1.0 Orientation

1.1 Community Intent
1.2 The Specific Plan Area
1.3 The Planning Process
1.4 Document Organization
1.5 Administration of the Specific Plan

This Chapter summarizes the community intent implemented by the Whittier Boulevard Specific Plan. It describes the geographic location of the plan area, the process used to develop the plan, and the primary components of the Plan.

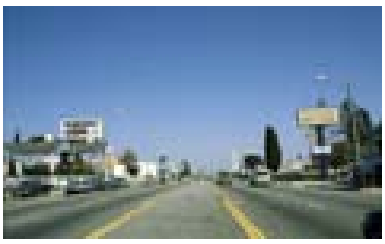
1.1 Community Intent

Whittier Boulevard is the most visible piece of the City of Whittier. It serves as the main commercial thoroughfare for the City, and functions as the primary distributor within the City's transportation network. It provides the major entrances to Whittier, and is the City's major access route to the I-605 Freeway. It houses a collection of unfocused, disparate uses, lined with auto-oriented retail, convenience and big-box uses, and containing some sporadic office and industrial uses. For the most part, it features the City's most undesirable or unattractive uses, whereas the best parts of Whittier – its tightly woven neighborhoods, beautiful homes, lush vegetation and natural landscape – lie hidden behind it. While it is the "front door" to the City and its neighborhoods, the Boulevard does not present a strong impression of the community that Whittier's residents know and love.

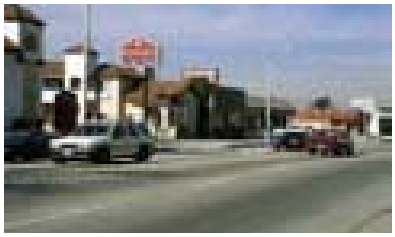
The Specific Plan was created with the stated intent to put the best of Whittier on display on Whittier Boulevard. This Specific Plan is intended as both a strategy for change along the Boulevard, and as a regulatory policy to guide and govern future development along Whittier Boulevard. It serves to publicly state the City's goals, objectives and expectations for the future of the Corridor, and to instigate the transformation of the character of the various parts of the Corridor along its length through the City. This Plan details the proposed land uses and their distribution, proposed infrastructure improvements, development standards, and implementation measures required to achieve its goals.

a. *The Decline of the Commercial Strip*

Beginning in the postwar 1940's, new businesses began to sprout up along Whittier Boulevard rather than locating in the City's commercial core downtown. Since that time, the Boulevard has developed like most suburban strips throughout the country, and the result is a single seven-mile stretch of scattered retail and services. Whittier Boulevard is characterized by "strip development", a structure which has dominated commercial development for the last 40 years in small- and medium-sized American cities. These strips began to capitalize on the power of the automobile, and thrived under the car culture of the second half of the century. The stores along them were built to provide for the needs and desires of people driving by private automobile, and announced themselves through loud signage, easy access and plentiful surface parking. They were structured to benefit from the economies of scale, and a society embracing mass production. Most were built in a one-size-fits-all fashion, irrespective of the communities they lie within. Today, most commercial strips are indistinguishable from one city to the next: exclusively commercial development for miles, goods and services in mass-produced buildings, all organized similarly along an arterial roadway designed in accordance with the same traffic engineering manuals.



Whittier Boulevard, the main commercial thoroughfare



Commercial development on Whittier Boulevard

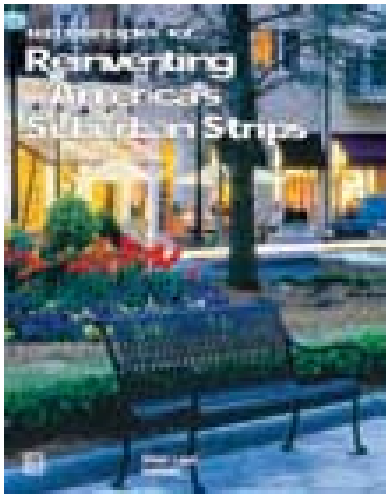
Now, however, the same factors that brought about the development of the commercial strip are bringing about its demise. The quest for increasing economies of scale has combined with the construction of grade-separated freeways has instigated the concentration of retail power at freeway interchanges and major intersections, leaving the older linear forms of strip development behind. And in addition to facing economic difficulties, strip development has lost the support of consumers as well. Community members are frequently disenchanted with the older strips, preferring other retail types. The convenience they offer is offset by the fact that they are not physically integrated with the communities they serve. The visibility they present to potential customers is overridden by monotonous repetition. The selection and prices that drew customers now competes with anchor stores at more powerful locations. New forms of retailing, such as the Internet, can offer more convenience, greater efficiency and a larger selection.

