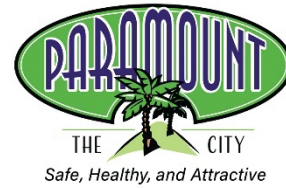
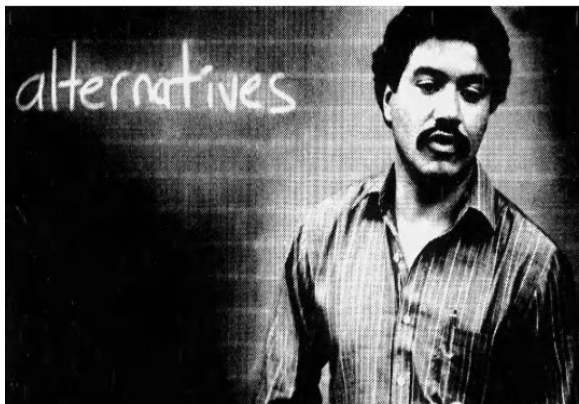


# HISTORIC RESOURCES GROUP



## CITY OF PARAMOUNT HISTORIC CONTEXT STATEMENT UPDATE, 1970-1999

MARCH 2026



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Cover: Clockwise from upper left: Rendering of Paramount General Hospital (Rochlin & Baran, AIA); City Council and the Paramount Neighborhood Shuttle (City of Paramount); Community Beautification Pocket Park (*Los Angeles Times*); Rendering of Century Place Apartments (City of Paramount); Tony Ostos of the Alternatives to Gangs Program (*Los Angeles Times*); Rendering of Vons Supermarket (Paramount Associates).

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# INTRODUCTION

This Citywide Historic Context Statement Update was prepared at the request of the City of Paramount. In January 2024, the City contracted with Historic Resources Group (HRG) to prepare a citywide Historic Context Statement and conduct a historic resources survey. This project was completed in February 2025 and adopted in April 2025. The City contracted with HRG in August 2025 to update the Historic Context Statement with an additional discussion of ethnic diversity in the city, development patterns in the 1970s, and a narrative overview of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

This update to the Historic Context Statement is a compilation of existing information, including published histories and historical narratives about Paramount’s history, supplemented with new research and analysis. The update to the Historic Context Statement is also informed by oral interviews with persons notable in the city’s development from the period of study. The Historic Context Statement identifies important periods of development, historical trends and development patterns, and important persons in the history of Paramount. The updated period of study dates from the 1970s through 1999.

## Contributors & Acknowledgements

This historic context was prepared by Historic Resources Group. The historic context was authored by Alexandra Perlman, Senior Architectural Historian, with support from Christine Lazzaretto, Managing Principal, and Emi Takahara, Intern. All are qualified professionals who meet or exceed the relevant Secretary of the Interior’s Standards Professional Qualification Standards. The project was completed under the direction of the City’s Planning Division and managed by John King, Planning and Building Director.

The project team is indebted to members of the community who contributed information, research, and suggestions related to historical development patterns in Paramount as well as specific properties. In particular, the team would like to extend their sincere gratitude to the members of the Paramount Historical Society for their feedback and advice, and extensive knowledge of Paramount’s history. Additionally, the historic context statement was informed by informal interviews with community members. Thanks are owed to the following individuals who dedicated their time to this project, as identified in the table below. See Appendix A for full biographies.

PARAMOUNT INTERVIEWEES	
Peggy Lemons	Mayor of Paramount
Manny Alcaraz	Former Order Picker, Sinclair Paint; "Mr. Paramount"
Gus Exiga	Owner, Gus's Deli/Eastern Meats and Deli
Gloria Gamino	Owner, Casa Gamino Restaurant

<b>PARAMOUNT INTERVIEWEES</b>	
Shirley Grayson	Former Controller, Cedarlane Natural Foods; Chair, Paramount Parks and Recreation Commission
Daryl Hofmeyer	Former Mayor, Paramount; Former owner, Romberg Mill
Grady Jones	Pastor, New Commandment Missionary Baptist Church
Dr. Max Martinez	Dentist- Owner, Dental Plus of Paramount; Treasurer, Paramount Education Partnership
Mike McKown	Director, Project Hope; Historian, Paramount Historical Society
Dr. Linda Timmons	CEO, Advocates for Family Unity; Chair, Paramount Planning Commission
Pat West	Owner, Pat West LLC; Former City Manager, Paramount and Long Beach

# SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

## Research Methodology and Limitations

Sources consulted as part of this investigation included primary and secondary literature regarding the history and development of the City of Paramount and the larger region, including historic photographs and archival sources at the Paramount Library Local History Collection. Other archival sources included: annexation records, city directories, U.S. Census and voter registration records, contemporary historical accounts and memoirs, historical newspapers, land patent records, secondary histories and biographies, and scholarly works including theses, dissertations, and journal articles. Visual records consulted included historical aerials and photographs as well as various historical maps. Because secondary source literature regarding the recent past is limited in scope and content, newspapers served as the primary sources for research.

## Period and Scope of Study

The study area for the project reflects the current boundaries of the City of Paramount. The scope of this Historic Context Statement covers national, State, and local events and movements in order to provide a broad framework for understanding more recent history in Paramount. The period of study starts in 1970 and ends in 1999.

Because this update to the Historic Context Statement covers the recent past, it is intended to serve as a historical narrative rather than a tool for evaluating properties for historic significance. Typically, in the field of historic preservation, fifty years is considered sufficient time for retrospective analysis of properties considered historically significant. Although the National Register of Historic Places has a consideration (Criteria Consideration G) for those properties that have achieved significance within the last 50 years, these properties must be of exceptional importance. As identified by the National Park Service:

Fifty years is a general estimate of the time needed to develop historical perspective and to evaluate significance. This consideration guards against the listing of properties of passing contemporary interest and ensures that the National Register is a list of truly historic places.<sup>1</sup>

As such, this Historic Context Statement Update serves as a first step towards future efforts to identify those properties that may have gained significance within the last 50 years. For this reason, eligibility standards are omitted from this document. However, a list of properties that may be considered for eligibility in subsequent years is included as Appendix A.

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<sup>1</sup> National Park Service, "Criteria Consideration G," *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation* (Washington, DC: Department of the Interior, 1997), 41.

# CITY OF PARAMOUNT HISTORIC CONTEXT STATEMENT UPDATE, 1970-1999

## Summary Statement

This update to the City of Paramount’s Historic Context Statement covers the last three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, recounting changes in the city from 1970 to 1999. It is divided into two sections. The first includes a general discussion of developments that altered all aspects of the community, including construction of the Century Freeway and the Paramount Redevelopment Agency. The second identifies development trends by property type, including residential; commercial; civic and institutional; and industrial.

The story of Paramount in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century is one of changing demographics and a slow decline, followed by a strong resurgence. The city’s population dropped from approximately 34,700 in 1970 to an estimated 30,900 in 1976. This decline was largely due to freeway construction, and the general aging of the city’s industrial, commercial, and residential infrastructure, which is attributed to residents moving to other communities. In 1973, the Paramount City Council established the Paramount Redevelopment Agency (redevelopment agency). According to the agreement, the City Council would purchase property and sell it to the Paramount Redevelopment Agency, who could in turn sell it to private developers. In 1982, the RAND Corporation published a research report that classified Paramount as a “disaster area” due to a variety of social-economic factors. The report was met with skepticism and anger by city officials and residents alike.<sup>2</sup>

In response, the City redoubled its redevelopment efforts in the industrial, commercial, and civic areas; increased and improved residential areas; and implemented civic programs aimed at ending gang activity, beautifying homes, and increasing safety. Specifically, Paramount’s Mayor Charles Weldon, City Manager William (Bill) Holt, Director of Community Development Richard R. Powers, and Finance Director Sandy Groves all sought to improve the city’s livability. Deputy City Manager Pat West recognized the RAND Corp. finding as “the trigger, the focal point for change. The city started becoming very progressive and proactive.”<sup>3</sup>

City efforts did not go unrecognized. In 1988, the New York-based nonprofit Civic League awarded Paramount the title of “All-America City.” The honor was given annually to 10 cities across the nation that brought government, business, and residents together to attack “major issues or problems.”<sup>4</sup>

As reported by a local news station, “Paramount is the success story of the 80s.”<sup>5</sup> Operating with a surplus budget from its industrial base in the 1990s, the City embarked on aggressive beautification programs, crime prevention campaigns, and new business attraction efforts. Notable projects included the Let’s Get Paramount Neighborhoods Lookin’ Good, White Picket

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<sup>2</sup> Ethel Hillyard, *The Story of Paramount* (Paramount, CA: The Paramount Journal, 1988), 64; Dorothy Korber, “Officials Deny ‘Dogpatch’ Label in Redeveloping City,” *Independent Press-Telegram*, July 17, 1977, 162.

<sup>3</sup> Jesse Katz, “Fighting to Keep a City’s Soul,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 31, 1992.

<sup>4</sup> Harris, 51.

<sup>5</sup> KCOP Channel 13 as quoted in Hillyard, 89.

Fence, Art in Public Places, and Alternatives to Gang Membership programs. By 1998, Paramount was one of 10 cities with the highest increase in property values in the region.<sup>6</sup>

As of 2025, Paramount has abundant housing, strong commerce, and active municipal government. The population is majority Latino. The city's history in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century serves to further bolster its reputation as a dynamic city that residents are proud to call home.

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<sup>6</sup> Dawnya Pring, "Paramount on the Rebound," *Press-Telegram*, February 19, 1999.

## Population and Demographic Changes

The City of Paramount experienced several waves of fluctuating population and demographics in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The city’s population dropped from approximately 34,700 in 1970 to an estimated 30,900 in 1976 due to freeway construction and aging infrastructure. However, as a result of the City of Paramount’s efforts to improve the quality of life for its residents and an increase in residential development, the population surged during the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, rising from approximately 31,000 in 1975 to over 36,400 in 1980 and reaching approximately 42,000 in 1985.<sup>7</sup> By the year 2000, Paramount residents numbered over 55,200—almost double its number 25 years prior.

Demographics in Paramount also shifted during this period. In 1971, the community had majority white residents, with 28% Latino residents and only 29 Black residents. These demographics began to shift in the 1970s. A 1978 advertisement in the *Independent Press-Telegram* recorded that “ethnic minorities make up a larger and larger proportion” of the city.<sup>8</sup> This trend continued in the 1980s and 1990s as more Latinos moved into the city. By 2000, the city was 72% Latino, 13% Black, 9% white, and 6% other residents.<sup>9</sup> Thus, by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Latino population increased to a majority of the population, most of whom were of Mexican and Guatemalan heritage.<sup>10</sup>

### PARAMOUNT’S PERCENT OF POPULATION BY ETHNIC GROUP

Year	Latino	White	Black	Other
1980	46%	46%	3%	5%
1990	60%	23%	10%	7%
2000	72%	9%	13%	6%

Since 2000, the population of Paramount has remained relatively stable at around 55,000 residents; however, the Latino population increased to 83% of residents in the 2020 census.<sup>11</sup>

As discussed below, the city experienced numerous “firsts” during this period, including the first Latino councilmembers. Although this document cannot account for all “firsts,” it does strive to identify areas in which notable events and people made lasting impacts, and to provide avenues for future research.

<sup>7</sup> Hillyard, 64.

<sup>8</sup> “Paramount,” *Independent Press-Telegram*, September 3, 1978, 143.

<sup>9</sup> Census information for demographics of Paramount in 1970 is not available. Other demographic information from: Mark Clutter, “Paramount has a Distinct Personality,” *Independent Press-Telegram*, November 28, 1971, 49; U.S. Census, 1980, 1990, and 2000.

<sup>10</sup> Hillyard, 64.

<sup>11</sup> City of Paramount, “City Profile/History,” <https://www.paramountcity.com/government/city-profile> (accessed September 19, 2025).

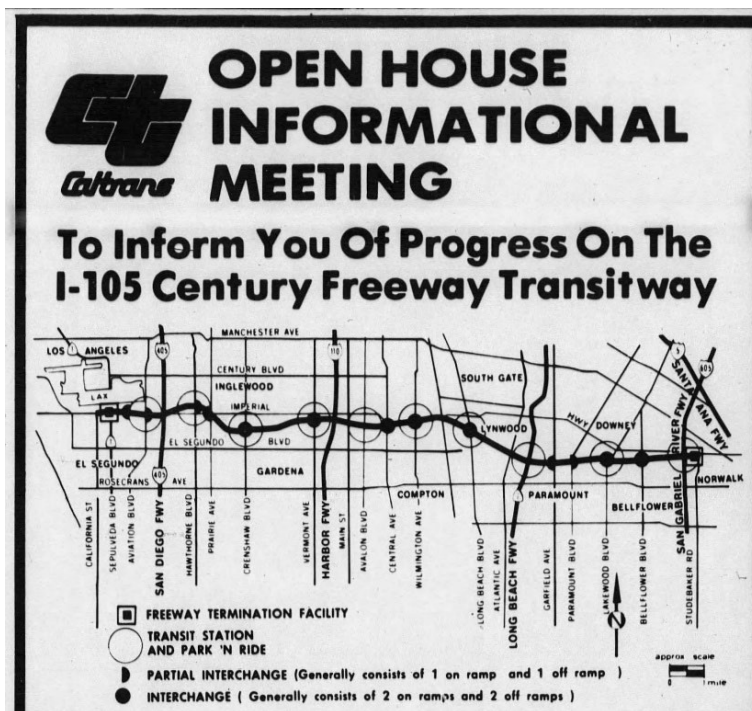
## Century Freeway

The Century Freeway (Interstate 105) is a 17.3-mile east-west stretch that runs through the City of Paramount. The freeway was an integral part of the California Department of Transportation's 1960 master plan, but took nearly 30 years of planning, false starts, and litigation to be completed.

Originally conceptualized in the late 1950s, the Century Freeway received interstate designation and federal funding in 1968, and by 1972, over 2,000 parcels had been acquired and 7,000 people displaced.<sup>12</sup> Plans called for the acquisition of 4,000 additional parcels, which would displace another 14,000 people along the route.

While the 1973 *Paramount General Plan* noted that the city was "built out," in fact, the population fell between 1970 and 1973 due to clearance for the Century Freeway.<sup>13</sup> Although Paramount didn't experience as much residential demolition as other municipalities in the freeway's path, the freeway bisected the northwestern portion of the city, cutting through established neighborhoods. This resulted in the loss of 421 parcels, half of which were razed by July 1972, with over 4,000 residents displaced.<sup>14</sup> As a result, the whole central business district of Paramount was deemed a blighted area, ripe for redevelopment.<sup>15</sup> Construction around the intersection of Paramount and Alondra boulevards was completed in 1971.

In 1972, a class action lawsuit, *Keith vs. Volpe*, was filed by thousands of plaintiffs against the project, including the Sierra Club, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Environmental Defense Fund, and the Hawthorne Freeway Fighters. The residents and groups argued that the freeway displaced low-income marginalized communities and failed to provide adequate relocation assistance and replacement housing. They also alleged that the freeway violated environmental laws, including the National Environmental Policy Act and the California Environmental Quality Act.



Caltrans Open House Advertisement, 1982. *Los Angeles Times*.

<sup>12</sup> "Class Action Lawsuit Hits Century Freeway," *Los Angeles Times*, February 18, 1972, B1.

<sup>13</sup> Other historic names associated with this freeway included the Norwalk Freeway, the Norwalk-El Segundo Freeway, and the Glenn Anderson Freeway; "Paramount Has a Distinct Personality," *Press-Telegram*, November 28, 1971, 49.

<sup>14</sup> "Change," *Los Angeles Times*, March 17, 1985.

<sup>15</sup> "Reaction to Freeway Halt Ruling Varied," *Los Angeles Times*, July 15, 1972, C6.

