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Planning the Gay City:

Incorporation, Redevelopment, and the Formation of West Hollywood

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Urban Planning

by

Gus Wendel

2025

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Planning the Gay City:

Incorporation, Redevelopment, and the Formation of West Hollywood

by

Gus Wendel

Doctor of Philosophy in Urban Planning

University of California, Los Angeles, 2025

Professor Dana Cuff, Chair

This dissertation examines the formation and development of West Hollywood, California, as the first "gay city" in the U.S., analyzing how cityhood was strategically employed by gay advocates to achieve unprecedented political power at the time of incorporation. It explores both the symbolic and material consequences of the cityhood project: symbolically, West Hollywood signaled the growing political legitimacy of gay and lesbian communities, demonstrating their ability to win elected office and constitute a political majority that could govern effectively; materially, cityhood enabled the enactment of progressive policies, such as domestic partnership and nondiscrimination legislation, and access to planning and policy tools that shaped key areas of municipal governance, including affordable housing, public health, public safety, and redevelopment. Using archival research and interviews, the dissertation traces the motivations and decisions of various actors involved in different phases of West Hollywood's formation,

from its incorporation campaign to post-incorporation governance and urban redevelopment. Drawing on planning history and theory, discourses of embodiment and space, and theories of neoliberalism and homonormativity, I argue that gay cityhood was simultaneously a project of identity-making and city-making, one that selectively elevated visions of gay identity aligned with economic development while marginalizing other queer livelihoods, particularly those associated with sex work. The city's gay identity was not fixed, but strategically invoked, contested, and redefined to navigate the competing imperatives of governance, respectability, and representation. In doing so, it illustrates how cityhood functioned as a political and spatial tool that at once reinscribed and resisted dominant configurations of space, identity, and power. The dissertation contributes to discourses on the relationship between urban planning, municipal formation and governance, and the politics of sexual and gender identity.

The dissertation of Gus Wendel is approved.

Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris

Kian Goh

Todd S. Presner

Dana Cuff, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2025

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the steadfast support of my dissertation committee members Dana Cuff, Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, Kian Goh, and Todd Presner. Beyond the dissertation, they have actively supported me during my time at UCLA, beginning a decade ago with the Master's program in Urban and Regional Planning program, the Urban Humanities Initiative, and, of course, cityLAB. Anastasia instilled in me a rigor for scholarship on public space and urban design, while also giving me the early confidence to pursue a PhD. It was during the Master's program that she first encouraged me to formulate a research agenda at the intersection of planning, public space, LGBTQ+ issues, and the urban humanities. Kian expanded my sense of what scholarship could be, and what it ought to do. From her, I learned how to ask critical questions, and to understand the real contributions scholars can and should make to the world. Todd's artful teaching inspired me to see the connections between our disciplines and showed me how to make those connections visible in my own work. His guidance in this dissertation, particularly his emphasis on the affective dimensions of queer spatial histories, was essential in shaping my approach to the archival and interview material. I am especially indebted to Dana, my committee chair, for her steadfast commitment and openness to supporting the ideas behind this project. Crucially, Dana helped me draw out the most compelling stories, make sense of complexity, and in doing so raise the stakes of the project. More broadly, my time working with Dana has taught me that to "know" the city is to go out and "do stuff", to engage directly with its messiness and contradictions. This disposition will continue to guide my teaching and research for years to come.

My sincerest thanks to the many librarians, archivists, former and current planners and city officials, and everyday residents who granted me access to West Hollywood's multiple histories and made this project possible. I especially wish to thank the following individuals, who generously shared with me their stories of West Hollywood's formation: John Heilman, Michael Jenkins, Gilda Haas, Steve Schulte, Barbara Grover, Abbe Land, Paul Brotzman, Paul Zimmerman, Henry Scott, Mark Lehman, John Duran, Sam Phillips, Jon Ponder, and Mariana. I am also eternally grateful to Bud Thomas for helping me navigate the collections at the ONE Archives at USC; to Maggie Tarmey for guiding me through the extensive archival and mapping collections at UCLA's Young Research Library; and to my fellow PhD comrade Greg Preston for patiently showing me the ropes of Census analysis.

My intellectual trajectory has been indelibly shaped by friends and colleagues at UCLA who, over the years, have inspired, supported, nudged, and encouraged me to keep moving forward in my academic journey. From the early days of the Urban Humanities Initiative to the UHI Alumni Salons and the Inaugural Global (Un)Conference, Jonathan Banfill, Jacqueline Jean Barrios, Kenny Wong, Sai Rojanapirom, Cate Carlson, Josh Nelson, Will Davis, Marko Icev, Nerve Macaspac, Paola Mendez, Lili Flores, Shine Ling, Jonathan Jae-an Crisman, Rebecca Choi–among many others–have deepened my commitment to creative, multidisciplinary, place-based scholarship. As co-instructors in UHI these past couple of years, Claire Nelischer, Doğa Tekin, Nidia Bautista, and Marlené Nancy Lopez have been an absolute dream team. At cityLAB, I have been fortunate to collaborate and conspire with an equally inspiring group, including Yang Yang, Rayne Laborde Ruiz, Carrie Gammell, Alejandra Guerrero, Manos Proussaloglou, Gustavo Leclerc, and Ryan Conroy.

In the UCLA Department of Urban Planning, I have been fortunate to work alongside so many wonderful colleagues: faculty, program and research center staff, and members of the "cohort that was too big." Many thanks to Teo Wickland, Kenton Card, Rebecca Crane, Tom Bassett, Jessica Bremner, Sheila Nem, Greg Preston, Madeline Wander, Pamela Stephens, tamika butler, Chendi Zhang, Derrick Behm Josa, Chris Giamarino, Tam Guy, and Aurora Echavarria. Special thanks to Emma French for being such a stellar co-editor for *Critical Planning Journal* Vol. 26; and to Claire Nelischer and Andres F. Ramirez for being equally stellar collaborators on the (Un)Common Public Space Group (and for our mental health retreats to Ginger Rogers, Bar Bandini, and Colombia).

Thank you also to the many Luskin faculty and staff who have supported me at various points in my academic journey, including Ananya Roy, Marisa Lemorande, Paavo Monkkonen, Evelyn Blumenberg, Mike Manville, Stephen Commins, Carol Goldstein, Tammy Borrero, and Vinit Mukhija. Outside of Luskin (but still within UCLA) I am grateful to have learned from Maite Zubiaurre, Judy Han, Elizabeth Marchant, Sherene Razack, Michael Osman, Ayala Levin, Vetri Nathan, Lieba Faier, Juan Herrera, and Eric Sheppard. Thank you also to my colleagues beyond UCLA, both before and after, who supported me on this journey: Andrew Whittemore, Nic John Ramos, Harris Kornstein, Renia Ehrenfeucht, Maria Francesca Piazzoni, Marisa Turesky, and Alex Burnett.

Finally, thanks to my friends (BOG!) and family, in Los Angeles and beyond, for continually encouraging me and making this path not only possible but fun. To my parents Katie and Tom, my brother Hans, and my sister-in-law Angelica, for your steadfast love and support. And to Omar for believing in me at every step.

VITA

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Architecture and Social Sustainability. Routledge.

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2022 Loukaitou-Sideris, A., Wendel, G., Bastar, G., Frumin, Z., & Nelischer, C. Green open space and physical activity for seniors: A post-occupancy evaluation of Golden Age Park (pp. 1–89). cityLAB-UCLA and UCLA Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies.

2021 Loukaitou-Sideris, A., Cuff, D., Leclerc, G., Zubiaurre, M., Wendel, G., Nelischer, C., & Bastar, G. Creating common ground: Opportunities for intergenerational use of public spaces in disinvested communities (pp. 1–96). cityLAB-UCLA and UCLA Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies.

2019 Cuff, D., & Wendel, G. My commute is hell: UCLA students, extreme commutes, impacts, solutions (pp. 1–49). cityLAB-UCLA.

2019 Cuff, D., & Wendel, G. Living in the 21st century schoolyard: Exploring the school-housing nexus in Southern California (pp. 1–66). cityLAB-UCLA.

2019 Cuff, D., Wendel, G., Carlson, C., & Laborde, R. Imagining future campus life: Site strategy analysis in Opportunity starts at home: Addressing housing insecurity for underserved L.A. Community College students (pp. 21–39). Southern California Association of Nonprofit Housing.

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2024 Wendel, G. "Planning West Hollywood: Incorporation politics and the formation of the first gay city" at Association of American Geographers Annual Meeting, Honolulu, HI.

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1. INTRODUCTION

A (Gay) City is Born

On November 6, 1984 residents of West Hollywood, a 1.9 square mile unincorporated area of Los Angeles County with a population of roughly 36,000 residents, voted overwhelmingly to incorporate as a city. While its size and population was tiny in comparison to neighboring Los Angeles, the significance of the moment was felt far beyond the confines of West Hollywood's modest borders. Most new municipal incorporations do not draw much national or international attention. West Hollywood was different. For the first time ever, a "gay city" was born.

Upon incorporating, West Hollywood residents elected five candidates to its newly formed city council. Of the five electeds, three were openly gay: Valerie Terrigno, Steve Schulte, and John Heilman. Terrigno won the most votes and was therefore appointed Mayor. Thus, West Hollywood became not only the first city to have a gay majority representing City Council, but also the first to elect an openly gay mayor, an unprecedented development in the trajectory of gay political advocacy.

The ascendency of a gay majority on city council marked a significant moment in the trajectory of gay rights in the U.S., one where, for the first time, gays held a majority of elected

positions in an elected body of government.[1] This shift towards political and institutional representation began with the 1977 election of Harvey Milk to San Francisco's city council and was buttressed by the larger gay rights movement unfolding post Stonewall. At a time when gays were afforded few legal protection and remained widely stigmatized in public discourse, the emergence of a gay-majority city council challenged prevailing assumptions about the limits of gay political agency. This shift was especially significant amid the unfolding AIDS crisis, which disproportionately affected, and further stigmatized, gay men. By assuming positions of direct governance, gay leaders in West Hollywood departed from a historical mode of gay activism that pursued political change by applying pressure on formal political structures and institutions from the outside.

Viewed from the local level, cityhood engendered a new set of alliances and coalition building among both gay and nongay actors. Moira Kenney has argued that, "West Hollywood marks the evolution of Los Angeles's gay movement from one focused on short-term responses to crises within the community to one of creating and sustaining community institutions through alliances with other local constituent groups and residents" (2001, 46). Making a new city required working in concert with other groups[2]–rent control advocates, seniors, Eastern European immigrants, business interests–and their representative leaders and organizations to form a cityhood coalition and build a collective vision for what they wanted West Hollywood to become and achieve. In this process, the identity and political aspirations associated with the

[1] Since West Hollywood's incorporation in 1984, only a handful of municipalities in the U.S. have had LGBTQ+ majorities representing their city councils, including Palm Springs, CA, Cathedral City, CA, and Wilton Manors, FL.

[2] While the gay population of West Hollywood was estimated at 35-40%, 88% of the city was renters (compared to 50% countywide) and the city was also home to a substantial number of seniors (28%) and Russian speaking, Eastern Europe immigrants (11%) (US Census).

"gay city" had to be negotiated alongside, and at times reconciled with, the priorities of these other groups.

The incarnation of West Hollywood as a gay city also represents a twist in the historiography of gay enclaves[3] in the U.S. Gay neighborhoods like the Castro in San Francisco and Greenwich Village in New York City have been understood as both a response to heteronormative planning practices in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and as expressions of homonormative political agendas in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. While planning scholars often cite the 1990s as the moment when formal planning tools began to shape gay neighborhoods, the formation of West Hollywood in 1984 predates this shift. Understanding why gay cityhood emerged at that particular historical moment, and what political and spatial opportunities it opened for gay advocates, is a question of critical interest.

This dissertation traces the formation of West Hollywood, focusing primarily although not exclusively on the period spanning its incorporation campaign (1984) through the first sixteen years of cityhood (1984-2000), to examine its significance for gay political advocacy and spatial identity. I explore what I term *gay cityhood*: the process of becoming a gay city, both through the campaign for incorporation and through the strategic use of the powers cityhood conferred, including zoning, redevelopment authority, taxation, contracting with public and private entities, and the establishment of boards and commissions. Rather than treating gay cityhood as a singular achievement or fixed event, I frame it as an ongoing process of identity

[3] Conner and Okamura define gay neighborhoods (also known as gay villages, gay enclaves, and gayborhoods) as "urban spaces that contain a variety of residents, businesses, and social service agencies catering to LGBT+ persons" (2021, 1). By all accounts West Hollywood, or 'WeHo' as it is often referred to colloquially, fits within scholarly definitions of what constitutes a traditional 'gayborhood' in major cities of North America and Western Europe.

and institution building. In this context, the meaning of "gay" was never stable, but continually negotiated, adapted, and contested within a shifting political and urban landscape.

Historic context

The area that is today known as West Hollywood was shaped by long histories of migration, settler colonialism, and shifting political economies tied to the wider Los Angeles region. Prior to 1770, approximately 5,000 Native Americans including the Gabrieleño, Kizh, and Tongva inhabited Tovaangar, the name of the region roughly spanning what is today Palos Verdes to San Bernardino, and between Saddleback Mountain and the San Fernando Valley (McCawley 1996). What is today known as West Hollywood sits right in the geographic center of this region. Following the establishment of the Spanish mission system in the seventeenth century, most Native Americans were removed from their lands and forced to abandon their way of life, culture, language, and religion. By the early nineteenth century the area that constitutes West Hollywood today became part of Rancho La Brea and Rancho Rodeo de Las Aguas, and by the mid-to-late nineteenth century the ranches had been subdivided and sold for farming (Architectural Resources Group 2023).

By 1895, the rapidly expanding network of streetcars, including the Los Angeles Railway created by Moses H. Sherman and Eli P. Clark, had reached the area, concluding in a five-acre railyard at the present-day corner of Santa Monica and San Vicente Boulevards (Figure 1.1). Sherman named the area "Sherman," and his company built residences for the railyard workers north of the railyard. The presence of worker housing persisted into the 1950s, and evidence

suggests that at least some housing was designated specifically for Mexican rail workers.[4] By 1912 Sherman acquired the nickname "Queen of the Foothills" by boosters and by the 1920s had a booming commercial corridor along Santa Monica Boulevard near San Vicente Boulevard. Residences began propping up along secondary streets, in between avocado groves and poinsettia fields (Architectural Resources Group 2023).

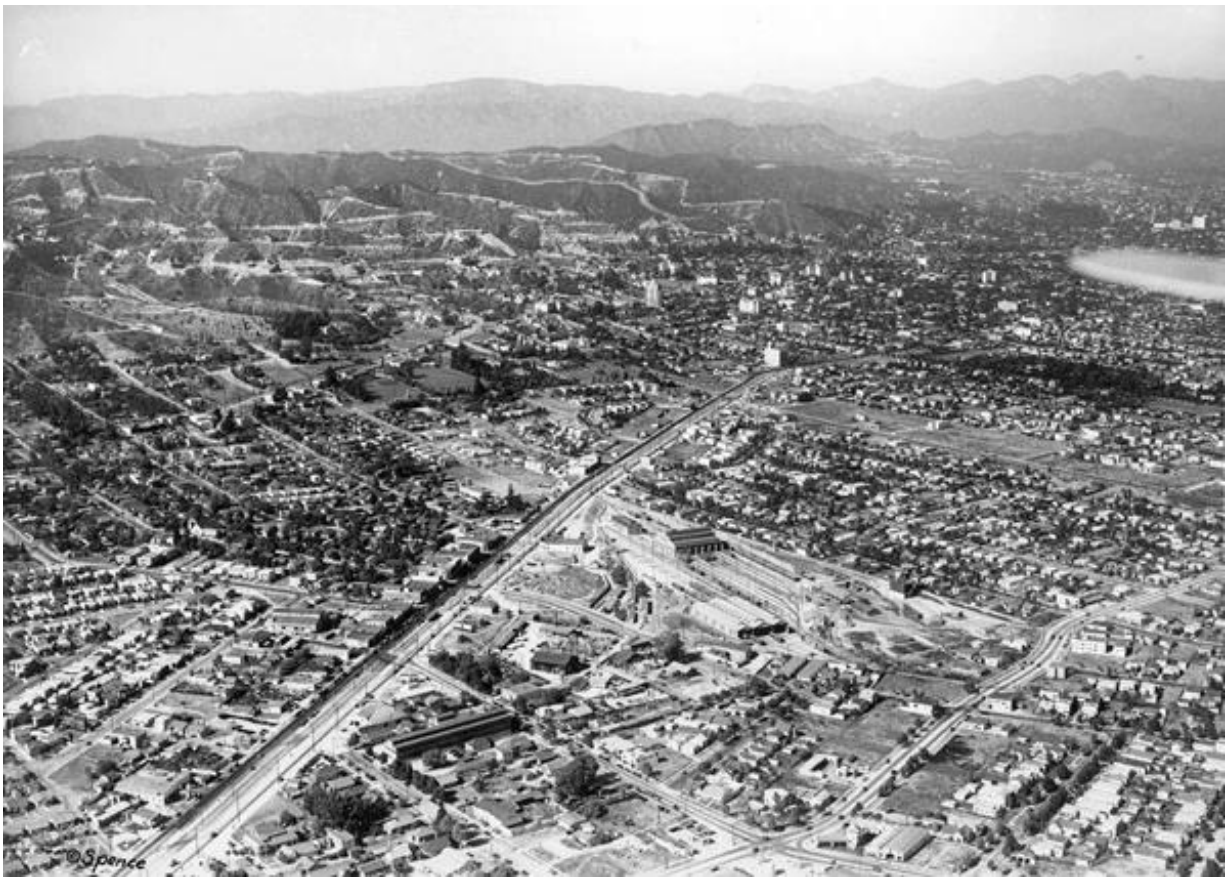


Figure 1.1. Aerial view of West Hollywood in 1922 (name changed from Sherman just nine years prior). The former rail yard is visible in the center-right. Source: California Historical Society Collection, USC Libraries.

[4] Historians argue that while Mexican worker housing had been demolished by 1926, the persistence of place names like El Tovar Place–the only street with a Spanish name–suggests that a Latino population remained in the area (Architectural Resources Group 2023).

By the early 1920s, the rapidly expanding City of Los Angeles had made several attempts to annex Sherman. Los Angeles successfully incorporated nearby unincorporated tracts of land nearby, including the 1,203-acre Fairfax district and the 430-acre Melrose district. However, Sherman was already an established community with its own identity, and the population was more divided over the issue of annexation by neighboring Los Angeles. According to Masters, "Realtors supported it, arguing that future development depended on access to Los Angeles' sewer and fire protection services. Sherman's Board of Trade and Chamber of Commerce opposed joining the city, however, fearful of increased property taxes" (Masters 2011). Anti-annexationists prevailed, and Sherman never became part of Los Angeles, even after renaming itself "West Hollywood".

The arrival of the film industry in the early twentieth century spurred further development, and celebrities began moving to the area (Gierach 2003). Actress Alla Nazimova's home became famous for its parties and for attracting a largely lesbian clientele (GPA Consulting 2014). Thus, as early as the 1920s, historical evidence suggests that West Hollywood was becoming known as a destination for LGBTQ+ or "queer" people.[5]" (Miranda 2010). West Hollywood, and Sunset Boulevard in particular, eventually became a bridge between the residences of motion picture stars in Beverly Hills to the West, and the burgeoning Hollywood scene to the east (see Figure 1.2 to see where West Hollywood is situated geographically). Given West Hollywood's location in unincorporated LA County, it faced less law enforcement scrutiny,

[5] This claim however must be reconsidered alongside evidence that, prior to the arrival of the Spaniards, California Indigenous peoples maintained cultures of diverse gender and sexual composition, a culture that could be configured as "queer" (Miranda 2010). Miranda (2010) uses the term "gendercide" to describe Spanish colonialists' destruction of the "joyas", or those who embodied a third gender. While severely destructive, the persistence of "two spirit" Indigenous peoples evidences the persistence of joyas today.

and its nightlife scene flourished in the prohibition era. While Sunset Boulevard acquired an increasingly glitzy and glamorous clientele, Santa Monica Boulevard continued to evolve as a residential and commercial hub for workers serving the railroad and, increasingly, film industries. Regardless, Sherman was eventually renamed to West Hollywood in 1925 to more closely align with neighboring Hollywood (Architectural Resources Group 2023). The renaming suggests an image-consciousness driven by real estate and entertainment interests, and foreshadows similar efforts over half a century later when, in the late 1980s, West Hollywood sought to rebrand itself as the "creative city."

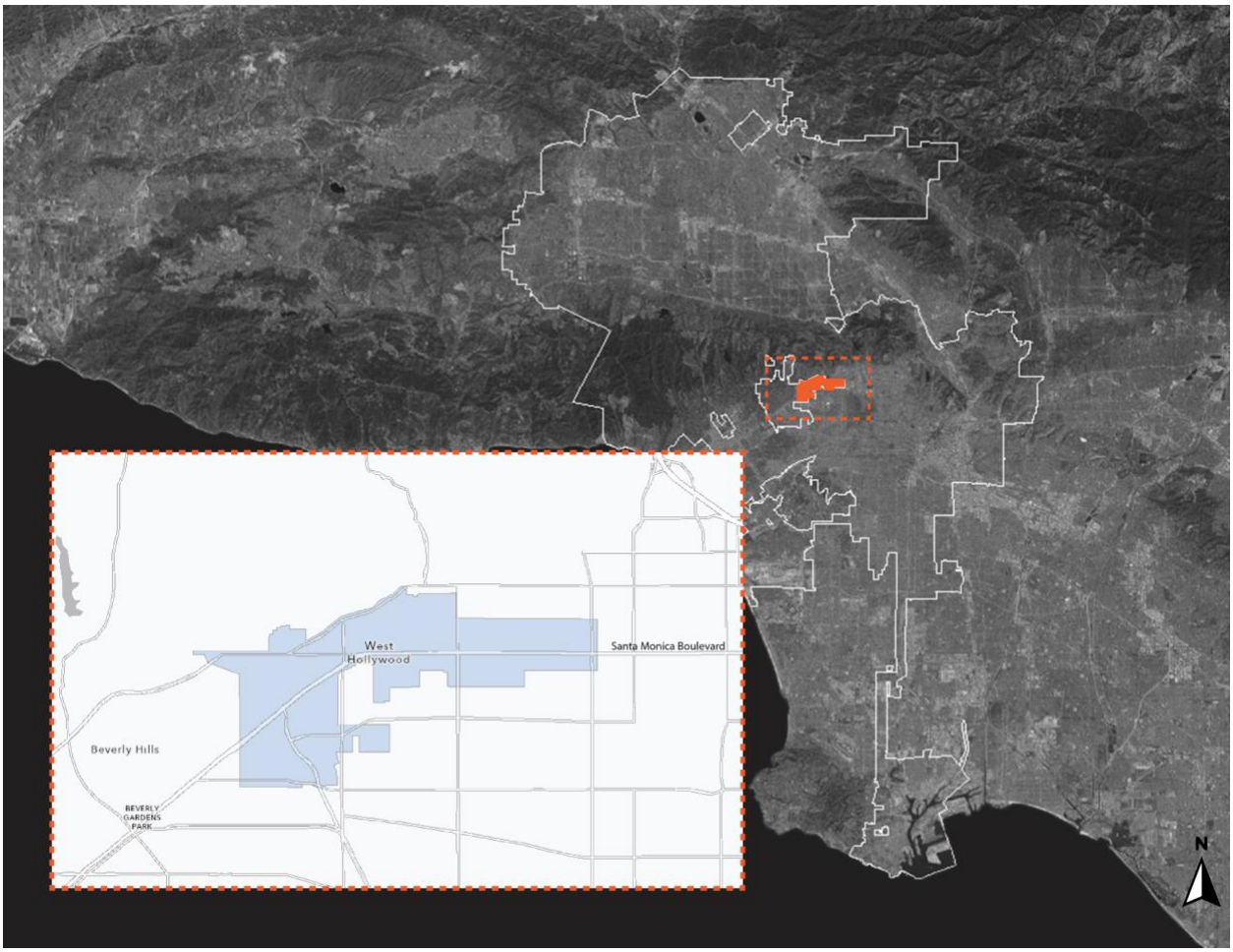


Figure 1.2. West Hollywood in relation to Los Angeles. Source: ArcGIS

Demographic data for West Hollywood in the first half of the twentieth century is difficult to come by, but historians have referenced surveys of restrictive covenants to show that West Hollywood, at least by the 1920s, was largely white. In response to a 1927 survey conducted by the California Real Estate Association (CREA), the realty board responded that the only non-white residents allowed in West Hollywood were those working in domestic labor (Flamming 2005). By 1939, maps commissioned by the Homeowners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) suggest that while much of West Hollywood appears to have been racially homogenous, the area adjacent to the Sherman rail yards on the east end of town was more heterogeneous and included Latino, Black, and Japanese families. The HOLC map authors described areas with nonwhite racial groups as containing "subversive racial influences", and assigned them a "C" (yellow) and "D" (red) grade, suggesting a higher risk for mortgage lending. One sheet notes: "owing to the fact that the area is located in unincorporated county territory, there is a possibility of an infiltration of subversive racial elements" (Nelson et al). The maps also evidence the presence of Jewish families on the east side of West Hollywood (Nelson et al., n.d.). More reliable census data became available in the 1940s, showing slightly more racial diversity in the city's east end, though residents of color remained below 2 percent of the east end's total population (Architectural Resources Group 2023).

While federal housing policy discriminated against racial and sexual minorities, at the more local level, West Hollywood was not except from the conservative cultural turn towards the end of the 1920s. For example, in 1930, the West Hollywood Chamber of Commerce passed a resolution requesting the Board of Supervisors take measures to ensure American citizens receive priority employment for public improvement projects–a xenophobic response to fears of immigrants taking away jobs (LA Times 1930). In the private sector, racially restrictive

covenants represented one of the most well-known forms of racial discrimination, and West Hollywood was not exempt. Research by the Architectural Resources Group (2023) reveals instances of restricted real estate listings, including this one from 1927 that read "One of the most commanding knolls in the West Hollywood hills. Easy to build on, convenient transportation, in the heart of a restricted residential park. Priced to sell." In a widely publicized incident, in 1947, a group of residents sued the Croker family, who lived on 435 Westbourne Drive, and whose children were of Native American descent, for violating deed restrictions that only permitted occupancy by whites. The court ruled that Mrs. Crocker could stay because she was white, but her children had to leave. The court case occurred a year before the 1948 Supreme Court case of Shelly v. Kraemer ruling that restrictive covenants were a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment's Equal Protection Clause (LA Times 1947).

Beginning in the 1940s and 1950s, the interior design industry began to take root in the western portion of West Hollywood as part of a shift away from Downtown Los Angeles to less expensive commercial space. Restaurants and art galleries began to open up alongside design industry showrooms and attracted an increasingly affluent clientele. At the same time, West Hollywood became increasingly known as a gay enclave. Gays moved to West Hollywood primarily to escape police violence. Unlike other urban gay enclaves that mostly formed in neighborhoods within much larger cities, West Hollywood was up until 1984 a section of Los Angeles County. Unincorporated West Hollywood was characterized by light governmental intervention and police presence compared to neighboring Los Angeles. In 1950 The City of Los Angeles appointed a new chief of police, William Parker "('Wild Bill Parker,' gays and lesbians called him)" (Faderman and Timmons 2009, 75) who began a massive crackdown against gay and lesbians through police raids on bars and other gathering places. By contrast, the Sheriff's

Department left gay bars in West Hollywood, and as a consequence a gay enclave began to form (Faderman and Timmons 2009; Kenney 2001).

The relative lack of police presence and the influx of gay migrants to West Hollywood made it an appealing location for early political organizing. In the 1960s and 1970s, many members of the gay liberation front held meetings in West Hollywood, and The *Los Angeles Free Press*, which often reported on issues affecting racial, gender, and sexual minority communities, set up its headquarters on Sunset Boulevard (Kenney 2001). Businesses catering to the gay community continued to open up, so much so that by the mid 1970s, Kenney notes that "78 percent of all gay institutions in Los Angeles were located within 3 percent of the metropolitan region, in an area centered along West Hollywood's Santa Monica Boulevard" (Kenney 2001, 39), earning the area the nickname "Boystown", in reference to a 1948 film by Spencer Tracy about a colony of orphaned newsboys (Faderman and Timmons 2009, 231).

While West Hollywood solidified its status as gay enclave by the 1950s, census data from the 1950s to the present shows that its racial profile has remained racially homogenous in contrast to Los Angeles County as a whole, despite becoming somewhat more racially diverse over time (Kenney 2001). West Hollywood's relative whiteness bears resemblance to its neighbors in the Westside subregion of the Los Angeles area that includes Beverly Hills, Culver City, Santa Monica, and Westside of Los Angeles, and to similar gay enclaves–the Castro, Greenwich Village–that emerged in the post war period as being largely white and male (Kenney, 2001). A wave of gentrification in the 1970s suggests that the movement of many gays and lesbians out of the downtown area and into "pockets of gentrification" including Lafayette Park, east Hollywood, Echo Park, and more established gay enclaves in Silver Lake and West

Hollywood, constituting what Kenney refers to as “the map of an assimilated gay community” (2001. 90).

In 1950, whites, including what the census referred to as “native-born” and “foreign-born” constituted 99.50% of the population. Russian immigration increased during the 1950s, though the census only includes information for the “foreign-born” category, which stood at 3,593 or 18.66% of the population. Subsequent census data does not include this “foreign-born” distinction, which may or may not include Jewish residents. Beginning in 1963, Jewish immigrants from the Soviet Union immigrated to the U.S. as refugees, with over 20,000 arriving in the Los Angeles area between 1970 - 1990. Many settled in the Fairfax District and in West Hollywood’s east end (Chazanov 1989). By the 1980s census estimates show the white (non-hispanic) population at 85%, Latino/Hispanic at 5-7%, Black or African American at 3-5%, Asian/Pacific Islancer at ~1-2%, and other/Multiracial at <1% (US Census Bureau, n.d.).

White West Hollywood has become more racially diverse since incorporating, the City today remains predominantly white (69.5%) (US Census 2023). The relative whiteness of West Hollywood provides context for studies showing the discomfort that many gender and sexual minorities within the LGBTQ+ community feel in West Hollywood’s public and private spaces (Ro et al. 2013; Han et al. 2017). Culturally, scholarship on Los Angeles has shown that gays and lesbians of color have often found a greater sense of community within residential communities of color, opting not to live in places like West Hollywood despite its hyper gay visibility (Kenney 2001; Reyes 1993).

Gay rights context

The emergence of a gay enclave in West Hollywood began at a time when gays, and to a lesser extent lesbians, began migrating to major U.S. cities en mass, a period anthropologist Kath Weston has called the "great gay migration" (Stewart-Winter 2016). In the post-World War II era gays moved to cities in search of safety from discrimination and to build a sense of community and belonging (Castells 1983), and to escape the oppressive heteronormativity of the growing suburbs (Frisch 2002; Howard 2009).[6]

Despite their growing concentration within cities in the postwar years, gays were still stigmatized by the larger public who perceived their presence as evidence of vice due to their deviant behavior. Fueling a postwar culture of homophobia, the McCarthyite-inspired red scare coincided with the "lavender scare" where government employees suspected of homosexuality were branded as "security risks" and fired. This period, beginning in the late 1940s and continuing through the 1960s, has been described by historians as the "bleakest period for gays and lesbians in the United States" (Faderman and Timmons 2009, 103) and gave rise to homophile organizations in the U.S. aiming to address the unfair treatment experienced by gays.

[6] There is now a significant body of research, driven mostly by sociologists, geographers, and historians, that documents the spatial claims that LGBTQ+ people have made in cities and elsewhere in the global North (Adler and Brenner 1992; Bell and Valentine 1995; Binnie 1997; Castells 1983; Gieseking 2020; Knopp 1992; Podmore 2013). Historian George Chauncy documented some of the earliest traces of public gay neighborhoods and associated services in New York City's Greenwich Village and Harlem since the turn of the 20th century (1995), though planning scholar Ann Forsyth notes that it was not until the 1950s that more "permanent" gay neighborhoods began to take hold (2001). Other scholars have sought to decenter the gayborhood by challenging the assumed boundedness of all queer people within gay neighborhoods through studies that show population of lesbians (Nash and Gorman-Murray 2015) as well as gender nonconforming people and queer people of color (Gieseking 2020) as being more geographically dispersed.

Two of the first homophile organizations were the Mattachine Society, founded in 1950 by Harry Hay, and ONE, Incorporated, founded in 1952, both in Los Angeles. These organizations focused on providing mutual aid for gays in need of financial or legal support, and instilling an "ethical homosexual culture" that sought to foster a sense of community and positive identity among homosexual individuals. The Mattachine Society also took on a more political role in trying to reform institutional attitudes towards sexuality. The Mattachine Society lasted well into the 1970s, and during its tenure sought to change institutional attitudes, particularly those that drove medical, religious, and legal sanctions against homosexuality (Hurewitz 2008). Despite the location of these early homophile organizations in Los Angeles, historians like Moira Kenny and Daniel Hurewitz have argued that Los Angeles has largely remained overlooked by scholars tracing the emergence of a gay rights movement in the U.S. Ahead of San Francisco and New York, Los Angeles was, as Hurewitz writes "a crucial cauldron" where the nation's first political movement for homosexual rights took root (2008, 12).

By the 1970s, a full-blown gay-liberation movement was taking form, fueled in large part by the famed 1969 uprisings at The Stonewall Inn bar in New York City's Greenwich Village in response to police brutality. Immediately following the riots, several gay liberation organizations emerged whose priority was protection from police violence. These organizations formed coalitions with other social movements, including Black Power, radical feminisms, and Third World decolonization. This approach stood in contrast to homophile activists who appeared slightly later, who advocated for police accountability through liberal reform (Hanhardt 2013).

A diverse advocacy scene began to take shape across the country, composed by organizations and activist leaders who often had contentious disagreements with one another's approach, leading to infighting among egotistical leaders, turf wars, and racist and gendered

exclusions driven largely by ideological as well as generational differences among movement leaders. These tensions resembled divides within adjacent social and political movements of the 1960s and 1970s including the Black civil rights movement, the women's movement, and the New Left. Despite divisions among advocates, moments of unity emerged during serious crises, like the "Briggs Initiative" that sought to ban gay teachers in California in 1978, and the onset of AIDS in the early 1980s.

As historian Stewart-Winter has pointed out, histories of the American gay rights movement since the 1960s have tended to emphasize legislative and policy victories at the level of federal government, yet it was at the municipal level where gay activism initially played out (2016). During the 1970s, gay rights advocates made important inroads with establishment leaders at the local level, particularly among the Democratic party. The election of openly gay Harvey Milk to public office in San Francisco in 1977 is another moment that signified the degree to which gays had become a recognized constituency with growing political clout.

Factionalism within gay advocacy was also on display in Los Angeles, a city whose own place within the national gay history has been overlooked. Los Angeles was the location of the anti-police riots at the Black Cat Tavern in Silver Lake in 1967, which predated Stonewall by two years, and was home to the country's first openly gay church, the Metropolitan Community Church, and the nation's first gay and lesbian community services center, called the LA Gay Community Services Center[7] (Faderman and Timmons 2009).

Scholars have tended to characterize this history of Los Angeles's gay movement, much like the nationwide movement, as either liberationist or assimilationist. One the one hand, organizations such as PRIDE and the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) were active in Los Angeles

[7] Now the LA LGBT Center, colloquially referred to as "the Center"

and called for radical tactics to confront anti-gay institutions like the police (Kenney 2001; Faderman and Timmons 2009). On the other hand, organizations like the Homophile Effort for Legal Protection (HELP), the Municipal Elections Committee of Los Angeles (MECLA), the Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center (GLCSC), and the Task Force, represented a more reformist and assimilationist approach (Ramos and Burnett 2022). Ramos and Burnett have critiqued these latter groups for frequently speaking "as if they were representing the entire LGBT community" (2022, 365), and have argued that Los Angeles gay moderate politics inspired a national politics where Americans could support gay rights without signaling support for the perceived radicalism of gay liberation activists associated with San Francisco and New York.

It is within this fraught civil rights and gay advocacy context that a gay identity began to emerge in West Hollywood and set the stage for incorporation in the 1980s. Given that MECLA was based in West Hollywood, with offices located in the French Market Building at 7985 Santa Monica Boulevard (City of West Hollywood 2016), the gay identity that took shape in West Hollywood was undoubtedly influenced by the interests of relatively affluent gays, whom MECLA courted for political donations and support. At the same time, the presence of organizations like the Los Angeles Free Press in West Hollywood, whose journalism focused on intersectional issues facing Los Angeles' racial, gender, class and sexual minority communities, suggests that the political identity of the area's gay scene was less monolithic.

By the time cityhood advocates took the first steps towards cityhood in the early 1980s, the gay community in West Hollywood and nationwide was already beset by the unfolding public health crises and trauma presented by AIDS. Researchers have shown that the AIDS virus had begun spreading in major U.S. cities as early as 1977, and disproportionately affected that

gay community including West Hollywood's. Gay bathhouses, bars, and social gathering places were identified by public health officials as potential transmission sights. Yet politicians like County Supervisor Ed Edelman and Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley were hesitant to close these locales due to the political support they received by groups like MELCA (Shilts 2000). Over time, the intensity of the crisis inspired several activist groups to emerge, like ACT-UP LA, which held its first meetings in West Hollywood, and AIDS Project Los Angeles, which held its first event in 1982 and advocated for research, medical care, and political support for the community. The timing of West Hollywood's incorporation towards the beginning of the AIDS epidemic affords an opportunity to look more closely at how the tools of cityhood were leveraged in response to the crisis.

Scholars focusing on the municipal incorporation and subsequent political and planning development of West Hollywood have tended to focus on isolated moments. Moos and Forest examine the municipal incorporation campaign. Moos (1989) shows how the initial impetus for incorporation was local control over land use, with mainstream gay advocates joining the effort only once it became clear the measure would appear on the ballot, seeing in it an opportunity for political gain. Moos downplays the symbolic significance of the effort for gay political power and advocacy. Forest (1995) takes up the symbolic dimension, analyzing representations of gay identity in the gay press during the campaign. He argues that West Hollywood ultimately projected a "respectable" and creative image of gay identity. Kenney (2001)takes an advocacy perspective, contending that West Hollywood reflected a shift in Los Angeles gay activism by aligning more directly with local organizations and institutions. Ehrenfeucht (2013) focuses on redevelopment, analyzing the transformation of Santa Monica Boulevard, West Hollywood's main thoroughfare, and arguing that so-called "nonconformist" groups, including many homeless

and transgender sex workers, were displaced in the process. While each of these accounts offers valuable insights into key aspects of West Hollywood's history, none fully explains how the city's identity, politics, and institutions evolved over time.

By examining the idea of the gay city through the lens of cityhood, and tracing the various stages of West Hollywood's development, this dissertation charts how gay identity was strategically invoked, contested, and redefined over time, and how these invocations shaped the city's relationship to its diverse constituencies. In doing so, it advances the argument that West Hollywood demonstrates how *gay cityhood* can be mobilized as a political and spatial tool: one that simultaneously reinscribes and resists dominant configurations of space, identity, and power. Part of what makes West Hollywood so interesting is its singular case where gay actors successfully used the new tools afforded by municipal incorporation, including planning and redevelopment, to not only achieve material goals like civil rights, affordability, and public health benefits, but also to moor a dominant gay identity to place, and therefore promote a national image of what it meant to be gay in America.

Methods

Research questions

How did cityhood serve as a spatial and political strategy to advance gay rights in West Hollywood, and what tensions and trade-offs emerged in constructing the "first gay city"?

- Why did gay advocates pursue cityhood as a means of political empowerment, and what did this strategy afford that was distinct from other forms of gay activism?

- What were the material and symbolic outcomes of cityhood, and how did West Hollywood's identity as a gay city shape its governance, planning priorities, and impact on both gay and nongay residents?

In response to these questions, this dissertation presents an historical analysis of West Hollywood to understand how the first gay city came to be through the use of planning tools like municipal incorporation and redevelopment. I undertake a "community study," or, more specific to my case, what queer historian La Shonda Mims describes as a "queer urban community study" (2020). Reviewing the recent work of Hanhardt's *Safe Space* (2013), Stewart-Winter's *Queer Clout* (2016), and Capó's *Welcome to Fairyland* (2017), Mims argues that these works represent "a refusal to allow urban history to cling to the commonplace–the sweeping urban narrative" (2020, 908). In each case, the authors present histories, rather than merely locate queers in space, demonstrating "how a place makes queer happen" (2020, 908). "Queer history" Mims writes, "disrupts traditional notions of urban growth by mooring politics and urban neighborhood development to a creation of queer space" (2020, 908). The events, actors, and politics that constitute queer history also produce urban history and space. At the same time, these authors refuse a singular narrative of queer history. For example, rather than presenting a "gay neighborhood history", Hanhardt (2013) emphasizes the relationship between gay people to the concept of neighborhood. In a similar vein, I present here a historical project on West Hollywood that unveils the interplay between "gay" (advocacy, experience, identity) and "cityhood" (municipal incorporation, urban branding, redesign, and redevelopment) that ultimately inform one another.

Using archival research and supplemented by interviews, I investigate the development, regulatory, and activist histories of West Hollywood's formation. I identify a chronology of historical events through which themes emerge. Themes are identified by using coding, not for the purposes of generalizing beyond the case, but for understanding the complexity of the case itself (Yin 2017). I seek to understand the perspectives and motivations (visibility, political gain, profit) of key actors involved in the formation of West Hollywood, including activists, politicians, city planners, and real estate developers.

The case study is multi-temporal–examining different time periods of the city's development, as well as relational–situating West Hollywood in relation to the larger City and County of Los Angeles, and within broader discourses about civil rights, urban governance, and redevelopment practices. I rely on multiple data sources and collection techniques, including document analysis and interviews to identify the actors and their motivations for different stages of West Hollywood's planning and development. In examining the actors and their motivations, each is marked by the rise of specific concerns expressed by different, sometimes competing, actors and constituencies. I identify how discourse surrounding "gay" issues was variously invoked and strategically employed to advance public policy and planning agendas.

A note on terminology

Generally, I use LGBTQ+ as an umbrella term to refer to anyone whose identities fall outside of traditional heterosexual, cisgender, and/or endosexed frameworks. This includes and exceeds identities such as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, two-spirit, pansexual, genderqueer, asexual, agender, and/or intersex. At the same time, I consider how, as Scott (2023) says, "sexual- and gender-based subjectivities are not necessarily reducible to identities" (2023, 21). Thus, I follow

Scott's use of the term queer as a general term to "situate people, places, and events on the margins of prevailing sexual and gender norms", and gay to "signify particular identitarian places claimed by and for the gay community" (2023, p. 21).

Given that the incorporation of West Hollywood predates the 'reclaiming' of the term queer, the predominant use of the term 'gay' in the formation of West Hollywood is of critical interest, especially when considering who was included and excluded when the term was invoked. Rather than assume an assimilationist or liberationist approach to gay advocacy and politics, I carefully examine how the term gay is used according to different actors and their motivations. In this way, a more complex reading of the politics surrounding the formation of a gay identity in the world's first gay city is possible, and avoids simplistic binary reductions as either "assimilationist" or "liberationist". This approach is inspired by recent historical scholarship that points to the often overlooked yet essential politics and discourse of the 'middle' and the ways in which values around terms like 'privacy' and 'safety' are used for political and social goals that are framed as politically neutral (Hanhardt 2013; Howard 2019). As the story of West Hollywood illustrates, the instability of these terms speaks to their shifting meaning over time, and how differentiated spaces imbued with power dynamics inform different meanings of sexuality and sexual subjectivity.

