Reinterpreting City Alleys:
Design Guidelines for the City of Vallejo, CA

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Not unusually, good students get jobs before they even finish their senior projects! This was the case for Karlo Felix, BCRP class of 2005, now a planner with the City of Napa. In 2013 he had the chance to wrap up his senior project which consisted of a thorough study of the City of Vallejo's alleys and the proposal of a policy and a strategy to protect and enhance these important elements of the city's original morphology.

The original function of the alley, designed as a means to access the rear of properties, has given way to its reputation as the storage location of garbage bins, the dumping ground of unwanted furniture, the cruising grounds for immoral encounters and acts. To some, the City of Vallejo shares the same notoriety as the forgotten side streets. A city founded to support a new state and a new country's Navy, its stature has ceded to its distinction as a dying town.

San Francisco, Sacramento, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Baltimore are among many cities that have embarked on alley activation projects. The overlooked and disregarded side-streets left over from the days of carriage houses are becoming unique and integral aspects of these cities. Vallejo too has an existing system of alleys in the heart of a city. This essay explores three questions: (1) how have alleys been reintegrated in other communities; (2) what design elements have encouraged their reintegration; and (3) from this exploration what design guidelines can be distilled to achieve those means in a manner appropriate to Vallejo.

Historical Overview of Alleys

Elfreth's Alley in Philadelphia claims to be "Our Nation's Oldest Residential Street" and may be the earliest form of the alley as we understand it today. Created in 1702, it was the product of two businessmen who decided to share a strip of land between their two properties to allow for easier access between their blacksmith shops near the Delaware River and the commercial thoroughfare of Second Street (Elfreth's Alley Association, 2010).

The 19th century brought the expansion of the newly created United States of America. Cities expanded in a regimented grid-pattern to accommodate the easy sale of land. Alleys were a common element in the urban morphology, allowing access to the rear of lots where stables, privies, and other unwanted elements were kept away from street view.

Post-Civil War economic growth drove people into cities. Property owners capitalized on the influx of freed slaves and immigrants and converted outbuildings into alley housing. With the automobile becoming a more widely available means of transportation, barns and stables reserved for horses and carriages were converted into residential units for people.

It is also at this time that cities began to take note of the poor circumstances that compromised alleys. The nascent field of planning held the First National Conference on City Planning and the Problems of Congestion in 1910. Several speakers at the conference detailed the problems of overcrowding and noted the poor housing conditions of alleys (Meck & Retzlaff, 2009).

Alleys disappeared from the nation's development vocabulary in the years after the Great Depression. Tasked with assisting the recovery of the housing market the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) published technical bulletins to assist developers and communities in securing financing, most efficiently subdividing their land, and locating home buyers (FHA, 1934; Southworth & Ben-Joseph, 2003). By coupling the ability to obtain financing and mortgage insurance with the use of FHA standards, the federal government was able to usurp local land use controls (Southworth & Ben-Joseph, 2003). Returning veterans looking to start families drove a residential development boom in the years after World War II where the suburban pattern defined by the FHA dominated.

Alleys only began to reappear in development patterns with the New Urbanism movement of the early 1990s. The Charter of the New Urbanism defines 27 principles to guide public policy, development, and design. These principles address a broad array of disciplines and range in scale from the region, city, neighborhood, and building. Developments utilizing these principles have several defining features that have encouraged the use of alleys. With a focus on fine-grain, alleys once again became prominent as the movement rejected suburban development patterns in favor of mixed-use and neo-traditional design. These principles have created

Note: This article is based on the author's senior project, available from <http://digitalcommons.calpoly.edu/crpsp/>

identifiable communities that include an interconnected and shared network of streets, a variety of housing typologies, and parking in the rear of properties.

Existing alleys nationwide are undergoing a revitalization movement. While New Urbanism added alleys back into the fabric of cities, contemporary programs seek to improve on existing alleys. Many communities have alley systems that are still intact. Large cities such as Chicago, Los Angeles, and Seattle have garnered a lot of attention for their programs. But mid-size to smaller cities such as Sacramento, Santa Cruz, and Fullerton have drafted their own programs as well. Under the banner of "alley activation" or "alley greening" the new focus is to reimage alleys to serve as a community resource.

Alleys and City Form

The urban design principles present in alleys are explored here through two approaches. First, by applying Kevin Lynch's concepts to examine how alleys are perceived by their users. Second, by using Donald Appleyard 's studies on the social effects of traffic on the lives of residents.

Lynch's analysis model is based on *imageability*, the "mental picture of the exterior physical world that is held by an individual" (Lynch, 1960, p. 2) and is formed by five elements: paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks.

Paths are the main element used by people and are "channels along which the observer customarily, occasionally, or potentially moves" (Lynch, 1960, p. 47). Segregated by land uses, alley identity is tied closely with the building form in which it is located. Enclosed mid-rises with continuous facades in commercial areas and fences with a staccato of low-rise accessory structures in single-family residential areas are a contrast, but provide the user with a specific identity. Continuity can be reinforced by the design of the alley through unified paving materials, lighting, and width. The naming of alleys contributes to the mental map of users and strengthens the path's image.

