

URBAN PLANNING

Urban planning

New study charts a prosperous future for northeast San Fernando Valley



Mi Kaffe, the first gourmet coffee shop in Pacoima, (Photo by Dean Musgrove/Los Angeles Daily News)

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The gritty northeast San Fernando Valley has long been associated with a lack of government services, high-paying jobs, trees, clean air and a dearth of bustling business districts.

Now a new study has created a roadmap on how to revitalize the mostly minority region through better planning, civic leadership and entrepreneurship.

“The takeaway is we have multiple challenges for the northeast San Fernando Valley,” said study author Robert L. Scott, executive director of the Mulholland Institute, a Calabasas-based think tank that works closely with the Valley Economic Alliance. “It’s been traditionally underserved.

“What it needs is more homegrown innovation and entrepreneurship, coupled with better transportation and infrastructure to serve people who are more dependent on public transportation,” he said, “who often don’t have simple things as street lights and shade trees.”

The “Northeast San Fernando Valley Sustainability and Prosperity Strategy,” commissioned by the Southern California Council of Governments, will be presented to community leaders on Wednesday at a sold-out meeting at Galpin Ford. The study is available at northeaststrategy.org.

The \$150,000 study outlines how the northeast Valley, one of the most underserved and overlooked regions of the county, can thrive.

But to benefit from the billions of dollars in transit, affordable housing and environmental remediation planned throughout Los Angeles County in the coming decades, the region from Sylmar to Sunland-Tujunga must have vision, planning and civic leadership, it said.

Poor planning over the past century has left the region north of Roscoe Boulevard with poor streets and sidewalks, a lack of meaningful public transportation, and students without an easy way to get to school. Many residents can’t afford cars.

Large industrial tracts with few jobs, little affordable housing, low education, a perception of high crime amid “aesthetically challenged main streets” add to the economic malaise.

“We wanted to target the most polluted region with the highest unemployment rate and underemployment, with the highest rate environmentally induced health problems,” said Peter McCarty, a board member for the Valley Economic Alliance who serves on the San Fernando Green Team, which pushed for the study. “What the study does is present a targeted assessment of unmet needs.”

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The 150-page study also outlines many solutions that could boost the quality of life for the northeast Valley, without gentrifying it and driving out its working-class residents. That means boosting the success of small businesses within targeted commercial districts throughout the region.

“We do this by making the current population more prosperous through innovation, entrepreneurship and locally owned businesses,” Scott said.

Solutions include an East Valley Transit Corridor that would link Sylmar with light rail to Sherman Oaks on a potential sales tax measure, providing better links to jobs.

They also include business districts to encourage entrepreneurial growth, including the San Fernando Mall, the Panorama Mall and Plaza del Valle and “remediation areas” of industrial Sun Valley.

But for any community development strategy to be successful, it said, it must be fostered by community leaders who have a vested interest in their neighborhoods and town centers.

The northeast Valley has 11 percent of the population of Los Angeles, and 15 percent of its land, and is one of the densest regions of the county.

Rolene Naveja, who has lived in Pacoima since 1960, hadn’t seen the study. But she knows what her neighborhood needs most.

“It’s not perfect,” said Naveja, a community activist, of her historic minority neighborhood. “I think the northeast Valley needs to make sure we have better pathway for young people to realize higher education.

“When people can avail their full potential, this community can’t help but be better.”