An injunction was granted that tied the project up in the courts into the late 1970s. The result was a blighted area of vacant homes that fostered degradation and crime in Paramount. Paramount resident Dr. Max Martinez remembers of the time, “There were a lot of boarded-up houses. There were a lot of empty lots, because they boarded up houses and people [would] graffiti on them, so they tore them down. So, then there were empty lot.”<sup>16</sup>

In 1976, Mayor Richard DeBie urged residents to ask Governor Brown to start construction on the freeway. He said:

The people of Paramount have grown weary and have asked their elected officials over and over again for their support in gaining immediate construction of the Century Freeway. The City of Paramount has been on record for years supporting the freeway and several years ago formally agreed, after public hearings, to the geometrics proposed by the State Division of Highways.<sup>17</sup>

In the early 1980s, the City of Paramount, which had historically been supportive of the freeway — anticipating its positive impact on the city’s ability to recruit and sustain industry — objected when the number of ramps in/out of the city was cut in half.<sup>18</sup> In 1981, the City Council held a special session to discuss the changes. Instead of the full interchanges originally proposed, Caltrans constructed half interchanges at Garfield and Paramount, with one-way frontage roads linking the two ramps. As recorded by City Manager Bill Holt at the time, “from our standpoint, two halves is the same as one whole. We feel that one full interchange would better serve the city of Paramount.”<sup>19</sup> Paramount ultimately signed the agreement with Caltrans,<sup>20</sup> and construction occurred in the 1980s, with the Century Freeway finally opened in 1993.



Aerial view of Century Freeway, 1989. *University of California, Santa Barbara FrameFinder.*

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with Dr. Max Martinez by Emi Takahama. December 18, 2025. On file with Historic Resources Group.

<sup>17</sup> “Mayor Blasts Delay; Paramount Pushes for Freeway,” *Press-Telegram*, August 6, 1976, 21.

<sup>18</sup> Kristina Lindgren, “Paramount Balks at Freeway Accord,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 3, 1981, 272.

<sup>19</sup> Kristina Lindgren, “Paramount Balks at Freeway Accord,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 3, 1981, 272.

<sup>20</sup> Paramount was the second-to-last of the nine cities in the freeway’s path to sign an agreement with Caltrans for its construction.

## Paramount Redevelopment Agency

Beginning in the 1970s, the City embarked on redevelopment efforts to improve the city's industrial, commercial, and institutional areas. These were undertaken by the City Council and the Redevelopment Agency, and through public-oriented programs to advance the general well-being of the community. Officials established three important programs during this period: Alternatives to Gang Membership; Let's Get Paramount Neighborhoods Lookin' Good; and the Public Safety Innovations. These initiatives are discussed further in the sections below.



City Council from 1972-1977 (shown in 1972, clockwise from top left): Raymond Guillen, John Mies, Richard DeBie, Ted Mosier, and Louis Spane. *Paramount High School Yearbook*.

The Paramount Redevelopment Agency (redevelopment agency) was adopted by the Paramount City Council in 1973. According to the agreement, the City Council would purchase property and sell it to the Paramount Redevelopment Agency, who could in turn sell it to private developers. The general aim of the redevelopment agency was to increase property valuations, improve blighted industrial areas, assist local schools with required developments, and provide a base for an improved water system throughout the city.<sup>21</sup>

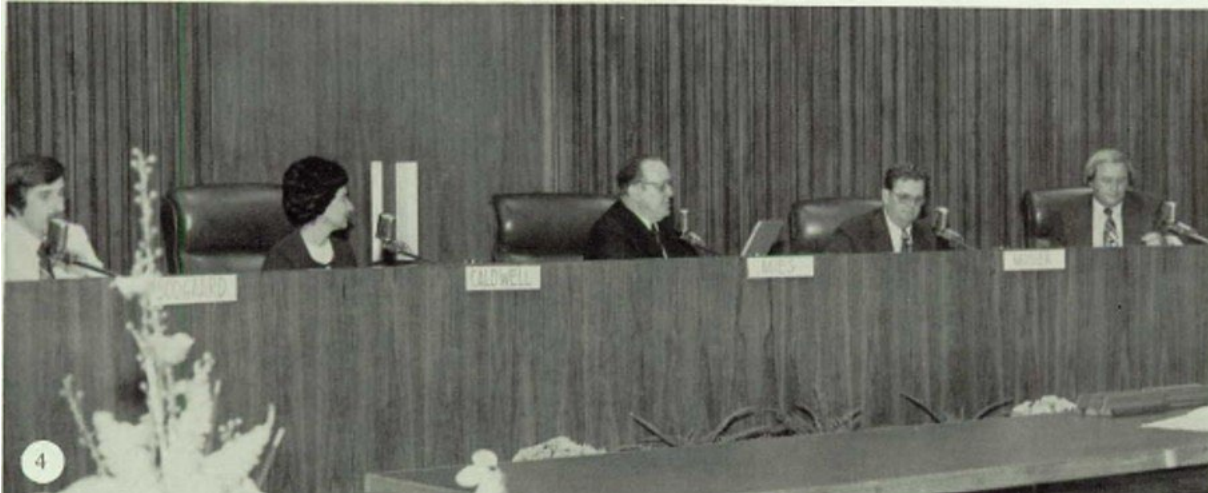
From its inception, the redevelopment agency was heavily involved in transforming Paramount. The *Independent Press-Telegram* reported on the initiative in 1977:

Paramount today is waging war against the deterioration affecting so many Southland cities. The key weapon here is redevelopment...Once a community of dairies and quiet residential neighborhoods, Paramount evolved into a patchwork of industrial sites, vacant lots and rental units. The city's population dropped from 34,700 in 1970 to an estimated 30,900 in 1976.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Ralph McClurg, "Hynes, Clearwater Live on in City of Paramount," *Independent*, July 4, 1976, 96.

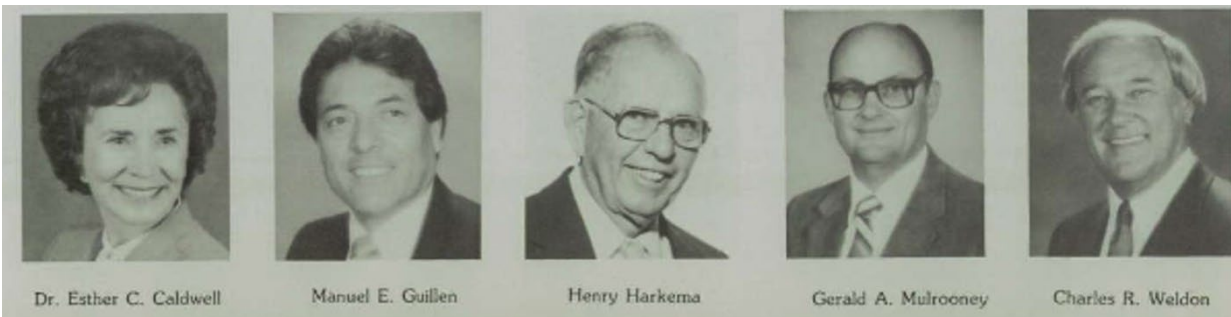
<sup>22</sup> Dorothy Korber, "Officials Deny 'Dogpatch' Label in Redeveloping City," *Independent Press-Telegram*, July 17, 1977, 162.

At the time of the redevelopment agency's establishment, the City Council consisted of Louis Spane, Ted Mosier, John Miles, Ray Guillen, and Richard DeBie. Other Councilmembers who spearheaded the agency in the early years included, but are not limited to, Charles Weldon, Gerald Mulrooney, Esther Caldwell, Case Boogaard, Manuel Guillen, John A. Mies, and Henry Harkema.<sup>23</sup> City Managers Bill Holt and Pat West were instrumental in the redevelopment agency and Richard Powers was its long-term director.



City Council from 1978-1980 (shown in 1978, from left): Cornelius (Case) Boogaard, Dr. Esther Caldwell, Ted Mosier, John A. Mies, and Charles (Chuck) Weldon. *Paramount High School Yearbook*.

The five-member Paramount City Council served as the city's redevelopment agency.<sup>24</sup> A special exemption approved by the State Assembly made Paramount the only California city with authorization to spend redevelopment funds outside of redevelopment areas. As such, funds generated could be used in public parks and landscaping.<sup>25</sup>



City Council from 1986-1989 (from left): Dr. Esther Caldwell, Manuel Guillen, Henry Harkema, Gerald (Jerry) Mooney, and Charles Weldon. *Paramount High School Yearbook*.

In April of 1990, Elvira Amaro and Allen J. Parker joined the City Council.<sup>26</sup> Priorities of the City Council increasingly moved away from redevelopment and toward relieving overcrowding,

<sup>23</sup> Hillyard, 62.

<sup>24</sup> Dorothy Korber, "Paramount Sets Sale of Bonds," *Independent*, March 4, 1977, 21.

<sup>25</sup> Jesse Katz, "Fighting to Keep a City's Soul," *Los Angeles Times*, December 31, 1992.

<sup>26</sup> However, when Parker passed away from a heart attack in December of that year, Henry Harkema was appointed his successor. "Ex-Councilman Harkema Appointed to Fill Vacancy," *Los Angeles Times*, December 20, 1990, 427.

increasing safety, and city beautification. In 1994 and again in 1999, Diane J. Martinez was elected to the City Council alongside Manuel E. Guillen and Henry Harkema.



City Council in front of aerial photograph of the Century Freeway, c. 1994. *City of Paramount.*

In 1997, Peggy Lemons and Gene Daniels were elected to the City Council. The City Council continued to work on redevelopment into the 1990s and early 2000s, with projects largely centered on commercial development and city beautification programs.



City Council members and Sheriff. From left to right: Manuel Guillen, Gene Daniels, Peggy Lemons, Sheriff Lee Baca, Diane J. Martinez, and Henry Harkema, c. 1999. *City of Paramount.*

However, partially because of density considerations and scale of new construction, redevelopment and freeway development have a mixed legacy in Paramount, as elsewhere in the country. The Century Freeway in particular disrupted neighborhoods in Paramount, leaving behind boarded homes and empty lots, some of which remained vacant for decades, thereby

reducing property values for remaining homes and leading to blight or neighborhood disruptions. By the time the Century Freeway was completed in 1994, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that over 8,000 homes in the project area had been condemned.<sup>27</sup> For nearly a decade, displaced residents fought to get help with the disruption in their lives caused by the freeway.

In the effort to improve the economic well-being of the city, some of its historic properties, particularly in the central business district, were lost. As remembered by historian Mike McKown of the Paramount Historical Society:

In the 1970s and in early 1980s, that's when redevelopment started, and a lot of buildings were lost, a lot of really cool buildings. I wish they had saved them, but they did what they did. They saved a couple of buildings and then we were excited because there were new stores coming in, a new Vons moved in, and new chain stores. Because people at that time were more enamored of chain stores than they were about the mom-and-pop businesses. Now they look back and say, "Oh, what did we do?"

That's hindsight. Then there were a lot of people who were excited for redevelopment, to see what's coming... Now, people wish they had the old Paramount back, but that's my own opinion, my own perception. And I love old architecture, and I think we lost some really wonderful buildings at that time.<sup>28</sup>

Ultimately, the redevelopment agency was largely responsible for the economic revitalization of the city. Because the agency was involved in numerous projects that spanned different property types in Paramount, a discussion of its work is included in subsequent sections on residential; commercial; civic and institutional; and industrial improvements from the 1970s to 1990s.

In 2012, as part of the 2011 Budget Act, the California State Legislature approved the dissolution of the state's 400 plus Redevelopment Agencies. This dissolution was intended to protect funding for core public services at the local level, and the remaining property tax revenues following the dissolution were allocated to cities, counties, special districts, and school and community college districts. In order to help facilitate the wind-down process, Successor Agencies were established to manage ongoing redevelopment projects, make payments on enforceable obligations, and dispose of redevelopment assets and properties.<sup>29</sup> The City of Paramount elected to serve as the Successor Agency to the former Paramount Redevelopment Agency, and is continuing the wind-down process to present day.<sup>30</sup>

In 2023, the City of Paramount embarked on the development of a historic preservation program, including the completion of a historic context statement and historic resource survey to understand and document the important milestones and properties in the city's history.

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<sup>27</sup> Mary Guthrie, "A Century of Emotions," *Los Angeles Times*, March 16, 1994, 157.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Mike McKown by Emi Takahara. December 18, 2025. On file with Historic Resources Group.

<sup>29</sup> "Redevelopment Agency Dissolution," *State of California Department of Finance*, accessed on February 9, 2026 at: <https://dof.ca.gov/programs/redevelopment/>

<sup>30</sup> City of Paramount, "Successor Agency for the Paramount Redevelopment Agency Resolution No, SAPREA 24:004," accessed on February 9, 2026 at: <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/199045.pdf>

## THEME: RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT (1970-1999)

Residential development and housing patterns changed in Paramount during the last three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the 1970s, the city was largely composed of single-family homes with a high percentage of rental units and a low percentage of multi-family residences. As reported in the 1973 General Plan, only 14 percent of the available housing stock in Paramount was constructed prior to 1940, 19 percent was constructed between 1940 and 1950, and 67 percent was constructed between 1950 and 1970.<sup>31</sup>

Because the majority of parcels in Paramount were built out (i.e., developed with buildings and no longer vacant land) by the 1970s, residential development during this period consisted primarily of in-fill construction in previously established neighborhoods. As in many cities, such development was largely composed of condominiums, apartments, and townhomes. In 1971, Councilman Louis Spane predicted “a trend toward multiple-family and high-rise apartments” in Paramount.<sup>32</sup> New development reflected the shift anticipated by Spane, and the community’s housing boom began in earnest in the 1980s.

Along with changes in building patterns and types from the 1970s through 1990s, demographics of residents (as discussed in greater detail above) also changed in Paramount during these decades. These changes are remembered by lifelong Paramount residents. As recalled by Dr. Linda Timmons, the city’s first African American member of the Chamber of Commerce, in the 1970s, “neighbors bonded on the block, but there was a transition. In the beginning, when I moved there, there were a lot of whites that lived there, but as we moved in, they were moving out, so that changed.”<sup>33</sup> Historian Mike McKown of the Paramount Historical Society remembers that:

The demographics were changing [in the 1970s], although not as drastically as some people might think, because one thing about Paramount, as opposed to some of the surrounding cities such as Bellflower or Downey, is that Paramount always had a very sizable Mexican and Mexican American population in the city. And that goes back to the turn of the century... So, while we’ve always had a sizable Mexican and Mexican American population, that change kind of accelerated at that time.<sup>34</sup>

Dr. Max Martinez notes that “Latinos were a minority at the time I became student body president of Paramount High School in 1973, and I was the first Hispanic Student Body President that Paramount ever had. We were a minority here. There were Hispanics, mostly Mexican American or Mexican, but nothing that’s close to how it is now.”<sup>35</sup> Dr. Martinez was a member of the Varsity Club, Key Club, and the Cross-Country and Basketball teams.<sup>36</sup>

Longtime resident Shirley Grayson also experienced the changing demographics of the city: “I look at my own block, and when I moved into my husband and I, our family, moved to the block,

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<sup>31</sup> Wisley & Ham, *City of Paramount General Plan*, August 1973, 37.

<sup>32</sup> Mark Clutter, “Paramount has Distinct Personality,” *Independent Press-Telegram*, November 28, 1971, 49.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Dr. Linda Timmons by Emi Takahara. December 18, 2025. On file with Historic Resources Group.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Mike McKown by Emi Takahara. December 18, 2025. On file with Historic Resources Group.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Dr. Max Martinex by Emi Takahara. December 18, 2025. On file with Historic Resources Group.

<sup>36</sup> “Max Martinex President of the ASB For Second Year,” *Paramount Journal*, 1972-1973.

but there were a lot of people transitioning out to Orange County. And so, a lot of African Americans moved on to our block, replacing the people that were there. I've seen a lot of Hispanic people move in, and so the transition has been good, as far as I'm concerned, and I'm sure that'll continue to happen...the blending of all the ethnicities.”<sup>37</sup>

Residential development from 1970 to 1999 represented several patterns. First were the City's efforts to improve single-family residences and neighborhoods that already existed, which largely resulted from the Let's Get Paramount Neighborhoods Lookin' Good program and other initiatives. The City also increasingly turned toward new residential development, particularly in industrial areas that were identified as “blighted” by the redevelopment agency. Under the auspices of the Paramount Redevelopment Agency, this often incentivized developers to come to Paramount. Attitudes toward residential development shifted during the 1980s and 1990s, oscillating between excitement and apprehension, and resulted in several construction moratoria and rent control considerations. Finally, several new properties catered to specific segments of the population, including senior housing.

## Improvement of Existing Residences

In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the City of Paramount made a concerted effort to improve the appearance of the city's existing residential building stock. Enacted in the 1980s, the Let's Get Paramount Neighborhoods Lookin' Good program united community volunteers, city crews, tenants, and property owners to clean up residential properties throughout the city. Many of the volunteers came from the Emmanuel Reformed Church. Over the course of two years, thousands of properties were improved by painting, yard work, and removing debris.

