Determining Appropriate Growth: Slowing the Process of Gentrification with L.A. Department of City Planning Zoning Tools

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Executive Summary

This report demonstrates that the Los Angeles Department of City Planning (LADCP) has tools to slow the process of gentrification and displacement, and promote appropriate growth. I conducted this research after working on multiple projects documenting the effects of displacement within Los Angeles and determined that the Planning Department could play a pivotal role in preventing the harmful effects of gentrification. To better situate a discussion of the planning tools available to the LADCP, I provide a scholarly account of gentrification, displacement, local and equitable development, and zoning in Los Angeles.

In order to evaluate the Planning Department’s role as a vehicle for equitable, organic, and appropriate growth, I interviewed 6 community planners as well as leaders of community organizations and officials from other city agencies. Through my interviews, I determined that the tools did, in fact, have potential to promote appropriate growth, but various elements and specifications within the tools inhibited their best implementation. The planners I interviewed were optimistic regarding the future of the tools, specifying that there is room for improvement.

These findings provide a resource for planners and community organizations by establishing and facilitating an extended discussion of the planner’s role in slowing gentrification and inappropriate growth.

Through this research I have compiled a list of recommendations for both planners and community groups:
• The planning department must conduct new research determining the unintended consequences and turning them into intended consequences.
• Planners must use the toolkit approach intelligently.
• Planners must reach out to constituents and community organizations.
• Communities and planners must work together to carefully craft CPIO’s, Strategic Plans, and Q-conditions. Planners must work more closely with other city agencies.
• Find a way to implement a mixed-income housing ordinance in Los Angeles
• Help negotiate Community Benefit Agreements between communities and developers.
I. Introduction

This research aims to situate the specific planning tools available to the Los Angeles Department of City Planning (LADCP) within the larger context of gentrification and displacement. Traditionally, city planners have not explicitly addressed planning tools through the lens of the negative effects of gentrification, but this research documents their opinions, experience, and perspectives on the subject. Previous to this research, planner’s perspectives had not been documented in any city, increasing the relevance and importance of this study’s findings. Both sides of the contentious debate may find this information valuable in determining the next steps to slowing the process of gentrification and displacement by promoting livable, affordable, and economically sustainable communities throughout the city. These findings provide a resource for planners by establishing and facilitating an extended discussion of the planner’s role in slowing gentrification and inappropriate growth. Community groups can also use the findings to prepare strategies for anti-displacement and gentrification campaigns. In this report I frame the current political, demographic, social, and economic dynamics in Los Angeles within the discussion of gentrification and displacement. I then thoroughly define the multi-faceted relationship between gentrification, displacement, economic development and zoning. This discussion leads into my primary research, where I delve into the interviews I conducted within the LADCP. From my findings, I distill recommendations that apply to the work of active community organizations and city planners in L.A.
II. Project Development

The roots of this project grew from an internship I had with Strategic Actions for Just Economy (SAJE) in the fall of 2008. I was working on a burgeoning campaign designed to open up the world of urban planning—land use jargon and zoning ordinances—to the local community in South L.A. The project aimed to help residents understand how urban planning effects their community negatively: why auto-related uses are next to schools, a liquor store on every corner, no parks, and few to no crosswalks. Most importantly, the campaign taught community members about the threat of displacement generated by impending gentrification. The economic investment in the Figueroa Corridor, extending from Downtown Los Angeles and the expansion of the University of Southern California posed a major threat to the non-student, majority renter population and SAJE was there to organize the neighborhood to protest the changes they were witnessing and preserve the existing community in South L.A.

While actively protesting gentrification in South L.A., the community understood the value of improving their neighborhood in order to eradicate the incompatible zoning, the nuisance land-uses, and create local services to build a thriving, healthy, and sustainable community. Unfortunately, as a consequence, improving the neighborhood also increases land values, invites speculation, and beckons development—all tell tale signs of gentrification and displacement. Through this research I define the tools that improve and preserve existing communities.
Urban renewal

Gentrification and displacement in Los Angeles are decidedly embedded in its history of urban renewal. Early housing trends delineate an exodus from the city during one of the greatest population booms since the mid 19th century. Post-World War II, the Federal Government promoted housing for returning veterans, giving them no-interest loans for cheap suburban housing. Other Angelenos fled the inner cities, flooded by African American workers from the South. Racist sentiments and coding policies drove white homeowners to the suburbs, relying on exclusionary housing, restrictive deed covenants, redlining and the power of Homeowner’s associations to keep lower classes and minorities out.1 Shortly after WWII, once vibrant factories located downtown with largely unionized African American workforces closed. Deindustrialization created a state of urban poverty and the separation of the upper and middle classes in the suburbs from lower income and jobless minority groups in the inner city.

