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CONTACT:

Jane Blumenfeld
LA City Planning Dept.
213 978-1372

LA PLANNING DEPARTMENT EXPANDS, LAUNCHES DYNAMIC NEW INITIATIVES

After years of hiring freezes and budget cuts, the LA City Planning Department has received the green light to bolster its ranks. Over the next three months, 20 new planners will join the Department to help launch dynamic new initiatives to enhance livability for all Angelinos.

"Los Angeles is currently facing some incredibly tough challenges: a housing shortage, issues of sustainability, ever-worsening traffic. New planners are strengthening the Department precisely to help craft solutions to these problems and make Los Angeles a wonderful place to live," said Bud Ovrom, Deputy Mayor for Economic Development.

The Department will expand its scope to focus on greening and revitalizing the Los Angeles River, creating a new office of historic preservation, developing new housing opportunities, and guiding the ongoing evolution of downtown. It will reinstate its Transportation Planning Unit to improve pedestrian and transit accessibility and to tackle traffic congestion. And, it will add Planners and Zoning Administrators to help process the high volume of projects filed with the Department.

"We will be working on the issues that affect all Angelinos and their quality of life," said Jane Blumenfeld, head of the Department's Citywide Planning Division. "As an example, we want to build on the opportunities presented by our budding rail system and put tools in place that make more of these stops into attractive, urban neighborhoods where people can get to their jobs, go to movies or walk to the bookstore without needing a car for every activity. We already see tremendous interest in such lifestyles in Downtown, Hollywood and North Hollywood. With proper planning, we can create many other great pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods centered on our rail stations."

However, Mark Winogrand, the Interim Planning Director, cautions that these kinds of transformations are cultural changes and must be approached with care. "Los Angeles neighborhoods are so diverse and unique and mass transit is still a relatively new phenomenon in the City. While the possibilities for change are exciting, we as planners need to craft strategies carefully, to strike a balance between the many competing goals, needs, and views."

The L.A. River also presents abundant opportunities for the city to address urban needs. Cities such as New York, Denver, San Antonio and Chattanooga have transformed unattractive, degraded rivers into centerpieces of their cities. Los Angeles is poised to do the same. "A revitalized River can change Los Angeles dramatically and offer all Angelinos unparalleled new recreation and open space opportunities," notes Winogrand. Working with a team of consultants, public agencies and community stakeholders, city planners will help craft plans that implement this vision.

Other new Planners will enable the Department to establish an Office of Historic Preservation, develop tools that produce more affordable housing, update the city's bicycle plan for both recreation and transportation, update several community plans, and reinvigorate its "Code Studies" Unit, to research and amend codes aimed at improving the livability of the city's neighborhoods. Planners interested in joining the Department should apply online at www.lacity.org under "**Jobs Available.**"