The Let's Get Paramount Neighborhoods Lookin' Good program was one of the only Code Enforcement efforts in the country that performed free work on private property.<sup>38</sup> It was available to all residents of Paramount in the 12 target areas.<sup>39</sup> The program was active in each target area for approximately two months and included clean up Saturdays and block rallies. As remembered by then City Manager Pat West:

We started painting things. We recognized too that crime stems from a crappy neighborhood. So, if you are depressed, you look around and you're in a depressed area and it just depresses. We were trying to uplift the neighborhoods to make it happier.<sup>40</sup>

Improvement of existing residences continued into the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> and first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. From 1990 to 2007, there were 346 residential rehabilitation projects completed in the city, totaling a public investment of \$3.85 million and private investment of \$1.23 million.<sup>41</sup>

The Neighborhood Improvement Program provided rebates to homeowners who qualified based on yearly income. Improvements covered by the rebates included painting or re-stuccoing; reroofing; repairing or replacing driveway and sidewalks; repairing or replacing front yard fences;

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with Shirley Grayson by Emi Takahara. December 15, 2025. On file with Historic Resources Group.

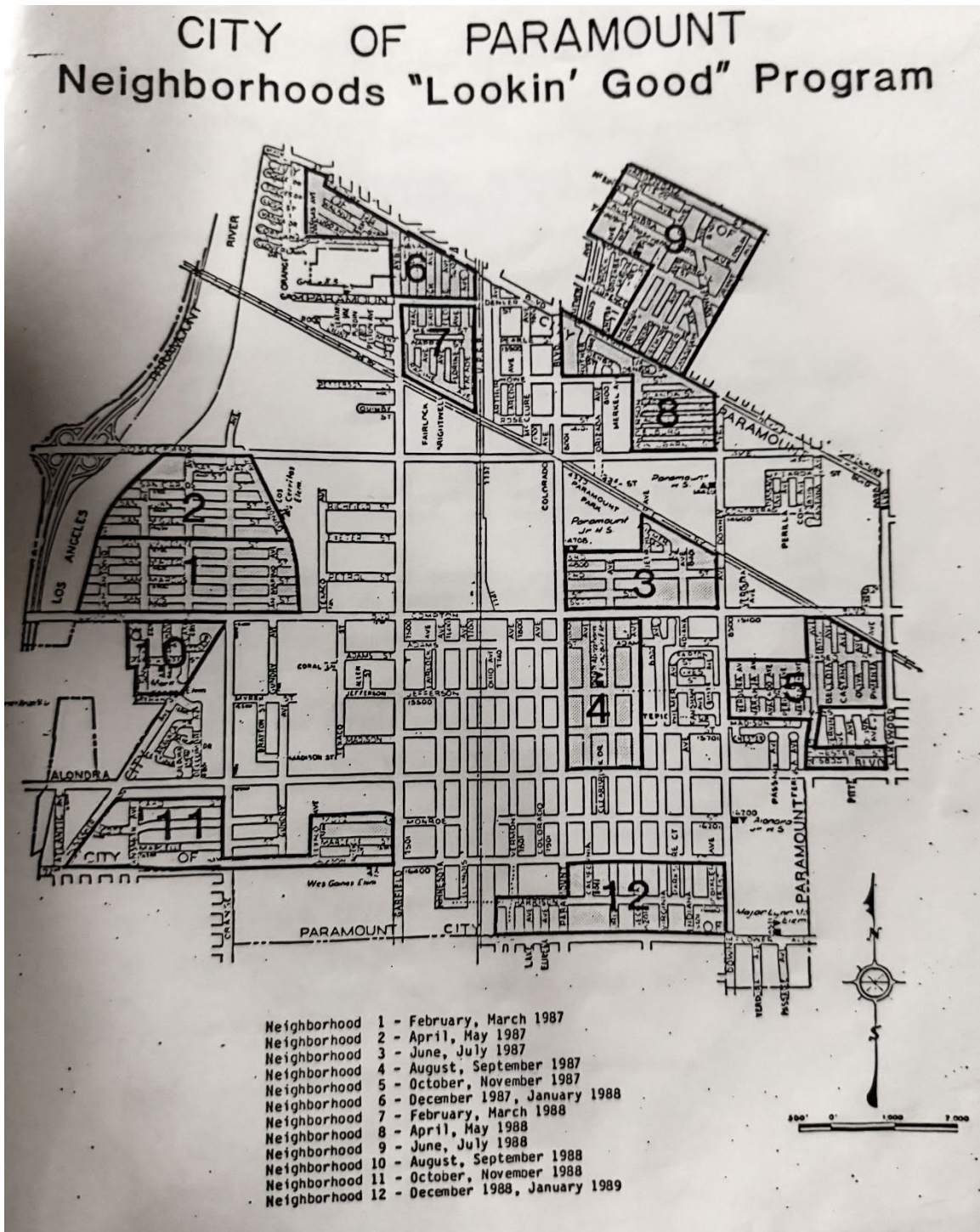
<sup>38</sup> Hillyard, 89.

<sup>39</sup> “Paramount Residences are Lookin' Good,” *Press-Telegram*, February 18, 1988, 5.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Pat West by Emi Takahara. November 25, 2025. On file with Historic Resources Group.

<sup>41</sup> City of Paramount, *Revitalization of Paramount*, 25.

replacing broken windows or screens; relandscaping; and correction of safety or building code violations.<sup>42</sup>



Map of Neighborhoods in Paramount's "Looking Good" Program, 1989. *City of Paramount.*

<sup>42</sup> "City of Paramount Neighborhood Improvement Program," Informational pamphlet, n.d. City of Paramount.



Don Holbrook, a volunteer from Emmanuel Reformed Church, helps clean up a revitalized Paramount as part of the "Let's Get Paramount Neighborhoods Lookin' Good" program. BIGGINS TANNER / Los Angeles Times

"Let's Get Paramount Neighborhoods Lookin' Good," 1988, *Los Angeles Times*.

In the mid-1990s, the City also adopted the White Picket Fence Program, which heavily subsidized the cost of replacing chain link fences with rust- and graffiti-resistant picket fences.<sup>43</sup> As the *Los Angeles Times* reported in 2007:

Paramount's sense of place is reflected in its little parks and white picket fences. The city's White Picket Fence Program pays 75% of the purchase and installation cost to replace chain link fences...Satisfied customers include Jose Luis Romero, who a year ago adorned his two-bedroom home with a fence he described as "a heck of a deal, almost free. The city lets you pay your 25% portion on a payment plan."<sup>44</sup>

The city also subsidized the cost of new roofs, which slowly eliminated the flat asphalt shingles that once dominated the city's skyline. From 1990 to 2007, there were 325 White Picket Fence projects totaling \$708,380 in private investment and \$257,126 in public investment.<sup>45</sup>



COURTNEY HEROESHEIMER Los Angeles Times

Paramount resident Jose Luis Romero in front of his white picket fence, 2007. *Los Angeles Times*.

<sup>43</sup> Louis Sahagun, "Paramount Likes it Picket-Fence Image," *Los Angeles Times*, June 25, 2007, B3.

<sup>44</sup> Louis Sahagun, "Paramount Likes it Picket-Fence Image," *Los Angeles Times*, June 25, 2007, B3.

<sup>45</sup> City of Paramount, *Revitalization of Paramount*, 27.

Paramount resident Shirley Grayson recalls the changes that occurred in Paramount, especially in regard to housing in the 1980s and the 1990s:

Things were changing... Condominiums were replacing the dairies. I saw it as always progressing, maybe getting a little more modernized, if you will. It seemed like it was just a pretty natural transition from a more slow pace to picking up a little bit. I remember a time when Paramount put up white picket fences for residents. I thought, how nice. I mean, everybody dreams of living in a house with a white picket fence. And Paramount did that. And they would paint houses, clean up yards. I just thought, this is great.<sup>46</sup>

## New Residential Redevelopment

New residential development also characterized Paramount from the 1970s to 1990s. In 1978, The Homestead, a condominium development by Zellner Communities, Inc. was completed at the southwest corner of Orange Avenue and Alondra Boulevard. The 7.5-acre development included a central swimming pool, parking lots, and extensive landscaping. Another early residential development was Paramount Shores by the Hynes Land and Cattle Company at the corner of Downey and Jackson (1980).



Rendering of The Homestead Condominiums, 1978. *Zellner Communities, Inc.*

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Shirley Grayson by Emi Takahara. December 15, 2025. On file with Historic Resources Group.

Between 1985 and 1988, over 24 acres of the city were zoned for new residential development, including single-family houses, apartments, and condominiums.<sup>47</sup> Private developers invested over \$75 million while the Redevelopment Agency contributed about \$1.6 million to the projects.<sup>48</sup> An advertisement for the city in 1985 recounted these new residential trends:

The community is also entering a new phase in the development of residential housing. The City has identified approximately 300 acres for potential housing development and is in the preliminary negotiation stage with some of California's largest development companies for the construction of new innovative housing projects. The City anticipates increasing its middle income housing stock from between 1,000-3,000 housing units over the next few years.<sup>49</sup>

The California Somerset Ranch project—a 162 home residential development by Kaufman and Broad—was the city's first new housing tract since World War II. Four models were offered in the community, ranging in price from \$139,990 to \$168,990. The residences featured woodburning fireplaces, wall-to-wall carpeting, air conditioning, upgraded kitchen appliances, and wood cabinets.<sup>50</sup> The homes were sold out within seven months.



Residence at Somerset Ranch, 1987. *Kaufman Broad*.

Other multifamily developments included an apartment complex at 7770 Alondra Boulevard (1985), the Triangle Development at the corner of Downey Avenue and Somerset Boulevard (1988), and MRLD, Inc.'s apartment complex at 7221-43 Petrol Steet (1988).<sup>51</sup>

Three other apartment complexes were built by Hermosa Beach-based Surfside Development Co., totaling 411 units. These were the Indiana Apartments on Downey Avenue (66 units), Twin Towers apartments on Vermont Avenue (153 units), and Somerset Village apartments (192 units).<sup>52</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Lee Harris, "Paramount Tightens Limits on Construction," *Los Angeles Times*, May 8, 1988, 4.

<sup>48</sup> Lee Harris, "All-America City Award Caps Rehabilitation of Paramount," *Los Angeles Times*, September 1, 1988.

<sup>49</sup> "City of Paramount," advertisement, *Press-Telegram*, January 28, 1985, 49.

<sup>50</sup> "California Somerset Models for Sale," *Press-Telegram*, November 29, 1987, 36.

<sup>51</sup> City of Paramount, DRA, 85-070, 7770 Alondra, Ken McKenzie and Joe Sinnott; DRA, 87-082, 7221-43 Petrol, MRLD., Inc; and DRA, 89-097 NE Corner of Corney-Somerset, Triangle Development.

<sup>52</sup> "Paramount's Refinery's New Life Puts Hold on City Plans," *Press-Telegram*, November 14, 1988, 21.

# Real Estate

PRESS-TELEGRAM  
advertising supplement

## Paramount

### California Somerset nears sell-out

One hundred fifty-one of the 162 single-family detached homes at Kaufman and Broad's California Somerset community are now sold, reports Eric Elder, director of sales for the company's Northwest Division. Since opening less than four months ago on June 27, California Somerset in Paramount has averaged over nine sales per week and had 5,427 families visit the site.

"Each phase released for sale has drawn a tremendous number of prospective home buyers," says Elder. "The first phase of 52 homes sold opening day, June 27, 38 homes sold two weeks later on July 11 and 41 homes sold August 1. Altogether, with 151 homes sold, we have three homes currently available for sale which are priced at \$141,990 and \$146,990. The four other lots and the four models will be released for sale soon."

California Somerset is part of the city of Paramount's extensive redevelopment program and represents the first for-sale housing community to open in the city in more than 10 years. Located in the Somerset Ranch area, California Somerset is close to business, shopping, entertainment and recreational facilities. It is also freeway-close to downtown Los Angeles, Long Beach and Orange County.

Visitors to California Somerset will find four fully-decorated models: a one-story, two-bedroom home, or three two-story homes with three and four bedrooms. The three homes that are now available are two Plan 2 models, and one Plan 3 model, both two-story, three-bedroom homes.

Part of Kaufman and Broad's California Series collection, California Somerset homes come with a number of standard amenities as well as distinctive architectural designs. The amenities include tile roofs, vaulted ceilings, bay and greenhouse windows, woodburning fireplaces and air conditioning.

In addition, buyers will receive wall-to-wall carpeting, kitchens with ceramic tile countertops, wood cabinetry, and General Elec-

packages, including competitive 30-year fixed-rate FHA and VA loans and both fixed- and adjustable-rate conventional loans.

To reach the community, exit the Artesia (91) Freeway at Paramount Boulevard and travel north to Somerset Boulevard and follow the signs to California Somerset. The sales office is open daily from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. For more information please call the sales office at (213) 531-8805.



**CALIFORNIA SOMERSET** — four fully-decorated models are ready for home-shopper scrutiny today.

tric appliances including a continuous-clean oven and dishwasher.

Kaufman and Broad also provides front-yard landscaping, rear-yard fencing and attached two-car garages.

Through its mortgage banking subsidiary, Kaufman and Broad can offer qualified home buyers a number of excellent financing

Kaufman and Broad of Southern California, Inc. is one of the most active home builders in the Southland. It is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Kaufman and Broad Home Corporation, a New York Stock Exchange-listed company which is the largest single-family home builder in California and third largest in France.

Advertisement for Somerset Ranch, 1987. *Press-Telegram*.

In 1986, the City Council voted to rename a 2.5-mile section of Compton Boulevard (previously Washington Street) as Somerset Boulevard. Developers of a proposed \$200 million residential development, Somerset Ranch Planned Community, were behind the request. The developers claimed that the name change would increase rental value of their properties on the boulevard by 40 percent. The City of Compton subsequently requested a retraction and apology from the developers, but the name Somerset Boulevard was adopted.<sup>53</sup>

By the end of the 1980s, nearly 2,000 new dwellings had been built in the city, helping make Paramount one of the fastest-growing cities in the Southeast Los Angeles region. During this decade, the population grew by 31%, from 36,407 to 47,669—second only to Signal Hill in terms of percentage of growth.<sup>54</sup>

In 1991, the City of Paramount won a National League of Cities award for “its effort to bring high-quality multifamily housing into an area blighted by gang activity and crime.”<sup>55</sup> The 1991 Urban Enrichment Award was given for the 306-unit Century Place apartment complex at 13801 Paramount Boulevard. The City granted density variances to Jan Development Co. for the project, which reduced land costs in exchange for providing affordable housing; twenty percent of the units were for low- and moderate-income residents. Community amenities for the complex included a swimming pool, sundeck, equipped gymnasium, Whirlpool baths, and BBQ areas.<sup>56</sup>



Century Place Apartments Grand Opening, 1991. *City of Paramount.*

## SENIOR HOUSING

During this period, there were several residential developments that accommodated adults and/or senior citizens. Completed in 1981, Lake Terrace was one such adult-only community of one- and two-bedroom condominiums, located at 16211 Downey Avenue.

<sup>53</sup> “City of Paramount Renames Stretch of Compton Boulevard,” *Press Telegram*, November 28, 1986, 64; Hillyard, 67.

<sup>54</sup> Duke Helfand and Psyche Pascual, “District’s Future Rides on Bond Decision,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 1, 1995, 51.

<sup>55</sup> “City Gets Award for its Role in New Apartment Project,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 24, 1991, 564.

<sup>56</sup> “City Gets Award for its Role in New Apartment Project,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 24, 1991, 564.

In 1983, the City of Paramount agreed to subsidize the development of low-rent senior-citizen housing. City staff helped applicants obtain rental subsidy certificates from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which paid a share of the rent. One-bedroom units were rented at the HUD rate of \$327 a month to residents. As recounted by Director of Community Development Dick Powers, “At that price, the building would be a tacky barracks (without a city subsidy). But the cost of balconies for each unit, a meeting room and other amenities will be underwritten by the city’s redevelopment agency and by federal block grant funds.”<sup>57</sup>

The following year, Paramount Housing Partners Ltd. developed a 158-unit senior housing complex known as the Town Center Senior Citizens Complex on Vermont Avenue, also known as the Town Center Terrace.<sup>58</sup> The project cost approximately \$5.5 million, \$3.4 million of which was financed by a county bond issue and \$1.8 million in Federal Housing and Community Development grants. Completed in 1984, the complex had 158 units for people 62 or older, each containing a bedroom, living room, kitchen, bathroom, and patio or balcony.<sup>59</sup>

## Shifting Attitudes to Redevelopment

By the mid- to late- 1980s, attitudes began to shift amongst some Paramount residences regarding new residential development in the city. These attitudes were reflected by community members’ support for various projects as well as the introduction of new legislation by City staff.

