

Improving Small Cities in California: Clearlake and Bell Community Planning III Studio, Spring 2013

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In this article, professor William Siembieda presents some of the individual projects developed by the MCRP students in-lieu of a thesis or a professional abstract. They choose projects that can be helpful to a local jurisdiction. Presented here are four projects developed in the class for the cities of Clearlake and Bell, California.

Most small towns have several unmet planning needs. Helping to meet these needs is a valued outcome of the Community and Regional Planning Studio III (CRP 556), an option for MCRP students who prefer not to pursue a master's thesis or who have not identified their own client for a master's professional project. Following a two-quarter-long studio when a class studies a community and develops a general plan—often through a contract with a local jurisdiction or public entity—in CRP 556 students choose from a list of projects to be developed individually for that same community in one quarter (ten-weeks). These projects have to fulfill a local planning need as identified by the instructors and local jurisdictions.

This article presents work done in the spring of 2013 for the cities of Clearlake and Bell, California. Clearlake is a freestanding rural city in Northern California, while Bell is an urban city in the Los Angeles region. Four of eleven projects are featured in this article while the complete list of projects from this class is presented in Table 1.

Clearlake

Clearlake, an incorporated city of 15,000 people in Lake County, is 80 miles north of San Francisco. This community of 10.8 square miles is located adjacent to Clear Lake, the state's largest fresh water lake. The residents enjoy a rural life style and its economy is dependent on tourism.

Project: Template for EIR

In California, a General Plan Update requires conducting an Environmental Impact Report. This costly, and time-consuming task is assisted by Kathryn Slama's project: a Program EIR Template for the General Plan. A program level EIR evaluates the implications on the environment as a result of adopting a planning document, such as a general plan which provides direction for long-term visioning and broad community goals.

This EIR template is used to assess all elements of the

Table 1: Students' project titles and cities.

	Student Name	Title	City/County
1	Michael Christensen	Accessory Dwelling Unit Ordinance	City of Bell
2	Gabriel Diaz	Transit Oriented Development Design Project	City of Bell
3	Brian Harrington	General Plan Update Economic Element	City of Bell
4	Michael Heater	Rails to Trails	City of Bell
5	Jonathan Hidalgo	Healthy Community Element	City of Bell
6	Abraham Sheppard	LA River Neighborhood Vision Plan	Bell/Los Angeles Cnty
7	Steven Ingoldsby	Air Quality Element	City of Clearlake
8	Lana Russell- Hurd	Transportation Priority List and Grant Proposal	City of Clearlake
9	Emma Schoppe	Olympic Drive Design Guidelines	City of Clearlake
10	Kathryn Slama	GP Update - Draft Environmental Impact Report Template	City of Clearlake
11	Tan Trango	Directional Signage Plan	City of Clearlake



Figure 1: Proposed General Plan for Clearlake.

General Plan Update, such as land use, whose main goals are as follows:

- Goal LU-1. Accommodation of future residential growth with a rural character.
- Goal LU-2. Concentrated development with heightened activity centers.
- Goal LU-3. Compatible land uses.
- Goal LU-4. Easy access to daily needs and services.

The template is then used to complete the program EIR based on the General Plan projections such as shown in Figure 1. This city of 15,000 people is expected to grow to nearly 19,000 by 2040. The template provides a basis for adequately assessing the expansion impacts.

Project: Olympic Drive

The main east-west road in Clear Lake is Olympic Drive. Emma Schoppe's project is a collection of circulation, streetscape, building form, landscape, and signage design guidelines for Olympic Drive in Clearlake.

The goal is to incorporate safe and attractive street design to enhance the community's social and economic viability. The Olympic Drive Design Guidelines is a tool to help implement the vision and goals developed in Clearlake's 2040 General Plan Update. Olympic Drive is identified as a major opportunity to focus growth and address the community's social and economic needs in the General Plan Update. Design standards and principles for shaping safe, efficient and active streets are applied to the Community context of Olympic Drive. The SWOT analysis conducted helped address the challenges and takes advantage of the opportunities for positive urban design elements.