The conditions leading up to urban renewal solutions are manifold. Los Angeles followed national trends as it began reinvesting in urban renewal programs. Blighted areas were bulldozed to make way for reinvestment in the form of Dodger Stadium, the financial district, and the Coliseum. Although these investments still bring revenue to the city today they were once vibrant immigrant communities in Chavez Ravine, elderly immigrant tenement residents in Bunker Hill, and jobless ex-engineers in South L.A and these communities are now completely destroyed; blight is a subjective word.

While communities in other cities, such as New York, were fighting this unfair displacement and documenting the injustices Angelenos’ plight went relatively unnoticed

1 Mike Davis, City of Quartz (London: Verso, 1990). 181
and redevelopment plans were executed. The combination of cheap land in the inner city created a climate of unrestricted development and growth in Los Angeles and pushed an agenda of a gentrifying and displacing growth machine.

**Deregulated Planning: Gentrification and Neo-liberalism**

Unregulated urban renewal unquestionably fits the definition of neo-liberalist urban policy and gentrification. Tom Angotti provides a definition of neo-liberalism in the context of urban policy in his book, *New York for Sale*. “Neo-liberal urban policy is based on the classical notions of individual liberty, an unfettered marketplace, and a noninterventionist state.” This highly deregulated state provides an environment where “communities ... confront local governments that are both less aggressive in leading land development and more dependent on hegemonic real estate interests and the pro-growth civic coalitions they are able to assemble”. Neo-liberalism is also defined as “the prevailing trends towards deregulation, commercialization, privatization, labor-market flexibility, public-private partnerships, and the downsizing of those parts of government that help the poor, racial or ethnic minorities, and other groups marginalized by market processes”.

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2 Community groups in New York have successfully resisted gentrification and displacement pressures: see Fifth Avenue Committee’s Displacement Free Zone, for example.
3 Tom Angotti is a Professor in the Hunter College Department of Urban Affairs & Planning in New York City. He is renowned for his progressive planning views as well as the founding of the Planners Network.
By definition, gentrification fits right in to this characterization of neo-liberalism. In fact, “gentrification is the leading edge” in “the fabric of neoliberal urbanism.” In this sense “the struggle against gentrification [is] intimately tied to struggles to protect public space and the commons from neo-liberal urban policies.” The state reflects gentrification and neo-liberalism as they have “willingly [walked] away from the provision of ... services, and [look] to the community-based sector to fill the holes it has left behind.” This is evidenced by the lack of basic services in the poorest communities in Los Angeles: full-service grocery stores have been replaced with convenience stores; libraries have been replaced by auto-related industries. Instead of proactively providing vital services, the government relies on the market to determine where economic activity occurs leaving the provision of these services to understaffed and underfunded community organizations. In this way, “the state is now the agent of, rather then the regulator of, the market... and neoliberal urban policy now expresses the impulses of capitalist production rather than social reproduction.”

While it is objectionable and unsavory that the political structure has de-regulated to the point where communities are being violently displaced, communities now have the impetus to step in and demand that reinvestment and redevelopment are slowed to prevent gentrification and the certainty of displacement.

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7 Tom Angotti, op. cit., pp. 31.
9 Loretta Lees et al. op. cit., pp. 163.
**Affordable/ Segregated**

With its history of neo-liberal urban planning and relatively unrestricted development, the urban landscape in Los Angeles is bleak. Los Angeles is one of the most segregated cities in the country: highly segregated geographically based on income and race in terms of housing. There is a $13-$1 ratio between the richest and the poorest in Los Angeles. The poorest are concentrated in communities in the South and on the East side, closest to the inner city while affluent white communities thrive in the more removed North and West.

With respect to the job market, jobs are unequally located throughout the city as well. Some neighborhoods, downtown especially, have an extremely high concentration of

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11 Ibid

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jobs whereas South L.A. has very few jobs corresponding thoroughly with the income data reported above. Even then not all downtown jobs are created equal: a strong bifurcation of the job market in the late 1980s created many very high paying jobs (categorized by international corporate positions in high rises) and even more extremely low paying jobs (categorized by the non-unionized service sector jobs such as janitors and security guards who work in the high rises). The number of Angelenos making more than $150,000 a year rose 79% from 1990-2000, whereas the number living below the poverty line grew by 650,000.\textsuperscript{13} These numbers are illustrative of the inequalities present in Los Angeles.