Edges, according to Lynch, are "the linear elements not used or considered paths by the observer. They are the boundaries between two phases, linear breaks in continuity" (Lynch, 1960, p. 47). Physically, alleys evoke few characteristics of edges as they generally are not features that divide distinct areas. However, where alleys intersect streets, a mental edge is present. As a break in the street façade, the gap may provide casual users with little incentive to explore. The association of alleys with social ills provides a reinforcement of alley ends which users may choose to avoid.

Most people order their community into districts that have an identifiable characteristic (Lynch, 1960). They are "medium-to-large sections of the city, conceived of as having two-dimensional extent, which the observer mentally enters 'inside of'" (Lynch, 1960, p. 47). Lynch further identifies physical characteristics that allow districts to develop a strong image. These include continuous and homogeneous building facades of similar form, detail, materials, and uses. A unifying activity whether it be art, architectural history, bars, or retail, plays into the identity of districts. Alleys do not form the backbone of districts. However, evoking the characteristics previously listed, alleys can be a contributor to districts they are located within and reinforce the internal identity of the district.

Nodes are "the points, the strategic spots in a city into which an observer can enter, and which are the intensive foci to and from which he is travelling back" (Lynch, 1960, p. 47). While identified with plazas, squares, and transit stations, some alleys may serve as nodes. Alleys that open up at intersections may serve as a node simply due to the large influx of users at the junction. Alleys that function as neighborhood rear yards or as restaurant rows provide for a unified concentration of an activity which creates a recognizable node.

While simple objects, landmarks are "another type of point-reference, but in this case the observer does not enter within them, they are external. They are usually a rather simply defined physical object" (Lynch, 1960, p. 48). Stumbling upon a distinctive alley may arguably help orient users, but landmarks are meant to be external identifiers. As alleys are tucked within the urban fabric they lack the ability to provide wayfinding cues. However as linear paths, alleys can be used to reinforce axial design. Locating prominent landmarks at the terminus of alleys, similar to monuments located at street intersections, can help users navigate through alleyways or to particularly distinctive alleys.

Appleyard's Charter of Street-Dwellers' Rights captures the wants and needs of his survey respondents with seven aspects of an ideal street (Appleyard, 1981). While these goals are designed with a broader road network in mind, they nonetheless speak to an alley's sense of place and further contribute to our understanding of design principles present in alleys.

Safe Sanctuary - As a sanctuary, streets are the territory of pedestrians where children can walk or bike safely to places they visit such as schools and parks. While vehicles are expected on the streets they should "move slowly, carefully, and with warning - as guests, not as owners" (Appleyard, 1981, p. 243). The limited vehicular use of alleys lends itself naturally to use by residents for walking and cycling. Furthermore, the relatively narrow design of alleys forces drivers to use the alley at slower speeds and with greater caution. Appleyard does not discount that streets must nonetheless be able to meet the need for access by emergency vehicles. This also holds true for utility vehicles such as garbage collection trucks.

Livable, Healthy Environment - Local residents "should not be forced to withdraw from the street because of the discomforts caused by traffic" (Appleyard, 1981, p. 244). Everyday activities should not be impaired by noise, dust, excessive lighting, and vibrations. Places on the street should be available for people to use whether it be for talking or playing. Unmaintained alleys can detract from achieving this goal. Poor paving can lead to pools

of water collecting when it rains and dust clouds in dry weather. Broken and uneven paving also may unnecessarily add to noise pollution as vehicles navigating the alley get jarred. Poor placement and design of safety lighting in alleys can affect the sleep of residents if glare is not adequately shielded.

Community - Streets can be a communal space where residents engage in daily activities. Community events such as block parties are also valid street activities. The short lengths and narrow widths of alleys create a defined area that lends itself to these activities. These communal events may be specific to the residents or businesses that abut the alley. Subject specific events relevant to the broader community, such as those found in arts districts, may find a home in alleys. These users maintain their communal space which in turn promotes activity within them.

Neighborly Territory - The cleanliness of streets and their amenities such as landscaping and seating areas is encouraged when residents take responsibility for their streets. "The street should be symbolic, if not in a legal sense, territory that the residents feel belongs to them" (Appleyard, 1981, p. 244). Along the same lines as "Streets as Community," active users will maintain their alley that they have "customized" by keeping it free of litter, serving as "bouncers" to keep unwelcome strangers away, and notifying municipal officials when it needs fixing.

Place for Playing and Learning - In urbanized settings with small rear yards and limited parks, the streets become a playground for children. Appleyard (1981, p. 244) notes, "[o]n it children can learn much about nature, through plants and trees, the sun and the wind, and through exposure to earth itself. They can learn about social life if there are people on the street whom they can safely meet" (1981, p. 244). Streets that include a variety of spaces, surfaces, landscaping, and textures provide a diverse place not only for playing, but learning as well. Limited vehicular traffic allows for residential alleys to become an extension of the neighborhood rear yards. However, poorly maintained alleys increase the potential for injury when they are littered, flooded, pot-holed, or occupied with strangers.

