Old Town La Verne Streetscape and Public Realm Design Study

1. Project Purpose

The purpose of the class project is to develop conceptual streetscape and public realm improvement strategies for Old Town La Verne that strengthen its identity, improve the pedestrian experience, enhance accessibility and connectivity, support local businesses, and create a more attractive and cohesive downtown environment.

Students will evaluate existing conditions and develop implementable urban design concepts that respect Old Town's existing character while identifying opportunities for both near-term improvements and longer-term capital investment.

The study should emphasize urban design and placemaking, with engineering feasibility, maintenance, cost, and implementation considerations incorporated at a conceptual level.

2. Study Area

The primary study area should encompass Old Town La Verne, centered on the commercial district along D Street and adjacent streets and public spaces.

Students should also consider important connections between Old Town and surrounding destinations, particularly the A Line La Verne/Fairplex Station, University of La Verne, nearby civic facilities, neighborhoods, parking areas, and other pedestrian generators.

A defined "core study area" and a somewhat larger "connectivity area" would allow students to concentrate on their design work without ignoring how people arrive in Old Town.

3. Scope of Work

The class will prepare an Old Town La Verne Streetscape and Public Realm Concept Plan consisting of the following tasks.

Task 1: Existing Conditions and Urban Design Inventory

Students will conduct field observations and document existing conditions throughout the study area.

The inventory should evaluate:

- Sidewalk widths and conditions
- Curbs, gutters, curb ramps, and accessibility

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- Crosswalks and pedestrian crossings
- Street trees and landscaping
- Tree canopy and shade
- Streetlights and pedestrian-scale lighting
- Benches, trash receptacles, bike racks, and other furnishings
- Decorative paving and other hardscape
- Signs and wayfinding
- Outdoor dining areas
- Building frontage and relationship between buildings and sidewalks
- On-street parking and loading areas
- Bicycle facilities
- Public and semi-public gathering spaces
- Utilities and other potential streetscape constraints
- General maintenance conditions
- Existing streetscape materials and design themes

Deliverable: Existing Conditions Map and photographic inventory identifying assets, deficiencies, constraints, and opportunities.

Task 2: Pedestrian Experience and Public Realm Assessment

Students will experience the district from the perspective of a pedestrian and evaluate how well the public realm functions.

Particular attention should be given to:

- Pedestrian comfort
- Shade
- Walkability
- Accessibility
- Crossing distances
- Perceived traffic conflicts

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- Seating opportunities
- Areas where people currently congregate
- Areas lacking pedestrian activity
- Blank or inactive frontages
- Opportunities for outdoor dining
- Daytime versus evening conditions
- Connections between parking and businesses
- Connections to the University of La Verne and A Line station

Students could conduct a simple pedestrian activity mapping exercise, documenting where people walk, cross, sit, gather, and enter businesses during selected observation periods.

Deliverable: Pedestrian Experience and Public Realm Opportunities Map.

Task 3: Old Town Identity and Placemaking Analysis

Students will identify the physical characteristics that define Old Town La Verne and consider how the streetscape can reinforce a recognizable district identity.

Students should examine:

- Existing architectural character
- Historic or culturally significant elements
- Gateways into Old Town
- Existing signage and branding
- Public art
- Landscape character
- Streetscape materials
- Lighting
- Opportunities for banners, monuments, interpretive elements, or wayfinding
- Opportunities to distinguish Old Town from surrounding areas

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The objective should not necessarily be to create an entirely new "theme," but to determine how public improvements can reinforce an authentic sense of place.

Deliverable: Old Town Character and Placemaking Framework, including precedent images and a recommended design vocabulary.

Task 4: Streetscape Design Concepts

This should be the primary design component of the project.

Students will develop conceptual streetscape improvements addressing elements such as:

- Sidewalk enhancements
- Decorative paving
- Street trees
- Landscape areas
- Tree wells
- Pedestrian-scale lighting
- Benches and seating
- Trash and recycling receptacles
- Bicycle parking
- Wayfinding
- Gateway features
- Public art
- Outdoor dining
- Parklets or flexible curb space
- Crosswalk enhancements
- Curb extensions
- Median improvements
- ADA accessibility
- Shade

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- Stormwater or green infrastructure opportunities

Students should consider how individual elements work together as a cohesive streetscape system, rather than simply recommending individual amenities.

Deliverables: Concept plans, typical street sections, perspective renderings, material palettes, and representative before-and-after visualizations.

Task 5: Focus Area Design Concepts

Rather than redesigning every block at the same level of detail, assign teams specific focus areas.

Each team could develop a more detailed concept for one location, such as:

1. D Street Core Streetscape
2. Old Town Gateway
3. Key Intersection/Pedestrian Crossing
4. Public Gathering Space or Plaza
5. Parking-to-Old Town Pedestrian Connection
6. Old Town-to-A Line Station Connection
7. Old Town-to-University of La Verne Connection
8. Alley or Underutilized Public Space Activation

This approach would generate multiple tangible concepts that the City could potentially draw from later.

Deliverable: Enlarged concept plan and at least one street-level perspective for each focus area.

Task 6: Streetscape Kit of Parts

I would specifically include this task because it could produce something useful to the City beyond the academic exercise.

Students would develop a coordinated Old Town Streetscape Kit of Parts showing recommended concepts for:

- Streetlights

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- Benches
- Trash receptacles
- Bike racks
- Bollards
- Tree grates or tree wells
- Planters
- Pavers
- Crosswalk treatments
- Wayfinding signs
- Gateway signs
- Street name signs
- Landscaping palette
- Public art locations

Students do not necessarily need to select specific manufacturers. The emphasis should be on design character, materials, colors, scale, and consistency.

Deliverable: Streetscape Kit of Parts board with recommended design standards and visual examples.

Task 7: Implementation and Prioritization

Require students to distinguish between attractive concepts and realistic municipal improvements.

Recommendations should be organized into:

Near-term / Quick Wins: lower-cost improvements that could potentially be implemented through maintenance activities, small capital projects, partnerships, or grants.

Medium-term Improvements: projects requiring design, funding, coordination, and construction.

Long-term Transformational Improvements: larger capital improvements involving significant reconstruction or changes to the public right-of-way.

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Students should consider relative cost, constructability, maintenance requirements, accessibility, impacts to businesses and parking, and potential funding opportunities.

Deliverable: Implementation matrix identifying recommendation, location, relative cost, priority, timeframe, and potential implementation mechanism.

4. Final Deliverables

The final class product could consist of one consolidated Old Town La Verne Streetscape and Public Realm Concept Plan, including:

- Existing conditions analysis
- Opportunities and constraints map
- Pedestrian and connectivity analysis
- Streetscape design principles
- Conceptual master streetscape plan
- Focus-area designs
- Typical street sections
- Streetscape Kit of Parts
- Landscape and materials palette
- Before-and-after renderings
- Implementation and prioritization matrix
- Final presentation to City staff and/or a City commission

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