. Plan an annual block party - include music, food, resources, local businesses, etc.
- b. Host a quarterly 'repair cafe' to enable neighbors to share and help one another

#### *Library Recommendations:*

- a. Connect to the Altadena Sheriff's Department for help setting up Neighborhood Watch groups
- b. Enlist the support of ACONA to help form new neighborhood associations

- c. Reach out to Collaborate PASadena's Supportive Communities Work Group in order to assist them to improve neighborhoods throughout the district
- d. Coordinate with the Time Bank to survey the assets and needs of the residents on your block so that the subsequent database can be shared in the neighborhood for exchanges
- e. Organize local block parties for your street and your neighbors
- f. Develop a 'welcome wagon' for new neighbors and provide them with information about the community and ways to have fun in the neighborhood (include Chamber info)
- g. Publish a regular note or newsletter for your block or neighborhood with highlights from recent activities and news on upcoming events
- h. Create a system for assisting neighbors in need, particularly seniors or disabled neighbors who could use a helping hand now and then by their neighbors
- i. Be outwardly focused and make time to chat with your neighbors and do things with them
- j. Plant new community gardens to bring neighbors together and provide the opportunity to grow one's own food

### *Action:*

The Library will host a huge 'block party' in the parking lot and invite all members of the community to attend. The Sheriff's Department will participate in National Night Out in August and encourage all of the Neighborhood Watches in town to get involved as well. ACONA will assist unorganized neighborhoods to form associations of neighbors. Collaborate PASadena will include Altadena neighbors in the planning and implementation of a 'Neighborhood Summit' that will take place at the end of the summer. The Chamber will provide neighborhood groups with literature to include in their 'welcome wagon' efforts for new neighbors. Neighborhood Associations will incorporate 'welcome wagon' activities into their menu of services.

### *How will we know if it is working?*

To begin with, neighbors will report a greater sense of community and improved quality of life. Tangible outcomes will be seen as more neighborhood associations are formed as well as Neighborhood Watch groups. There will be safe and fun streets to go for Halloween where neighbors won't have to leave town for their kids to 'trick or treat'. More block parties will be undertaken and neighbors will break bread and play games together. A new community garden or two will be planted so that folks can grow their own food and provide it to their neighbors. Children will feel valued and recognized and have safe places to play in their own neighborhoods. Library community builders such as Second Saturday will have increased participation by the community.

## **7. Information Sharing / Communication**

In a community of more than 40,000 it is unique that there is no area-specific newspaper. With the advent of Altadena Now there is a semi-regular reporting mechanism for Altadena issues, but for daily events there is no carrier of information. Many residents felt the absence of a local newspaper and stated that it was difficult to keep up on local issues and events. Also, there was a frustration about not having effective information sharing and communication tool. Wired Women and Next Door serve their constituencies well, but are not distributed widely and have a specific focus. For Spanish-speaking neighbors Pasadena En Espanol is very helpful, but emphasizes Pasadena events and activities and not necessarily those in Altadena.

### *Community Input:*

- a. Create a forum for communication (outside ND and FB; maybe Yahoo?)
- b. Develop a community newsletter with news, calendar through the Altadena News Group
- c. Create an advertising or PR campaign to inform residents about positive change efforts
- d. Develop an outreach project to inform folks about the town
- e. Bring Public Access TV to Altadena via the Arroyo Channel

### *Library Action Items:*

- a. Continue to support the Altadena News Group's activities
- b. Expand Library newsletter to include articles and information about the community, not just the library
- c. Create a 'community calendar' where any resident can add upcoming programs, events and activities through an interactive web portal

### *Library Recommendations:*

- a. Form partnerships to apply for grants and other funding in order to generate new funding sources for Altadena information sharing activities
- b. Expand coverage of Pasadena En Espanol to Altadena
- c. Continue to convene the Altadena News Group to develop other consistent forms of communication
- d. Encourage neighborhood groups to develop their own systems for communication so that they are able to share local information effectively (Next Door, Facebook, email, etc.)
- e. Create a local on-line directory of schools, businesses, nonprofits, religious organizations and government entities
- f. Motivate businesses to develop public information or bulletin boards to share details about upcoming events, programs and activities (example: Sidewalk Cafe chalk board)

### *Action:*

As the result of these conversations the Library will develop a community calendar. This calendar will be open to all community members who would like to promote their events, activities, programs, etc. The Library will also provide local organizations with the opportunity to submit articles for its newsletter and website to give them broader visibility and support. The Altadena News Group will consider options for developing a system for news gathering and distribution on local issues. Other businesses will create systems for sharing information like 'chalk boards'.