During interviews, I deferred to how research participants self-identified. Generational preferences also bear largely on how certain terms are used. For example, queer has more radical connotations today than it did only a few decades ago. Thus, older individuals may find 'queer' offensive while younger individuals find it more empowering and expansive than gay or LGBTQ+. In all cases, I attempt not to fix identities, acknowledging that such identity categories are contested and can invoke violent histories and memories.

Data collection

This dissertation is principally based on archival research. I scoured newspaper clippings, meeting agendas and minutes, reports, public consultation materials, press releases and other loosely organized documents including personal notes, photographs, and letters in order to document the incorporation campaign and the post-incorporation years. Sources for the research included the Robert S. Conrich Archives located at the UCLA Young Research Library, the ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives at the University of Southern California Libraries, the West Hollywood Library, and the Los Angeles Public Library Central Branch. Conrich's archives at UCLA are the most extensive. Conrich hosted the first meeting of the West Hollywood Incorporation Committee in August 1983 and was a regular volunteer at City Hall after incorporation. He also authored a weekly column on city issues at the Post Newspaper Group often criticizing the decisions of the city's new government. I was able to locate planning documents, municipal ordinances, and policy briefs at the West Hollywood Library, the City of West Hollywood's Planning Commission, and the UCLA Young Research Library. Editions of the *Los Angeles Times* dating to 1881 are accessible online. Other newspapers including the *Los Angeles Daily News, Los Angeles Weekly*, and the *Los Angeles Examiner* were either available online or through UCLA libraries. Gay-focused newspapers including *The Advocate, The Post, Edge, Frontiers, LA Weekly,* and *Update* were mostly located within Conrich's collection at UCLA's YRL Library. All other sources used, including journal articles and secondary sources regarding West Hollywood from a historical, planning, or policy perspective and beyond are available through the University of California libraries or through UC's Interlibrary Loan service.

In addition to archival data I conducted supplemental interviews with key actors and constituents who could speak to the different time periods of West Hollywood's development. This included former and current city council members, representatives from government agencies, nonprofit and activist organizations, business owners and real estate developers, as well as everyday residents and critics of West Hollywood. I relied on snowball sampling and referrals to reach participants. Interviews were conducted either in-person or remotely via Zoom or over the phone, and follow-up interviews were conducted as needed.

In conducting primary research, it is important to recognize a key imbalance: while it is relatively straightforward to identify the primary actors who shaped city government and planning decisions, it is far more difficult to trace the experiences of those most affected by those decisions. The historical record, for instance, offers limited visibility into the lives of low-income transgender women of color, despite the fact that they were undoubtedly impacted by the formation of the first gay city. Moreover, given the disproportionate impact of HIV/AIDS epidemic on LGBTQ+ communities, many actors, including those who played prominent roles in the early days of West Hollywood's formation, passed away during the time period that is the focus of this research. Thus, the research presented here leans heavily on archival records containing journalistic data, meeting minutes, planning documents, and so on.

Study risks

There are several risks to my approach in this dissertation. First, there is the risk of presenting *the* story of West Hollywood. I want to emphasize that the story of West Hollywood I present here is only partial and incomplete. My engagement is primarily focused on the role of gay actors and their relationship to West Hollywood and does not undertake a deep analysis into the

histories of other significant groups–renters, seniors, Jewish Russian immigrants–and their relationships to the city. Relatedly, my analysis is primarily concerned with the period leading up to incorporation through the early 2000s, and therefore does not deeply engage the city's pre-incorporation history nor its more recent years from the late 2000s to the present. My decision to confine my analysis temporally and focus on the "gay city" does not preclude the importance of other actors and time periods, but rather emphasizes the particular material and symbolic meanings that gay cityhood entailed.

Second, by locating the "first gay city" in West Hollywood I risk retelling a familiar, dominant narrative about a gay neighborhood that, while critical, leaves the mainstream–gay, white, middle class, cisgender, and male–at the center of discourses of sexuality and space, overshadowing narratives of alternative queer politics and spaces. Relatedly, by emphasizing the "city" of West Hollywood, which is inseparable from the much larger city and urban region of Los Angeles, my project reflects what Halberstam (2005) has termed a "metronormative" bias in queer historiography. Following Hanhardt (2013) who argues "for the centrality of the city, not as a natural or preferred place for homosexuality or for LGBT identities, but as a critical nexus for analyzing how politics, policy, and property have indelibly shaped LGBT social movements" (2013, 11), I argue that the project of cityhood, and in particular gay cityhood, affords analysis of how a dominant, albeit shifting strand of gay political identity took shape. While Hanhardt's analysis is particularly focused on how LGBT social movements formed in response to violence in New York City and San Francisco, my analysis shows how the act of making a new city unlocked the tools of politics, planning, and redevelopment in service of gay politics. Thus, while this is primarily a story about municipal governance and politics, it is also a story about

how various actors and institutions, both within and outside of West Hollywood, shaped the gay city.

Organization

Chapter one, this chapter, introduces the historical context, problem framing, discussion of methods and study risks, and contributions. Chapter two frames the study in the existing literature and theoretical foundations for the issues and topics addressed, including the relationship between issues of planning and sexuality, the specific role of planning in gay neighborhood formation, theories of neoliberalism and homonormativity, and theories that help explain what 'planning' is, and its relationship to the concept and process of cityhood. The subsequent five chapters constitute the empirical study of this dissertation. Chapter three examines the key events, actors, and motivations behind the 1984 municipal incorporation campaign for West Hollywood. Chapter four concerns the legislative agenda, internal dynamics, and public perception of West Hollywood's city council during its immediate post-incorporation period, from 1984 to 1995. Chapter five traces the city's forceful response to the working public health crises presented by the AIDS epidemic, and how such a response reflected an embrace of gay identity and advocacy. Chapter six takes a broader view of the years between 1985 and 2001, examining the city's strategic efforts to address political scandal, public safety concerns, and economic development through partnership with the LA County Sheriff and an extensive "Creative City" rebranding campaign. Chapter seven examines the city's streetscape redesign and redevelopment initiatives, and how they represented an extension of earlier rebranding efforts aimed at cultivating the city's "creative" economic base, and the implications of for gentrification. Chapter eight provides a synthesis and conclusion, where I reconsider the

relationship of gay identity, advocacy, and relationality to the project of cityhood in order to answer the question about why gay advocates pursued cityhood, and the various material and symbolic outcomes. I also discuss the implications of this history for planners, policymakers, and advocates invested in creating more inclusive and just urban spaces.

Findings and contributions

Through this research, I have been able to adequately trace the formation of the first gay city and 1) show how the case of West Hollywood reveals gay advocates' pursuit of cityhood as a means to attain an unprecedented degree of political power, 2) show how this newfound power afforded symbolic and material gains: symbolically, cityhood demonstrated that gay and lesbian individuals could hold political office and shape governance; materially, it secured legal protections and municipal authority responsive to LGBTQ+ needs, 3) determine that the benefits of this new power were unevenly distributed among the city's diverse LGBTQ+ communities– particularly those not included in the dominant project of gay cityhood.

The critical years of West Hollywood's formation unfold across several, overlapping phases: the incorporation campaign (early 1983 to November 1984); the initial governance period post incorporation (1984–1985); and a third phase spanning the late 1980s through the 1990s. Each phase is marked by shifting priorities, shaped by a range of actors and often conflicting constituencies. Ultimately, the gay cityhood project in West Hollywood emerges as a dialectical process in which identity-making and city-making were in dynamic tension. Efforts to uphold a more respectable image of gay governance through selective, often sanitized

representations, both shaped and were shaped by the political imperatives of cityhood, including incorporation, legislation, planning, and redevelopment. Rather than functioning as parallel or complementary strategies, these identity and city-making impulses often collided and co-evolved, generating ongoing conflicts and recalibrations in the pursuit of political legitimacy and material transformation. In this sense, the story of gay cityhood is less a triumphant narrative of gay pride through municipal success than a complex account of how "gay" was strategically and variously invoked to advance specific public policy and planning agendas.

This research contributes to our understanding of how and why municipalities incorporate by investigating the formation of the gay city in West Hollywood. My findings shed light on a case where sexual identity is not only a driving social and political factor underlying motivations for incorporation, but also the degree to which cityhood serve as a spatial and political strategy to advance gay rights Relatedly, this research contributes to our understanding of how incorporation can lead to different outcomes for diverse gender and sexual minorities. Conversely, by focusing on municipal incorporation this research expands the range of planning tools that have been seriously interrogated for their role in creating and sustaining gay neighborhoods and spaces. The project also provides a much more in-depth and nuanced portrait of West Hollywood than prior studies focusing on the city and its history.

In terms of planning practice, the research findings suggest that planning and governance practices relating to gay neighborhoods ought to change. Considered alongside the history of gay neighborhood creation, West Hollywood promises to further demonstrate how outcomes largely depend on motivations. In other words, the initial reasons for creating gay space, and, crucially, who is included in the process, will largely determine outcomes, i.e. to whom this space belongs. The case of West Hollywood adds credence to the notion, as some critical scholars have argued

that efforts to create ‘gay space’ reflect a territorial and identity fixation, and that truly liberatory or ‘queer’ space is not tethered to identity per se. This discourse matters a great deal today, considering ongoing discussions about how and whether to preserve traditional gayborhoods (Bitterman and Hess 2021), as well as municipal strategies to create new gay spaces as a way to spur economic development (Piepenburg 2022; Janzer 2023)

It may be easy, and convenient, to assume that the story of West Hollywood represents a harmonious union among gay advocates, politicians, planners, and developers, and their heterosexual neighbors, collectively motivated by the desire to keep West Hollywood safe, affordable, and to a greater extent for gay-identified groups, a city for gay and straight people alike. This is indeed the narrative the City of West Hollywood has embraced. Yet this history calls for renewed attention in the face of contemporary critiques that call into question West Hollywood’s gay inclusive-reputation. A key purpose of this dissertation is to unveil this history with greater care and particular attention to omissions and impacts on West Hollywood’s constituencies whose perspectives and experiences may have differed from those of the mainstream.

2. THEORY

Over the last several decades planning scholars have begun to conduct empirical and theoretical analyses of planning's relationship to sexuality (P. Doan 2011; P. L. Doan 2023; Ehrenfeucht 2013; Forsyth 2001; Goh 2015). This recent engagement reflects the field's latent consideration of the subject of sexuality in contrast to scholars writing from other disciplines, namely geography, history, philosophy, and interdisciplinary fields like gender studies and critical race studies. Scholars from these outside fields have theorized the broader relationship between sexuality and space more generally, and have tended to implicate either explicitly or implicitly the historic and ongoing role of planning in mediating this relationship. The relationship between planning, sexuality, and space, or rather the interrelationship of these mutually constitutive concepts, illuminates dynamics of power and agency, and the variegated ways in which sexual identities and practices facilitate, as well as challenge, power hierarchies in and across space.

In this chapter I situate the formation of West Hollywood within a set of historical and theoretical discourses that help explain how planning and policy structure the relationships between space, sexuality, and power. First, I examine discourses that understand the construction of sexuality and sexual identity as a power relation, and the role of space in sustaining this relation. Second, I review the history of gay neighborhoods in the U.S., with attention to the role of planning in gay neighborhood formation. Concepts such as heterosexism and

homonormativity help explain both the initial emergence of gay neighborhoods in spite of exclusionary planning practices in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the eventual embrace of planning tools beginning in the late 20th century. Lastly, I turn to planning theory to explain how the project of gay cityhood can be understood as a spatial and political practice. The case of West Hollywood builds on and extends these discourses by showing how the project of cityhood and the articulation of a gay identity were in dynamic tension; the visibility, governing mechanisms, and constituency pressures afforded by cityhood required the continual calibration of the city's gay identity to suit shifting narratives and political agendas.

The construction of sexuality as a power relation

Geographer Phil Hubbard has written that "while sex is always a matter of biology (i.e. embodied acts and physical processes), the fact that specific bodily actions and performances are understood as 'sexual' or 'erotic' means they take on a *meaning* that ripples out to encompass all dimensions of our identities and practices" (2012, 2). Moreover, some sexual actions and performances are socially privileged while others are marginalized. Thus it is possible to speak of sex that is, as anthropologist Gayle Rubin put it, "good sex" –that which is deemed normal, natural, and healthy, and "bad sex" –that which is "utterly repulsive and devoid of all emotional nuance," the latter category assigned to "the most despised sexual castes…transsexuals, transvestites, fetishists, sadomasochists, sex workers such as prostitutes and porn models, and the lowliest of all, those whose eroticism transgresses generational boundaries" (2006, 117).

How is it that some sexualities are privileged while others are suppressed? What constitutes "deviant" sexualities? Michel Foucault provides a theoretical foundation that can

begin to answer these questions by tracing the genealogy of sexuality as a socially constructed concept. In *History of Sexuality* (1978) Foucault describes how sexuality began to be examined in a scientific manner in the 18th and 19th centuries as terms like "perversion" categorized sexualities that did not conform to the marital bond, and came to be associated with a set of moral and social ills affecting the overall "health" of society. Foucault identifies four main groups that constituted key sites of deviancy: hysterical women, masturbating children, the reproductive couple, and the 'pervert' or homosexual adult male. Each category carried "significant iconic charge" in 18th century discourses over which sexual practices were deemed 'normal' or 'natural', yet most histories of sexuality have focused on the 'deviant' homosexual male (Hubbard 2012, 14). The 'homosexual' emerged as a deviant category whose lifestyle was considered anti-communal and anti-reproductive, representing a "death drive" that stood in contrast to the goals of the 'heterosexual family' (Edelman 2004; Halberstam 2005). Thus, the concept of sexuality is produced through labeling and diagnostic practices that sought to discern the "truth" of sexuality, a phenomenon Foucault notes was particular to Western society.

One of the central elements to Foucault's thesis on the modern construction of sexuality is its relationship to strategies of knowledge and power, where the bourgeoisie-backed state instrumentalized a combination of medical and moral ideas that justified the policing of perverse sexualities. Foucault writes:

> "Sex must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which power tries to hold in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge tries gradually to uncover. It is the name that can be given to a historical construct [*dispositif*]: not a furtive reality that is difficult to grasp, but a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledges, the

strengthening of controls and resistance, are linked to one another, in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power" (1978, 105–6).

Key to Foucault's analysis is the idea that regulation of sexuality was characterized by 'auto-surveillance' exercised by individuals themselves rather than solely the state, for the interest of a kind of greater good. In this view, 'proper' sex is not only about individual well-being but about society at-large. Sexuality becomes central to the reproduction of the state through the exercise of *biopower*, the "numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations" (Foucault 1978, 240). The state did not necessarily seek to punish deviant sexualities but rather sought to encourage the 'right' sexualities such that the individual body and the wider population constituted two different scales for discipline and regulation. One can already see here the implications for urban planning, which might regulate sexuality in space through explicit discipline, but also do so implicitly through encouraging the 'right' kind of sexual behavior.

If Foucault offers a theory for why sexual regulation is in service to the reproduction of the bourgeoisie-back state, then what is the state doing for the bourgeoisie? The bourgeoisie, or the ruling class, Marx would say, is ultimately interested in the production, circulation, and accumulation of capital or wealth. According to Marx (1867), the commodity and its attendant value constitute the central, hegemonic feature of capitalism (or the "capitalist mode of production"), and is the mechanism through which capitalists accumulate wealth. In order for the commodity to contain value, its production must yield surplus value created through exploited labor, thus establishing a politics of class relations. For commodity production to continue, an exploited labor force must be reproduced, a process that itself requires labor.

The reproduction of the state, then, is achieved through *social* reproduction, or the reproduction of exploitable labor. Marxist feminist scholars have subsequently stressed how the reproduction of labor is itself a gendered division of labor, distinguishing between 'productive' and 'unproductive' (or reproductive) labor. Productive labor produces goods or services that possess monetary value and can therefore be exchanged on the commodity market, while reproductive labor involves unwaged work in the private home, like cleaning, cooking, and rearing children (Benston 1969; Morton 1971).

A power relation is thus established on a gender hierarchy, where men dominate the public sphere and earn wages for their labor, and women are confined to the domestic sphere whose labor is unwaged. Considered alongside one another, Foucault's theory of sex and power, and feminist Marxists' theories of gender and reproductive labor, constitute a theoretical axis upon which relations of power, capital, and the construction of sex and gender can be mapped, and have informed subsequent scholarship within feminist geography and the formation of queer theory.

Scholarship from critical race theory, Black feminism and women of color feminism reframe this theoretical axis. If capitalism and its attendant production of citizens was always a racializing process, then so too were attendant processes of gender, sexuality, and class formation. This intersectional understanding of power and oppression has its foundation in Black feminist and women of color activism and scholarship (Combahee River Collective 1977; Crenshaw 1991; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981). Robinson (1983) centers race in his analysis of the European mode of commodity production (that is, "European capitalism") that emerged in as early as the late 16th century. "European capitalism" Robinson argues, was distinctly racialized, in that racial hierarchy upheld production hierarchies so that capitalists could reap more profit. In

this way, race, as a social construct, is akin to other scientifically defined categories of difference that emerged from European Enlightenment thought.

Writing from a postcolonial perspective, building on the foundational work of Fanon (1952), Said (1995), and Spivak (1999), scholars like Mbembe (2003), Roy (2003), Kipfer (2007), Gregory (2004), Razack (2000), and Rao and Pierce (2006), have contributed to understandings of how the racialized body is constructed as "other" through colonial and settler colonial practices that rely on state sanctioned violence. This construction is dialectically linked to the figure of the "human", a supposedly rational, universal subject coded as white, male, European, Christian, heterosexual, and middle- or upper-class. In contrast, the "other" is cast as subhuman: inherently inferior and rendered legible through phenotypical, gendered, and embodied difference.

The role of space in the sex-power relationship

Foucault's theory of sexuality and power is spatial insofar as the sites of sexual discipline and knowledge produced about different sexualities primarily took place in cities, where rapid urbanization was associated with social flux and the perceived need to manage discourses of sexual perversity, obscenity, and danger. Scientific study of sexuality took place in key state-sponsored institutions located in cities, like laboratories, hospitals, and clinics. Yet Foucault does not consider the centrality of space to the sex-power relation. What, for example, is the role of space in facilitating reproduction under capitalism, and how are embodied hierarchies of power structured and maintained through space? And what is the role of sexuality?

Marxist geographers are instructive here. Building on the work of French sociologist Henri Lefebvre (1974) that space is socially constructed, Marxist geographers have argued that the production of space is intimately tied to commodity production under capitalism. In the production process, commodities must circulate through time and space and across firms, thus structuring our social relations and leading to uneven development and outcomes for the built environments within and across different spaces. The reproduction of exploitable labor is achieved, in part, through the ordering of embodied differences in space (Harvey 1990; Massey 1994; N. Smith 1984; Soja 1996).

Again, these differences are relational and consist of interlocking categories of gender, sexuality, race, and class. As mentioned earlier in this paper, the reproduction of labor under capitalism is a gendered process where women have been historically confined to unwaged household labor and men earn wages through 'productive' labor. This gendered division is already spatial, where unwaged 'women's' work takes place in the 'home' and waged 'men's' work is in the 'factory'. In the U.S. and Britain during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the proliferation of single family homes in the suburbs embodied the continuation of a profoundly gendered and sexed socio-spatial production (Mackenzie and Rose 1983). Places of work are also coded as male or female, and are nearly always heterosexual (Knopp 1992). These production arrangements have consequences for the spatial formation of sexual identities, where men seeking homosexual relations with other men are more likely to do so in 'public' spaces like bars, baths, and nightclubs, while women relied upon settings surrounding the domestic sphere and other institutions like work and education.

In the domestic sphere women were able to experiment with lesbianism to the extent that it did not threaten men's power, yet lesbian relationships outside of the exclusive bonds with

men were not economically feasible given women's lack of economic power. While men could more easily consider the economic possibility of pursuing non-heterosexual, monogamous relationships, they were still confronted with the loss of status and power that comes with heterosexual family arrangements. For both men and women homophobia emerged in both the productive and reproductive spheres to keep the strict gender division of labor in place, and "affirm men's power, as a group, over women" (Knopp 1990b, 660). A contradiction arises, then, within industrial capitalism's need, on the one hand, for a disciplined labor force that is gender-conformist, and its creation, on the other hand, of "real and imagined spaces" of "personal life" where women and men could explore (to varying degrees and in different ways) nonconformist gender roles, sexual practices, and attendant identity formations.

More recent scholarship taking an intersectional view of the historical entanglement between space and sexuality has challenged assumed binaries embedded within extant academic writings that assume narrow conceptualizations of space as either "gay" or "straight" and as either "male" (gay) or "female" (lesbian). In terms of gender, Halberstam (2005) has called attention to the ways transgender embodiment challenges normative heterosexual and familial lifestyles, and in doing so produces new meanings of time and space. Planning scholar Petra Doan (P. Doan 2010; 2011; P. L. Doan 2023) has written extensively about the implications of planning practice for transgender and gender nonconformist groups. Planners often assume binary gender constructions, including within traditional gay neighborhoods, speaking to what Doan refers to as the "tyranny of gender" (2010).

Scholars like McKittrick (2006), Gilmore (2007), Lipsitz (2011), and Woods (2017) have highlighted the enduring processes of racial dispossession, and resistance to that dispossession, made possible through spatial practices across geographies. The plantation emerges as a central

spatial manifestation and metaphor linking the histories and enduring legacies of racial dispossession. A key task of this scholarship has been to not only understand the historic role of the plantation in the structuring spatial hierarchy according to anti-Blackness in the postcolonial settings like the U.S., but also its enduring legacy and reification (Woods 2017), albeit in different spatial forms, i.e. the prison (Gilmore 2007) and the contemporary city (McKittrick 2013). Spaces like the plantation and the prison provide the bedrock for racial capitalism, the source of slave labor that upholds capitalist production in the colonies, and transfers wealth back to the metropole. Scholars like Bates (2018) and Brand and Miller (2020) draw from Black geographies scholarship to implicate urban planning in both the structuring and undoing of oppressive racialized geographies.

Space, then, is not merely a static backdrop across which bodies are differentialized and capital circulates. Space *produces* embodied difference and thus aids in the structuring of labor hierarchy that capital depends on. Spaces not only contain embodied difference but also represent it, contributing to narratives and, one might say, cultures that either substantiate dominant narrative myths invoking 'morality', or counter them. Cultural scripts of sexual–and by default moral–deviance are contained and represented through space, and are simultaneously racialized, gendered, and classed. The space-body relation is material in the sense that it constitutes literal spaces: the prison, plantation, ghetto, red light district, the city. It is also imagined in the sense that the relation requires certain narratives to sustain it.

West Hollywood affords a unique case to examine how municipal power shapes embodied experience, and who is included in the "gay" community that constitutes the gay city. While analysis of national and state-level policies have laid bare the ways in which sexuality is disciplined, what happens when a city's raison d'etre is largely predicated on a minoritized

sexual identity? When an entire municipality is under the control of a gay City Council, how do municipal functions like planning, urban design, and redevelopment contribute to a gay identity and material outcomes for gay residents?

Urban planning and the formation of gay neighborhoods

Despite evidence of gay enclaves forming in cities in the middle of the 20th century, it was not until the 1990s that practicing planners began to take note and explicitly mention gay populations in plans and other planning documents (Forsyth 2001). The 1990s plan for Chicago's Halsted Street improvement is one of the earliest examples. In order to promote the area as a gay space, planners created a multi-million dollar streetscape plan that used designs like a rainbow gateway and street pylons. In the 1990s, cities also began funding gay and lesbian-specific social service centers located within gay enclaves (Forsyth 2001).

West Hollywood's 1984 campaign for cityhood signifies an even earlier example of using planning tools–municipal incorporation–to create and sustain a gay neighborhood. West Hollywood stands out as the only case where incorporation was used to establish a gay political territory. While the planning literature on the motivations for municipal incorporation is silent on West Hollywood, scholars have shown how incorporation has historically been used, like other political boundaries, to maintain racial, and economic homogeneity, and contribute to the creation of "place identity" via the exclusion of unwanted communities (Weiher 1991, 60).[8] The use of municipal incorporation to exclude others on the basis of race or class is consistent with

[8] In addition, exclusionary land-use controls like large-lot zoning are made possible by incorporation (Burns 1994).

other forms of spatial separation and segregation that have characterized the history of urban planning in the U.S. (Alesina et al. 2004; Carruthers 2003).

Despite the documented use of incorporation as a tool of oppression and exclusion, some majority-minority communities (Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native-American majority and other non-white communities) turned to municipal incorporation as a direct response to racism (R. M. Smith and Waldner 2018). In their analysis of 44 majority-minority Newly Incorporated Municipalities (NIMs) Smith and Waldner show that incorporation has been a response to surrounding cities refusing to annex majority-minority communities (called a 'rebound incorporation'), or a response to environmental racism and a means to pursue social justice through local political empowerment. Thus, like other planning tools, municipal incorporation can be leveraged as a mechanism for race and class exclusion and oppression, but also as a way to resist domination. The case of West Hollywood offers an opportunity to examine how sexual identity was conceptualized as a political motivation for incorporation. To what extent was municipal incorporation, and the political and planning tools that cityhood unlocked, a strategy to achieve gay political power and enshrine civil rights protections?

This question is salient given that, up until 1984, federal and local policy and planning tools had for the most part been used to suppress sexual deviance either implicitly or explicitly. In the postwar years planning was used to create 'heterosexist space', where "zoning, housing rights, and our sense of the public realm are built around heterosexual constructs of family, work, and community life" (Frisch 2002, 256). Planning historian Michael Frisch has shown how modernist city planning discourse, exemplified by the writings of Patrick Geddes and Lewis Mumford, promoted heterosexual lifestyles as the best way to achieve the "natural order of things" (2002, 259). Land use and zoning were deployed to promote and protect the family,

where marriage between opposite sex couples and producing children were seen as central to the American national project. Housing types labeled single family and multi-family in the U.S., and attendant suburban development, reflect this cultural interest in promoting the moral character of the building's inhabitants. Howard (Howard 2009; 2013) has shown how postwar housing policies required mortgage lenders to consider the "reliability" of borrowers, determined in part by their marriage status and by criminal offenses like "lewd vagrancy" and military discharge for homosexual conduct.

Homosexuality is not the only marker of identity historically associated with sexual deviance. Historians have shown how 19th century U.S. cities were sites of both academic study and regulation of sexual, racial, and gender difference (Carby 1999; Ferguson 2004; Mumford 1997; Ross 2004). Family and neighborhood became key sites of sociological and police intervention. Concerning Black communities specifically, Ferguson writes, "While sociology established an epistemological proximity to blackness and homosexuality, vice districts helped to render them as materially proximate" (2004, 41). Other racialized migrant and in-migrant groups who were confined to impoverished neighborhoods, like Chinese immigrant men and women and Native Americans, were similarly associated with the "perversions" of their neighborhoods by researchers, policymakers, and social workers alike (Shah 2001).

These histories and theories emphasize both the material and imagined ways in which space, differentiated by 'place', and bodies, differentiated by race, gender, class, and sexuality, are co-constituted. The space-body relation is material in the sense that it constitutes literal spaces: the prison, plantation, ghetto, red light district, the city. It is also imagined in the sense that the relation requires certain narratives to sustain it. The formation of West Hollywood offers a more contemporary case to examine how bodies are materialized (through planning practices

like incorporation and redevelopment) and imagined (through the idealized image of the "first gay city"), and how some bodies, even if they are gay, leverage their housed or property-owning status, as well as race, class, and gender privilege to distinguish themselves as 'respectable' West Hollywood residents in contrast to in contrast to other 'nonconformist' groups.

The story of how, in 1984, a gay constituency had enough clout to use a planning tool as powerful as municipal incorporation to consolidate and expand their political interests, requires an analysis of how homosexuality was disaggregated from the perceived "problems" of other social groups. How did planning go from a tool of anti-gay oppression, to one in support of creating gay neighborhoods? As the next section shall reveal, frameworks of neoliberalism and homonormativity are instrumental in understanding the parsing of homosexuality from other deviant categories.

Planning as a homonormative project?

The 1984 incorporation of West Hollywood took place at a transitional moment in U.S. urban economic development regimes. Beginning in the 1970s urban political and economic policies have been increasingly governed by the neoliberal ideology that values individual enterprise and entrepreneurship over and against the welfare state that characterized postwar liberalism (Brenner and Theodore 2002; W. Davies 2014; Harvey 2007; Molotch 1976; Peck and Theodore 2019; Peck and Tickell 2002). The spatial consequences of neoliberal policies include market deregulation, increased privatization of urban spaces and services, and gentrification, leading to recurrent destruction and selective reinvestment in central cities, a process David Harvey refers to as "creative destruction" (2004).

One feature of this recurrent cycle is the notion put forth by political pundits and policymakers that (white) gay populations hold the potential to revitalize disinvested urban areas. In the 1970s gay men were praised as leaders in the back-to-the-city movement for rejuvenating declining cities; in the late 1990s and early 2000s gay populations and their attendant placemaking practices were credited for establishing a "creative class" (Florida 2002) of workers whose presence would lead to economic growth. The formation of gay neighborhoods has also been described as a place making strategy that lends itself to a form of "gay entrepreneurialism" (Bell and Binnie 2004; P. L. Doan and Higgins 2011; Kanai and Kenttamaa-Squires 2015; Sibalis 2004), fueling popular creative class development strategies. Overlooked by pundits and gay gentrifiers alike is the impact of gay redevelopment practices on predominantly working class communities of color who are displaced (Knopp 1990a; Lauria and Knopp 1985).

The notion of gays-as-asset for economic growth reflects a shift in attitudes towards gays in American society during this time. Scholars have attributed this shift to the concept of *homonormativity,* first introduced by Lisa Duggan (2002), to describe an emerging "neoliberal sexual politics" or "new gay politics" that wedded gay equality rhetoric and lobbying to policies that work within the framework of neoliberal politics generally. Homonormativity is "a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (2002, 178). Duggan used the term to describe an increasingly right wing gay political agenda that emerged in the 1990s, but its origins lie in the debates between assimilation versus liberationist homophile activists that occurred in the decades prior. Homonormativity not only emphasizes an emergent gay politics but also highlights the historic convergence of a conservative neoliberal social and economic

agenda and an assimilationist gay agenda, where US gay and lesbian organizations increasingly abandoned progressive-left affiliations to gain access to state and economic power.

If the concept of homonormativity helps to situate the changing nature of the state to an assimilationist strand of gay identity and activism, then it also helps to explain the changing nature of state-sanctioned tools, like planning and policing, to gay neighborhoods and spaces. Scholars writing from disciplines such as gender studies, geography, planning, and history have subsequently employed *homonormative,* and related terms like *homonationalist* (Puar 2018; Ritchie 2015) and *homo-entrepreneurial* (Kanai and Kenttamaa-Squires 2015), as frameworks for understanding the exclusionary socio-spatial processes and outcomes whereby a consumer and institutionalist-oriented gay politics is comfortably embedded within a privatized, neoliberal state and economic agenda.

Explicit in Duggan's critique of *homonormativity* is the idea that by ascribing to the values of heteronormative institutions, those who do not or cannot conform are left out, often through violence. Hanhardt illustrates this paradox within the history of gay activism, which originally organized against anti-gay violence in public and private space. Under neoliberalism, gay men (and, to a lesser degree, lesbians) were increasingly seen "as the arbiters of risk, their vulnerability to violence–or their protected presence–a measure of an urban region's vitality" ((2013, 8–9)8-9). Thus, the risk of violence associated with gay vulnerability, alongside the risk of lost profit associated with real estate development, has given rise to crime control policies and interventions that "shape the conditions of possibility for normative gay community belonging and the land market" (2013, 9). Indeed, gay neighborhood advocates turned to policing as a tool to remove members of the LGBTQ community deemed "criminals"--transgender and queer youth of color–from the streets of Greenwich Village and the Castro (Goh 2018; Hanhardt 2013).

As a consequence, the critical literature on gay neighborhoods supports the idea that such spaces are set up for a certain kind of gay subject and lifestyle conditioned by race, class, gender, and disability, where sexual and gender minorities within the gay community do not always feel welcome or safe within gay neighborhood spaces.[9] This is the documented experience of many trans and gender nonconforming people (P. Doan 2010; P. L. Doan 2007), queers youth of color (Greene 2014) and those who experience overlapping forms of oppression due to their multiple, intersecting identities (Goh 2018; Irazábal and Huerta 2016).

In the case of West Hollywood, there is very little scholarship that critically analyzes the role of planning in establishing the gay city, making it difficult to assess whether the city fits squarely within a homonormative planning framework. What has been written supports the notion that West Hollywood developed along an assimilationist path like other gay neighborhoods, with exclusive outcomes. In his study of West Hollywood's incorporation, Forest (1995) argues that gay advocates for incorporation used the campaign to present an idealized image of gay identity in the gay press, one that conformed to heteronormative values of economic productivity. Forest's study does not examine in detail the incorporation campaign itself, the motivations of the various gay and non-gay actors involved, and the shifting alliances among different interest groups. For example, the prominent role of rent control advocates in pushing for incorporation and their alliance with gay advocates suggests a more progressive rather than consumer-oriented intention.

Ehrenfeucht's (2013) more recent study of the 1990s streetscape improvement and redevelopment of Santa Monica Boulevard suggests that West Hollywood's approach to

[9] Another useful concept is "crosscutting", introduced by Cathy Cohen (1999) to describe processes that bring some members of minority communities into the protection of the state by excluding members of the same social category.

redevelopment was exclusive of "nonconforming" populations, including unhoused people and sex workers, many of whom were trans women of color. She does not however attribute these outcomes to homonormative frameworks, and instead concludes that inadequate outreach to nonconformist groups during the participatory planning process led to their exclusion and marginalization. Situating the redevelopment of Santa Monica Boulevard within a neoliberal and heteronormative economic and political framework helps to understand the underlying motivations behind pursuing a redesign of the boulevard.

Homonormativity is a useful theoretical frame for analyzing the motivations and outcomes behind different phases of West Hollywood's formation, yet it does not neatly apply to all periods of West Hollywood's formation. Rather than relying on homonormativity as a comprehensive framework for understanding the gay city and its exclusions in West Hollywood, I argue that the city's historical trajectory–from the incorporation campaign to post-incorporation governance, and eventually to rebranding and redevelopment–reveals a gradual but significant shift in the priorities of its leadership. The progressive coalition that initially secured cityhood championed a bold agenda centered on aggressive rent control, pioneering civil rights protections, and substantial investments in social services such as health and housing. However, this early momentum gave way to a new strategic orientation in response to mounting public backlash, local grievances, and political scandal. In this context, the city increasingly turned to redevelopment and branding as tools for maintaining legitimacy and attracting investment, ultimately ushering in the era of the Creative City.

This transition to the Creative City, discussed in chapter six, anticipates Richard Florida's coining of the "creative class" concept by at least a decade (2002). Florida's central argument about the creative class was that post-industrial economic growth is driven by creativity and

innovation, driven by a 'creative class' composed of scientists, artists, engineers, designers, tech workers and educators. Regions that could support and attract members of the creative class would thrive economically, and those who could not would suffer. A key part of Florida's argument was that diversity and inclusion correlated with the creativity needed for economic success. He developed several indices, including the "Gay Index", which aligned with the presence of high-tech industry and suggested that the presence of LGBTQ+ people led to increased creative talent and economic growth. He pointed to cities like San Francisco, Seattle, Austin, Minneapolis and Boston, as evidence of his theory. These cities, in contrast to "rust belt" cities like Cleveland and Detroit, have thrived in a post-industrial age due to their creative class economies (2002). For West Hollywood, the Creative City was both a brand and an economic development strategy, one that addressed the bad press post-incorporation and resolved emerging complaints over crime and blight. It was also "inclusive" in that it intentionally linked the city's gay community to notions of creativity, while also promoting real industries like design and entertainment that comprised the city's economy.

Thus, according to the creative class idea, the presence of gay space is an indicator of economic performance, as well as inclusion. Hanhardt refers to these spaces as "canaries of the creative age" to underscore their perceived role in revitalizing areas with high crime rights and dilapidated housing stock (2013, p. 187). Gay populations are cast as the "last frontier" of both social tolerance and economic revitalization. Hanhardt points out a contradiction in the creative class thesis, which is that people of color are absent from the Composite Diversity Index, which includes the Gay Index, Melting Pot Index, and the Bohemian Index.[10] Even Florida admits as

[10] Florida developed these indices using Census data to capture the openness, diversity and cultural dynamism of a region: The Gay Index tracks same-sex household per capita to reflect a region's 'tolerance'; the Melting Pot Index reflects the proportion of foreign-born residents; the

much, “My research identifies a troubling negative statistical correlation between concentrations of high-tech firms and the percentage of the nonwhite population.” (2002, pp. 262-263).

In the case of West Hollywood, and similar gay enclaves like Greenwich Village in New York City, the presence of low-income queer and transgender people of color complicates the narratives that underpin the “creative class” promise. Rather than being embraced as contributors to urban vibrancy, these populations are often excluded from the celebratory framing of diversity promoted by creative city boosters. As Hanhardt observes, “one can celebrate diversity and cast tolerance as a new investment strategy at the same time as one assails those very features by naming the acceptance of people of color, transgender women, and people of low income as “liabilities” of a neighborhood best known for its gay populations and bohemianism.” (2013, 187). In this sense, it is not their presence that undermines the promise of the creative city, but the selective and exclusionary way that promise is constructed in the first place.

Beginning in the late 1980s, shortly after key civil rights protections and progressive rent control measures were enacted, West Hollywood began to fully embrace its identity as a particular kind of gay city, one that promised creativity and economic prosperity. By suturing “gay” and “creative” within the framework of the Creative City, it projected a positive and marketable image of both gay identity and the city itself. In doing so, West Hollywood illustrates how planning in the neoliberal era might have become a homonormative project, to which the title of this section refers, extending Frisch’s (2002) analysis of *planning as a heterosexist project* that structured the postwar relationship between sexuality and urban planning.

Bohemian Index uses occupational data to reflect the presence of creative professions like artists, musicians, and writers (Florida 2002).

Gay cityhood as a planning project

To begin to understand the role of planning in creating the "first gay city" I situate my research in the literature on theories of planning. For example, what makes a project like West Hollywood a "planning" project? Rather than merely a tool for achieving local control of city functions, how do we understand municipal incorporation to be illustrative of planning? Planning theorist John Friedmann (1987) puts forth two formal definitions of planning: "Planning attempts to link scientific and technical knowledge to processes of society guidance" and "Planning attempts to link scientific and technical knowledge to processes of social transformation" (1987, 38). Societal guidance is principally concerned with pursuing systematic change through the state, whereas social transformation is concerned with the political practice of system transformation. Friedmann further identifies four main traditions of planning thought since the late 18th century to the present day: Policy Analysis, Social Reform, Social Learning, and Social Mobilization. Friedmann arranges each tradition according to the formal definitions of planning and reflects either "conservative" or "radical" political tendencies (Figure 2.1).

KNOWLEDGE TO ACTION	Conservative	Radical
In societal guidance	Policy Analysis	Social Reform
In social transformation	Social Learning	Social Mobilization

Figure 2.1. The politics of planning theory: a tentative classification. Source: Friedman (1987)

Broadly speaking, the Social Reform tradition is focused on improving planning as a public-serving institution and is philosophically guided by the notion that planning, in conjunction with the state, should be pursued in the public interest. Policy Analysis is more

pragmatic and technocratic in that it is concerned with the rational behavior of large organizations, and guided by the belief that a "best solution" can be found through the proper application of scientific theories and mathematical techniques. Social Learning is concerned with overcoming contradictions between theory and practice, and is driven by the notion that knowledge is derived from experience and practice rather than from scientific methods. Social mobilization is concerned with "direct action from below" where planning (also called radical planning) is a form of politics rather than a mediator of scientific knowledge (Friedman, 1987).

According to Friedmann's definition of planning, I argue that the project of establishing West Hollywood as the "first gay city" was a planning project. The gay cityhood project best resembles aspects of the social reform, social learning, and social mobilization traditions. The reliance on existing institutional and legal structures, such as municipal incorporation, reflect a social reform approach. Even if the campaign for gay cityhood seemed radical, it relied on an existing legally recognized institution–the city–as its raison d'etre. The social learning aspect of gay cityhood is reflected in the pragmatism of gay cityhood advocates. The cityhood campaign and subsequent redevelopment efforts were framed through lenses of economic viability and self-governance so as to convince state officials, and the broader public, of their capacity to run a city. In terms of social mobilization, I argue that the mobilization of a broad political base, which included not only assimilationist and liberationist gay advocates but also advocates motivated by rent control, reflected a ground up campaign for what was understood as 'progressive' political change.

Within these formal definitions, Friedmann argues that what counts as "knowledge" and "action" and who participates in these are ongoing concerns for planners. For instance, what constitutes "knowledge" must be understood as its own socio-historical process with its own

group dynamics and power struggles. Thus, how planners evaluate claims to validity is a core concern, especially given contemporary society's "crisis of knowing" where "the certainties of positivism have suddenly become undone" (1987, 312). Relatedly, how planners link "knowledge" to "action" depends upon who constitutes the relevant "actors," their organizational and institutional settings, and differential access to power. In Friedmann's view, "planners" and "actors" are traditionally treated as separate entities, where actors are united in their core values about what kind of change to achieve and how to go about it, and where planners offer dispassionate guidance informed by science-driven analysis.

This dichotomy is challenged by the emerging practice of what Friedmann calls radical planning, conceptualized as an extension of the social mobilization tradition. Radical planners understand their role in social transformation as inherently political and not value neutral. The aim of radical planning is "the structural transformation of industrial capitalism toward the self-production of life, the recovery of political community, and the achievement of collective self-reliance in the context of common global concerns' ' (1987, 412). Thus, a "radical planner" may also be an "actor" driven by political concerns and objections, and may or may not have professional training. Planning, then, is not the exclusive domain of the state, and blurs the state/non state dichotomy. Holston's (2008) notion of insurgent citizenship in the context of Brazil's metropolitan peripheries demonstrates how "planning from below" or outside and in opposition to the state can yield alternative claims to citizenship through "autoconstruction" of the peripheries . Putting together Holsten's notion of insurgent citizenship with Friedmann's notion of radical planning, Miraftab (2009) conceptualizes insurgent planning as a form of radical planning emanating from the global South. Insurgent planning is a counter-hegemonic

practice that responds to neoliberal governance regimes predicated on "inclusive" planning processes.

Dismantling a clear distinction between "planner" and "actor" is significant for this project because the formation of the "first gay city" involved a multitude of actors whose backgrounds did not necessarily include traditional planning credentials. Gay activists, rent control advocates, seniors, real estate developers, and others were involved in "planning" the first gay city, even if they did not refer to their activities as "planning." More expansive definitions or possibilities of planning as "alternative," "radical," "insurgent," or "social mobilization" are useful for further broadening the scope of who is included in planning processes, particularly those who have been historically marginalized.

