

The LA Live Project: Catalyst in the Revitalization of Southern Downtown LA

After World War 2, people moved out from major cities and other inner cities to the suburbs. As a result, these older cities experienced a decline. However, a number of efforts have been undertaken to revitalize older cities such as San Francisco, Oakland, Richmond, Berkeley, and San Jose. These include renovating existing declining downtowns, introducing new projects to spark development, and beautifying blighted areas. These revitalization efforts have been met with success in various cities such as Emeryville, with the Bay Street Mall, Santa Monica, with a renovated Downtown shopping area, and San Diego, with the Gaslamp District. Other cities from suburbs and to major cities have undergone efforts to revitalize themselves. One of the biggest and controversial projects being undertaken is taking place in Los Angeles. The project, LA Live, will change the feel of southern section of Downtown LA, with the hope of revitalizing the LA Convention Center and the surrounding neighborhood.

Fewer companies are holding events at the Convention Center because of more attractive sites in other cities. In addition, the LA Convention Center and Staples Center are isolated from the rest of Downtown LA, with few hotels serving them. As a result, the Convention Center is having trouble booking events and exhibits. As a result, the Convention Center operates at a loss of \$30 million annually (Glaser). In addition, the area around the Convention Center and Staples Center has been languishing and is in need of revitalization.

Anschutz Entertainment Group (AEG), a sports development group, is heading the LA Live Project, which will include apartments, ballrooms, bars, concert theaters, condominiums, restaurants, movie theaters and hotels (LA Live). The aim of LA Live is to create a flashy district similar to Time Square in New York City and the Ginza District in Tokyo (Wikipedia). LA Live will consist of a variety of uses, tailored to make the neighborhood a vibrant one. First and foremost is a new 54 story hotel with a 1,100 room capacity across the street from the Staples Center. The skyscraper will also include 216 luxurious condominiums. Also, other sections of the project area will provide housing through condominiums and lofts. Twenty percent of new housing will be affordable. AEG has commissioned the YWCA to construct 200-room total apartments to cater to lower-income families. The apartment complex will have facilities such as job placement centers that will aid these families in getting a job (Maese). Also, the Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising is constructing an apartment complex for students of the institute. Another important component of LA Live is a new theater, which will hold internationally-renowned events. According to AEG, some of the events to be held at the theater include the Grammys, Emmy, ESPY, and MTV Music Awards (AEG Worldwide). In fact, one of the projects slated to be built on site is a Grammy Museum, in an attempt by LA to permanently locate the Grammy Awards in the new theater permanently (Glaser). The theater is stated to have a capacity of 7,000. Next, a large,

upscale nightclub will be built that will complement both the theater and LA Live itself. The club, which will be among LA's most renowned, will also be used for musical acts and cultural shows. The club will have a capacity of over 2,000. Also, a 15-screen movie theater will be constructed, with the largest theater having a capacity of 700. Next, offices will also be constructed, which will include tenants such as AEG, ESPN, and Herbalife (Williams). In addition, 400,000 square feet of retail space will be used for restaurants, bars, and stores to serve patrons of LA Live (Glaser). All these components will surround a grand plaza, which will include giant screens, live music, and a facility for red carpet entrances during special events at the theater (AEG Worldwide). A pedestrian bridge will be constructed to connect visitors and residents from the hotel/condominium complex to the plaza. To accommodate increased parking needs, 4,000 parking spaces in addition to existing parking will be constructed (AEG Worldwide). In all, the project will encompass 4 million square feet of land and when completed, will be Los Angeles's and the nation's premiere entertainment destination.

LA Live will provide a number of benefits to both the neighborhood and the City of Los Angeles as a whole. First, it will stimulate the use of the LA Convention Center as a hall for special shows and exhibits again. As previously mentioned, the LA Convention Center has continually been on a decline in terms of the number of shows, down to 14 in 2006 from 30 in 2005 (Maese). A big factor in its decline is because of the lack of hotel rooms nearby to accommodate convention center attendants. LA Live will change that, with the addition of a world-class hotel. The hotel will give visitors easy access from their room to the Convention Center, instead of having to drive from the northern part of Downtown LA, where most Downtown hotels are located. Because of the improved accessibility from hotels, the Convention Center will be more attractive as a place to hold shows and exhibits, which will bring more revenue to the Convention Center and the surrounding area.

