

Executive Summary

29th St. / San Pedro St. Area Health Impact Assessment

The Crossings at 29th Street is a proposed 11.6 acre development providing more than 450 units of affordable housing along with retail and multipurpose space for community activities. The four-block area where The Crossings will be developed is located in South Los Angeles, is currently being rezoned from industrial to residential, and is next to a residential community and an elementary school.



Development of The Crossings, and other potential redevelopment projects in the 29th St. / San Pedro St. area, have the potential to bring many benefits to the health and well being of local residents living in the area through increasing:

- The number of homes that are affordable to moderate and low-income residents including families with children;
- Neighborhood walkability, bikeability and access to public transportation;
- Access for local residents to health-promoting goods and services, such as grocery stores and other healthy-food retail, as well as health care services;
- Access to parks and recreational facilities where residents, including families and youth can exercise, socialize and relax; and
- Educational opportunities, including early childhood and afterschool programs, which can provide safe environments as well as improve academic and social development for youth.

At the request of Los Angeles ACORN (Association of Communities Organizations for Reform Now), with the agreement of Urban Housing Communities (UHC), the developer planning to build The Crossings, and with support from The California Endowment, Human Impact Partners conducted a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) to evaluate whether the proposed plans for The Crossings development would help realize health and well-being benefits or potentially lead to negative health outcomes for local community residents; and to issue community recommendations for improving health through redevelopment policy in the 29th St. / San Pedro St. area. The HIA considered how health would be impacted by changes in housing, transportation and pedestrian safety, access to retail and services, and parks and recreation facilities. Recommendations as to how to mitigate negative health outcomes or improve potential benefits to health for each of these areas were developed. In accordance with the World Health Organization, this analysis defines health as the state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

HIA is a combination of procedures, methods and tools by which a policy or project may be judged for its potential health effects on a population, and the distribution of those effects within the population. HIA can be used to improve the quality of public policy decision-making through evidence-based recommendations to enhance predicted positive health impacts and minimize negative ones.

Screening: *determining the need and value of an HIA*

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The decision to conduct this Health Impact Assessment was based on a number of factors, including:

- The clear need for affordable housing in this area – especially for families with children – and the negative health outcomes that community residents currently face as a result of the lack of affordable housing;
- Given the size of the project, The Crossings offers the opportunity to bring amenities such as health-promoting retail, educational programs, improved pedestrian environment and access to transportation, that address existing community needs;
- The presence of an active and involved base of local residents and other stakeholders that identified health as an important outcome of developing The Crossings in this area; and
- The commitment expressed by the project developer to meet existing community needs for affordable housing as well as community services.

Scoping: *determining the potential health impacts to evaluate*

Issues included in the scope of the HIA were selected based on health related needs and concerns expressed by local community residents and other project stakeholders, and organized into five topic areas: Housing; Pedestrian Safety, Neighborhood Walkability and Public Transportation; Health Services and Food Retail; Education; and Parks and Recreation Facilities. Research questions were identified by reviewing health statistics, results of a community survey, and reports about existing neighborhood health conditions.

Assessment: *using qualitative and quantitative data, expertise and experience to judge the magnitude and direction of potential health impacts*

Relevant existing conditions data was collected from a number of sources including the U.S. Census Bureau, The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, the California Nutrition Network, reports from University of California Los Angeles and Occidental College, the Trust for Public Land, as well as through primary data collection regarding conditions such as the pedestrian environment. An extensive community survey was developed by ACORN, UHC and HIP, and disseminated by ACORN to nearly 300 residents living in close proximity to the proposed site, and the responses were analyzed as part of this HIA.

Findings

A complete report with the results of this HIA is available through ACORN and at www.humanimpact.org. Major findings and recommendations of the HIA are summarized here.

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Major Findings & Recommendations

Housing

Housing affordability and size have many health implications, including allowing families and seniors to have enough money for healthcare and nutritious food, preventing overcrowding and displacement, and encouraging shorter commutes.

Household incomes in the area surrounding The Crossings site are significantly lower than in the rest of the City and County of Los Angeles. Housing units should be offered at a rate that is affordable for local community residents, which is approximately \$500 - \$800 per month. Since The Crossings will bring additional housing units, it does not threaten to displace existing residents. A large proportion of families with children live in this area, and overcrowding as well as poor quality housing is a particularly severe problem. The size of housing built at The Crossings should reflect the range of family sizes in the local population. Based on analysis conducted in this HIA, the demand for housing units at The Crossings with three or more bedrooms is likely to be high. In order to maintain safety in and around The Crossings development, the housing developer and ACORN should initiate discussions with residents living (or who will be living) at the site about how to establish a safety plan for the area.