Green and Pleasant Land - Landscaped city centers "provide relief from the hardness and greyness of the city" and can provide glimpses of nature in an otherwise austere urbanscape (Appleyard, 1981, p. 244). Where alleys no longer function as access to residential properties there are opportunities to "cede" the space back to its residents for landscaping. Current stormwater management practices also encourage the greening of streets and alleys to serve as a means to control non-point-source water pollution. Commercial alleys can utilize planters to soften them and to screen utility meters and waste receptacles.

Unique Historic Place - The stories and activities that have taken place over the years on streets contribute to the history of the street. Users take pride in a space that has a special identity to them, becoming a "place" to residents rather than just a route (Appleyard, 1981). Across a city, alleys may lack a broad quality that makes them unique. However individual alleys, such as those with views, that lead to parks, or within a historic district, can create an identity for themselves.

Design Principles

Four overall design principles for alleys are detailed below based on the historical aspects of alleys and the design elements that alleys contribute to the urban fabric.

Provide Access - Alleys as a means to access the rear of properties must be maintained, as they are channels of movement within an existing circulation network. This network provides people with passage to homes, businesses, and public spaces. This principle extends beyond simple ingress and egress as alleys provide an accessible location for utility meters, waste collection facilities, and emergency access.

Define the Place - A self-defining feature bound by buildings or fences along its length and streets at its ends, an alley should be an identifiable place. A continuous alley-fronting facade pattern that links both ends of the alley with quality architectural elements encloses the space. Paving that is durable and consistent the length of the alley increases the legibility of the alley. Thoughtful orientation and placement of building facades, signage, lighting, plantings, and utilities must be accompanied by a contextually-based selection of materials and expression forms that are appropriate to the surrounding uses and history to establish a legitimate sense of place.

Foster Neighborhood Ownership - Like streets, alleys provide access for nearly anyone. In a manner different than streets, alleys have boundaries, a permeable edge that allows for them to become outdoor living rooms. Here users can play, socialize, and interact—creating a territory that the neighborhood invests in and maintains.

Encourage Multiple Uses and Functions - Pedestrians, bicycles, and vehicles bringing residents, workers, visitors, and customers. The safe sharing of the alley by these users is encouraged and expected. Urban life is not limited to the confines of private property and positive casual encounters can be encouraged when alleys are seen as an extension of the community.

Case Studies

San Francisco, Sacramento, Baltimore, and Austin created separate programs that resulted in unique alley "products". San Francisco's Belden Place exemplifies a concentration of a single-use on an alley: restaurants. Liestal Row in Midtown Sacramento's Handle District is an example of an evolving alley where both restaurant and residential uses are oriented toward the alley and include environmentally-protective features. The Hill and Patterson Park neighborhoods in Baltimore are an example of the successful implementation of a program to return alleys to adjacent residences. And Austin's Alley #111 is an example of engaging an alley as a cultural space through temporary events. Each case study includes an examination of the alley based on the four design principles discussed earlier.

San Francisco - Belden Place

- *Provide Access* - With the exception of service vehicles, the alley is generally closed to vehicular traffic. A sidewalk lines both sides of the alley and allows the middle of the alley to remain free of channels and drainage inlets.
- *Define the Place* - A continuous facade of storefronts encloses the alley, with high-rise buildings beyond providing layers of building form to the site. Further accentuating the intimate atmosphere of the alley is a set of string lights that drape across the length of the alley. Awnings project into the alley and denote the entrances into the restaurants which comprise the dominant land use within it.
- *Foster Neighborhood Ownership* - Moveable tables, chairs, planters, and windscreens fill the alley in the afternoons after the alley has been vacated for use by service and delivery trucks.
- *Encourage Multiple Uses and Functions* - Reflecting on the alley's original establishments of French cuisine, celebrations such as Bastille Day are hosted at Belden Place.

Sacramento - Liestal Row

- *Provide* Access - Vehicular access was maintained to allow access to parking lots and alley-loaded housing units.
- *Define the Place* - While 20-feet at its widest points, Liestal Row narrows down to 12-feet. This reduction allows for the placement of above-ground planters and several consolidated trash enclosures. The majority of utilities are located beneath the alley. Gutter drains, fire risers, and electrical panels are located on the facades facing the alley. Several surface lots interrupt the facade lines along the alley. A few businesses front onto the alley, including a cafe and bike repair shop on the north-side and a three-unit alley-loaded condominium building on the south-side. The alley-loaded units allow for efficient use of land that was previously used as a surface parking lot. The alley is lined with pervious pavers that include built-in lights that accentuate the alley in the evenings.
- *Foster Neighborhood Ownership* - Small tables and chairs are located adjacent to the alley, but are limited in their placement and location as the alley is still utilized by vehicles. There are several murals painted on the walls of the sides of buildings facing the parking lot on the east-side of the alley.
- *Encourage Multiple Uses and Functions* - The alley's location in the cultural and culinary heart of Sacramento provides for a steady stream of pedestrian traffic throughout the day and night. The alley is also the location of small festivals throughout the year that close the center of the alley for events. Its pervious pavers allow for a portion of rainwater to infiltrate the soil, reducing surges in the stormwater system. Throughout the year the alley closes for neighborhood and City events.