In 1984, a “tough” apartment ordinance was passed that addressed features such as architectural variety, outdoor living space, private entries, parking spaces, recreational amenities, landscaping, and compatibility with condominium conversion. Director of Community Development Dick Powers noted that “the goal [of the ordinance] is to substantially upgrade our residential areas. To allay fears of excessive cost, affordable projects have been built this way already. The architectural quality of a project has a lot to do with its long-term success.”<sup>60</sup> City Council members endorsed the stronger ordinance with enthusiasm, with Mayor Gerald Mulrooney remarking “We’re very much into changing the image of Paramount.”<sup>61</sup>

Some Paramount residents became increasingly alarmed over the high-density residential projects— and their increased pressure on the city’s infrastructure and institutions—and asked for residential development to slow in the mid-1980s. Among those who voiced caution with development was Councilwoman and former Mayor Dr. Esther Caldwell, who was reelected to City Council in 1988.<sup>62</sup> Proponents argued that big apartment complexes congested traffic and overtaxed schools, sewers, and other public facilities.

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<sup>57</sup> Richard Howland, “Paramount Oks Senior Housing Plan,” *Press-Telegram*, February 10, 1983, 66.

<sup>58</sup> Richard Howland, “Seniors Hailed at Paramount Groundbreaking,” *Press-Telegram*, February 22, 1984, 86.

<sup>59</sup> Hillyard, 65.

<sup>60</sup> Richard Howland, “Paramount Apartment Law Stricter,” *Press-Telegram*, July 11, 1984, 87-89.

<sup>61</sup> Richard Howland, “Paramount Apartment Law Stricter,” *Press-Telegram*, July 11, 1984, 87-89.

<sup>62</sup> “Incumbents Feuding in Paramount,” *Press-Telegram*, March 11, 1988, 3-5.

As a result, in 1988 Paramount passed a 45-day development moratorium, followed by Measure FF later that year, which limited housing density to 22 units per acre, decreased from the existing 70 units per acre.<sup>63</sup> The slow growth initiative was approved by Paramount voters by a margin of 61 percent, with 3,965 votes for and 2,585 votes against. Developers and other critics of Measure FF said that the limit would “put a freeze on the city’s hard-won recent progress.”<sup>64</sup>



Pro-Growth Supporters at Paramount City Council meeting in 1988. *Los Angeles Times*.

The reason for, and results of, the measure were mixed. As City Councilman Gerald Mulrooney remarked following the vote:

Paramount is in a pretty prime spot, so growth will continue. It wasn’t a situation in which the council thought we had to have 60 or 70 units per acre. We thought 35 units was about right. It already was evident [that] people wanted to slow down. People are just tired of fighting crowds wherever they go. It’s not the housing in Paramount that’s causing traffic to stand still on the freeways, but people aren’t reasonable about that kind of thing.<sup>65</sup>

Following passage of the measure, Deputy City Manager Pat West noted that building permits had declined drastically and that due to the narrow smaller lots in the city, it was difficult to guarantee good design for smaller apartment complexes.<sup>66</sup>

However, despite limitations on the number of units per acre and periods of economic downturn, residential construction did continue in the city into the 1990s and 2000s. According to Los Angeles County tax assessor data, 818 properties in the city were developed between 1990 and 1999. Examples of residential developments from this decade include Meridian Terrace Homes at 16212 Hunsaker Avenue and Emerald Court at 7221 Petrol Street. Meridian Terrace Homes was a collection of 10 single-family, four-bedroom detached homes designed in the Mediterranean Revival style of architecture. Emerald Court was a condominium project by Emerald Investment Company that featured condominiums with four floor plan options. Emerald Court was VA and FHA approved and only required \$5,600 for a down payment.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Harris, “Paramount Tightens Limits on Construction,” 4.

<sup>64</sup> “Paramount Slow-Growth Vote Stirs Talk,” *Press-Telegram*, November 10, 1988, 20.

<sup>65</sup> “Paramount Slow-Growth Vote Stirs Talk,” *Press-Telegram*, November 10, 1988, 20.

<sup>66</sup> Richard Howland, “Paramount,” *Press-Telegram*, January 30, 1989, 26.

<sup>67</sup> “Future Estates opens Meridian Terrace for Viewing,” *Press-Telegram*, March 11, 1990, 59; “Paramount’s Renaissance Aided by Emerald Court Condominium Project,” *Press-Telegram*, February 11, 1990.



Emerald Court Condominiums, 1990. *Press-Telegram*.

## THEME: COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT (1970-1999)

The dairy, cattle, and hay industries which had dominated the local economy and served as the center of Los Angeles County’s agricultural outputs in the early- to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century had waned by the 1960s. By 1971, an article in the *Independent* reported only six dairies left in Paramount, with the last one closing in 1977.<sup>68</sup> In an area once home to 80,000 cows (as of a 1952 estimate), Paramount’s dairy, cattle, and hay industry gave way to suburban homes, commercial developments, and industrial plants.<sup>69</sup> Historian Mike McKown remembers that in the 1970s:

Paramount really started to grow in different ways. There were a lot of new businesses going in on Paramount Boulevard. It was a sort of assembling. Anything that you needed, you could get in Paramount, not everything that you maybe *wanted*, but anything that you needed, you could get here in Paramount.<sup>70</sup>

Daryl Hofmeyer, Paramount resident, former Mayor, and owner of Romberg Milling, recalled that in the 1970s “Paramount was just like an old farm town [with a] Main Street, no curbs and gutters. The dairies were just starting to move out in the 1960s. So, we sold dairy feed for a while to them, and then we switched over to horse feed.”<sup>71</sup> Resident and historian Mike McKown recalls, “Paramount in the 1970s and 80s was a transitional time because by the early 1970s, the dairies had started to close... A lot of those dairies were just abandoned. So, we had a lot of open space back then ... I remember it was a quieter town.”<sup>72</sup>

In 1971, the *Independent Press-Telegram* wrote that Paramount was zoned 25 percent commercial and was “a town of many businesses—there are more than 1,000 business licenses—but most of the stores are small and look less than prosperous. There is a strong emphasis on service businesses.”<sup>73</sup> However, during this period many local commercial businesses closed, and the redevelopment agency actively sought to revitalize the commercial center. Property types evolved in this period, transitioning from the small brick-and-mortar specialty stores to large mall complexes and strip malls. Many Paramount residents traveled to nearby regional shopping centers, including the Lakewood Center and the Cerritos Center (opened in 1972). These malls catered to the automobile with their large parking lots and big box stores, such as Sears, J.W. Robinson’s, and Ohrbach’s.

Restaurants also played an important role in Paramount, particularly amongst the business community in the 1970s. As recalled by Mayor Peggy Lemons, “back then the big restaurant was called Salvatore’s. It was an Italian restaurant, and that’s where all the business community ate, either there or at Hector’s Deli.”<sup>74</sup> However, when the restaurants closed in the 1980s, the business community had few places to take clients, and businesses struggled.

Small companies also struggled to adapt and compete with larger stores. Paramount resident and restaurateur Gus Exiga, who worked at and later owned the store Eastern Provisions and

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<sup>68</sup> Hillyard; Mark Clutter, “Paramount has a distinct personality,” *Independent*, November 28, 1971.

<sup>69</sup> Mark Clutter, “Paramount has a distinct personality,” *Independent*, November 28, 1971.

<sup>70</sup> Interview with Mike McKown by Emi Takahara. December 18, 2025. On file with Historic Resources Group.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Daryl Hofmeyer by Emi Takahara. December 15, 2025. On file with Historic Resources Group.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Mike McKown by Emi Takahara. December 18, 2025. On file with Historic Resources Group.

<sup>73</sup> Mark Clutter, “Paramount has a distinct personality,” *Independent*, November 28, 1971.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Peggy Lemons by Emi Takahara. January 8, 2026. On file with Historic Resources Group.

several other businesses, remembered “we started doing a lot of catering events for the companies, especially industrial. We started doing events at Paramount Petroleum, the refinery, and same thing with Carlton Forge. But then they sold it, and everything changed.”<sup>75</sup>

A 1981 study found that in the city “there was an unmet demand of at least 80,000 to 110,000 square feet of new space for basic goods and services and a shortage of nearly 50,000 square feet of professional offices.” The study “found that because of these limitations, new residents probably wouldn’t live long in Paramount... With few places to shop in Paramount, the outflow of sales to surrounding communities was estimated at \$20 million to \$30 million a year.”<sup>76</sup>

As a result, in 1983, City Manager Bill Holt and Director of Community Development Dick Powers championed development of new businesses. Within the first two years, the City was involved in more than 70 projects in Paramount, with development projects worth close to \$30 million. These projects were largely made possible by the Paramount Redevelopment Agency, which allowed the City Council to purchase property and sell it to the agency, which in turn sold it to private developers.

One of the City’s first major efforts during this period focused on improving existing businesses. The firm of McLellan, Cruz, Gaylord & Associates provided architectural and construction drawings to businesses as an incentive for owners to upgrade their buildings, all at the City’s expense. The City also set up a relocation program for businesses moved from parcels being assembled for larger projects, with the City paying up to 100% of owners’ costs to replace equipment and holdings. Between 1980 and 2007, there were 260 commercial rehabilitation projects totaling \$7 million in public investment and \$2.5 million in private investment.<sup>77</sup>



Director of Community Development Dick Powers, 1985. *Los Angeles Times*.

Code enforcement was also imposed; the City analyzed every piece of property in the City limits and cited those properties with substandard conditions in violation of Chapter 99 of the State Uniform Building Code. This code enforcement resulted in widespread demolition and rehabilitation; for example, in one neighborhood of 50 acres, approximately 30% of the structures were demolished for new construction.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Interview with Gus Exiga by Emi Takahara, December 15, 2025, on file with Historic Resources Group.

<sup>76</sup> “Change,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 17, 1985, 120, 123.

<sup>77</sup> City of Paramount, *The Revitalization of Paramount*, 19.

<sup>78</sup> “Change,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 17, 1985, 120, 123.



Before and after renovation/relocation projects for Ehrmann's Hardware (top) and Ace Auto Wrecking (bottom). *City of Paramount.*

The City also sought to create new commercial zones, including the "Central Business District," designed by architects McLellan, Cruz, Gaylord & Associates. The major commercial development in downtown Paramount was comprised of Town Center East and Town Center West, two large shopping centers with anchor stores, small retail stores, and fast-food restaurants.

Paramount Town Center West opened in 1985. Strategically located at the intersection of the Long Beach Freeway and the 91 Freeway, the shopping center was described as an anchor for the "aggressive redevelopment program."<sup>79</sup> The City spent \$8 million to obtain and clear the land for Town Center West and an additional \$2 million for the construction of streets and other infrastructure. The shopping center featured a 50,000-square-foot Vons supermarket and 34,000 square feet of other retail space. Stores in the new complex included Ehrmann's Hardware, Paramount Center Video, Koopman's Travel, and Paramount Sporting Goods, among others.<sup>80</sup>

The Paramount Swap Meet at 7900 All America City Way was originally founded in 1955 by Joseph Bianchi, a Brooklyn-born entrepreneur, and by the 1970s, was operating 7 days a week. In 1993, the Paramount Swap Meet expanded its capacity by purchasing the six-acre Carlon Industry site to the north, adding approximately 285 additional vending spaces and a new parking lot. The expansion also included the removal of drive-in theater screens, resurfacing of the parking area,

<sup>79</sup> "Paramount Complex Called Business Boon," *Press-Telegram*, September 26, 1985, 151.

<sup>80</sup> "Paramount Complex Called Business Boon," *Press-Telegram*, September 26, 1985, 151.

installation of new perimeter landscaping, construction of an eight-foot decorative wall, and the renovation of the existing snack bar.<sup>81</sup>

In 1994, Walmart opened a store in Paramount, the first time a major chain had established a “big-box” store in the area. Walmart and other retailers were constructed on the location of the Rosecrans Drive-In Theater, which was demolished in 1993.

In the ensuing years, several other franchises opened, including a Quiznos sandwich shop, two Baskin Robbins stores, and two Carl’s Junior restaurants.



Rendering of proposed Vons, 1980s. *Paramount Associates.*

In the 1990s, the first Starbucks opened in Paramount, a major win for the city as the company was highly selective in where it opened its locations at the time. City Manager Pat West was largely responsible for convincing investors to open in Paramount, which was the first Starbucks in a majority Latino community in Orange or Los Angeles County. Pat West remembers:

I went to a meeting with Starbucks. It was one of the most powerful meetings I've ever [been to] in my life and took about two hours. And they were just trashing Paramount... that we can't put our employees in a situation where they're going to be abused or there's going to be violence or they're going to be robbed. And that went on. And I just happened to remember that a year before there was a Starbucks in Huntington Beach on Main Street by the pier and two Starbucks employees were marched out of the store and assassinated on the street. Both shot dead. And I pulled that out of my pocket. I go, well, you know, in Huntington

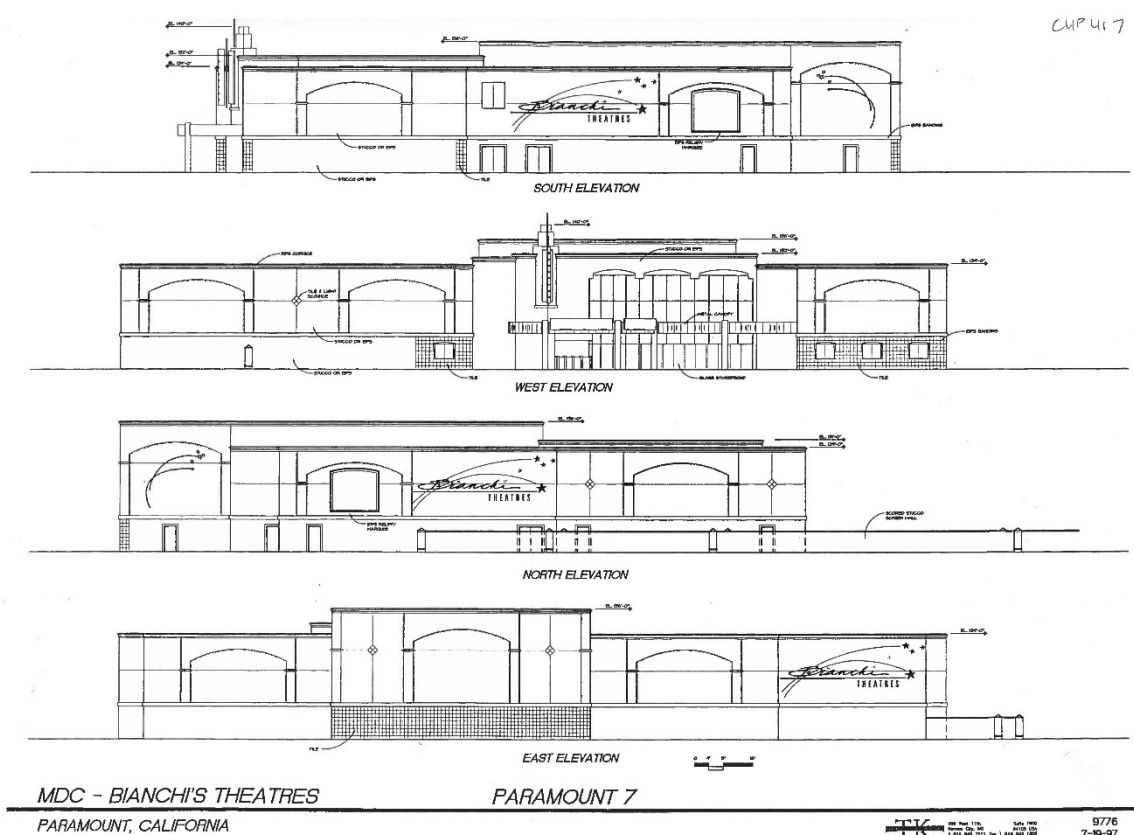
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<sup>81</sup> City of Paramount, “Conditional Use Permit Application 366,” to Planning Commission from Community Development Department, June 9, 1993.

