



City of Arts & Innovation

Economic Development Committee

TO: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEMBERS **DATE: FEBRUARY 20, 2025**

FROM: COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT **WARDS: ALL**

SUBJECT: MAGNOLIA CORRIDOR REINVESTMENT, RESILIENCE & REVITALIZATION (3R) STRATEGY

ISSUE:

Receive an update on recent activities and next steps for the Magnolia Corridor Reinvestment, Resilience & Revitalization (3R) Strategy.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Land Use Committee:

1. Receive and file update on the Magnolia Corridor 3R Strategy; and
2. Provide direction on selection and prioritization of “kit of parts” revitalization strategies for the Arlington Village district.

BACKGROUND:

Corridors play a fundamental role in Riverside’s economic well-being. More than just infrastructure to move people, goods, or services, corridors foster the physical and intangible connections of residents (live), to jobs (work), to recreation (play). Their ability to link the full breadth of a city’s land uses, including economic drivers and resulting growth, makes corridors key to realizing vibrant, equitable and sustainable communities.

The Magnolia Avenue Corridor has been the focus of a number of land use and community planning efforts for several decades, starting in the mid-1990s with the Council’s appointment of a task force to develop recommendations for revitalizing Magnolia Avenue’s prominence as the City’s premier commercial corridor and showcase roadway. The task force’s report, and the 1999 Magnolia/Market Corridor Study prepared by an urban design firm that followed it, would go on to form the basis of several key objectives and policies for Magnolia Avenue in the General Plan (GP 2025), adopted in 2007, as the City’s primary transportation and mixed-use corridor and the focus of the Smart Growth approach to infill development that features prominently in the GP 2025. This included preparation of a Specific Plan for the Magnolia Corridor, which proceeded immediately following adoption of the GP 2025. The Magnolia Avenue Specific Plan was adopted in 2009 and divided the entire corridor from the western City Limit at Buchanan Street to the edge of Downtown

at 14th Street into a series of subdistricts each with its own unique character, development pattern, roadway cross-section and land use and urban design considerations. One of these subdistricts is Arlington Village (Attachment 1), which interpolated a number of key themes and recommendations from the Task Force Report, the Corridor Study and the 2001 Arlington Community Plan (significant portions of which were carried through to the Specific Plan).

A number of themes emerged and have been carried through these previous planning efforts which articulate both the community's vision for Arlington Village as well as persistent challenges the area has faced over recent decades. These include:

- The value of the Village's historic character and pedestrian scale, which has been gradually reduced over time due to development pressures and decisions
- The challenge of high traffic volumes and speed, particularly on Van Buren Boulevard
- Lack of public and private investment
- Deterioration of the public realm due in part to crime and vandalism
- High rates of commercial vacancy and stability of area businesses
- The need for a strong identity to market the area for reinvestment

The Magnolia Avenue Specific Plan establishes policies to address some of these challenges. However, they continue into the present day, and as a result area stakeholders have called for a fresh look at a broader strategy to reinvigorate Arlington Village and, by extension, the larger Magnolia Corridor.

In early 2024, staff began to engage with Arlington Village stakeholders to address ongoing challenges in the Arlington Village neighborhood. In response to the feedback received, staff began work with a consultant team to address ongoing challenges in the Arlington Village neighborhood and leverage its location along the Magnolia Corridor to identify strategies for immediate relief and long-term prosperity. The City entered into a Professional Consultant Services Agreement with Kimley Horn on January 4, 2024. The scope of work comprised of urban design and strategic planning tasks including:

- Conduct a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threat (SWOT) Analysis of Arlington Village;
- Review and evaluate whether the existing Magnolia Specific Plan aligns with present-day community concerns and priorities;
- Conduct stakeholder and community outreach to discuss the future of the Magnolia Corridor; and
- Provide recommendations for a surgical, streamlined approach to address immediate needs and long-term goals.

The consultant team and staff then commenced a three-step workplan with a heavy emphasis on stakeholder and community engagement to ultimately fine tune a suite of recommended strategies to best serve the Arlington Village Neighborhood. This report will outline the framework and recommendations for Reinvestment, Resilience and Revitalization. While the goals and vision may be specific to Arlington Village, the overall workplan and strategy may be implemented across other neighborhoods, for a corridor-scale strategic plan for Magnolia Avenue, and eventually neighborhoods along other key corridors within the City.