Another benefit from the LA Live project is its positive effect on the neighborhood. The Grand Avenue Project, located in the northern part of Downtown LA is in the beginning stages of revitalization, spearheaded by the completion of the Disney Hall. Already underway for the area are more residential units and commercial and recreational spaces to fill the needs of the people who will live in those units. The southern part of Downtown LA, in contrast, other than the Staples Center, is still filled with underutilized structures and vacant lots. LA Live will be a focal point of redevelopment in the area, similar to the Disney Hall. LA Live, once completed, would be an attraction that would encourage more economic development. Once economic development occurs, people would be drawn to live there. These residents would require amenities such as grocery stores, mail services, barbershops, etc., and businesses would open up to serve these amenities. A combination of an influx of residential units and commercial space will contribute to the vitalization of this area. Also, the vitalization of the area will give this neighborhood an identity, something that's been lacking in the southern Downtown area. An identity will help in promoting the neighborhood as a place to live and do business.

Next, LA Live will help promote Downtown Los Angeles's image as a place to live. Historically, people in the LA area tended to stay away from Downtown, citing undesirability, reputation, and the lack of safety, attractions, and amenities, among other reasons. LA Live will change the perception of Downtown LA. People will see Downtown LA as more than just a place to go to during working hours, that there's more after working hours and that living there is actually desirable. As a result of the influx of more people as a result of LA Live, safety will be increased, both as a result of more people around and an increased police presence (Williams). Once this part of Downtown revitalizes, revitalization will spread to other parts of Downtown LA that are in need of it. New areas that were once seen as not an option to live or do business in will be desirable to live because of low rents and costs. The interest would only make the different parts of Downtown LA more desirable to live, which would help Downtown overall. All these positive changes will change the reputation of the southern Downtown LA in a positive way. Downtown LA will join the likes of New York City, San Francisco, and Chicago as cities that have vibrant and attractive downtowns (Barrett).

LA Live will improve transportation and infrastructure in the area. First, in an effort to improve aesthetics in the pathways around LA Live, unique streetlights and trees will be emplaced (Glaser). These improvements will make LA Live more inviting to pedestrians. In addition, to further enhance the pedestrian experience, sidewalks will be widened and additional pedestrian-friendly enhancements, such as pedestrian bridges that will connect the different venues and avoid car and pedestrian conflicts, will be built (Glaser). In anticipation of increased traffic as a result of the project, improvement work is being done on streets near the LA Live Project. In addition, since LA Live is located near a major freeway, Interstate 110, the off-ramps and on-ramps are being reconfigured to handle the additional traffic (Glaser). Next, as mentioned earlier, the amount of parking will be expanded, up to 4,000 spaces. Though LA Live will attract plenty of pedestrian traffic, people living in the LA area in general still rely on their automobile, so LA Live will attract many people from outside the Downtown area, who need a place to park their vehicle when visiting. These improvements will accommodate drivers to the LA Live project. Fortunately, the project will be built near an existing rail line, the Blue Line, so people have an alternate mode of transportation to get to LA Live (Williams). Lastly, the LA Live project will also require electrical, water, and sewer improvements that when completed, will not only improve the infrastructure of LA Live itself, but also the surrounding area (Maese).

A last benefit of the LA Live Project is the jobs and wages it will create. The project itself will create 1,753 jobs (Maese). In addition, another 3,077 jobs related to construction will be created indirectly (Maese). As a result of these combined jobs, \$151 million in wages will be made by workers associated in the project (Maese). Also not analyzed but likely to occur as a result of the project is an increase in jobs from corporations who move into offices at LA Live and from businesses opening up in the area as a result of the project.

As in the case of all major projects, the LA Live project has its share of criticisms. A first criticism is that the project won't really benefit the neighborhood. Critics contend

that the project will really just be another entertainment complex for the rich, with minimal benefits for people who actually live in Downtown (Williams). LA Live doesn't have any plans for any commercial areas that will directly benefit residents, such as a grocery store, drug stores, etc. This kind of commercial area will have to be developed in separate projects in the neighborhood. This means that residents will not have a prime destination to shop for everyday goods, and may have to drive to head to other neighborhoods to shop for everyday goods. Many aspects of the project cater to out-of-town visitors and upper-class people, such as the retail shops and the higher-end restaurants (Glaser).

Another criticism of the project is that it resembles too closely to other entertainment malls which dot the LA area (Williams). Critics complain that LA Live doesn't have any distinct personality, and is generic. The project doesn't have any cultural influences, which is notable since the LA area has much cultural diversity. This lack of cultural influence makes LA Live feel even more generic. Nearby the project is a big concentration of Latino and African-American population, and the project does not have any influence from any of those populations, even though they most likely will be patrons of the project since they live close to it.