Figure 1: Belden Place, San Francisco, CA.
(photo © Esther Reyes; http://www.flickr.com/photos/estify)

Figure 2: Liestal Row (Old Sould Alley), Sacramento, CA.
(photo © Geno Massuda)

Baltimore - Glover-Luzerne Alley

- *Provide Access* - East Fairmount Avenue bounds the alley to the north. Two alley entrances are located along North Glover Street on the east-side of the alley. A fourth entrance to the alley is located on the west-side, accessing North Luzerne Avenue, directly across from the southern access off of North Glover Street.
- *Define the Place* - They alley is approximately 20-feet wide but appears to be wider as the rear yard fences of abutting residences encloses the alley. This is especially apparent where fences have been lowered or set back from the alley. Beyond the fences are continuous rows of attached homes which front on the street. All four entrances into the alley are gated with access granted only to residents with keys and to public safety personnel.
- *Foster Neighborhood Ownership* - As the alley has limited access, it has become the location of neighborhood block parties and gatherings. It functions as an additional open

space, serving as an extension of the adjacent rear yards. Residents have personalized the space with brightly painted planters and walls. The alley is also furnished with tables, chairs, grills, and umbrellas. Rainwater drains along the center of the alley which is also dotted with utility poles. No formal lighting is provided within the alley, but several residents have installed lighting on their own fences and around utility poles.

- *Encourage Multiple Uses and Functions* - This alley no longer provides access to vehicles and users are limited to those with keys. Gover-Luzerne functions as a neighborhood space for those with residences that directly abut the alley. As an extension of their rear yards, the space is a playground and park utilized by the residents for playing and socializing.

Austin - Alley #111

- *Provide Access* - Alley #111 is bounded by 10th Street and 9th Street on the north and south and Congress Avenue and Brazos Avenue on the east and west. It is open to vehicular access.

Figure 3: Glover-Luzerne Alley, Baltimore, MD. (photo © Kate Herrod, Director of Community Greens; wikipedia/creative commons)

Figure 4: Alley 111, Austin, TX.

- *Define the Place* - Alley #111 is 20-feet in width and approximately 350-feet in length. With the exception of a large service area on the northern-side of the alley, the alley has a continuous facade, enclosed by two-story buildings on the south and a three-story and 12-story building on the north. Gutter drains, electrical panels, and fire escapes hang over the alley, with waste bins lining the edges of the alley.
- *Foster Neighborhood Ownership* - The exhibition was the pilot project of the Alley Workgroup: a group organized by the City of Austin's Downtown Commission and composed of representatives from the Commission, city staff, Downtown businesses, and art organizations. Planning for the exhibition focused on physical improvements to the alley and activation of the alley. Grants funded the design of physical art that was to be installed on the ground and above the alley. Donations funded smaller individual art pieces, furniture, and landscaping. Activation of the alley took place over five days with the goal of attracting a diversity of interests. Over the course of the program there were vocal exhibitions, visual art installations, commuter networking events, culinary showcases, and family-oriented activities.
- *Encourage Multiple Uses and Functions* - The organizers of this project sought to involve families, artists, and businesses in their pilot installation.

Lessons Learned

Adding to the four principles discussed earlier are four lessons learned from existing alleys based on the exploration of the elements that contribute to their character.

Not All Alleys are the Same - A single typical design pattern for alleys cannot be applied to all alleys in a community. A community's alleys must be grouped into alley types based on surrounding land uses. As guidelines regarding alleys are developed, they must keep in mind activities of those using the alley and that they establish an expectation of a high-level of design quality.

Garner Community Buy-In - Regulatory authority over rights-of-ways generally required that municipalities take the lead in implementation of alley programs. However, funding sources came from various agencies and the community with technical assistance provided by businesses and local universities. As these alleys will eventually be largely patrolled by abutting users, neighborhood buy-in is required.

Urban Life Can Occur in Alleys - Alleys are an underutilized land resource that can be transformed into recreational spaces to supplement parks and open space in a developed area. The community space can further strengthen neighborhoods by addressing criminal and safety concerns through their attractive appearance and active use.

Alleys Can be "Green" - Plantings within the alley soften what can often be an austere environment. Alleys can also assist with the treatment of runoff through the choice of materials and the design of the alley. When correctly designed the alleys will reduce nonpoint sources of pollution discharged into waterways, eliminate localized pooling and/or flooding of alleys, and require minimal maintenance.

The City of Vallejo and its Alleys

Located approximately 32 miles northeast of San Francisco and 57 miles southwest of Sacramento, Vallejo is the largest city in Solano County (Metropolitan Transportation Commission & Association of Bay Area Governments [MTC & ABAG], 2013). The city is situated on Mare Island Strait, which drains the Napa River into San Pablo Bay.

When California gained independence from Mexico and was subsequently annexed by the United States, General Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo offered 156 acres of his rancho to establish a new state capitol, which the new California legislature named after him (Kern, 2004). However General Vallejo was unable to develop the capitol to the satisfaction of legislature who eventually decided to move the capitol to Sacramento in 1852 (Delaplane, 1995).

While the city's 1852 stint as capital was brief, Vallejo's new identity as a navy town would soon begin. Due to Vallejo's sheltered location across from the selected site for the state's new capital, the federal government purchased Mare Island, a new naval facility to support commerce in the newly opened Pacific the same year. Construction of ship-building facilities began immediately and in 1854 Commander David Farragut, of Civil War fame, opened Mare Island Naval Shipyard; the nation's first naval base on the West Coast (Delaplane, 1996; Kern, 2004).