Beach last year you had two employees that were marched out of the store and shot... That would never happen in Paramount, I said. Never. You're going to be embraced by the faith-based community. People are going to have concerts there. We're going to dress it up.<sup>82</sup>

The resulting Starbucks opened on Paramount Boulevard and Jackson Street and featured a pond and garden. As recounted by the *Los Angeles Times* in a 2002 article titled “Just South of Los Angeles, a City Climbs Out of the Doldrums,” the “Starbucks shop has become a point of pride for city officials, who gladly take visitors to the emporium, overlooking a sculpture garden.”<sup>83</sup>

In 1996, the City Council approved an amendment to the Clearwater East Specific Plan to allow for retail, restaurant, and cinema uses. In 1997, Modern Development Company developed Bianchi Theatres at 7770 Rosecrans Avenue, the former location of ARB Construction. The 11-screen movie theater featured a lobby, banquet/meeting room with patio, and courtyard with a fountain.<sup>84</sup>



Proposed Architectural Elevations of Bianchi Theatres, 1997. TK.

<sup>82</sup> Interview with Pat West by Emi Takahara. November 26, 2025. On file with Historic Resources Group.

<sup>83</sup> Nick Madigan, “Just South of Los Angeles, a City Climbs Out of the Doldrums,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 26, 2002.

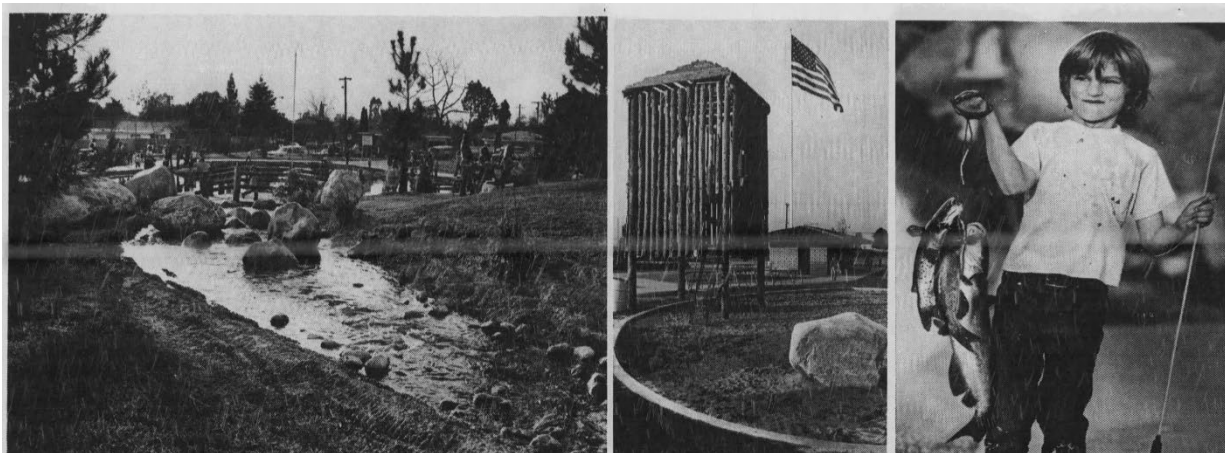
<sup>84</sup> City of Paramount, “Agenda Report: Development Review Application No. 97:011,” from Patrick H. West to Honorable Redevelopment Agency, August 5, 1997.

## THEME: CIVIC AND INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT (1970-1999)

### City Beautification and Parks

From the 1970s through the 1990s, the City of Paramount made a concerted effort to improve and expand recreational sites, including parks, swimming pools, and community centers. In 1976, the City received funds from the State's Beach, Park, Recreational and Historical Facilities Bond towards park development. As a result, \$50,961 was allotted for the improvement of Paramount Park and \$50,000 towards development of a new park.<sup>85</sup> During the era of redevelopment, the City sought to improve the Paramount's recreational institutions. Between 1980 and 2000, the city planted 10,000 trees, built 11 fountains, established 10 pocket parks, installed 13 entry point monuments, and created 10 miles of landscaped traffic medians.<sup>86</sup>

In 1976, Spane Park (originally known as Gundry Park), was founded at the intersection of Rosecrans Avenue and Gundry Boulevard. The 4.2-acre park was named after the longtime city councilman Louis Spane and cost \$654,420 to complete.<sup>87</sup> Spane Park included a stream-fed fishing pond stocked with catfish as well as play equipment, picnic areas, a lighted baseball field, and restrooms.<sup>88</sup> City-sponsored events at the park in the 1980s included the Huck Finn Fishing Derby and kite flying competitions.



Spane Park and Child with Catfish, 1977. *Los Angeles Times*.

Progress Park was founded in 1970 on the 7.5-acre former Henry Weis dairy ranch.<sup>89</sup> In 1975, a former library building from Bellflower was relocated to the park and renovated to serve as a community center. The building was extensively renovated by Ron Jones, Inc. of Santa Fe Springs.<sup>90</sup> Known as Plaza Hall at completion, the 3,000-square-foot hall had a \$30,000 stainless steel kitchen equipped to feed an estimated 1,000 people. As reported by the *Independent*, “just

<sup>85</sup> “\$84,082 for area parks,” *Independent*, January 14, 1976, 14.

<sup>86</sup> City of Paramount, *The Revitalization of Paramount* (Paramount, CA: The City of Paramount, 2007), 10; Louis Sahagun, “Paramount Likes its White Picket-Fence Image,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 25, 2007, B3.

<sup>87</sup> “Paramount Park Honors Longtime City Councilman,” *Independent*, December 9, 1976, 52.

<sup>88</sup> “Real Garden Spot,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 20, 1977, 21.

<sup>89</sup> “Grand Land Singers Due,” *Press-Telegram*, April 4, 1970, 30.

<sup>90</sup> “To Come Down,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 26, 1975, 163; Ralph McClurg, “Bids Opened to Move Library,” *Independent*, May 9, 1974, 36; “Building to be Improved,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 20, 1975, 157.

recently completed in Progress Park, a 6.2-acre recreational area at 15542 Downey Ave., is the Plaza Hall, a community center, meeting and recreational building with ultra-modern cooking facilities.”<sup>91</sup> It was the first City-owned building to have a no-smoking rule, which was established in 1976.<sup>92</sup> In 1977, the City described the park as a “welcome green spot in the vast urban sprawl.”<sup>93</sup>

In 1980, the City dedicated Banana Park, a ribbon of open space nearly seven blocks long and narrower than 120 feet. The park is located along the Los Angeles River channel between Rosecrans Avenue and Somerset Boulevard. It was dedicated by Paramount’s first female Mayor Dr. Esther Caldwell.<sup>94</sup>

Pequeno Park was established in 1983 at the cost of \$20,000. Located on Ackley Street, the city added fencing, playground equipment, a barbecue, picnic tables, and a shelter.<sup>95</sup>

The Paramount Park Community Center, which originally opened in 1962, was renovated in 1985. The \$470,000 exterior remodeling project added Spanish style detailing to the vernacular building and included general landscaping of the park. In 1986, the City applied for an additional \$109,000 to remodel and renovate the interior of the center, which was completed in 1987.<sup>96</sup>

In all, between 1982 and 1987, the City spent nearly \$4 million on improvements to its eight parks, which totaled nearly 40 acres of recreational land. Paramount also featured four community centers—Firehouse Activity Center, the Community Center, Progress Park’s Plaza Hall, and Spane Park Recreation Center.



LONG AND NARROW – Banana Park in Paramount, located next to the Los Angeles River, is a ribbon of open space that stretches over seven blocks. This photograph looks north with Rosecrans Avenue at the top and Compton Boulevard at the bottom. Dedication of the park is scheduled for Feb. 23.  
Times photo by Thomas Kelsey from the Goodyear blimp

Banana Park in Paramount, 1980. *Los Angeles Times*.

<sup>91</sup> McClurg, “Hynes, Clearwater Live on in City of Paramount,” 96.

<sup>92</sup> “Council Bans Smoking in Paramount Building,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 8, 1976, 149.

<sup>93</sup> City Advertisement, 1977 Paramount High School Yearbook.

<sup>94</sup> “Paramount to Dedicate Park,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 14, 1980, 10.

<sup>95</sup> “Paramount Looks for Solution to Gang Hangout at Playground,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 22, 1992, 696.

<sup>96</sup> “Paramount Seeks \$109,000 for Park Community Center,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 16, 1986, 59.



Community Center before renovation (left, 1970s) and rendering of proposed changes (right, 1980s). *City of Paramount.*

In 1998, the sixth pocket park in Paramount was established on a vacant lot at the corner of Alondra Boulevard and Gundry Avenue. The City spent approximately \$10,000 converting the lot into a “grassy” oasis until it sold. According to Assistant City Manager Linda Benedetti-Leal “We are very sensitive in our city to blight and the way we look... It’s nice to have soft green areas in an urban environment.”<sup>97</sup> By 2000, the City of Paramount had completed 10 pocket parks with a total development cost of \$142,000.<sup>98</sup>

Art also played an important part in Paramount’s city beautification efforts. In 1985, Paramount started an “Art in Public Places” program which used donations paid by residential and commercial developers to purchase and display artwork throughout the city. Unlike other cities that required developers to set aside money, Paramount’s program was voluntary in the early years of the program. Examples of artworks include “KAI KOO VII,” by Betty Gold; “The Die is Cast” and “Hole in One” by local artist Arlene Cartozian; and “9 x 9 x 9” and “Vestige” by Harold Pastorius Jr.

By 1988, the collection was estimated to be worth over \$378,000.<sup>99</sup> Between 1980 and 2007, three Los Angeles River murals, 11 fountains, and 29 sculptures were completed in the city.<sup>100</sup> As recorded by the City, “with its calming influence and liberating effects on the human soul, art is not just an embellishment to the City’s landscape; it becomes a fundamental component of the environment.”<sup>101</sup>



“9 x 9 x 9” by Harold Pastorius Jr. at Spane Park. *City of Paramount.*

<sup>97</sup> “City to Convert 6<sup>th</sup> Vacant Lot into Park,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 19, 1998, 30.

<sup>98</sup> City of Paramount, *The Revitalization of Paramount*, 12.

<sup>99</sup> Hillyard, 84; Lee Harris, “Paramount Encourages Art Where ‘People Can Feel It, Sit on It and Become Part of It,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 19, 1987, 249.

<sup>100</sup> City of Paramount, *Revitalization of Paramount*, 29.

<sup>101</sup> City of Paramount, *Revitalization of Paramount*, 29.

In 1993, the City Council approved a 1% Public Art Development Fee on new development valued at \$100,000 or more. The collected fees are used for the purchase, placement, installation, maintenance, and protection of public art.<sup>102</sup>



Fountains and sculptures Kai Koo VII (bottom left) and Suffer the Little Children (bottom right), 2007. *City of Paramount.*

Welcoming visitors and residents to Paramount was a key tenant of the city beautification program, and several signs were erected around the city limits. The City Council was heavily involved in the creation and dedication of these welcome signs. Into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, these were carefully designed to merge with surrounding infrastructure. For example. The “Paramount Welcome Wall,” was a public sculpture at Flower and Downey avenues that masks a bus maintenance yard and incorporated a waterfall and plantings.<sup>103</sup>



Santa Train with City Councilmembers Peggy Lemons, Gene Daniels, Diane J. Martinez, and Manuel Guillen, c. 2005. *City of Paramount.*

<sup>102</sup> City of Paramount Administrative Services Department, “Public Art Development Fee,” Established July 1, 1993.

<sup>103</sup> “White Picket Fences Help Paramount’s Image,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 25, 2007, 73.

The city also sought to welcome and encourage civic engagement with regular events and festivities. Perhaps the most famous example of this in Paramount is the annual holiday Santa Train, which was established in 1969, and delivers “holiday cheer to kids in every neighborhood of town.”<sup>104</sup>



City Council dedicating Paramount Welcome Wall, from left to right: Henry Harkema, Peggy Lemons, Diane J. Martinez, Gene Daniels, Manuel Guillen, c. 2005. *City of Paramount*.

## Other Civic Programs

One issue that plagued the City of Paramount in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century was the presence of several gangs. By the late 1970s, Paramount had at least three active gangs in the city: the Dogpatch Varrio, the Paramount Varrio, and the Compton Trace.<sup>105</sup> One resident reported that “at midnight you can hear them fighting (in the streets). One gang against another.”<sup>106</sup> By the early 1980s, the Los Angeles County’s Sheriff’s Department determined that approximately 40% to 50% of the city was under gang influence, with approximately 1,000 gang members active in the area.<sup>107</sup>

In 1981, the City Council decided to combat gang activity with the Alternatives to Gang Membership program. Unlike other programs which sought to reform gang members, the program was preventative: it endeavored to stop youths from joining gangs from the start. Under the leadership of Director Pat West and former probation officer Tony Ostos, the program taught anti-gang curriculum to fifth graders at five Paramount schools: Roosevelt, Mark Keppel, Los Cerritos, Gaines, and Lincoln elementary schools.<sup>108</sup> The 15-week program included films, lectures, posters, and puppet shows to illustrate the negative impacts of gang activity. Parents were also involved in the program and were educated about various recreational programs. Two local

<sup>104</sup> “Santa Train,” *City of Paramount*, accessed on March 31, 2026 at: <https://www.paramountcity.gov/event/santa-train-2/>

<sup>105</sup> Dorothy Korber, “Paramount Probing Violence by Teen Gangs,” *Press-Telegram*, March 22, 1978, 24.

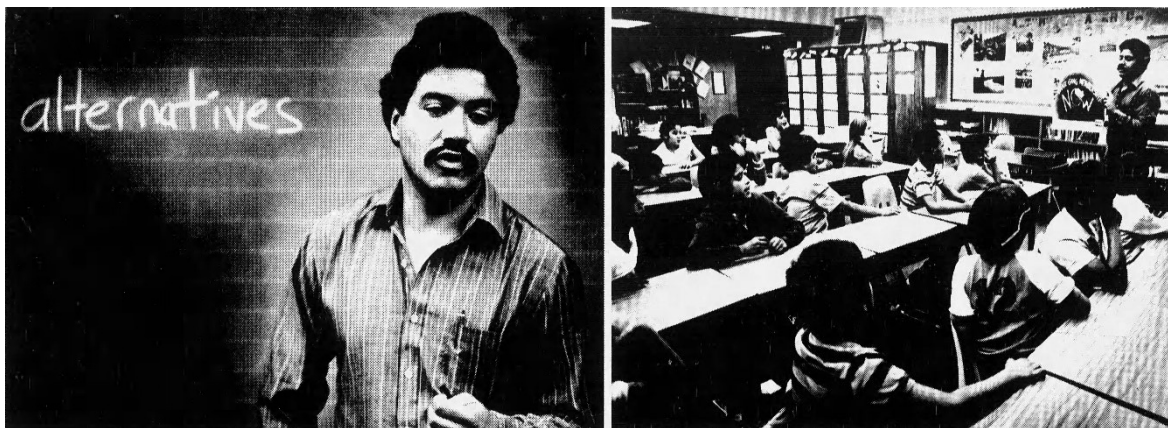
<sup>106</sup> Lee Harris, “Paramount Class Hopes to Mold 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Attitudes,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 13, 1983, 250.

<sup>107</sup> Harris, “Paramount Class Hopes to Mold 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Attitudes,” 250.

<sup>108</sup> Harris, “Paramount Class Hopes to Mold 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Attitudes,” 250.

mothers, Jenny Lacayo and Charlene Dominguez, were particularly involved in initiating the program.<sup>109</sup>

By 1984, the neighboring Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) was “favorably impressed” by the program and planned to implement it.<sup>110</sup> The 1986 *U.S. News and World Report* determined that Paramount was “breaking the pattern by getting to boys and girls before they join gangs and giving them a stern lesson in the evils of gang membership.”<sup>111</sup> According to the *Los Angeles Times*, the district attorney’s office cited the program as “one of the nation’s most admired and imitated programs for steering children away from the streets.”<sup>112</sup>



Tony Ostos; Ostos teaching fifth graders at Roosevelt Elementary to lessen interest in joining gangs, 1983.  
*Los Angeles Times.*

However, despite early hopes, gang issues persisted in Paramount into the 1990s. Parks were one public space in which gangs regularly convened. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, residents near Pequeno Park reported frequent fights at the park, and the City increased sheriff deputy patrols of the area.<sup>113</sup> Approximately 90% of nearby residents polled by the City identified the park as a site of recent crime activity, including loitering, drinking, drug use, fighting, and drive-by shootings.<sup>114</sup> According to Deputy City Manager Pat West, Paramount Park was more vulnerable to vandalism because of its layout: “it’s almost impossible for deputies to patrol the park effectively because they can’t drive through it. It has mounds all over, and there’s no vantage point from where you can see the entire park.”<sup>115</sup> In 1998, the park received anti-gang renovations, which included stainless steel restroom fixtures and graffiti-resistant walkways.<sup>116</sup>

Community members also took active stances in addressing gangs and other general safety issues. As recalled by Pastor Grady Jones, “Paramount at the time was kind of gang infested. The city got rid of the gangs, and it has been a city on the move since then. I formed a committee called Unity in the Community Committee... We had several meetings trying to bring different

<sup>109</sup> Interview with Peggy Lemons by Emi Takahara. January 8, 2026. On file with Historic Resources Group.