Gay cityhood, for the purposes of this project, is therefore a planning project, but it is also a framework for analysis. Beyond the narrow, administrative meaning of "cityhood" (referring to municipal incorporation), I conceptualize cityhood as a concept, one that enables analysis of the various components that comprise the process of citymaking. This view is informed by an expansive body of scholarship that destabilizes the notion of the city as a politically, geographically, and temporally bounded entity (Abu-Lughod 1999; Amin and Thrift 2002; Bourdieu 1999; Brenner and Schmid 2015; Castells 1983; J. S. Davies and Imbroscio 2010; Hayden 1995; Peck and Theodore 2015; Simone 2010; Sugrue 2014). The various components of analysis include: actors (politicians, planners, bureaucrats, activists, everyday residents); strategies (municipal incorporation, spatial configuration and design, plans and policies); and the meanings attached to the city (identity, representation, memory). Examining these components helps to identify the stages of the city's formation (incorporation, redevelopment, branding, and activism) and reveals how its meanings and outcomes shift over

time, and in relation to other, outside phenomena (e.g. neighboring cities, the surrounding regional economy, the civil rights context).

3. THE INCORPORATION CAMPAIGN

Camelot on the horizon

In the lead up to the incorporation of West Hollywood, gay advocates saw an opportunity. The idea that, for the first time ever, a city could be run by gays and lesbians inspired hopes for civil rights gains and expanded gay political power. This view was shared by the most prominent gay rights organizations in West Hollywood and in Los Angeles at the time, including the Harvey Milk Gay and Lesbian Democratic Club, the Stonewall Gay and Lesbian Democratic Club, and the Municipal Election Committee of Los Angeles (MECLA). As Erin Lorber, the executive administrator of MECLA, said at the time: “The city could be the first in the United States, probably the world governed by a homosexual majority,” adding, “I think people are beginning to appreciate the historic dimension of what’s going on” (Lindsey 1984). Lorber was correct in asserting the potential historical significance of the moment. Up to this point in 1984, only a handful of openly gay candidates had been elected to public office in the U.S., including Kathy Kozachenko, who won a seat on the Ann Arbor City Council in 1974, and Harvey Milk, who was elected to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in 1977. Nowhere did an openly gay majority constitute a political majority.

Lorber's quote appeared in a New York Times article on November 5, 1984 that was the first, and only article from the paper to cover West Hollywood's incorporation campaign. The article was titled "Vote Set on Homosexual Community". The title of the article speaks to the centrality of the significance of incorporation for gay constituencies from the perspective of the newspaper. Much of the media coverage of the incorporation effort emphasized this aspect, making only passing mention of the other constituencies and issues implicated in West Hollywood's cityhood movement.

Later in the article, Lorber is quoted again, this time speaking to the potential implications of a gay-run city: "For the first time, said Mr. Lorber, who is the executive administrator of the Municipal Elections Committee of Los Angeles, a city will make a deliberate attempt to assure and protect "civil rights, human rights for gays and lesbians," as well as other residents." The emphasis on gay civil rights was important, as it signaled the significance of a gay city beyond its symbolism to include legal, material gains as well. At the time of the incorporation campaign, civil rights protections for gays and lesbians were limited and varied.[11] At the national level, conservative activists frequently invoked gay issues in moralist terms, stoking debates over whether gays should be allowed to teach in public schools or serve in public roles. The advent of the AIDS epidemic added fuel to these debates, as stigmas associated with sexual deviance and disease seeped into national discourse (Shilts 2000). Thus, the idea that there could potentially exist a political entity by and for gay people in 1984 inspired gay advocates to make West Hollywood a gay city, one that, if realized, portended manifold possibilities. As Lorber stated at the end of the New York Times article, "If it [cityhood] passes,

[11]A patchwork of municipalities had passed ordinances prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation. Berkeley, California was the only city to allow gay couples to register as domestic partners, though this policy was limited to public employees.

and the majority of the City Council is gay, there are certainly lots of possibilities of having a gay Camelot, whatever that means" (Lindsey 1984).

While gay advocates were clear-eyed about their goals with incorporation, the original purpose behind the cityhood effort was not necessarily a gay one. Before prominent gay advocacy organizations such as MECLA and the gay Democratic clubs joined the cityhood effort, the first issue driving cityhood was land use: residents sought to prevent the conversion of apartments to hotels, which County law would have made easier. Rent control also became a driving issue, reflected by the leading role of the Coalition for Economic Survival (CES) in both the incorporation campaign and early city governance. With 88% of residents renting (compared to just 50% countywide), and a county-wide rent control measure set to expire, renters' rights shaped the political agenda. As a result, both incorporation advocates and candidates for City Council had to build coalitions that appealed to the priorities of these diverse groups.

This chapter traces the unfolding incorporation campaign, highlighting the key events, actors, and motivations behind it. Initiated by local activist Ron Stone, the cityhood effort evolved over 15 months, bringing together a coalition primarily centered on gay rights and renters' protections under the broader theme of "local control." For gay advocates, incorporation offered a strategic avenue to advance gay rights, such as enacting domestic partnership laws and anti-discrimination measures, while also requiring careful navigation of political dynamics. To mitigate fears of a "gay takeover," they downplayed the notion of a distinctly "gay city" to reassure non-gay residents and mainstream media. Simultaneously, they worked alongside advocacy groups focused on rent control and zoning, balancing shared goals with internal tensions. This chapter explores how these intersecting interests shaped the campaign's strategies and outcomes, highlighting the complexities of coalition politics in the fight for cityhood.

Ron Stone, the primary activist

Nearly 15 months before the vote on whether or not to incorporate was set to take place, Ron Stone, a 37-year-old management consultant, began to lay the groundwork for a municipal incorporation campaign. Described by the *Village Voice* as "a tall, skinny veteran of both gay and straight political activism who uses phrases like "power to the people" without sarcasm" (Mithers 1985). For at least a year, Stone "almost single handedly touted the idea of incorporation for West Hollywood" (*Frontiers* 1984b). The archival materials relating to the incorporation campaign, and the interviewees with whom I spoke about the incorporation period, speak to the central role Stone played in the formation of West Hollywood during the campaign, and his success in building coalition of activists, organizations, and interest groups in favor of cityhood.

Stone made his case for why West Hollywood residents should pursue cityhood in an op-ed he wrote for the June 24-30 publication of the *LA Weekly*, titled "Gay Pride: Will Success Spoil West Hollywood?" He begins the article thusly:

> Every morning at 8 a.m. (give or take five minutes) the church bell in the tower above St. Victors on Holloway Drive rings out to awaken the sleepy residents of West Hollywood. It's time again for everybody to wake up and set the trends which all of L.A. has come to expect.

Stone proceeds to provide an overview of West Hollywood's history, summarizing, tracing its evolution from the company town Sherman to a hub of counterculture, a destination for film

industry celebrities, and eventually a haven for gay residents. He offers a clue as to what he means by "trends" in his conclusion of the historic overview:

> As an unincorporated section of L.A. County, West Hollywood was beyond the reach of Chief Ed Davis. Also, 20 years of relative neglect left the area pocketed with cheap rents and vacant stores–precisely the combination a struggling lifestyle needed in order to flourish. And flourish it did. In the short space of ten years, what previously had been a backwater became, once again, a desirable, hip place to live.

The implication is that "gay" is what makes West Hollywood "hip". Stone elaborates:

> The gay community in West Hollywood is the cultural center of what is now the largest gay community in the world, surpassing San Francisco and New York. West Hollywood has more organized sports, newspapers, magazines, business groups, associations and services of all kinds than in any other comparable settlement. L.A. itself is where the top models live now, where the smartest and most attractive young kids continue to arrive daily, and where the gay subculture has the most potential to connect its creative energies to the national media that this city controls. Gays in other cities dance to L.A.s tunes.

Stone centers West Hollywood as the center of gay culture in L.A., which is also the center of gay culture nation-wide. This framing positions the city as not only a geographical hub for gay life but also as a media capital where queer cultural production and political activism could gain national visibility.

Stone's own identity as an openly gay man likely informed his perspective, lending personal urgency to his analysis of incorporation's stakes. His observations reflect an acute awareness of how media representation and political integration could serve as instruments of empowerment for the gay community. By securing municipal recognition, West Hollywood's

gay residents could assert their presence in governance, ensuring that political visibility complemented cultural influence. Stone explicitly links incorporation to the possibility of electing "the nation's first gay mayor" (Stone, 1983, 28), highlighting the transformative potential of institutional legitimacy. His argument suggests that incorporation was a historic opportunity to cement the political and cultural authority of the gay community.

Moreover, Stone situates incorporation within the broader context of media discourse, emphasizing how West Hollywood's official city status would enhance its role as a strategic stronghold for gay activism. Given the city's already prominent media presence, formal recognition would amplify its influence in shaping national narratives about gay identity, rights, and representation. In this sense, incorporation was both a practical and symbolic act, one that signified self-determination and affirmed the community's place within the broader sociopolitical landscape. By positioning West Hollywood at the intersection of media, culture, and politics, Stone underscores how its incorporation functioned as a model for gay empowerment, both locally and nationally.

Multiple stakeholders

While West Hollywood had gained a reputation as a predominantly gay space, Stone reminds readers that "West Hollywood isn't as gay as you might think." He points to the prominent Jewish community along the eastern end of West Hollywood–many of whom were seniors–as well as a growing subculture of recent Russian émigrés. Citing the 1980 census, Stone challenges the stereotype that West Hollywood was populated solely by young gay men, noting that the

male-to-female ratio was 50/50 and that only 9% of the city's 35,982 residents were under 21 (Stone 1983).

Contrary to the public image of West Hollywood as "a settlement of young men who apparently have nothing better to do than flaunt their good looks while waiting for spotlights, hustling along Santa Monica Boulevard, cavorting in discos, and getting drunk in bars," Stone asserted that West Hollywood is "a community of adults" (1983, 27). His portrait of the city is one that balances its reputation as a vibrant gay enclave with the reality of a diverse population, each group wielding comparable power. He highlights the influence of Jewish voters in particular, noting that they were the dominant force in the Third Supervisorial District. This political landscape was shaped by figures such as Supervisor Ed Edelman, his deputy for West Hollywood, Bonnie Fine (a non-resident), and the Supervisor's Citizens Advisory Committee, chaired by Bud Siegel.

Stone thus positions both the gay and Jewish communities as significant political actors within West Hollywood. However, he also warns that the area is "very vulnerable politically." Given its small geographic size and its placement within a sprawling county district that stretched from West Hollywood to East Los Angeles, home to over one million people, West Hollywood lacked significant political influence. Stone writes, "You might wonder, given the pressing problems this county faces with pollution, transportation, regional land-use, crime, welfare, disaster preparedness, education, integration, and the current budget crisis, why the county board bothers to keep a pet village." The answer, he argues, lies in development: "A defenseless animal like West Hollywood is a prime target for development, and contributions from developers provide high-octane fuel for the county machine" (1983, 27). This gets at a core motivation driving Stone: local control over development. Incorporation to Stone, then, was

about more than representation; it was about shielding West Hollywood from unchecked development and external political maneuvering, which he frames as issues affecting all constituencies.

John Heilman, another key figure in the incorporation effort and candidate for City Council, reinforced the idea the local control over land use was a primary motivator for incorporation:

> The incorporation movement really came out of people who were involved in the county's community plan for the West Hollywood area. After the community plan was adopted, the county started allowing things that were not consistent with that community plan…they were concerned that the county was allowing things to be built that were bigger than what the community plan had contemplated.[12]

In particular, residents were concerned about the conversion of apartments-to-hotels conversions, which would, as Stone forewarned, make West Hollywood "become another Westwood/Wilshire highrise corridor" (Stone 1983). Putting a finer point on it, Mark Lehman, a former city planner for West Hollywood and resident of pre-incorporation West Hollywood, said, "We felt ignored…We were abused to some degree" adding, "the community felt like it had no real say in development and in future, and looking at what did we want West Hollywood to be."[13] Thus, the initial set of issues driving incorporation were really around land use issues rather than renters issues or gay issues.

Published over a year and a half before residents voted on whether to incorporate, Stone's article in the *LA Weekly* underscored what he saw as the benefits of incorporating West

[12] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, March 20, 2024.
[13] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, June 11, 2025.

Hollywood as a city, and is one of the earliest indications as to what Stone's motivations for incorporation were. Stone was primarily motivated in wresting political and planning control away from the County Board of Supervisors, which he viewed as unresponsive to the area's needs. Stone saw cityhood as a mechanism to achieve local control over development. However, in an attempt to appeal to multiple audiences, Stone positioned incorporation as beyond merely a mechanism for regulating development. Specifically, he extensively mentions the important role of the gay and Jewish communities in West Hollywood, and implies that each has much to gain from incorporation. In the months following his article in the *LA Weekly*, Stone would pull together an seemingly unlikely coalition, a "fragile alliance between senior citizens, Jews, lesbians, and gays" (Mithers 1985).

Thus, Stone makes his case for incorporation. In doing so, he hints at what would eventually evolve into a multifaceted effort driven by both material and symbolic concerns. Incorporating West Hollywood was about many things: it was about securing political autonomy in the face of external threats, building coalitions among diverse local constituencies, and solidifying the city's national identity as a center of gay culture. By capturing these tensions and dynamics, Stone's writing, and subsequent role in spearheading the incorporation effort, provides a crucial historical perspective on the forces that shaped West Hollywood's path to cityhood and its enduring role as a highly visible symbol for queer political and cultural expression.

Over time, the coalition expanded to include housing advocates, most notably the Coalition for Economic Survival (CES), which prioritized rent control, as well as members of the gay political establishment who saw cityhood as both a political opportunity and a symbolic affirmation of gay identity. "Heilman shared that "They wisely wanted to bring in the LGBT

community. So they invited the Harvey Milk Democratic Club, the Stonewall Democratic Club. CES [Coalition for Economic Survival], I think I ended up joining as a representative [of CES].[14]

August 4th, 1983, first meetings

The first meeting of community members interested in West Hollywood's incorporation took place on August 4, 1983, convened by Ron Stone. This gathering brought together a diverse group of West Hollywood residents united by a shared frustration over the lack of representation in county government. At the time, unincorporated West Hollywood covered just 1.9 square miles but was home to approximately 34,000 people, one of the most densely populated areas in Los Angeles County, which spanned 4,751 square miles.. Despite its significant population and distinct character, West Hollywood remained governed by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, a five-member body responsible for overseeing a vast and diverse array of unincorporated communities, ranging from rural Topanga Canyon to the East Los Angeles barrio, Marina del Rey, and West Hollywood itself. This lack of direct representation fueled concerns that local needs and priorities were being ignored in favor of broader county interests.

A primary grievance driving the early incorporation movement was the Board of Supervisors' approval of apartment-to-hotel conversions, a policy that directly threatened West Hollywood's predominantly renter-based community. According to a 1985 *Village Voice* article, the issue became personal for Ron Stone when he saw a large hotel seemingly appear overnight in his neighborhood without any consultation with local residents. "When a big hotel seemed to

[14]Interview by the author, Los Angeles, March 20, 2024. Heilman shared that many of the initial actors involved with these gay advocacy groups have since passed away due to AIDS, including Ira Stein, Mark Bliefield, and Ron Stone, among others.

spring up ‘overnight’ in his neighborhood, 37-year-old Ron Stone started wondering why no one had asked the community how they felt about having the building, and questioning just who was making decisions for the people of West Hollywood” (*Village Voice*, 1985). This lack of local oversight, particularly on housing issues, galvanized Stone and others to push for self-governance.

At the time, West Hollywood’s demographics reflected a unique and politically significant coalition. The city had a large renter population (80%), seniors (28%), Eastern European immigrants (20%), and a sizable gay and lesbian community (30%) (1985). This intersection of constituencies, many of whom were vulnerable to displacement due to rising rents and development pressures, contributed to the urgency of the incorporation movement. Renters feared unchecked gentrification, seniors worried about losing stable housing, and the gay community, which had established West Hollywood as a cultural and political hub, recognized the importance of self-governance in maintaining the city’s progressive identity.

The earliest meetings that laid the groundwork for incorporation. brought together a diverse group of civic leaders and activists, including Ron Stone, Art Guerrero, Bernard “Bud” Siegel, Cynthia Grace, Bob Conrich, Jeanne Dobrin, Frank Wittenberg, and Francis Montgomery, all residents of West Hollywood who were initially brought together over their shared concern that the County was increasingly unresponsive to resident needs, particularly as they related to land use. Each member contributed a distinct set of skills and political experience. Guerrero, as president of Arthur, James Advertising, had worked on high-profile political campaigns such as Lindsay for Mayor in New York City and George McGovern’s presidential run. Siegel had served as Chairperson of the West Hollywood Citizens’ Advisory Committee, while Grace, a former city planner turned attorney, provided expertise in urban development and

municipal law. Conrich, an arbitrator with the American Arbitration Association, facilitated discussions and hosted the first meeting in August 1983. Dobrin, a local resident, had been appointed by County Supervisor Ed Edelman to a regional planning task force focused on unincorporated areas, including West Hollywood. Wittenberg, as President of the West Hollywood Homeowners Association, represented property owners, while Montgomery was a prominent real estate developer whose views would later diverge sharply from the incorporation effort (Staff Report 2020).

Stone, a management consultant with little prior involvement in local politics, was not part of West Hollywood's political establishment. It is arguable that his outsider status allowed him to rally a broad coalition, uniting those who felt overlooked by county governance. This coalition ultimately evolved into the West Hollywood Incorporation Committee (WHIC), the driving entity behind the incorporation campaign. Notably, not all original members remained aligned with the effort. Francis Montgomery became a staunch opponent of cityhood, actively challenging WHIC at every opportunity. His resistance underscored the ongoing tension between real estate development interests and the broader vision of local self-determination that WHIC sought to achieve (Moos 1989).

Preceding these divisions, these initial group members pressed forward. Historical accounting of this group is difficult given that there are no recorded meeting notes or minutes that detail the discussions among group members. We know however, from Adam Moos' interviews with Ron Stone, that the group's first move was to request a revised economic viability report from a Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO), which oversees incorporation of communities in California. LAFCOs, established in 1963, has the authority to regulate city boundaries, assess economic feasibility, and ensure that new municipalities are not

formed solely for the benefit of special interests.[15] In order for a community to incorporate, LAFCO must determine that the proposed city is financially viable, after which it can place the incorporation measure on a ballot for residents to vote on (Moos 1989).[16]

Previous efforts to incorporate West Hollywood had failed, largely due to economic assessments that deemed the city financially unsustainable.[17] However, Stone and WHIC successfully lobbied LAFCO to revise its outdated 1980 report, which had projected an economic shortfall. This effort proved crucial: on November 30, 1983, LAFCO issued a new preliminary report estimating that an independent West Hollywood would actually generate a budget surplus of $4.8 million annually. This dramatic shift in financial projections not only legitimized the movement but also provided the necessary foundation for moving forward with a formal incorporation vote (Moos 1989).

The premise that an area must prove itself to be financially sustainable was a prerequisite for LAFCO's approval. The emphasis on financial sustainability foreshadowed an enduring theme throughout West Hollywood's evolution–that of fiscal responsibility and economic viability. While Stone initially made the case that incorporation was about local control over development and community self-determination, the idea that West Hollywood would be economically prosperous, and who would gain from it, became more central to the incorporation narrative as the voices reflected in the campaign increased. It also foreshadowed how gay actors

[15] With the exception of San Francisco County, since the City and County of San Francisco share identical geographical areas and therefore no unincorporated area exists (Moos 1989).
[16] Before California established LAFCOs, some cities were formed primarily to serve specific industrial or commercial tax interests. LAFCOs were created to prevent the formation of such cities (Moos 1989).
[17] Local residents had made three previous attempts to incorporate, all of which were unsuccessful. The most recent attempt in 1980 fell apart after LAFCO issued a highly unfavorable report on the area's financial ability to function as an independent city (Moos 1989).

would position the "gay city" to a larger public, as one that would not only govern responsibility, but also economically thrive.

At this early stage in the incorporation effort, as word regarding West Hollywood's possible incorporation continued to spread in the media, it is worth noting that neither the gay political establishment nor the Coalition for Economic Survival (CES), the area's main renter advocacy organization, were fully on board with the incorporation effort. In fact, Sheldon Andelson hinted that he was opposed to the idea. Quoted in the LA Times, December 15, 1983 article: Andelson wrote, "I feel that West Hollywood has done extremely well under the present system," said Sheldon Andelson, chairman of the board of directors of the Bank of Los Angeles and one of the largest property owners in West Hollywood. Andelson, who was also influential in Democratic Party politics, said talk of incorporation has arisen periodically in West Hollywood. "I don't see widespread support for it," he said. "I know what we've got now and it's working" (LA Times, 1983).

Sheldon Andelson's political and financial influence positioned him as a key figure in both Democratic politics and gay advocacy. His ability to leverage wealth for political power was evident in the lavish fundraising events he hosted at his Bel-Air mansion, where top Democrats–including Edward Kennedy, Walter Mondale, and Jerry Brown–sought his backing. While his status as an openly gay man posed potential risks in elite political circles, Andelson balanced discretion and activism. Initially donating anonymously, he emerged over time as one of the gay community's most prominent financial supporters, helping to establish institutions like the Gay and Lesbian Services Center. His appointment in 1981 as the first openly gay University of California Regent marked the growing political legitimacy of affluent sectors of the gay community and Andelson's role in fostering that power (Roderick 1984a).

However, Andelson's relationship with West Hollywood was more complex, shaped by both his political ambitions and business interests. As a major property owner and founder of the Bank of Los Angeles, much of his wealth stemmed from legal work and real estate investments. A Los Angeles Times reporter wrote that "Andelson's wealth came from legal work and a real estate empire he started by acquiring lots in what was then, two decades ago, the depressed county territory of West Hollywood." Former City Councilmember Steve Schulte shared with me in an interview that Andelson also represented many closeted individuals, representing "guys in the alley behind the Circus of Books. Guys would line up after the bars, and many of them [would] get busted…and [Andelson] would represent them."[18]

Andelson's initial reluctance to support West Hollywood's incorporation reflected concerns over how cityhood, and particularly policies like rent control, might affect his financial interests. City Councilmember John Heilman noted that Andelson was wary of the economic implications for landlords and developers, given his extensive holdings in the area. Heilman shared that "Sheldon was initially concerned about the implications [of incorporation] for property values. And I'm sure he was concerned about development, because he owned several properties. I'm sure he was concerned about rent control, because he was a landlord. And I think Steve [Schulte] actually was his tenant".[19] Andelson's eventual support for incorporation and backing of figures like Steve Schulte suggest a pragmatic shift, likely driven by the realization that aligning with West Hollywood's political transformation could serve both his personal and community interests. His endorsement, however, also came with a desire to have a friendly voice

[18] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, December 10, 2024.
[19] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, March 20, 2024.

in the city council. As Heilman shared: “Sheldon eventually did become a supporter. And I think he strongly backed Steve Schulte.”

Schulte confirmed this in my interview with him, and shared that Andelson was “An advocate [for Schulte] and a mentor. He helped me raise a lot of money, like $55,000, which was a big deal in those days, and the Landlord Association”. I asked Schulte why he received the support of Andelson and groups like the Landlord Association, to which he responded, “I was probably seen as the more moderate person.”[20] Andelson’s evolving stance on West Hollywood illustrates the tensions between economic self-interest and broader social advocacy. While his financial investments initially positioned him at odds with the city’s push for incorporation, his later engagement reveals his adaptability and the interconnectedness of wealth, politics, and activism. His trajectory reflects a calculated yet influential role in shaping both West Hollywood’s political landscape and the broader struggle for gay political influence.

January 26, 1984, WHIC is formed

On January 26, 1984, bolstered by a favorable report from the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO), the original cityhood proponents established the West Hollywood Incorporation Committee (WHIC). While some members from the initial incorporation effort remained, the committee's composition evolved. Ron Stone continued to lead the charge, while new members brought diverse expertise to the effort. Art Guerrero, an advertising executive, joined as WHIC’s secretary, and Cynthia Grace, a former city planner and practicing attorney, took on the role of treasurer. Audrey Isser, a clinical social worker, family counselor, and

[20] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, December 10, 2024.

founder of the West Hollywood chapter of the Coalition for Economic Survival (CES), became Vice Chair. Bob Conrich continued to provide secretarial and research support.

In the following months, WHIC worked diligently to expand its membership and build the campaign infrastructure necessary to gather signatures and broaden cityhood's appeal to voters. Membership fluctuated throughout the campaign, with new members joining at different points. Among them were Bud Siegal, former chairperson of the West Hollywood Citizens' Advisory Committee; Helyne Landers, president of the West Hollywood Democratic Club; Larry Gross, coordinator of CES; Ira Stein, president of the Norma Triangle Association and co-council of WHIC; Marc Bliefield, political action coordinator of the Harvey Milk Lesbian and Gay Democratic Club; Valerie Terrigno, president of the Stonewall Democratic Club; and Frank Wittenberg, president of the West Hollywood Homeowners Association.[21]

WHIC's primary objective was securing enough signatures to obtain LAFCO's approval to place cityhood on the November 6, 1984, ballot. Twenty-five percent of registered voters needed to sign a petition showing their support for playing incorporation on the ballot (Images 1-3) . This required 5,000 signatures from West Hollywood residents, a formidable challenge for a single committee. Recognizing the need for broader support, WHIC sought endorsements and assistance from key individuals and organizations. Chief among these was the Coalition for Economic Survival (CES), led by Larry Gross.

[21] WHIC meeting minutes from April 15, 1984, show that WHIC expanded to include "Candidates for General Membership" where were nominated by and voted on by the "Executive Board" On April 15, new members to the General Membership included Dave Tuttle, Jonathan Ahearn, Arthur Lawrence, Lorraine Howell, Margo Siegal, Brian Rushing, Gil Chasen, Steve Weltman, Sally Fisk, John Heilman, Harry Gottlieb, Mary Beavers, Jerry Hyde, Bob Craig, Joan Walpert and Hank Bernard. (WHIC meeting minutes). By May 5, Ron Stone announced that WHIC would begin meeting every first Sunday of the month until the November election (WHIC meeting minutes).

According to WHIC meeting minutes on Feb 10, 1984, Ron Stone updated that group that getting endorsements from gay-affiliated groups was proving difficult. Included in these groups was the Municipal Elections Committee of Los Angeles (MECLA), the Stonewall Gay and Lesbian Democratic Club, the Log Cabin (Republicans) and other groups. “Stone discussed his lobbying efforts with MECLA, Stonewall, Log Cabin and other groups. He discussed the problems of getting group endorsements and contributions” (1984).

On February 12, 1984, WHIC formally launched its signature-gathering campaign, coinciding with CES’s official endorsement of cityhood. CES, the community’s leading tenant advocacy group, had long championed renters’ rights, particularly among senior residents, who made up two-thirds of its steering committee.[22] West Hollywood seniors made up the bulk of CES’s local membership, and were deeply concerned over what they viewed as the tenuous status of rent control (Mithers 1985). Cityhood meant that West Hollywood could establish its own rent control law. The organization had been instrumental in passing the 1980 County rent control ordinance and played a major role in Proposition M, a countywide initiative to strengthen rent control. Although Proposition M ultimately failed at the county level, it passed in West Hollywood by a decisive 5:1 margin, underscoring CES’s organizing power. With its strong grassroots network and a membership of over 2,000 seniors, CES became a crucial ally in WHIC’s signature drive (Moos 1989).

As CES’s involvement deepened, its director, Larry Gross, joined WHIC alongside Audrey Isser as a representative of the organization. CES’s primary interest was the establishment of a rent stabilization ordinance, making cityhood a means to achieve that goal.

[22]Interview by the author, Los Angeles, December 5, 2024. According to Gilda Haas, who was active in both CES and during West Hollywood’s incorporation effort, CES was widely recognized as “the main driver of getting rent control in the City of Los Angeles”.

However, its growing influence within WHIC caused friction. Longtime members Cynthia Grace and Helyne Landers eventually resigned, concerned that CES was exerting too much control over the committee. Meeting minutes from March 3 (WHIC 1984) document Ron Stone's attempts to mediate internal tensions, urging members to "work together" to resolve disputes, though specific conflicts were not detailed.

WHIC actively sought the support of gay organizations to bolster the incorporation movement. Meeting minutes from March 3, 1984, reflect these outreach efforts, as Chairman Ron Stone introduced key figures from the gay political sphere, including Howard Armistead of the Municipal Elections Committee of Los Angeles (MECLA), and Marc Bliefield and John Heilman of the Harvey Milk Democratic Club (WHIC meeting minutes). Bliefield outlined the Harvey Milk Democratic Club's commitment to progressive causes, including gay and lesbian rights and rent control. While the club pledged to assist with signature collection and precinct walking in predominantly gay neighborhoods, Stone emphasized the need for broader outreach, particularly in homeowner areas. Armistead, representing MECLA, acknowledged the significance of the cityhood movement but noted that his organization would not take an official stance until the November election. Despite this, WHIC voted to add both Armistead and a Harvey Milk Club representative to the committee, signaling growing gay and lesbian involvement.

Momentum continued to build. On March 11, 1984, WHIC secured a key endorsement when the Stonewall Democratic Club supported placing cityhood on the ballot. That same meeting, the committee voted to seat activist Valerie Terrigno as a WHIC member, further strengthening gay representation in the movement (WHIC 1984). "We asked him (Stone) thousands of questions about finances," Terrigno is quoted as saying when Stone approached the

Stonewall Democrats for their support. “Once we realized it was a reasonable thing to do, the emotional element came out. It was an excellent opportunity for gay and lesbian people all over” (Mithers 1985).

By March 29, efforts had expanded into media advocacy. Art Guerrero reported that the gay publication *Frontiers* was preparing to endorse cityhood, with publisher Bob Craig set to publish an editorial backing the movement in the magazine’s April 3 issue (WHIC 1984). Craig recognized an opportunity to both advance the cityhood cause and boost his magazine’s circulation. With the help of advertising executive Art Guerrero, Craig repositioned incorporation as a pivotal gay rights issue. In the months that followed, *Frontiers* became a vocal advocate for the movement, driving both political support and readership. Craig’s increasing involvement eventually led him to join WHIC, and when Stone stepped down to run for city council, Craig took over as the organization’s leader (Moos, 1989).

At this point in the incorporation effort, it becomes clearer how cityhood came to reflect different, sometimes overlapping, priorities of its advocates. John Heilman spoke to this during my interview with him, saying that, for example, people like “Marc [Bliefield] did care about rent control, but he didn’t really care about land use. So his involvement was more about advancing LGBT agenda. And Bob Craig, I would say is likely in the same category, probably was more conservative on rent control and a number of issues”.[23] Like Ron Stone, John Heilman saw multiple reasons to pursue cityhood: “You know, for me, it was just sort of an outgrowth of my involvement on LGBT issues and on tenants issues. I was really more focused on housing than LGBT issues. Initially, I mean, what I was working on with CES was, you know, I worked on trying to get that county wide [rent control] initiative passed. And I think I joined the West

[23] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, March 20, 2024.

Hollywood Steering Committee for CES. So that's really where I started. Marc Bliefield was far more advanced in terms of, you know, LGBT advocacy. But you know, we obviously, like, I was a member of that Democratic Club, and we would be getting people to sign petitions at gay pride and things like that".[24]

Gilda Haas, an activist with CES involved in the cityhood campaign, spoke to me about what it was like to work within emerging coalition that began to take shape in support of cityhood:

> I do remember being in CES, who did not have glamorous, fancy offices. And also, again, this is before, you know, the internet and technology was ubiquitous…And so there are all these rolodexes with index cards with information about members of CES and doing calls and doing mailing and doing outreach and stuff like that. But I remember being there, you know, various evenings, and it would be like old Jewish people and gay young men working together and it was hysterical because, it kind of brought out the more flamboyant gayness in people's behavior at to entertain the older people. And the older people would be like, "bubby, can you get me the cards from over there? I can't get up with my sciatica. You know, kind of thing it would be. It would be so adorable…I just have these flashes because it was a while back.[25]

During this period, the primary opposition came from Los Angeles County Supervisor Ed Edelman. His office released a report challenging the findings of the LAFCO study, arguing that West Hollywood would not be economically viable as an independent city. WHIC meeting minutes from March 15, 1984 stated "County Supervisor Ed Edelman releases a report from the

[24] Ibid.
[25] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, December 5, 2024.

county's Chief Administrative Office challenging the LAFCO budget estimates. The surplus will be around $660,000 a year, rather than $4.8 million, the CAO report concluded" and "Incorporation supporters stick by the LAFCO report and charge Edelman is against cityhood". Although Edelman publicly maintained that he was "neutral" on the cityhood issue and claimed his report was intended to ensure an accurate economic analysis, WHIC members saw him as a political adversary. They believed his true concern was the potential loss of political influence and tax revenue from his county district (Moos 1989).

Despite Edelman's opposition, WHIC successfully gathered the required number of petitions, acquiring 6,200 signatures (WHIC meeting minutes 1984), leading to a scheduled LAFCO hearing to determine whether incorporation would appear on the ballot. While LAFCO had issued a favorable economic report, approval was not guaranteed. The commission's majority-conservative membership was generally unsympathetic to rent control and LGBTQ+ issues. However, as Moos (1989, 355) notes, "the strength of the LAFCO staff's report attesting to the economic viability of West Hollywood as a city meant that LAFCO could not deny the application on this basis."

The main opposition group at the hearing was the West Hollywood Study Group, composed of landlords and residents against incorporation. They argued that there was insufficient information to justify placing cityhood on the ballot and attempted to block the effort through their own petition drive. Hiring a consulting firm to aid their campaign, they sought to collect signatures from 50% of registered voters opposing cityhood but managed to gather fewer than 10% of the required threshold. Ultimately, despite opposition efforts, LAFCO voted unanimously to place the incorporation measure on the November 1984 ballot.

May 30, 1984, LAFCO approves cityhood for the ballot

After the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) approved the West Hollywood Incorporation Committee's (WHIC) petition to place cityhood on the ballot, the political landscape of the movement shifted dramatically. Cityhood advocates pivoted to winning over voters, emphasizing themes of "good government" and "self-determination" while avoiding divisive post-incorporation policy debates. At the same time, candidates for city council launched their own campaign, including several members of WHICH, as well as earlier opponents of cityhood. Two major issues quickly took center stage: rent control and the increasing embrace of cityhood by the gay community and its political leaders.

Once it was clear the cityhood would be on the ballot, individuals began to register as candidates for the city's first city council, for which there would be five seats. In total 44 candidates ran for a seat. Given the centrality of rent control and gay issues to the purpose of cityhood, virtually all the candidates were in favor of some form of rent control, and were supportive of gay issues. The distinguishing factors were the degree to which candidates favor "strong" versus "weak" rent control, and similarly, whether gay issues were the dominant feature of their campaign, or more secondary (Moos 1989). Of the 44 candidates who ran for West Hollywood's inaugural city council, nineteen openly identified as gay or lesbian, highlighting the genuine possibility that the new city could be governed by a gay-majority council. As a result, support from gay voters was shaped less by a candidate's sexual orientation and more by their positions on key issues such as rent control and urban development (Gierach 2003). This represented a notable departure from earlier gay political campaigns, such as Harvey Milk's in San Francisco, in which a central argument for election rested on the candidate's status as the

sole openly gay contender. In West Hollywood, the political field was already gay; the distinction lay in ideology, not identity.

With LAFCO's approval, opposition forces began to organize themselves more assertively. On June 10, 1984, two anti-cityhood groups–the West Hollywood Study Group and the Taxpayers Association of West Hollywood–filed lawsuits challenging incorporation. Around the same time, influential landowner Francis Montgomery sought to annex his 10-acre Sunset Plaza shopping center to Los Angeles, an effort that ultimately failed (Stinshoff 1984a). It is interesting to note that Francis had initially been part of the working group that explored the possibilities of incorporating West Hollywood, and speaks to the division between landowner interests and those of WHIC, which, ever since it began working with CES, focused more explicitly on communicating the benefits of cityhood for establishing rent control, an issue landowners like Montgomery opposed.

Developers Arthur Lawrence and Lorraine Howell escalated the opposition by releasing a privately commissioned report on June 12, 1984, arguing that cityhood would result in a $2.4 million annual budget deficit. The WHIC, suspecting that the West Hollywood Study Group was a front for landlords opposing cityhood, filed a complaint with the Fair Political Practices Commission on June 25, demanding transparency about its membership. However, the commission ruled that the group did not need to disclose its members until cityhood was officially on the ballot. Two days later, LAFCO upheld its decision to allow cityhood to move forward despite appeals (Stinshoff 1984a).

Around this same time in early June, internal divisions emerged within WHIC, as Cynthia Grace and Helyne Landers, concerned about the growing influence of the Coalition for Economic Survival (CES), specifically its leader Larry Gross, within the incorporation effort,

split off to form an alternative cityhood group, Citizens for Cityhood. Heilman, who was a CES member, shared that "CES was really a leader in a lot of ways even though they weren't part of the core incorporation committee. And so there was tension there. Because CES already had this network and endorsed three candidates, and then endorsed two more later. And four of the five were elected. So that created Some tension as well…We didn't all get along…CES was much more progressive than some of the people who were, you know, in the initial core, and some of the initial core people didn't care about rent control, because they were either homeowners or, you know, a condo owner. So they might have been supportive of rent control, but it wasn't their primary issue".[26] Other committee members, however, suggested that "unauthorized actions" had prompted Grace to resign. The committee's new executive board members included John Heilman, an attorney with the ACLU and member of CES; Jonathan Ahearn, founder of Unity Savings & Loan; Dave Tuttle, an urban planner, and Bob Craig, the publisher of *Frontiers*, a gay-oriented weekly newspaper (*Frontiers* 1984c).

Speaking to some of the divisions and overlapping interests among cityhood advocates, Barbara Grover, a former political consultant, shared, "I think a lot of the factions had to do with what kind of rent control the city's gonna have…And then the business community was sort of freaked out that it's gonna be 'the gay Camelot.' So then there was that split, and then the head of the Chamber [of Commerce]. He was gay, but he was also a businessman and a landlord".[27] Tony Melia was the Director of the West Hollywood Chamber of Commerce.

As the political effort intensified, Supervisor Ed Edelman intervened on July 26, persuading his colleagues to postpone placing cityhood on the ballot after thousands of

[26] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, March 20, 2024.
[27] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, January 29, 2025.

signatures opposing incorporation were submitted. WHIC leader Ron Stone accused Edelman of trying to "kill" the effort (Stinshoff 1984b).

Discourse on the "Gay City" and its backlash

One of the fiercest anti-cityhood figures, Francis Montgomery, took a particularly aggressive stance. He commissioned a survey to gauge whether residents could be swayed by fears of a so-called "gay takeover" of the city council. Conducted from September 21-23 by San Francisco based polling firm Fairbanks, Canary & Maullin, the survey included questions implying that cityhood would attract an influx of gays and lesbians. The survey asked, "Do you believe if gays control the city there will be an influx of gays and lesbians from all over the country?," and "If cityhood were to lead to gay control of the city, would you still vote for cityhood?"

The poll, widely condemned as a homophobic tactic, backfired. Instead of undermining cityhood, it further galvanized the gay community's support for incorporation. Candidates such as Art Guerrero and William Larkin decried the survey as blatant "gay-baiting" designed to divide the community. Montgomery denied that it was his intention to raise the gay issue, saying he knew that would divide the community and that that was not his intention (*Frontiers* 1984d). "The Montgomery family would never do anything to harm the gay community in West Hollywood," Banks responded (Braun 1984a). However, Banks Montgomery is quoted later saying "It's always been quietly gay for 30 to 40 years. Now it's being overly publicized, (and) that's not to the advantages of our town," as if to suggest that the attention on the gay aspects were bad for West Hollywood (*West Hollywood Incorporation* 1984).

Regardless, three candidates who had each received $500 contributions from the Montgomery firm announced that they were returning the funds. Gay candidates like William Larken expressed concern over anti-gay bias, "Some of those questions, the way they were worded, are very slanted. This kind of thing polarizes the community…We're concerned that this could be the beginning of a hate campaign" (Braun 1984a). Another candidate, Steve Smith, branded the poll as a propaganda tactic. "It looks like gay-baiting," adding he thought such a campaign would not resonate in West Hollywood, long the commercial hub of Los Angeles' gay community" (Braun 1984a).

Despite the homophobic efforts of anti-cityhood actors, by the time cityhood was officially placed on the ballot, major political and business figures within the gay community had come out publicly in support of the effort. The prominent gay businessman and political donor Sheldon Andelson had come around in support of cityhood. Andelson pushed the idea that West Hollywood could be developed into an economically prosperous and aesthetically pleasing city, where "Santa Monica Boulevard" the city's main thoroughfare "could look like a street in Paris" (Lindsey 1984). Such comments during the incorporation campaign foregrounded the large-scale redevelopment and beautification project that cityhood would afford. Such motivations reveal the extent to which some prominent gay actors promoted the idea that the new city would be business friendly and still ripe for development potential. Similarly, the Municipal Elections Committee of Los Angeles (MECLA), who had not come out in support of cityhood, began to speak to the benefits of cityhood for gay civil rights and became active in voter registration efforts (Figures 3.1 and 3.2). The fact that at least half of the forty city council candidates were openly gay underscored the potential political power that cityhood could grant the gay community.



Figure 3.1. Voter Registration - West Hollywood. Credit: Stephen Stewart. Source: USC One Archives



Figure 3.2. MECLA Voter Registration Table - West Hollywood - Santa Monica Boulevard. Credit: Stephen Stewart. Source: USC One Archives

Media Framing: A Gay Camelot

In the final months of the incorporation effort, media narratives increasingly framed West Hollywood's cityhood campaign as a referendum on gay political power. National and local

headlines emphasized the possibility of West Hollywood becoming the "first gay city," shaping public perception of the movement.

A *Newsweek* article published just a day before the election, titled "A Gay City on the Hill?", reinforced this framing by positioning the incorporation vote as a watershed moment for gay political representation. The article quickly zeroes in on the potential for a gay-majority city council, presenting this possibility as a historic first in American governance: "West Hollywood has a large and thriving homosexual community, and its new city council may turn out to be the first lawmaking body in the United States in which avowed gays constitute a majority" (Pederson, 1984). It also situates the election as a symbolic national moment for gay rights, quoting National Gay Task Force director Virginia Apuzzo, who sees it as an opportunity to challenge media-driven stereotypes: "the stereotypic image of us that makes this a story" *Newsweek* (Pederson 1984).

The New York Times took a similar approach in its election-eve coverage, running the headline "VOTE SET ON HOMOSEXUAL COMMUNITY." The article reinforced the idea that West Hollywood's cityhood was fundamentally about gay self-governance: "The [incorporation] measure is considered likely to pass and, if it does, West Hollywood is expected to become a city run by homosexuals and officially free of bias toward homosexuality" (Lindsey, 1984). The article quotes Erin Lorber of MECLA, who explicitly frames incorporation as a historic first: "The city could be the first in the United States, probably the world, governed by a homosexual majority" (Lindsey, 1984). Lorber's comment about the possibility of a "gay Camelot" underscores the utopian expectations some activists had for cityhood, a theme echoed in other media coverage.

The *Evening Outlook*, a local Santa Monica-based paper, took a more sensationalist approach with its August 31, 1984 headline: "Homosexuals to rule West Hollywood?." The article reiterates the "Camelot" idea, this time attributing it to *Frontiers* publisher Bob Craig, who said at a MECLA-sponsored breakfast that "the gay community is getting very close to Camelot" (City News Service 1984). This phrasing, while intended to evoke the promise of political self-determination, also played into fears of a "gay takeover," a concern quietly voiced by opponents of incorporation.

