

## Land Use and Violence Prevention

A Summit of the Healthy, Equitable, Active Land Use Network (HEALU Network)

### Reflections and Next Steps



#HEALU4ALL

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Making Connections for Wellbeing - South LA	The California Wellness Foundation
Movember Foundation	The Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Foundation

*Our co-sponsors helped shape the topic and agenda, distribute convening materials to their networks, and brought attendees to the convening. Those indicated with an asterisk above provided subject matter expertise before and during the summit.*

### Special thanks to the team that collaborated on planning and implementing the summit and contributing to the report:

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## Land Use Decisions Can Prevent Violence

Violence is preventable. A growing evidence base, grounded in research and practice, describes the factors that influence the frequency, severity, and likelihood of violence, as well as what it takes to prevent it. Land use planners and the disciplines they most commonly work with (e.g., parks and recreation, transportation, housing, agriculture, banking, and finance) have real potential to promote community resilience and prevent violence from occurring in the first place. From inclusive community planning processes, to innovative incentives and zoning practices, the ways we plan and use land in our neighborhoods can have a profound impact on neighborhood-level access to resources and institutions, as well as the look, feel, and safety of our communities. Effective violence prevention requires creativity and commitment from many stakeholders and sectors: land use related sectors are among the critical players that need to be ‘at the table’ to engage community residents to inform how we plan, design, and use our public and private spaces, to prevent violence and ensure safety for all.

Land use is an important determinant of health and safety because it shapes resident access to health-promoting resources—transportation, jobs, housing, healthy food, safe places to play and be physically active, and more. On the other hand, a lack of safety-promoting resources and infrastructure such as schools and jobs and an oversaturation of unhealthy land uses—like firearm distributors, liquor stores, freeways, and polluting industrial facilities—can conspire against community health and correlate with disproportionately high rates of preventable illness, injury, and violence.

In Los Angeles, like many places across the nation, low-income communities and communities of color have not received the same level of investments or innovations in healthy, equitable land uses that have benefited higher income neighborhoods. Youth are at particular risk, as early exposure to stress, violence, toxins, physical inactivity, and malnutrition can have lifelong health and safety impacts. Community violence<sup>1</sup> is just one of many issues, like unfair land use planning, entrenched disproportionately in low-income neighborhoods and in communities of color, with costly negative outcomes. And like many entrenched community issues, violence is also preventable.

### **Community violence**

*is defined as acts of interpersonal violence committed by people who are not related and may or may not know one another. It usually takes place outside the home in public places.*

Just as inequities have been created, there are pathways to achieve safe, violence-free neighborhoods for all. Bringing together the disciplines of land use and violence prevention, professionals in those fields can work together with government, community members, and local business owners to identify and implement policies, invest resources, eliminate public nuisances, and democratically plan for and implement land use decisions that prioritize safety.

### Many sectors make decisions about land use that shape community safety:

- **Architects** can influence the extent and quality of social interactions through their design of buildings and spaces.
- **Businesses** decide where to set up shop, and what goods and services to provide to the neighborhood. They determine upkeep of the storefront or office and the landscaping. They make hiring decisions and influence local governments' business development strategies.
- The **education** sector decides where to site schools and whether community members are allowed access to campus facilities and land during non-school hours.
- **Healthcare** institutions decide where to site hospitals, clinics, and medical waste facilities. Nonprofit health systems invest community benefit dollars that can be used to prevent violence as a means to promote community health and mental health.
- **Housing** authorities decide where to build housing, how it will be designed and landscaped, and whether or not it will be mixed-income, so wealthy people and lower-income families may live as neighbors. Numerous land use and construction decisions are embedded in housing authority.
- **Parks and recreation** determines where to develop parks, what facilities to install, how they will be operated and maintained, and what programs to provide.
- **Planning and zoning** departments make decisions that affect alcohol density, housing density, and the mix of business and residential uses, and they also issue permits to allow specified uses.
- **Property owners** make decisions about the design, maintenance, landscaping and occupancy of buildings and the surrounding land, including whether to abandon a structure or make improvements so it complies with building codes. They also have significant influence on local government decisions related to violence prevention and land use.
- **Public works** maintains public lands and determines whether, where, and how often teams clean up public streets.
- **Transit** authorities decide where to run bus or rail lines, the frequency of service to particular neighborhoods, and the locations, look, and feel of transit stops.