### *How will we know if it is working?*

The 'community calendar' is used by local non-profits, businesses, religious entities, the Library, schools and individuals to share information about their programs, events and activities. There will be a group of reporters and mentors who are working with journalism students to create interest stories for Altadena. These stories will be posted to the Library's newsletter and website. Residents will be better informed because more businesses will be sharing information about events and programs in town.

## **8. Government / Elected Officials**

Living in a town that is unincorporated has various challenges including feeling distanced from government departments and decision-makers. Residents yearn for improved communication with the Altadena Town Council and with L.A. County departments and the Board of Supervisors. Many observed that it felt like the Altadena Town Council was not representing their needs well and were frustrated by apparent ineffectiveness of that body. A few felt that by incorporating into an independent city with its own governing body and service departments that these issues would be eliminated. Many others were less optimistic about what improvements such a change in structure might bring and were committed to keeping the existing structure and attempting to improve it. All recognized that they live in a unique and challenging situation politically and governmentally, and one that is very different from surrounding communities. However, there was not clear consensus on how to change it for the better. Another issue that surfaced only a couple of times in the 23 conversations was the update and recommendations of the Community Standards District and how this addendum to the County zoning code would be implemented.

### *Community Input:*

- a. Improve our connection to decision-makers (ATC, BOS)
  - 1.) Meet with L.A. County Supervisor Kathryn Barger

- 2.) Meet with Altadena Town Council members
- 3.) Encourage the ATC to meet at the Library
- b. Vote in ATC elections
- c. Improve/increase attendance at Altadena Town Council meetings
- d. Improve ATC accountability/responsibility; increase ATC oversight, understanding by residents
  - 1.) Start an Altadena Town Council Facebook group
  - 2.) Broadcast Altadena Town Council meetings on TV; post on web site
- e. Advertise/promote local elections
- f. Determine what current zoning requirements are and develop new requirements that are consistent with community needs/goals
- g. Conduct a comparative analysis of other unincorporated sections of LA County to understand better how they function
- h. Improve local control over zoning and planning; understand how the Community Standards District impacts development around the community

### *Library Action Items:*

- a. Offer seminars/workshops on how Altadena is served by L.A. County programs and departments
- b. Provide presentations on the relationship of the Altadena Town Council with the L.A. County Board of Supervisors
- c. See: Priority Section 'Library as the Hub/Center of the Community' for more examples of the Library's role in accessing elected and government officials

### *Library Recommendations:*

- a. Create Town Council member job descriptions with communication expectations as well as roles/responsibilities for each member
- b. Conduct team building exercises at the Town Council's annual retreat as well as a visioning process to develop common goals between members
- c. Develop relationships between Town Council members and the PUSD school board members
- d. Coordinate for each Town Council census tract pair of representatives at least one 'town hall' meeting each year
- e. Organize a regular communication system between each pair of census tract representatives and their constituents (email, mailing, newsletter, blog, etc.)
- f. Inspire the Altadena Town Council to take the Harwood Institute for Public Innovation's 'Turning Inward/Outward' survey
- g. Plan and organize an annual 'mixer' for ATC members to get to know members of the community
- h. Develop relationships with the L.A. County Board of Supervisor reps for this district
- i. Understand which L.A. County departments serve Altadena; create a phone list of frequently called numbers with names of staff members for these departments
- j. Dedicate one ATC meeting per year for a dialogue with the community in order to hear their concerns and develop a common vision for Altadena

### *Action:*

Begin with clarifying the Altadena Town Council's roles and responsibilities as well as purpose so that it will garner more trust and appreciation from the community and can propose ways to be perceived as more than solely a listening body for the community's concerns. Bring the various community organizations together like NBBA, ACONA, AH, AHS, Chamber of Commerce, etc. in a convention to provide suggestions and feedback regarding the function, the structure and responsibilities of the ATC and to provide support in improving its image in the community.

### *How will we know if it is working?*

The Town Council will be structured and operating in a way which will be perceived by the community as better representing the town at the county level. Residents will be much better informed about the ATC, its purpose and what it is focused on each month. As a result, more community members will attend ATC meetings and feel more comfortable with what is being discussed there. Research and discussion are underway to analyze different forms of local governance.

