



PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

STAFF REPORT

DATE: NOVEMBER 13, 2024

TO: PLANNING COMMISSION

FROM: JENNIFER PAIGE, AICP, DIRECTOR OF PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

SUBJECT: STUDY SESSION #5 ON THE NORTH LAKE SPECIFIC PLAN UPDATE: PUBLIC REALM

RECOMMENDATION:

Receive an update and a recap from the Planning Commission's subcommittee (Subcommittee) on the North Lake Specific Plan (NLSP) public realm and provide feedback. There is no action required at this time.

BACKGROUND:

The Planning Commission has held four study sessions on the NLSP update, focusing on the following topics:

- Study Session #1: May 24, 2023 – Planning background, plan vision, and subarea concepts; for more information, go to www.ourpasadena.org/NLSP-PC-SS-052423.
- Study Session #2: January 10, 2024 – Plan boundary, land uses, and residential density; for more information, go to www.ourpasadena.org/NLSP-PC-SS-011024.
- Study Session #3: April 10, 2024 – Drive-through businesses and potential redistribution of residential density; for more information, go to www.ourpasadena.org/NLSP-PC-SS-041024.
- Study Session #4: May 8, 2024 – Implementation of public realm improvements in the 2007 NLSP; for more information, go to www.ourpasadena.org/NLSP-PC-SS-050824.

At the conclusion of the May 8, 2024 Study Session, the Planning Commission voted to create the Subcommittee to draft recommendations for public realm improvements.

SUBCOMMITTEE DISCUSSION:

As part of their effort, the Subcommittee held several meetings with City staff and members of the community. On May 28, 2024, the Subcommittee met with City Staff (Planning and Public Works) to review background information on the public realm, and on June 7, 2024, a member of the Subcommittee met with Department of Transportation staff to review the current public

realm plans for North Lake Avenue. The Subcommittee also met with the Executive Director of the South Lake Business Association on July 15, 2024 to learn about the processes to form and manage a Business Improvement District.

In addition, the Subcommittee held a meeting with invited members of the community on August 17, 2024, with over 20 total attendees. At that meeting, a 10-member working group was formed, which met on August 26, 2024 and September 9, 2024.

Based on these meetings and discussions, the Subcommittee prepared recommendations for the public realm of the NLSP area (refer to Attachment A). The recommendations include goals, objectives, policies, and implementation actions with timelines.

STUDY SESSION #5:

This Study Session is a continuation of the Commission's discussion on the public realm improvements from the May 8, 2024 Study Session. At this Study Session, the Subcommittee will present its recommendations for discussion by the entire Planning Commission.

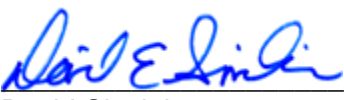
NEXT STEPS:

Following the Study Session, the proposed public realm recommendations that come from the Planning Commission will be analyzed with staff from the various departments in the City that may be impacted. Staff will present the proposed NLSP, including the Public Realm Standards Chapter, to the Planning Commission at a public hearing on a later date for review and recommendation to the City Council.

Respectfully Submitted,


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Attachment (1):

Attachment A – Planning Commission Subcommittee North Lake Specific Plan “Public Realm” Section Recommendations

ATTACHMENT A
Planning Commission Subcommittee North Lake Specific Plan “Public Realm”
Section Recommendations

DATE: September 12, 2024

TO: Community Members and City Staff

FROM: Planning Commission Subcommittee on the North Lake Specific Plan “Public Realm” Section
(Commissioners Cole, Delgado, Hunt Hernandez, Sims)

North Lake Specific Plan “Public Realm” Section Recommendations

INTRODUCTION

North Lake Avenue is the most prominent boulevard in the northern half of the City and a central artery for our community. Unlike South Lake Avenue, a successful retail and commercial street, North Lake Avenue functions as a *strode*, with the worst characteristics of both a street and a road. As a street, the current space and scale of North Lake Avenue are devoted to cars and trucks with a right-of-way disproportionately wide that does not accommodate well pedestrians and bicycles. As a road, it conveys a high volume of through traffic without a walkable, attractive public realm to support a healthy mix of uses for a successful street.

To ensure it lives up to its highest potential, reflecting the strength and vitality of the surrounding neighborhoods, North Lake Avenue needs a realistic community-based placemaking and placekeeping design and structure. The City of Pasadena, not the private sector, is responsible for creating and maintaining the Public Realm. Rather than being leftover space between buildings, the Public Realm is the communal expression of *place* that reinforces the vision and quality of life in the planning area. It cannot be left to chance. A vibrant Public Realm is the key to creating a valuable community as well as improving the value of private development.