As retailers continue to find new ways to draw customers - with power anchors on a grand scale, with pedestrian amenities and architectural charm - commercial activity along the commercial

strip is stagnating. In today's overbuilt retail market, these convenience centers on suburban strips are performing poorly. The decline of the commercial strip has been recognized as a major phenomenon facing American cities today, by urban research groups such as the Urban Land Institute and the Congress for the New Urbanism. But communities across the country have yet to respond to this change. While cities are expanding their retail zoning around freeway intersections, they often also leave the existing commercial zoning along the strips in place, greatly exacerbating the oversupply of commercially zoned property.

Strip commercial buildings on Whittier Boulevard

The decline of the commercial strip as a viable way to organize commercial development in a small city, presents an opportunity to rethink the roles of these corridors. The failings of their current retail-only structures can provide cities with an opening to serve the needs of communities for better public spaces, more housing, and more open areas. They can be reworked to contain development that is more reflective, in both type and character, of the communities they serve. The uses along strips can be shifted over time to meet a broader range of the City's needs, including spaces where people can not only shop, but also live and work. They can be transformed from monotonous, single-use strips to diverse corridors serving multiple uses, as wide-ranging as the cities they fall within.

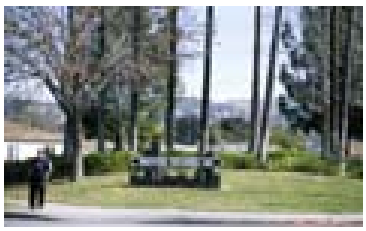


Research on Commercial Strips

As a prototypical commercial strip failing under all kinds of pressures - too much retail, obsolete store types, lack of character – Whittier Boulevard presents the City with an opportunity to establish its central spine as a proper "front door" to the community. The primary intent of the Whittier Boulevard Specific Plan is to break the monotonous length of the Corridor into a varied journey through distinct segments, by limiting the Boulevard's retail to two well-defined shopping clusters, locating the Boulevard's jobs and workplaces in a single district, and directing infill of other Corridor segments towards uses such as housing. This strategy is supported by outside research on the phenomenon, such as ULI's "Ten Principles for Reinventing America's Suburban Strips" which advocates that cities focus various uses into clustered points along the roadways. Overall, the Whittier Boulevard Specific Plan is directed toward the rebirth of the Whittier Boulevard as a series of focused segments, each designed to be a valuable "piece of the City", that work together to create a Corridor that is reflective and respectful of the community it serves.

b. *A New Vision for the Corridor*

As one exits off the I-605 Freeway to Whittier, entering the westernmost point of the Whittier Boulevard study area, a grand gateway treatment announces one's entrance to the City. Low and medium-rise offices and services line the street's edge, interspersed with community and civic uses. Together with the existing residential neighborhoods, the overall impression is of a compatible neighborhood fabric where people move easily among the different activities. A continuous streetscape of trees along a green median carries the traveler down the Boulevard towards the "Heart of the City".



Park at Whittier's western entrance

Approaching the area east of and including the City's Five Points intersection, one enters an impressive job center. This job center begins the most public part of the Boulevard- the "Heart of the City", where travelers from all parts of the City and the region come together. A broad green space along the Boulevard acts as an inviting "front door" for the District, announcing the quality of the job center that lies within. Three- and four-story buildings designed in the City's Mediterranean and Art Deco traditions house new jobs for the City's residents, providing headquarter office space, medical support services, educational anchors and other opportunities. Employees arrive at the District by car or transit, and carry out all of their activities within the District throughout the day. They walk to get supplies or copies at the nearby district center, stroll to pick up lunch at a local deli, and eat in the plaza that the shops and services enclose.

Open space to enliven new districts

Continuing along the Boulevard through the "Heart of the City", one encounters the Corridor's retail core, where new stores and activity add life to the shopping areas east of Five Points. This revitalized "Shopping Cluster" is pleasant and convenient- frequent bus service allows residents to get there without hassles, and plentiful parking areas are centrally located so that shoppers can park their car once and walk from store to store to accomplish all of their errands. Wide sidewalks make strolling along the street pleasant, and pocket spaces throughout the segment offer places for them to rest, gather, or take a break from their activities. People live and work in the upper stories above the stores, so there is always activity along the sidewalk. A series of signature buildings, housing some of the most visited establishments in the segment, front onto a major public space. This green plaza, visible from the Boulevard but protected from traffic, offers a central gathering space for people living, working, and visiting the segment, a place where

they can rest on a bench and chat with friends, enjoy a break in the shade, or wait comfortably for a bus.