The *Newsweek* article acknowledges these anxieties, stating that for some incorporation opponents, "the election represents a danger," with a "whispered fear" that a gay-controlled council would trigger an influx of gay residents from across the country to the "new Gay City on the Hill" (Pederson, 1984). The *Evening Outlook* article similarly implies that cityhood could lead to a wave of migration, reinforcing conservative fears about West Hollywood becoming an enclave of gay political dominance.

However, incorporation advocates sought to push back against this framing, emphasizing that cityhood was not just about gay representation but also about protecting renters–both gay and straight–through strong rent control policies. Lawyer and city council candidate John Heilman told *The New York Times*, "The gay issue is not that significant," arguing that voters were more focused on housing protections than the sexuality of candidates. Larry Gross echoed this sentiment in the Evening Outlook, insisting, "There will most likely be some gay candidates who will get elected, but West Hollywood is a diverse community. There are lots of gays, seniors and, most of all, renters, living here." He concluded, "But the most important thing here is rent control" (Lindsey, 1984).

Notably, *Frontiers*, Los Angeles's most widely circulated gay weekly, largely avoided this nationalized framing. In its July 4, 1984 issue, the cover story likened the cityhood campaign to the American Revolution, celebrating it as an extension of the country's founding principles rather than a movement centered on gay rights or rent control (*Frontiers* 1984b). Titled "Independence: A Great American Tradition Continues," the article emphasized themes of self-governance and resistance to "taxation without representation" (*Frontiers* 1984b). Unlike Newsweek, the New York Times, or the Evening Outlook, *Frontiers* positioned incorporation as a universal struggle for political autonomy rather than a battle for gay self-rule.

Together, these varied media portrayals shaped public discourse around West Hollywood's incorporation. While mainstream national and local outlets framed the cityhood movement as primarily about gay political power, either as a historic breakthrough or a potential threat, supporters on the ground worked to reframe it as a broader coalition effort to protect renters and promote self-governance. The competing narratives reflected deeper societal tensions about the intersection of gay rights, local governance, and media representation in the early 1980s.

The Montgomerys and "Keep West Hollywood United"

Despite opposition efforts, the movement gained momentum. On August 7, county supervisors set a November election date after verifying that of the 8,059 signatures submitted against cityhood, only 980 were from registered West Hollywood voters, far short of the 9,502 needed to halt the vote. Three days later, 44 individuals filed to run for city council, a number later reduced to 40 after some candidates failed to gather enough signatures. On August 14, Los Angeles

Superior Court Judge Vernon Foster dismissed lawsuits filed by anti-cityhood groups, removing the final legal obstacle to the election (Stinshoff 1984c).

In what increasingly felt like a desperate bid to prevent cityhood's approval, Montgomery and other landlords launched a well-funded campaign. The "Keep West Hollywood United" organization sent mailers warning that cityhood would undermine rent control and bankrupt the new city. In a mailer to residents, Keep West Hollywood United states: "As long as West Hollywood remains an unincorporated part of Los Angeles County residents can be assured of permanent rent control" (Keep West Hollywood United 1984). Another mailer argued that, "In small cities, special interest groups with money, like big landlords, have a disproportionate amount of influence on voting matters They could prevent us from ever having a rent control law in West Hollywood" (Zentman 1984).

Another, rather hysterical mailer, this one sent by West Hollywood Residents Association, stated: "We cannot afford to lose our new county rent control! We cannot afford a city that will not pay for itself! The Committee to Analyze the Cityhood Budget projects a first year deficit of $2,400,000! Who is going to pay for a new city hall and administrative offices? Who is going to pay for police protection? Who is going to pay for urban renewal? WE CANNOT AFFORD HIGHER TAXES! A new city cannot pay for itself! There are too many unanswered questions! Join us, VOTE NO on RR!!!" (West Hollywood Residents Association 1984).

Bob Craig of WHIC publicly denounced these claims as misleading and accused Montgomery's group of violating campaign laws by failing to properly identify itself in its mailers. WHIC ultimately requested that the District Attorney pursue criminal charges against Montgomery over the deceptive campaign materials (Frontiers 1984a). Banks Montgomery

(Francis' son) responded saying "There was no deception involved or intended", explaining that the "proper disclaimer" was not placed on all the mailings because of a "miscommunication between our campaign manager and the printer" (Stinshoff 1984a).

Montgomery also made his case directly to voters. In his October 11 letter to *The Post*, Banks Montgomery cautions against the push for West Hollywood cityhood, arguing that "the incorporation of West Hollywood at the present time would not be in the best interests of the people who live and work in our area." He likens the creation of a city to planting a tree–it "needs to be watered and nurtured." However, in his view, the current conditions were not ripe for incorporation. He warns that it would merely "add another layer of government with no increase in municipal services," asserting that Los Angeles County already provides "top-notch services" and is responsive to local needs (The Post 1984b).

In response, Bob Conrich challenges Montgomery's opposition, pointing to what he sees as a vested financial interest in maintaining the status quo. He notes that Montgomery's father, a wealthy developer, attended the first meeting of the West Hollywood Incorporation Committee but ultimately chose a path of "obstructionism" rather than constructive participation. Conrich refutes the claim that incorporation would lead to unnecessary bureaucracy, arguing instead that a small administrative layer would allow West Hollywood to retain its tax revenue, estimated at $14.5 to $19.5 million, rather than sending it to Los Angeles County. He asserts that maintaining services at their current level would cost $9.5 million, leaving a significant surplus to enhance local programs. Conrich also calls attention to the financial stakes in the debate, pointing out that "the Montgomerys and other developers have pledged $100,000 to defeat cityhood" and suggesting that their priorities may not align with those of the broader community (The Post 1984a).

Frank Wittenberg, President of the West Hollywood Homeowners Association, further counters Montgomery's concerns, particularly regarding government responsiveness. Drawing from his experience on Supervisor Edelman's Citizens Advisory Committee, Wittenberg describes a local governance system in which key decision-makers are largely absent. "When I was asked to serve on it, I expected it to be what he said, 'An Advisory Committee,' with the supervisor in attendance. However, it didn't turn out that way." Instead, the supervisor rarely participated, according to Wittenberg, leaving decisions to a field office and a deputy supervisor. In Wittenberg's view, a locally controlled government would be more accountable to West Hollywood residents than the existing system (The Post 1984a).

Together, these letters highlight the sharp divide over cityhood. Montgomery saw incorporation as premature and unnecessary, while Conrich and Wittenberg argued that local governance would better serve the community's interests. Their responses attempt to shift the core of the debate to the question of whether West Hollywood should continue relying on Los Angeles County's services or take control of its own future.

Last-Minute Efforts to Block Cityhood

Anti-cityhood efforts extended beyond Montgomery and his Keep West Hollywood United group. Wealthy hotel developer Severyn Ashkenazy, who was building six luxury hotels in West Hollywood at the time, joined the opposition. Ashkenazy expressed concern that the incorporation movement was "premature and too fast" and that it could lead to governmental chaos because of a lack of administrative experience by the council candidates. "I do not see

people with really deep community involvement over the years coming to run the city," Ashkenazy said (Braun 1984c).

To counter pro-rent control advocacy, landlords formed West Hollywood Concerned Citizens, an organization that accused CES-backed candidates of using fear tactics to sway public opinion. In a letter to The Post on November 1, 1984, titled "Scared Yet?" West Hollywood Concerned Citizens argued "There are many good candidates running for West Hollywood City Council. Unfortunately, there are a few political opportunists running too. They were hand-picked by Larry Gross and his radical C.E.S., and have been campaigning behind the misleading name of "United For West Hollywood". They are out to scare you into voting for them through lies, half-truths, and misrepresentations. They want to make you think they care about your welfare. They don't. They care about political power, and they'll do anything to get it. THINK ABOUT WHAT THEY'RE TELLING YOU."

As the election neared, cityhood opponents orchestrated one final maneuver. In the last week of the campaign, landlords persuaded the county government to create a Special Rent Control District for West Hollywood, extending the county's weaker rent control law in an attempt to preempt stronger regulations a new city council might enact. The Board of Supervisors passed the measure with an unexpected coalition of liberal and conservative members, including Peter Schabarum, who also chaired LAFCO (Stinshoff 1984b). "For the first time in history, apartment owners and renters have united together in support of rent control," said Banks Montgomery, quoted in the L.A. Times. "The county has now given us a guarantee (that it will keep rent control in West Hollywood)" Montgomery said. "The matter of rent control should no longer be an issue" (Stinshoff 1984b).

Cityhood advocates denounced the move as a last ditch effort. Candidate Art Guerrero dismissed the county's rent control as inadequate, pointing out that it allowed annual rent increases of 9% and exempted vacant units. Craig Lawson predicted that if cityhood failed, landlords would push to repeal rent control altogether. Even some moderates, like Steve Schulte, acknowledged that the county's last-minute measure was "too little, too late" and that "the county law has "no teeth in it' to deal with landlord abuses (Stinshoff 1984b).

By late October, tensions remained high. On October 25, candidates Bill Larkin and Joyce Hundal attacked CES for alleging they were backed by landlords, demanding proof of the claim. The next day, WHIC formally called for legal action against Montgomery's campaign tactics (Stinshoff 1984a).

November 6, 1984, voters approve cityhood

Despite the aggressive opposition campaign, the push for cityhood ultimately succeeded with a vote of 2:1 majority. The battle over incorporation had not only exposed deep divisions over rent control and land use but had also solidified West Hollywood as a political stronghold for a coalition of gays, renters and seniors. The election of an openly gay-majority city council marked a historic shift, ensuring that West Hollywood's future governance would be shaped by the very groups that had fought so hard for its creation.

Voters approved cityhood by a two to one margin and elected five council candidates, four of whom were backed by CES. An election night party was hosted by the Bel Age Hotel (Figures 3.3 and 3.4). John Heilman, one of the five elected to the council, shared with me that the successful incorporation campaign was largely due to the involvement of CES. "That's part

of the reason why [the incorporation advocates] were so successful is that they had, you know, tenants associations at different buildings, and they had been organizing in West Hollywood around tenants issues".[28] Pro cityhood advocates gathered and celebrated at the Bel Age Hotel (Image 5). Three of the elected candidates were openly gay, including Valerie Terrigno, Steve Schulte, and John Heilman. Ron Stone was among the candidates who was not elected, reflecting a failure to achieve enough name recognition in comparison to the winning candidates, and broadening his appeal beyond his assertiveness on "local control" issues (Moos 1989). Terrigno, who won the most votes and had achieved Hollywood celebrity status, became West Hollywood's first mayor, and therefore the nation's first 'out' lesbian mayor. Thus, West Hollywood not only established the nation's first gay-majority government but also solidified its status as the first gay city.

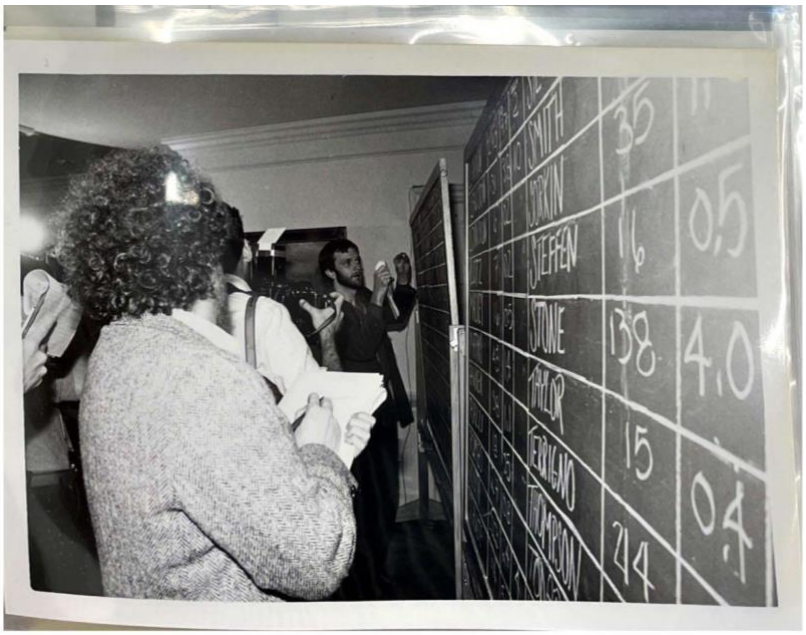


Figure 3.3. Counting the Votes - Bel Age Hotel - West Hollywood. 11-6-1984. Credit: Stephen Stewart. Source: USC One Archives

[28] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, March 20, 2024.



Figure 3.4. KCBS CH. 2 Ross Becker interviewing Ron Stone on election night- Bel Age Hotel - West Hollywood. Credit: Stephen Stewart. Source: USC One Archives

Conclusion

While the incorporation effort tells a story of a campaign made possible through a coalition of gays, seniors, and renters, it was also initially driven by a small group of concerned residents who wanted to wrest local control over land use away from the county. This fact is somewhat lost in narratives of cityhood that seek to valorize an unlikely progressive coalition. While the issue of "local control" was somewhat overshadowed by the opposition's focus on rent control, and the media's incessant attention on the gay city, it proved to be critical to shaping the future of the city in subsequent years. At the same time, it is true that a successful coalition of progressive actors did come together to achieve a mutual goal. In the process, the idea that cityhood could advance gay civil rights *and* consolidate gay political power was unprecedented. As subsequent chapters will reveal, the ramifications of this power extended beyond symbolic and material outcomes for gays, but also shaped new ideas of how gayness could contribute to urban change and, in doing so, what it *meant* to be gay.

Reflecting on the incorporation campaign, Adam Moos, who was the campaign manager for Mayor Alan Viterbi during the incorporation campaign, later served as the city's first Director of Rent Stabilization, (1989) argues that the organized leadership of West Hollywood's gay community largely withheld support for the cityhood effort until after LAFCO (Local Area Formation Committee) approved the measure for the ballot. He points out that key figures, such as Steve Schulte, who was initially preparing for a Los Angeles City Council run, and Sheldon Andelson, a major landowner and Democratic Party power broker, neither contributed financially nor publicly endorsed incorporation. Both Schulte and Andelson were among the most public out gay figures in Los Angeles politics at the time. According to Moos, this hesitation stemmed from the political strategy that had long defined the gay community's success in West Hollywood: a preference for working behind the scenes rather than engaging in overt political activism. Drawing on Castells (1983), Moos contrasts this approach with the more confrontational, activist-oriented strategies seen in cities like New York and San Francisco. Additionally, many in the gay community viewed L.A. County Supervisor Ed Edelman as an ally and feared that supporting cityhood, especially if it failed, could jeopardize their political standing and influence within existing power structures (Moos 1989, 357).

However, Moos argues that once cityhood was officially on the ballot, the calculus changed dramatically. The prospect of electing openly gay and lesbian candidates to public office transformed cityhood from a potential liability into an unprecedented opportunity. At this point, the question was no longer about maintaining favor with Edelman but about securing direct political representation. As Ron Stone put it, "this is our chance to determine our own fate" (Moos 1989, 357). Cityhood now represented a chance for the gay community to exercise

control over policies that directly affected them, most notably rent control and anti-discrimination protections.

Forest (1995) challenges Moos' framing, arguing that cityhood was not just about local control but also about projecting a broader image, one that demonstrated that gay people, as a political and social identity group, were capable of governance. While Moos interprets early reluctance as a tactical maneuver to preserve Edelman's patronage, Forest points to early gay press support for incorporation dating back to mid-1983 and Stone's *LA Weekly* article (Stone, 1983) that highlighted the role of West Hollywood's gays community in the cityhood movement. He contends that Moos, despite his insider perspective as both a campaign manager and West Hollywood's first Director of Rent Stabilization, does not fully explore the symbolic dimensions of incorporation for the gay community. Moos treats gay activists and rent control advocates as equivalent actors within a broader political coalition, each pursuing local control, but in doing so, he overlooks the deeper significance of cityhood as a struggle over identity and representation (Forest 1995, 140).

Forest further critiques Moos' claim that the large number of gay candidates on the ballot made sexual orientation a secondary factor for voters. He argues that, while this situation may seem of marginal importance to Moos, it was in fact unprecedented. Even in cities with significant gay populations, such as San Francisco, gay residents had never held a political plurality. West Hollywood was unique in that an entire city, not just a district, would become politically defined by its connection to the gay community (Forest 1995, 140).

Revisiting the archival record, as this chapter has done, it becomes clear that both Moos and Forest are correct in some respects, but also left key questions unanswered. Forest rightly highlights the symbolic significance of incorporation for the gay community, something Moos

downplays. However, Moos is accurate in observing that key gay power brokers, such as Andelson, and institutional actors, such as Gay Democratic clubs, did not initially support the effort, something Forest does not fully explore. Reconciling these perspectives requires a closer examination of why major gay figures initially hesitated to support cityhood. Moos attributes this to their desire to maintain Edelman's patronage, but the deeper question is why this patronage was so valuable. A compelling argument can be made that figures like Andelson, who was also a major real estate developer and landlord, had financial stakes in preserving the status quo. This suggests that their reluctance was not only about political caution, but about economic self-interest. Ultimately, both Moos and Forest offer valid analyses, but they ask different questions and emphasize different dimensions of the cityhood movement. A more comprehensive understanding integrates their perspectives: acknowledging both the symbolic struggle over gay identity and governance, as well as the material and political calculations that shaped the timing and nature of elite support for cityhood.

4. A NEW (GAY) CITY: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The incorporation of West Hollywood and the ascendancy of three openly gay candidates to the five-member city council was nothing short of historic. For the first time, a newly formed municipality elected a city council with a majority of openly gay members, an unprecedented development that carried both symbolic and material consequences. Among the five elected officials were Valerie Terrigno, 31, president of the Stonewall Democratic Club, a gay political advocacy group; Steve Schulte[29], 38, the former executive director of the Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center; and John Heilman, 27, an attorney and secretary of the American Civil Liberties Union. The two non-gay members of the council included Alan Viterbi, 22, affiliated with the American Jewish Congress; and Helen Albert, 73, a retired schoolteacher. Valerie Terrigno, who received the most votes, was subsequently appointed mayor by her fellow council members[30], becoming the first openly lesbian mayor of a U.S. city.

News of the "first gay city" spread swiftly. National and international media quickly recognized the symbolic weight of West Hollywood's founding, often framing it through utopian or exceptionalist narratives. An article in the *New York Times* just a day before the election ran

[29] An article in the Detroit Free Press adds to Schulte's resume "posed nude for photos in gay-oriented calendars, magazines and greeting cards" (Haithman 1984).
[30] West Hollywood adopted a rotating mayor system, where city council members select one of their own to serve as mayor for a period of one year.

the headline "Vote Set on Homosexual Community" (Lindsey 1984). Headlines proclaimed the arrival of a "gay city," evoking mythic imagery such as "Gay Camelot" (Worthington 1984; Braun 1984b) and "A Gay City on the Hill?" (Pedersen 1984). Other publications emphasized both the novelty and the political implications of the moment: "West Hollywood is born–with gay council majority" (Dubin 1984), and "Gay-run city: West Hollywood's council is out of the closet" (Haithman 1984). Giving rent control advocates some credit, an *LA Times* headline read "Rent Control, Gay Rights Lead New City's Agenda" (Braun 1984d). Underscoring the significance of the first gay city, Jim Kepner, then head of the National Gay Archives in Hollywood, described the moment as "enormously symbolic and significant. It represents not only the first area in which gays have been up front about their gayness, but have come up with a majority, and a coalition" (Haithman 1984).

The symbolic impact of West Hollywood's founding west felt far and wide. Letters addressed to Mayor Terrigno from countries as distant as France and Turkey reflected both admiration and desperation. One correspondent from France wrote, "Felicitation on your victory. You are an example for a French people homosescule [sic]," while another from Turkey pleaded, "Homosexuality is completely forbidden [in Turkey]. Please, please, help me, take me near you–dear friend, my sister." These letters testify to the broader international resonance of West Hollywood's political emergence, revealing the extent to which gay communities globally saw the city as a beacon.

Not all residents were excited about the prospect of a gay city. A resident quoted in the San Francisco Examiner said, "I say keep things the way they are. You get these gay people in power and then after a while you get another San Francisco. And we don't want another San Francisco" (Beitiks 1984). Hotel developer Severyn Ashkenazy similarly voiced concern with a

gay city, saying "I think it could become an unbalanced community, and the gay community may become the most vocal. It could polarize. The predominant number of candidates are avowed homosexuals. This is not what some people want in a government" (Post 1984).

Some electeds and individuals involved with the cityhood effort sought to downplay the significance of the first gay city, largely responding to concerns of a "gay takeover". "This influx–I don't think it's going to happen any more than it does already," member Heilman said to the Detroit Free Press (Haithman 1984). His comment was a direct response to beliefs that a gay-led city would lead to an inflow of gay people. "The only thing about the character of the city is that it will improve", Heilman added. Mayor Terrigno went further, saying, "People didn't vote straight gay or not gay. I think that's a joke. Nobody wants any extra labels, period." Kepner added, "I've had friends refer to (the election) as a gay takeover. But if Chinatown had an election and became a separate city, wouldn't you expect most of the officials elected to be Chinese? In that area, it's a natural development. But it's [West Hollywood] the only such area in the country. It's a beacon in that respect" (Haithman 1984). Similarly, prominent developer and Democratic donor Sheldon Andelson said the notion of a substantial gay migration into West Hollywood is "ridiculous…It's like saying that if you elect a black mayor of Los Angeles, all the blacks in the South will move to L.A. It's a racist myth. That's the worst kind of homophobia" (Post 1984).

The flurry of media coverage of West Hollywood underscored the significance of the new gay city to both locals and the broader public. In highlighting the city's gayness, the media became a forum for politicians and the public to voice their perspective on the gay city, reflecting both their hopes and their frustrations. From the perspective of the city's new leaders, the framing of West Hollywood as a gay city presented both opportunity and challenges, the

latter of which would only become more pronounced over the ensuing months. The city and its new leaders did not have much time to revel in their success, and the public's perception of it. Indeed, the perception of success was paradoxically made more visible *and* short-term as a result of the media frenzy.

This chapter focuses on the immediate affordance of gay cityhood. The newly elected City Council not only enacted laws and policies that advanced the rights of gays and lesbians but also launched a series of ambitious initiatives to improve quality of life in West Hollywood. These efforts addressed issues such as housing affordability, development regulation, and the inclusion of other constituency groups within the city's framework of municipal nondiscrimination and recognition. At the same time, a public perception of misplaced priorities began to take root in response to the perceived progressiveness of the Council's actions. Tensions among the Council Members themselves sometimes complicated a unified front on all issues.

Call to order

The inaugural meeting of the West Hollywood City Council was held on November 29, 1984. Paul Brotzman, who became the City Manager, shared with me during an interview that the Council did not yet have a designated space, a City Hall (and would not for several months), and decided to set up a temporary meeting space in Fiesta Hall at Plummer Park. Fiesta Hall, which functioned primarily as a community meeting and event space, was not set up for office-related uses, so the Council set up make-shift offices using free-standing partitions. Out of this space,

newly appointed Councilmembers and staff could field constituent inquiries and conduct the operational business of setting up a new city.[31]

The first City Council meeting had an ambitious agenda. Both procedural and celebratory, the meeting was opened by Los Angeles County Supervisor Ed Edelman, marking the official transition from an unincorporated area to an incorporated city with a mandate of self-governance (*Minutes, November 29* 1984). The meeting agenda followed routine elements: an invocation, the Pledge of Allegiance, and the swearing-in of council members, yet the symbolic weight of the moment made the event anything but routine. The unanimous selection of Valerie Terrigno as the city's first mayor–nominated by Steve Schulte and seconded by John Heilman–was historically significant, both for her identity as the first openly lesbian elected mayor of a city, and for what her election represented: the consolidation of gay political agency in a newly formed municipality. Her appointment was followed by the selection of John Heilman as Mayor Pro Tempore, and brief speeches by local community figures including Ron Stone, who led the incorporation effort, Larry Gross of the Coalition for Economic Survival, and representatives from the Chamber of Commerce. Each of these voices reflected the interests of key constituents who played a significant role in the incorporation effort–gay activists, tenants' rights advocates, and business interests. After these comments, E. Frederick Bien, 62, was provisionally hired as temporary city manager, and Michael Jenkins, 31, an attorney for the law firm Richards, Watson, Dreyfuss & Gershon, was named city attorney.

Mike Jenkins became the City Attorney. In an interview with Jenkins, he described the beginning days of cityhood as "overwhelming". "We had no staff. We had no infrastructure. We had to rent space for City Hall. We had to hire people. And we were finding that the number of

[31] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, April 30, 2025.

issues and the number of inquiries we were getting from the community and the number of all of the things, overwhelming". Jenkins spoke to the turbulent nature of preparing for the first meeting: "We had weeks to get together everything for that first meeting, and the Council was very anxious to make a statement at its first meeting by passing (a) rent stabilization moratorium and passing some anti-discrimination laws, and getting some things on the books that would kind of send a message to the community that, you know, these were the issues that were important. And we were going to come out strong, and show the world that we were serious, and that we were going to push the limits, push the envelope, and do some things nobody else had done"[32]

Among the council's first actions included establishing key administrative structures and ordinances, including rolling back rents, establishing anti-eviction measures, and enacting a moratorium on building permits. A crowd estimated at approximately 500 attendees attended the meeting, filling the auditorium and spilling out onto the surrounding grounds "crowded at windows to get a look at the proceedings, which began with boisterous applause and a loud, mass recitation of the pledge of allegiance" (Roderick 1984c). The size of the celebratory crowd and the presence of local dignitaries and national media reflected the broader resonance of West Hollywood's formation, not only as a new city but as the "first gay city". Heilman shared with me this symbolic significance: "In terms of symbolism, having the first City Council where a majority of the council was openly gay. Well, that was huge. We got attention from all around the world. I could barely get to the first meeting, because there were reporters, we had reporters from Japan and France and everywhere. 100 cameras there".[33] The Los Angeles Times described the event as a "celebration" with an "overflow crowd", emphasizing the ceremonial tone of the

[32] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, March 29, 2024.
[33] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, March 20, 2024.

evening. Newly elected Council Member Steve Schulte invoked Harvey Milk, an iconic gay political forebear, to roaring applause. “Harvey was a pioneer who showed us we can all contribute to the public good” Schulte proclaimed. In doing so, Schulte situated the founding of West Hollywood within a genealogy of gay civil rights struggle and martyrdom. Further linking the symbolic emergence of the city’s new government to gay political struggle, Judge Ran Schrader, one of the first openly gay judges in California, administered the oath of office (Roderick 1984c).

While media coverage of the event overwhelmingly focused on the significance of the “first gay city”, it also highlighted the implications for renters, who constituted 85 percent of West Hollywood. The fact that the new council immediately passed tenant protections signaled a commitment to progressive policy responsive to the city’s renters, which of course included gays and seniors (Roderick 1984b). Four of the five elected council members were endorsed by the well-resourced Coalition for Economic Survival (CES) whose principal mandate was to increase affordability through tenant protections and other progressive housing policies.

The inauguration of West Hollywood was a convergence of spectacle, symbolism, and governance that set the tone for the city’s early political identity. The city was founded with a sense of purpose defined by social justice and local control, and, at least on this particular day, fully enjoyed the moment.

Getting down to business

Mike Jenkins, West Hollywood’s first City Attorney, shared with me that “the beginning of West Hollywood was quite a bit more chaotic, interesting, in some respects, than any other city I had been involved in”. Jenkins had been involved in a number of incorporation processes in the past.

Part of the challenge in West Hollywood was the council's early ambition. "The City Council had an agenda, multiple agendas, and they were very anxious to make their mark" Jenkins said. "And to and to put into law all kinds of things that, you know. They were a very progressive group. They were very anxious to legislate".[34]

The Council quickly set to work addressing a wide range of foundational issues. In addition to establishing a temporary City Hall at Plummer Park, the Council had to hire temporary staff and arrange for equipment and insurance. The Council adopted key health, safety, and building ordinances in partnership with Los Angeles County and took initial steps toward implementing rent control, including a hotline and public communication. They also voted to join several regional government organizations and discussed issues such as preferential parking, parking meter maintenance, and staff support for Council Members. Early policy concerns included smoking bans in city facilities, building permit moratorium exceptions, and alternative housing initiatives. Public comment was encouraged, with citizen input on rent control, building permits, and committee appointments, while plans were made for televising meetings and forming citizen committees. (*Minutes, December 3* 1984; *Minutes, December 6* 1984; *Minutes, December 13* 1984; *Minutes, December 20* 1984).

At the December 6 meeting, Mayor Terrigno presented a proposal for five council subcommittees, with two councilmembers on each committee:

1. Economic Development, Small Business Development, Finance, and Budget
    a. Chair: Viterbi
    b. Member: Terrigno
2. Management, Personnel, Contracts, Intergovernmental Relations, & Transportation

[34] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, March 29, 2024.

    a. Chair: Albert
    b. Member: Heilman
3. Structural Planning, Zoning, Parking, Public Works
    a. Chair: Schulte
    b. Member: Viterbi
4. Parks, Public Spaces, Public Safety, Cultural Affairs, Tourism, Recreation
    a. Chair: Terrigno
    b. Member: Schulte
5. Human Services, Health, Housing, Rent Control
    a. Chair: Heilman
    b. Member: Albert

During the third meeting on December 20, 1984, in what appears to have been a tense exchange between Heilman and Terrigno, Heilman requested that the council revisit how committee assignments had been made, stating his "concern" about the way the Council had reached its decision, and asked someone to make a motion to reconsider. Mayor Terrigno reminded the council that "the minority cannot make a motion" and moved on to the next agenda item (*Minutes, December 20* 1984). The exchange would seem to foreshadow a tense dynamic between Terrigno and Heilman, two of the three out gay City Council members. The tension speaks to the not-always harmonious relationship between the Council members, despite their alignment on multiple policy issues.

Moving into 1985, while continuing to build the city's administrative foundation, the Council advanced several policy priorities on social justice issues. On January 24, the Council unanimously adopted Resolution No. 35, expressing support for Assembly Bill 1 (AB-1) that

prohibits employment discrimination based on sexual orientation. They also introduced Ordinance No. 22, which established a domestic partnership[35] registry, granting registered partners certain legal recognitions within the city, including visitation rights in healthcare and detention facilities (*Minutes, January 24* 1985). On February 21, the Council proclaimed February 22, 1985, as Lesbians and Gays Against Apartheid Day, signaling solidarity with both gay rights and the international movement against apartheid in South Africa (*Minutes, February 21* 1985).

In addition to prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation, the Council passed ordinances banning gender-based dress codes in bars, mandating equal pay for men and women doing jobs of comparable value, and banning discriminatory dress codes in bars This latter ordinance reflected long standing claims that West Hollywood's clubs and bars were racist and sexist. Gilda Haas, a CES activist who served as member Heilman's aid, spoke to me about this exclusion:

> The clubs, the discos, were super racist…If you wanted to go to a club…it would say, "No open-toed shoes", which was really designed to exclude women… and like, "no hats", and that was designed to exclude Black people…There were other things. When you got to the front of the line, it says "we reserve the right to ask you for three picture IDs"...If any of these subtle hints didn't take, then, nobody walks around with three pictures…In the little City Council meetings, the club owners would come and defend themselves, and their defenses were really, really, really bad…So the first laws were really about civil rights.[36]

[35] Berkeley's domestic partnership law preceded West Hollywood's, but it only applied to public employees. West Hollywood's ordinance made it so anyone could register.
[36] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, December 5, 2024.

City officials subsequently enacted a "shoe rule" aimed at bars that discriminated against men wearing women's clothing, or that welcomed gay men but turned away lesbians. The ordinance made it illegal for bars or restaurants to deny entry to someone based on clothing that did not match their assigned sex at birth, and also prevented them from asking for more than one form of ID to prove someone is over 21, which was widely recognized as an effort to keep out Black and Hispanic customers by demanding that they have three forms of identification (Lindsey, 1985).

The city also reviewed its pay structure to ensure compliance and extended full employee benefits to domestic partners, regardless of gender or marital status. Taken together, the package of policies implemented in the City's first few months were boldly progressive, a fact not lost on the media. In a *New York Times* article titled "West Hollywood Acting on Pledges" the reporter Robert Lindsey wrote "The City of West Hollywood is not yet four months old, but it is already evident that it is not an ordinary place. West Hollywood, its founders say, is moving toward fulfilling their vision of a "model city" free of discrimination against homosexuals or other minority groups." Mayor Valerie Terrigno is quoted saying "To the degree we can do something different, we'll do it" (Lindsey 1985).

While the city followed through on its legislative commitments to anti-discrimination, it also took highly visible and symbolic action. In one high-profile incident, on January 16, 1985, Mayor Terrigno, followed by a crowd of supporters, marched down to Barney's Beanery, a well-known local restaurant and bar, and personally removed a sign reading "Fagots Stay Out". (Figure 4.1) Rather than trying to prevent the signs removal, the restaurant owners dismissed the sign's significance, arguing that it had hung there for decades, and claimed that the council lacked a sense of humor (Braun 1985b). Regardless, the media interpreted the Mayor's actions as taking seriously that the city would not tolerate bigotry, symbolic or otherwise (Lindsey 1985;

Upi 1985b; 1985a). While few formal complaints of discrimination were reported at the time, the Council's early actions sent a strong message about the kind of city West Hollywood intended to be, one built on equity, inclusiveness, and a fresh start for *all* its residents (Kenney 2001).



Figure 4.1. 'Fagots Stay Out' (Sic) at Barney's Beanery. Source: (Pat Rocco/ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives at USC Libraries

Beyond advancing gay rights, the Council demonstrated a commitment to serving the city's broader population by implementing policies that addressed the needs of other key constituencies. This included establishing local bus routes for seniors and Jewish residents (many of whom did not drive), and ensuring city offices remained open during Christmas, recognizing that not all residents observed the holiday.

On renter and housing issues, West Hollywood enacted a six-month moratorium on rent increases and evictions, implemented a rent rollback, and later passed a robust rent control ordinance that included provisions for mandatory building upkeep such as painting and carpet replacement (Braun and Rainey 1985; Lindsey 1985). To the *New York Times*, Mayor Terrigno continued: "It really isn't only a gay city," she said of West Hollywood. "Everyone has a lot of hope that we'll do it right here. We have a chance to start at the beginning and have a model city. We have a good chance, a real opportunity to do it" (Lindsey 1985).

The swift action taken by the newly formed West Hollywood City Council on multiple social justice issues was a critical early step in establishing the city's progressive reputation. Indeed, the civil rights measures adopted by the city early on became models for other municipalities. "A lot of our policies got replicated because we were involved in the National League of Cities and other organizations," Heilman shared with me. Heilman emphasized the model that West Hollywood became for other municipalities seeking to undertake similarly progressive action:

> I remember when we did our AIDS discrimination ordinance–people wanted copies of it so that they could implement it at their local level. And then that builds a groundswell. And eventually, you know, the Americans with Disabilities Act covered discrimination on the basis of HIV, but our domestic partnership ordinance, which, you know, nowadays seems so quaint and antiquated, but at the time, it was the only recognition for same sex couples and smaller communities, other cities, took our ordinance and copied it. And then eventually, the state of California adopted domestic partnership law. And I think it really,

> in many ways, normalized relationships so that when gay marriage was being fought for was like, well, what's the big deal? Right?[37]

Heilman's emphasized the critical response of West Hollywood to the AIDS epidemic, which was already unfolding by the time the City incorporated. Heilman's view also underscores the perceived role the West Hollywood played in paving the way for broader gay civil rights, namely gay marriage.

For gay constituencies, the immediate impacts of cityhood were clear. The City Council swiftly passed some of the most progressive ordinances in the country, such as an ordinance that established a domestic partnership registry that granted partners certain legal recognitions within the city, including visitation rights in healthcare and detention facilities (*Minutes, January 24* 1985)[38]. Emerging in the early years of the AIDS epidemic, the Council responded with relative speed (a topic I'll revisit in greater depth in the next chapter) to an unfolding public health crisis that disproportionately affected gay men, especially at a time when governmental action at all levels was frequently slow, inadequate, or absent. The Council implemented some of the first municipal AIDS policies in the United States, allocating funding for services such as free or low-cost testing, hospice care, and legal assistance for individuals living with AIDS, while also enacting anti-discrimination ordinances to protect their rights. From an inclusive and progressive governance standpoint, these early actions made West Hollywood a local and national model.

However, initial responses from council members to media coverage revealed early concerns and cautious effort to manage how the city's identity was publicly framed. Even as the council prioritized protections for the gay community, and made public demonstrations of it (see

[37] Interview by author, Los Angeles, March 20, 2024.
[38] The City of Berkeley had a domestic partnership law that preceded West Hollywood's, but it only applied to public employees. West Hollywood's ordinance enabled anyone to register.

Barney's Beanery) there was a clear concern about West Hollywood being reduced to the label of "only a gay city." This tension reflected a continuity with the pre-incorporation period, when cityhood advocates had strategically built a coalition across diverse constituencies–renters, seniors, immigrants, and gay activists–requiring careful balancing of different interests and identities. Pro-incorporation advocates understood that broad-based support had been key to winning incorporation, and now, in the public eye, the city's elected leaders sought to position West Hollywood as a city that could sustain itself politically, economically, and socially. In the immediate aftermath of incorporation, discussions about the city's future shifted from campaign-era coalition-building toward more practical questions of governance.

The honeymoon is over

Despite the wave of early legislative accomplishments, the city struggled to find its administrative footing following incorporation, a fact not lost on local media and public commentators. A year into cityhood, a Los Angeles Times article summed up the growing pains: "West Hollywood is progressing at an infant's pace, learning to crawl, but frequently bumping into walls" Despite early accomplishments and a projected $7.4-million budget surplus, public perception increasingly framed the council as inexperienced and overwhelmed.

To demonstrate the city's sense of incompetence, the LA Times article pointed to the fact that the council needed a temporary city hall but found every option unsatisfactory. "Nothing was done for months, while the staff grew and space dwindled. In mid-May, the council finally signed a three-year lease to occupy the second-floor of a Santa Monica Boulevard shopping gallery.)" (Braun 1985b). The piece then quotes Ron Stone, the gay activist who spearheaded the incorporation effort, "'They should have been solving vital management problems then," said

Stone. “Instead, they were preoccupied with less important social issues that could have waited. The votes would have still been there.”’ Stone referred to the council's early focus on landmark civil rights legislation, including domestic partnership recognition, protection of Sabbath worship for Orthodox Jews and others, and the prohibition of discriminatory dress codes in bars.

The article captured the response of council members, however, who defended these early measures as essential to the city’s identity. ‘“It was a statement that had to be made,” said Councilman Stephen Schulte. “We are different from other cities, and our attention to social issues shows that as well as anything.”’ But according to reporting in the LA Times, even Schulte wondered aloud whether the council had “lost sight of its nuts-and-bolts issues” (Braun 1985).

Rent control, despite its widespread appeal given the 85% of residents renting, was another point of tension, namely because it was fiercely contested by landlords. After county controls were phased out, it was clear that West Hollywood would pass its own regulations, modeled after the strict laws of Santa Monica and Berkeley. Council members John Heilman and Helen Albert, both closely aligned with the well-resourced Coalition for Economic Survival (CES), consistently supported tenant protections. Steve Schulte shared during my interview some of the dynamics of the first City Council:

> The liberals on [the issue of rent control who were] the strongest were John Heilman and Helen Albert. And they were a little bit distrusting of us, a little bit condescending. Valerie was a little bit in the middle, and Alan Viterbi and I were both seen as more moderate. And what does that mean? That just meant that the most aggressive ideas about rent control didn't come from us generally. They came from the other end of the table. But you know, you have a bunch of landlords who you know as friends and who are

> constituents saying, “Don't do this. You're going to ruin the city and the economy,” right? And then, on the other hand, a bunch of old ladies, excuse me, who [were asking] “who was CES?” you're not going to [get far]. “We don't trust You”[39]

Schulte underscores some of the dispositions of the council members, not only towards certain policies, but towards each other. His reflection is also revealing in terms of how the council members positioned themselves in relation to what were perceived as more progressive policies, like rent control, and how many constituents, particularly land lords, were skeptical of the Coalition for Economic Survival, had endorsed all of the sitting council members with the exception of Steve Schulte.

The *LA Times* covered the city’s public hearings on the rent ordinance, which it described as charged and combative. Landlords decried the measures as "communist," while tenants hurled back equally bitter insults. At one meeting, a Russian immigrant landlord muttered darkly, “What next? They’ll be building a stop on Fairfax Avenue for the Moscow subway.” The final law capped rent increases at 75% of the Consumer Price Index and restricted rent hikes between tenancies (Braun 1985). Landlords felt betrayed. “Sure, the tenants think it’s great,” lamented apartment owners’ leader Grafton Tanquary. “But we’re the victims of discrimination, pure and simple. Who wants to be a landlord?” In protest, some landlords painted at least two dozen buildings bright red, a vivid symbol of their anger at what they called "rent control communism" (Braun 1985). “Landlords thought the [City] Council was crazy,” Abbe Land shared with me during an interview. “And you know the business community didn’t know what to make of this council.”[40]

[39] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, December 10, 2024.
[40] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, February 26, 2025.

Paul Brotzman similarly spoke to the backlash rent control created:

> Oh my god. We had city council meetings that went to 2, 2:30, 3 o'clock in the morning over that issue. And part of the controversy around it was that, on the one hand, you had tenants who really were living on very limited fixed income, who needed protection And that was the purpose of the ordinance. And on the other hand, you also had many, many, many small apartment owners, and that was their livelihood. They were, you know, small,
>
> independent individuals who might own a three bedroom or four bedroom unit, and their retirement income or livelihood was based on the rent income. And so for them, rental stabilization was a challenge, because how do you repair? How do you fix? How do you take care of your property, maintain it? how to escalate rents at some point in time to reflect cost of living changes? And so on.[41]

While rent controls dramatically shifted economic and political power toward tenants–spurring a flood of demands for apartment refurbishments–other feared impacts, such as depressed property values or bond market resistance, had yet to materialize. “I don’t think rent control has hurt anyone outside landlords,” said Larry Gross, the director of CES, whose influence remained strong heading into the next election cycle. The *LA Times* piece portrayed a growing disillusionment among civic leaders and business owners. “I think there’s a sense that the council doesn’t know what it’s doing, that we’re the town fool of America,” said Robert Conrich, who had been involved in the incorporation effort. Ron Stone, a friend of Robert’s, agreed, lamenting the rise of West Hollywood jokes in Johnny Carson’s late-night monologues. Abbe Land shared that part of the perception that the Council didn’t know what it was doing was a response to its

[41] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, April 30, 2025.

newness, "'Who are these people saying what we [business owners] can do? What do they know?' And the truth is, what did we know? We were so young. And none of us had started a city".[42]

According to the *LA Times*, "West Hollywood's image wasn't helped by a vote voiding Christmas as a paid holiday for the growing city staff" (Braun 1985). The article also mentions a "power struggle between Mayor Terrigno and John Heilman over the ceremonial mayor's job." This struggle took place after a more serious scandal took hold, one that placed the city's first Mayor at the center of the city's challenges.

Scandal and backlash

On August 8, 1985, Valerie Terrigno formally resigned from her position as Mayor. Terrigno was convicted for misuse of funds while she was director of the L.A-based Crossroads Counseling Service, a role she had held before running for City Council. During the August 8 City Council meeting, Terrigno delivered closing remarks, reflecting on the city's progress over the past eight months and affirming her continued commitment to supporting the city's mission of unity and responsible governance (*Minutes, August 8* 1985). As the meeting continued, the City Council turned its attention to reorganizing leadership. A motion was introduced by Councilmember Schulte and seconded by Councilmember Albert to vacate the mayoral position and nominate John Heilman as the new Mayor. Before the vote, council members took time to thank Terrigno for her service. Councilmember Viterbi led the tributes, presenting her with a plaque in recognition of her pioneering leadership. Councilmembers Albert, Schulte, and

[42] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, February 26, 2025.