Absent a sustained and bold commitment by the City to transformation and revitalization (akin to its successful effort in Old Pasadena), this North Lake Specific Plan Update will suffer the same failure as the earlier plans adopted in 1997 and 2007.

DEFINITIONS [insert into text here or at end in separate ‘Definitions’ Section]

To comply with and implement the City’s 2015 General Plan, the North Lake Specific Plan shall address North Lake Avenue as a *complete street* and *greenstreet*, as well as its *streetscape*.

Complete Street

Smart Growth America’s definition of a *complete street*—embodied in Pasadena’s Mobility Element—focuses on sustainable means of transportation to minimize environmental impacts while creating streets that are safe for everyone regardless of age, ability, or mode of transportation. Complete streets include physical improvements that benefit pedestrians, bicyclists, and mass-transit users while minimizing the focus on single-occupancy vehicles. The *complete street* concept also embraces the *greenstreet* principles of incorporating methods of mitigating stormwater runoff.

Greenstreet

Closely related to the definition of a *complete street*, the City of Seattle further describes a *greenstreet* as a public right-of-way that through design and operations prioritizes pedestrian and open space over

other transit modes. The purpose is to enhance and expand public open space while reinforcing desired land use and transportation patterns. It also focuses on the environmental aspect of mitigating stormwater runoff through creating vegetated stormwater treatment areas that can become a major theme in the design of the street.

Streetscape

The term *streetscape* has been used narrowly to mean the character of the space between building frontages and the curb (i.e., the sidewalk) or include related elements such as public open spaces, alleyways, and paseos. However, a larger and more useful definition means everything that makes up the scene on a street, as well as incorporated principles of *complete streets* and *greenstreets*. Typical elements include the roadway itself, flanking buildings, sidewalks, street trees, street lights, street furniture (permanent benches, trash receptacles, etc.) in addition to adjoining public or publicly-accessible open spaces. Collectively, these elements create an outdoor environment, a place for people to circulate, gather, and be outside.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRANSFORMING THE PUBLIC REALM

The following recommended goals, objectives, and related policies are to be incorporated into the “Public Realm” section of the North Lake Specific Plan to transform the planning area into a special place consistent with the visions embodied in both the 2015 General Plan and the 2007 Amended North Lake Specific Plan.

VISION FOR NORTH LAKE AVENUE

The vision for North Lake Avenue is a result of a community planning effort. That effort is an instrument for both imagining and then implementing related design principles resulting in a street for people. According to Pasadena’s 2015 General Plan, the vision for the North Lake Specific Plan is

...to transform its automobile-oriented character with pockets of commercial and residential uses into a well-designed and attractive corridor supporting multiple travel modes including transit, bicycling, and walking with clusters of distinctive places for shopping, dining, and living. These will serve and be accessible to residents of adjoining neighborhoods....

[Pasadena 2015 General Plan Land Use Element, page 35]

Simply stated, the Vision for North Lake Avenue is to become a *Great Street*, the most important ingredient in creating a memorable urban place. As the heart of the North Lake Specific Plan Area, the Avenue will be a primary destination, a public arena for interchange and commerce, where the public life of the community occurs in a welcoming, inclusive environment. North Lake Avenue now lacks surrounding buildings of consistent scale and compatible design, vital to creating a vibrant ‘outdoor living room.’ As a *great street*, the Avenue will function for the community like an outdoor living room, a protected well-defined place for people to be outside, to meet, connect, linger, or conduct business. Appropriate building frontages will form the ‘interior walls’ of the outdoor room; the sidewalks, landscaping, roadways, and related public open spaces and greens its ‘floor’; its ‘ceiling’, the canopy of trees, overhangs, awnings, or umbrellas that modulate our experience of the weather and sky above. Experiencing North Lake Avenue will be protective while celebrating its history and mountain views.

