

*The Lakewood Story: History, Traditions, Values*

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**1954-2004: Times change. Values don't.**

City of Lakewood - 5050 Clark Avenue - Lakewood, CA 90712 - 562-866-9771

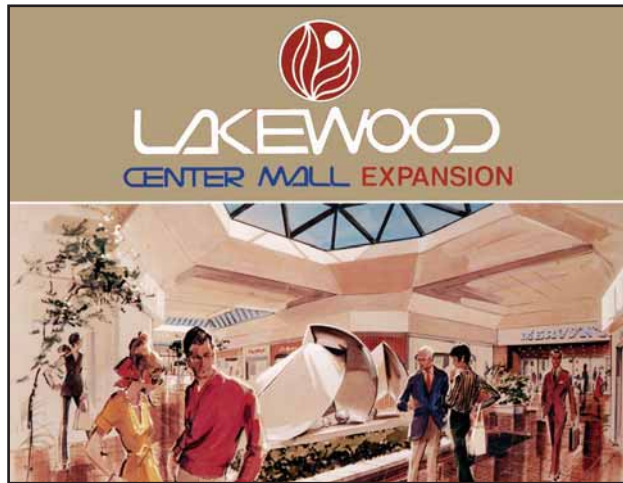
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for older residents, the provision of new housing within the fabric of existing neighborhoods, and the redevelopment of aging retail centers.

Land use that favors residential over commercial and industrial zones remains a constant in Lakewood's history. Yet, the 6 percent of land mass designed for commercial use is very important to Lakewood's tax base and ability to provide quality public services. Nowhere is change more dramatic than in Lakewood's retail sales zones.

Lakewood Center, once the nation's largest open-air shopping area, was



The Macerich Company, owner of Lakewood Center, has made major investments in Lakewood's economic future. The company enclosed and expanded the mall in 1977.

enclosed in 1977. Since then, its owners have adapted to changing shopper preferences by adding three major discount and electronic megastores first as "outparcel" stores, then adding in 2003 a two-story Target discount store to replace a closed Montgomery Wards department store at the mall's northern extension.

The city's second-largest shopping area was dramatically transformed when the dilapidated Dutch Village shopping center at the four corners of Woodruff Avenue and South Street was demolished and transformed to contemporary retail and service businesses.

For the most part, city leaders have cautiously encouraged redevelopment, reflecting Lakewood's political realities. Some Lakewood residents, following the creation of the city's redevelopment agency in 1972, feared that commercial redevelopment might force people out of their homes, despite repeated assurances from city leaders that this would not happen. By 1976, these fears had fueled a growing sense of alienation from city government on the part of some voters. Their anger spilled over in a bitter fight to control a majority of the seats on the five-member city council.

In March 1976, anxious Lakewood voters elected three candidates who had campaigned in opposition to the city's development efforts. The new, "anti-city hall" majority forced the resignation of City Manager Milton Farrell, repealed an ordinance requiring pre-sale inspections for houses on the market, and killed the city's plans for an innovative "auto mall" on Lakewood Boulevard.

The careers of the critics were short, however. By 1980, only one of the three council members elected in 1976 remained on the council—one had actually been recalled by Lakewood voters—and redevelopment eventually ceased to be a source of community division. By 2003, the city had evolved a flexible, strategic approach to redevelopment—one of the lessons of 1976. And Lakewood redevelopment efforts never led to the wholesale demolition of residential neighborhoods, the fear that had driven the foes of pro-redevelopment city council members.

**Kids first.** Nothing has energized Lakewood's neighborhood concerns more than the fragmentation and future of its public schools. As early as 1962, the city council had objected to school attendance

boundary decisions made by the Long Beach Unified School District, saying that a Lakewood school district would be more responsive to Lakewood residents. The city council considered the fragmentation of Lakewood schools again in 1971, 1974, 1977, and 1980 (when the Bellflower Unified School District sold a school site in Lakewood that city council members sought to preserve).