Heilman echoed the sentiments, with Heilman presenting her a gavel plaque as a symbol of appreciation and transition.

Community members also stepped forward to express their gratitude. Tony Melia from the Chamber of Commerce commended Terrigno's dedication. Norman Chramoff highlighted the importance of a woman serving as the city's first mayor, praising her competence and her effort in "taking on the issue of West Hollywood being a "gay city". Ms. Tremaglio presented another plaque and advocated for a future charter amendment to extend the mayoral term beyond eight months. Sally Fiske of the *West Hollywood Paper* spoke movingly about Terrigno's impact, noting how she had become a heroic figure, giving women and lesbians a sense of dignity and visibility rarely afforded to them.

With no objections, the motion passed, and John Heilman was officially declared Mayor of West Hollywood. In his acceptance, Heilman thanked Terrigno for her work and expressed gratitude to the Council for their support. He spoke of the city's opportunity to become a "model city." The Council then turned to other matters of city leadership. A motion was introduced by Mayor Heilman and seconded by Terrigno to vacate the position of Mayor Pro Tempore and elect Councilmember Steve Schulte to the role. Again, the motion passed without objection. In a final round of administrative appointments, the Council approved the selection of Jerry Shnell as Assistant City Manager and Lloyd Long as the city's Human Services Director, with unanimous support (*Minutes, August 8* 1985). The meeting marked a turning point in West Hollywood's history–closing a first chapter of foundational leadership and ushering in new stewardship while honoring the contributions that had shaped the city's early days and months.

Placing the issue of leadership aside, the Terrigno scandal further complicated the city's efforts to maintain a respectable image, and prove that it could govern effectively. The media

was often blamed for sensationalizing the drama unfolding among West Hollywood's leadership. As if to document the media narrative, *The Advocate* wrote "The transfer of short-term mayoralties between Terrigno and Heilman was colored in the media as a power struggle…A number of gays and nongays have said that the media presented biased reportage designed to discredit the council–particularly Terrigno, a highly visible and popular mayor. John Heilman, the new Mayor, told *The ADVOCATE*, "I think the media have overemphasized some of the problems we've had. I think a lot of that has to do with the fact that we do have a majority that is gay or lesbian and…that has caused a great deal more attention than we deserve and has certainly exacerbated some of the problems we've had." These factors, particularly the alleged dispute between Terrigno, who received the most votes during the incorporation election, and John Heilman, who is backed by the powerful rent-control group, Coalition for Economic Survival (CES)–may have been responsible for the large media and audience turnout at the transfer of power, where it was rumored there would be a "fight to the finish" between the two. Instead, there was a smooth transfer of power, which included the naming of Steve Schulte, also gay, as the new mayor pro tempore. Schulte offered Terrigno his "heartfelt appreciation and respect…for a very honorable eight months" (Brooke and Dwyer 1985).

Just before transferring the mayoral gavel to Heilman, Terrigno, who had three and a half years left on the council, told the assembled crowd: "it's been an honor to serve as the first mayor of the City of West Hollywood…we have the most comprehensive gay and lesbian and human rights legislation of anywhere in the world. Despite what you read and what you hear, we're all here to work for the citizens of West Hollywood and that is our goal. Let us move on and change titles tonight, but not goals; let's remain together: a diverse city whose leadership can work together to make this an ideal city" (Brooke and Dwyer 1985).

While the scandal surrounding Mayor Terrigno deepened the perception of West Hollywood as chaotic and unstable, it coincided with a public backlash against what was viewed by many residents and public commentators as a city government that was overly concerned with progressive issues.

To some the city's gay reputation was to blame for a lack of tourism. A 1985 article in the *West Hollywood Paper* put it thusly, "Some question whether or not the city's image has suffered enough since cityhood to have had an adverse impact on tourism here. The city's image as a predominantly gay city is seen by many as detrimental, and something the city needs to change." As evidence of this perspective, the article quoted Kay McGraw, the Chamber of Commerce's executive director, who said "The image has been very, very harmful. We've had proof of that. The Hyatt Hotel does its central booking in Omaha or somewhere, and when they have visitors to Southern California, they're asked which area they want to stay in. Without a doubt, the drop in interest in West Hollywood has been huge. They often say they want to stay anywhere but West Hollywood" (La Voie 1985). At the time, even major publications like The Wall Street Journal suggested that fears around AIDS might be discouraging people from visiting the area. Local and regional media continued to debate whether the city's reputation, particularly around its gay population, was having a negative impact.

Some residents levied personal, homophobic attacks to express their disdain for perceived deviant behaviors. In a letter to the L.A. Times, Brent Unsler (1986) likens the young city to a baby: "The Gay City" has stirred up a National Enquirer thrill that we haven't seen since the Rajneesh assault on poor little Antelope. All this attention has gone to the baby's head. Even the smartest baby has to have time to learn–and to decide what it wants to be when it grows up." To begin to "polish up its image" he recommends West Hollywood do the following:

1) "Tell their mayor John Heilman to stop appearing in public in 'black leather drag' outfits, with his hair sprayed 'shocking blue,' or in white 'Sheik of Arabi' balloon pants with 'dainty elf pumps'.
2) Confiscate all the nude porno pictures of their next-in-line-to-be-mayor Steve Schulte who spends way too much time pumping up his pectorals and not nearly enough on learning how to speak out of *one* side of his mouth.
3) And will someone please wake up Helen Albert out of her "kindergarten fairy sleep." She'll make a motion at City Council (from a prepared text) and then vote against it when the roll is called".

"The best way to change West Hollywood's image" Unger continues, "is to get rid of the clowns who are running the "Animal House government" there. (Election: April, 1986). Who wants to live or invest in a god-less, anti-American town that has even banned Christmas as a legal holiday?" (Unsler 1986).

In an interview with historian Moira Kenney, Jodi Curlee, West Hollywood's director of social services at the time, responded to criticisms that the city was overly focused on gay issues. She characterized such critiques as a distortion of the city's broader agenda: "Backlashers think that the city is a one issue city. This is so different from reality that it is scary…They think that one queer equals one hundred queers and that is scary" (Kenney, 2001, p. 57).

As part of the city council's efforts to solicit the perspectives and concerns of the city's many different constituencies, the city asked local business owners how they felt about the new city government and the business environment. The responses were often negative. In one letter to the city council, a business owner made their frustrations clear, "There is far too much negative publicity and media attention to gays and grays and Russians. . . . We are perceived as

anti-religious socialists who think making money is for the purpose of feeding the needs of homosexuals and senior citizens" ("Letter to City" 1985). The sentiment that the city paid too much attention to gays, seniors, and immigrants, in addition to the issue of rent control, was often wrapped up into a view of the city as 'ultra leftist'.

Another resident, Mel Wick, wrote a letter, titled *'Scrubbing Down' West Hollywood* to the *LA Times*, in which she warned that, "Our image, "City of Eternal Socialism," will continue to gain momentum unless our City Council refrained from surface decisions tailored to its personal interest and desires" (Wick 1986). To Wick, the outsized role of the Coalition for Economic Survival (CES) was part of the problem, "As we all know, three council members are running for reelection this April, and hopefully, it will not be the Coalition for Economic Survival [but residents] that give the council members their next performance evaluation".

To Debbie Potter, West Hollywood's recently appointed Economic Development Manager, the city's image problem essentially came down to one of marketing and branding: "I think we just need to enhance our image and educate the outside population about what we have to offer and why West Hollywood is a nice place to visit and shop, eat, go to the clubs. It's really a matter of marketing and promoting our city, and basically enhancing the image we already have". To Helen Goss, the city's Public Information Officer, the city also needed a new visual identity. She is quoted saying "people don't have a visual identity of what is West Hollywood. They see Beverly Hills, and they see Los Angeles, and they don't really know what the boundaries are. A lot of people don't connect that the Sunset Strip is a part of West Hollywood. I think that's a very strong tourist attraction. I've heard people say the Strip is one of the most popular streets in the world outside of perhaps Broadway in New York, and a lot of people don't make that geographic identity with West Hollywood" (La Voie 1985).

Conclusion

The aftermath of the immediate post-incorporation period was, to use Mike Jenkins' word, "chaotic". The administrative hurdles of putting together a new city were immense in-and-of themselves, and the Council and its staff had to scramble together a functioning government, and space out of which to hold meetings, within a few weeks. Despite this, the Council acted quickly on a number of policy goals, including passing civil rights legislation affecting gays and lesbians, racial minorities, and people with disabilities, and measures that signaled religious inclusion. The city's swift action on rent control and curtailing development made good on the cityhood advocates' promise to keep West Hollywood affordable and maintain its character of the built environment.

At the same time, like any city, West Hollywood's city council faced pressures from constituents and outside observers that shaped perceptions of its governance. Critics often portrayed the city as dysfunctional and overly preoccupied with progressive, identity-based issues. As media coverage and community surveys reveal, these portrayals were often tinged with homophobia, reflecting anxieties about the city's dual identity as both a "gay city" and a champion of progressive economic policies. That these critiques were marked by homophobia, is an experience unique to West Hollywood, given that other cities, which did not have openly gay-majority city councils, were not subject to the same forms of scrutiny. Tensions among council members, exacerbated by the ousting of Councilmember Valerie Terrigno on charges of embezzlement, further fueled doubts about the Council's competence and integrity. Even prior to these controversies, the archival record indicates that some council members felt compelled to downplay the city's gay identity. This impulse can be read as a response both to perceived

demands for broader inclusivity and as an attempt to distance the Council, and the city itself, from the stigma still associated with homosexuality at the time.

As the conclusion of the chapter shows, City staff began to see the issues outlined above as a matter of public relations. This set the stage for a marking and rebranding campaign that will be explored in chapter six. A much more pressing issue facing the new City, the gay community specifically, was quickly taking shape. The emerging AIDS crisis was already in full swing by the time cityhood was achieved, and presented West Hollywood with a far more urgent and profound challenge. How the City responded to this challenge is the focus of the next chapter.

5. AN EPIDEMIC: WEST HOLLYWOOD'S RESPONSE TO THE AIDS CRISIS

By the time West Hollywood achieved cityhood, the AIDS[43] crisis was already beginning to unfold. However it was not until the mid-to-late 1980s that the epidemic became a central issue in public discourse. The first reported cases of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) epidemic in the U.S. were in June 1981. The number of cases and deaths among people with AIDS increased rapidly during the 1980s, peaked in the early 1990s, and then declined with advancements in medicine and increasing awareness of how HIV is transmitted (CDC, n.d.). Like several other gay enclaves with relatively high concentrations of gay residents, West Hollywood was disproportionately affected by the epidemic, which exacted a devastating toll.

Nearly everyone involved with either the incorporation campaign or the immediate post-incorporation years was affected by the epidemic. The trauma was expressed during interviews with former activists, politicians, and staff members. Gilda Haas, an activist who worked on the incorporation campaign and was a rent control activist, spoke to the impact of AIDs on the community: "So many of the people who were involved in the cityhood [effort] died. People

[43] By 1982 the CDC started using the term AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). It was not until 1986 that the virus was officially named HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus). By the late 1980s the epidemic was increasingly referred to as HIV/AIDS to distinguish between the virus (HIV) and the condition (AIDS) it causes.

were terrified".[44] At the peak of the crisis, estimates suggest that more than 10% of the city's population was living with HIV, and many others had already died from AIDS-related complications. (CDDF 1998). "It was really horrible. I went to more different kinds of funerals than you can imagine" former council member Steve Schulte shared with me.[45] The emotional and psychological toll on the community was immense, with nearly everyone in the gay community losing friends, partners, or family members. "Everybody came together" Abbe Land, also a former council member, shared with me. "Because I don't think you could live here and not know somebody [affected by AIDS]".[46] "I was losing a staff member every three or four weeks," Paul Brotzman, the former City Manager, said during an interview. "I can't tell you how many times I did eulogies for a city employee. And that was hard...was probably one of the most difficult times of being a city manager" (Brotzman interview).[47]

Taken together, the accounts of city leaders and staffers reveal the immense challenges of launching a new municipal government in the midst of a public health crisis, and the trauma that accompanied it. That West Hollywood responded so proactively to the AIDS epidemic is all the more remarkable given the intense stigma surrounding the disease and the widespread governmental inaction at the time. In contrast to the sluggish or absent responses from many local, state, and federal authorities, West Hollywood acted swiftly, motivated in part by its sizable gay population and the presence of openly gay officials on the City Council. This chapter focuses on how the city became a national leader in municipal AIDS policy, pioneering efforts that included funding for free or low-cost testing, hospice care, and legal assistance for those

[44] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, December 5, 2024.
[45] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, December 10, 2024.
[46] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, February 26, 2025.
[47] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, April 30, 2025.

living with AIDS, as well as enacting some of the earliest local anti-discrimination ordinances to protect their rights. It also highlights some of the enduring consequences of stigma associated with AIDS, which fueled concerns over tourism and the economy.

AIDS stigma and public policy

In addition to the death toll, HIV fueled widespread fear and deepened existing stigmas against the gay community (D. W. Purcell 2021). "You couldn't get health care. You couldn't get people to see you. You couldn't go to a dentist. People were terrified of the plague" (Haas interview). According to the CDC's HIV surveillance reports, gay and bisexual men and other men who have sex with men (MSM) have consistently represented the majority of HIV cases.[48] HIV emerged in a sociopolitical climate where, despite some progress following the Stonewall uprising and the removal of homosexuality from the American Psychiatric Association's list of mental disorders, pervasive prejudice and discrimination persisted (Herek et al. 2007). In the 1980s, nearly 20 states still had anti-sodomy laws that criminalized sexual activity between members of the same sex, or, in some cases, all non-procreative sex. This stigma was further legitimized by the U.S. Supreme Court's 1986 decision in Bowers v. Hardwick (478 U.S. 186), which upheld Georgia's right to enforce its sodomy law, even against private, consensual conduct between adults (D. Purcell and Hick 1996). Although infrequently enforced, these laws were routinely used to justify broader forms of discrimination in legal, institutional, and social contexts. As Purcell puts it bluntly: "When HIV took hold in the United States, same-sex behaviors and relationships had no legal protections, gay parents often lost their parental rights

[48] Since the early 1990s, the epidemic has placed an increasingly disproportionate burden on MSM from racial and ethnic minority groups, highlighting the intersection of public health inequities and systemic marginalization (CDC, n.d.).

during divorce, violence and victimization was too common, and, in almost all circumstances, discrimination was legal in employment (including the military), housing, and social services" (2021).

Scholars have explored how public attitudes, policies, and local politics shaped the response to HIV/AIDS, especially in relation to marginalized communities (Takahashi 1998). Takahashi has shown how stigma–especially related to HIV/AIDS, homelessness, and drug use–heavily influenced where housing and health services could be located and how they were funded. Fear of these populations living with HIV/AIDS often translated into political resistance, which blocked the creation of necessary support systems. The "Not In My Backyard" (NIMBY) phenomenon, where communities opposed locating HIV/AIDS housing or service facilities in their neighborhoods, was both a land use and safety concern that reflected moral judgments and fears of contamination or declining property values. Takahashi makes the point that while HIV/AIDS was a national issue, much of the fight over services happened at the local level, where city councils, neighborhood groups, and local media shape public opinion and policy. Even when federal funding was available, local resistance could stall or kill projects (Takahashi 1998).

Thus, the AIDS crisis brought a devastating dual burden: the profound loss of life on one hand, and intense social stigmatization on the other. For leaders engaged in the fight against the disease, this meant confronting not only the urgent medical and humanitarian challenges, but also the pervasive cultural and political biases that accompanied the epidemic. In West Hollywood, where the crisis struck at the heart of the community, these dynamics were especially acute. By the time cityhood was achieved, the city was already witnessing increasing numbers of AIDS-related deaths. Among the victims were prominent actors–including Ron

Stone and Sheldon Andelson[49]–who played important roles in shaping the city. On top of this, as the city became increasingly self-conscious about its public image, and as AIDS became more deeply associated with gay men in the broader public imagination, concerns grew among residents, business owners, and public commentators. Many feared that West Hollywood's emerging reputation as a "gay city" would alienate potential visitors, investors, and new residents, jeopardizing the city's economic development and long-term viability. Thus, even as West Hollywood positioned itself at the forefront of progressive responses to AIDS, it also faced difficult questions about whether and how to manage its public image.

West Hollywood's response to AIDS

The first city council minutes where discussion of AIDS appears is March 7, 1985. Member Schulte introduced Daniel Warner of Shanti Foundation, a nonprofit organization providing emotional and practical support to people with AIDS. Warner asked the council to consider sponsoring an annual 5 - 10K run, with the proceeds being distributed to community organizations, including Shanti, the AIDS Project Los Angeles (APLA), and Aid for Aids, whose "projects involved Aids related problems". The council approved a motion by member Schulte to support the effort (*Minutes, March 7* 1985). By the April 25 council meeting, Schulte reported to the council that the run was to be scheduled for September 8, 1985, and that it would be an annual city event. The council approved a $2,500 matching fund for the annual 5K/10K event, and established a five member committee to be responsible for the event (*Minutes, April 25* 1985).

[49]Ron Stone passed away on August 27, 1988, at the age of 40 (LA Times 1988). Sheldon Andelson passed away on December 29, 1987, at age 56 (Roderick 1987).

At the April 4 1985 meeting, discussion returned to the Shanti Foundation. Member Albert introduced the item, detailing the functions of the foundation and their financial difficulties, and their request for emergency financial assistance. Present at the meeting was Dr. F. James Gay, Co-chair of Shanti Foundation. A psychiatrist in private practice who volunteers with Shanti, Gay spoke to the critical work of Shanti in this moment of crisis, and "strongly appealed for help in their financial difficulties." Four other individuals subsequently appealed to the council to support emergency funding to the organization (*Minutes, April 4* 1985):

> Mark Hendsch, 738 North Alfred St., 6652-7123, AIDS victim, stated that the Shanti Foundation had offered very important services to him and to other people with AIDS, and strongly urged that the Foundation be helped to survive.
>
> Marin James, 879 ¾ N. San Vicente Blvd., 659-1284, Director of Shanti Foundation, stated that many people are working 80 hours per week without pay, and asked that the Council seriously consider helping the Foundation, because they do not have time for fund-raising.
>
> Ivy Bottini, 1627 Hillhurst Ave., Board of Directors, stated that there are very few sources of funding for the Shanti Foundation because it is not as well known as some others.
>
> Andy Davi, 9021 Harratt St., 276-2772, Board of Directors, Volunteer Counselor, AIDS victim, urged that the Council help the work of Shanti.

The Council responded with concern and support but also recognized the need to create a formal process for handling such emergency funding requests. Councilmember Heilman proposed tabling the item until the next meeting so that the City Manager and City Attorney could return with guidelines for evaluating future requests, given that the city's budget had not yet allocated funds for this purpose. Mayor Terrigno agreed, emphasizing the importance of establishing a clear procedure to manage similar cases going forward. While the council did not revisit the issue until three meetings later (the council had spent the intervening meetings setting up interviews for planning consultants for the General Plan), on April 18 the Council agreed to approve $6,828 for emergency funding to Shanti Foundation.

The Council continued to spearhead efforts to address the AIDS crisis. On June 20, 1985, the Council voted to approve June 22nd as the "official day of memory for persons with AIDS, their loved ones, and organizations related to AIDS" (*Minutes, June 20* 1985). On June 27, 1985, the Council approved funding for several social service grant proposals, including $171,248 to AIDS Project L.A., $50,000 to Shanti Foundation, and $132,000 to the Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center (GLCSC)[50] (*Minutes, June 27* 1985).

At the July 11, 1985 Council meeting, Member Schulte asked that Agenda item 21: Discrimination against persons with AIDS be moved up in the agenda as there was a person present in the audience who wished to speak on the topic. According to the minutes, Member Schulte "stated that there have been a number of incidents that show the need for this ordinance. He requested that the City Attorney draft an urgency Ordinance for the meeting of August 1st." Colleen Johnson from AIDS Project L.A. spoke to the Council and shared examples of

[50] $50,000 of this funding was allocated to the GLCSC/Edelman Health Center, and $37,000 was allocated for Housing and Youth Emergency Shelter run by GLCSC.

discrimination against HIV-positive individuals occurring in "dental care, skilled nursing care, home care, ambulance, housing programs, insurance, hotels, jobs and bars and restaurants." After Ms. Jonsons spoke, Member Schulte asked her to return to the Council at their August 1st meeting and bring "one of the Doctors from the project". (*Minutes, July 11* 1985).

On August 1, 1985, Mayor Terrigno announced that the City Council had proposed an ordinance to prevent discrimination against individuals with AIDS. The Council sought both public input and internal discussion on the matter. Several individuals spoke in support of the ordinance, including representatives from the City/County AIDS Task Force, AIDS Project L.A., attorneys, community members, and the Chamber of Commerce. Speakers included Neil Schram, Robert McLane, Gregory Merritt, Budd Kops, Lee Walker, Peter Laura, Rick Saslaw, Nancy Taylor, David Pierce, Kay McGraw, and Bob Lucas. The testimony from all speakers emphasized the importance of public education on AIDS. They stressed that "AIDS is not contagious but is transmitted by intimate physical contact and through blood by-products" (*Minutes, August 1* 1985).

On August 15 the Council passed Ordinance No. 77U, "An ordinance of the City of West Hollywood Prohibiting Discrimination in employment, housing, business, city services and facilities, and educational institutions on the basis of AIDS or an AIDS" (*Minutes, August 15* 1985). This made West Hollywood the second city in the nation to pass an ordinance banning discrimination against persons with AIDS (Brooke and Dwyer 1985).[51] On August 29, Councilmembers Albert and Schulte proposed a plan to declare October as AIDS Awareness Month designed to both educate and inform the public about AIDS. The campaign would involve

[51] The City of Los Angeles, which had passed a similar ordinance a day earlier on August 14, was the first.

a series of public education forums and small home-based workshops led by an outside consultant, as well as a broad public awareness campaign using media, informational brochures from United Way, bookmarks, flyers, posters, and the creation of a hotline (*Minutes, August 29* 1985).

On September 19, the Council approved the release of $50,000 previously allocated to Aid for AIDS (*Minutes, September 19* 1985), and on October 3, Mayor Heilman officially proclaimed October as AIDS Awareness Month in the city. The first public forum would focus on dispelling myths about AIDS, and took place on October 9 at Plummer Park (*Minutes, October 3* 1985).

By November, the Council took steps to become a more prominent voice on AIDS at the state level. This was precipitated by the Food and Drug Administration's decision in 1985 to order blood banks to begin screening all donations for HIV antibodies, which fueled public anxieties around AIDS transmission. Advocates pushed for the passage of Assembly Bill 403 in California, which would make it illegal for employers to discriminate against individuals based on their HIV status and protect workers from firing or hiring bias due to testing positive for antibodies (Colbrook 2022).

After hearing concerns from citizens about AB 403, the Council publicly supported the bill and drafted a letter to the League of California Cities and state representatives stating West Hollywood's opposition to any weakening of anti-discrimination provisions. The Council also requested to be consulted on any future AIDS-related legislation (*Minutes, November 7* 1985). Later that month, on November 21, Councilmember Schulte presented proclamations to notable political leaders, including Joel Wachs, Henry Waxman, Ed Edelman, and Ed Roybal, at the

National Conference of Gay and Lesbian Elected Officials, recognizing their efforts in human rights and AIDS advocacy (*Minutes, November 21* 1985).

In December, to close out the year, the Council hired Helene Meshar and Stephen Smith & Co. as legislative advocates on policy matters related to the AIDS crisis (*Minutes, December 12* 1985, 12). On December 19, Member Schulte presented a proclamation honoring the cast and crew of P.S. *Your Cat Is Dead*–a benefit production that raised funds for the Ed Edelman Clinic at the Gay and Lesbian Community Center. The Council also approved to provide the Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center $92,700 to enhance their counseling services and information programs tailored to both lesbian and gay populations (*Minutes, December 19* 1985).

Abbe Land reflected on the City's pioneering efforts to address the AIDS crisis

> As a city, we advocated, and when there were protests, we supported them. You know, we
>
> did whatever we could. We did really what was groundbreaking education campaigns about the transmission of AIDS. Like, yea, you get AIDS with unprotected sex. Like that was one of the ways you get AIDS, not from shaking my hand, and having to have really graphic and hard hitting education campaigns so people understood, you know, and people weren't used to that.[52]

In later years, West Hollywood established memorials and annual vigils to remember those lost to the epidemic. This included events like World AIDS Day observances and public art installations like the AIDS Memorial Walk.

[52] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, February 26, 2025.

Planning and public health

In addition to funding AIDS social service organizations, West Hollywood's leaders drafted long-term plans to address the crises. As the City began the multi-year process of formulating its first comprehensive General Plan, completed in 1988, issues relating to AIDS were raised as key concerns to be addressed through the section focusing on Human Services. This was a notable departure from conventional urban planning practices, which rarely addressed specific health conditions related to AIDS in foundational planning documents.

To identify and quantify this issue of AIDS, the plan authors conducted a series of surveys of residents and drew from public hearings with the City. In the household survey, respondents were asked to rank among 18 different types of services, giving each a score that would help determine priority. The four highest ranking priorities included: 1) Support services for persons with AIDS/ARC; 2) Support services for seniors; 3) Crisis intervention/emergency services; 4) Medical services (affordable and conveniently located). Based on the needs assessments results, the plan authors surmised that "the City has for the most part successfully prioritized its social services" (CWHGP, 1988, 252). The plan further emphasized the need to prioritize these services.

The City also pioneered the integration of housing services with services for people living with AIDS. As Paul Zimmerman, former director of the West Hollywood Community Development Corporation (WHCDC), recounted, the urgency of the AIDS crisis spurred a shift in the organization's housing priorities:

> At this point, the first two buildings [built by the WHCDC] tend to have more of a senior focus, and the board looks around and says, 'Hey, we're in the middle of an epidemic. We've got to do some housing in response to the AIDS epidemic'... The third project was

> targeted for people living with HIV. It was new, which was something new for all of us, including my board. There had been only one or two dedicated housing developments for HIV/AIDS at all. At that time, we opened our first in 1992.[53]

The third housing project was located along Havenhurst Drive. The WHCDC's approach illustrates how the City's response to AIDS extended beyond the provision of medical and social services, integrating housing as a key vector of public health intervention. The housing project was not only unique in its emphasis on people living with AIDS, but also attempted to integrate them with older adults who were primarily Russian immigrants, a key demographic of the City. Zimmerman described the anticipated tensions that accompanied this effort:

> We said to ourselves, are we really gonna mix these homophobic old Russians with people living with AIDS? And our resident services coordinator said, 'Yeah, I think it'll work.' And so by the end of the 90s, we had integrated both populations, which was interesting.[54]

The possibility of designing housing that integrated groups from different cultural backgrounds, at such a moment of heightened stigma around AIDS seemed risky. Yet, Zimmerman shared that it moved forward without much tension at all. In an archived interview of Paul Zimmerman, he speaks to how this approach of integrated care set the stage for the idea of 'permanent supportive housing':

> WeHo is a pretty social service rich environment. There was a fairly well established HIV/AIDS support network services and senior services–the problem was establishing adequate referral liaison with those outside services. And so we created one of the first

[53] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, June 4, 2025.
[54] Ibid.

> resident services coordinators that existed in a CDC, and that person's primary role was to find out what the residents needed and make connections between those residents and outside services, get case workers, arrange for whatever. It worked. And people were able to live independently longer. That kind of model of thinking of low income housing as more than just housing but as extending into supporting people to live independently grew into what now characterizes a large part of the affordable housing effort… Recharacterized as "permanent supportive housing" these days. Permanent supportive housing now typically incorporates services on site (Collings, 2012 Interview of Paul Zimmerman).

West Hollywood's innovative approach to housing provision in the midst of the AIDS crisis illustrated its leaders' broader commitment to human services planning, an ethos that was also reflected in its General Plan and supported through municipal funding of HIV-related housing and care. That the City's approach would also inform the concept and strategy behind permanent supportive housing is also noteworthy, and speaks to the influence of West Hollywood in housing policy and planning generally.

The inclusion of AIDS-related concerns in a General Plan marked, and the integration of affordable housing provision and health services, served as early examples of a municipality integrating public health, particularly a stigmatized and politically fraught issue, into its long-term land use and service delivery framework. This approach demonstrated a broader, more inclusive understanding of planning, linking spatial and infrastructural development with social well-being and health policy. In this vein, West Hollywood helped expand the scope of what urban planning could encompass, and set a precedent other municipalities could follow. "We had, at the time, probably the largest per capita social service budget of any city in the State of

California"[55] Paul Brotzman shared. West Hollywood became a model for social service provision, particularly in response to AIDS. "Other cities later followed suit," Brotzman added. "Santa Monica became a significant provider of community social services, so we kind of set the framework for that type of service at a municipal level".[56]

AIDS activism and the politics of location

The timing of West Hollywood's incorporation as its own city was important. Had incorporation not occurred, it is unlikely that Los Angeles County would have responded to the AIDS crisis with the same urgency, especially given the County's more conservative leadership. As Abbe Land reflected, "The county, for its part, 'ended up doing pretty well.' But there were some pretty conservative people on the LA County Board…people did not want to talk about the 'gay disease' or whatever the hell they were calling it. And so I think our response was very important."[57] The AIDS crisis further underscored why it mattered that West Hollywood became a "gay city": its predominantly gay constituency played a central role in shaping the city's early priorities and policies. As Land explained, "We established a Human Services Department and social services, and probably spent more than most cities did on making sure services were there for our community." She continued, "The federal government was very much like the one we're going to have today–was not helpful. And so as a city, we advocated…we did whatever we could."[58]

[55] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, April 30, 2025.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Interview by the author, February 26, 2025.
[58] Ibid.

Activism, both locally and nationally, played a critical role in shaping policy responses to the crisis. Beginning in the 1980s and culminating in the mid-1990s, the increasingly visible AIDS epidemic, and the federal government's lackluster response to it, spurred gay activists to take to the streets in protest across the country. The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) rose up in New York City, and organizations like Queer Nation, Women's Health Action Mobilization, Women's Action Coalition, and the Lesbian Avengers used direct action as tools to draw attention to government inaction (Kenney 2001). Kenney has written that while these modes of protest were common in other cities, "Los Angeles has been less visibly a part of this transformation" (2001, 153). This is not to suggest that AIDS protests did not occur in Los Angeles, but rather that they were not as common nor as visible. Kenney attributes this less to political apathy or inaction and more to the sprawling, car-centric geography of Los Angeles, alongside racial and economic stratification across the Los Angeles region.

A notable exception to the relatively quiet activism in Los Angeles were the 1991 protests, which actually originated in West Hollywood. The protests were a response to then–California Governor Pete Wilson's veto of Assembly Bill 101 (AB 101), as well as frustrations over local and national governments' lack of response to the worsening AIDS epidemic. AB 101 would have prohibited employment discrimination against lesbians and gay men (LA Times 1992). The bill exempted small business and churches, while state and local ordinances already enshrined protections for gays and lesbians employed in the public sector. For two straight weeks, massive street protesting ensued in the streets across Los Angeles, drawing thousands–as many as twenty thousand people from across the city (Kenney 2001). The scene was captured by the LA Times:

Images painted a picture of a city transformed. The California flag was torched; so was

> Wilson's effigy. Someone smashed a door at the Ronald Reagan State Office Building; John Heilman, a gay West Hollywood city councilman, alerted the sheriff that he was marching and not to disturb him; 15,000 gays and lesbians stopped traffic and business on city streets for weeks…In short, a new community–more militant and diverse than anyone could have envisioned just two months ago–had emerged overnight (Sadownick & Brownworth, 1991).

While the protests began in West Hollywood, they moved across Los Angeles, from Westwood to downtown to the Los Angeles International Airport. In contrast to the highly organized, often dramatically staged ACT UP protests and demonstrations that had characterized highly successful actions in other cities, the AB 101 protests were largely ad hoc events, led by untrained activists without set routes or coherent slogans or media messaging. That these protests often began in West Hollywood and moved outside of it underscores both the centrality of West Hollywood as symbol of gay and lesbian activism for the Los Angeles region, as well as a new moment for gay and lesbian activism in the region, one Kenney characterizes as: "For the first time in decades, gays and lesbian took to the streets for common purposes, moving outside the boundary of the West Hollywood boystown to defy the spatial logic of a city that had proved remarkably resistant to direct action visibility" (2001, 157).

West Hollywood was not a staging ground for the protests due solely to its symbolic importance as a center of gay life in the region. The City Council also made it easier to stage protests. Council members allowed ACT UP to march without applying for a parade permit, which was required for all other protests. ACT UP also held its first meetings in the Plummer Park community room. Kenny interviewed Paul Daniels, a member of ACT UP's Agitate Committee (responsible for organizing major demonstrations). Daniels said: "West Hollywood

does not want to alienate the gay and lesbian community[which is] effectively a third of the population. You get voted out of office very easily if you alienate the community too heavily…West Hollywood has been very supportive of ACT UP" (Daniels interview with Kenney, 2001, 182).

Despite the support the City's leaders showed for ACT UP, the centrality of the city for organizing efforts contributed to schisms within ACT UP's leadership. After the Rodney King riots of 1992, the People of Color Caucus within ACT UP/LA attempted to diversify the group and involve more people of color. They tried to persuade the organization to move its meetings outside of West Hollywood to areas further east and south that were more accessible to communities of color. This idea "frightened" several activist members, and discussions appeared to go nowhere. For this reason, many people of color left the organization after 1992, and "ACT UP/LA's sphere of influence was never as successful at infiltrating minority communities as it was in the gay enclaves west of downtown" (Kenney, 2001, 181).

The whiteness of ACT UP/LA's leadership was a frequent point of contention among organizers in the 1980s and 1990s. That West Hollywood, a recently formed city whose predominantly white racial demographics contrasted it with much more racially diverse communities across Los Angeles, became a central mode of organizing for ACT UP/LA, contributed to criticisms that communities of color were being left behind in the fight against AIDS. Kenney makes the point thusly: "The white self-identified power base that spearheaded ACT UP organizing in Los Angeles reflected not only the sense of social entitlement that middle-class gay men took for granted, but also the way West Hollywood operated as a stage upon which this sense of entitlement could be expressed" (2001, 182).

Thus, while West Hollywood's gay identity and leadership created the conditions for activism to occur, its geographic and demographic position complicated the broader movement's claims to inclusivity and alliances that crossed racial, gender, and class lines. These tensions were also at play in debates over where to locate social service organizations in the Los Angeles region. Founded in 1983, AIDS Project Los Angeles (APLA) quickly became the primary community-based organization serving persons with AIDS in Los Angeles County, and was funded largely by the City of West Hollywood. APLA began as a telephone hot line program of the Gay Community Services Center (the Center), based in Hollywood. Originally based in Hollywood, it quickly moved to a building near Plummer Park in West Hollywood. APLA's decision to locate in West Hollywood was similar to the Gay Community Services Center's decision to locate near West Hollywood: it was centered within the gay community, their primary client base up until the mid 1980s. In the mid 1980s APLA moved much of its work to offices in central Hollywood, partly for more affordable rents. West Hollywood was increasingly seen as "leased up" and prohibitively expensive. Another reason was to diversify its client base. When it became clearer that AIDS not only affected heterosexual people but disproportionately low-income people of color, APLA, along with the Center, sought to offer services with more geographic diversity. Kenney also notes that "both agencies were concerned with the upper-middle-class white image of West Hollywood and wanted to find a location without such stereotypical associations" (2001, 97).[59]

The politics behind APLA's location decisions and the demographic makeup of ACT UP/LA's leadership, which were refracted through West Hollywood, reflect not only West

[59] For a more in-depth history of APLA and the Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center, see Moira Kenney's *Mapping Gay L.A*. (2001).

Hollywood's central role in shaping regional public policy responses to the AIDS crisis, but also the broader significance of its emergence as a self-identified gay city. Without West Hollywood becoming a gay city, and embracing its identity as such, such debates might never have occurred, or would have taken a more diffused form. In this view, the symbolism of West Hollywood's gay identity mattered as much as the material outcomes of its actions and the resources the gay city provided. Adding to the symbolic import of the city was the establishment of public monuments in West Hollywood dedicated to queer activists.

Monument and memory

The first public monument installed by the City of West Hollywood honored the 1992 protests. Installed in 1992, the monument consists of a single bronze plaque located at the grassy triangle at Santa Monica Boulevard and Crescent Heights Boulevard. The plaque designates the spot "Queer Village" and includes text engravings naming activists who participated in two hunger strikes calling for anti-AIDS medication and gay rights legislation. The plaque honors the series of demonstrations that took place in 1991 in response to the AIDS crises, and the Governor' veto of Assembly Bill 101 (LA Times 1992).

The plaque stands at five feet (Figure 5.1), and at the time of installation was, according to the Los Angeles Times, "only the third gay-rights monument in the world" (LA Times 1992). At the memorial's commemoration, David Smith, a spokesman for the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Services Center, shared remarks: "The two weeks of sustained demonstrations of thousands of people, angry, weighed heavily on his mind. And that started here." Reflecting on the protest nearly three decades later, local activist Steve Martin wrote in WeHo Online, "It was a moment of spontaneous outrage that shaped the lives of countless people and re-energized a

community that was numb from the devastation of the AIDS Pandemic. While demonstrations rocked California from San Francisco to San Diego, West Hollywood was the epicenter of what became a Renaissance of LGBTQ activism"(Martin 2021).

The Los Angeles Times, covering the protest, wrote: "Wilson's veto triggered immediate protests from gay activists who had been awaiting his decision in a small West Hollywood park they dubbed "Queer Village." Sunday night, hundreds of gays marched along Santa Monica Boulevard in a demonstration marred by a violent clash between protesters and a motorist that left at least one man injured" (Harris 1991a; Harris and Gewertz 1991). ACT UP and Queer Nation led the organization of encampments at the newly named "Queer Village," which served as staging grounds for subsequent protests that extended far beyond West Hollywood and into neighboring Los Angeles and Beverly Hills (Harris 1991b; Martin 2021).



Figure 5.1. Queer Village Memorial. Source: Celebrating Los Angeles Map

In 1993 the City sought to memorialize victims of the disease through a memorial project. Initially called the West Hollywood Palms Project, the *West Hollywood Memorial Walk* (Memorial Walk) was created in partnership with the nonprofit Aid for AIDS (Figure 5.2). The memorial consisted of a series of bronze plaques engraved with the names of people who had died from AIDS, emplaced along the sidewalks of Santa Monica Boulevard between Fairfax Avenue and Doheny Drive. A keystone plaque was embedded at the northwest triangle at Santa Monica Boulevard and Crescent Heights Boulevard. The reference to "palms" in the original name reflected the initial plan to place the plaques on palm trees along the boulevard. The trees

were eventually replaced or removed, so the memorial was renamed a “memorial walk” (Blevins 2014).

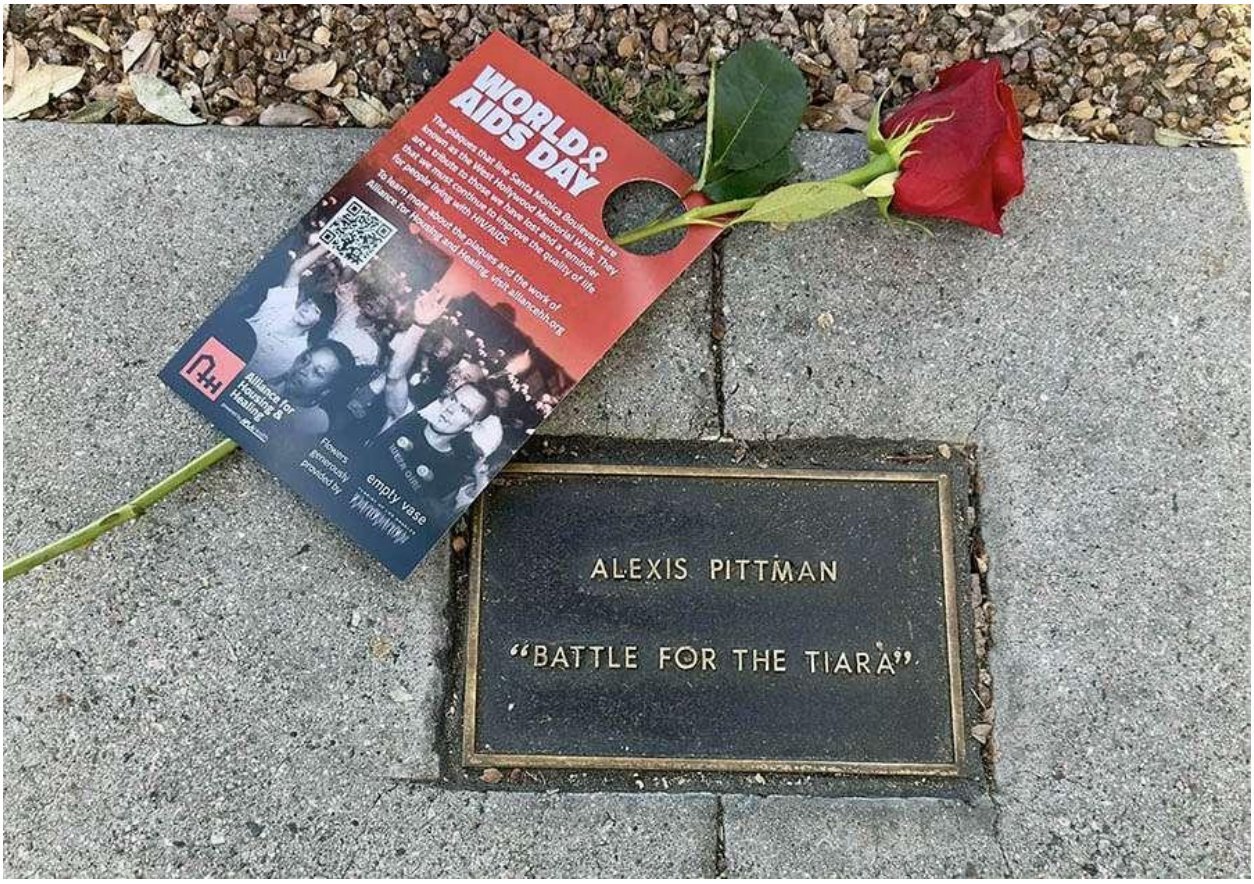


Figure 5.2. Image of a plaque for the West Hollywood Memorial Walk. Source: APLA Health

The City’s efforts to construct a memorial to AIDS victims at such an early date–near the height of the AIDS epidemic–speaks to how seriously the issue was taken by leaders and community members. Over 150 plaques have been placed since the memorial’s creation. Plaques can be purchased and installed, the funds for which go towards nonprofits like Aid for AIDS that provide services to people living with HIV/AIDS. To this day the City holds events that use the plaques as gathering points. Every year on World AIDS Day, City leaders and community members clear the plaques and lay flowers on top of them (“News | City of West Hollywood”

2024). That people can continue to purchase plaques speaks to the enduring value of the monument and its capacity to grow.