## **9. Mobility - Walking, Biking, Riding, Driving**

Even with its gorgeous views, mountainous terrain and being surrounded by nature, for many Altadenans the town is a tough place to walk or ride bikes or horses. Most streets, they observed, are not safe for pedestrians, cyclists or equestrians due to the rapid rate of speed of vehicles and, at times, the high volume of traffic. One neighbor commented that it is nearly impossible to cross New York Dr. between Pepper and Altadena Dr. during the evening rush hour. Others stated that the lack of sidewalks makes it highly challenging to walk long distances on busier streets. Even some less busy thoroughfares like Mariposa St. can be awkward as one is nearly walking in a car lane. Ultimately, community members agreed that walkability in Altadena was poor and it needed to be improved. Two of the major aspirations from the Conversations were to build more sidewalks and to increase traffic calming measures.

### *Community Input:*

- a. Conduct a 'Complete Streets' analysis of major avenues to determine which are best to convert to multiple uses
- b. Create comprehensive street structures where pedestrians, cyclists, skateboarders, wheelchair users, horseback riders and vehicles can all share the road

### *Library Action Items:*

- a. Form a 'walkers club' that meets at the Library and sets out for walks each week from there
- b. Develop a 'walkers/cyclists/equestrian/riders' exhibit, webpage and document filled with maps and information about how to get around Altadena without a car; include information for persons with disabilities and seniors

### *Library Recommendations:*

- a. Form a 'walking club' for folks in your neighborhood; walk for exercise and to be social
- b. Revisit NBBA's 'walkability survey' to determine what else needs to be completed and how to help them to accomplish their goals
- c. Visit East Pasadena near Del Mar Blvd. and Madre Ave. to see how the County installed sidewalks and planters to determine the viability of constructing those in Altadena
- d. Review the 'complete streets' project in Temple City on Rosemead Blvd. where bikes, parked cars, pedestrians and traffic share the road
- e. Organize community historical walks via Altadena Heritage and the Altadena Historical Society so that residents know better the origins of the town
- f. Coordinate local hikes through the Sierra Club, the Arroyos and Foothills Conservancy, and Outward Bound Adventures for exercise and community building
- g. Plan bicycle rides for community members around town with the Altadena Bicycling Club such as Midnight Ridazz; post rides on the Library's community calendar

### *Action:*

Community members will join Neighbors Building a Better Altadena's efforts to map more streets around town so that further study can be conducted about traffic patterns, walkability and connections to local businesses. NBBA will continue the next phase of its 'walkability study' and present the findings to the Altadena Town Council, County departments, and other stakeholders. The Library will create a re-

source exhibit which describes how people can move around the town without automobiles. Altadena Heritage will coordinate historical walks around the community to raise awareness about Altadena's past and note walkability patterns. Outward Bound Adventures will work with the US Forest Service to schedule trail maintenance activities that community members can volunteer for and will result in community hikes in the foothills.

### *How will we know if it is working?*

There will be more benches installed at busy intersections for folks to be able to rest. More sidewalks will have been constructed in many parts of the community. Several more 'walking clubs' will have been formed with dozens of people walking together. Residents will feel more comfortable about walking around town and will thus use local business districts as destination points. Cyclists and equestrian riders will also use the streets with more confidence as 'complete streets' structures are implemented and traffic calming measures take effect.

## 10. Civic Engagement / Advocacy / Activism

Altadena is filled with enthusiastic and hard-working individuals who are dedicated to maintaining the town's unique charm and to improving its quality of life. Over its history there have been numerous community groups and organizations that have surfaced and worked hard to develop the town that we all currently enjoy. A concept that surfaced in the conversations was the notion that these entities should advocate for all members of the community, even those who don't feel that they have a voice or a seat at the decision-making table. Occasionally folks feel as though these organizations don't speak for them or are not open to all members of the community. It was suggested then that community groups should strive to be inclusive and to take into consideration the perspectives of all sectors of the community when advocating on an issue. It was also recognized that it would be beneficial if these organizations were collaborating and supporting each other's work. Another observation was that in order to have more effective advocacy then training and workshops should be offered both around techniques in organizing and how government works. This is especially true in a place like unincorporated Altadena where the lines of responsibility and access are not quite as clear as in a municipality like Los Angeles or Pasadena. Also, there was a nearly unanimous recognition that more community engagement would be beneficial as would having more Altadenans involved civically at some level.