Further down the Corridor, one comes face-to-face with the community character of the City of Whittier, driving alongside grand residential buildings that bring Whittier's lovely neighborhoods right up to the Boulevard's edge. Beautiful native landscaping buffers the residents' front yards from the traffic of the Boulevard. Neighbors stroll down tree-lined streets, walking to visit friends, to get something to eat at a local restaurant, or to pick up some necessities at the neighborhood stores. Overall, one's trip down the boulevard is not a drive through a typical strip corridor anywhere in California, but a journey through the City itself- through its destinations and community places, through its character and beauty, and through the best part of Whittier, its neighborhoods. Whittier Boulevard now represents the best of Whittier - the Boulevard and its uses are integrated with the City and with its community, truly a part of the City of Whittier.

1.2 *The Specific Plan Area*

Residential development along a "grand boulevard"

The contents of the Whittier Boulevard Specific Plan apply to all of the properties fronting Whittier Boulevard from Broadway Avenue to Valley Home Road; see Illustration 1: Plan Area Boundaries. In the interest of creating a cohesive development pattern for each segment of the Corridor, some properties adjacent to Whittier Boulevard have been brought into the study area as well (see Illustration 25:Corridor Plan Areas map in Chapter 4) for more precise boundaries of each plan area.

This Specific Plan was developed to expand upon the recommendations contained within the City's General Plan, and is consistent with the policies and goals set forth in that document. This Specific Plan is intended as both a policy and an implementation document, in that it will govern and determine the character and orientation of future development on Whittier Boulevard. It will serve to clarify the City's goals, objectives and expectations for the future of the study area, and as such, it will be used to direct zoning, subdivision, and public works decisions. This Plan details the proposed land uses and their distribution, development standards and design guidelines for new development, proposed infrastructure improvements, and implementation measures required to achieve its goals.

1.3 *The Planning Process*

The planning process was organized around a series of community workshops, within which the plan objectives and concepts were developed. All community workshops were publicly noticed and open to anyone interested in participating. At the first community workshop, held in September 2000, the community of Whittier began the process of developing a vision for Whittier Boulevard, re-examining the role it plays in the City. An introductory seminar began the discussion of what the Corridor could become, what types of development should occur, and how the City could improve its major arterial street.

The Shopping Cluster

A second workshop was held in June of 2001, where introductory ideas for the Boulevard's transformation began to be explored. The workshop focused on identifying the opportunities and constraints contained within the Boulevard, and on redefining the community's intent for its central spine.

The third workshop was held during October 2001. It was at this workshop that the strategy for the Boulevard's revitalization was solidified. In addition, capital improvement concepts targeted at attracting the types of investment implied in the preferred Revitalization Strategy were discussed for each of the segments along Whittier Boulevard.

The fourth public workshop took place in December 2001. This workshop focused on the design of buildings throughout the Corridor's various segments. Building categories, architectural prototypes, and design guidelines were presented, and questions such as what new retail should look like, how older retail can be improved, how housing can replace retail along the Boulevard, and what types of housing are appropriate, were discussed with workshop participants.

Comments from the community workshops

At all of the public workshops, community opinion was solicited through question-and-answer sessions, comment periods, and through workshop activities. At one workshop, participants gathered at roundtable sessions on topics such as the retail cluster or segment containing the City's auto dealerships; and at another, the community was given a set of green and red stickers, and asked to post green stickers on aspects of the plan or graphics that they liked, and red ones on those that they did not. The community continued to give input over the course of the project in the form of phone calls, letters and emails. Information gathered from the community was complemented by conversations with City staff and by stakeholder group discussions with the automobile dealership owners located in the City. The detailed recommendations developed in response to the community workshops and focus group discussion were brought forward for the review of the

City Council and the Planning Commission, at a joint study meeting in January 2002, and again at a second study session in December 2002.

The workshops served as the basic generators of the primary plan objectives, and provided a forum for review of alternate means to achieve these objectives. It was the energy and input of community members - from business owners to individual homeowners to special interest groups and service clubs - that identified the problems that the plan had to address, and helped to determine the solutions. The culmination of community efforts was the development of a strategy to transform the aggregate appearance, identity, and economic performance of the Corridor.