\textit{What is the Goal?}

As we see from these statistics, Los Angeles is a highly inequitable city with an urban renewal-centric neo-liberal planning strategy that has negative effects throughout many communities. The historically anti-community approach to planning in Los Angeles has produced a trend of inorganic growth best couched within the definition of gentrification. How can we tame current planning strategy to better serve all of the city’s communities? In order to answer this question we must first precisely define gentrification and displacement.

\textsuperscript{13} Gottlieb et al. \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 90-91.
III. Gentrification

Coined by sociologist Ruth Glass, the first use of the word gentrification referred to a 1964 London neighborhood. Glass wrote,

One by one, many of the working class quarters of London have been invaded by the middle-classes—upper and lower. Shabby, modest mews and cottages—two rooms up and two down—have been taken over, when their leases have expired, and have become elegant, expensive residences.

The gentrification that Ruth Glass examined began as a way to mitigate the cycle of disinvestment and depreciation that was widespread in American and Western European cities throughout the 1970’s and 1980’s. This cycle is thoroughly described by Lees, Slater, and Wyly in their book entitled, *Gentrification*: as “new development undermines older investments, and ongoing depreciation forces owners to consider carefully before sinking more capital into aging land uses.”¹⁴ This process is further defined as a cycle of (dis)investment of those who physically inhabit the neighborhood:

People with the money to do so will leave a neighborhood, and financial institutions will ‘redline’ the neighborhood as too risky to make loans. Neighborhood decline accelerates, and moderate-income residents and businesses moving away are replaced by successively poorer tenants.¹⁵

As a way to mitigate the negative impacts of disinvestment and depreciation urban neighborhoods, the government created legislation and provided funding to “encourage reinvestment in ‘rundown’ neighborhoods.”¹⁶

The definition since Glass in 1964 has altered slightly. The 1980 Oxford American Dictionary defined gentrification as the “movement of middle class families into urban areas causing property values to increase and having the secondary effect of driving out

¹⁴ Loretta Lees et al. *op. cit.*, pp. 53.
¹⁵ Ibid
¹⁶ Loretta Lees et al. *op. cit.*, pp. 23.
poorer families.”\textsuperscript{17} Most generally, according to Lees, Slater, and Wyly gentrification is “an economic, political, social, and institutional phenomenon” directly related to “the transformation of a working-class residential and/or commercial use.”\textsuperscript{18} Lees, Slater, and Wyly’s definition hints at the negative effects but is mostly unbiased and general.

Gentrification, despite its most basic definition is a highly politicized and loaded term. Even in Ruth Glass’ original definition, the British sociologist included the negative ramifications of the process of gentrification. Glass states, “once this process of ‘gentrification’ starts in a district it goes on rapidly until all or most of the original working-class occupiers are displaced and the whole social character of the district is changed.” Lees et al. also allude to these negative repercussions of gentrification in another of their definitions: “The well-to-do people who move into revitalizing neighborhoods value both land and accessibility, and can afford to pay for them both. They thus outbid all other groups for land close to the urban core.”\textsuperscript{19}

This definition suggests the inherent inequalities between the revitalizers and those who currently lived in the revitalizing neighborhood. The gentrifiers have the upper hand, both financially and politically, to revitalize a neighborhood through redevelopment. As a development strategy, gentrification can also be defined as a market process of profitable and unfair development.

Gentrification occurs when the gap is wide enough that developers can purchase shells cheaply, can pay the builders’ costs and profit for rehabilitation, can pay interest on mortgage and construction loans, and can then sell the end product for a sale price that leaves a satisfactory return to the developer.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{17} Loretta Lees et al. \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 9.
\textsuperscript{18} Loretta Lees et al. \textit{op. cit.}, pp. XV, 3.
\textsuperscript{19} Loretta Lees et al. \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 47.
\textsuperscript{20} Loretta Lees et al. \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 53.
Those who participate in revitalizing a community, and thus gentrifying it, are in the game to maximize profit and have “incentives to use a particular land parcel for the most profitable function possible.” In most cases, the most profitable use of a parcel is not low-income housing or a local business, but rather a large development complex with high-end retail and condominiums.

These definitions only begin to show the negative implications of gentrification in low-income communities. “The most traumatic aspect” of gentrification, as John Betancur points out “is perhaps the destruction of the elaborate and complex community fabric that is crucial for low-income, immigrant, and minority communities – without any compensations.” The “complex urban fabric” that Betancur underlines refers to the social capital and dependence on each other for services and general well being. Lees et al. even go so far as to describe gentrification as a form of colonization.