<sup>110</sup> Lee Harris, “Educators Say Kids are Learning to Say No to Gangs,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 29, 1984, 304.

<sup>111</sup> Hillyard, 89.

<sup>112</sup> Jesse Katz, “Fighting to Keep a City’s Soul,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 31, 1992,.

<sup>113</sup> Rick Higuin, “Tiny Park Source of Sizable Gang Problem,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 22, 1992, 686.

<sup>114</sup> “Paramount Looks for Solution to Gang Hangout at Playground,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 22, 1992, 696.

<sup>115</sup> Richard Howland, “Park is Gang Playground,” *Press-Telegram*, August 6, 1989, 22.

<sup>116</sup> Richard Howland, “Paramount Park to get Facelift,” *Press-Telegram*, September 7, 1989, 9.

races of people together, which is still in progress. In fact, we've been going since 1986, when we started this group.”<sup>117</sup>

The Public Safety Innovations program also increased law enforcement services for more responsive “dedicated services” whereby police officers were assigned to specific areas of the city. The City also organized a Neighborhood Watch group that allowed for community input and resulted in over 2,000 volunteers. These volunteers educated the public on general safety issues.<sup>118</sup> In 1989, an undercover drug operation with the Los Angeles County sheriff’s deputies resulted in the arrest of 43 people on drug charges.<sup>119</sup>

In 1992, suspected gang members killed three people who were, or had been, students at Paramount High School. Following the shootings, the Paramount City Council and Paramount Unified School District hired a Los Angeles County sheriff officer to patrol Paramount High School.<sup>120</sup> On December 31, 1992, the *Los Angeles Times* wrote:

In 1982, this tiny, blue-collar suburb pioneered the gang-prevention movement...The Alternatives to Gang Membership course [was] a farsighted move that predated the current trend toward prevention among many law enforcement and community-based agencies... But as Paramount has grown and the county’s gang scene has expanded, the limitations of the course have also become increasingly evident. Because of a transitory population, as many as 30% to 40% of the city’s high school students never took the class in grade school. With the mayhem that some gangs seem bent on wreaking, even the most effective prevention program would be hard-pressed to head off the capricious violence that has rattled the city over the last year.

“Nowadays, there are no guarantees,” conceded Tony Ostos, creator and head instructor of the program. “Paramount is not an island. It’s not one of those encircled cities surrounded by walls.”<sup>121</sup>

Gang activity in Paramount began to subside in 1993. That year, a task force of 60 city officials, residents, teachers, and deputies brainstormed and came up with TARGET (Team Approach Regarding Gang Enforcement Techniques). In TARGET, the Sheriff’s Department identified the top 25 youths considered to be the most violent gang members in town and closely monitored them. Within eight months, all of the original 25 were arrested or had left town.

In April 1993, the City Council agreed to raise the utility users’ taxes by 2%, which paid for six new deputies, a crime analyst, and new equipment.<sup>122</sup> Additionally, a county probation officer was stationed at the Paramount police station, and parole officers were in much closer contact with the district attorney’s office. As a result, the city saw a decrease in crime: in 1993, there were 172 gang-related violent crimes, by 1996 that number had dropped to 89.<sup>123</sup> From 1981 to 2001, Part 1

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<sup>117</sup> Interview with Pastor Grady Jones by Emi Takahara. December 18, 2025. On file with Historic Resources Group.

<sup>118</sup> Hillyard, 89.

<sup>119</sup> Lee Harris, “43 Arrested in Paramount Drug Inquiry,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 26, 1989, 472.

<sup>120</sup> “Deputy to Patrol Campus to Deter Shootings,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 12, 1992, 635.

<sup>121</sup> Jesse Katz, “Fighting to Keep a City’s Soul,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 31, 1992.

<sup>122</sup> “Gangs: Deputies Keep Close Tabs on Top 25,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 6, 1994, 143.

<sup>123</sup> “Anti-Gang Program Producing Results,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 12, 1996, 47.

crimes (including homicide, rape, robbery, burglary, and grand theft auto) dropped 16.3 percent in the City of Paramount. According to Deputy City Manager Pat West, “we’re not saying Paramount is crime-free, but the gang problem is way down.”<sup>124</sup> In 1996, the TARGET program received a special achievement award from the California Healthy Cities Project, a statewide organization that promoted citizen participation and civic wellbeing.<sup>125</sup>



Paramount Sheriffs, 1999. *City of Paramount*.

## Education

As a result of changing demographics in the City, Paramount schools also diversified during this period, with an increase in Latino and Black teachers and students from the 1970s to 2000s. The first Black teacher employed by the Paramount School District was Lena Alford, who also served as the first Black principal in the district. She was selected as an outstanding teacher of Wesley Gaines Elementary in 1973.<sup>126</sup>

Theodore Ratcliff was the second Black teacher employed by the district. Ratcliff worked as a teacher at the Major Lynn H. Mokler Elementary School for 17 years and was the recipient of a prestigious federal grant through the NDEA Civics Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles. He was also a notable inventor, and created a teaching device called “Letto,” which aided grade school children in work analysis, and a swiveling paintbrush, among other inventions. A graduate of the



Theodore Ratcliff with pivoting paint rollers, 1983. *Los Angeles Sentinel*.

<sup>124</sup> Emily Adams, “City Goes After Gang Members on Top 25 List,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 6, 1994, 139.

<sup>125</sup> “Anti-Gang Program Producing Results,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 12, 1996, 47.

<sup>126</sup> “Prairie View Honors Alumni,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, April 24, 1975, C5; “5 Teachers Honored by Paramount,” *South Gate Press*, June 30, 1973, 3.

Historically Black College of Alcorn A&M, Ratcliff edited *The Builder*, a newspaper sponsored by the African Methodist Church of Los Angeles, and published a book of poetry, “Black Forever More.” Ratcliff was nominated for the 1984 *Who’s Who in California*.<sup>127</sup>

Other significant elementary school teachers in Paramount were Carol McCafferty Robinson and Suzanne Roberts. McCafferty and Roberts were both second wave feminists and active members of the National Organization for Women (NOW). NOW was an advocacy group that addressed issues such as women’s reproductive rights, feminist art and culture, financial literacy, violence against women, and the discipline of women’s studies.



Youth Awareness Club, 1976. *Paramount High School Yearbook*.

Diversification of students attending Paramount schools was also reflected in the various students’ clubs active at Paramount High School. The Mexican Cultural Club was formed in the spring of 1974 and had over 80 student participants by the following year. The club’s purpose was to provide recreation and cultural awareness for anyone interested in Latin American countries and customs. The New Breed Club was another Latino group formed in the 1970s. The group painted a mural on Mexican culture at the school in 1977.



New Breed Club in front of mural, 1977. *Paramount High School Yearbook*.

<sup>127</sup> “Theodore Ratcliff,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 8, 1967, D3; “Paint Roller Debuts,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, February 3, 1983, A8; “Ratcliff Included in Who’s Who,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, April 12, 1984, A8.

In 1976, the Youth Awareness Club was active on campus and adopted the club slogan “Peace, Unity, and Brotherhood.” The club sought to “stimulate intellection growth and promote social interaction” among different students at the high school, including through the celebration of Malcolm X’s birthday.<sup>128</sup>

Paramount resident Manny Alcaraz remembers other early Latino groups and after school programs in Paramount, including the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC).<sup>129</sup> Latino cultural clubs continued through the 1980s and 1990s. In 1985, Club Latino sponsored activities that promoted an interest in Latino American cultures, including the Cinco de Mayo contest. All meetings were held in Spanish.<sup>130</sup>

## **SCHOOL OVERCROWDING AND EXPANSION**

The Paramount Redevelopment Agency was also heavily involved in institutional and community development. In 1978, the Agency purchased the Harry Wirtz School site from the Paramount School District for \$3.8 million. The agreement obligated the school district to use the money from the sale to rehabilitate Paramount High School. Funds went toward the construction of 34,000 square feet of new classroom space, new athletic facilities, and a new gymnasium on the high school campus.

In the 1980s, residents located in the southern region of Paramount petitioned to transfer 1,536 students from the Paramount School District to the neighboring Bellflower Unified School District. Parents charged that the Paramount district lacked quality education, was geographically remote, and was plagued by gang violence. The issue came to the state Board of Education in 1984, which denied the parents’ request for transfer. Among the reasons cited by the Board was the fact that transfer would have promoted racial or ethnic segregation, as the Paramount district which had 70% minority students would have lost about 3% of its white students. Bellflower’s student population was 71% white and 29% minority. The transfer would have also removed \$3.35 million in state money from Paramount’s funds. The Board assigned a staff member to work with parents and district officials to find solutions for their issues.<sup>131</sup>

As a result of redevelopment efforts, particularly the increase in housing in Paramount, the school district faced severe overcrowding in the 1990s. The school district’s enrollment grew from about 9,800 students in 1980 to over 14,000 in 1995. Latino enrollment also rose from 50% of the student population to 74%.

According to the *Los Angeles Times* in 1995:

Paramount’s school district is teeming with students. After years of growing enrollment and little construction, district officials find themselves scrambling to relieve swollen campuses, some of which house nearly twice the number of students they were intended

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<sup>128</sup> Clubs, *Paramount High School Yearbook*, 1976, 221-222.

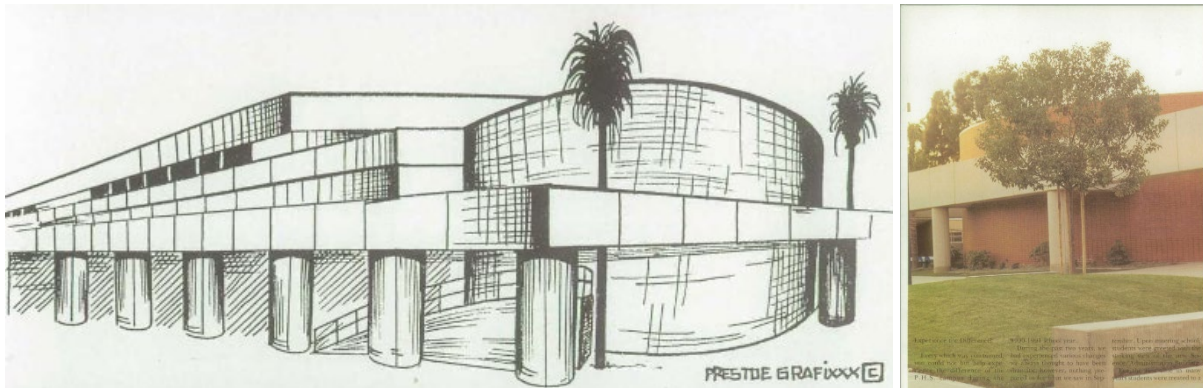
<sup>129</sup> Interview with Manny Alcaraz by Emi Takahara. January 6, 2026. On file with Historic Resources Group.

<sup>130</sup> Club Latino, *Paramount High School Yearbook*, 1985.

<sup>131</sup> Lee Harris, “State Acts to End Paramount Schools Clash,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 22, 1984, 335.

to accommodate. Today, playground space is being eaten up by portable classrooms, and libraries double as storage areas for copying machines and other school equipment.<sup>132</sup>

Paramount High School, originally built to accommodate 1,800 students, served over 3,000 by the mid-1990s. Gaines Elementary School was built for 540 students but served nearly 900 by 1995. In 1991, a new Science/Administration Building was completed at Paramount High School at a cost of \$9 million. While this helped relieve some of the overcrowding, there were still issues with space at the school.



Rendering and Photograph of the Science/Administration Building at PHS, 1991. *Paramount High School Yearbook*.

In March of 1995, a special election, Proposition S, was held for a \$15-million bond measure to pay for two new schools and classroom renovations. The bond was defeated with 59% in favor, failing to secure the two-thirds majority to pass.<sup>133</sup> In November 1996, Proposition S was again brought before voters, this time earning 64% in favor, but still ultimately defeated.<sup>134</sup>

Education largely improved thanks to the Paramount Education Partnership (PEP) program spearheaded by then-Commissioner Peggy Lemons. The PEP program is a collaborative effort between the City, School District, Chamber of Commerce, and the faith-based community. It is dedicated to providing programs and services that increase the academic achievement and educational expectations of the City's residents. The PEP program and the Pennies for PEP Scholarship Program has raised over \$2 million for student scholarships. Peggy Lemons also introduced the Boulevard of Scholars program to recognize student achievement.

## Civic Development

Changes in Paramount from the 1970s to 1990s also included civic entities and institutions such as the Sheriff's Department, the Fire Department, City staff and services, and health institutions.

For police services, the City of Paramount contracts with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's department, with a dedicated fleet in the city. In 1995, the vehicles that patrol the city underwent a facelift: instead of Sheriff's Department logos on the doors the vehicles received new decals that read "City of Paramount." Assistant City Manager Linda Benedetti-Leal remarked that the

<sup>132</sup> Duke Helfand and Psyche Pascual, "District's Future Rides on Bond Decision," *Los Angeles Times*, January 1, 1995, 51.

<sup>133</sup> "School Officials Vox to Renew Bond Fight," *Los Angeles Times*, March 9, 1995, 155.

<sup>134</sup> "Final California Election Returns," *Los Angeles Times*, November 7, 1996, 26.

City had long wanted the change, because “if you’re contracting, the best thing you can do is customize the service to your own needs.”<sup>135</sup>

In 1987, the City of Paramount initiated a “Citizen Satisfaction Form,” that was handed out by Sheriff’s deputies whenever they responded to a request for service. Residents could evaluate the services they received by checking whether the deputy was courteous, and commenting if they were satisfied by the response. As remembered by Mayor Peggy Lemons, the mailer was “turned into the City and therefore the City could then evaluate what was going on” and determine how to fix any issues.<sup>136</sup>



Paramount’s Police Crime Watch vehicle, 1990s. *City of Paramount.*

In the first three months of its operation, more than 25% of all forms were mailed back with an overwhelming 98% of the public stating that they felt Paramount’s law enforcement services were excellent. Paramount was also served by Sky Night, one of the only multi-jurisdictional helicopter patrol services in the country.<sup>137</sup>

Fire Services in Paramount are provided by the Los Angeles County Fire Department. County Station No. 31 at 7521 Somerset Boulevard serves the community, and houses a paramedic squad, and fire engine. According to Captain Ralph Bommelje, the department was “one of the busiest stations in the County. Guys like to bid (ask for assignment) into this place.”<sup>138</sup>

In 1985, there was a major chemical fire in Paramount at a lacquer company at 15713 Vermont Avenue. Several chemical drums burned, tossing flames about 150 feet in the air. Firefighters were able to extinguish the flames after several hours, with damage estimated at approximately \$200,000.<sup>139</sup>

<sup>135</sup> “Police Car Decals Boost Civic Pride,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 7, 1995, 31.

<sup>136</sup> Interview with Peggy Lemons by Emi Takahara. January 8, 2026. On file with Historic Resources Group.

<sup>137</sup> “Paramount Lookin’ Good,” *South Coast Business*, June 1987, on file with the City of Paramount.

<sup>138</sup> Larry Lane, “Station 31: Even ‘Slow’ Days Aren’t Dull,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 13, 1977, 325.

<sup>139</sup> Joe Segura, “Spectacular Chemical Fire Breaks out in Paramount,” *Press-Telegram* July 23, 1985, 1.



Los Angeles County fireman and truck with school children, 1975. *City of Paramount.*



Firemen Spray Foam on Chemical Fire, 1985. *Los Angeles Times.*

In mid-1970s, the City of Paramount constructed a new 2.5-acre public works yard which served as a homebase for City employees and a warehouse for equipment (15328 Downey Avenue). Paramount's then-City Manager Harry Bond championed the project, which was completed in 1978 at a cost of \$1.6 million.