DISCUSSION:

Stakeholder and Community Engagement

On November 30, 2023, Staff held a community workshop at the Arlington Branch of the Riverside Public Library to promote the Small Business Grant, a program designed to support local business resiliency with grant awards of up to \$25,000 for qualified businesses (Attachment 2). Grants may be used towards rent, utilities, insurance, licensing, marketing or minor tenant improvements, among other eligible costs. During the workshop, the business community offered feedback regarding the unmaintained conditions and lack of service and assistance within Arlington Village and along the Magnolia Corridor. Some property owners expressed concern that the Magnolia Avenue Specific Plan does not align with community priorities and is stifling to land and business development. Others advocated for restoring and enhancing the area's historic status as a "downtown" for the central-western portion of the City.

On March 18, 2024, Staff, along with the consultant team, conducted a stakeholder meeting at the Bourns Youth Innovation Center to assess the current state of the neighborhood, perceived weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement. Among the stakeholders were heads of several city departments, the City Manager, Council office representation for Wards 5 and 6, and the Arlington Business Partnership. Stakeholder feedback included impressions that the neighborhood is unsafe, has too many vacant buildings, has no local-serving focus, and needs catalytic projects. Perceived challenges to overcome included increased homeless population, disjointed land use pattern with small lots and varied ownership, a concentration of City and County services within the area, and high-speed cut-through travel along Magnolia Avenue and Van Buren Boulevard. The stakeholder feedback also confirmed the study area for this effort, with the intersection of Magnolia Avenue and Van Buren Boulevard being the central node generally bound by Jackson Street, the 91 Freeway, Harrison Street, and Garfield Street (Attachment 3).

On May 29, 2024, Staff and the consultant team hosted a community-wide workshop at the Arlington Branch of the Riverside Public Library to engage the greater public. Through a visioning and prioritizing exercise, the community was able to confirm some of the stakeholder feedback, express their vision for the future of Arlington Village, and prioritize focused initiatives for the neighborhood. The exercise found that the community wanted a traditional downtown feel to Arlington Village, which included public dining uses, pedestrian scale storefronts and placemaking such as gateway treatments, directional signage, and neighborhood branding. Barriers identified to realizing the community vision included too many car washes, drive through uses, and single purpose development that do not encourage gathering, recreation, and ultimately community building. Top priority initiatives that the community chose to focus on were the following:

- *Health and Safety:* Increased police and security presence within the neighborhood, community involvement in public safety, homeless services and resources, increased street cleaning and maintenance.
- *Public Realm/Mobility:* Investments in bicycle infrastructure and share programs, landscaping improvements, widened sidewalks, improved street frontages and use of sidewalk space, and public plazas and community gathering spaces; public artwork, outdoor dining or parklet programs.
- *Catalytic Projects:* Projects to stimulate neighborhood investment and improvements including mixed-use projects, food halls, or hotel; expanded presence of nearby healthcare or educational institutional uses or cultural facilities.
- *Event Programing:* Community gathering events including food truck festivals, farmer's or craft markets, art walks; and interactive public elements including art installations and playgrounds.

Ground Truthing

Specific Plan Analysis

Part of the feedback received through engagement was the perception that the Magnolia Specific Plan is out of alignment with the community vision. However, an appraisal of the existing Magnolia Specific Plan recommendations compared to community feedback found that the challenges the neighborhood continues to experience are acknowledged and addressed in the Specific Plan (Figure 1). This finding implies that, although the existing Specific Plan has set the table for and aligns with the community's vision, actualized development and investment in the neighborhood have not achieved that vision, whether it be due to market forces, limitations of the existing built environment, or lack of resources.

Community Feedback	Existing Specific Plan Recommendations
Pedestrian scale village feel is eroding	Create design standards and guidelines, focus on streetscape
Diminishing quality and unclear responsibility	Economic revitalization through business improvement
Speeding cars, auto oriented	Balance traffic with pedestrian and bike improvements; Gateway treatment at the 91 freeway
Lots too small to develop	Land assembly and alley closures
Too many drive through uses and vacant storefronts	Discourage “strip” development, encourage mixed use
Arlington Park hidden from Magnolia Avenue	Extend Arlington Park to Magnolia
Not enough residents	Catalytic projects with residential focus

Figure 1 – Community Feedback and Specific Plan Comparison

Walk Audit

On December 13, 2024, a team of City staff (comprised of representatives from the departments of Community and Economic Development and Public Works including Economic Development, Planning, Traffic, Landscape Maintenance), along with the City Manager, Ward 5 Councilmember and Council Assistants, and representatives from the Arlington Business Partnership walked the Magnolia Avenue Corridor from Donald Street to Taft Street. The goal of the walk audit was to inventory the immediate needs of the neighborhood and understand where short-, mid-, and long-term strategies can work to achieve the goals and vision for the neighborhood.