Lastly, the project shifts City Hall's focus to Downtown Los Angeles and away from other parts of LA that are also in need of neighborhood improvements, or have pending projects. In particular, members of the San Fernando Valley, an area known to be neglected by City Hall, have criticized the continued attention spent on LA Live, and not on projects that would improve the San Fernando Valley. They complain that City Hall is trying too hard to turn Downtown LA into a destination spot, while not concentrating on giving people in the San Fernando Valley a destination spot, which would boost the welfare of the San Fernando Valley (Glaser). In fact, critics complain that the San Fernando Valley has no such entertainment district. Downtown LA already has another major revitalization project ongoing in the before-mentioned Grand Avenue Project, and critics say that City Hall should focus on improving other parts of Los Angeles (Wikipedia).

I think the project is a smart idea, but not the best use of property for revitalizing the southern part of Downtown Los Angeles. The area has been neglected for many years until the opening of the Staples Center, which has acted as a stimulus for growth. In spite of the opening of the Staples Center, continued development needed to be done to further stimulate growth and revitalize the area. The LA Live Project helps achieve this. Land values will rise and make the area a more desirable place to live as attractive housing and commercial space opens up. LA Live will create a distinct neighborhood. Downtown LA will finally stretch out farther south and become a more attractive downtown. The LA Live Project will no doubt rekindle interest in the LA Convention Center, and a rise in the number of shows and exhibits there will undoubtedly help the local and city economy. LA Live will showcase Downtown LA as the premiere entertainment destination in both LA and in the country.

What I don't like about this project is that the concept is not very original, and the project does not cater to locals. In its current design, the project seems like it is geared more to people living outside Downtown LA who want to travel to an entertainment mall, but don't want to travel to any of the other entertainment malls located other parts of the LA area and Orange County, such as ones in Universal City, Irvine, Orange, etc. The project itself doesn't provide any direct benefits to residents living nearby other than providing a source of entertainment. The project doesn't provide any daily amenities that residents would need, such as a grocery store or post office. In addition, the design is unoriginal. The architecture is modern, but not unlike other revitalization projects around the United States. The project doesn't have any unique aspects to it. In contrast, the Irvine Spectrum in Irvine has design elements taken from different cultures, such as Middle Eastern and European influences, which makes the mall unique and helps make each part of the mall feel different and interesting.

What I would like to see changed is to scale down some parts of the project to make it fit with the existing neighborhood. The existing neighborhood has some high-rise buildings to the north, closer to Downtown, but to the south and east are many buildings that aren't skyscrapers, but instead, are at most three to four stories. Instead of making all tall structures that try to be flashy and attract people outside LA, the project should have design elements that mix in with existing structures. In addition, the LA Live Project, if better integrated into the neighborhood, would encourage local residents to travel to LA Live. Next, LA Live should have uses that are more reflective of the neighborhood and its needs, instead of uses that attract out-of-towners. Grocery stores, post offices, health and beauty stores, drugstores, etc. should be built that better serve the needs of residents. To further enhance the quality of life in the neighborhood, some of the land should be used for parks or other forms of recreation, such as a skate park, bowling alley, or skating rink. Lastly, LA Live should be designed to reflect the diversity of Los Angeles. Instead of generic designs that are already seen in many malls throughout the LA area, different sections should be designed with a specific theme to give the area a sense of diversity and a mix of uses. The various designs will keep people curious and interested in visiting different sections of the project area.

LA Live will change the look of the southern section of Downtown LA in the hopes of revitalizing the neighborhood and attracting both residents and visitors to Downtown LA. LA Live will attract world-renowned events and aid in making the LA Convention Center a premiere venue in holding events and shows. LA Live will be a focal point of a revitalization effort that will see an increase in residential units, which will bring more residents to the Downtown LA area. It will create a new cohesive neighborhood and make Downtown LA a destination to live. The increase in residential units will also bring more businesses, and this will in effect create a new, vibrant neighborhood. This new neighborhood, being so close to Downtown, will give people the opportunity to use alternate modes of transportation to get to Downtown and LA Live itself. In spite of these benefits, a few issues still remain, which continues to make the project controversial. The project doesn't present enough everyday amenities to residents in the neighborhood; instead it caters to out-of-town visitors. In addition, the design of the project doesn't appeal to everyone. These issues need to be addressed to make LA

Live a more successful project. However, overall, the LA Live is a good step in revitalizing Downtown LA, and along with the Grand Avenue Project in the northern section of Downtown LA, will revitalize the Downtown and make it comparable to other great downtowns throughout the United States.

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