At the time of its completion, the *Los Angeles Times* described the new compound as “the royal palace of public works yards, a still-new, brown-masonry monument dominating a stretch of Downey Ave. like a fortress.”<sup>140</sup> The facilities had a fully equipped gym, secluded patio, lunchroom, and stone grotto with waterfall. The warehouse stored gardening equipment, office furniture, and office supplies. It was named after C.D. Mosier, a former councilman and mayor, and brother of then-elected mayor Ted Mosier.<sup>141</sup>



REST AREA — This plush patio area is one of the features of the city of Paramount's public works facility. The structure has a separate outdoor lounge area for women employees, a gym, and a fountain and pool which were once stocked with Japanese fish. Times photos by Michael Malby

Public Works Yard Rest Area, 1979. *Los Angeles Times*.

In addition to general parks and recreation activities, the City also invested in the community in the 1970s and 1980s with the Elderly Nutrition Program and a neighborhood shuttle. The Elderly Nutrition Program regularly held events for senior citizens that provided healthy and nutritious foods. Events included Halloween parties and luaus. Two vehicles were purchased by the City for the Elderly Nutrition Program in 1989: a minivan and a Ford Escort. The Los Angeles County paid a majority portion of the cost by allocating federal funds from the Older Americans Act.<sup>142</sup>

The Neighborhood Shuttle provided both curb-to-curb service and fixed-route transportation for all local residents. The shuttle guaranteed it would pick up residents within 20 minutes anywhere and deliver them anywhere else in the city. The fare for the service was 50 cents, except for seniors going to and from the Elderly Nutrition Program at Paramount Park, who rode for free.<sup>143</sup>

<sup>140</sup> Gerald Farris, “The P in ‘Public Works’ Stands for Posh,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 25, 1979, 1.

<sup>141</sup> The name has since been dropped from the yard. Gerald Farris, “The P in ‘Public Works’ Stands for Posh,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 25, 1979, 18.

<sup>142</sup> “2 New Vehicles OK'd for Elderly Nutrition,” *Press-Telegram*, June 14, 1989, 20.

<sup>143</sup> “Paramount Neighborhood Shuttle Service to Begin this Week,” *Press-Telegram*, November 1, 1985, 54.



City of Paramount Elderly Nutrition Program Bus (left, 1980s) and City Council with the Neighborhood Shuttle (right, 1985). *City of Paramount*.

Medical services also evolved in the late-20<sup>th</sup> century. Paramount General Hospital (now Kindred Hospital) was built in 1971. The one-story, 91,000-square-foot facility cost \$4.5 million and accommodated 150 patients. The architectural firm of Rochlin and Baran & Associates designed the building.<sup>144</sup> The firm was well known as leading designers of medical facilities in Southern California.<sup>145</sup>

The hospital was founded by 11 doctors, including several who were Latino. In 1980, the hospital was leased to the Charter Medical Corp., which operated 63 other hospitals nationwide. By 1985, approximately 40% of its 4,500 patients were Latino.



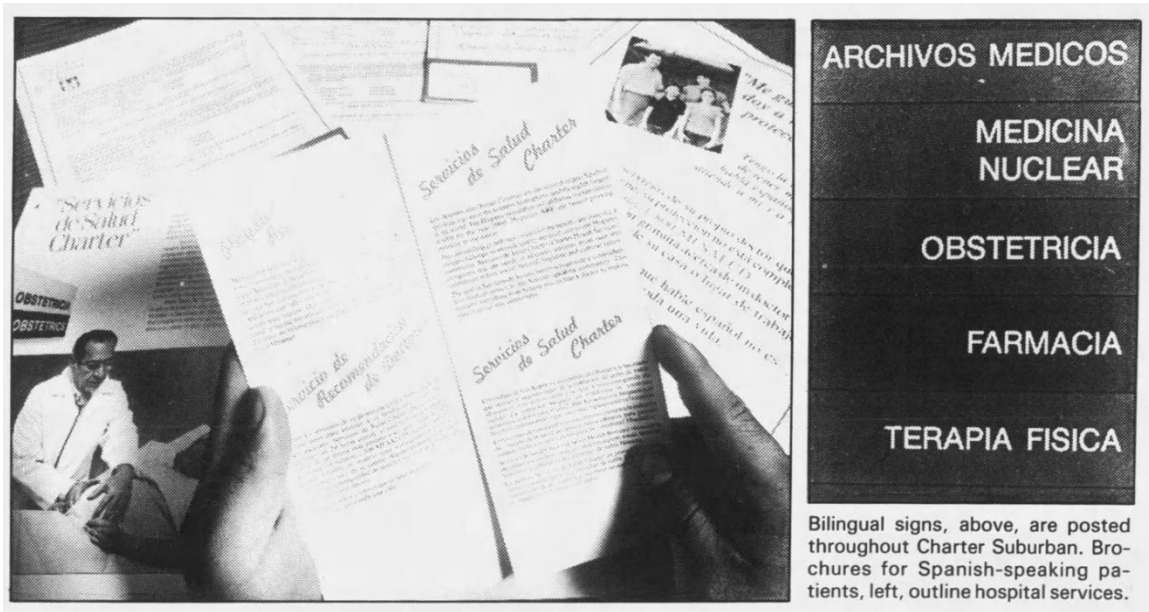
Rendering of Paramount Hospital in 1971 (left) and Kindred Hospital in 2026 (right). *Rochlin & Baran, AIA and HRG*.

About 30 of the hospital's 200 doctors and 12 of its 100 nurses were bilingual, many having been on the staff since the hospital was founded. In 1985, the hospital decided to go fully bilingual and

<sup>144</sup> "Drawings Set for Hospital in Paramount," *Los Angeles Times*, March 1, 1970, 167; Advertisement, *Los Angeles Times*, August 22, 1971, 160; City of Paramount, Building Permit No. 35769, issued on May 25, 1969.

<sup>145</sup> Other healthcare and research centers designed by the firm include the UCLA and Northridge Hospital Medical Center.

bicultural, regularly advertising its services in Spanish. As part of this program, the hospital required new employees to be bilingual, printed forms and medical literature in English and Spanish, and offered Spanish language classes.<sup>146</sup>



Bilingual signs and pamphlets at Charter Suburban Hospital, 1985. *Los Angeles Times*.

<sup>146</sup> "Paramount Hospital Talks Latinos' Language," *Los Angeles Times*, June 20, 1985, 264.

## THEME: INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT (1970-1999)

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, the industrial sector in Paramount was struggling. Once known for its hay sales and dairy production, by the 1970s only six dairies were left in the city. What was left were large tracts of industrial — oftentimes vacant — lands and small industries.

By the mid-1970s, the city had approximately 34,500 residents and 150 industrial firms. It had “prime industrial potential” due to its proximity to the Artesia Freeway on the south, the Long Beach Freeway on the west, the San Gabriel River Freeway (Interstate 605) to the east, and two railroads.<sup>147</sup> The *Independent* wrote in 1971 that “the factories are the heart and meaning of Paramount... The town is zoned 50 percent industrial.”<sup>148</sup>

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1. From the manufacture of precise aerospace filters to the fabrications of giant 30,000 gallon cryogenic storage vessels, Capital Westward's production facilities are completely and extensively equipped. Within the 3 acre plant complex, separate areas are devoted to pressure vessel and piping fabrication, machine shop production, filter manufacture, raw material storage, assembly and finishing, and testing operations. In all production departments, plant operations are designed for maximum efficiency and smooth work flow.

2. This is a set-up for automatic welding of large pressure vessels.

3. This is high capacity pump housing for liquefied natural gas transmission.

4. This is one of the processing vessels for the Alaska Pipeline project now installed in Prudhoe Bay.

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1. For your comfort, Denmac Industries creates these plastic coated chairs for Mr. Donald's Restaurants.

2. The storage tanks seen in background contain Denmac's chemical coating supplies.

3. The non-rusting dish rack provides a clean and attractive dish container.

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Examples of industrial companies active in Paramount, 1979. *Paramount High School Yearbook*.

In 1975, the redevelopment agency approved \$15 million worth of tax allocation bonds to fund development efforts within an area spanning approximately one-third of the 45-square-mile city. Within a month, the agency sold \$3.8 million worth of tax allocation bonds to fund the first project: the Orange Avenue Industrial Park.<sup>149</sup>

The 39-acre project site for the Orange Avenue Industrial Park was “blighted dairy land along the east side of Los Angeles River Channel.”<sup>150</sup> In order to usher in greater development, the site was sold to a developer in 1977.

<sup>147</sup> Peyton Canary, “Bond Sale Funds Renewal Project,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 8, 1975, 239.

<sup>148</sup> “Paramount has a Distinct Personality,” *Independent*, November 28, 1971, 49.

<sup>149</sup> Peyton Canary, “Bond Sale Funds Renewal Project,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 8, 1975, 239.

<sup>150</sup> McClurg, “Hynes, Clearwater Live on in City of Paramount,” 96.



Historic aerial photographs of the Orange Avenue Industrial Park in (clockwise from top left): 1952, 1976, 1989, and 2007. *University of California, Santa Barbara FrameFinder.*<sup>151</sup>

<sup>151</sup> From left to right: Flight AXJ\_1952, Frame 19K-8, November 3, 1952; Flight TG-7600, Frame 6-15, February 1, 1976; Flight WAC\_89CA, Frame 2-140, March 30, 1989; Flight NAPP\_3C, Frame 12465-42, June 10, 2007. FrameFinder.

Councilmember Richard DeBie noted that the City was less interested in the price offered for the property than the industries proposed:

What we're interested in is what generates the most sales tax and employment. That is the point of this whole redevelopment project. We want manufacturers who employ lots of people and who sell products that produce sales tax."<sup>152</sup>

Other early improvements included utilities, development of a sewer system, and area grading for several newly-purchased parcels along Orange Avenue. Water development projects included construction of a water treatment plant, a reservoir, and refurbishment of the old water system.<sup>153</sup> In 1978, an advertisement in the *Independent Press-Telegram* recorded that Paramount had "a mixture of light and heavy industry with the Anaconda Brass Company the largest company. A 40-acre industrial park is being developed."<sup>154</sup>

The business blocks along both sides of Paramount Boulevard between Alondra Boulevard and Jackson Street were razed. Sections of Monroe Street and Colorado Avenue were also eliminated. Many businesses left town, but a few stayed and used incentives provided by the City. Other industrial parks were soon completed.

In the 1980s, projects included the combining of all water companies (approximately 27) under city management and ownership; establishment of another business complex south of Compton Boulevard; park additions and renovations; a new medical building; and the refurbishment of the Clearwater Intermediate School Auditorium.

The 1981 General Plan studied employment by place of work in Southeast Suburban Los Angeles. According to the data, Paramount's sectors in services and public administration slightly increased; agricultural, mining, construction, and manufacturing largely remained the same; and transportation and wholesale trade decreased.<sup>155</sup> With a diverse work force in the industrial sector of the city, immigration raids occurred in Paramount. One such raid at the Golf Products Plant in Paramount in 1984 was covered by the *Los Angeles Times*.

One long-term industry in the city that continued to operate, even despite periods of intense economic difficulties, was the Paramount Petroleum Corp. oil refinery. The refinery manufactured and sold asphalt and heavy fuel oils and had several different owners in the mid- to late-20<sup>th</sup> century. Refinery founder, Douglas Oil Co. of Costa Mesa, was acquired in 1961 by Houston-based Conoco Inc. Facing low demand, Conoco in turn sold the refinery in 1982 to Oasis Petroleum Corp.

In 1984, Oasis merged with Independent Valley Energy to form the Paramount Petroleum Corp., operating the 16,500 barrel-a-day Paramount refinery. A few months later, Paramount's bank creditors filed an involuntary bankruptcy petition on June 23, 1984.

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<sup>152</sup> "Paramount Industrial Park to be Sold as Unit," *Independent*, May 20, 1977, 25.

<sup>153</sup> Dorothy Korber, "Paramount Sets Sale of Bonds," *Independent*, March 4, 1977, 21.

<sup>154</sup> "Paramount," *Independent Press-Telegram*, September 3, 1978, 143.

<sup>155</sup> Alfred Gobar Associates, Inc., "Community Economic Profile: City of Paramount," prepared for the City of Paramount, October 1981.



Paramount Petroleum Corp. oil refinery c. 1980. *City of Paramount*.

As recorded by reporter Art Wong in the *Press Telegram*:

Two years ago, Paramount Petroleum Corp. was in the midst of bankruptcy proceedings, and its hulking fume-belching refinery faced a likely shutdown and demolition. It was a heady time of the city... Those anticipating the refinery's demise, however, may have jumped the gun. On Oct. 11, the U.S. Bankruptcy Court in Los Angeles accepted a \$43 million bid for Paramount Petroleum – not from a real estate developer, but from a Santa Barbara-based refinery operator, Alaska Pacific, Inc.<sup>156</sup>

When the refinery was purchased by Alaska Pacific in 1988, reactions to the sale were divided, with some residents ambivalent or supportive, while others were deeply disappointed. City Manager Bill Holt wrote that “sale of the refinery insures [*sic*] the continued visual blight of approximately 60 acres in the region.”<sup>157</sup> Mayor Charles Weldon remarked, “You’ve got people here who hate the new housing so much, they prefer the refinery. The refinery is ugly. There are warnings of cancer on its fence. It’s subject to explosions. It emits noxious smells.”<sup>158</sup>

In 1989, Paramount Petroleum Co. offered the city of Paramount a 35-year agreement guaranteeing the right of the refinery to continue processing oil products while compelling the company to pay tax of \$700,000 a year.<sup>159</sup> In 1990, the company again filed for bankruptcy.<sup>160</sup>

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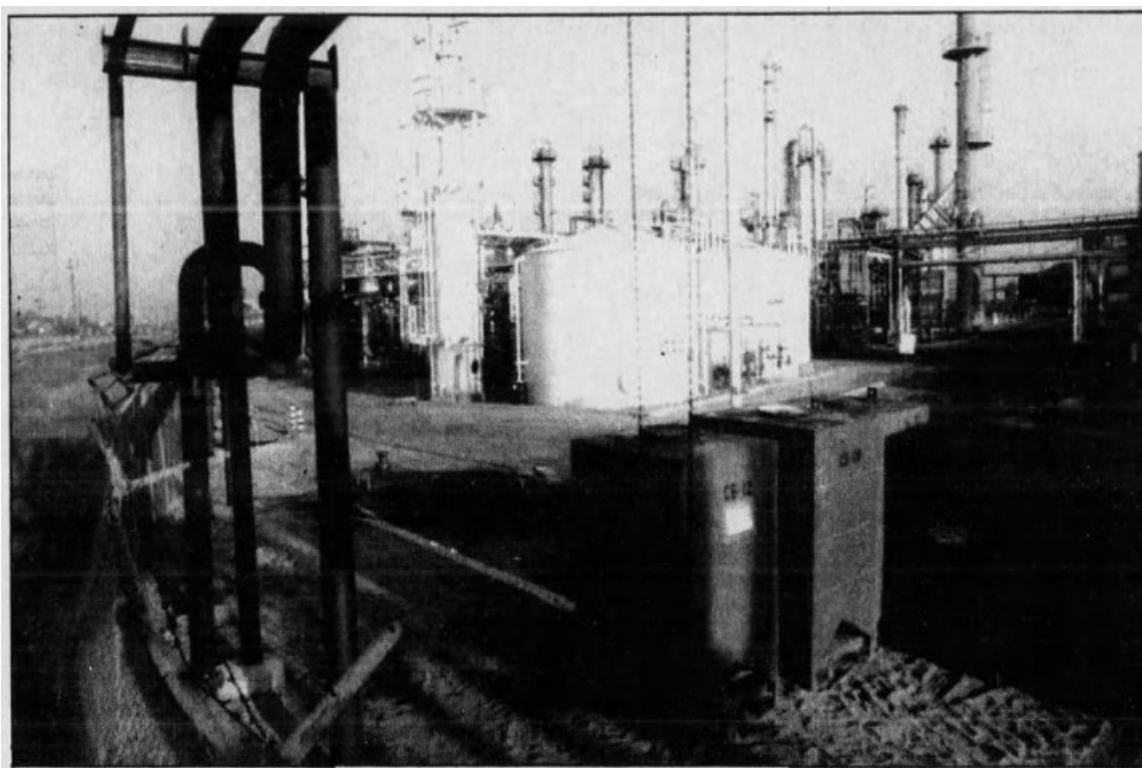
<sup>156</sup> Art Wong, “Refinery’s New Life Stymies Paramount Plans,” *Press-Telegram*, November 14, 1988, 19.