Source: Prevention Institute, *Community Safety by Design*<sup>2</sup>

### The Healthy, Equitable, Active Land Use Network (HEALU Network)

On September 29, 2016, the Healthy, Equitable, Active Land Use Network (HEALU Network), in partnership with the Violence Prevention Coalition of Greater Los Angeles' *Making Connections for Mental Health and Wellbeing* initiative (which is managed by Community Intelligence and funded by the Movember Foundation), convened a summit on the landscape, challenges, and opportunities at the intersection of land use and violence prevention work. This was an exploratory conversation and was the third in a series of summits examining how land use initiatives and policies can promote health and safety in communities that have experienced chronic disinvestment, with a particular focus on Los Angeles; the first summit was on [Healthy Land Use for All: Elevating Innovation in Los Angeles and Beyond](#) and the second was on [Healthy Development without Displacement](#). As the nation's most populous county and one of its most diverse cities, with strong community-based organizations and progressive elected representatives, Los Angeles is a laboratory for learning and innovation on land use as a key lever to achieve health equity.

The HEALU Network was convened by Prevention Institute in 2014. The Network is a multi-disciplinary group that works together to promote policies and practices in Los Angeles' land use system that support health, safety, and social equity. The Network represents broad topical expertise—active transportation, parks and open space, affordable housing, environmental law, public health, and more—and varying approaches, from grassroots organizing to non-profit community development to strategic policy advocacy, across Los Angeles' diverse landscape. We are joined by a shared belief that healthy, equitable land use can be intentionally produced through strategic multi-sector action. Together, we are committed to building a healthier, more equitable land use system in Los Angeles—and developing a model to share with cities and regions across the nation.

### **The Healthy, Equitable, Active Land Use Network (HEALU Network)**

The HEALU Network collaborates to ensure that land use initiatives and policies will benefit communities that have experienced chronic disinvestment, through four key strategies:

- 1) Increasing the percentage of public funds invested in health-promoting infrastructure in low-income communities of color.
- 2) Building capacity in government, private sector, and community-based organizations for robust community engagement in land use planning and policymaking.
- 3) Accelerating land use innovations and demonstration projects in low-income communities of color, and scaling up successful pilot projects to drive policy change.
- 4) Fostering cross-government collaboration to embed health equity in all land use decisions.

At the Land Use and Violence Prevention summit, close to 100 participants came together to better understand the role they could play within their organizations, institutions, and sectors in preventing violence and promoting health equity through land use related decisions and investments. Participants and speakers included community members and representatives of the transportation, parks, city and regional planning, violence prevention, gang reduction, public health, food policy, education, early childhood development, law enforcement, and local government sectors. The summit was held at Los Angeles' Magnolia Place Family Center, itself an example of healthy land use: the center supports child, family, and neighborhood resilience by providing quality daycare and early childhood education, a health clinic, community gathering spaces, a farm stand offering fresh produce, and myriad social services, all under one roof. Magnolia Place also houses Children's Bureau and a major place-based initiative that engages neighboring families and youths in policy and community education efforts to improve local conditions. This location was thoughtfully chosen because Prevention Institute felt it was important to hold this summit in a venue that embodies strategies important to violence prevention: strengthening social connectedness, creating sustainable change, and supporting community mobilization. We thank the Magnolia Place Family Center for opening its doors to us.

## Summit Speakers and Panelists



**The Honorable Marqueece Harris-Dawson, Los Angeles City Councilmember, 8th District**

Marqueece Harris-Dawson was sworn into office as a Los Angeles City Councilmember representing the 8th District (South Los Angeles) in July 2015. A long-time community organizer in South LA, Councilmember Harris-Dawson has deep roots in the community. He previously served as President and CEO of Community Coalition, one of the most progressive non-profit community organizing and policy advocacy organizations in the city, and a model for this approach, nationally. Councilmember Harris-Dawson was born and raised in South Los Angeles, and after graduating from Morehouse College and working in the family real estate business, he joined Community Coalition under then founder and current Congresswoman Karen Bass. He has been a champion of education, community safety, parks and open space, and equitable funding for South LA communities and schools.