More recently, the City, in partnership with the Foundation for The AIDS Monument, donated land adjacent to the West Hollywood Library, within West Hollywood Park, to create a new monument dedicated to the memory of AIDS (Figure 5.3). Titled *STORIES: The AIDS Monument*, the monument was designed by Australian artist Daniel Tobin, and will consist of 147 bronze pillars, called "Traces", each measured approximately 4 by 4 inches at the base and standing at 13 feet tall. The Traces will be laid out informally at first, becoming more grid-like as you move through them. Thirty of the Traces are engraved with words expressing the feelings and experiences of people that lived through the early days of the epidemic, and will be made audible through mobile devices. Over a decade in the making, and costing approximately $9 million, the monument is scheduled to open August 2025, in time for the 41st AIDS Walk Los Angeles event.



Figure 5.3. STORIES: The AIDS Monument Source: City of West Hollywood and the Foundation for the AIDS Monument

Given the existence of at least two monuments to the memory of AIDS in West Hollywood, it is significant that the city decided to invest significant resources to create a third monument. The location of the monument–at the heart of West Hollywood Park, next to the library–is also symbolically significant. West Hollywood lacks a designated 'civic center', and this area of the city, containing the West Hollywood Library, West Hollywood Park, and the looming Pacific Design Center just across the street, most closely approximates a symbolic 'center' of West Hollywood. That the monument takes center stage suggests just how important the city's leaders and advocates consider this part of the community's history to be, and is another indicator of the significance of the city's LGBTQ+ identity to the city.

In an interview, Michael Ferrera, the executive director of the Foundation for The AIDS Monument, shared the significance of the monument to him:

> I came to WeHo to come out when I was 25 years old. The city embraced me and gave me everything I needed to work on becoming a healthy gay man. I met the guy who I ended up marrying, and we were married for 23 years. Within a month after saying our vows, he found out he was HIV positive. We thought he was going to die. This monument represents the people who embraced people like me and gave us the opportunity to feel good about ourselves and to feel positive. This horrible and traumatic experience came upon us, and WeHo was a warm and accepting family with unconditional love. The monument is a tribute to that (Sager, 2017).

In terms of the monument's design, its immersive layout is reminiscent of the type of 'living' memorials that not only function to spur memories of loss and mourning, but also look forward. In the case of STORIES, its function, beyond remembrance, is to both educate future generations

and celebrate histories of resistance and activism. The monument's adjacency to the park and the library invites visitors to have a range of experiences upon visiting, including feeling mournful but also hopeful about the future.

Conclusion

It can be argued with a degree of certainty that West Hollywood's identity as a gay city enabled it to respond to the unfolding AIDS epidemic in a more bold and assertive manner than most other municipalities, and certainly more than if it had remained an unincorporated part of Los Angeles County. West Hollywood's relatively large gay population and representation in City Council made the trauma of AIDS more widely felt. In response, the Council enacted a sweeping set of initiatives made possible by the powers of cityhood: it directed substantial public funding to frontline social and health service organizations; passed landmark nondiscrimination ordinances protecting people with AIDS; incorporated AIDS-related services into its General Plan; and integrated social services with affordable housing specifically tailored to people living with HIV/AIDS.

Cityhood helped in another way: it fostered an spatial environment that made activism and protest easier by allowing public protests to take place without acquiring permits. Thus, the 1991 protests, which became some of the largest in the history of the Los Angeles area, originated in the heart of West Hollywood. West Hollywood's elected leaders like John Heilman took part in these protests, underscoring the City's alignment with activist demands.

The critiques around AIDS activism and service provision largely stemmed from the fact that West Hollywood was the geographic and symbolic center of these activities. One can speculate how differently these dynamics might have unfolded had West Hollywood not become

a city, and whether AIDS services would have emerged elsewhere, or whether ACT UP/LA might have anchored its activism in a more demographically diverse part of the region. What is certain is that West Hollywood embraced its role with uncommon conviction, a legacy now inscribed in the city's public memorials and monuments to AIDS victims and activists.

Yet, the city's early and public engagement with the crisis also deepened external perceptions of West Hollywood as a gay city grappling with tragedy. This was a problem for those who were particularly concerned about efforts to market West Hollywood as an attractive destination for business and tourism. Thus, even as the city acted out of necessity and solidarity, it faced a new set of challenges around managing its public image and ensuring its economic viability in a climate often marked by homophobia and fear. The pressure city leaders felt to respond to these negative perceptions led to a series of ambitious marketing and redevelopment efforts, which are explored in the next two chapters.

6. TOWARDS THE CREATIVE CITY: IDENTITY CRISIS AND MAKEOVER

Within a year of its incorporation, the nascent City of West Hollywood faced a convergence of challenges: a worsening public health crisis brought on by AIDS, the resignation of its first mayor amid embezzlement charges, and criticism that the city was overly focused on progressive, identity-based issues. These difficulties were compounded by a growing public perception, amplified by media coverage, that crime and urban blight were being neglected, to the detriment of local businesses, economic development, and overall quality of life. These concerns made their way into The City of West Hollywood General Plan, the City's first comprehensive plan, adopted in 1988. Under the plan's section concerning "Economic Development Strategy" the plan states:

> Initial negative treatment in the regional and national media has caused some investment hesitancy in the city. Regional and national media concentrated on the emerging AIDs crisis, political personalities, rent control, development moratoria, and investment community concerns. Subsequently, negative media treatment has substantially declined. There is, however, a residue of doubt which will only be removed by consistent demonstration of business activity success, development investments that work, and continuation of an innovative public relations program (CWHGP, 1988, 165).

Although the city council had enacted a range of progressive policies early on, city leaders soon found themselves under considerable pressure to respond swiftly and decisively to these multifaceted problems, which were often centered around safety and economic viability. Such critiques were not unique to West Hollywood; most cities contend with similar concerns, whether rooted in reality or perception. What set West Hollywood apart, however, was the way in which gay identity became intertwined with debates over effective urban governance. City leaders grappled with whether this identity was part of the city's problems or key to its solutions. This chapter, along with the next, examines the strategies the city employed in response and explores their broader implications.

Beginning approximately one year after incorporation, the city launched a series of ambitious initiatives that would unfold throughout the late 1982 and the 1990s. These initiatives employed a variety of municipal tools, including new ordinances and policies, a strategic marketing campaign, and a large-scale redevelopment project focused on the city's eastern corridor or 'eastend'. While these efforts collectively sought to enhance public safety, stimulate economic growth, and bolster the city's reputation for effective governance, they were also shaped by a desire to retain West Hollywood's identity as an affirming community that embraced its notable gay, senior, renter, and immigrant constituencies.

First, the city sought to address public safety. In response to resident concerns about petty crime, prostitution, and especially the rise in anti-gay violence and police harassment, the city sought to draw the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department's attention to these issues. Community members also took grassroots action, including the formation of a neighborhood watch group to patrol the eastern stretch of Santa Monica Boulevard. While city officials

acknowledged that many of the individuals engaged in sex work were gay[60], the emphasis remained on criminalizing and removing sex workers from the city rather than addressing its root causes. At the same time, the city sought to improve law enforcement practices by encouraging the Sheriff's Department to conduct sensitivity trainings and to recruit openly gay and lesbian officers.

Second, the city launched a rebranding campaign aimed at reshaping public perception. To this end, the city hired consultants to assess its image and formulate a communications strategy. The result was the adoption of the moniker "The Creative City," a label that served multiple, and at times contradictory, purposes. On one hand, it distanced West Hollywood from the stigmatized associations of "The Gay City", often linked with disease and dysfunction during the AIDS crisis. On the other, it underscored the city's economic potential by emphasizing its ties to the entertainment, design, and tourism industries, sectors that were themselves frequently associated with the gay community. Thus, the city was able to signal continuity with its queer identity while simultaneously repositioning itself to appeal to broader economic and political constituencies.

Policing as public safety

The issue of public safety was not singular in its source, yet it largely focused on the east side, or 'eastend', of West Hollywood, particularly along Santa Monica Boulevard. Concerns emanated

[60] The use of the term "gay" here reflects how communities and individuals were commonly described in the 1980s and 1990s. While many sex workers in West Hollywood during this period were gay men, others were transgender women or gender-nonconforming individuals who might today be included under the broader LGBTQ+ umbrella. However, the language and public discourse of the time did not always recognize or differentiate these identities as they are understood today.

from resident complaints regarding petty and violent crime. “gay bashing”, anti-gay harassment by Sheriff’s deputies, and prostitution.

A new police force, or gay inclusion?

A primary set of safety concerns came from gay residents citing instances of anti-gay harassment by the LA Sheriff’s Department (LASD)[61]. As early as 1988, City Council meetings were filled with testimony from gay and lesbian residents who alleged mistreatment by sheriff's deputies. These included claims of harassment near nightlife venues, profiling in public spaces like Plummer Park, and a general sense of disrespect from deputies who patrolled the city. For a community forged in activism and resistance around gay issues, such treatment was intolerable.

To address the issue of anti-gay police harrassment, Councilmembers John Heilman and Steve Schulte emerged as key advocates within City Hall, arguing that safety and justice required not only policy change but representation within the ranks of law enforcement. The council began publicly urging the LASD to recruit gay and lesbian deputies and called for the establishment of a Gay and Lesbian Task Force, made up of equal numbers of lesbians and gay men, in order to address community-specific concerns, including issues with law enforcement and public safety (*Minutes, October 3* 1988; *Minutes, November 21* 1988). These efforts were galvanized by frustration over internal LASD investigations, particularly the revelation that of 22 formal complaints lodged with the city in 1988, only one was found substantiated by the department. By early 1989, the issue had drawn significant press attention. On February 20, 1989, the Los Angeles Times reported that while the LASD acknowledged the presence of gay

[61] The City of West Hollywood did not have its own police department, and instead contracted with the LA County Sheriff.

and lesbian deputies among its 7,000 personnel, none had come out publicly (Russell 1989a). Gay activists argued that this was symptomatic of a hostile department culture that punished openness. Meanwhile, West Hollywood residents and city council officials, despite praising the department's crime-fighting record, voiced increasing concern about the lack of trust between deputies and the gay residents they served (*Minutes, March 6* 1989; *Minutes, March 15* 1989).

In March 1989, city officials and the LASD agreed to form a 10-person liaison committee composed of five sheriff's deputies and five members of the gay and lesbian community. The initiative, crafted in part by Capt. Rachel Burgess and the West Hollywood Gay and Lesbian Task Force, aimed to address issues like hate crimes, recruitment, and community relations. Applications for community representatives were opened to the public, marking the first time such a forum was institutionalized (*Los Angel. Times Pre-1997 Fulltext* 1989).

Still, deeper reforms remained elusive. Gay activists expressed skepticism over the department's willingness to change in response to public pressure. Schulte and Councilmember Paul Koretz proposed the creation of a Public Safety Commission to serve as a forum for complaints against LASD deputies, a move the department resisted. Sheriff Sherman Block held a press conference on May 11, forcefully denying accusations of discrimination and rejecting the idea of a civilian oversight body. Block insisted that he alone bore responsibility for disciplining errant deputies, characterizing the criticism as an attempt to paint the department as discriminatory and thereby discourage applicants (Russell 1989b). Tensions appeared to deepen when activists learned that the department had refused to place recruitment ads in gay publications, citing the presence of sexually explicit content. City officials pushed back, arguing that several publications were suitable and devoid of such material. Councilmember Koretz publicly criticized the department for trying to "have it both ways", in which they appear to

welcome gay applicants on paper while refusing to visibly gays by placing recruitment ads in the gay press (Russell 1989b).

Despite these hurdles, a recruitment event was scheduled for June 17, 1989, at Fairfax High School (*Minutes, March 6* 1989). Heralded as the department's first general recruitment drive in West Hollywood, it was the result of a compromise: rather than openly recruiting gay and lesbian applicants, the department would hold an event in a city where such populations were prominent. Yet by August, the results were underwhelming. Mario Soliz-Marich, interim director of Advocates for Better Law Enforcement, reported that only about six openly gay individuals expressed serious interest, and none had made it into the hiring process. He cited a lack of department interest and poor coordination by city officials (Russell 1989c). Mayor Abbe Land offered a more optimistic view, suggesting the process had laid groundwork for future efforts (Mitchell 1990b).

Still, by mid-1990, frustrations were again boiling over. Residents expressed anger over both police harassment and quality-of-life issues such as homelessness in Plummer Park and prostitution along Santa Monica Boulevard (Mitchell 1990a). With public dissatisfaction mounting, calls grew louder to cancel the city's $9-million contract with the LASD and form an independent police for the city (Mitchell 1990b). The financial burden of such a move, however, kept it off the table. Capt. Burgess, who had taken over the West Hollywood station, acknowledged the stakes. "I certainly didn't want to be the one to lose that contract," she later reflected. Her approach emphasized fairness and impartiality, traits that earned her rare praise in a city known for political contentiousness. "She has humanized the West Hollywood Sheriff's Station," said Morris Kight, a prominent gay rights advocate and a member of the Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations (Mitchell 1990b). While the Sheriff's Department

continued to deny that sexual orientation factored into its hiring practices, citing legal restrictions on affirmative action, Capt. Burgess provided a degree of reassurance. City officials remained candid about their motives: they wanted gay deputies patrolling their streets, and they wanted to see that goal embraced rather than tiptoed around.

City Council meeting minutes from 1992 (*Minutes, November 16* 1992) and 1993 (*Minutes, May 3* 1993) meetings show that tensions and demands for progress remained. The narrow margin of a vote on police-related issues and public calls for at least one openly gay or lesbian officer highlight persistent frustration with the slow pace of change. Simultaneously, the city was broadening its response to hate crimes and violence. Councilmember Heilman's announcements about new grants to combat gay bashing, recruitment efforts for gay officers, and a public forum on hate violence underscore a continued and increasingly public commitment to confronting anti-gay violence.

By 1994 (*Minutes, October 3* 1994), the city's efforts appear to have matured into a more proactive approach. Reports of arrests in gay bashing cases, and the City Manager's reference to "Clean and Safe City" priorities, reflect both a reactive and preventive approach to public safety. Importantly, Captain Mangan's public commendation of community involvement in making arrests suggests that a culture of cooperation between law enforcement and gay residents was beginning to take root. Thus, by the mid 1990s, with growing civic momentum behind it, the city had laid the groundwork towards institutionalizing its commitment to addressing hate crimes (namely, "gay-bashing") and recruiting gay officers.

The approach to police reform by gay activists leaned into broader calls by gay rights movements in places like San Francisco and New York City to reform the police through sensitivity training and recruiting openly gay and lesbian police officers. Neither the media, city

council minutes, nor West Hollywood actors themselves[62] reflected on the fact that many sex workers who worked along Santa Monica Boulevard during the late 1980s through the early 2000s were gay men and transgender women of color. Thus, the contradictory policy approach of embracing the police as a primary mechanism through which to address "safety" for the city's gay community was lost on them.

Policing, sex work, and AIDS

While the City sought to work collaboratively with the Sheriff to address gay bashing and anti-gay harassment among officers, local residents increasingly called upon the city council to increase police presence along Santa Monica Boulevard, particularly in the Eastside. The worsening AIDS crises added panic about the perceived increase in possible transmission rates due to sex work activity in the city. In a piece by Josh Meyer for the Los Angeles Times, vice officers lamented that male prostitution was "far more likely to be infected with the AIDS virus," and that "unsafe homosexual sex practices" made it a "far worse blight" than female prostitution (Meyer, 1990). Here, sex work, and those who practice it, becomes a dual symbol of danger: morally deviant and biologically contaminated.

The city responded accordingly, making use of the tools afforded by cityhood: conditional use permits, licensing commissions, and zoning restrictions as means to "clean up" the streets. Councilman Steve Viterbi advocated for stricter licensing not on the basis of criminal behavior but potential associations with organized crime, he argued that even the most tenuous links prevent adult-oriented businesses from receiving city approval, despite admitting that no

[62]Here I'm referring to the interviews I conducted with several former West Hollywood actors, including former and current city council members, incorporation activists, and city staff.

such links had been found (Braun 1985a). These regulations functioned as de facto methods of exclusion, giving the city the power to marginalize businesses, and by extension, populations that did not fit its desired profile. Law enforcement intensified its efforts, shutting down an all-night hamburger stand known for drug activity and prostitution, evicting a free-meal program from Plummer Park, and banning sleeping in public spaces. These efforts were less about rehabilitation than displacement. As Sgt. H. Snyder explained, male sex workers simply "have to find greener pastures, I guess you'd call it" (J. Meyer 1990). The implication was clear: the goal was not to solve the problem, but to move it out of sight.

This strategy of regulation as spatial cleansing exposed a core tension within West Hollywood's moral geography: certain bodies were tolerated only insofar as they remained invisible. The contradiction in the City's progressive approach to social issues becomes evident here. On one hand, West Hollywood demonstrated leadership by linking its robust response to the AIDS crisis with affordable housing and social service provision, embracing a multifaceted, supportive framework. On the other hand, its efforts to displace unhoused individuals and sex workers from public spaces suggested a more exclusionary impulse, one that treated sex work, poverty, and disease not as interconnected social conditions requiring structural solutions, but as visible problems to be contained, redirected, or removed.

The paradox, of course, is that West Hollywood was founded in part on the promise of gay liberation. And yet, the early years of self-rule saw the rapid deployment of policies that marginalized some of the community's most vulnerable members. The specter of prostitution, understood as a threat to safety, morality, and health, helped justify these actions. It offered a convenient figure through which anxieties about sex, class, and contagion could be projected and managed. West Hollywood's post-incorporation struggle over sex work and public safety defined

the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion in a city negotiating its identity at the intersection of gay freedom and bourgeois respectability. The regulation of adult businesses, the policing of public spaces, and the moral panic around AIDS were all strategies in the construction of a sanitized civic image, one in which some queer lives were celebrated, and others systematically erased.

From "The Gay City" to "The Creative City"

While the city council took action to address public safety concerns, it concurrently sought to address the city's negative image, initially through a marketing and rebranding campaign, and later through redevelopment. By late 1985 the city created an ad hoc task force composed of community members, business leaders, and city council staff. The task force also included a consulting firm–Economic Research Associates–to help determine current assets that attract tourists. The goal was to eventually establish an institution to both promote the public image of the city while attracting more tourists to the city. The goal of the corporation would be to create a promotional campaign.

One of the task force's first actions was to hire a public relations firm, Public Technology, Inc., to conduct a survey to identify key issues and perceptions of the city. An article[63] The *West Hollywood Paper* discussed the survey results, which identified "four views" of West Hollywood that the marketers felt the city needed to overcome in order to attract tourists and encourage business development. "Those concerns were the perception of the area as a gay city, fear of AIDS, a "flaky" city council and an anti-business attitude" (*West Hollywood Pap.*

[63] This article from the *West Hollywood Paper* is from a newspaper clipping found in the Conrich archives at UCLA YRL Library. There is no identified author of the article.

1986). Here, the city's "gay city" identity is perceived as a marketing problem that needs to be solved. The association of the gay city with AIDS demonstrates the degree to which gays and AIDS were stigmatized in the 1980s. The descriptor "flaky" used to describe the city council leans into enduring stereotypes of gay people as nonconforming, unreliable, and without resolve, a sign of weakness. All attributes that the Council tried to dissociate with. In this perspective, West Hollywood, including its leadership, was simultaneously hyper-visible *and* pathologized. The instability associated with the city's leadership was framed as unhealthy for creating a business-friendly environment and attracting tourists. "Things will be alright" the author of the article in the *West Hollywood Paper* writes, "But the concern–and the image–make it clear that something has to be done". This "something" would soon take the form of the West Hollywood Marketing Corporation, whose role would be to enhance West Hollywood's public image.

Realtor Ron Kates, who was appointed to the ad hoc task force, reacted to findings of the survey. His perspective of the image issue hints at some of the early thinking around how the city's public image might change. "My perception is that we have to be proud and take credit for all those wonderful things we have in this community. We must teach people where it is and what it is." Among the wonderful things Kates had in mind included the city's more than 200 restaurants. "People think Chasen's is in Beverly Hills. We need to make them know it's in West Hollywood, along with Trumps and Peter Moron's." He also expressed his pride in the city's hotels. "The Bel Age matches any hostelry in California. The St. James Club will be opening a private hotel in our landmark Sunset Towers."

With regards to the gay image, Kates remarked, "We have a positive gay image here. And I believe part of the creativity which makes this city so interesting is derived from its gay population." Here, Kates is leaning into an emerging association between gays and creativity that

became a key feature of urban regeneration narratives that espoused the role of gays in reversing inner city decline. The association of "creative" and "gay" was so powerful that Economic Research Associates, the consulting firm the city hired to analyze West Hollywood's economic development, made it the key theme of the city's promotional program: "The Creative City". Thus, rather than a "gay city" the "Creative City" was a more palatable identity that still included "gay", even if indirectly.

David Wilcox, vice-president of the consulting firm Economic Research Associates, put the strategy thusly, "Creativity is not new here. It has been a part of the area's quality for decades as has been the concept of personal freedom. It is characterized by its entertainment services, its quality as a trend-setter, its night spots and that personal freedom. That creativity is reflected in the design industry, which is major here" (*West Hollywood Pap.* 1986).

One of the recommendations that emerged from the ad hoc task force was to create "West Week '86", an event that would "promote the superior retail, entertainment and cultural attractions of West Hollywood" ("Subject: Proposal to Promote the City of West Hollywood to 'West Week 86' Visitors" 1986). Wilcox saw West Week as "an ideal emphasis for urban promotion for West Hollywood" (*West Hollywood Pap.* 1986).

The effort to reframe West Hollywood's image was perceived by some to be an effort to sideline its gay identity. In a letter penned by Bob Conrich to city manager Paul Brotzman on January 11, 1986, Conrich wrote "A city plan is being developed to promote West Hollywood as a place to work, live, do business, invest in and visit. An early draft of the marketing plan has been submitted to members of the council. Our city is perceived across the nation as America's "gay city." Whether or not we like it, whether or not it's good for business, that perceiption (sic), like the Pacific Design Center, is not likely to disappear. Instead of using this perception in a

positive manner, the draft plan makes reference to the gay community only once, and then as a "customer concern to be overcome through counter-marketing." How about advertising our city as a place to visit in national gay publications? Or encouraging the operator of one of our moderately-priced hotels to do direct marketing to the national gay community? I hope the city council will view our gay community as an asset, rather than a "concern to be overcome." There was a great deal of talk before our first election about the diversity of our community, remember?" (Conrich 1986).

Reflecting these concerns, Mayor Heilman wrote a letter on January 16, 1986 to Debbie Potter, then the Economic Development Manager, and Paul Brotzman, City Manager, in which he responded to a section of the draft marketing plan. The section title "CUSTOMER CONCERNS TO BE OVER-COME THROUGH COUNTER-MARKETING" included "1. Gay city, 2. Fear of aids, 3. "Flaky" City Council, and 4. Anti-business attitude." Heilman wrote back:

> I am very concerned with all of those items. I don't think we should ever be in a position of trying to deny that many of our residents and many of our businesses are gay or gay-oriented. I understand the intent is to make sure the City isn't regarded as only a gay city. However, I think we need to be extremely careful how we deal with this issue. I don't think we need to deal with it by pretending that the gay and lesbian issue is insignificant. Similarly I have concerns about how we deal with the issue of AIDS. With regard to the "flaky City Council" I don't see what relevance that has to the marketing program. I also don't know what you mean by anti-business attitude. Are we going to use our marketing strategies to try to overcome what some people believe is a perception that the Council or the City is anti-business?" (Heilman 1986).

Heilman continues: “Under the section Distribution Issues, I think we are ignoring a natural market by failing to publicize the City in the Gay Media. The Gay Media is read almost exclusively by gays and lesbians and so, we can target certain materials exclusively to the lesbian and gay community. By doing so, I don’t think we will be exacerbating problems that West Hollywood is perceived by some as an exclusively gay city. There is a lot of concern and interest in the national and international lesbian and gay community and we should not ignore it and we should in fact, use it to our benefit” (Heilman 1986).

The city moved forward with an extensive marketing campaign that sought to rebrand West Hollywood. Council member Alan Viterbi, quoted in the LA Times, said, “For now, the attention is on promoting the city’s design, entertainment and restaurant industries. An aggressive marketing scheme has been undertaken to create a new reputation for West Hollywood as the “creative city” (Lozano and Ito 1987). John Cole, executive director of the West Hollywood Marketing Corporation[64], led the campaign with the goal of presenting West Hollywood not only as a destination for tourists and businesses but as a "Creative City," emphasizing its role as an oasis of artistic and economic innovation within Los Angeles (Figure 6.1).

[64] The West Hollywood Marketing Corporation later evolved into the West Hollywood Convention and Visitor’s Bureau.

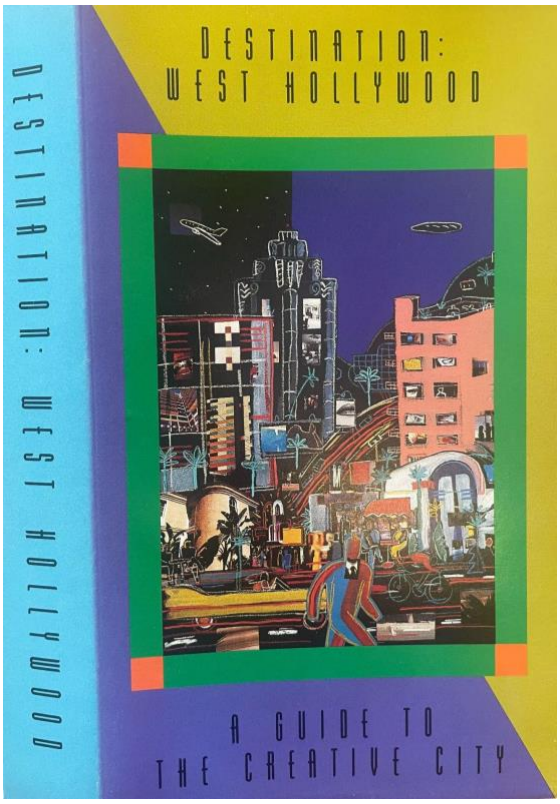


Figure 6.1. Cover to a VHS tape "Destination: West Hollywood, A Guide to the Creative City". Source: West Hollywood Marketing Corporation

The marketing campaign, managed by the newly created nonprofit corporation–the West Hollywood Marketing Corporation–funded by the city, cost approximately $400,000 annually (*Minutes, April 15* 1986). This level of investment was significant for a small city of approximately 37,000 residents, particularly when compared to neighboring cities such as Santa Monica and Redondo Beach, which had similar or larger populations but much smaller marketing budgets. The effort included the distribution of promotional brochures, banners, and catalogues, as well as the installation of 500 modernistic purple and blue street banners intended to reinforce the city's new identity.

Cole's strategy was rooted in West Hollywood's economic composition, noting that over 40% of the city's economic activity derived from "creative" industries such as fashion, food, and

the arts. He argued that it was natural to promote the city as "an artistic and avant-garde area," comparable to New York's Greenwich Village or the Left Bank in Paris. Beverly Moore, director of the Santa Monica Convention and Visitors Bureau, praised the campaign as "the best thing since sliced bread," describing the materials as "stylized," "attractive," and "classy." Bill Welch, head of the neighboring Hollywood Chamber of Commerce, similarly remarked that he was "very impressed" and that West Hollywood was "at the forefront" of municipal marketing (Citron 1988).

Both Cole and Paul Brotzman, the City Manager, pointed to quantitative data to support the argument of the campaign's success. Sales tax revenues rose from $6 million to $6.5 million between fiscal years 1986 and 1987, while hotel tax receipts increased from $3.1 million to $3.7 million over the same period. National media recognition, including coverage in Adweek, further validated the campaign's effectiveness (Citron 1988).

Gay backlash

However, the marketing strategy also provoked significant criticism, particularly from members of the gay community, which had played a crucial role in West Hollywood's incorporation as a city in 1984. Critics, including *Frontiers* magazine editor Bob Craig and Councilman Stephen Schulte, argued that the marketing corporation failed to adequately acknowledge the contributions and presence of the city's substantial gay population, estimated at about 25% of residents. Schulte emphasized the need for targeted marketing that recognized gay-owned businesses and institutions, noting, "They have not marketed to a gay audience . . . and they need to do more of that" (Citron 1988).

In a sharply worded letter to the editor of an unidentified newspaper, Gary Steele lambasted the City Council's ad hoc promotional and marketing task force and its decision to

create the West Hollywood Marketing Corporation, which was jointly run by the city and its business community (Steele, n.d.). Steele viewed this move as emblematic of West Hollywood's "preoccupation with its image," and criticized what he saw as a clear effort to downplay the city's gay and lesbian community.

Steele's letter is at once satirical and pointedly critical. "It almost sounds too absurd to take seriously," he writes, mocking the Times' decision to quote the executive vice president of "no less than Playboy Enterprises" on the city's image. Steele dryly comments, "you have to seriously wonder whose image is at stake here, anyway," suggesting that the city's authentic character, shaped largely by its gay residents, was being subordinated to an externally manufactured and commercially palatable vision.

He takes further aim at the consultants' recommendation that the new non-profit promote West Hollywood as a "creative city" full of design, music, restaurant, and entertainment industries–industries, he notes, that "are in West Hollywood in the first place, and as creative as they are in the second place, because they just happen to be full of gay men and lesbians." For Steele, this effort represents an attempt to "have their cake and eat it too"--capitalizing on the cultural contributions of the gay community while minimizing its public visibility.

Steele's critique extends beyond marketing to the broader priorities of city governance. He contrasts the image-focused efforts with the candidacy of Ron Stone, whom he refers to as the "City Father" and whom he describes as someone "whose concern has always been with substance more than style." Expressing skepticism about the role of political endorsements, Steele holds out hope that voters, who "certainly had enough sense to incorporate in the first place," would similarly reject superficial rebranding efforts and support leadership focused on the city's "real" needs (Steel, n.d.).

In response to these criticisms, Councilman Heilman facilitated meetings between gay community leaders and the marketing corporation. As a result, the corporation committed to producing targeted advertising for the national gay and lesbian community and developing a dedicated visitor's guide for gay tourists.

Cole acknowledged the difficulty of balancing broader market appeal with the desires of the gay community. He stated, "Gays are rightly proud of the city's gay image, but it's virtually impossible to address the agenda of gay activists who would like to portray the city as the 'Gay Camelot.' It's hard to cope with this issue in a way everyone is going to feel good about." He also noted the challenge posed by prevailing homophobia, particularly in the context of the AIDS crisis.

City officials, including City Manager Paul Brotzman, supported Cole's broader marketing approach. Brotzman asserted that the city needed to be promoted to a wider audience beyond the gay community, emphasizing that while the contributions of the gay population were significant, "there is also a lot more here. And that also needs to be shown."

The marketing effort, while successful in rebranding the city, selectively emphasized West Hollywood's upscale and entertainment-related aspects, such as the Sunset Strip and designer showrooms, while downplaying issues such as the presence of senior citizens, immigrants, and less glamorous businesses. Cole defended this selective portrayal by explaining, "We're not selling cat food or dishwashers. We're trying to give an identity to a new city" (Citron 1988).

Other city leaders framed the rebranding strategy as accomplishing multiple goals simultaneously, one that embraced the city's gay identity while promoting tourism and business development, and in turn generating needed tax revenue. Abbe Land emphasized the multiple

purposes behind the "Creative City" strategy–the pursuit of inclusivity and economic development:

> It costs money to take care of people you know…So we billed ourselves as the Creative City…And also, you know…the design community, gay. Movies, gay. You know, creativity, gay. So it all fit together as to who we were, so we could maintain that image of, like, 'Yeah, this is a place that you come [to].' I always remind people, you know, every year when you have that Christopher Street West parade, every year, it's someone's first parade, and trying not to forget that.[65]

Land frames the Creative City rebranding as an economic development strategy that not only made it possible for the city to provide robust support for critical social services, like AIDS and affordable housing, but also a way to honor the city's gay identity.

Similarly, Paul Brotzman shared that the taxes generated through tourism was a crucial component of the city's revenue base:

> The hospitality industry turned out to be one of the huge revenue sources for the city. The hotel transient occupancy tax was a real significant income for the city. And the city was a low property tax city. When it negotiated with the county for a corporation, it got a very low percentage of the property tax. Property tax was capped by Proposition 13 at 1% and that 1% was divided among all of the agencies providing service. So you would have the county, you would have a flight control district, or you would have a mosquito abatement district, or whatever districts were out there–the school district got a portion of it, that 1%...So West Hollywood was a very low property tax city. So it needed revenue from other sources and the transient occupancy tax was one of those major sources. So having

[65] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, February 26, 2025.

said that, John [Heilman] recognized that if the city had a significant revenue base, it could do a lot in terms of social service provisions, in terms of programs for the community.[66]

The embrace of the hospitality sector was further solidified through a deal with developer and hotelier Severyn Ashkenazy, owner of several luxury hotels including the Mondrian, the Bel Age, and the Montrose, who fought the city council in order to convert several apartment buildings into hotels. He sought to accelerate their conversion before cityhood, but they were not fully converted by the time West Hollywood incorporated. He and John Heilman ultimately struck a deal allowing the transition to take place. "But as part of that deal" Brotzman shared, "Ashkenazi had to allow the existing residents to stay there until they were ready to leave. Ashkenazi had to put in a fairly significant affordable housing contribution in the millions of dollars. And he agreed to that, and the city agreed to allow the conversion".

Former city councilmember John Duran similarly shared his enthusiasm and pride in the city's rebranding and redevelopment strategy during an interview:

> You know, people have to get outside the box. Think outside the box. Be creative, be innovative, and think that way, yeah, and I think that you know the past governments that existed in the city again, once we went beyond the launch into the Okay, now we need to build something here, build an economy. I think we largely did that. A lot of the five star restaurants and hotels that you see in West Hollywood that didn't happen by accident…it happened by design. Because we were about branding and trying to create something that wasn't stuffy, like Beverly Hills. But wasn't gritty like Hollywood. It became its own kind of identity as a cool happening, great place. And we were out recruiting, you know, new

[66] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, April 30, 2025.

> restaurants, new businesses, new hotels. You know, we are trying to create something because, like it or not, in a city like West Hollywood, which is completely built out and it's largely apartments, meaning transient residents coming in and out, the one thing that stays are the commercial purposes. Like the city gets defined a lot by its commercialization, the strip, the businesses on Santa Monica, Melrose, the (Pacific) Design Center, that is what helps give this city a complexion.[67]

Duran's view echoes many of those involved in West Hollywood's formation and subsequent governance. A tellingly persistent theme is the idea of West Hollywood as a "cool" and "hip" place, an attribute Ron Stone referred to in his initial proposal for why West Hollywood should incorporate. This sense of "cool" is at the heart of the Creative City ethos, which ties together alternative identities like "gay" with creative identities like the arts, design, and entertainment.

Not everyone agrees that the city's fiscal success was entirely attributable to its rebranding and redevelopment initiatives. Paul Zimmerman, former director of the West Hollywood Community Housing Corporation (WHCHC), shared his view that the city also did well financially because of the revenue produced through the development of the Sunset Strip. Generally speaking however, West Hollywood's tourism and nightlife economies were considered major factors contributing to the city's fiscal soundness. This in turn helped fund progressive initiatives like the provision of affordable housing, a sentiment Zimmerman spoke to:

> I feel incredibly lucky in that I landed in a rich town that could support a lot of these things. And there was so much development that it fed the inclusionary kitty. And I did 13 projects in 18 years, which isn't bad, and there wasn't a hell of a lot of units. Was only

[67] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, June 13, 2025.

about 375 units, because it's a town of small lots. So you're doing 3040, 50 unit projects at a time, instead of 200 unit projects, which you could do in LA. [68]

Mark Lehman, a former planner for the city, further emphasized the outsized financial resources available to West Hollywood, "The business community here pays for West Hollywood. It's the bank for the city. I mean, we have a humongous budget. Cities of 39,000 people don't have budgets like we have."[69] Ultimately, the West Hollywood marketing campaign of the late 1980s stands as an early example of strategic municipal branding that sought to boost local revenues and reshape public perception, while also highlighting the tensions inherent in representing a diverse and politically active community.

Camelot Lost? The battle to fill Terrigno's seat

The city's gay identity was put under further scrutiny and strain with its changing representation on the City Council. The special election to replace Valerie Terrigno, the city's first openly lesbian mayor, revealed further fissures between West Hollywood's diverse constituencies, and fueled anxieties among many gay residents who felt like the dream of a 'gay Camelot' was slipping away. Two front runners emerged to fill Terrigno's seat: Abbe Land, the Los Angeles Planning Commission Chairwoman, and Gene La Pietra, a wealthy gay businessman and owner of the Circus Disco.

Gene La Pietra had earned a reputation as a benefactor of the gay community. He had funded AIDS services, supported gay cultural initiatives, and was so deeply embedded in the community's institutional fabric that a leadership award bore his name. To supporters like

[68] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, June 4, 2025.
[69] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, June 11, 2025.

Michael Weinstein of the AIDS Healthcare Foundation, La Pietra was a quiet force of good: generous, loyal, and emblematic of community solidarity. In this view, La Pietra was a symbol of the gay community to be proud of.

Despite his connection to the gay community, La Pietra and his campaign stumbled amid controversy. His convictions on obscenity charges and issues surrounding liquor violations at his nightclub opened a vulnerability that opponents leveraged. Despite his generosity and gay identity, he failed to gain endorsements from key gay political organizations such as the Stonewall Democratic Club and the Municipal Elections Committee of Los Angeles. Even the West Hollywood Democratic Club declined to endorse him. In a surprising twist, the Harvey Milk Democratic Club backed his opponent, Abbe Land. Land also had the backing of the Coalition for Economic Survival (CES), and current councilmember John Heilman (who was gay), Helen Albert and Alan Viterbi (Stinshoff 1986).

Land, though straight, was not without her own gay credentials. She had a history of supporting gay issues and was connected to progressive circles. Still, her victory was felt by some as a betrayal–an affront to the symbolic idea that West Hollywood was "our city." Her win was interpreted not simply as a political shift, but as a symbolic displacement.

In *Frontiers,* the gay-oriented weekly magazine, editor Bob Craig lamented, "West Hollywood quietly passed from gay control…The true dream of the Camelot we wanted to create is fading into the mist." The anguish in his editorial wasn't merely about electoral loss, but the evaporation of a utopian ideal: a city run by gay people, for gay people (Craig 1986). In a letter to an unmarked newspaper, Clark Monrovia echoed the grief and disbelief: "She has stolen away Camelot; stolen hopes away…There must be something we can do to someone who has stolen a dream away" (Monrovia 1986). This mournful language spoke to a vision of West Hollywood

that could govern with pride and competence. For many gay people, the loss of a gay majority on the council was experienced as a rupture in symbolic power.

This symbolic power, however, was itself contested. While Land's campaign suffered accusations of harboring "vicious homophobes," she was simultaneously supported by major progressive and gay political organizations. Activists like Barbara Grover, who campaigned for Land while also fighting against homophobic LaRouche measures, found themselves paradoxically vilified. "We would go to these [campaign] events, and Gene La Pietra and his campaign manager would get up and say "there are those vicious homophobes working for Abbe Land. We must stop them"".[70] The discourse around "who counts" as authentically gay or supportive of gay rights revealed fractures within the community about what representation meant.

Conclusion

The various pressures that defined West Hollywood post-incorporation period inspired the city's leaders to respond through a series of initiatives, each of which demonstrated the utility of municipal governance tools in navigating the complex imperatives of political legitimacy and identity preservation. Efforts to enhance public safety through engagement with the Sheriff's Department and the policing of sex work revealed both the city's responsiveness to resident concerns and the limits of its progressive aspirations, particularly when public safety agendas clashed with the realities of queer and marginalized life along Santa Monica Boulevard.

Meanwhile, the rebranding of West Hollywood as "The Creative City" exemplified a strategic reframing of its image: one that retained connections to the city's gay identity while

[70] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, January 29, 2025.

also positioning it as a forward-looking hub of cultural production and economic vitality. This balancing act, between affirming its roots as a haven for gay, senior, renter, and immigrant communities, and projecting itself as a model of effective, business-friendly governance, defined the early months of West Hollywood's formation. These formative efforts reveal how the politics of cityhood were inseparable from the politics of identity, spatial control, and economic reinvention.

While the city leveraged public safety measures and a rebranding campaign in order to address issues over safety and economic development, it also laid the groundwork for an even more ambitious agenda: redevelopment and resign. This strategy and its outcomes was a more explicitly spatial approach to addressing community concerns over crime, blight, and quality of life, and are the focus of the next chapter.

7. PLANNING THE FUTURE: URBAN DESIGN AND REDEVELOPMENT

The city's response to the public safety and economic development concerns raised by residents did not stop at policing and marketing. A third initiative centered on the physical redevelopment of public spaces, most notably along the Sunset Strip and the eastern end[71] of Santa Monica Boulevard. The latter area, long considered underdeveloped, blighted, and "dirty" (Faderman & Timmons, 2009) became the focus of a major revitalization effort in the 1990s. Contributing to the perception of blight was the occurrence of sex work along the boulevard, particularly near the edge of West Hollywood's eastern boundary with neighboring Hollywood in Los Angeles. City planners aimed to integrate the eastern segment of the boulevard with its more affluent western counterpart and to create inclusive public spaces that could attract a more diverse group of users.

The first step was a four-day participatory design workshop that sought to diagnose the issues facing the city's East End, which contained recommendations ranging from urban redesign, small business support, and social service provision. The West Hollywood Marketing Corporation, who had spearheaded the Creative City rebranding, was one of the sponsors of this design workshop, underscoring the connection between urban design and redevelopment to the city's image and economic development agenda.

[71] The eastern end of the city was variously referred to in archival materials as the "East End", "Eastside", and "East West Hollywood."

The design workshop set the stage for a later, more ambitious participatory planning process conducted in 1997 and 1998 engaged over 300 residents across six visioning workshops. With a budget of approximately $15 million, the city began construction in 1999 on a 2.7-mile stretch, adding over 1,000 trees, pocket parks, and landscaping, while redesigning the streetscape to promote coherence and connectivity. The project, completed in 2001, garnered four awards, including an Honor Award for excellence in urban design from the American Institute of Architects. These initiatives proceeded alongside the redevelopment of major commercial projects like the Gateway Project, and the construction of affordable housing projects through the West Hollywood Community Housing Corporation, throughout the city. This chapter traces how these initiatives unfolded throughout the 1990s and into the early 2000s, and reflects on their material outcomes for the City's residents.