<sup>157</sup> “Paramount’s Refinery’s New Life Puts Hold on City Plans,” *Press-Telegram*, November 14, 1988, 21.

<sup>158</sup> Art Wong, “Refinery’s New Life Stymies Paramount Plans,” *Press-Telegram*, November 14, 1988, 19.

<sup>159</sup> “Community Digest,” *Press-Telegram*, September 22, 1989, 49.

<sup>160</sup> “Refinery Down Again,” *Press-Telegram*, January 29, 1990, 40.



Paramount Petroleum Corp. Refinery, 1994. *Los Angeles Times*.

## CITY OF PARAMOUNT, 2000-PRESENT

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the City of Paramount continues to grow and change. As of 2020, 82 percent of Paramount’s more than 51,000 residents are Hispanic and about 36 percent are foreign-born, according to census data. Its median household income is \$70,900.<sup>161</sup> Development continues in the residential, commercial, civic, and industrial sectors. The “Pitch in Paramount” programs of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century leveraged City funds and local nonprofit organizations to continue beautification efforts through the addition of picket fences, house painting, and physical improvements at no cost to residents. Developers are required to donate a percentage of their project costs to the public art fund, continuing that important civic program. The result has been a new sense of pride among the residents of Paramount. In 2007, the City scored the second-largest gain in property values (17.2%) of any city in Los Angeles County.<sup>162</sup>

Despite some challenges in the mid-2010s, by the 2020s, Paramount is again making headlines as an improving and attractive city. According to the *Los Angeles Times* in 2025:

In recent years, Paramount has been revitalized as the children of immigrants have sought out more affordable homes and opened businesses. Now, young people catch up over elaborate horchata and coffee concoctions at Horchateria Rio Luna and belt their favorite songs during karaoke nights at Casa Adelita.<sup>163</sup>

In 2025, *City Journal* listed Paramount as one of the cities in Southern Los Angeles “making a comeback.” According to the article:

Today, walking along Paramount Boulevard, one sees not broken-down storefronts but a thriving downtown, full of attractive restaurants and shops. The city has adopted a “broken windows” approach to policing. While crime rates remain above average for the state, they have been trending down. Homicides, down two-thirds from 1990s levels, are well below the L.A. city average and almost half of those in nearby South L.A. neighborhoods. Paramount has also gotten its city finances on a more solid footing than those of its peers. Whereas L.A. was flirting with huge deficits even before the wildfires, Paramount maintained budget surpluses over the past decade.

Perhaps even more remarkable, one sees no signs of the homelessness, graffiti, and urban disorder that’s so common throughout Southern California—a remarkable shift from conditions just a decade or two ago. Much of Paramount’s relative success comes from paying attention to little things. The city has focused on parks, urban space, and landscaping, helping local neighborhoods improve their look by subsidizing flower beds and white picket fences to improve the curb appeal of homes.

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<sup>161</sup> U.S., Census, “Paramount,” 2020.

<sup>162</sup> “Paramount Likes its Picket-Fence Image,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 25, 2007, B3.

<sup>163</sup> Jill Cowan, “Paramount, Where Protests Erupted, has a Large Hispanic Population,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 8, 2025.

Much of this success stems from the city’s strong community spirit and close collaboration between local government, businesses, and schools... Paramount’s tight-knit community—now increasingly led by young families, many of them homeowners or aspiring to be—has driven its turnaround.<sup>164</sup>

In 2025, the City made national headlines when residents collectively resisted raids by federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents. According to Los Angeles City Council member Hugo Soto-Martinez as recorded in the *Los Angeles Times*, Paramount was “full of working-class Latinos that were able to have a piece of the middle class... like [a] Latino suburb.”<sup>165</sup> Paramount residents protested targeted immigration raids near the Home Depot. Law enforcement officers used flash-bang grenades and fired rubber bullets at demonstrators.

One overriding theme in interviews with longtime Paramount residents is the City’s dedication to its residents. As recalled by Dr. Linda Timmons:

One thing about Paramount that I don’t see in any other city is the camaraderie that they have with the citizens. They really work hard to make sure citizens are happy as much as possible...Our public safety has a neighborhood watch community, which I’m a part of. We come together and we talk about our city and how we can improve and what needs to happen. And I think that Paramount is one of the few cities that makes a big difference. My own experience is that they know you by name. And that’s important. It’s important to me.<sup>166</sup>

Pastor Grady Jones of the Emmanuel Church notes:

The City [has] been there for us. They’ve been there for us. I can’t claim Paramount is a hidden city in this sense. It’s not known public for crazy stuff, but as a city full of compassion. Administrators of the city are full of compassion. They have built this city from where [it] used to be to where it is today. And again, I’ve seen how they work through the community, how they invest in the community, invest in the people in community, and everything I’ve asked for is helped.<sup>167</sup>

Gloria Gamino, business owner and Director of the Paramount Chamber of Commerce, states:

[The City] caters to the people and helps them a lot, helps us a lot... we never felt that we were alone. I think the City of Paramount is united, and all the people here have been... very helpful. I’m very grateful and very lucky to be in a city like Paramount.<sup>168</sup>

Today, the City of Paramount continues to be a “safe, healthy, and attractive” city that prioritizes its residents and strives to improve with every passing year.

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<sup>164</sup> Joel Kotkin and M. Andrew Moshier, “In Southern L.A., These Cities Are Making a Comeback,” March 6, 2025, *City Journal*.

<sup>165</sup> Jill Cowan, “Paramount, Where Protests Erupted, has a Large Hispanic Population,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 8, 2025.

<sup>166</sup> Interview with Dr. Linda Timmons by Emi Takahara. December 18, 2025. On file with Historic Resources Group.

<sup>167</sup> Interview with Pastor Grady Jones by Emi Takahara. December 18, 2025. On file with Historic Resources Group.

<sup>168</sup> Interview with Gloria Gamino by Emi Takahara. January 6, 2026. On file with Historic Resources Group.

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## APPENDIX A. INTERVIEWEE BIOGRAPHIES

<b>Alcaraz, Manuel “Manny”</b>	
Title:	Co-founder, Zoot Suit Riots Memorial Cruise
	Born on December 24, 1948, in Mexicali, Mexico, Manuel Alcaraz moved with his family to Chino, CA shortly thereafter. At age nine, he relocated to Paramount, where he attended Lincoln Elementary and Wesley Gaines Elementary, followed by Paramount Junior High. He graduated from Paramount High School in 1967. During the Vietnam War, Alcaraz served in the U.S. Navy and was a member of a touring Navy basketball team that traveled throughout the American South. He later settled in Downey and then Norwalk. Alcaraz worked as an order picker for both the Sinclair and Glidden paint companies for a total of 36 years, retiring in 2010. In 2017, Alcaraz co-founded the Zoot Suit Riots Memorial Cruise to raise awareness of the 1943 Zoot Suit Riots and to celebrate Mexican American heritage. He currently lives in Paramount.
<b>Exiga, Augustin “Gus”</b>	
Title:	Owner, Gus’s Deli BBQ and Grill
	Augustin “Gus” Exiga was born in Mexico in 1963 and moved with his family to Paramount in 1975. He graduated from Paramount High School in 1982 and, while still a student, began working at Eastern Provisions butcher shop in Paramount cleaning equipment. He continued working at the deli throughout college and, after graduating, chose to remain with the business. In 1999, Exiga purchased the shop from its owner and later renamed it Gus’s Deli BBQ and Grill as he expanded into barbecuing and smoking meats. The deli became a community gathering place, known for hosting weekly car shows and fundraising events for local youth soccer teams. After 45 years with the business, Gus retired in 2025.
<b>Gamino, Gloria</b>	
Title:	Owner/Manager, Casa Gamino Restaurant; Board or Directors, Paramount Chamber of Commerce
	Gloria Gamino was born in Guatemala in 1954 and moved to Paramount at age 15 to join her mother. She attended Paramount High School and, in 1972, began working at the Casa Gamino restaurant while also studying at Cerritos College. She later married the restaurant’s owner, and together they expanded the business, opening seven Casa Gamino locations throughout the South Bay. Today, the original Casa Gamino in Paramount restaurant remains, serving as a longstanding community hub with employees who have worked there for decades. In addition to her work in the family business, Gamino has served for nine years on the Board of Directors of the Paramount Chamber of Commerce.
<b>Grayson, Shirley</b>	
Title:	Chair, Paramount Parks and Recreation Commission; Board Member, Stephens/T.A. Upshaw Scholarship Foundation.
	Shirley Grayson was born in the mid-1940s in Natchitoches, LA, and attended Southern University in Louisiana, where she majored in Business Administration. She relocated to Los Angeles in 1965 and continued her studies at UCLA. In the mid-1970s, Grayson and her husband moved to Paramount. Beginning her career in an entry-level position at the Knudsen Corporation, she advanced to become Director of Sales and Marketing Accounting. She later

	served as head of Business Analysis, Operations, Forecasting, and Sales Reporting at Kraft General Foods, and then as Vice President and Controller of West Pico Foods and, subsequently, Controller for Cedar Lane Natural Foods. After four decades in finance, she retired in 2012. Grayson currently serves as Chair of the Paramount Parks and Recreation Commission and as a board member of the Stephens/T.A. Upshaw Scholarship Foundation.
<b>Hofmeyer, Daryl</b>	
Title:	Former Mayor, Paramount, 2006, 2011, 2016; Former owner, Romberg Milling
	Daryl Hofmeyer was born in Iowa in 1938 and moved to California after serving in the U.S. Marines. In 1960, he and his wife settled in Paramount, where his uncle owned Romberg Milling, a company that produced dairy feed. Hofmeyer began his career unloading bales of hay and eventually purchased the business, expanding it into horse feed and hay brokering and becoming a pioneer in the manufacturing of alfalfa hay cubes in California. Beginning in 1985, he became involved in the Paramount community, serving on the City's Water Board as well as the Parks and Recreation, Public Works, and Planning Commissions. Elected to the City Council in 2003, Hofmeyer served three terms as Mayor where he helped launch the Paramount Education Partnership (PEP) scholarships, which promotes continuing education and economic opportunity for residents. In 2024, he passed Romberg Milling to his grandson.
<b>Jones, Grady</b>	
Title:	Pastor, New Commandment Missionary Baptist Church; Former Safety Director, Robert Shaw Controls
	Pastor Grady Jones, born in 1943 in Little Rock, Arkansas, moved to Compton, CA, in 1969 and settled in Paramount in 1975 with his family. Jones served for 22 years as Director of Safety for Robert Shaw Controls. He began to help pastor at the New Commandment Missionary Baptist Church, and in 1991 he became the pastor of the church. Jones founded and now serves as President of the Unity in the Community committee, a group which fosters inclusivity and strengthens relationships between residents and law enforcement. In partnership with the Paramount City Council, he has organized health fairs and toy drives for decades. In recognition of his longstanding service, Pastor Jones received the Mayor's Gold Key Award in 2025.
<b>Lemons, Peggy</b>	
Title:	Mayor, Paramount, 1998, 2002, 2007, 2012, 2017, 2020, 2025
	Peggy Lemons was born in 1955 in South Gate, California, and raised in Paramount, where she attended Roosevelt Elementary School and Paramount High School. A Paramount homeowner since 1976, she has served on the Paramount City Council since 1997 and has served multiple terms as Mayor. Mayor Lemons is the founder of the Paramount Education Partnership (PEP) and the Pennies for PEP Scholarship Program, which has raised over \$2 million for student scholarships, and she introduced the Boulevard of Scholars program to recognize student achievement. Mayor Lemons served more than 25 years as Executive Director of the Paramount Chamber of Commerce and founded the Paramount Pulse Beat community newspaper to promote local businesses and community news. A former Public Safety Commissioner, she was recognized by the California State Legislature as Public Safety Person of the Year and has received the Soroptimist Woman of Distinction Award and the Rotary Club's Paul Harris Award. As of 2026, she continues to serve on several regional and

	local committees, including the Southeast Area Animal Control Authority Board, the Tri-City Public Safety Joint Powers Authority, and various City ad hoc committees focused on community beautification and addressing homelessness.
<b>Martinez, Dr. Max</b>	
Title:	Dentist/Owner, Dental Plus of Paramount; Treasurer, Paramount Education Partnership
	Dr. Max B. Martinez, born in Long Beach, CA in 1955, is a graduate of Paramount High School, Class of 1973. He earned his Doctorate in Dental Surgery from Georgetown University in 1984 and opened his private practice in 1988. Dr. Martinez has received fellowships from the Academy of General Dentistry, the American College of Dentists, the International College of Dentists, and the Pierre Fauchard Academy, and in 2018 was honored with the Distinguished Alumni Award from CSU Long Beach. His other awards include the Paramount Mayor's Award, Chamber Business of the Year, and Paramount's Most Beautiful Business Award. He is currently the President of the Board of Directors of the California Dental Association. Dr. Martinez has held longstanding leadership roles with the Paramount Chamber of Commerce and is a founding board member of Paramount Education Partnership (PEP), helping secure more than \$1.8 million in scholarships for local students. His service also includes extensive volunteer dental care for underserved communities and decades of civic and youth involvement.
<b>McKown, Mike</b>	
Title:	Director, Project Hope, Paramount Care Foundation; Historian, Paramount Historical Society; Founder, "Pitch In, Paramount"
	Michael McKown was born in Inglewood, California, in 1956 and moved with his family to Paramount in 1959. He attended Lincoln Elementary and Alondra Junior High before graduating from Paramount High School in 1975. After graduating from college in 1979, McKown went on to own and operate a combined pet store and dog grooming business in Downey for 22 years, closing it in 2008. Beginning in 2010, he was a leader of "Pitch In, Paramount," a biannual volunteer neighborhood clean-up initiative, for which he received recognition from the Paramount Mayor in 2017. In 2011, McKown began working with Project Hope, a faith-based nonprofit that operates a food bank and conducts community outreach; he currently serves as its director. McKown is also co-founder and historian of the Paramount Historical Society.
<b>Timmons, Dr. Linda</b>	
Title:	CEO, Advocates for Family Unity; Chair, Paramount Planning Commission
	Dr. Linda Timmons was born in 1950, was predominantly raised in Compton, and moved to Paramount in 1975. Linda Timmons was the first African American student to attend Paul Revere Junior High School in Brentwood and the first African American to attend Palisades High School. Timmons put herself through college, attending Cal State LA and the University of Phoenix. Timmons was employed with the City of Compton for over 34 years, beginning as a clerk and rising to become the Special Assistant to the City Manager before retiring in 2005. She returned to school and obtained her Doctorate Degree in Psychological Therapy in 2008 and founded Advocates for Family Unity. Dr. Timmons has demonstrated a lifelong dedication to uplifting others and making a meaningful difference in communities near and far. In addition to her professional work, Dr. Timmons has been deeply committed to humanitarian service and missionary outreach which led her to participate in missionary efforts in other

	countries including China, Egypt, Africa, and Haiti. In the aftermath of the devastating Hurricane Katrina in 2005, she volunteered her time and energy with the American Red Cross and received formal recognition from the City of Paramount and the Red Cross. Dr. Timmons served as a Public Works Commissioner from 2016 to 2023, was appointed to the Planning Commission in 2023, and has been an Ambassador for the Chamber of Commerce for over 15 years. Dr. Timmons founded the Women’s Empowerment Tea, an initiative to uplift and mentor young women by providing guidance, and positive role models.
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<b>West, Pat</b>	
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Title:	Former City Manager, Cities of Paramount and Long Beach; Founder, Pat West LLC
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	Pat West was born in Inglewood, California, in 1954 and moved to Paramount in 1979. He began his career with Paramount in 1980 as Leisure Activities Superintendent. He later served as Parks and Recreation Director, where he led the Alternatives to Gang Membership Program, an initiative through which City staff educated fifth-grade students about the dangers of gang involvement. West was appointed City Manager in 1994 and oversaw community-focused initiatives including “Let’s Get Paramount Neighborhoods Looking Good,” in partnership with the Public Works Department and Emmanuel Reformed Church, as well as the White Picket Fence and Pocket Park programs—all aimed at strengthening neighborhood pride and civic engagement. In 2005, he became Community Redevelopment Director for the City of Long Beach and, in 2007, was appointed City Manager. West retired in 2019 from the City of Long Beach and now works as a consultant.
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