GOALS

The Goals in implementing the Vision for North Lake Avenue as a *Great Street* are as follows:

1. Build a sense of place for the community and individuals by changing the current space and scale to create a vibrant outdoor living room.
2. Attract investment in business and mixed-use projects, especially housing and its retail and service needs.
3. Ensure visible care and upkeep critical to the safety, vitality, and sense of community pride and ownership in North Lake Avenue's urban street life. Above all else, the Avenue must be clean and safe.
4. Find effective ways to calm traffic movement along North Lake Avenue through symbols of enhanced walkability, traffic management in a two-way system, and design of traffic lanes to promote and protect pedestrian and bicycle use and safety.
5. Emphasize transit to and within the planning area rather than transit through it.
6. Manage and reduce congestion. For North Lake Avenue as a destination via all modes of transportation, understand that congestion is a byproduct of successful urban places. A place by definition that supports concentrations of social and economic activities within a pedestrian-scaled environment is going to be congested.
7. Address environmental impacts and the heat-island effect by reducing our carbon footprint. De-emphasize single-occupancy vehicle use and dependence on fossil fuels, reduce excessive impermeable paving, substantially increase the extent of the tree canopy, and ensure a memorable, walkable, delightful, and sustainable environment that is a model for other parts of the City.
8. Mitigate stormwater runoff through creative landscaping.
9. Establish a creative public art program that includes murals and reinforces a strong sense of place and continuity between the past, present, and future.

OBJECTIVES: How to Make North Lake Avenue a *Great Street*

1. Fund and Develop a Pedestrian Plan and Implementation Strategy

The Pedestrian Plan will provide the foundation for planning and developing the Public Realm for the North Lake Specific Plan Area. It will provide the blueprint for implementing pedestrian-oriented capital improvements to make it easier, safer, and more interesting to walk along the Avenue as well as to and from adjoining neighborhoods. The Plan will describe the existing conditions facing pedestrians on North Lake Avenue, analyze walking data and trends, describe best practices successfully used in other cities, and provide the basis and justification for funding and implementing capital improvements aimed at walking.

2. Design a Comprehensive Streetscape Plan for North Lake Avenue that incorporates principles of beautification, complete streets, and greenstreets.

Following adoption of the North Lake Specific Plan Update, the City shall develop and design a Comprehensive Streetscape Plan through a community outreach and participation effort, which is expected to include a citizen-lead steering committee. The Specific Plan's zoning will enable more residents to 'live above the store' along the Avenue and provide the needed 'eyes on the street' for safety and self-policing that will also support new community-serving businesses. The purpose of the Comprehensive Streetscape Plan—in concert with the zoning—is to transform North Lake Avenue physically into a *great street*. It serves as a catalyst for improving the visual character of the planning area while respecting, preserving, and celebrating its historic fabric and context. The Plan will establish a unique sense of place, providing pedestrian amenities, and supporting wellness through walking and biking. The 'new' North Lake Avenue will be clean and safe, no longer serving solely as an arid thoroughfare but as the heart of the surrounding neighborhoods. It will increase the customer base and property values, and generally enhance the quality of life for the planning area and the City as a whole in a sustainable way.

3. Fund installation and maintenance of the Comprehensive Streetscape Plan through public and private investment based on the City's binding commitment to direct adequate public resources to achieve the goal.

Along with the Pedestrian Plan studies, as first steps in the process, the City shall conduct an economic study of the North Lake Specific Plan Area while surveying and engaging the property and business owners. Prioritize City investment, apply for State and Federal grants, and support establishing a Property-based Business Improvement District (P-BID). Also, explore establishing an Enhanced Infrastructure Funding District (EIFD), a Parking District, or other financing mechanisms. Consider creating a set-aside fund with fees collected from new development projects in lieu of required onsite improvements to install the Comprehensive Streetscape Plan, which Pasadena has done in the past. Explore alternate funding sources such as fundraising and private sector donations for planting and maintaining street trees and creating a Landscaping Improvement District (LID) for adjacent neighborhoods. In the event that parking meters are installed along North Lake Avenue, explore the use of meter revenues in excess of expenses to fund improvements (as was done in Old Pasadena).

4. Designate a City staff lead to spearhead a planning and design team to coordinate and develop the Public Realm. This would include developing and installing capital improvements recommended by the Plan and an operation and maintenance program to ensure their viability over time.

Establish a City staff lead person for North Lake Avenue to work closely with residents, businesses, private investors, and relevant City departments—especially Planning, Transportation, and Public Works—to ensure all capital improvements are installed and maintained in a comprehensive, cost-efficient, and resource conscious manner. Ensure the Housing and Economic Development departments actively and consistently market investment opportunities along North Lake Avenue, especially housing opportunities and community-serving retail that supports residents. To be most effective, improvements to the Public Realm should be implemented within the same period of time to achieve the best possible effect (as was done in Old Pasadena).