The Walk Audit resulted in a running list of areas that are defaced, damaged, or in disrepair including areas of graffiti and accumulated litter/trash. Issues on private property to be addressed by increased engagement and enforcement were identified, including non-compliant wall and window signs, temporary signs, outdoor storage, and buildings with compromised integrity. Maintenance needs on public property were also observed, including damaged curb on Farnham Place, damaged streetlight poles, empty tree wells, and needed groundcover/additional landscaping in planters.

Several storefronts and properties were identified for potential improvement. The Economic Development Division has started to engage with property owners to understand the needs for technical assistance to improve storefronts, lease structures, building signage, or business attraction and retention. There was also an expressed interest in property acquisition as a potential strategy for reinvestment and revitalization.

SWOT Analysis

Through stakeholder and community engagement and in person walk audits, the consultant team conducted a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats analysis (Figure 2) of the neighborhood to establish a baseline upon which recommended strategies may be built.

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historic Core/Corridor • Invested Community • Successful institutions nearby • City Leadership committed to change • Stable neighborhood • Some successful businesses 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confusing/disjointed land use pattern • Magnolia/Van Buren intersection • Cars moving too fast/low pedestrian activity • Concentration of City/County services • Specific Plan implementation • High Vacancy Rates
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leverage committed leadership • Funding opportunities • Partnerships with local institutions • Magnolia/Van Buren corners and intersection • Preserving a sense of quality • Changing perceptions/creating a buzz 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived lack of safety • Market forces treating community as a commodity • Absentee ownership • Complexity of economic barriers • Lack of financial resources

Figure 2 – SWOT Analysis

Ongoing Strategies and Recent Activity

To properly assess the barriers and gaps that challenge revitalization, reinvestment and resilience in Arlington Village and the greater Magnolia Corridor, existing and ongoing strategies were inventoried. Through Small Business Grants (funded through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021), 131 businesses were assisted in Wards 5 and 6 resulting in the deployment of \$1,505,000. These funds assist businesses to recover from the ongoing impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, including payments of rent, utilities, technology, and minor tenant improvements. Ongoing efforts to address public safety include hiring private security to patrol commercial areas, enforcement of graffiti removal, enforcement on blighted buildings, and increased police presence along the corridor. Operation Streetsweeper is a continuous law enforcement effort to reduce petty and violent crimes, use and sale of illicit substances, and other illegal activity affecting the safety and wellbeing of the neighborhood. Arlington Park is anticipating the installment of a 17,000-square-foot pickle ball court complex, including new fencing, furniture and landscaping by Summer of 2025. Magnolia Avenue right-of-way also recently began maintenance and updates with repaving including bicycle lanes and high visibility cross walks between Hole and Jackson Street, and median improvements between Hughes Alley and Van Buren Boulevard. The City has also received \$11,000,000 through the Safe Streets For All Grant, with an anticipated Neighborhood Safety Investment area including Arlington Village. The neighborhood has also seen new placemaking Arlington Village banners installed on light posts along Magnolia Avenue.

Arlington Village has seen significant development activity over the past year. After years of vacancy and neglect, the commercial property located on the northeast corner of Magnolia Avenue and Van Buren Boulevard has been demolished due to compromised life-safety integrity, and has since received interest from the development community for potential projects. On August 15, 2024, the Planning Commission approved a Conditional Use Permit for the construction of a drive-through coffee shop on the southeast corner of Magnolia Avenue and Taft Street. The project is anticipated to start construction the first quarter of 2025. On July 18, 2024, the Planning Commission approved a tentative tract map and design review for a 149-unit townhome development, eight of which are reserved for very low-income households, on the northwest corner of the State Route 91 right-of-way and Van Buren Boulevard. That project has broken ground and

vertical construction is expected to begin in early 2025. Lastly, Staff have initiated a Technical Assistance Request with WRCOG to start a feasibility analysis to draft an Adaptive Reuse Ordinance to repurpose some of the City's existing underused commercial building inventory into much needed housing. Although focus areas have not yet been identified for this effort, the opportunity to repurpose existing structures for residential uses may be a potential revitalization strategy for the Magnolia Corridor.