Vallejo was little more than a small town of 3,000 in the early 1860s. But the shipyard brought business interests into town from San Francisco and California's hinterland. Over the next 100 years the City of Vallejo would grow to support the Navy through the Spanish-American War, World War I, and World War II. By the 1950s Vallejo had grown-up into a city with all the amenities required to support a navy town. Hotels, shops, offices, churches, schools, and hospitals grew in the city center alongside stately mansions. Vallejo also began to push eastward to accommodate the growing population of World War II veterans that either remained or settled in Vallejo. The city's population exploded from 26,000 in 1950 to 61,000 in 1960 (MTC & ABAG, 2013). But the growth left the downtown in disrepair, and like countless towns across the United States, redevelopment took hold in the 1960s and 1970s. Large areas of the historic downtown and waterfront were demolished under the banner of urban renewal (City of Vallejo, 1994).

With the end of the Cold War in 1989, Mare Island's budget was gradually reduced and in 1996 the base closed after constructing 513 vessels and repairing another 1,227 which ranged from wood ships to nuclear submarines (City of Vallejo, 2003). The Navy's presence had identified the city since its inception and the base closure left the City reeling. While Vallejo's population continued to grow outward, the commercial heart of the city began to fade. Vallejo's identity as an industrious American navy town shifted to a crime-ridden central core with empty storefronts. This identity was further pushed with Vallejo's bankruptcy in 2008, which was at that time the largest municipal bankruptcy in the nation. *Newsweek* listed Vallejo in their "Dying Cities" rankings and *Forbes.com* listed it as one of the "Most Miserable Cities" in 2011, 2012, and 2013.

With the City's exit from bankruptcy, Vallejo's appeal is drawing new investments due to its established infrastructure, centralized location, and trained workforce. The City is home to the Vallejo Center (a campus of Solano Community College), Touro University (an osteopathic medical school), and California Maritime Academy (a campus of the California State University System). Six Flags Discovery Kingdom and the regional office of the United States Forest Service also call Vallejo home. Downtown has retained a majority of its historic structures which have appealed to those from around the Bay Area seeking to own a historic home.

Project Area

Development patterns within the city have varied throughout time. Despite the redevelopment movement of the 1960s and 1970s, Vallejo has been able to retain a large portion of its original lotting pattern. Alleys that separated the rear yards of properties on a block are still present today. These alleys are the focus of this report and guided the establishment of the boundaries of the project area. The project area encompasses approximately 444 acres with 2,054 parcels over 116 blocks. There are 108 alley segments that total 8.2 miles in length.

The majority of the project area is composed of residential uses. Detached single-family residences dominate but attached single-family and multi-family residences are also present. Strip commercial uses are located along Tennessee Street to the north, as well as Sonoma Boulevard and Broadway Street which bisect the project area. The Downtown provides for a mix of commercial uses, including restaurants, a theatre, and small markets.

The roadway system is oriented in a north-south and east-west direction. Streets running east-west are named after states and streets running north-south are named after California counties. The alleys run in the east-west direction and are named after motorcycle brands (York, 2013).

Despite the hilly terrain, the project area retains essentially the same block pattern from when the City was first platted with blocks 280-feet by 400-feet. Lots 50-feet in width and 130-feet deep were separated by 20-foot alleys and 80-foot streets. The majority of the project area is composed of

Figure 5: Downtown Vallejo's street grid, with the alleys show in purple.

single-family detached houses that are two- to three-stories in height. Downtown consists mainly of three- to four-story buildings. The grain of the project area is varied. While the historic block pattern remains, the inconsistent building pattern and patchwork of surface parking lots do not provide for long lengths of continuous street-fronts or alley-fronts. The strong defining features of historic buildings are lost on more contemporary structures in the area. Both historic commercial and residential buildings provide a base, body, and crown that are accentuated with detail missed on buildings developed within the past 60 years. These historic structures are also oriented towards the street and are pedestrian in scale with a rhythmic pattern of windows.

Opportunities

Intact Alley System - While many of the alleys require a significant amount of maintenance, the lanes themselves have survived and the purchase of additional right-of-way is not required. A large amount of development potential is stored in the surface parking lots that are located throughout the area that abut the alleys.

Prime Location - Alleys located within the Downtown are located within walking distance of the City's civic center, arts district, and transit hubs. This positioning allows not only for an increase in street-level activity but the influx of potential customers spending money within commercial establishments.

Planned as a Center - Recently adopted policies and regulations seek to greatly increase the number of residents in the Downtown. A larger neighborhood base allows for a wider variety of uses to flourish during the day and evening.

Green Trend - A trend towards the greening of communities has been extant in Vallejo for some time. Opportunities to create new open space for infill areas that incorporate green technologies are welcome.

Constraints

Local Regulation - Although the City has relaxed many of its regulations toward restaurants to encourage a more active Downtown, the City maintains very restrictive requirements and permitting processes for outdoor dining and alcohol service. Many permits are not subsidized and require the applicant to pay the full cost of the processing of applications. A lack of adequate staffing also results in a lengthy processing timeframe.