POLICIES: Twenty Five Ways to Transform North Lake Avenue into a *Great Street*

1. Create an equitable balance of space usage between sidewalks and streets in the public right-of-way. The ideal allocation is 50/50 between pedestrians and vehicles. This translates on North Lake Avenue, with its 105-ft. right-of-way, to about 50 feet for pedestrian-oriented use and the remaining 50 feet for all other modes of travel and on-street parking.
2. Provide two vehicular travel lanes in each direction going north and south along North Lake Avenue. The travel lanes shall be narrowed as much as possible to deemphasize the width of the right-of-way yet still provide two safe travel lanes. Vehicle lanes shall not exceed 12 feet in width. The design speed along North Lake Avenue shall not exceed 35mph.
3. Eliminate the current shared vehicle/bicycle travel lanes. Instead, install one-way protected bicycle lanes on the east and west side of the Avenue or a two-way bikeway on one side protected from vehicle traffic by trees, landscaping, and parking lanes without the barrenness and confusion of the Union Street bikeway (see the City of Rosemead as a model). Include bicycle and pedestrian safety improvements around the Metro stop/freeway overpass zone that connect to North Lake Avenue.
4. Maximize off-street parking as much as possible. Eliminate on-street parking from Orange Grove to Mountain Streets where fronting drive-thrus. Where critically needed to serve businesses without onsite parking, reduce the number of on-street spaces or re-configure them to be more efficient (i.e. install diagonal parking, create parking inlets, etc.).
5. The center turning lanes shall be removed or minimized as much as possible for safe turning at intersections. Useable space freed up within the right-of-way shall be dedicated to pedestrian or community use. The additional space can be used for central, pedestrian-oriented medians, *ramblas* (such as in the City of Lancaster), and wider sidewalk areas.
6. The additional right-of-way gained from eliminating on-street parking and center turning lanes shall be used to establish or enlarge useable medians along all or part of North Lake Avenue to benefit the community. The additional space can be used for walkable, landscaped 'park blocks' like in Portland or West Hollywood, especially from Orange Grove to Washington flanked by drive-thrus. Or, create central diagonal-parking and event space like the Moule & Polyzoides-designed *ramblas* for Downtown Lancaster; or community gardens like in Vancouver and Oakland; or some combination.
7. "Pedestrian refuges" shall be installed at the end of each median or somewhere in the middle of longer ones where needed, to ensure that those who cannot cross the entirety of the street can wait safely in the median until they can continue crossing to the other side, like sections of South Lake Avenue.
8. Lighted crosswalks at selected locations in between the controlled intersections shall be installed, with flashing lights embedded in the road and on signs beside it to alert drivers.
9. Install diagonal crossings (like in Old Pasadena) and continental "ladder" crosswalks at intersections. These will serve to mark North Lake Avenue better as a pedestrian street, significantly lessen the mixing of pedestrians and vehicles, and reduce traffic speeds. At all signalized intersections ensure enough

time for pedestrians to cross the street comfortably and safely. Default to pedestrian crossing prior to initializing green lights for vehicles.

10. At all bus stops, ensure a permanent tree canopy or other shading devices to shelter transit users from the elements. Provide adequate lighting, comfortable seating, and real-time transit information.

11. The entire streetscape shall be landscaped using water-conserving low-impact development (LID) and smart irrigation techniques. Incorporate permeable paving, bio-swales, and other methods to control runoff and capture stormwater for onsite reuse.

12. Landscaping should include a diversity of species—native, non-native Mediterranean, non-invasive and other water efficient types—to increase urban resilience, create habitat for insects and birds, and serve as drought-tolerant, waterwise demonstration gardens.

13. Plant appropriate, evergreen street trees—as designated in an updated adopted Street Tree Plan for the North Lake area—that provide a year-round canopy with a spread preferably of 18 feet or more, planted at about 10 - 30 feet on center intervals, depending on the species. Consider planting citrus and other food-producing species for resilience and as accents to celebrate our climate and heritage.

14. Sidewalks shall be 18 feet in width as a baseline, with 10 feet apportioned for the path of travel next to the building property line, known as the “pedestrian zone,” and the remaining 8 feet reserved for trees, utility access, street furniture, known as the “curbside zone.” Variations in these two zones may be designed to accommodate outdoor dining, installing public art, street vending, and other activities.