In 1995, the frustration felt by residents led to the formation of the Lakewood Unified School District Organizing Committee, a community-based, volunteer organization. The committee, led by future City Council Member Todd Rogers, organized a successful school district petition drive, collecting far more names than required under state regulations to bring the matter of a new Lakewood district before the State Board of Education.

The resistance of school district officials and the hostility of state school board members abruptly ended the petition process in 2001, after an exhausting round of local hearings and the publication of a critical report on the Lakewood proposal by state school board staff.

Undaunted by the unanimous State Board of Education decision that turned down the petition—signed by more than 14,000 Lakewood-area voters—the city council formed a council committee to seek educational changes in Lakewood with the ultimate goal of creating a single, unified school district.

In 2002, the city turned to Dr. Gerald C. Hayward, a principal partner in Management, Analysis and Planning Inc. (MAP), for a wide-ranging review of the condition of educational delivery in Lakewood. His report, released in 2003, recommended that the city take immediate steps to increase its influence among the

four school districts, while recognizing that the state's budgetary stresses precluded the ability to form a new school district immediately.

The MAP study showed that upwards of 60 percent of low-income Lakewood students were performing below California academic standards in English. Statewide, the figure was 53 percent in 2002. They also showed that most schools in Lakewood were overcrowded. Two of the three high schools in Lakewood had more than 3,000 students each.

Compared to other high schools outside the city, Artesia, Mayfair, and



Lakewood high schools had fewer opportunities for advanced learning than Wilson, Poly, Cerritos, and Whitney.

Based on the MAP study's recommendations, city council members said they would:

- Meet with officials in all four districts to review the report's findings and recommendations.

- Create a committee that would be dedicated to examining Lakewood's educational delivery systems and strengthening communication between the city and the districts.

- Help the Long Beach district find

Lakewood joined the Bellflower school district in refurbishing the Mayfair High School gym. It's now used for both school athletics and city recreation programs.

the resources to build new campuses to relieve overcrowding in Long Beach schools.

The report also suggested that city and school district leaders work to reform the four-way split in Lakewood schools by combining the tiny portion of Lakewood that is in the Paramount Unified School District with either the Long Beach or the Bellflower districts. In 2002–2003, Lakewood had, at most, 800 potential students in the Paramount district, of which perhaps only 150 actually attended a Paramount school. Both the Long Beach and Bellflower districts are much larger.



As the number of students in Lakewood schools continues to grow, Lakewood residents seek answers to the city's educational needs.

The MAP report, however, recommended against new efforts to reorganize all four districts into a new, Lakewood district, reserving that goal for a time when the political climate may be more favorable.

The report included the first school-by-school comparison analysis for Lakewood education, using data compiled by the state and more than thirty other variables, including overall student enrollment, ethnicity, attendance, teacher staffing levels and qualifications, and residency.

Based on the statistics in the 2002

state Academic Performance Index, the academic quality of Lakewood schools ranged from very high (at the Intensive Learning Center in the Bellflower district) to very low (at the Lakewood Elementary School in the Paramount district, one of the poorest performing schools in the state, according to 2002 state statistics). The MAP report found other poorly performing Lakewood schools in the ABC district—at Willow and Palms elementary schools, which posted low on the Academic Performance Index, and Artesia High School, which ranked in the bottom 20 percent of all comparable high schools in California.

Overall, the rest of Lakewood schools, however, were average in their Academic Performance Index results, with some of these schools showing recent gains in test scores.

School district officials, on the whole, said that the MAP report characterized their schools fairly, although two districts disputed how the state statistics were interpreted. A Long Beach school district spokesman said the report's findings and recommendations were "thoughtful, perceptive, and attainable."

Efforts to remove Lakewood students from Paramount Unified School District received a boost in 2004 when Long Beach Unified School District officials agreed to accept "all transferees" from Lakewood neighborhoods in the Paramount Districts. Still, city leaders prefer fewer school districts in Lakewood with the overriding, long-term goal of a single Lakewood district.

**Changing aerospace economy.** As the German army rolled through Europe and the Japanese army penetrated China in the late 1930s, the United States began to bolster its defenses. In September 1940, Long Beach sold to the Navy—for just