Maintenance of Functionality - Aside from their function as a means of access to the rear of properties, alleys provide service access to residences and businesses. Waste collection and utility meters are located within the alley requiring access by both large waste collection vehicles and utility workers on foot. Additionally, fire trucks must also be able to access the rear of properties and require a minimum width and vertical clearance.

Insufficient Financing - The City is still undergoing a recovery from the recent economic downturn and bankruptcy. While the passage of a voter-approved sales tax increase benefited City services, a consistent and sufficient amount of public funding may still not be available to upgrade, beautify, and maintain the alleys. Additionally, private property owners do not appear to have the financial means to upgrade their own buildings so private funding of improvements may be a challenge.

Vision for Vallejo's Alleys

> *Vallejo's alleys serve a diversity of uses and are attractive spaces that encourage neighbors, the community, and visitors to share in the distinct cultural character of the City. As a part of the community's network of streets, sidewalks, and open spaces, alleys are inviting and functional, linking the community and contributing to the environmental, social, and economic well-being of Vallejo. (City of Vallejo, 2005)*

Design Goals

Neighborhood Identity - Create alleys that enhance the neighborhood and are respectful of the residents and businesses that abut the alley. Build on the character of existing neighborhoods to create a distinct identity.

Economic Vitality - Strengthen the historic heart of Vallejo by creating destination alleys that attract residents and visitors and encourage them to patronize neighborhood businesses.

Aesthetic Quality - Foster a pedestrian environment with public improvements that provide visual interest, durability, and functionality. Maintain the rhythm and scale of the neighborhood with the use of quality materials and architectural elements.

Environmental Responsibility - Incorporate green infrastructure systems that improve stormwater drainage, minimize resource consumption, and promote a healthy lifestyle.

Accessibility - Ensure that alleys retain their function as a means of access to the rear of properties. Provide a route for residents to access garages, alley units, and accessory second units and for customers patronizing businesses.

Social Vitality - Encourage the potential for social interactions by creating a usable outdoor space. Create safe spaces for a diverse range of users.

Design Guidelines

This essay only presents the guidelines as a single list. The actual design guidelines are broken into three sections: (1) the "private realm," which includes privately-developed buildings and improvements; (2) the "public realm," which pertains to alleys; and (3) programs related to the use of alleys.

The project area is additionally divided into three alley districts: (1) the "single-family districts," which are located in areas that are exclusively residential and function mainly as automobile access to homes; (2) the "shared-use districts," which are located on blocks that include both commercial uses and residential uses; and (3) the "central core district," which is located in the heart of Vallejo's historic Downtown. The actual design guidelines tag each specific guideline to the district or districts where they should be applied as guidelines for an alley in one district may not be applicable to another district.

A. *Site Layout and Building Design* - Orienting uses towards the alley creates a feeling of vibrancy and reduces potential for criminal activity. Setbacks from the alley should respond to the neighborhood.

- Orient buildings so that facades and pedestrian entrances face the alley in addition to streets and plazas.

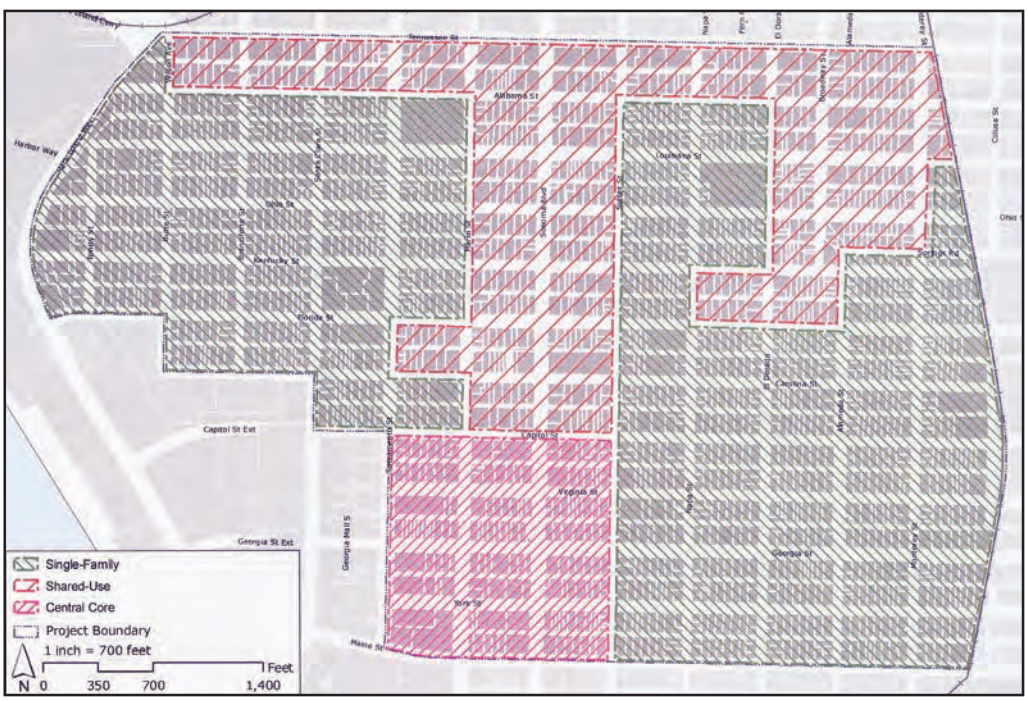

Figure 6: The three proposed Alley Districts for Vallejo.