Focus on the East End

By mid 1990, there was discussion among council members regarding a shift in economic development priorities. While the West Hollywood Marketing Corporation was deemed successful, the council began to consider decreasing some of its funding, and directing more resources towards the "east end of town" (*Minutes, June 11* 1990). The "east end" referred to the entire eastern section of West Hollywood, encompassing the Santa Monica Boulevard corridor, bounded on the west by Fairfax Avenue, and by La Brea Avenue on the east, Willoughby and Romaine Avenues to the south, and Fountain Avenue to the north. (Figure 7.1). The area was characterized by multifamily residential zones divided by prominent commercial corridors like Santa Monica Boulevard. The boulevard on the east end consisted mostly of one-story neighborhood shops, auto-shops, and a scattering of bars and adult-oriented businesses, as well

as several recently built mini-malls, and some office and light manufacturing uses (SDDW, 1991). “It was ugly,” Mark Lehman, former city planner, shared with me. “When I moved here, we still had train tracks on Santa Monica Boulevard”...There was [a] cool neighborhood in Boystown, but the rest of it sucked”.[72]

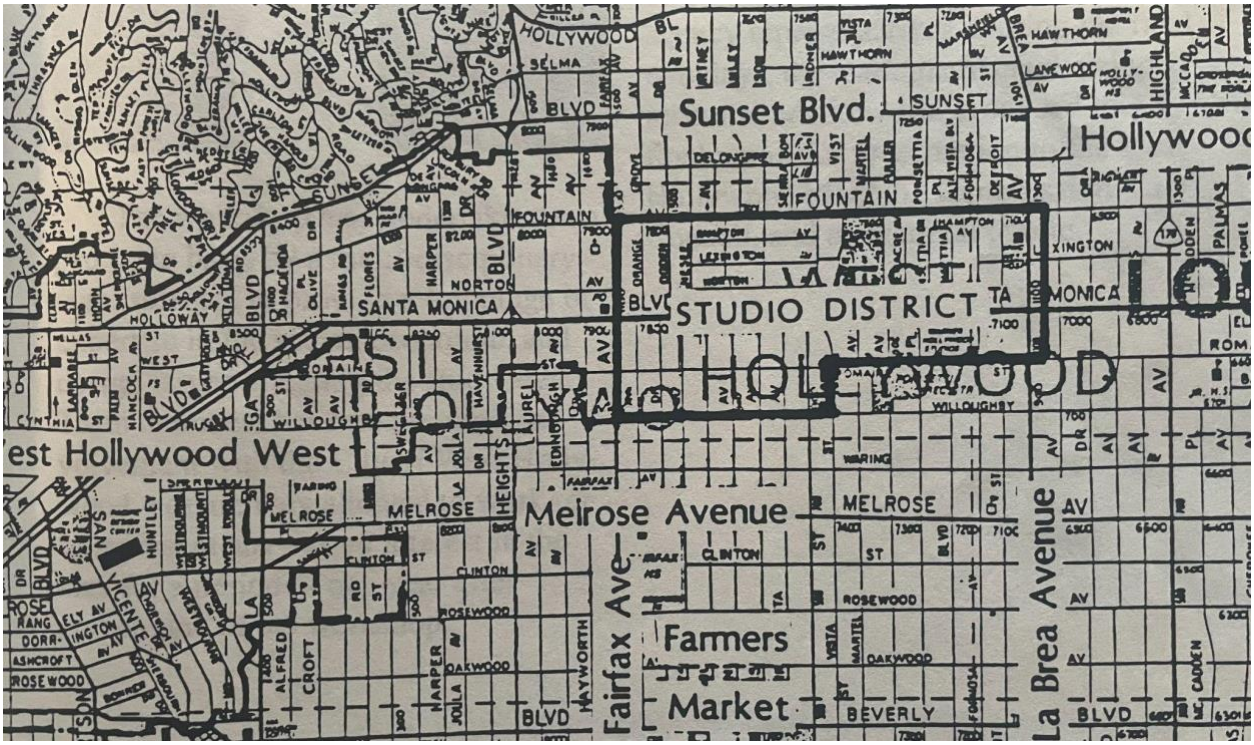


Figure 7.1. Focus area of the Studio Design District Workshop (SDDW 1991).

The council commissioned a study by an independent panel of planning and design experts to evaluate the east end and make design recommendations to the city (*Minutes, November 18* 1991). The 12-member panel organized a 4-day ‘Studio District Design Action Workshop’ whose purpose was “to hear the experiences and opinions of the East End community in order to get a fresh look at new visions and new opportunities” (SDDW 1991, 3). The workshop was facilitated by a team of urban planners, transportation specialists, business

[72] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, June 11, 2025.

owners, developers and community activists, and was co-sponsored by the City of West Hollywood's Housing and Economic Development Division, The West Hollywood Marketing Corporation, and the Urban Design Advisory Coalition (SDDW 1991). The workshop involved interviews with "over 100 people, including residents; community groups; merchants; owners; developers; representatives from social, cultural and religious organizations; elected officials, and government agency representatives." During the final two days of the workshop, the team developed a report titled "Revitalizing The City of West Hollywood's East End Community: A Design Action Workshop" and presented their findings and recommendations to the council during a city council meeting on November 18, 1991.

The executive summary of the report diagnoses several key issues to be addressed, including social service issues. In providing a brief demographic profile of the area–"A high proportion of seniors and elderly Russian Jews and a significant population of Latinos live in the East End"--the report acknowledges "another distinct population" that consists of "youth runaways, homeless people, and male prostitutes." "This population" the report claims "places a demand on social service providers and is seen by the business community as a threat to customer and employee safety and an impediment to investment" (SDDW, 1991, 2). At the outset, the report positions youth runaways, unhoused people, and sex workers as central to the issue of economic revitalization of the East End. This language reappears throughout the report.

In terms of design recommendations, one of the proposals is to "Design for a Defensible Environment," meaning "Design elements should be used to create a hospitable environment which discourages crime." Key elements to achieve this include: "increase lighting; develop vest-pocket parks; designate one-way streets to discourage cruising; provide incentives to property owners to encourage building maintenance, provide design guidelines to ensure

compatibility of new multi-family structures within the existing context" (SDDW, 1991, 2-3). The executive summary further elaborates recommendations to address "Street Design and Crime Prevention" including "Use shade trees along the Boulevard and accent major intersection with palms; Improve street lights, especially at intersections and pedestrian crossings; Encourage design that will bring pedestrian activity, attract "eyes on the street" and discourage crime; Eliminate long, blank facades, walls, and extensive shrubbery" (SDDW, 1991, 5). Later in the report, "Defensible Space" is linked to broader social issues that give rise to crime: "Design features are part of the response to broader social issues related to homelessness, lack of economic opportunity, and a history of the area as a center for prostitution" (SDDW, 1991, 39).

The report also recognizes the need to include "social services" as part of its urban design and economic development strategy. "Addressing human services needs is critical to the success of any East End revitalization policy" the report reads, "because of the presence of a high percentage of people living and working in the area who are in need of such services" (SDDW, 1991, 9). Here, the report authors recognize a marginalized, underserved population whose needs are best served through social services rather than solely design and economic development. However, the authors continue to frame this population as an issue of concern primarily to the business community: "This issue is a sensitive one, since there is the perception among some East End residents and business people that the East End has become the City's "dumping ground" for the needy. The business community is particularly frustrated by the presence of these individuals, fearing that they attract crime and visual blight while discouraging investment" (SDDW, 1991, 9). The report authors also argue that the business community needs to be part of the solution: "The experts believe that the problem must be solved with compassion and through mutual commitment. Public policy should create opportunities for those East End residents in

need of human services, but private organizations must also bear the responsibility for delivering these services" (SDDW, 1991, 9).

The report also proposes law enforcement as part of the solution to addressing crime. "Several actions can be taken to improve the lives of runaway youth, prostitutes and homeless, and, at the same time reduce their presence on the street and thereby support the business community. While law enforcement is necessary and should be used to curb illegal activities (such as hustling) it is limited by budget constraints and can never be a complete solution. The legal system is not equipped to keep prostitutes in jail for more than a few days. Thus, alternative strategies must be considered which focus on outreach, advocacy and education" (SDDW, 1991, 10). In addition to outreach and job creation programs funded through "public/private partnerships" the authors recommend "establishing a drop-in center for homeless people to receive mail, bathe, do laundry and get off the streets temporarily." The authors recommend the existing West Hollywood Homeless Shelter as a potential site for the drop-in center.

Interestingly, the report's section for addressing the East End's "social needs" is divided into the following subsections: "Runaway Youth/Prostitutes/Homeless," "General Needs of Seniors," "Needs of Elderly Russian Immigrants," "Needs of Persons with HIV Infection and/or Disabilities," "Needs of Gays and Lesbians," and "Needs of Children and Youth" (SDDW, 1991, 11-12). In the executive summary, the report fails to consider how the overlap or intersections among these groups might shape needs interpretations and policy and design solutions. For example, the needs of "Runaway Youth/Prostitutes/Homeless" would seem to necessarily include, at the very least, the "Needs of Children and Youth," Needs of Persons with HIV Infection and/or Disabilities," and "Needs of Gays and Lesbians". In this last category, a report finding does mention "Gay men are particularly concerned over gay-bashing and police policies

towards cruising and prostitution" (SDDW, 1991, 12), suggesting that some of the gay-identified participants might have recognized the intersection of gay identity, cruising, and sex work.

Later, in the body of the report, the intersection among groups is briefly mentioned: Most of West Hollywood's homeless are young males and a substantial proportion suffer from one or more severe functional disabilities such as mental disability, substance abuse, and AIDS/ARC. Some of the young street hustlers on the Boulevard are part of this homeless population" (SDDW, 1991, 56). Still, the intersection with "Gay and Lesbians" is not mentioned. The report's ambivalence on the issue of prostitution is worth quoting in full:

> "Prostitution is a crime; prostitutes are people. The presence of crime tarnishes the City's image and must be dealt with if West Hollywood is to become the kinds of city both residents and businesses need and want; at the same time, some of the hustlers can be assisted in finding alternative opportunities. The dilemma this creates for public policy is highly controversial within the City. "Law enforcement is not the answer, these people need help," some say. "No amount of social services will do away with the flow of
>
> prostitutes who end up here, and we cannot afford more," say others. While both views–and others–have merit, the question at this time is not, "Who is right?" but "What to do?" (SDDW, 1991, 56).

Responding to this crux, the authors do not lean into solutions that require law enforcement in addition to enhanced social service programs, economic opportunities, and urban design. "Better law enforcement is necessary," the report states, "but it will not solve the problem and it is limited by budget constraints. Currently, law enforcement officials in West Hollywood and Hollywood are pushing the offenders over each other's boundaries" (56). The authors favor a

cross-jurisdictional approach to addressing the issue, one that does “not rely exclusively on the justice system” (SDDW, 1991, 56). Corroborating this predicament, former City Manager shared during my interview with him that the “Los Angeles Police Department would tell people to get out of town and go over to West Hollywood. And so there was kind of this law enforcement pressure of, you're going to get in trouble in West Hollywood if you engage in illegal activity, street prostitution, or you're going to get in trouble in Hollywood. And so it is a push back and forth. It's just, it just is what it is, or was what it was” (Brotzman interview).

In terms of design, the panel also suggested the creation of a “town center” around Plummer Park, which would include a new City Hall and an “urban plaza” with underground parking and a promenade that would connect Plummer Park with Poinsettia Park. This vision for urban design should be accompanied with redevelopment of businesses and affordable housing along Santa Monica Boulevard (SDDW, 1991). In presenting the report findings to the council, Kenneth Bernstein, the panel’s co-facilitator, said “West Hollywood is a single city with unique districts” and “The city should not treat the east end as a stepchild” (Helfand 1991). The panel also recommended the creation of a nonprofit economic development corporation that would oversee the redevelopment of Santa Monica Boulevard, particularly its “commercial district” between Vista and Fairfax avenues. They also suggested establishing a “studio district” that would attract entertainment industry businesses related to production, publishing, and recording. The district would complement the planned expansion of Warner Bros. Hollywood Studios, which would add nearly 400,000 square feet of office space along Formosa Avenue.

The report was met with mixed enthusiasm. City councilors generally supported the report’s recommendations. Councilwoman Abbe Land said "I look for more specifics on how we reach some of the goals in this document. What's missing is the `how' in all this" (Helfand 1991).

Several residents were wary of the report's proposal to open a daytime center for the homeless. Tad Bright, co-chair of the citizen group Eastend Community Action, said "A shelter like this will attract more of those people into the neighborhood and increase the problems that we already have there." Bright's group had previously opposed the creation of a 24-hour homeless shelter on La Brea Avenue. They had also successfully lobbied the City Council to pass a "no camping" ordinance in Plummer Park, leading to the eviction of a homeless feeding program and the closure of a nearby 24-hour hot dog stand. "This is simply a matter of the community taking back the park from vagrants," said Ed Riney of the East End Community Action group. "It wasn't as dramatic as taking down the Berlin Wall, but for us it was reversing a really bad direction that our park was heading (in)" (Szymanski 1990). Members of East End Community Action continued to express frustration at the city council for persistent homelessness and prostitution in the city's East End. The authors of the 1991 panel urged the city's leaders and residents to "focus on the positive aspects of the east end and the visions contained in this report". Ben Claven, a member of the city's Planning Commission expressed optimism: "This is an important first step. Hopefully, this will be a point of departure for implementing a new view of the east end" (Helfand 1991).

Following the panel presentation, the council endorsed the creation of the East End Revitalization Task Force and directed Community Development staff to incorporate the report recommendations into future planning and development projects in the East End (*Minutes, November 18* 1991). While not all of the design recommendations were incorporated, the City did pursue the creation of an East End Economic Development Corporation (EDC), which was formed in 1997 (City of West Hollywood 2010), to capture state and federal funds that could be used to support affordable housing and small business retention. Similarly modeled on the West

Hollywood Community Housing Development Corporation, the EDC would facilitate the development through financing and zoning, coordinating with the Marketing Corporation and the City to "encourage redevelopment" (8). These actions set the stage for when the city was able to pursue its most ambitious redevelopment goal yet: the redesign of Santa Monica Boulevard.

The Remaking of Santa Monica Boulevard

In 1998, the city successfully acquired ownership of Santa Monica Boulevard from Caltrans. Santa Monica Boulevard was also California State Route 2, the stretch that crosses West Hollywood up until that point had been owned and managed by the state. It was unusual, although not unprecedented, for cities, especially newer and small cities like West Hollywood, to successfully lobby the state to relinquish control of a state-owned route. The City of Santa Monica had done it only a few months before, acquiring the portion of Santa Monica Boulevard that runs through it. West Hollywood, being relatively new and small, was particularly assertive in its attempt to acquire the boulevard, especially since Santa Monica Boulevard was the main thoroughfare of the city, and the Council felt it had not been adequately maintained despite years of trying to work with the state (Gierach 2003).

As part of the agreement, the state granted $8.6 million in funds to the city for basic road and sidewalk reconstruction. With additional grant funding, the city had a total budget of $15 million and granted the city an opportunity to remake the boulevard and further establish its identity as the city's main street. To achieve this goal, the city undertook an extensive community engagement process from Fall 1997 to Spring 1999 to guide the redesign of the boulevard. From September 1997 to February 1998, city staff organized six public visioning workshops to gauge resident perceptions and desires for the boulevard. According to the Santa

Monica Boulevard Master Plan, over 300 people attended these workshops. Following the workshops, the City Council directed the City Manager to assemble a Santa Monica Boulevard Advisory Steering Committee (SMBASC) and hired the design firm Zimmer Gunsul Frasca Partnership to work alongside the SMBASC (SMBMP 1999).

The redesign had to abide by the vision of the east side as described in the General Plan, the Zoning Ordinance, the Urban Design Streetscape Master Plan, and the Eastside Redevelopment Plan. The SMBASC worked with the design team to make design recommendations to the City Council specifying urban design elements along the boulevard's streetscape and public spaces, resulting in the comprehensive Santa Monica Boulevard Master Plan (SMBMP).

The SMBASC recommended both near-term and long-term design priorities. In the near-term, the following recommendations were laid out: 1,200 new street trees, Basic median, boulevard garden and gateway landscaping, Boulevard parkway landscaping, Infrastructure for future water features and landscape work (water and power), Wiring for holiday tree lighting, Major pedestrian crosswalks in patterned asphalt. Long-term priorities focused on enhancing the overall streetscape, public spaces, and neighborhood identity through a range of integrated improvements, including additional landscaping and planting initiatives; water elements at key locations including medians, and decorative elements like light pole vines or hanging baskets; lighting improvements; new street furniture; a cohesive signage program; public art; and the expansion of Plummer Park (SMBMP 1999).

Concerning the East Side specifically (the section of Santa Monica Boulevard between La Brea to Holloway), the plan outlined several recommendations focused on improving the sidewalk environment. Among these included "Improve safety by extending the sidewalk at

intersection corners to make the pedestrian more visible to motorists and to shorten pedestrian crossing distances" and "Develop special boulevard gardens and gateways at La Brea, Vista / Gardner, Fairfax and Crescent Heights." (Figures 7.2 and 7.3). As part of the strategy to create an "effective gateway entrance for West Hollywood" the plan includes a recommendation to "Commission an artist who works primarily with light to design a unique way to illuminate the city's eastern gateway...A glow way entry from La Brea into West Hollywood would create an exciting, distinctly different gateway for the East Side."



Figure 7.2. View of proposed East Side improvements near Vista and Gardner showing sidewalk extension and enhanced bus stop. Source: SMBMP, 1999



Figure 7.3. Birds Eye view looking east from atop Emser Tile building at Croft. Source: SMBMP, 1999

At the project's conclusion, Santa Monica Boulevard had been transformed according to the vision set out in its master plan. Over 1000 new trees, including Drake elms and Jacarandas, were planted, along with newly designed pocket parks, boulevard gardens, and drought tolerant landscaping in the medians. The redesign of the boulevard was hailed as a major success, and was awarded the American Institute of Architects Honor Award for excellence in urban design.

City leaders have since hailed the redesign and redevelopment efforts as major successes, particularly for overcoming urban blight. Mike Jenkins discussed during my interview with him West Hollywood's approach to redevelopment on the city's East End:

> We did, at one point, have a redevelopment agency. And we used it, and we had one redevelopment area, and the south west corner of Santa Monica Boulevard and La Brea

> Boulevard completely redeveloped. That area is now a mall. Before it had been a very rundown blighted area. So the city did make use of its power of redevelopment for a period of time until the state, several years ago, dissolved all redevelopment agencies. So that was one area where we did a massive redo of a blighted area of town through the power of redevelopment.[73]

Separate from the 2001 redesign of Santa Monica Boulevard, the redevelopment agency completed the West Hollywood Gateway Project in 2004. The redevelopment included a private mall along the city's eastern boundary, containing a Target and a Starbucks, among other shops and restaurants (Figures 7.4-7.6). The use of a redevelopment agency in the context of West Hollywood's East End is in many ways a classic urban renewal move–a publicly guided redevelopment effort to address perceived decay of a neighborhood. This was followed by a broader strategy of harnessing private markets through BIDs and physical infrastructure like billboards, particularly and most famously along Sunset Boulevard.



Figure 7.4. Rendering of the West Hollywood Gateway Project. Source: City of West Hollywood.

[73] Interview by the author, March 29, 2024



Figure 7.5. West Hollywood Gateway Project: Before and After. Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development



Figure 7.6. West Hollywood Gateway Project. Source: City of West Hollywood.

While most city leaders have a favorable reflection of the redevelopment, some people, like Gilda Haas, maintained a more critical position towards redevelopment. In my interview with Haas, she shared her view on redevelopment:

I think the whole creation of a redevelopment agency….tax increment financing, all that other kind of stuff…I think I was a big critic of it at the time…I didn't see that it was equitable or useful…It had to do with the bigger context of where redevelopment was going, and redevelopment law and stuff like that, that more and more cities were like, "Oh, our whole city could be a redevelopment area", you know, like, this whole thing about blight or social blight…And here's West Hollywood, you know, West Hollywood is

located in between Hollywood and Beverly Hills. And it's not there's a wall around it or anything like that, you know?[74]

"Redevelopment was slum removal," Haas added. "It was replacing, you know, a slum with Brasilia. And you know that's how I came to CES (Coalition for Economic Survival)…I had observed how the Los Angeles Redevelopment Agency seemed to be picking off neighborhoods one by one. And CES was organizing in some of those neighborhoods, like in Pico Union, for example. That was my first introduction to CES." [75] Haas, who is also an urban planner, provides a perspective of how planning as a discipline has had to come to terms with its history of destructive development processes, particularly in the mid twentieth century.

Paul Zimmerman, the former head of the West Hollywood Community Housing Corporation (WHCHC) shared his view that there was less attention among City Council leaders towards housing affordability:

There were certain people who claimed allegiance as part of, again, more movement based progressive thinking, who would cave when it came to get to votes. And that

[74] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, December 5, 2024.
[75] Ibid.

> alludes a little bit to the big change that happened in the early 90s around shifting towards business interests in the city. So the kind of revolutionary fervor of the city lasted until the early 90s, and then it petered out, and the new participants all seemed to have business connections. Gay, typically. So I just had to fight harder.[76]

Zimmerman attributed part of this change to a broader right-wing shift in national politics. "The whole culture is shifting to the right with Reagan. We've got an AIDS crisis. And I guess, well, I still have trouble understanding gay Republicans, I'm sorry"[77] I asked Zimmerman if he could elaborate on the Council's shifting attitudes towards affordable housing, to which he responded:

> More gay people from the business community were taking an interest [in city issues], and the more progress, and let's say, using John [Heilman] and Abby [Land] as a as a placeholder for the more liberal interests…the business people knew John and Abby favored housing, and so I think in some subtle way, we became a trading chip, that the business people were able to ask for more business oriented stuff by intimating that they would go along with the housing stuff, or that they would get in the way, and that would go on completely blind to me. I would just have a nagging feeling that we were being traded. And I think there is something that if you're, if you're basically a capitalist, you see housing as charity work, and you only think a certain amount of charity work is warranted. You don't want to change the housing marketplace, which is certainly what Alan Heskin[78] wanted to do with his co-ops that were owned by the tenants, which is certainly what people out of the 60s wanted to do with housing owned by nonprofit

[76] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, June 4, 2025.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Alan Heskin was a UCLA professor of urban planning who taught a graduate course that produced the first housing plan for the City of West Hollywood.

> corporations and locked up–you see, all of these properties have covenants which run for a minimum of 55 years. So they're off the market. You can't buy them, you can't trade them. You can't sell them because the rents are too low to make a profit. That's kind of offensive to a business person.[79]

The reflection of business interests in the city's policy and planning agenda can partly be traced to the connection between planning and the city's nightlife and entertainment industry, a relationship that Mark Lehman, a former planner for the city, helped foster. I met with Lehman for an interview, which took place at the Soho House in West Hollywood, where he is a member. Lehman, who had worked in real estate and transactional business law, shared the following anecdote about the city's relationship to entertainment industries vis a vis urban planning:

> Ultimately I do land use work. And what's been unique for me this crossover between planning and West Hollywood's entertainment and hospitality community. Yeah, I mean, I'm gay…I come from the club scene in New York, and then I walked into the club scene in LA and especially in West Hollywood, which predated cityhood. And it just turns out, I got to know a lot of people who owned and the running bars, and I wind up representing them. Wow. So what I've done, you know, over the last 25-30 years, that's actually why I'm a Soho House member, because I handled SoHo House's entitlements here in West Hollywood.[80]

Ehrenfeucht (2013) points out that the redesign was successful in another way: "it corresponds with what the gay press had depicted" (68). An 1984 article in *Frontiers* (3/7/84) foresaw a newly designed streetscape as a potential product of the new gay city:

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[79] Ibid.
[80] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, June 11, 2025.

> Colorful open-air mini-buses take residents from their offices to their homes. The new city's system of 'pocket parks' comes alive with…lovers strolling past the fountains and through the gardens…The lights go on along the center strip of West Hollywood Concourse (formerly called Santa Monica Boulevard) which is now lined with tall palm trees, birds of paradise flowers and sculptures…The City of West Hollywood has commissioned local architects and designers to create special bus benches, sidewalks and refuse containers for the area. Flower planters now line the entire Melrose District. (Forest 1995, 144).

Forest quotes the same article in his analysis of West Hollywood's gay identity. He argues that the emphasis on public space, rather than private, is evidence of "a city which is highly conscious of its visual appearance, where even the garbage cans are 'created' by designers" (1995). While the new garbage cans were not quite as remarkable as the *Frontiers* article envisions, and while the SMBMP does not directly reference the city's gay identity, the extent to which the article, written before cityhood and over a decade before redesign efforts began, matches the attention given to the scale and details of the boulevard's new aesthetic is remarkable. Perhaps Sheldon Andelson, the prominent gay landowner and political donor, was right when he foreshadowed to the New York Times in 1984 that "Ultimately, Santa Monica Boulevard could look like a street in Paris" (Lindsey 1984).

While the redesign was lauded for its aesthetic achievements, the new design assumed a user group that was primarily oriented towards commercial consumption at private business establishments like shops, bars, and restaurants. This meant that several "nonconforming groups" (Ehrenfeucht 2013) who had regularly frequented the eastern segment of the boulevard prior to the redesign, including people who were low-income, unhoused, and sex workers, were excluded

from the new vision behind the redesign masterplan. Nothing in the masterplan for the redesign effort suggested that the city intended to make the boulevard comfortable for nonconforming users. Indeed, the lack of public benches except for at bus stops led some unhoused people to sit on the sidewalk. The redesign also incorporated formerly overlooked spaces of the boulevard into a consistent whole, and thus exposed the spaces sex workers formerly frequented in pre-incorporation days. Among these spaces was the Yukon Mining Company restaurant, which had served until it closed, both as space for sex workers to socialize as well as pick up clients (Figure 7.7 and 7.8). The redesign, combined with the city's efforts, beginning in 1991, to enforce state laws banning prostitution, pushed unhoused people and sex workers, many of whom were transgender women of color, out of West Hollywood (2013).



Figure 7.7. The Yukon Mining Company Restaurant. Source: Ehrenfeucht, 2013.



Figure 7.8. Interior of The Yukon Mining Company Restaurant. Source: Instagram

Much of the redevelopment on the East End focused on the adjacent buildings and spaces surrounding the film studio. Former city councilmember John Duran shared the ambition behind the clearance of such spaces:

> We decided we would create an entire zone and just take it all. And completely shut it all down and create an opportunity to build new housing, new restaurants, new clubs. There was a homeless shelter there back then. I mean, we just took over everything from La Brea, roughly, to where the Astro burger is on Gardner.[81]

When I asked Duran to clarify which spaces were targeted for redevelopment, he said, "It was all the smaller businesses that had been serving that studio that were no longer functional or largely vacant. We had a lot of vagrancy. There was a lot of open prostitution, male hustlers, primarily, a lot of illicit drug use".[82] Duran was quite proud of the redevelopment despite being controversial:

[81] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, June 13, 2025.
[82] Ibid.

> All of the existing businesses that were there–the car washes, some of the restaurants, you know, the homeless shelter–they all fought us and said 'no.' But, I mean, we had a bigger picture and a bigger idea, and we voted 'yes.' The residents that were there fought us. They did not want us to do anything to redevelop the Eastern end [of] town. And, you know, we had to cast some critical votes, and we did. And today, if you go to La Brea and
>
> Santa Monica. It's quite, quite beautiful…with big sidewalks and neighborhood-serving businesses and, you know, floors and floors of housing and people who get to be part of West Hollywood.[83]

Reflecting on the transformation of West Hollywood, Steve Schulte shared with me: "If I get on Santa Monica and get to La Brea, I don't recognize it anymore".[84]

Ehrenfeucht (2013) has argued that this exclusionary outcome was primarily a result of a failure to include non-normative populations in the design process, implying that better planning outreach would have incorporated and therefore reflected the needs of such populations. Campaign materials and interviews documenting the incorporation period reveal otherwise; gay and non-gay advocates for incorporation were fully aware these populations existed and, while not explicit about connecting gender and racial non conformity to criminal activity, were explicit in connecting sex work to deviant behavior and that such behavior presented a threat to the "public." Thus, the promise of safety as a potential benefit of cityhood relied on the implicit notion that certain members of the LGBTQ+ community were not only excluded from the

[83] Ibid.
[84] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, December 10, 2024.

community for whom cityhood would protect, but also constituted the very threat that cityhood would address.

Impacts of Redevelopment

Speaking to the potential impact such initiatives could have for gentrification on the East End, former City Manager Paul Brotzman shared during my interview with him the following reflection:

> The Council was committed to trying to remain the same; retain the same social, economic, demographic mix over time that existed at the time of incorporation. I used to say to the council, at least to some of the council members, I used to say, 'You know, if you're successful on some of the major elements of your agenda, you make it a serious challenge to be successful on other elements. And that is if you make West Hollywood a hugely desirable place to live, it's going to be a challenge to maintain affordability.' There's a paradox. You have a significant law enforcement program that really makes West Hollywood a very safe place to be. You have significant money going into public improvements, whether it was street tree planting or whether it was upgrading all of the parks, or whether it was paving of streets. All of the different improvements that were made to the city to make it a more desirable place to be also meant that it costs more to be there, because the values went up. So there is the paradox. How do you retain the same social, economic, demographic mix?.[85]

[85] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, April 30, 2025.

I asked Brotzman if he believed the city had done the best it could in maintaining that affordability. “Yes,” he replied. “By Yes, I mean the West Hollywood Housing Corporation controls a significant number of rental units, and they are permanently affordable. Rent Stabilization still exists, although, you know, significantly restricted by state law, but still exists. So yes, the city did work aggressively to maintain that mix. But on the other hand, individual housing property values. Look at what it costs to buy a house in West Hollywood…hugely expensive. It's crazy expensive.”[86]

One way to at least partially assess the impacts of redevelopment is through an analysis of socio-demographic changes over time. In the ensuing years following redevelopment, West Hollywood's socio-demographic profile began to change. While it is difficult to trace shifts in housing tenure, income levels, cost of living, and property values to the decisions of West Hollywood’s planning and policies since the city incorporated, one can at least assess the extent to which the city’s leaders have succeeded in maintaining West Hollywood as an affordable place to live.

It is important to highlight that West Hollywood, like most cities in metropolitan areas, is not an island. Changes to socio-demographic trends, housing affordability, and employment patterns are impacted by trends in neighboring cities and their neighborhoods, and West Hollywood is no exception. Given that the City is surrounded on all sides by larger Beverly Hills to the west, and the much larger Los Angeles to the north, east, and south, West Hollywood is necessarily affected by social, political, and economic factors of those cities. For this reason, I compare West Hollywood changes in rents values and other census data with those of

[86] Ibid.

neighboring cities, including Los Angeles as well as the more comparably sized cities of Beverly Hills and Santa Monica.

In addition to regional factors affecting West Hollywood, state and national-level factors must also be considered (see Figure 7.9 for a timeline of events related to West Hollywood's redevelopment and economic history). At least two economic recessions affected affordability– the early 1990s recession, and the Great Recession in the late 2000s. A short recession also occurred in 2020 in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Economic recessions not only suppress real estate markets, household incomes, and job growth, but have an outsized impact on economies based on tourism and entertainment, such as West Hollywood's.

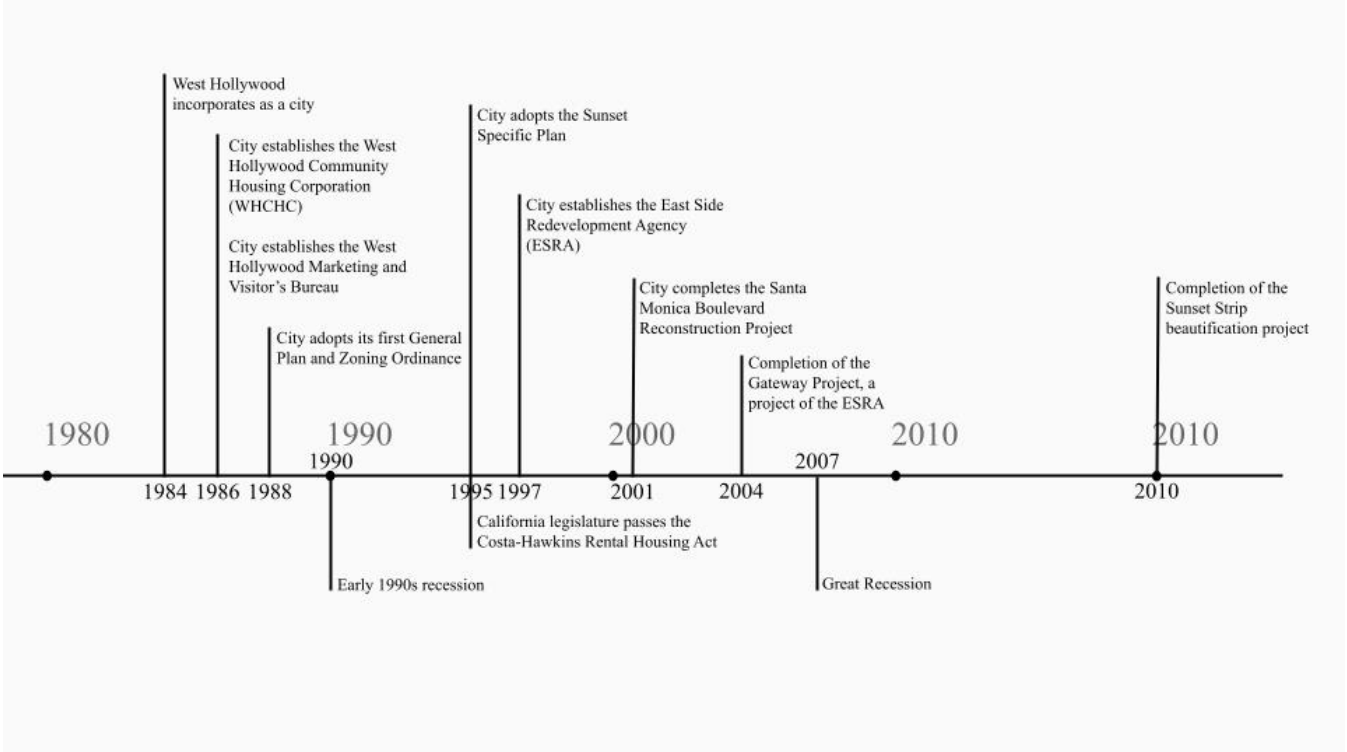


Figure 7.9. Timeline of redevelopment and economic events. Source: author.

Another factor affecting affordability in West Hollywood, and California as a whole in the 1990s, was the passage of The Costa-Hawkins Rental Housing Act, in 1995. The law enforced

state-wide de-control of rent controlled housing as vacancy occurred. Limits on rent increases such as those enacted through West Hollywood's Rent Stabilization Ordinance were gradually eliminated for units that were vacated voluntarily or through eviction for non-payment of rent. Compounding the difficulty of assessing the effects of laws like Costa-Hawkins Act on rental rates is the fact that an economic recession took place in the early 1990s, affecting the housing market and household incomes nation-wide. Thus, while median gross rent declined between 1990 and 2000, so did median household income. The percentage of cost-burdened households spiked in 1990 in almost all the geographies discussed here–census districts and neighboring cities–then declined in 2000, increased again in 2010, and leveled out somewhat in 2020.

Data pulled from the US Census makes it possible to compare indicators of affordability across census tracts and across cities. For example, Table X shows decennial changes in the number of renter-occupied households in each of West Hollywood's five districts from 1980 to 2020. Each of the five districts conforms to the city's census tracts for the 1980, 1990, 2000 and 2010 census (Figure 7.10). Beginning in 2020, the two additional tracts were counted, one in Eastside and one in Northwest, and have been combined within their respective districts in order to make tracts comparable across decades.

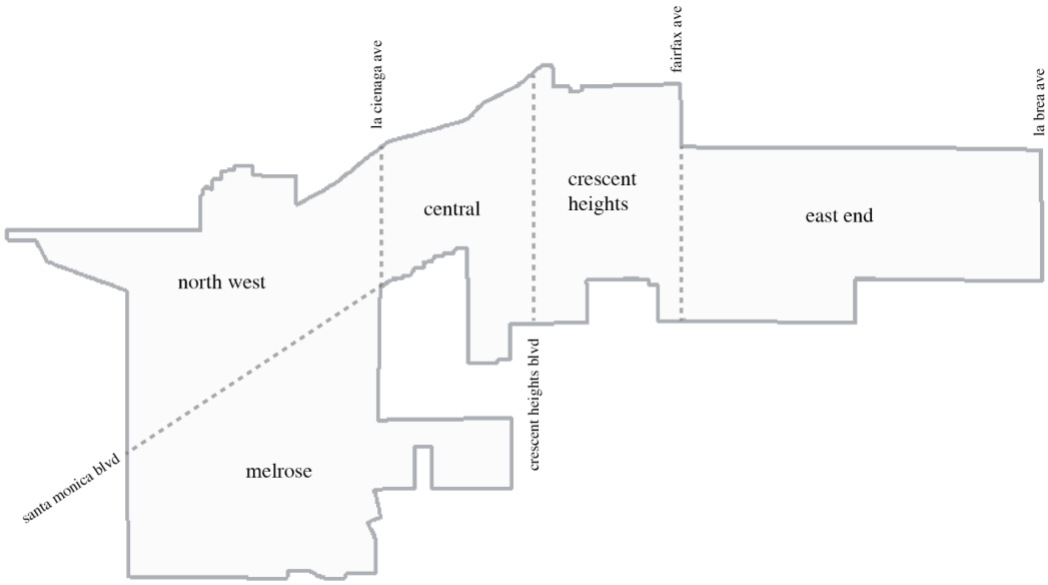


Figure 7.10. Districts of West Hollywood Districts. Districts are based on 1980 Census tracts. Source: author.

	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
Eastside	5087	5212	5270	5162	6075
Cr. Heights	3990	3737	3936	3735	3946
Central	3384	2637	2740	2624	2757
Melrose	2950	2643	2548	2468	2151
Northwest	3978	3140	3643	3553	3395

Table 7.1. Renter-occupied households by district. Source: Longitudinal Tract Database (1980-2010); US Census Bureau, 5-Year ACS (2020)

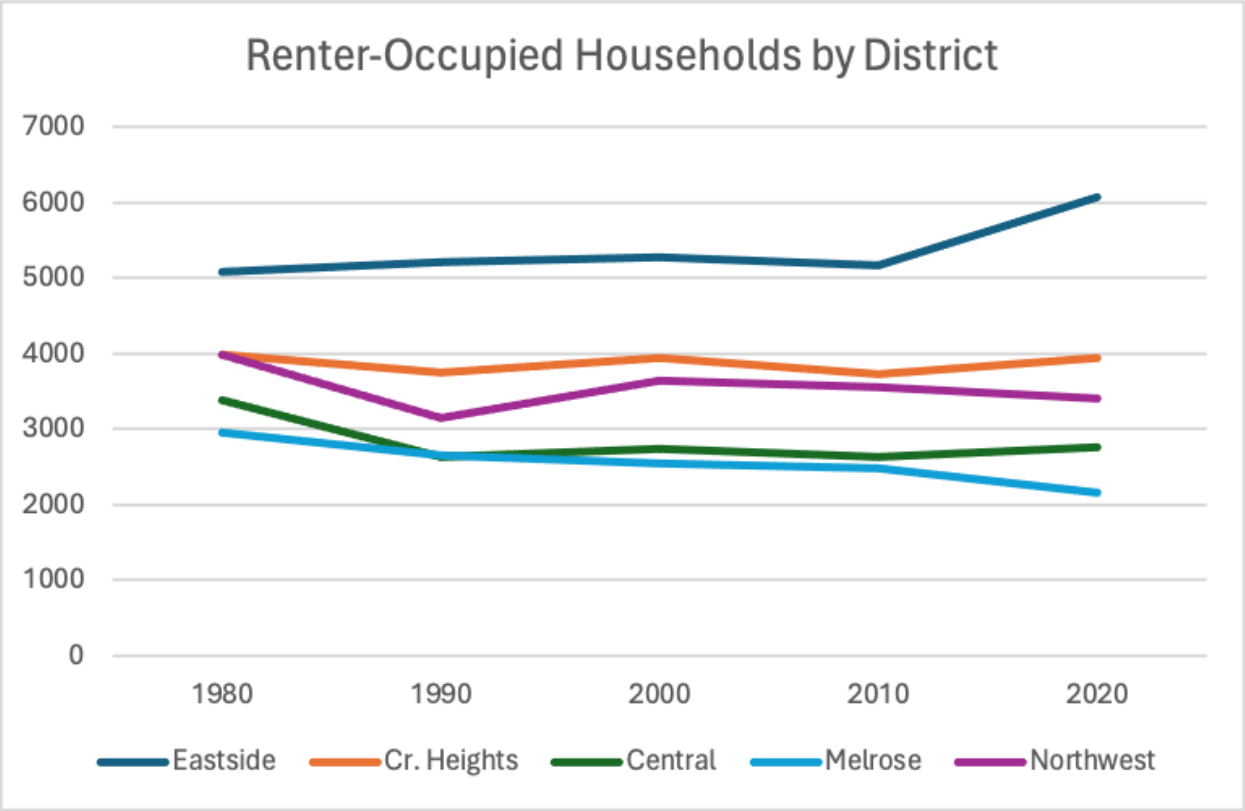


Figure 7.11. Renter-occupied households by district.

The number of renter-occupied households dipped in every district, with the exception of the Eastside, from 1980-1990, and then held steady for most of the city's history. Notably, the number of renters jumps significantly on the Eastside from 2010 to 2020, perhaps reflecting an increase in the number of apartment buildings–at least 150–constructed by the West Hollywood Community Housing Corporation during that decade (Table 7.1 and Figure 7.11). By contrast, the number of owner-occupied households increased most significantly in the first decade 1980-1990 (Table 7.2 and Figure 7.12). The overall decline in renters and increase in homeowners during this first decade is likely due to the grandfathering of apartment-to-condominium conversions on the west side of West Hollywood, and that had mostly begun prior to incorporation.

	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
Eastside	419	463	424	435	142
Cr. Heights	201	498	435	522	478
Central	391	1175	1189	1184	1153
Melrose	678	870	848	805	823
Northwest	1009	1981	2088	2030	1925

Table 7.2. Owner-occupied households by district. Source: Longitudinal Tract Database (1980-2010); US Census Bureau, 5-Year ACS (2020)

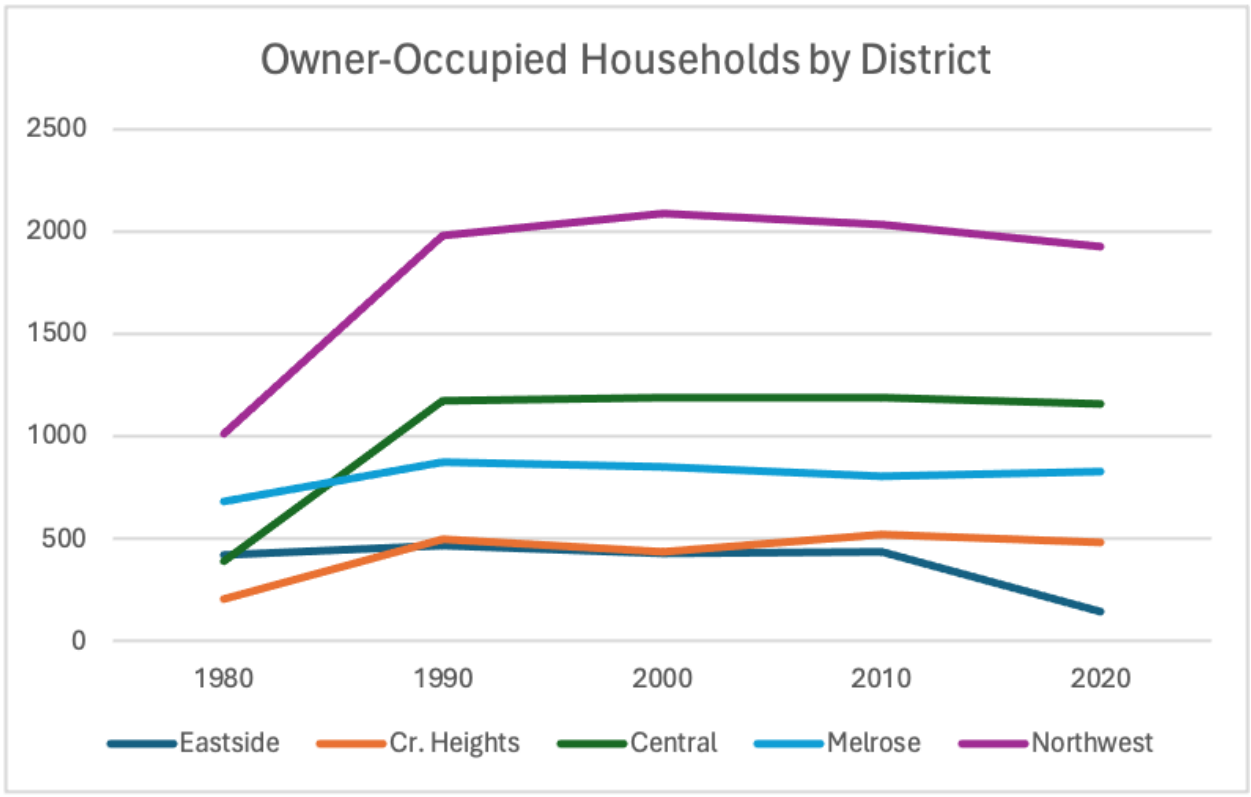


Figure 7.12. Owner-occupied households by district

In terms of housing affordability, the city saw rent values increase in every district in every decade, with the exception of the 1990s (Table 7.3). This exception likely reflects the early

1990s economic recession. In the decades where rents increased, the Eastside saw the greatest percentage change, suggesting that the impact of redevelopment was greatest on the Eastside. (Table 7.4 and Figure 7.13).