The specifics of this strategy, and the policies that will guide its realization, are detailed in this document. Land Use Policies were prepared by "working backwards" from workshop principles and concept plans to provide implementation tools. Development Standards were prepared to give cohesion to pieces of the Corridor, creating distinct segments along its length. Design Guidelines were prepared to guide the development of building, street and landscape types within these segments. Several streetscape concepts, including public infrastructure and landscape improvements, were designed for each segment of the Boulevard. Two master plan concepts, for a "Job Center" at the Five Points Intersection, and a "Shopping Cluster" between Greenleaf and Painter Avenues, were developed to illustrate how development might best unfold in these areas. All of the Plan elements- the Revitalization Strategy, the Land Use and Development Policies, the Design Guidelines and the Capital Improvements- are targeted to implement the community's intention as voiced in the community workshops and stakeholder meetings, and re-clarified in the Council Study Sessions

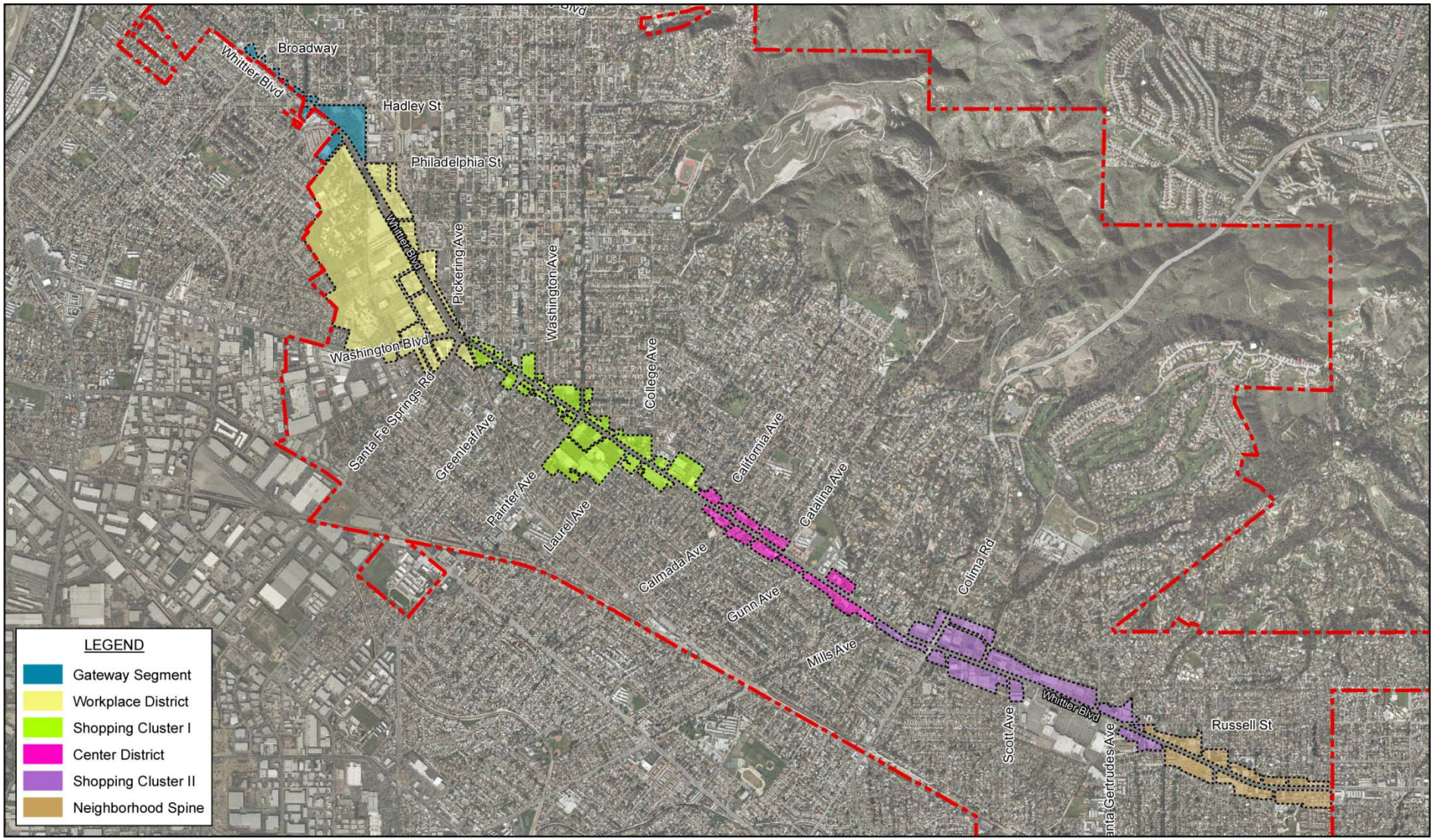


Illustration 1: Plan Area Boundaries

1.4 Document Organization

A "snapshot" of current conditions on the Boulevard

An example of Whittier's strong building traditions

The organization of the Specific Plan reflects the general organization of the planning process, which began with a broad vision for the corridor and a "laundry list" of problems requiring attention, and evolved toward a focused Revitalization Strategy, and a detailed set of policies, plans, and designs for the separate segments. The urban design concept for each segment is a direct result of the vision developed by the community for the overall planning area. This concept results in the formation of Land Use Policy, Development Guidelines, and Design Guidelines that direct the development that will occur within each plan area. The functional requirements of the proposed vision are addressed through Capital Improvement Recommendations. The recommendations culminate in the formulation of an Implementation Plan for the City, which details a step-by-step list of actions necessary to implement the vision for Whittier Boulevard. The Revitalization Plan contains the following elements:

a. Existing Conditions

This Chapter provides a "snapshot" of the condition of the corridor at the time of plan formation, reviewing the past and present conditions of the City and the Boulevard, in order to analyze the forces currently shaping the Corridor and the land around it. Elements that have contributed to the City's current pattern of development and change include land use, zoning policies, circulation patterns, economic conditions and architectural character.

b. Revitalization Strategy

The Revitalization Strategy establishes a coordinated direction for all Plan elements, guiding all policies, principles, plans, and designs so that they serve to achieve specific community objectives for the Corridor.

c. Land Use and Development Policies

This Chapter contains the regulatory portion of the Specific Plan, providing a framework to guide public and private actions in the study area. These policies direct new investment at any scale, to insure that Specific Plan goals are implemented. They govern both site development and building architecture, covering all of the permitted development types in the Plan Areas. Proposals for new construction and use changes will be required to adhere to the Development Standards contained within.

d. *Design Guidelines*

This Chapter provides guidance on a wide variety of design and aesthetic components that contribute to achieving the overall vision of the Specific Plan. These guidelines provide direction for new development as well as redevelopment, remodeling and rehabilitation of existing buildings. The Design Guidelines encourage creativity and innovative design while working to ensure development with consistent and cohesive imagery that contributes to a corridor with a strong sense of place.

e. *Utility Element*

This element describes the storm drainage, water and sanitary sewer systems needed to support the implementation of the Whittier Boulevard Specific Plan. It also includes policies and standards for improvements and mitigating impacts to these systems.

Capital Improvement recommendations

f. *Capital Improvement Recommendations*

The Capital Improvements concepts detailed in this Chapter are designed to stimulate development along Whittier Boulevard. Key Projects, Streetscape Improvements and Utility Requirements all become contributing factors to the Implementation Plan.

g. *Financing Plan*

The Financing Plan in Chapter VII generally identifies methods of financing available to the City of Whittier and the Whittier Redevelopment Agency for funding improvements to both public and private land detailed in the Whittier Boulevard Specific Plan. Particular emphasis is placed on the public infrastructure improvements.

h. *Appendices*

Included as appendices to this plan are: Appendix A: Glossary Appendix B: Community Workshop Agendas and Community Input Appendix C: Economic Market Analysis (that supplied the market basis for the Specific Plan, prepared by Keyser Marston Associates) and Appendix D: Caltrans Director's Policy for Context Sensitive Solutions

1.5 *Administration of the Specific Plan*

The Whittier Boulevard Specific Plan is established to coordinate public and private investment along the city's primary corridor to fulfill the community's intention for the corridor as espoused in the City's General Plan.

Under the legal authorization set by Article 8 of the State of California Government Code (Section 65450-65457), this Downtown Specific Plan establishes the primary means of regulating and directing land use and development within the Specific Plan Study Area. At the time of plan adoption, properties included in the Specific Plan area are contiguous with the Whittier Boulevard thoroughfare which is owned and under the regulatory control of the State of California. In the instance of any conflict between the policies in this Plan and those of the State of California, the regulations of the State of California shall take precedence.

Specific Plan Amendments: A Text and/or Specific Plan map amendment shall require Planning Commission review and City Council approval and shall be initiated in one of the following manners:

a) A resolution of intention by the Planning Commission.

b) A resolution of intention of the City Council directing the Planning Commission to initiate an amendment.

c) An application from a property owner. Any amendment shall be accompanied by a Specific Plan Amendment fee.

Before recommending the Specific Plan or amendment to the City Council, the Planning Commission shall hold at least one public hearing, with appropriate notice of the time and place. Prior to adoption of any such plan or amendment thereto, the City Council shall hold at least one public hearing, with appropriate notice of time and place.

Zone Boundaries: Where uncertainties exist, the Director of Community Development shall, by written decision, determine the location of the zone boundary.

City of Whittier Municipal Code: Should any development issue or topic not specifically addressed within this Specific Plan be identified, the City of Whittier Municipal Code shall apply.

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