### *Community Input:*

- a. Start a petition on the issue that you are most passionate about and circulate it around town to then be submitted to the County Board of Supervisors for action
- b. Craft an elevator speech to be able to share updates and educational information with community members

### *Library Action Items:*

- a. Provide community advocacy groups with meeting space at the Library
- b. Feature the work of community groups in each month's Library newsletter
- c. Ensure that community organization activities, events and meetings are placed on the Library's calendar

### *Library Recommendations:*

- a. Conduct discussions/forums/town halls/conversations/speaker series on issues of the day
- b. Form action teams/committees on specific topics to effect change
- c. Organize fun activities to bring people together, form relationships and raise awareness
- d. Inspire more people to get involved/create critical mass
- e. Link/connect to existing organizations and their initiatives
- f. Educate/train residents on how to get involved in and build the community; use the community mailer to promote that idea and activities
- g. Make time for advocacy/activism: alter our lifestyles; desire for change
- h. Interview existing advocacy groups (NBBA, ACONA, AH, AHS, COC, etc.) to determine how they can be supported/strengthened and how they might work closer together; bring them together on a regular basis to better understand one another and build collaboration



- i. Develop a plan of action for creating positive social change/strategic plan
- j. Identify a leader or chairperson who is able to guide the implementation of that plan
- k. Conduct workshops on public speaking, running effective meetings, resolving conflicts, strategic planning, and other topics of interest
- l. Ensure that advocacy includes working on a County level, i.e. knowing which County department representatives to connect with
- m. Know the County Board of Supervisor for this district and form a positive communication link with that representative

### *Action:*

As with other cities, like Pasadena and Long Beach, one very effective method of increasing local leadership capacity is to start a training program. Leadership Pasadena, for example, has educated the community's leaders for over 15 years by helping them to understand the context in which they live and the characteristics that are required to be effective leaders. There are many other mechanisms for preparing community members to be better at advocating for their needs, including using organizations like Planned Parenthood, Sierra Club, and the ACLU which offer training in these areas. The point that was made over and over again in the Conversations, however, was that we (the community) need to work together. When we (the community) have a common vision and purpose then we are stronger and ultimately more effective. So developing a structure that brings folks together around a positive action like skill-building or technique enhancement, will enable more people to get involved civically and for Altadena to better advocate for their needs.

### *How will we know if it is working?*

Within 6 - 8 months there will be several trainings and workshops conducted and well attended to teach community members about techniques in organizing and advocacy. Community members will feel confident about their abilities to advocate for their needs and will be willing and able to represent their neighbors perspectives as well.

## 11. *Support PUSD Schools in Altadena*

For many families the idea of being able to send their kids to a public school rather than paying for private school tuition was extremely attractive. Ideas ranged from forming an independent unified school district for just Altadena to working to shore up the schools around town. One participant suggested that a referendum to sunset the PUSD be organized and then a more 'modern' school district be developed to better meet the needs of families. With approximately 40% of school age children in charter, private, parochial and home schools the PUSD has one of the highest rates in the country of children outside the public schools. In addition, the current families of the PUSD also deserve a high quality public education system, so bringing resources to Altadena schools through volunteers, fundraisers, partnerships, etc. would be extremely beneficial. Currently two of Altadena's schools are deemed 'focus' schools by the PUSD which indicates that they are the recipients of additional resources from the district. A worthy goal of the community would be to help move those schools from 'focus' to 'achieving'.

### *Community Input:*

- a. Reinstate the 'Education Committee' of the ATC
- b. Convene charter, private and public school principals/directors/leaders to discuss the state of education in Altadena
- c. Provide tours at schools so that residents can visit and learn about each school
- d. Conduct a community-wide discussion/town hall on public education
- e. Utilize the Eliot MS TV studio as well for community broadcasting needs
- f. Link Altadena businesses to the PUSD
- g. Connect MonteCedro to the PUSD

### *Library Action Items:*

- a. Expand teen programs; look at gaps and work on filling those when possible
- b. Review and revise children's activities and programs based upon community input and partnerships with local schools
- c. Continue participation in 'Collaborate PASadena's' activities in order to play an active part in helping the initiative reach its goals

### *Library Recommendations:*

- a. Volunteer to read with an Altadena child through the 'Reading Partners' program
- b. Institute Pasadena Education Foundation's 'Walk to Read' program in Altadena
- c. Increase participation in 'Collaborate PASadena's' initiatives to strengthen the district
- d. Assist all parents to be able to access early childhood development programs
- e. Teach a 'ballet folklórico' dance class to kids at Jackson School
- f. Volunteer to help with both the native and edible gardens at PUSD schools
- g. Paint/varnish/refinish benches, doors and walls in schools
- h. Tutor a child in math or science at most any PUSD school (particularly Jackson and Eliot)
- i. Volunteer to coach next year's Math Field Day team at any school
- k. Coordinate a regular 'school beautification day' to plant trees/plants and to clean-up the school
- l. Visit a PUSD school and tour the classrooms and grounds
- m. Serve as a mentor for a student at Eliot MS or other schools in Altadena (area programs include, but are not limited to: Lake Avenue Community Foundation, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Flintridge Center Mentoring)
- n. Encourage Altadena realtors to participate in next year's 'Read Across Pasadena'

### *Action:*

Collaborate PASadena will continue its community-wide initiative to connect all schools with businesses, government agencies, non-profits, churches, institutions and other organizations around town. Community members will sign up with Reading Partners to volunteer to read with children. Community members will commit to mentoring a child/youth from Altadena for one year.