**Dr. D'Artagnan Scorza, Founder and Executive Director, Social Justice Learning Institute**

Dr. D'Artagnan Scorza is the Founder and Executive Director of the Social Justice Learning Institute in Inglewood, California. Dr. Scorza is a US Navy Iraq-War Veteran, obtained his Ph.D. in Education from UCLA, served as a University of California (UC) Regent, an Education Pioneers Fellow, and a Business Alliance for Local Living Economies Fellow. He has a BS in Liberal Studies with a concentration in Business Management from National University and a BA in the Study of Religion. Dr. Scorza's expansive research and policy experience extends throughout California having passed policies that established veteran's service centers across UC campuses, prioritized \$160 million for student services, improved sustainability in Inglewood schools, and expanded programs for boys and men of color throughout Los Angeles County.



**Dr. S. Randal Henry, Founder and Chief Intelligence Officer, Community Intelligence**

During his decades of experience in public health and mental health, Dr. S. Randal Henry has gained developed technical and subject matter expertise in multisite program evaluation, qualitative data collection and analysis, community engagement, asset mapping and community needs assessment, health promotion and disease prevention, and strategic planning. Prior to starting Community Intelligence, Dr. Henry served as a Senior Health Scientist/Implementation Research Coordinator for the Veterans Health Administration; a Senior Behavioral Health Scientist for Children's Hospital Los Angeles; an Adjunct Professor at the University of Southern California, School of Policy, Planning, and Development; and an Instructor with the UCLA Health Education Extension program. Dr. Henry earned his Doctor of Public Health in Health Services and Master of Public Health in Community Health Sciences, each at UCLA, and a BA in Political Science at the California State Polytechnic University Pomona. Community Intelligence is a member of and academic partner to the Healthy, Equitable, Active Land Use Network and leads the *Making Connections for Mental Health and Wellbeing* initiative of the Violence Prevention Coalition of Greater Los Angeles.



**Yvette Lopez-Ledesma, Deputy Director, Pacoima Beautiful**

Yvette Lopez-Ledesma is the Deputy Director of Pacoima Beautiful. In this role she works with staff to ensure proper delivery of grant deliverables and also researches funding opportunities. Yvette started with Pacoima Beautiful as a Project Manager under the Community Transformation Grant where she further developed programs such as the

People's Planning School and Complete Streets. She earned her BA in Urban Studies and Planning at CSUN and also earned her Master of Public Administration in the Urban Planning track at CSUN. Yvette currently serves as a commissioner on the Sustainable Burbank Commission and is a member of the RE:Code LA Zoning Advisory Committee. On behalf of Pacoima Beautiful, Yvette serves on the Healthy, Equitable, Active Land Use Network and advises the network on strategic opportunities to integrate health in land use planning and environmental justice issues.



**Jamecca Marshall, Program Manager, Prevention Institute**

Jamecca Marshall, MPP, MA, manages and supports Prevention Institute's California Approach to Prevention portfolio. Jamecca works on policy advocacy, translational research, and program management. A native of Los Angeles, Jamecca is committed to working toward social justice and equity for communities across the nation. She provides subject matter expertise, training, and technical assistance to Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention grantees in injury and trauma prevention, based on her deep understanding of community-based violence prevention, youth resilience, and gang prevention. Jamecca received her BA from Stanford University and her dual Masters of Public Policy and History from George Washington University.



**Rachel Bennett, Associate Program Manager, Prevention Institute**

Rachel Bennett, MPH, MURP, works to promote social justice and health equity with an emphasis on the role of urban and regional planning in public health. Rachel works on research, policy advocacy, trainings, and technical assistance to create healthy cities, promote equitable regional planning, and implement Health in All Policies. She manages the Healthy, Equitable, Active Land Use Network, a multi-sector collaborative working to achieve health equity through land use policies and practices in Los Angeles. Rachel earned dual Masters Degrees in Public Health and Urban/Regional Planning from UCLA and a BA in Psychology from UC Davis.



**Manal J. Aboelata, Managing Director, Prevention Institute**

Manal J. Aboelata, MPH, oversees Prevention Institute's California strategy, a multi-disciplinary program area designed to create a more systematic approach to prevention and health equity throughout California. Manal's work emphasizes policy and community-based approaches to achieve equitable health and safety outcomes, with a particular focus on comprehensive strategies that improve access to healthy foods, prevent injuries, and increase opportunities for safe physical activity. Manal provides senior leadership and strategic direction to Prevention Institute and contributes to the organization's fundraising and development portfolio. Her commitment to collaboration is exemplified by her many years chairing the statewide Strategic Alliance for Healthy Food and Activity Environments, founding of the Joint Use Statewide Taskforce, and, more recently, her work to establish a Healthy, Equitable, Active Land Use Network in Los Angeles. She has authored professional reports and book chapters on health equity, the built environment, and community engagement, and is a certified California Walkability Expert. Manal obtained her BA from UC Berkeley and her Master of Public Health in Epidemiology from UCLA, where she was inducted into the Iota chapter of the Delta Omega honorary society in public health and the public health alumni hall of fame.