The Design Guidelines include sections on: circulation and parking, streetscapes, parks and landscapes, building form and signage and wayfinding. Implementation recommendations for updating the city code, related planning documents, and streetscape improvement projects are included in the project report. Clearlake can begin implementation immediately (Figure 2).

Bell

The City of Bell is an inner-ring Los Angeles suburban town, located eight miles to the southeast of downtown Los Angeles (Figure 4). Its built fabric is primarily composed of well-established residential neighborhoods and arterial commercial corridors. With over 35,000 residents in only 2.81 square miles, Bell has one of the highest population densities of any city west of the Mississippi. The channeled Los Angeles River bisects the industrial areas to the northeast from the southwest residential area.

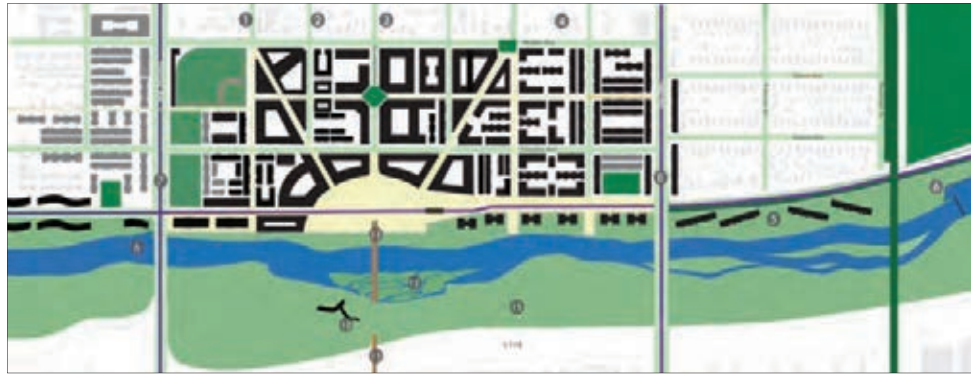
Project: La Orilla del Rio

Bell Riverfront Vision Plan, developed by Abe Sheppard, provides a strong urban design statement on the potential to develop recreational activities for the city. The project plan envisions a revitalized riverfront that is a desirable place to live, work, learn, shop, and play for an active, diverse community. Bell's eastern border is the Los Angeles River, a concrete flood control channel that provides few assets to its adjoining communities. By joining other river-adjacent communities in a comprehensive approach to river corridor revitalization, Bell can take incremental steps to realize the



Figure 2: Depiction of a possible future for Olympic Drive. (source: <http://www.nybc.net/advocacy/complete-streets>)

Figure 3: Project La Orilla del Rio, in Bell.



riverfront's potential to become an urban amenity.

Near-term improvements to the channel sides and adjacent land uses can provide recreational amenities in an area that lacks adequate parks and open space. In addition, both near and long term revitalization efforts can be a regenerative force for Bell's neighborhood by La Orilla del Rio – the shores of the river. The plan proposes a three-phased approach for revitalizing the Los Angeles River riverfront and its adjoining neighborhood district.

For the nearer term (5-10 years), the Riverfront Plan envisions new recreational facilities and parks, attractive market-rate and affordable multi-family housing options, and improved river accessibility. This phase incorporates elements that are most likely to be implemented within a ten-year time period. During the mid-term phase (10-20 years), further enhancements are made to the district's circulation network, public infrastructure, and recreational amenities (Figure 3).

Project: Rail to Trail for Bell

Bell has a railroad line through the city (Figure 4). An innovative project proposal developed by Michael Heater is the Randolph Street Rail to Trail Feasibility Study. This project examines the potential possibilities for creating a non-motorized, multi-use trail along the rail corridor. The study provides the preliminary foundation needed to plan, design, and construct a rail to trail corridor.

The project would create an east-west bicycle and pedestrian linkage between the City of Huntington Park neighborhood to the north, the City of Maywood neighborhood to the west, and several neighborhoods in the cities of Bell Gardens and Commerce to the east. The project proposes using the existing ROW between 80-120 feet in width to develop the active trails (Figure 5). Creating this trail responds to the city's need for more parks and open space. This project builds on the national movement of utilizing underutilized Right of Way for multiple use purposes.



Figures 4 & 5: Existing rail's Right of Way in Bell, and an example of the proposed design for rail-trail separation.