At the neighborhood level itself poor and vulnerable residents often experience gentrification as a process of colonization by the more privileged classes. Stories of personal housing dislocation and loss, distended social networks, ‘improved’ local services out of sync with local needs and displacement have always been the underbelly of a process, which, for city boosters, has represented something of a savior for post-industrial cities.

The definition most grounded in social justice comes from Kalima Rose who defines gentrification as a three-step process. The first stage “involves some significant public or nonprofit redevelopment investment and/or private newcomers buying and rehabbing
vacant units."\(^{24}\) This stage causes very little displacement, but fluently leads to increased displacement “as housing costs rise and landlords begin to evict long-time residents in order to garner greater revenues by renting or selling to the more affluent.”\(^{25}\) In the third stage “rehabilitation becomes more apparent [and] prices escalate.” In full force, the third stage of gentrification displaces “original residents ... along with their industries, commercial enterprises, faith institutions and cultural traditions.”\(^{26}\) Rose’s statement best reflects the sentiments of the displaced and lays a framework for tenant’s rights and anti-gentrification campaigns.

While it is very important to discuss the genesis of the cycle of gentrification and its multitude of definitions, Lees et al. point out that “in the end, the ‘why’ of gentrification is less important than the ‘how’ and the repercussions of the process.”\(^{27}\) Gentrification is a reality in our urban communities; we have to document these repercussions. The most insidious of these repercussions is that of displacement.

These negative elements of gentrification are reinforced by a study I conducted in 2008 with Occidental College in the Wyvernwood housing development of Boyle Heights. The owner made plans to tear down the development, which houses approximately 10,000 people, mainly immigrants, making way for condominiums and commercial improvements. The Occidental College team conducted over 400 surveys with Wyvernwood residents to qualitatively gauge social capital within the development and prove to developers that Wyvernwood was in fact a thriving community. We wanted to show the developers that


\(^{25}\) Ibid

\(^{26}\) Kalima Rose. \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 3.
teardown would likely cause the displacement of most, if not all of the residents. Plans to raze the historically affordable development have not changed.

IV. Displacement

As we can discern from the definitions of gentrification above, “the sunny view of ‘revitalization’ and ‘renaissance’ ignored the harsh reality of poverty, displacement, and chronic shortages of affordable housing.”28 Displacement is one of the most tangible and visible consequences of gentrification. I have selected three definitions of displacement to highlight in order to begin understanding its effect on communities. The first definition is from famed political theorist Herbert Marcuse:

When one household vacates a unit voluntarily and that unit is then gentrified... so that another similar household is prevented from moving in, the number of units available to the second household in that housing market is reduced. The second household, therefore, is excluded from living where is would otherwise have lived. 29

A more modern definition comes from, urban scholar Richard LeGates and concerns the social and cultural implications of displacement on urban communities:

The term displacement describes what happens when forces outside the household make living there impossible, or hazardous, or unaffordable. The fact of displacement is a grotesque and spreading feature of life for lower-income people in the United States. It also means a process by which they are engineered out of their traditional neighborhoods, to make way for new occupants deemed more ‘desirable’ because of the color of their skin, the taxes they will pay, or the ‘life style’ they lead.30

27 Loretta Lees et al. op. cit., pp. XVII
28 Loretta Lees et al. op. cit., pp. 44.
29 Ibid
30 Tom Angotti. op. cit., pp. 2.
The experience of displacement is a “shattering” and at worst “leads to homelessness, at best it impairs a sense of community. Public policy should, by general agreement, minimize displacement and encourage growth that is appropriate for each community. Yet a variety of public policies, particularly those concerned with gentrification, seem to foster it.”

Similar to gentrification, displacement is highly politicized concept. Lees et al conform this politicization with their resolved statement that

Moving people involuntarily from their homes or neighborhoods is wrong. Regardless of whether it results from government or private market action, forced displacement is characteristically a case of people without the economic and political power to resist being pushed out by people with greater resources and power, people who think they have ‘better’ use for a certain building, piece of land, or neighborhood. The pushers benefit. The pushees do not.

Displacement is the clear manifestation of the inequalities inherent in the process of gentrification. Since a return to unregulated growth in Los Angeles, gentrification has again “[become] a widespread phenomena,” and low-income communities face the harsh reality of displacement. Rather than sit back, “we should be thinking about how to manage the process to help us achieve a more equitable and just society.” Collecting data that effectively reflects displacement trends is “extremely difficult” and almost impossible “to quantify persuasively.” Often, victims of displacement do not notify authorities or necessarily understand injustices of their predicament.