## Key Themes and Recommendations from the Summit

### 1. Engage multiple sectors to leverage their decision-making powers and collaborate with one another to help prevent violence.

Every day, people working across a number of sectors make decisions that shape how land is used, by whom, and for what purposes—and these decisions impact community safety. Research has identified specific aspects of the environment that make violence more or less likely to occur, called risk and resilience factors (*see table on next page*). Risk factors are conditions or characteristics of individuals, relationships, communities, and societies that increase the likelihood of violence; resilience factors decrease that likelihood and counteract risk factors.

A range of sectors can help prevent violence *in the work they already do*, by addressing the risk factors for violence and bolstering resilience against violence. Land use decisions, in particular, shape these risk and resilience factors—in some cases directly and in others indirectly. Other sectors, like education, media, law enforcement, public health, and early childhood development, also influence these factors and sometimes do so in ways that intersect with land use plans and planning powers. For instance, a community plan might define guidelines for how much and what kind of advertising and businesses exist in a community, which can influence the visible promotion and availability of alcohol or firearms, key risk factors for violence. This intersection of issues represents opportunities for multi-sector partnerships. As Prevention Institute’s Rachel Bennett said, “We all have a role in preventing violence, in collaboration with one another.” Taking ownership of one’s own role in promoting community safety, and working collaboratively on solutions across sectors, is a major—largely unrealized—opportunity.

#### Exploring Practical Applications:

- How does violence present a barrier to your organization accomplishing its goals?
- How do your sector’s decisions influence the risk factors for violence and the resilience factors against violence?
- *If you primarily work in a land use related sector:* What are some concrete ways you could integrate violence prevention strategies in your organization’s efforts? (e.g., Transportation agencies can collaborate with public works to ensure that transit stops in low-income neighborhoods have safe shelter and lighting.)
- *If you primarily work in a violence prevention related sector:* What are some concrete ways you could integrate land use strategies in your organization’s efforts? (e.g., Sexual and domestic violence prevention could collaborate with parks and rec to organize late-night park activities that promote safety.)



Source: Rise Design Lab





## Risk Factors for and Resilience Factors against Violence

### Risk Factors

- Societal inequities

*Example: Land use decisions have historically separated groups by class and race and created areas of concentrated disadvantage.*

- Neighborhood poverty

*Example: Exclusionary zoning policies contribute to neighborhood poverty by reducing affordable housing options.*

- Diminished economic opportunities and/or high unemployment rates

*Example: Investments in areas affected by violence can stimulate economic development and promote local entrepreneurship.*

- High alcohol outlet density

*Example: Changes in zoning can discourage liquor stores and bars from opening in an area with high alcohol outlet density and encourage other types of businesses in a neighborhood.*

- Poor neighborhood support and lack of cohesion

*Example: Constructing parklets and public seating outside local businesses can encourage positive interactions and a sense of place.*

- Community deterioration

*Example: Investments in public infrastructure can improve the condition of public facilities, sidewalks, and parks, increasing usage and their appeal.*

- Residential segregation

*Example: Land use decisions that support reliable, efficient, and affordable public transit can create greater access to other neighborhoods and people, helping bridge class and racial divisions.*

- Incarceration and re-entry

*Example: Land use decisions can diminish the likelihood of successful re-entry, by prohibiting people with criminal records from living in certain places or spending time in proximity to parks and schools.*

### Resilience Factors

- Employment and economic opportunities

*Example: Zoning regulations determine what types of businesses can open in which locations, and where jobs are located relative to where people live.*

- Community support and connectedness

*Example: Landscaping decisions around community centers can make public spaces feel more welcoming.*

- Strong social networks

*Example: Parks and recreation facilities designed to be family-friendly and to accommodate team or group sports can support social networks.*

- Coordination of resources and services among community agencies

*Example: Land use decisions can facilitate space-sharing or co-locating staff by various agencies.*