15. Widened sidewalk areas shall be landscaped and installed at one time or phased along entire blocks or sub-districts in a coordinated way. Interest and continuity shall be provided in the design that also connects people safely to the median and across the street. Provide hardscape variation in shape, width, and quality paving materials to promote strolling and discovery and differentiate the sub-districts. Accommodate activities such as ‘people-watching,’ street vending, and street or farmers markets, with kiosks, newsstands, and outdoor dining, shaded from the California sun. Include permanent street furniture (benches and chairs for gathering and lingering, waste receptacles, water faucets, etc.), public art and murals, pedestrian-scaled lighting, bicycle facilities, and other amenities.

16. To give variety to the design of the corridor, special landscaping treatments shall be installed as decorative nodes or ‘plazas’ at four major intersections along North Lake Avenue: at Villa Street, Orange Grove Blvd., Mountain Street, and Washington Blvd.

17. The east side of Boylston Street shall be closed off or vehicle access curbed to stop illegal cut-through traffic from fast food businesses on North Lake Avenue into the neighborhood.

18. Identify and acquire potential paseos, parklets, and greenspaces. Reduce onsite parking requirements, support shared parking arrangements on private property, or develop district-wide parking or through some other means reduce excess space for cars, and instead acquire easements for passive greening (non-active recreational use) and public space throughout the planning area.

19. At the Food for Less property, the onsite parking requirements shall be reduced to eliminate the heat island effect from the massive, underutilized sea of asphalt. The City shall find the means to incentivize the property owners to redevelop the site with underground parking and added housing,

with residential units above stores or offices along the North Lake Avenue frontage, and community-serving retail to support residents. The same shall be undertaken for the CVS property, the former Big Lots property, and others with parking fronting North Lake Avenue.

20. As much as possible, underground parking shall be required for redeveloped sites. In all cases, new onsite surface parking lots abutting North Lake Avenue shall be prohibited.

21. The City shall develop and support the means to “Park Once and Walk” along North Lake Avenue by working with property and business owners to increase shared parking opportunities in publicly owned parking lots and to reduce on-site parking requirements to the extent possible. Include some public parking in the redevelopment of the former Kaiser site at Lake and Villa as a start.

22. New curb cuts shall be prohibited along North Lake Avenue. As uses change, current ones shall be relocated or eliminated to increase the safety and continuity of the pedestrian realm.

23. Emphasize allowing outdoor dining along the street frontage that is protected from vehicle emissions through screening or landscaping. Outdoor dining shall not be allowed adjacent to residential uses, especially in parking lots or open space in the rear of restaurants, without approval of a Minor Conditional Use Permit (MCUP).

24. Develop an incentivized façade improvement “Main Street”-type program to encourage and assist existing owners to upgrade their properties flanking the public right-of-way through building repair, re-modeling, re-painting, and onsite landscaping. Partner with Habitat for Humanity, the American Institute of Architects, or other professional, service, educational, faith-based, and neighborhood organizations, as well as businesses to provide *pro bono* design assistance, labor, and materials.

25. Develop, adopt, maintain, and enforce a comprehensive, coordinated sign program for the North Lake Specific Plan Area. Pay special attention to reducing the amount of signage that obscures street-facing windows to increase transparency and a sense of safety for pedestrians. An over-street sign at the start of the streetscape or a system of banners or other artistic means shall be installed to demarcate the planning area, enhance its unique visual character, and create a sense of entry and arrival (look to Culver City and Santa Monica as examples).



A Potential View of North Lake Avenue; image generated by Megheti DerBoghossian

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS AND TIMELINE

<u>ACTION</u>	<u>DUE DATE FROM PLAN ADOPTION</u>
Designate City Staff Lead	Upon adoption
Create City Task Force w/Citizen Participation	Upon adoption
Reach Out to Property and Business Owners	Upon adoption/On-going
Conduct Economic/Demographic Study	One Year
(Concurrently) Develop Pedestrian Study and Plan	One Year
Develop Funding Sources	On-going
Include in Capital Improvements Program	One Year
Develop Property-Based Improvement District (PBID)	Three Years
Establish Partnerships with Non-Profits	On-going
Design Comprehensive Streetscape Plan	Three Years
(Concurrently) Revise Street Trees and Landscaping Plan	
(Concurrently) Establish Public Parking District	
Install Streetscape Plan Improvements	Five Years
Reconfigure Right-of-Way and Install Infrastructure	
Install Paving, Street Trees, Landscaping, Street Furniture	



Looking south from the intersection of Lake Ave. and Washington Blvd., circa 1950.

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