Figure 7: Typical alley in the Single-Family District. (author's photo)

Figure 8: Typical alley in the Shared-Use District. (author's photo)

Figure 8: Typical alley in the Shared-Use District. (author's photo)

- Encourage rear and side facades that are visible from the public realm to be pleasant and inviting. These facades should have the same level of trim and finish as street-facing facades.
- Avoid large uninterrupted expanses of wall surfaces.
- Ensure that buildings are designed with references to a particular style or period and use materials consistent that are consistent. New developments should not, however, imitate historic styles but complement them.
- Locate ground-floor commercial uses that encourage pedestrian activity in the alley.
- Encourage new development to reflect the parcel widths that characterize the Downtown, with sensitivity to historic building sizes and storefronts.
- Strengthen the rhythm of alley facades by ensuring a consistent setback and continuous facade patterns.
- Reduce potential for criminal activity by discouraging cutouts or openings that are not visible from the ends of the alley.
- Require the placement of fencing along rear property lines to provide a continuous enclosure of the alley and prevent criminal activity by eliminating spaces that are not visible from the ends of the alley.
- Allow for awnings or overhangs to provide protection for pedestrians and to highlight alley entrances. Awnings should complement the overall alley facades.
- Ensure that the alley network remains intact by preventing the abandonment for a singular private use of an alley.

B. *Landscape and Lighting* - Plantings provide for an inviting pedestrian atmosphere and can soften austere facades. Adequate lighting discourages crime and encourages pedestrian use. Lighting fixtures should be attractive and provide for an inviting ambiance.

- When they do not conflict with the structural integrity of the building, access to utilities, and public safety systems, encourage the use of green walls to soften facades and to add vegetation to alleys.
- Ensure that alley entrances are adequately lit with light fixtures that complement the architectural style of the building.
- Avoid washing the rear facades with light to reduce unnecessary glare that only flattens the appearance of the facade.
- Unique materials, such as masonry, can be accentuated by using lighting that grazes the facade to highlight their texture.
- Lighting should be downward-oriented or shielded to prevent glare onto residential properties.

- Landscaping should incorporate plants, shrubs, and trees native to California. These species require less maintenance and watering that those from other climates. Additionally the impact of invasive species is reduced with local plant selection.
- Match new installations to current lighting fixture specifications in the Downtown Specific Plan and Sonoma Boulevard Design Corridor Plan. [applicable district(s): Shared-Use, Central Core]
- Encourage the use of lighting that employs low-consumption technologies to reduce the use of electricity.
- Consider in-pavement lighting within destination alleys to create an identifiable place.
- Canopy lighting or decorative lighting that drapes across the alley is encouraged to reduce the scale of surrounding buildings. Lighting should be placed at a minimum clearance of 14-feet to allow for service by utility vehicles and public safety vehicles.

C. *Signage* - Signage is important not just for business identification, but for contributing to the character of the alley. Signage also assists users with wayfinding and should be designed for pedestrians and vehicles.

- Encourage the use of suspended signs that are mounted perpendicular to the wall and are scaled for pedestrians.
- Signs on awnings should be on the valances. Placement on the sloping portion of the awning should be avoided.
- Require that all electrical components be placed behind the wall.
- Prohibit interior illuminated plastic panel faces with sheet metal enclosures.
- Consider the placement of pole-mounted signs of a different sign-type than street name signs to businesses.
- Match new installations to current sign fixture specifications in the Downtown Specific Plan and Sonoma Boulevard Design Corridor Plan. Consider placement of building-mounted signs to identify alleys. Explore an alley name sign-type different than the street name signs.

D. *Paving* - As public right-of-way, the paving and maintenance of alleys falls to the City. Paving should be chosen not only based on pattern and style, but on ability to reduce environmental impacts, reduce ongoing maintenance, and support the functions of the alley.

- Consider the use of special paving materials, colors, and/or patterns to differentiate the alley from the periphery streets and sidewalks. The change in materials should provide for an attractive pedestrian environment and lend an identity to the alley.
- Impervious paving should be avoided to reduce associated stormwater pollution. Encourage the use of pervious pavement, permeable pavers, grid pavers, and or strip paving where appropriate.
- Explore on-site water treatment through the use of drainage channels located within the alley.
- Encourage the use of high-albedo paving to reduce the heat absorbed by the pavement and reduce the heat-island effect.
- Explore the use of recycled construction materials, potentially from existing street repair projects, to reduce the amount of new material utilized when rehabilitating an alley.
- Ensure that the design and installation of paving satisfies the bearing loads required by utility vehicles, such as waste collection trucks, and public safety vehicles, such as fire trucks.
- Ensure that the design and installation of paving is completed using quality materials and practices with low-maintenance needs and a long life cycle in mind.

E. *Furniture* - Furniture provides convenience for users and is a way to encourage public use of the alley. Moveable tables and chairs allow for use of the space by restaurants while allowing for deliveries and pickups to operate. Furniture also includes waste receptacles, bicycle racks, bollards, and public art.