- Collective efficacy; willingness to act for the common good

*Example: Public art that affirms a community's cultural heritage and reinforces a shared, positive identity can promote collective action and resident mobilization to address local problems.*

- Community design that promotes safety

*Example: Increasing exposure to nature, for example by 'greening' formerly vacant lots, can reduce stress and violence.*

- Quality schools

*Example: Zoning regulations determine where schools are relative to where families live, and the schools themselves determine whether residents may use fields and classrooms during afterschool hours.*

- Opportunities for artistic and cultural expression and for meaningful participation

*Example: Land use decisions affect whether these opportunities are accessible to all youth, since parks, public spaces, and community centers can look and feel markedly different depending on the maintenance schedule, lighting, design, and the quality and types of recreation programs offered afterschool and on weekends.*

Source: Prevention Institute, *Community Safety by Design*<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Broaden crime prevention efforts by moving toward more comprehensive violence prevention approaches.

Violence is a public health issue. It jeopardizes the health and safety of our population and is a leading cause of injury, disability, and premature death. It produces a significant disparity, disproportionately affecting young people, people of color, and LGBTIQ people, and it increases the risk of other poor health outcomes. There are multiple forms of violence, including but not limited to community/street, family, gang, gender, intimate partner, intergenerational, sexual, school, and structural violence. Recognizing that the issue of violence is multifaceted and far-reaching, violence prevention practitioners have increasingly turned toward broader, more comprehensive approaches that go beyond punitive crime prevention and law enforcement strategies.

### The Three Keys to Preventing Violence

The Three Keys to Preventing Violence is a framework that incorporates public health, law enforcement, social service, and education perspectives.

- **Key 1: Violence is complex and requires a comprehensive approach.** The determinants of violence are multiple, complex, and often interrelated. A successful strategy must include the participation of a broad group of individuals and a range of activities that link with, build upon, and add value to each other.
- **Key 2: Risk and resilience factors must be addressed.** Successful violence prevention requires strengthening of the factors that protect and support individuals, families, and communities, as well as the reduction of factors that threaten their well-being.
- **Key 3: Preventing violence requires an integrated strategy for action.** Successful efforts to prevent violence integrate an understanding of the complex issues, policies, and systems that affect individuals, families, and communities into an action plan that strategically coordinates multiple efforts.

Source: Prevention Institute, *Preventing Violence: A Primer*<sup>4</sup>

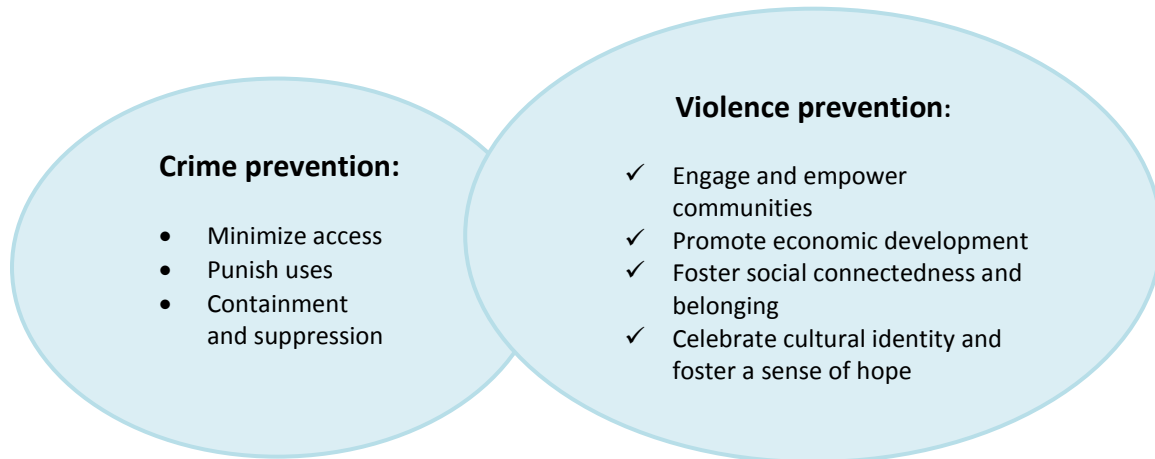
Although violence and crime are related, there are important distinctions between the two. Violence is the intentional use of physical force or power—threatened or actual—that is likely to result in interpersonal harm; whereas crime is a legal construct, defined as forbidden actions deemed punishable by the state.<sup>5</sup> Because many forms of violence are not actually deemed crimes in our society, focusing on crime instead of violence prevention provides an incomplete picture of community needs and experiences.