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31 Loretta Lees et al. *op. cit.*, pp. 44.  
32 Loretta Lees et al. *op. cit.*, pp. 246.  
33 *Ibid*  
34 Loretta Lees et al *op. cit.* pp 218.
V. Gentrification as an Economic Process

From the definition of gentrification, we can infer that gentrification is an economic process and merits an examination through the field of economic development. What are the economic development tools we can use to prevent and slow the process of gentrification? From the history of development and its fragmented pro-growth nature, we realize that an alternative approach to neo-liberal planning is necessary to keep our communities both livable and affordable. The dilemma is that we want growth, but we want a very specific type of growth that does not harm communities. Previous growth strategies in developing communities have been “to reinvent the private sector in these communities and to stimulate corporate private capital to reinvest”35 But, unfortunately, these strategies have very negative side effects for local residents including “gentrifying the area, displacing former residents, and crowding the poorest residents into even more unhealthy living arrangements in the city or in nearby inner-ring suburbs.”36 This has been the trend in Los Angeles, a trend that desperately needs to change.

There have been several alternative approaches to economic growth that do not promote gentrification, including advocacy planning and equitable growth strategies. The latter strategy has been widely implemented through the Policylink’s equitable development toolkit and includes approaches such as preserving and expanding the supply of affordable housing, controlling land for community development, income and asset creation, and finance strategies.37 The most recent scholarship in the field of progressive

37 Kalima Rose. op. cit., pp. 1.
economic development strategies builds off the equitable growth strategies and explores local economic development as a solution to inequitable growth and gentrification.

VI. Local Economic Development

Local Economic development is an alternative approach to “conventional” neo-liberal economic development planning. As Joan Fitzgerald et al. state, the

Conventional approach errs in seeking economic growth over economic development... Economic growth is more development, more business, more jobs, and more taxes, whereas economic development is raising standards of living and improving the quality of life through a process that specifically lessens inequalities in metropolitan development and improves the metropolitan population’s standard of living.38

Economic development focuses on creating organic community initiated growth rather than developer driven growth – which will spur gentrification and imminent displacement for community members. Edward Blakely best delineates the main tenets of local economic development planning in his book entitled Planning Local Economic Development. Among his list are building community-level institutions for development (i.e. community organizations, non-profit housing developers, etc.), expanding local ownership, which use local resources, building quality jobs, achieved by linking employment and economic development policies and programs, and a combination of public and private venturing – combining the public interest with private funding.39

Fitzgerald et al. add commercial revitalization to this list but includes that it must be paired with an assessment of what “goods and services the community needs and which

39 Edward Blakely. op. cit., pp. 91.
businesses can operate successfully in the community." She also clearly notes that realizing successful local economic development is highly dependent on cooperation of “grassroots support and community building” efforts. Blakely also argues that in order to achieve successful local economic development, communities “must market their resources intelligently and gain competitive advantage to create new firms” while at the same time working to sustain and preserve local institutions such as “schools, colleges, hospitals, recycling centers, churches, day cares centers, youth programs, housing projects, county fairs, and ethnic organizations.” While this balance becomes increasingly difficult to maintain when large-scale development proposals are made, local institutions “have a stake in the local economy” and are necessary in sustaining appropriate growth in every community. Local economic development relies heavily on community participation and ownership, which in the current economy and political atmosphere have decreased. We have seen that most private investment leads to gentrification and displacement, a higher degree of transparent government regulation is necessary to promote local economic development— cities should look to the power of zoning to counter the negative effects of gentrification and displacement.

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41 Ibid
42 Edward Blakely. *op. cit.*, pp. 53.
43 Ibid
VII. Economic Development through Zoning

Organic community driven growth in a neighborhood can indeed be achieved through local economic development strategies. As grassroots organizations face myriad financial setbacks in the current economic climate, are there other entities that have the power and may be better suited to combat and prevent gentrification and displacement? Michael Schill and Richard Nathan wrote in 1983, “local governments are in the best position to recognize the complexity of a displacement problem within their housing markets and to devise anti-displacement strategies.”

As we look to the built environment to solve many other problems that plague our communities such as poor health, health inequalities, urban crime, and transportation in what respect, if any, can we look to the built environment, and specifically zoning and land-use to slow the process of gentrification and displacement and promote equitable growth? More explicitly, in what ways can we promote the tenets of local economic development through the way we zone our cities and the way our land is used? The planning department is a powerful local entity in terms of regulation of development.