### *How will we know that it is working?*

All schools will be thriving. Parents will have viable choices for where to send their kids to school. The community will take pride in ensuring that all children receive a high quality education. Families will have options for affordable, high quality early childhood education.

## *Conclusion / Summary / Going Forward from Here*

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One of the questions during the Community Conversations was, in essence, why does this matter to you? Why are these visions and ideas and dreams important to you? By tapping into these feelings we can assess what motivates people to take action. By recognizing what is important to them and what they are passionate about we can better understand what will inspire a neighbor to, for example, attend an Altadena Town Council meeting and speak their mind on an issue. Or if they will volunteer for a location organization or participate in a community improvement activity. For most of the participants it came down to this concept: quality of life. Certainly that term is defined by each person individually, but there were many common themes in that thinking process. To be more specific, everyone wants to live in a place where you feel cared for and supported. So feeling connected to your neighbors, feeling accepted for who you are, receiving support in times of need, and celebrating those moments of accomplishment or success were all qualities that participants named as being instrumental to a high quality of life. So, how is that atmosphere created and by what mechanisms is it cultivated and expanded? At some point members of any community must decide how they want to live and how they want to care for each

other. Each community is different and will develop its own culture, nevertheless, in order for the above recommendations to become a reality there are several commitments that need to be made in order to assure success. Here are a few that will help Altadena to move forward with its goals and objectives:

- Understand that everyone has value, even the folks who you might not agree with
- Be willing to take responsibility for what you say and what you do
- Work to build trusting relationships, with all stakeholders
- Believe that everyone involved desires a better community, they just might define that differently from you
- Make time for the community; for advocating or organizing, change won't happen unless you dedicate some energy to the vision
- Be content with the fact that your goals might take a long time to come to fruition
- Remember to celebrate and have fun; tilting at windmills is fatiguing but it doesn't have to be drudgery and lifeless

To be clear, many of the recommendations in this report are either being considered by groups for action, or are already underway. The purpose of this document then, is not to be repetitive but to highlight and raise up the work of community organizations and individuals. What some of them need is a few more volunteers or additional resources to be even more effective. The hope here then is to inspire residents of Altadena to identify a section of the community that they are passionate about and commit a bit of time and energy to work on that issue/concern/idea. For example, the vision of a dog park emerged at several CC's and was enthusiastically supported by those who heard about it. An example of the dog park in Pasadena was given to show that this idea could become reality, if there was enough momentum around it. For the Pasadena project it required more than ten years of effort, but the end result is a park that is highly used and extremely popular, so much so that folks come from other communities to use it.

In many ways, the Altadena Library District's Community Conversations project builds on previous similar endeavors. For example, most of what the County of Los Angeles identified as key issues for the town in its 'Community Visioning Process' nearly five years ago are still issues today. Why is that? What can be done to create positive change? The formation of NBBA and its undertaking of a 'Walkability Study' were direct outcomes of the CVP and have considerable accomplishments to date. What else, for example, could be done to support their work around improving walkability, especially in business areas or districts. Also, the CVP refers to the Community Standards District (CSD) in depth particularly around 'design regulations and guidelines'. There are many outstanding community suggestions in the CVP, especially with regards to the CSD. It is interesting to note, however, that some of those issues are still concerns five years later. For example, while not raised in the Community Conversations the concern of 'fence heights' was identified in the CVP as being very important to residents and it is still a priority to many Altadenans five years later.

The challenge then is not so much trying to determine what the community wants but, rather, how to catalyze enough energy around community priorities in order to create long term and productive change. This report has many recommendations in it that are designed to be actionable and straightforward in implementation. Some are more complicated due to the nature of the relationship in governance between the town and the County, so those would require greater effort. Nevertheless, with the zeal and passion that Altadenans feel about their community all of these visions and creative ideas are possible. Working with existing organizations and groups, and creating a strong partnership with the County, will enable Altadena to move forward with its goals and desires to improve the quality of life of the community for all of its residents. We hope that this report will help to move the community towards those goals.

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