Source: Rise Design Lab

As Councilmember Marqueece Harris-Dawson reminded us, though much violence (such as state-sanctioned violence) is never reported as crime, it causes significant harm and has lasting, traumatic effects. Trauma can occur not just by being the victim and/or perpetrator of a violent act, but also by living in a community where one witnesses (or lives in fear of) violence at a young age or on a regular basis. Community trauma extends beyond any one person or isolated incident of violence; and it has been perpetuated, in part, by enforcement of inequitable land use decisions throughout history—such as Jim Crow, redlining, and border policing. It is time to reverse these inequities.

Since land use laws can help define the terrain for enforcement and criminalization, increasing health-promoting land use policies can be a direct way to decrease crime and prevent violence and trauma. Currently, non-violent crimes (e.g., trespassing and transit fare evasion) make up the majority of reported criminal offenses<sup>6</sup> and hinder people's (especially low income people and people of color's) access to necessary resources like living wages, safe housing, quality healthcare, and stable family relationships, by overbroad or unfair policing and adjudication practices. Focusing on a crime prevention approach inequitably impacts Black, Latino/a, and Native American livelihoods<sup>7,8,9</sup> and often exacerbates violence and trauma experienced by historically underfunded communities.



If land use sectors were to transform policies and practices that exclude access to spaces and movement (e.g., park curfews or increased transit fares) into opportunities for healthier and safer living (e.g., shared use agreements for schools and parks or affordable transit passes for youth and low-income residents), they could help prevent violence and increase opportunities for physical activity, social cohesion, and employment, among others. Maximizing access to and use of the land that communities have is a key opportunity to promote health and safety. As sectors working to better our society, we must engage each other and uplift community voices to collectively shift our focus and funding away from depending on criminalization and incarceration, and towards developing a comprehensive approach that addresses the root causes of violence, heals trauma, supports community cohesion and resilience, and proactively shapes opportunities for equity and health.

**Exploring Practical Applications:**

- Is this strategy getting at the root causes of violence, or just preventing/suppressing crime?
- How can you incorporate broader notions of “evidence” such as experiential evidence?
- How can you evaluate the effects of land use strategies on community safety and health?
- How could the Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) approach be broadened to include violence prevention?

### 3. Acknowledge the impact of violence and trauma on individuals and communities, and include community residents (particularly youth and people who have experienced or perpetrated violence), in land use planning and decision-making.

Land use decisions—including who gets to access or control land and for what purposes—have sparked conflict and led to violence and trauma throughout history. Historical policies, practices, and decisions around land use have resulted in residential segregation by race, culture, and income, and created areas of concentrated disadvantage where conditions increase the likelihood of violence. Informed by both lived experience and professional practice, Dr. Randal Henry of Community Intelligence articulated that overexposure to trauma and violence complicates development for boys and men of color across the U.S., who, among other things, are more likely than their White counterparts to have an incarcerated parent, experience post-traumatic stress disorder, and live in historically underfunded and unhealthy environments.<sup>10</sup> Dr. Henry also reminded us that to “heal” from such traumatic exposures is a verb—one that often involves reclaiming one’s space.



Source: Rise Design Lab

Yvette Lopez-Ledesma of Pacoima Beautiful stressed the importance of understanding the history of the land as a first step towards healing and developing meaningful violence prevention initiatives. Lopez-Ledesma highlighted that Pacoima was originally Native land and has suffered from being colonized, redlined, and industrialized over time. These land conflicts have inflicted intergenerational trauma on the residents of Pacoima and led to present-day challenges, such as an overconcentration of renters versus homeowners, community distrust of new land use policies, and turf wars among street gangs.

Recognizing this, Lopez-Ledesma spoke passionately about the importance of humanizing people and not alienating anyone from a seat at the table. “Gang members are part of our community,” she said. “You can’t pick and choose the members at your table. We embrace and accept everyone because our communities carry trauma.”

“Youth are often forced to join gangs under threat, under duress, and for protection. There’s a whole culture that goes along with it. Gang is not synonymous with violence. And if you don’t have everyone at the table when the community comes together to do planning, you’ll end up making decisions that leave people out.”