In its most basic form zoning establishes that the “interests of private property owners must yield to the interests of the public.” This meaning has been slightly lost in Los Angeles, visible through the uninhibited growth and concessions to major developers and inequitable development since the 1960s. From the same equitable growth perspective,

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Zoning must continue its attempt to strike that elusive balance between preservation and growth. While protecting our quality of life, it must not become a regulatory straitjacket making economic revitalization [growth?] impossible. It should tie itself ever more closely to comprehensive planning ... if it is to continue providing meaningful guidance to growth and change.46

Land-use and zoning regulations are highly specific to each city, but most cities have a standard set of zoning tools. Using these tools efficiently and effectively can “promote economic and commercial development” in neighborhoods by “setting aside a sufficient amount of land for industrial and commercial use,” which allow for certain types of growth.”47 Even with sufficient foresight, these tools may be too lenient and may lack specificity in terms of preserving neighborhood character, streamlining pedestrian access, standardizing solutions to incongruous uses, or integrating different uses in a particular neighborhood. Creative planning tools are then created to mitigate these problems. In Los Angeles, most of the creative planning energy has been put into supplemental use designations that are classified as overlay districts. Overlay zoning can promote certain kinds of economic development by relaxing

Static traditional zoning that assigns specific uses to particular land tracts. Instead, overlay zones are a special modification to the existing basic land use provisions. An overlay zone may contain regulatory provisions that designate land uses, height and bulk as a standard zoning ordinance, or it may have unique features such as historic preservation.48

The flexible nature of the overlay zone tools available to the LA city planners sparked my initial interest in zoning as a solution to gentrification and

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46 Haar. op.cit., pp. xi.
47 Blakely. op. cit., pp. 185
48 Blakely. op. cit., pp. 186.
displacement. Before I delve into my research, I have documented progressive planning in other large urban centers.

VIII. Case Studies

Can Los Angeles look to other cities that have implemented progressive city planning policy? Both New York City and Chicago have had instances where the city has utilized progressive planning processes to work to improve communities in an way that encourage *appropriate growth*.

**New York City and the 197a Plans**

In 1991, New York City finalized city charter reform to allow for community based planning initiatives. The 197a Plans, named for the city charter section that created them enables “communities... to submit official plans for approval by the City Planning Commission and City Council.”49 While plans only trickled in initially, several plans have been initiated since. The 197a plans have given a voice to communities facing threats of gentrification and displacement and have acted to “[challenge] the conventional development scenario reinforced by the existing zoning regime.”50 The 197a plans have been instrumental in promoting *appropriate growth* through “preservation of a mix of industry, retail, and housing ... defined as ‘mixed-use development’. ”51 The 197a plan, proposed and developed completely by grassroots community organizations in turn, are working to help the City tailor planning decisions to fit the community’s needs and goals.

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50 Angotti . *op. cit.*, pp. 163
51 Ibid
Chicago: Mayor Harold Washington

In 1984, Harold Washington, a progressive democrat was elected Mayor of Chicago. Similar to the current situation in Los Angeles, Chicago was in a state of “economic and social dislocation” where “the rift between the relatively poor segments of the city and the middle and upper class grew wider exacerbated by race and geography.”  

Previous to the election of Washington “the challenge of urban problems was [great] and the capacity of city governments to respond seemed to dissolve in political and social polarization.”

Washington’s successful election in 1984 was due, in great part, to the immense power of community organizations throughout the city. Washington’s economic development and urban planning approach reflected an era of “new political terrain” in Chicago, ending an age when the city “let developers take maximum advantage of very generous zoning ordinances.”

The City Planning Director under Washington stated in an interview

The first step to changing the lives of the poor of the city was making their issues a part of the debate. As the mayor had said to me, putting homelessness on the agenda was the key. It was only in retrospect that the city began to understand how the nature of the agenda had changed. Groups representing every segment of the city... had all been built into the agenda-making process. The vehicles included appointments to boards and commissions, task forces, funding of delegate agencies, city-staff appointments, and community forums... community-based organizations were partners in every endeavor, whether combating gangs or building housing. Major private development projects routinely provided amenities in exchange for building rights, even though the zoning ordinance had not been changed.

The tactics used during Washington’s three years in office integrated many constituents from the community organizations that supported him through his

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53 Ibid
54 Pierre Clavel. *op. cit.*, pp. 2
55 Pierre Clavel. *op. cit.*, pp. 136
56 Pierre Clavel. *op. cit.*, pp. 144
campaign and during his time in office. Involving communities in the planning process ensured that projects reflected the vision of the people and not the economic goals of developers. Progressive urban and economic policies progressed smoothly under Harold Washington until his unexpected death in 1987. Washington's progressive policies were not preserved after his death, political momentum died along with him.