- Match new installations to current fixture specifications in the Downtown Specific Plan and Sonoma Boulevard Design Corridor Plan.
- Encourage the use of quality and attractive furniture by businesses utilizing the alley.
- Ensure that bicycle racks are placed in convenient locations within the alley.
- Waste receptacles placed within the alley should be screened. Screenings should be consistent with the building architecture in form, material, and detail.
- Property owners and/or tenants are encouraged to consolidate collection areas to provide for efficient service and to reduce encroachments into the alley. To the extent possible, these areas should be located away from public pathways and public gathering places to minimize views and offensive odors.
- Encourage the placement of public art to be installed within the alley. Non-historic facades provide a canvas that can bolster the local art community.

F. *Alley Programs*

- Festival Space - Consider a process to allow for the use of alleys as an event space for festivals. Alleys can be an alternative for intimate festivals that do not require the closing of large streets, parks, or plazas.
- Gating - Consider a process to allow for the gating of alleys in locations where vehicular access is no longer required. These

spaces can be used as an extension of rear yards, adding recreational space to an area lacking in open space.

Implementation Strategies

Implementing the proposed alley design guidelines requires the adoption of amendments to City policies and regulations. In order to involve the public, a community-based planning process is encouraged to engage property owners, business owners, residents, City staff, and appointed and elected officials. Recommended "next steps" may include:

Exploratory Committee - Similar to efforts in Sacramento and Baltimore, a committee could be formed and tasked with creating protocols and implementation plans for an alley program, as well as identifying potential pilot projects. This body should be composed of community stakeholders as well as City of Vallejo staff members.

Funding Sources - Funding source should be sought to pay for the development of plans, the creation of pilot projects, the evaluation of those projects, and the eventual full implementation of plans. The identification of potential funding sources is discussed later in this chapter.

Pilot Alleys - As funding and existing regulations permit, construct pilot projects. Once these projects are constructed an analysis of their benefits and impacts should be performed. Lessons learned should be incorporated into any comprehensive guidelines or standards that are to be adopted by the City.

Regulation Development - Ideas drafted by the committee must then be "grounded" against existing regulations to identify where amendments to regulations must occur to implement the plans. Vallejo's Planning, Building, Development Engineering, and Fire Prevention Divisions should be consulted as those divisions must draft the amendments, implement processes, and administer the policies and regulations.

Financing Strategies

Several sources that may be available to fund the further exploration and implementation of these guidelines. They include public sources, project-funded sources, and new taxes.

General Fund - An appropriation from the General Fund could be approved to allow for the further exploration and development of a program directly related to alleys. Once a program has been established, funds could be appropriated to implement alley programs. Additionally, incremental sales tax or property tax revenues in the Downtown area could be set aside and dedicated for specific use of alley reintegration in that area.

Federal and State Grants - The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program provides Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funds to support low-income development. These HUD funds could be used to rehabilitate existing neighborhoods, improve infrastructure, and assist in the development of affordable housing. The Vallejo Downtown area has been identified by MTC as one of the Bay Area's Priority Development Areas (PDA). This designation allows for technical assistance as well as disbursement of funds.

Measure B - In 2012, the citizens of Vallejo voted to levy an additional sales tax. A portion of these funds are available to fund one-time projects proposed by Vallejo residents. Through a unique Participatory Budget process, programs are proposed, identified, and recommended for funding to the City Council. As a one-time money source, Measure B funds could be used to fund the development of an alley plan.

Benefit Zones - Property Business Improvement Districts can be used to finance programs, infrastructure, and maintenance of commercial areas. Businesses located within a benefit zone pay an additional tax on their business licensees. A portion of these funds could be directed to the physical implementation of an alley plan. The City has also legislated the creation of Community Benefit Districts. These districts allow for residents to impose a tax on their properties to fund neighborhood improvements.

Development Impact Fee - An impact fee special to alleys could be adopted. A study would have to be completed that demonstrates a nexus between the alley improvements that are programmed and the calculated fee.

Development Agreements - As the City has large amounts of under-developed land within the Downtown, Vallejo could negotiate for the funding or actual completion of alley programs as individual private development projects are proposed.

Capital Improvement Program - Once an alley program is adopted, selected alley programs can be incorporated into Vallejo's Capital Improvement Program (CIP). CIPs are five-year programs in public infrastructure that pool federal, state, regional, and local funds.

Special Districts - Partnering opportunities with the local parks and recreation district, sanitation and flood control district, and school district should be explored. Several goals of alley reintegration projects match-up with the mission of these districts. Jointly pursuing grants with shared costs requirements may maximize the potential to be awarded funds.

Concluding Remarks

These guidelines to reintegrate alleys are only a starting point in a community-wide discussion on their future use. Any alley program implemented by the City should reflect the desires of the community. As planners we are tasked with bringing forward the latest processes, tools, and practices that support those desires. But the educational and professional background we have allows us, and requires us, to bring forward ideas that are new to the community. This targeted and single-topic

exploration of a small feature of the built environment is not the panacea to Vallejo's reemergence. But perhaps in the same manner that alleys have seen a rise in esteem, a reinterpretation of Vallejo alleys will see the same for the City.

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