—Jamecca Marshall,  
Prevention Institute

Dr. D’Artagnan Scorza of Social Justice Learning Institute (SJLI), added that “not only is it important to humanize folks, because these are our family members and friends in the community, but also to provide the resources and the space to heal and rethink the way we see the world.” Having the space to heal internally from trauma is a necessary component to building community leaders and sustaining healthy societies. For some, healing can happen when they leave their homes and are able to navigate down the street safely, breathe clean air, drink fresh water, or see their cultures reflected and respected in their surroundings. For others, healing may occur by planting a community garden.

Dr. Scorza shared that in his work at SJLI in Inglewood, youth identified the physical quality of their schools and the surrounding neighborhood as important places in which to invest. Through the wisdom of their lived experiences, they identified an empty lot across the street from their school as a place with significant gang activity that could, through land use changes, be used to promote health and community ownership instead. When they took their issues to the City, however, they discovered that the land wasn't zoned for gardens. This led them to work with local residents, city officials, and community based organizations to advocate for a change in zoning. Together, their unique perspectives and tireless organizing catalyzed the entire community to unify in an effort to build 100 gardens throughout Inglewood. As one student shared about his relationship to the transformed space, "When I come out here and I stick my hands in the land, I feel whole. Like I'm able to put my anger into the soil and have the Earth take it from me."

People working in violence prevention and/or living in areas with concentrated violence know that those who engage in violent behavior have often grown up as victims of violence themselves. When it comes to gang participation, youth often join gangs seeking protection and community, because they feel unsafe in and disconnected from their physical or social environment. As Jamecca Marshall of Prevention Institute and a native Angeleno wisely noted, "Youth are often forced to join gangs under threat, under duress, and for protection. There's a whole culture that goes along with it. Gang is not synonymous with violence. And if you don't have everyone at the table when the community comes together to do planning, you'll end up making decisions that leave people out."



Source: Rise Design Lab

Community engagement that embraces the whole community, including those who are most stigmatized, *is* a violence prevention strategy. The land use sector can play a role in shaping environments where *all* members of the community feel welcome, as well as partnering with violence prevention and gang intervention initiatives to understand the needs and fears of the community. As Lopez-Ledesma said, "It all just starts with a conversation." We can all engage in those conversations.

### Exploring Practical Applications:

- What existing relationships do you have with populations experiencing violence and other health inequities?
- How does your organization show that it values and recognizes the expertise of community members?
- In addition to the people "at the table," who are the most marginalized members of your community whose voices are missing from the process?
- Do any strained relationships exist in the community? Why do they exist?
- Are you using techniques that build community capacity and leadership? If not, what techniques could you pursue?

#### 4. Develop multi-sector strategies to promote healthy community environments in ways that prevent displacement, rooted in an understanding of the historical and present day impacts of displacement on community safety and health.

The built environment has an impact on people's real and perceived ownership of their own communities. Without protections in place (for land/property owners and renters), well-intentioned, health-promoting land use investments can catalyze gentrification and lead to displacement, compromising the health of the very people who have perpetually been denied such resources. Prevention Institute's Manal J. Aboelata commented that, too often when new development comes into a historically under resourced area, the long-term residents are not central to the planning process and instead are developed on top of, becoming marginalized in spaces that were their homes first. Dr. Scorza underlined that, for those reasons, community-based planning and robust community engagement must be priorities.

Long-term residents of communities carry the cultural knowledge and personal investment to develop plans that take care of their past, present, and future generations. Yet, when development plans are not led by the community, and/or are implemented without their priorities at the fore, they can lead to displacement and social loss of long-term residents. The displacement of low-income communities of color has shown to have devastating impacts on health, safety, and wellbeing—in the form of increased levels of violence in communities, family disintegration, substance abuse, sexually transmitted diseases and high levels of stress.<sup>11</sup> The social loss experienced by residents of rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods exacerbates the effects of trauma and affects the mental health and wellbeing of communities.