Reinvest, Resilience, and Revitalization Strategies

These engagement and assessment efforts have led to the development of a suite of strategies and actions the City, in partnership with key Arlington Village stakeholders, may choose to pursue in order to jump-start and sustain economic revitalization of the district. Strategies have been organized by reasonable implementation timeframes of Immediate/On-Going, Short-Term (one to three years), Mid-Term (three to four years) and Long-Term (five years and beyond), and assigned a Lead Department as well as estimated levels of effort and investment.

At the direction of the Committee, strategies may be added, deleted, modified, expedited or delayed. The selection of strategies is intended to function as a work plan for future City efforts in the area and will require varying levels of additional planning, coordination, stakeholder engagement and resources; this may include but not be limited to contracting for external support; therefore, the Committee's input on how these should be prioritized will be essential to preserve momentum and create visible and meaningful results. Additionally, these strategies may serve as a "kit of parts" that can be adapted, modified or augmented to address specific challenges occurring elsewhere along the Magnolia Corridor and other key corridors throughout the City. These strategies are summarized below; however, further details including levels of effort and estimated cost can be found in the Magnolia 3R Toolkit under Attachment 4.

Immediate/On-Going

- Clean up & compliance of private property and public right-of-way including addressing graffiti, trash, and debris;
- Activating street frontage with improved storefronts;
- Temporary sign policy review with the City Council Land Use Committee;
- Property Owner Engagement for catalytic development;
- Property Owner technical assistance with commercial leasing and/or permitting;
- Pilot projects such as public art, banners, tactical urbanism, and public events; and
- Evaluate and assign costs and funding sources for various strategies for sustained long-term investment.

Short-Term (1-3 years)

- Explore additional streamlining for the development and permitting process;
- Placemaking efforts (parklet/outdoor dining program, storefront design guidelines, wayfinding and gateway signage);
- Economic Development incentive or support programs for façade improvements, leasing structures, etc.
- New streetscape, hardscape, and landscaping improvements;
- Public realm maintenance (sidewalks, curb, crosswalks, streetlights, landscaping and trash receptacles); and
- Feasibility and drafting of an Adaptive Reuse Ordinance (potential project funding from WRCOG grant).

Mid-Term (3-4 years)

- Micro-mobility improvements such cycle tracks, bike lockers, bike share, etc.;
- Infrastructure and intersection improvements;
- Study potential for Enhanced Infrastructure Financing District or other permanent financing mechanism within the district;
- Evaluate transit service for mid- and long-term service improvements; and
- Modernization of the Magnolia Avenue Specific Plan (part of the scope of work for the Riverside 2050 General Plan Update).

Long-Term

- Partnering with nearby academic, healthcare and/or cultural institutions for potential satellite projects;
- Pursuit and facilitation of catalytic development projects; and
- Land assembly strategies including acquisition, lot consolidations and alley closures.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This item contributes to **Strategic Priority 3 – Economic Opportunity** and **Goal 3.3** – Cultivate a business climate that welcomes innovation, entrepreneurship and investment, and **Strategic Priority 5 – High Performing Government** and **Goal 5.3** - Enhance communication and collaboration with community members to improve transparency, build public trust, and encourage shared decision-making.

This Project aligns with the following Cross-Cutting Threads:

1. **Community Trust** – The workshop is presented at an open public meeting and contains transparent information on City processes and regulations.
2. **Equity** – The workshop promotes discussion on business-friendly regulations and solutions to maintain and improve quality of life in a feasible and practical manner.
3. **Fiscal Responsibility** – The workshop will not have any fiscal impact to the City.
4. **Innovation** – The workshop is to discuss and encourage reinvestment, resilience, and revitalization in Arlington Village and the greater Magnolia Corridor.
5. **Sustainability & Resiliency** – The workshop is intended to pursue goals for resiliency for the Arlington Village neighborhood.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact related to receiving this report.

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Attachments:

1. Magnolia Avenue Specific Plan – Arlington Village District
2. Small Business Grant Flyer
3. Magnolia Corridor 3R Study Boundary
4. Magnolia 3R Toolkit
5. Presentation