**How Does this Apply in Los Angeles?**

While these case studies may provide inspiration for Los Angeles, they cannot necessarily serve as models. In the case of the 197a plans in New York, the Los Angeles has an exceedingly different government structure and political ideology from that of NYC, one that doesn't currently support a similar community generated plan strategy. In the Case of Chicago, community groups played a large role in shaping the urban policy during the progressive Harold Washington administration. While Los Angeles has an extensive network of community organizations and coalitions working toward social, economic, and environmental justice, these community groups do not necessarily have the same political clout that the groups in Chicago did.

Furthermore, there is no research specific to Los Angeles that addresses the issues of zoning, economic development, progressive politics and the efforts of grassroots community organizations collectively. Herein lies a dilemma, these four devices contradict each other in that zoning and economic development traditionally promote growth in the form of gentrification and displacement while progressive politics and community groups opposes inappropriate growth. This dichotomy exists in Los Angeles, but we cannot deny that communities and neighborhoods across Los Angeles need some form of growth.
investment to survive. This growth can come in the form of simple infrastructure such as lights, evenly paved streets, and continuous sidewalks. At the height of its complexity, this growth comes in the form of affordable housing, retail, and green space. Historically any form of growth or redevelopment in Los Angeles results in gentrification and displacement. In what ways can Los Angeles promote growth without promoting gentrification and displacement? How can the city you promote appropriate growth?

IX. Appropriate Growth

I developed the term appropriate growth through my conversation with planners. Essentially, it builds on the idea of equitable growth and development strategies, outlined above, but loses the grassroots connotation that equitable development carries. Initially, planners were hostile to the use of equitable development because traditionally these ideals opposed the work in the formerly neo-liberal LADCP. Through my interviews with LADCP staff, I wanted to be able to engage the planners in a discussion of a type of growth that opposes inorganic and displacement instigating growth. Appropriate growth recognizes economic development strategies but adds urban planning strategies in line with the organic development of a community. The elements that compose appropriate growth are essentially unlimited and different for every community, but include the creation and preservation of affordable housing, local land ownership strategies, building job markets, increased community participation, ecological sustainability, etc. Appropriate growth is about building communities for the people who live in them and not building based on speculation or development pressures. Appropriate growth defines and builds
livable communities expanding on the tools and work of L.A. City Planners (discussed below). Appropriate growth, in this way, is also limited to the scope of tools that the LA City Planning Department uses throughout the city.

X. Methodology

My main research question aims to test the potential for planning tools from the Department of City Planning to slow the process of gentrification and displacement in developing communities. I knew previous to the commencement of this project that there was no language that would formally slow gentrification—no legislation that directly prohibits gentrification and displacement as economic growth strategies—and promote appropriate growth. For my research, I wanted to assess planner’s opinions on the matter and better understand the steps to actualizing appropriate growth. I spent over 3 months in the planning department chin-deep researching these tools, from the community plan, to the municipal code, to Q-conditions in order to generate a list of questions that the planner’s themselves would relate to. The questions morphed into an interview tool with the feel of a survey—I asked the exact same questions to all 6 of the planners I interviewed in order to gain qualitative knowledge rather than quantitative data on the effectiveness of select planning tools. Every quote, unless specified, is the view of an L.A. City Planner. All of the planners work within the Community Planning Office. Many of the planners I interviewed chose to remain anonymous, so I have not listed any of the planners by name. Instead, I present their answer by themes and categories based on their responses. Not
only do my findings show the potential in the tools I have chosen to combat gentrification and displacement, these finding also show the attitudes of the planners towards the issue of gentrification and their willingness to stray from the literal city policy language. While the research highlights the opinions of select individual planners, it gives a reasonable overview of the potential and limits of each of the tools and next steps the city can take to guarantee appropriate growth in communities that face the threat of gentrification and displacement. Before I delve into findings from my interviews, I will examine and outline all of the tools I selected based on their definition and legal intentions in the municipal code and City Planning Department documents (See Appendix I).