Pedestrian Safety, Neighborhood Walkability and Public Transportation

The advantages of walkability, bikeability and accessible public transit include increased physical activity, social cohesion, and access to neighborhood resources like parks, schools, retail, and services. The Crossings will draw more residents to the neighborhood, increasing the number of pedestrians and bicyclists on local streets, and creating a higher demand for public transit.

The pedestrian and bicycle environment near the project site is historically unattractive and unsafe, lacking marked crosswalks, traffic signals, sidewalk curb ramps for wheelchairs or strollers, and safe walking routes to schools. The consequences of not addressing these issues include increased fatalities and injuries for pedestrians and bicyclists, and continued lack of physical activity and social cohesion.

Many of the residents living in the vicinity of The Crossings rely on public transit as their chief mode of transportation, therefore, improving the quality of transit services through additional bus lines such as the DASH, and more frequent bus service in this area should be given a high priority.

Though the developer may be able to influence certain features of The Crossings that improve conditions for pedestrians and local access to transit, implementing many of these improvements will require the comprehensive engagement of the City of Los Angeles. Further assessment of transportation needs in the community should also be used to inform future transportation projects and improvements.

Health Services and Food Retail

The presence of health-promoting retail and health services in a community, such as grocery stores and medical facilities, can help to provide residents with the resources they need to make healthy choices in their lives. The location of these resources determines whether people use them, how often, and how they are accessed.

There is a clear need for improved access to health services and healthy food in the area surrounding The Crossings development. While a number of health service providers are located in close proximity to the project site, local residents indicated that their health care needs are not being met. The Crossings can help to link local residents with existing health services by publicizing information about how to access available services or hosting a health fair.

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Healthy food is not readily available in the neighborhood, though plans for The Crossings include space for businesses to locate, which could be designated for healthy food retail. Additionally, The Crossings could consider using the new park or multipurpose space to host a farmers market and/or healthy cooking classes for local residents.

Where possible, the developer and ACORN should work together with the City of Los Angeles and other stakeholders to advocate for the establishment of additional healthy food retail and health services that address local community needs.

Education

Research has found that participation in afterschool programs, especially those consisting of voluntary and structured activities, is linked to positive academic and social development, and that children who attended early childhood programs are significantly more likely to perform well in school and on intelligence tests, and to give achievement-related reasons (such as school or work) for being proud of themselves. Priority education related concerns for residents living in the area include poor academic performance, lack of schools in close proximity, lack of public library facilities, and lack of accessible afterschool programs. The Crossings may provide opportunities to help improve students' academic performance by designating the use of space at the site for afterschool and early childhood education programs that are affordable and accessible, and as a place where local residents can access books, computers, and the Internet.

Parks and Recreation Facilities

The presence of parks and recreational facilities in a neighborhood encourages physical activity, improves mental health, and can serve to speed recovery from illness, encourage social cohesion and improve environmental quality. Residents of South Los Angeles, especially families with children, are underserved by existing park space. Current residents in the project area identified parks and recreational facilities as priority community needs, and as places where they would like to engage in physical activities and spend time with family and friends. Safety concerns often discourage local residents from frequenting existing parks in the vicinity, however, previous research has shown that lower levels of crime have been found in parks located in neighborhoods where there is a high level of community involvement.

Plans for The Crossings include space for a park with amenities including a recreational facility and playground, and separately, a Community School Park is being proposed for the 28th Street School adjacent to the site. Improving the availability of public transportation for residents in and around The Crossings will enhance their ability to access other park and recreational facilities throughout the city. Engaging residents in the development an appropriate safety plan for The Crossings will also improve accessibility of local parks and recreational spaces.

Conclusion

Development of The Crossings at 29th Street, and other potential redevelopment projects in the 29th St. / San Pedro St. area, offer an opportunity to provide a number of health benefits to a local community where existing health concerns are evident. Engagement of community residents in this project to date has been critical to understanding the context in which The Crossings is being developed, and the potential impacts that the development could have on the community. Participation from the community as well as the City of Los Angeles will be crucial in order for this and other projects to move forward successfully, opening the potential for these projects to serve as an example for healthy development for other projects on a local and regional level and beyond.