The solution is *not* to avoid investing in underfunded communities out of fear of sparking gentrification, but rather to do so with proactive protections in place so that the intended beneficiaries—existing residents and low-income people whose access to health-promoting infrastructure and resources has been limited over time—do, in fact, benefit. Since community plans guide development in each city, it is crucial to have a community-led design and planning process, and to have developers, financial institutions, and local government agencies accountable for and committed to implementation of those community-developed plans. Another strategy is to create ownership incentives and pathways so that people can transition from being renters to owners as a neighborhood transitions to more economically desirable conditions. A third strategy is to link residents to long term job training and career pathways with academic, medical, or other institutions—like airports or transit systems—that frequently expand into communities and also serve as major employers. Land use decisions like these can play an important role in addressing the root causes of violence and in building safety, health, and prosperity.

##### **Exploring Practical Applications:**

- Do you know about the history of land use in your community? If not, who could you talk with to learn more?
- What would existing community residents like to see in their neighborhood? What are they concerned about?
- What protections are in place to ensure that new land use investments benefit existing residents? Are existing residents informed about and in agreement with the protections?
- How could you (better) partner with affordable housing organizations and existing anti-displacement coalitions?

## 5. Invest in public art and cultural expression, and embed the arts into land use planning processes and infrastructure investments, as ways to contribute to community safety and prevent violence.

Art plays a key role in reflecting community culture, reinforcing ethnic traditions, and impacting the look, feel, and safety of a neighborhood. It serves as a powerful tool in promoting hope, happiness, empowerment, self-awareness, healing, and connection to historical experiences and ancestral practices. Celebrating diversity of culture and tradition through art is a beautiful way to encourage resilience factors such as social connectedness and intercultural respect. Encouraging arts and cultural expression can be a powerful and effective way to foster a positive sense of belonging and worth and, in turn, prevent violence in a community.



Source: Philadelphia Murals Arts Project

However, when artists who are not rooted in a community begin to exploit and misinterpret the community culture through work that isn't reflective of the traditions and demographics of long-term residents, art's influential power can also accelerate risk factors—like the loss of cultural cohesion. This can attract affluent groups from better-resourced communities to relocate into low-income spaces and cause local goods and housing to become more expensive and less accessible. What outsiders may consider to be positive contributions to historically underfunded communities can have negative consequences, like increased rates of gentrification, displacement, and social loss—including a feeling that these changes aren't “by us” or “for us” among current residents. This can perpetuate historical violence and trauma and, consequently, fray critical community threads.

It is important to use participatory models that engage members of the community—including violence prevention organizations—and not only showcase but invest in the local community's cultural, artistic, and linguistic traditions. Land use related agencies and organizations can partner with schools, cultural organizations, and youth programs to create opportunities for youth engagement in decisions that cultivate their creativity and leadership. Most importantly, they can help organize efforts that encourage living expressions of culture such as street festivals with traditional music, dance, and food, or mural arts depicting significant social, political, and cultural imagery. Meaningful community art strengthens resilience factors that reduce the presence of violence and trauma by stimulating community connectedness and trust, promoting education and political activism, boosting the local economy and civic pride, honoring ancestral rituals, and improving mental health and wellbeing. Throughout the nation, we've seen examples of local government leaders engaging victims and perpetrators of violence, including former gang members, and sometimes employing them as artists and artists in residence to create public art.

### Exploring Practical Applications:

- How can land use investments and public works projects showcase and invest in the local community's cultural, artistic, and linguistic traditions?
- When decisions about land use policies and investments are being made, who is at the decision-making table? Who isn't?
- How can land use decisions better connect people to opportunities for learning, arts, and cultural and political expression?

## Together, We Can Build Health and Safety

Land use decisions have transformative effects on the safety and health of communities; they can either perpetuate historical inequities or uplift resources, institutions, and opportunities that help foster civic participation, community connectedness, and neighborhood empowerment. A comprehensive violence prevention approach brings multiple sectors and residents together to make land use decisions that honor all community voices and priorities, factor in context and history, make space for healing, promote local ownership of communities, and strengthen cultural and artistic traditions. Our work thus far highlights that there are many exciting and untapped opportunities for effective future collaboration to leverage land use planning and implementation to create safer, violence-free communities—and it reminds us that there is a role for all of us in this work. Violence is preventable, and there is an incredible opportunity and need for people working in land use planning and related fields (e.g., transportation, parks and recreation, housing, banking, and finance) to embrace a shared responsibility for community safety. Together, we can be successful. Together, we can prevent violence.

*A comprehensive violence prevention approach brings multiple sectors and residents together to make land use decisions that honor all community voices and priorities, factor in context and history, make space for healing, promote local ownership of communities, and strengthen cultural and artistic traditions.*

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