**Supplemental Use Designations**

**Pedestrian Oriented District (POD):** The Pedestrian Oriented District creates a place for pedestrians in the auto-dominated urban landscape. In order to qualify for the POD, a community must be commercially zoned, must have buildings of similar size or linked architecturally, or must have outdoor “amenities” which are “conducive to pedestrian activity.” The POD restricts development in that they may have no blank walls exceeding 10 feet, at least one entrance for pedestrians on the ground floor, 75% of the front of the building on the ground floor must be devoted to pedestrian access – display windows, non-reflective glass, etc., the building must have a ground floor, uses are limited to “neighborhood retail” which includes neighborhood services such as child-care facilities, dry cleaners, blueprinting, etc. (no major retailers or big box stores). The POD has a very low height restriction of 40 feet for new construction and parking must be located out of the path and view of the pedestrian. Design guidelines are also included in the
development restrictions but are specific to each district. Generally, the POD increase pedestrian access to commercial uses under the authority of the Los Angeles Department of City Planning (LADCP), but requires some collaboration with the office of building and safety and final sign off by the City Council.

**Community Design Overlay (CDO):** The Community Design Overlay is a much more flexible tool that can be tailored to an individual community and aims to create/preserve neighborhood character. The CDO ensures “accordance with community design policies” and “promotes distinctive character” within a particular neighborhood. Out of character for most zoning regulations the CDO enhances “attractiveness” of the housing stock for “all social and economic groups within the community.” I will further discuss this peculiarity in language in the findings section. Community Design Standards that the CDO must comply with are articulated within the Community Plan and determined by the planning department and an appointed Citizen’s Advisory Committee (CAC). While the initiation of a CDO will always come from a decision-making entity within the city, the CAC guarantees some level of community participation in the formal process.

**Mixed Use District (MUD):** The mixed-use district encourages ‘land uses that combine commercial uses and dwelling units in order to reduce vehicle trips and vehicle miles traveled by locating residents, jobs, and services near each other” and is applied to high density Residential zones and most commercial zones. By collocating all of these different uses, the MUD supports transit, economic vitality, and “revitalization of areas of special need. The Municipal Code requires that any MUD be “consistent with the intent and purposes of the applicable Community Plan” to ensure appropriate design standards and accordance with long-range planning policy. Unfortunately, the MUD is one of the most
restrictive overlay zones in terms of development requirements and regulations. The language in the municipal code describes over 11 development requirements regarding only fence regulations! Development requirements also apply to signage, height, Floor Area Ratio (total floor area of buildings on a certain location to the size of the land of that location), pedestrian orientation, parking, façade treatment, enhanced paving materials, street trees, and visible rooftop appurtenances (ventilation, heating, and air conditioning ducts). The stringent restrictions the MUD places on development have somewhat hindered proliferation of the Mixed-use district designation which I will also speak to in my findings.

**Transit Oriented District (TOD):** Transit Oriented Districts integrate “transit planning, development, urban design, streetscape improvements, and reinvestment”. In Los Angeles, these components contribute to creating livable neighborhoods, linking residents to jobs, and stabilizing low-income communities.57

**Other Tools**

**Historic Preservation Overlay District (HPOZ):** The HPOZ was created to preserve buildings that meet the city’s requirements for historic preservation. The HPOZ “protects and enhances” the use of “buildings, structures, landscaping, natural features...having Historic, Architectural, cultural or aesthetic significance.” One of the purposes of the HPOZ is to “stabilize neighborhoods and/or communities,” which is what makes the ordinance so appealing in terms of its potential to slow gentrification.

**Community Plan Implementation Overlay (CPIO):** The Community Plan Implementation Tool is a new tool developed to implement the policies and guidelines developed in the Community Plan Update programs. The West Adams/Leimert Park/ Baldwin Hills Community Plan Area will launch the first CPIO.

**Q Conditions:** Q Conditions are footnotes that can accompany any land-use designation. Q condition examples include but are not limited to restricting Alcohol Licenses (used widely in South L.A.), managing riparian habitats, mandating multi-family housing in Elysian Valley, etc. Countless Q conditions exist to preclude specific elements from a project.

**Specific Plan:** The Specific Plan is a planning tool that allows planners and communities to work together to define and create the most specific plan for the chosen neighborhood. In the LAMC, the specific plan is defined as a “regulatory [control] or [incentive] for the systematic execution of the General Plan” and shall provide for public needs, convenience and general welfare” (See Appendix II). The specific plan has one of the most comprehensive tool as well as one of the best tools for engaging the community. Consequently the Specific Plan is one of the most staff and time intensive tools on this list.

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58 Per the LADCP definition the “community plans are intended to promote an arrangement of land uses, streets, and services which encourage and contribute to the economic social and physical health, safety, welfare and convenience of the people who live and work in the community.” The plans are a policy document and therefore are not directly enforceable.