	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
Eastside*	$ 966	$ 1,238	$ 1,161	$ 1,555	$ 1,874
Cr. Heights	$ 1,106	$ 1,390	$ 1,366	$ 1,809	$ 2,120
Central	$ 1,353	$ 1,548	$ 1,552	$ 1,936	$ 2,081
Melrose	$ 1,288	$ 1,540	$ 1,467	$ 2,041	$ 2,450
Northwest*	$ 1,384	$ 1,592	$ 1,552	$ 2,052	$ 2,203

*Weighted average of multiple tracts

Table 7.3. Median gross rent (in #2025) by district. Source: Longitudinal Tract Database (1980-2010); US Census Bureau, 5-Year ACS (2020)

	1980-1990	1990-2000	2000-2010	2010-2020
Eastside	28%	-6%	34%	21%
Cr. Heights	26%	-2%	32%	17%
Central	14%	0%	25%	7%
Melrose	20%	-5%	39%	7%
Northwest	15%	-3%	32%	7%

Table 7.4. Median gross rent - percent change by district. Source: Longitudinal Tract Database (1980-2010); US Census Bureau, 5-Year ACS (2020)

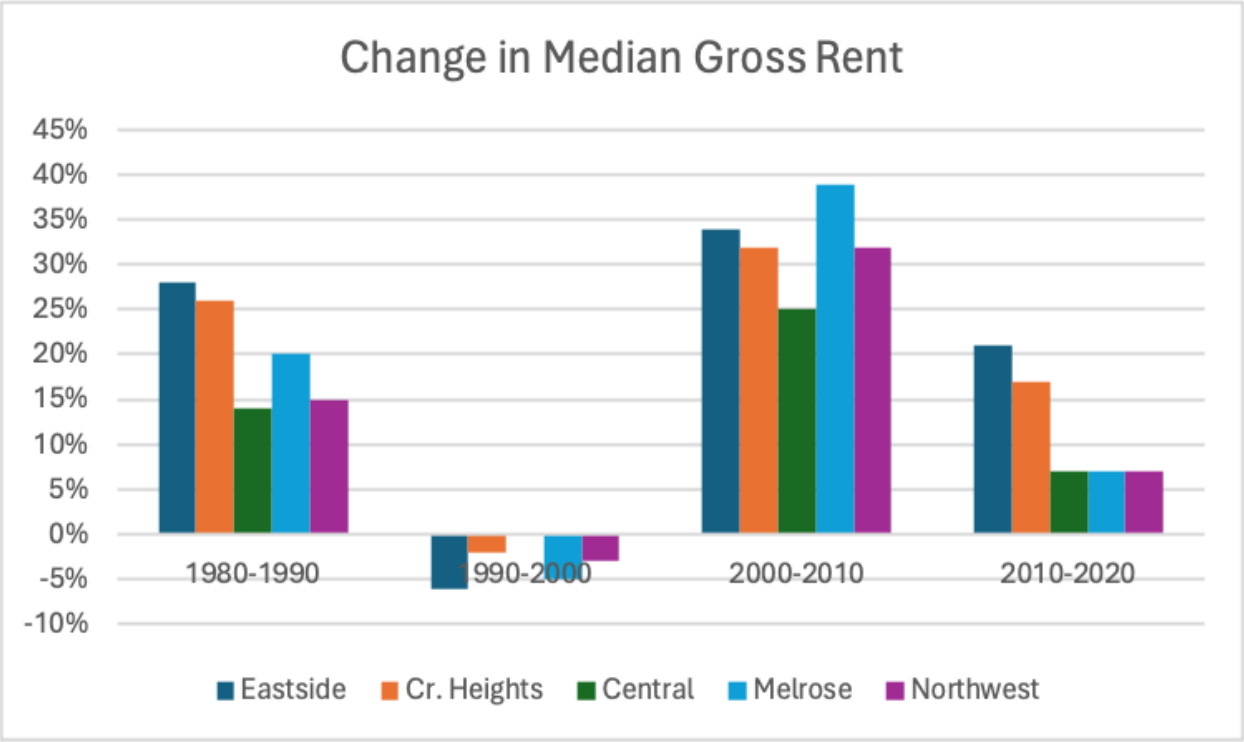


Figure 7.13. Median gross rent - percent change by district.

When compared to neighboring and nearby cities including Los Angeles, Beverly Hills, and Santa Monica, West Hollywood fares somewhat better–rent values did not increase to the same extent in the first three decades of comparison. This is likely due to the city's strong rent control ordinance and protections put in place soon after incorporating. Rent values in West Hollywood did increase at a larger rate in 2010 (Table 7.5 and 7.6, Figure 7.14).

	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
West Hollywood	$ 1,271	$ 1,518	$ 1,356	$ 1,675	$ 2,093
Santa Monica	$ 1,249	$ 1,382	$ 1,499	$ 1,978	$ 2,280
Los Angeles	$ 1,054	$ 1,523	$ 1,211	$ 1,551	$ 1,828
Beverly Hills	$ 1,639	$ 2,272	$ 2,129	$ 2,474	$ 2,711

Table 7.5. Median gross rent (in $2025) by city. Source: US Census Bureau, Decennial Census (1980-2000); US Census Bureau, 5-Year ACS (2010, 2020)

	1980-1990	1990-2000	2000-2010	2010-2020
West Hollywood	19%	-11%	24%	25%
Santa Monica	11%	8%	32%	15%
Los Angeles	44%	-20%	28%	18%
Beverly Hills	39%	-6%	16%	10%

Table 7.6. Median gross rent - percent change by city. Source: US Census Bureau, Decennial Census (1980-2000); US Census Bureau, 5-Year ACS (2010, 2020)

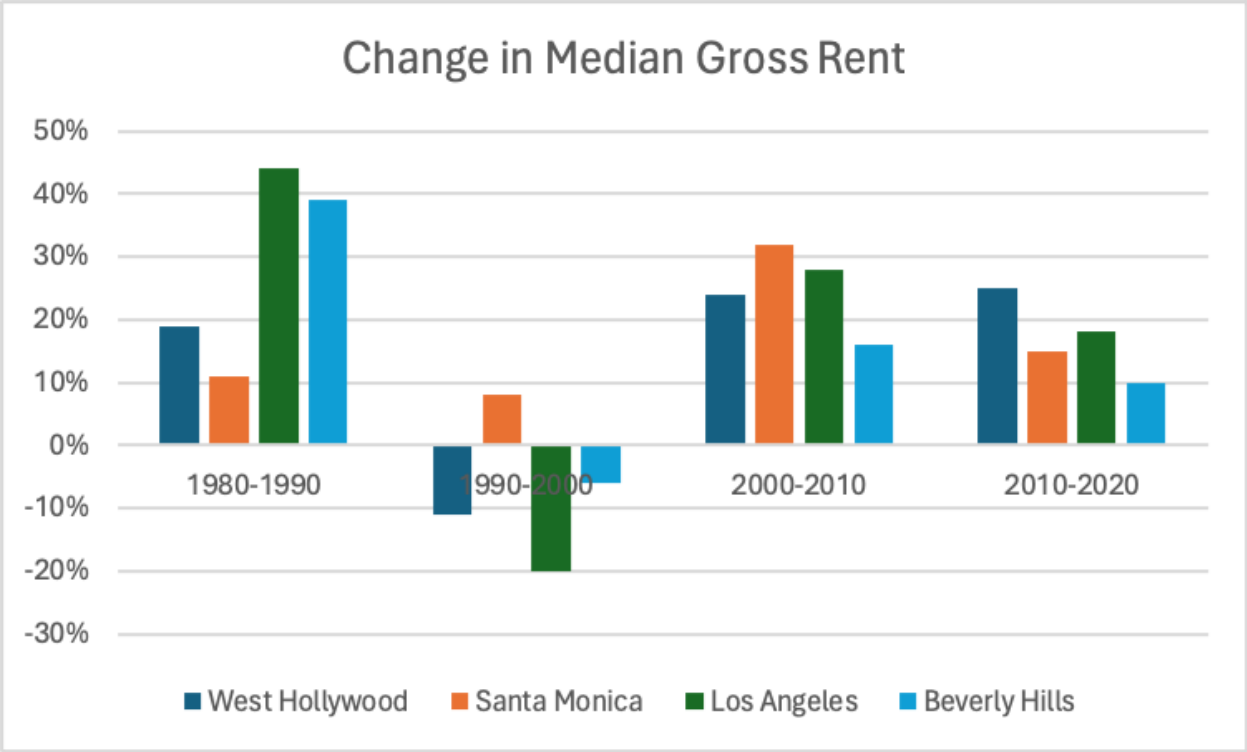


Figure 7.14. Change in median gross rent by city

In terms of home values, each of the five West Hollywood districts saw increased values in each in the 1980s and 2000s, and decreased values in the 1990s, and only modest changes in the 2010s, reflecting the impacts of economic recessions (Table 7.7 and 7.8, Figure 7.15).

	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
Eastside*	$ 392,768	$ 682,901	$ 602,993	$ 998,354	$ 1,094,755
Cr. Heights	$ 500,521	$ 768,843	$ 384,536	$ 894,104	$ 1,067,760
Central	$ 673,957	$ 817,712	$ 337,685	$ 818,455	$ 807,240
Melrose	$ 538,038	$ 1,012,832	$ 781,188	$ 1,146,220	$ 1,301,760
Northwest*	$ 575,118	$ 900,161	$ 522,136	$ 971,666	$ 930,277

*Weighted average of multiple tracts

Table 7.7. Median home value by district (in $2025) Source: Longitudinal Tract Database (1980-2010); US Census Bureau, 5-Year ACS (2020)

	1980-1990	1990-2000	2000-2010	2010-2020
Eastside	74%	-12%	66%	10%
Cr. Heights	54%	-50%	133%	19%
Central	21%	-59%	142%	-1%
Melrose	88%	-23%	47%	14%
Northwest	57%	-42%	86%	-4%

Table 7.8. Median home value - percent change by district. Source: Longitudinal Tract Database (1980-2010); US Census Bureau, 5-Year ACS (2020)

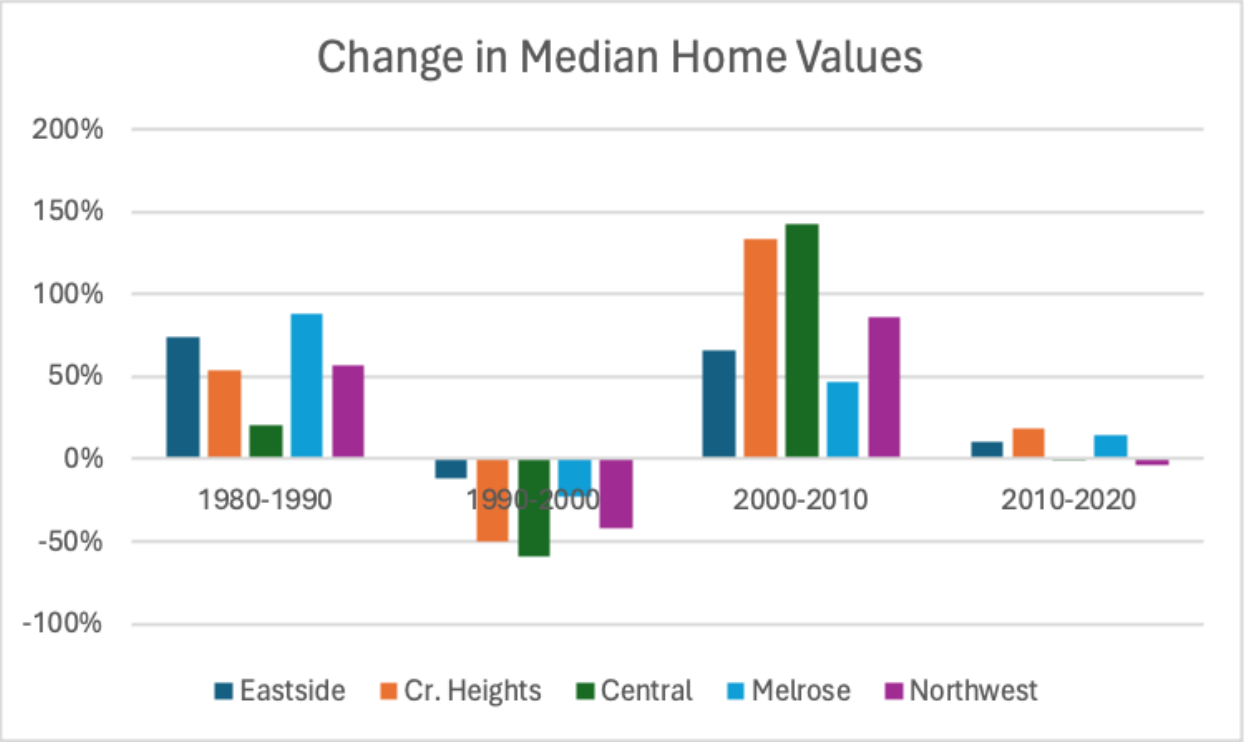


Figure 7.15. Change in median home values by district.

When compared to its neighborhoods, home values in West Hollywood increased at the fastest rate in the 1980s, which may be partially explained by improvements to the city's relatively old housing stock. By contrast, Los Angeles saw the greatest percentage increase in home values in the 2000s, while Beverly Hills saw the greatest increase in the 1990s and 2010s (Table 7.9 and 7.10, Figure 7.16).

	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
West Hollywood	$ 474,880	$ 827,288	$ 707,136	$ 879,040	$ 892,440
Santa Monica	$ 704,158	$ 1,190,000	$ 1,089,066	$ 1,320,570	$ 1,742,520
Los Angeles	$ 356,531	$ 574,532	$ 385,584	$ 742,226	$ 804,840
Beverly Hills	$ 742,371	$ 1,190,000	$ 1,740,000	$ 1,340,000	$ 2,400,001

Table 7.9. Median home value (in $2025) by city. Source: US Census Bureau, Decennial Census (1980-2000); US Census Bureau, 5-Year ACS (2010, 2020)

	1980-1990	1990-2000	2000-2010	2010-2020
West Hollywood	74%	-15%	24%	2%
Santa Monica	69%	-8%	21%	32%
Los Angeles	61%	-32%	92%	8%
Beverly Hills	60%	46%	-22%	79%

Table 7.10. Median home value - percent change by city. Source: US Census Bureau, Decennial Census (1980-2000); US Census Bureau, 5-Year ACS (2010, 2020)

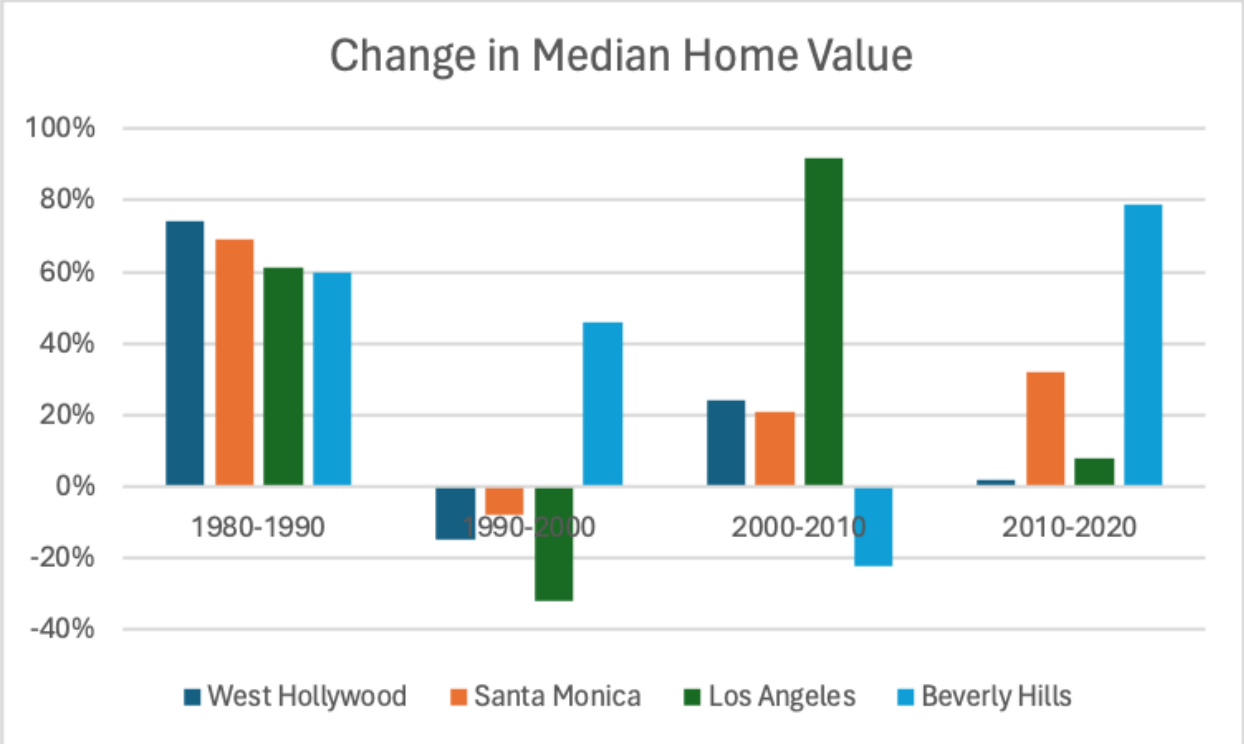


Figure 7.16. Change in median home value by city.

In terms of income, West Hollywood's Eastside began with the lowest median income, followed by Crescent Heights. By 2020, the Eastside's median income was still the lowest, but had increased at the highest rate when compared to the other five districts (Table 7.11 and 7.12, Figure 7.17). The drastic change in income levels on the Eastside may be an indicator of gentrification, especially viewed alongside increased rents, which similarly outpaced other districts.

	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
Eastside*	$ 38,656	$ 52,817	$ 51,340	$ 44,043	$ 65,168
Cr. Heights	$ 47,561	$ 70,069	$ 69,413	$ 69,408	$ 89,526
Central	$ 61,768	$ 85,762	$ 88,651	$ 109,454	$ 96,457
Melrose	$ 61,957	$ 73,252	$ 75,530	$ 90,565	$ 98,770
Northwest*	$ 65,412	$ 85,207	$ 86,012	$ 98,796	$ 92,748

*Weighted average of multiple tracts

Table 7.11. Median household income (in $2025) by district. Source: Longitudinal Tract Database (1980-2010); US Census Bureau, 5-Year ACS (2020)

	1980-1990	1990-2000	2000-2010	2010-2020
Eastside	37%	-3%	-14%	48%
Cr. Heights	47%	-1%	0%	29%
Central	39%	3%	23%	-12%
Melrose	18%	3%	20%	9%
Northwest	30%	1%	15%	-6%

Table 7.12. Median household income - percent change by district. Source: Longitudinal Tract Database (1980-2010); US Census Bureau, 5-Year ACS (2020)

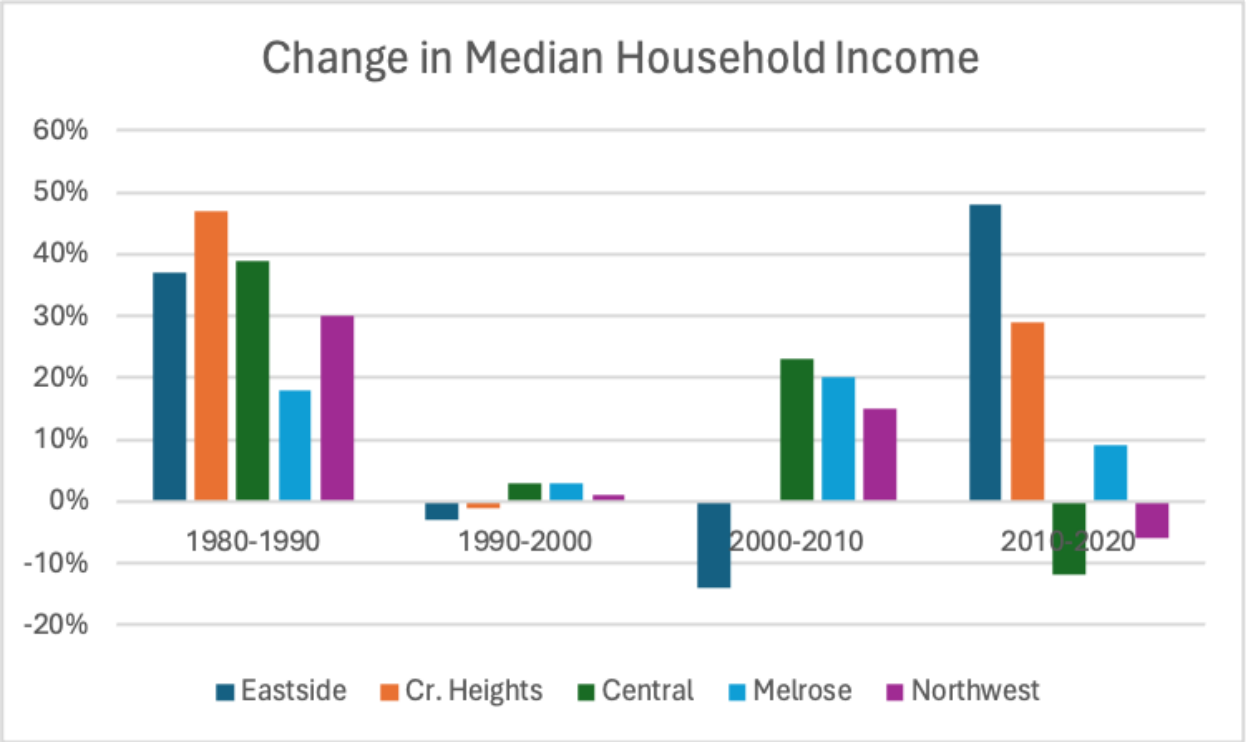


Figure 7.17. Change in median household income by district

When compared to neighboring cities, West Hollywood saw similar rates of changing median income (Table 7.13 and 7.14, Figure 7.18). Income levels in West Hollywood rose

considerably in the 1980s and 2010s and more modestly in the 2000s, and declined in the 1990s. Santa Monica was the only city to see median income increase across all decades.

	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
West Hollywood	$ 50,983	$ 69,767	$ 67,710	$ 69,692	$ 86,030
Santa Monica	$ 61,601	$ 85,673	$ 88,242	$ 92,248	$ 117,960
Los Angeles	$ 58,377	$ 73,601	$ 63,835	$ 65,845	$ 78,348
Beverly Hills	$ 92,921	$ 129,348	$ 123,444	$ 111,840	$ 121,489

Table 7.13. Median household income (in $2025) by city. Source: US Census Bureau, Decennial Census (1980-2000); US Census Bureau, 5-Year ACS (2010, 2020)

	1980-1990	1990-2000	2000-2010	2010-2020
West Hollywood	37%	-3%	3%	23%
Santa Monica	39%	3%	5%	28%
Los Angeles	26%	-13%	3%	19%
Beverly Hills	39%	-5%	-9%	9%

Table 7.14. Median household income - percent change by city. Source: US Census Bureau, Decennial Census (1980-2000); US Census Bureau, 5-Year ACS (2010, 2020)

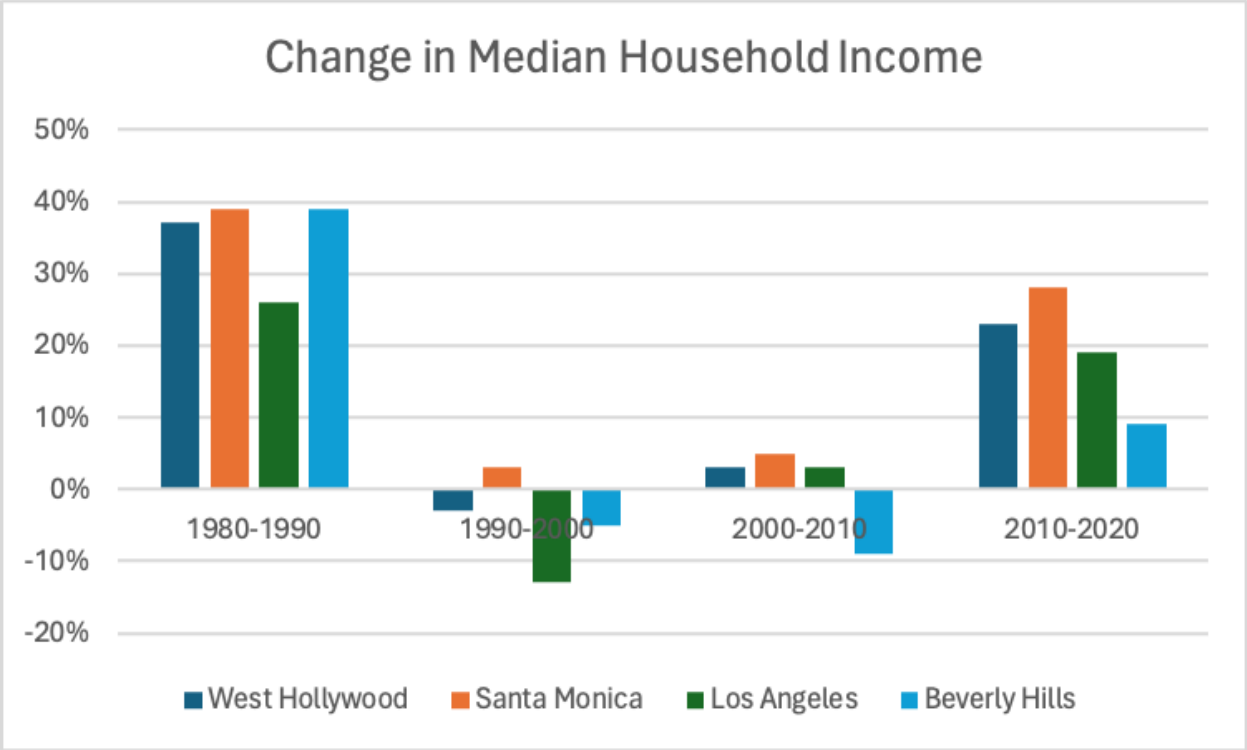


Figure 7.18. Change in median household income by city

Another indicator of affordability is the income-to-housing cost ratio, where households paying over 30% of their income for gross housing costs are considered overpaying for housing (also referred to as households who are "cost-burdened"). According to the 1980 Census, 38% of renter households in West Hollywood overpaid for housing, compared to 32% in Santa Monica, 39% in Beverly Hills, and 34% in Los Angeles (Table X and Figure 7.19). For the remaining decades, the percentage of renters overpaying in West Hollywood remained similar to Santa Monica's, while the percentage increased more significantly in Beverly Hills and Los Angeles. This may be a result of West Hollywood and Santa Monica's similarly strong rent control laws. Comparing West Hollywood's districts, the Eastside was the most cost-burdened district in the 1980s, but began to align with the percentages in other districts. This is possibly due to an influx of a higher-earning population of renters on the Eastside in the last several decades.

	1980*	1990	2000	2010	2020
Eastside	46%	45%	47%	56%	45%
Cr. Heights	39%	44%	37%	48%	45%
Central	36%	44%	36%	46%	46%
Melrose	32%	40%	44%	47%	49%
Northwest	35%	44%	40%	42%	51%
West Hollywood	38%	44%	42%	49%	47%
Santa Monica	32%	31%	37%	45%	41%
Beverly Hills	39%	47%	44%	51%	55%
Los Angeles	34%	49%	45%	55%	56%

Table 7.15. Affordability (gross rent as percentage of household income). Source: US Census Bureau, Decennial Census (1980-2000); US Census Bureau, 5-Year ACS (2010, 2020)

*1980 uses >35% of income

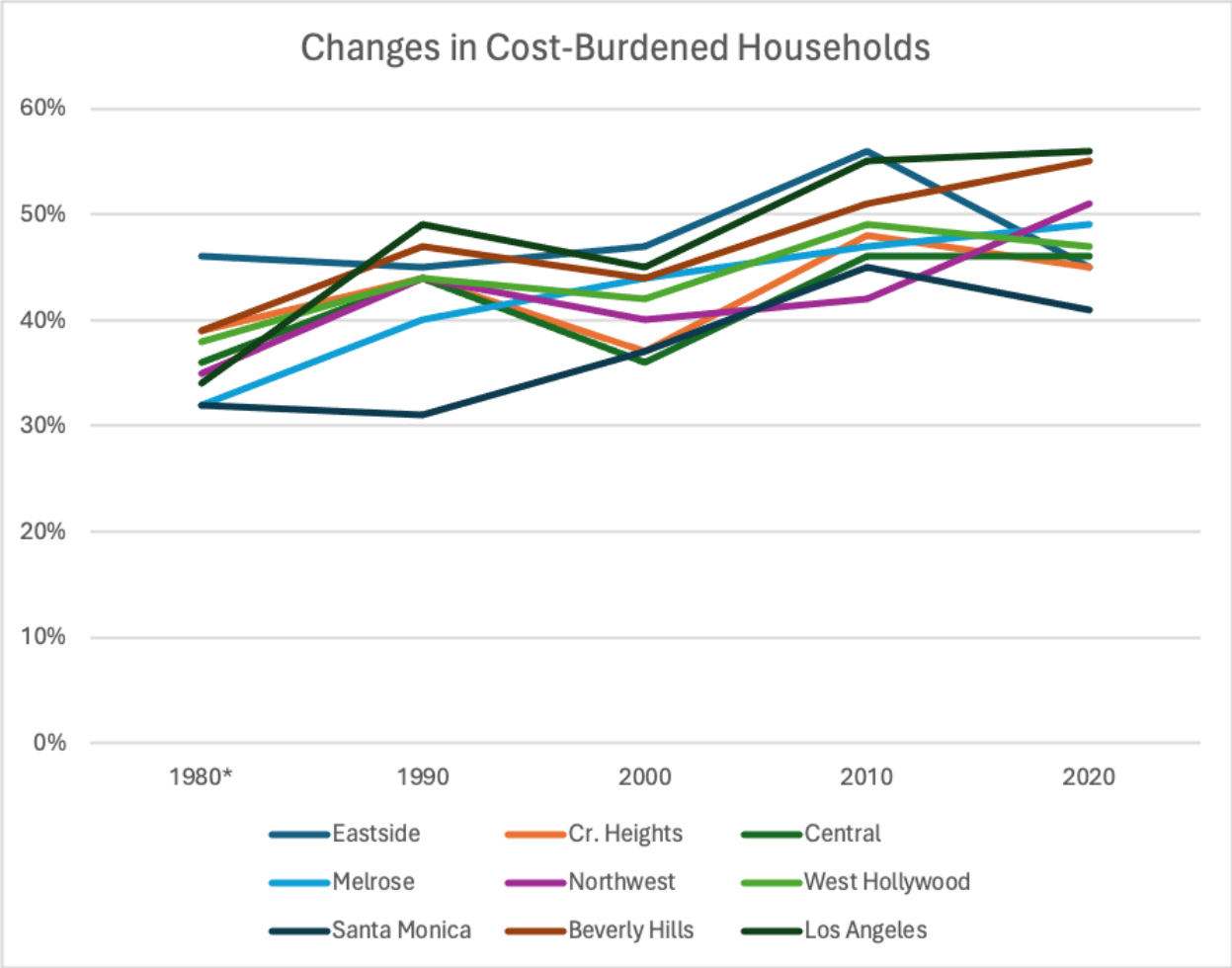


Figure 7.19. Changes in cost-burdened households, city and district

While rent stabilization is not the only factor affecting housing affordability, it has had the effect of moderating rent increases and preventing sharp increases in the city, compared to its neighbors. There has been relative improvement in housing affordability among renters in the City when compared to its neighborhoods in Beverly Hills and Los Angeles, which saw especially share increases in the percentage of cost-burdened households over the last two decades. Despite the relative affordability of West Hollywood, there remains a slightly higher percentage of cost-burned households in 2020 compared to 40 years ago. Adding to affordability

pressures is the general decline in rental units over time (with the exception of the last decade, which saw a sharp increase on the Eastside).

Taken together, the quantitative data speaking to metrics of affordability show that West Hollywood as a city has fared relatively well in maintaining a more affordable place to live compared to neighboring cities. This outcome can largely be attributed to its aggressive rent control measure and affordable housing provision. At the same time, looking within West Hollywood, the greatest increases in cost of living occurred in the East End. This suggests that the impacts of large-scale urban design and redevelopment may have driven up home values and rent prices, and potentially displaced lower-income residents. While these outcomes are not explicitly assessed in relation to LGBTQ+ populations, they carry particular significance for this group, especially transgender women of color and queer youth, who face disproportionately high rates of poverty and lower income levels compared to the general population. (Grant et al. 2011; Greytak et al. 2013; Wilson et al. 2023).

The impacts of redevelopment and neighborhood change are not always quantifiable. Nor are they always discernable through mechanisms like the Census, through analyzing policy and planning reports and documents, or official meeting minutes available through public record. This is particularly true for more vulnerable, less visible populations, like LGBTQ+ communities. One of the challenges researching LGBTQ+ populations is that the U.S. Census has not consistently nor comprehensively collected data on sexual orientation and gender identity (Frisch 2021). For these reasons, it is difficult to rely solely on the Census to assess outcomes for gender and sexual minorities, particularly those experiencing the intersection of multiple oppressions related to their class, race, age, or disability. A more rigorous assessment would require a more comprehensive and, ideally, community-driven approach. For the purposes of this

study, I highlight two conversations with two interviewees who spoke directly and indirectly about the impacts of redevelopment in West Hollywood, particularly as it affected the City's Eastside late-night activities like afterhours club-going, sex work, and social service provision and outreach.

Sam Phillips, who managed a gay bar in West Hollywood for several years before working in healthcare, said the changes in the neighborhood throughout the decades were noticeable. When I asked Sam how the city had changed, he first spoke to the disappearance of gay bars:

> It really changed a lot. I mean, a lot of the clubs that we went to have all gone. There's still some, but not like it was. And bars are becoming more mixed…You still have your big clubs, but in some of the small ones in Central West Hollywood, like the 772, the Spike, Gold Coast…is gone. The bars on [Central, East] end of town are more disappearing. And I think that's a frame of the gentrification of neighborhoods. The price of housing is going so far up.[87]

In addition to rising housing prices, Sam also attributed the changes to the internet, which made it possible to meet people online, and decreased the importance of bars as meeting spaces for gay people. Phillips, originally from LA, born in Inglewood, began going to clubs in West Hollywood in the late 1970s, and in the 1990s. In the 1990s, he became a general manager at the Spike, a gay bar in then unincorporated West Hollywood. According to Pillips, the Spike "had a big lesbian clientele in the 50s." Then in the 1960s it became a straight bar and was renamed "Next Generation". Then it became gay bar again in the 1970s onward.

[87] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, July 15, 2025.

In 2002, Phillips took a job working at social service and research center Friends Community Center (FCC) (FCC was originally Venice Prevention Division, becoming FCC around 2007), where he worked as a case manager in the center's drug and alcohol treatment program. Phillips worked at FCC for 23 years. FCC was located on La Brea and Santa Monica, and moved locations several times over the years, but always maintained a presence near the border of West Hollywood and Hollywood, where it could conduct outreach to queer people experiencing health disparities.[88] FCC's longtime objective has been to reduce HIV transmission and acquisition and the risks that can result from substance use.[89]

When Phillips joined FCC, direct outreach on the streets was the easiest way to connect with clients. "In 2002 more people were out and about. We would do street outreach to try to get clients and help people that needed some help. And you could walk out the door and walk either direction on Santa Monica and run into people that needed services. As years went by, that became harder and harder to do." Throughout the early 2000s, Phillips said fewer and fewer people were out and about in the streets, a result of the internet in part, but also because of rising costs and policing.

In terms of policing, Phillips said that police working for the LA County Sheriff were more hostile to LGBTQ+ communities in comparison to the LAPD. This reflects a reversal of the pre-incorporation period, when one of the primary reasons West Hollywood became a haven for gay people was the relatively lax attitude of the Sheriff deputies. According to Phillips, a primary police target was gay cruising spots:

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[88] According to FCC's website, its primary clientele included "gay and bisexual men, sexual minority men, other men who have sex with men, and trans and gender-expansive individuals who are experiencing multiple health disparities" (FCC website).

[89] FCC abruptly closed its operations on March 19, 2025 as a response to the U.S. President's executive order eliminating funding for the organization (FCC website).

> When I was young and coming out, you just go behind the Gold Coast, called East Alley, and you cruise the parking lots, and [the police] didn't have stops up, and no one bothered you. Same thing with people on the streets just standing around. You'd see the cops just drive by. And as years went by, they stopped driving by and started stopping. [The police]
>
> blocked off Vaseline Alley so you couldn't cruise it, and they just started taking steps to make it harder for people to continue. And over a number of years, that effort slowly paid off for what they wanted there.[90]

Mariana,[91] who immigrated to Los Angeles in the late 1990s largely to escape the transphobia she experienced in Guatemala, shared her experience coming to West Hollywood, and having to deal with a sometimes hostile, transphobic police force. Much of her work as an advocate for LGBTQ+ issues centered on educating the police about the Transgender community: "I remember how much work we have to put in with the police to get their respect and to say we live here because this city is friendly with us. 'We are part of this city. We go to school over here. We have jobs over here'".[92]

In terms of redevelopment, Phillips mentioned several places that had been replaced by redevelopment projects on the Eastside. The Yukon Mining Company Restaurant, which used to be a late-night gathering place for gays and transgender people coming out of clubs, and also engaging in sex work, was replaced by a Trader Joes and a multi-unit apartment complex. A Carl's Junior restaurant located on the northwest corner of La Brea and Santa Monica was

[90] Ibid.
[91] I refer to this interviewee solely by their first name "Mariana" as requested by the interviewee.
[92] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, July 17, 2025.

similarly replaced by a multi-unit apartment complex. Mariana similarly referred to Yukon Mining Company, among other locales, as a late night destination for the queer community:

> Back then there was a lot of cruising. There was the Yukon. There was 7679. I mean, one of the first things my friend got to show me, was like, "when you see a guy, you tell, tell the guy, 'I charge." And I remembered [thinking] like…this is crazy, because the guys were willing to pay…So there was a supply and demand back then."[93]

Just south of the Carl's Junior, on the southwest corner of La Brea and Santa Monica, is where the Gateway Project rose up, a shopping center with over 250,000 square feet became home to a Target, a BestBuy, a Ben & Jerry's, a Starbucks and a Baja Fresh. Phillips shared that, "where the Target is now, there was a car wash, a homeless shelter…I think it was called "Found"...and so they had public services there. I think that was one of the only shelters in West Hollywood…So that was taken out, and the Target was built." Despite the redevelopment, Philips said you could still find clients there, at least for a little while. "people still, even though it was different, would still migrate there. But over time, with the security at the Target, and the Sheriff's Department, they stopped. And it's, you know, became just a shopping center".[94]

Phillips said that another impact of gentrification in the area was to make clients feel out-of-place:

> The more [the City] developed, the nicer it became. A lot of times. For our client base, the more uncomfortable they become there. For example, if you're going to refer [clients to apply] to medical services, and he's homeless and clothes maybe look a little bit iffy, and he hasn't been to a doctor for a long time, I wouldn't send them to [West

[93] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, July 17, 2025.
[94] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, July 15, 2025.

> Hollywood]...They do wonderful work, and they're wonderful people. But the client going to that lobby in West Hollywood..on the eighth floor of that building (Men's Health) might not feel comfortable.[95]

Over time, FCC had to adapt its outreach strategies, and find potential clients in other, more hidden spaces like alleys, bathhouses, and homeless encampments:

> We found that you had to go to bath houses or be at certain locations and stay there because there just wasn't people hanging on the street, doing sex work on the street, using their drugs on the street. And then it turned into more encampments…and then a month later, or two, the cops cleared them out. Now they're on another street, and this, that kind of thing, and like, three or four here and ten over there. So that was the biggest change. I think just the look of the community, that area really changed.[96]

Phillips added that while the number of sex workers diminished over the years, the years since COVID-19 began saw the biggest decline.

To summarize, redevelopment may have improved the economic viability of the City, and even increased the tax base from which affordable housing projects could be funded, yet it also had the effect of replacing areas of the City, particularly on the Eastside, that had been gathering spaces for sex workers and late night party-goers, as well as contact points for healthcare service providers and outreach workers. While the internet certainly had an outsized impact on the prevalence of sex work and partygoing, the added impacts of redevelopment and policing can only have made those activities more difficult in the public environs of the City.

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[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.

Conclusion

West Hollywood's urban design and redevelopment initiatives of the 1990s reveal a more directly spatial response to the political, social, and economic challenges that threatened the city's early legitimacy. Through coordinated investments in the built environment, including large-scale urban design and redevelopment–city leaders sought to assert control over public perception, improve quality of life, and signal competence in governance. These efforts extended the logic and strategy behind the "Creative City" branding campaign by cultivating an aesthetic that was stylish, design-forward, and unmistakably gay. In doing so, the city successfully fostered an economy rooted in tourism, nightlife, and entertainment, generating tax revenues that could be reinvested into affordable housing and social services for its diverse constituencies, including LGBTQ+ residents, seniors, and immigrants.

West Hollywood's redevelopment agenda appears ingenious from an economic development standpoint. Even from an affordability perspective, data suggests that despite a significantly upgraded and aesthetically improved built environment, West Hollywood remains relatively affordable compared to neighboring cities. Yet the strategy also reflected a pragmatic application of progressive values, one that celebrated inclusivity and gay visibility, while neglecting the impact of such strategies on the city's most marginalized members of that community, particularly unhoused people and sex workers. The city's approach demonstrates how municipal actors, at the behest of resident activists, can deploy a combination of policy, symbolism, and urban design to reframe local identity and catalyze economic development. However, it also illustrates the limits of progressive politics when entangled with market logics and reputational management. As West Hollywood sought to establish itself as both "The

Creative City" and a model of progressive governance, it did so through choices that negotiated, and at times compromised, the inclusivity of its vision. Understanding these tensions is essential to evaluating the legacy and contradictions of West Hollywood's formative years of city-building.

From an urban design perspective, the redesign of Santa Monica Boulevard essentially functioned as a comprehensive urban design strategy. The boulevard was, and is, the city's primary thoroughfare and symbolic spine, making it not only a functional corridor for transportation, but the spatial focus through which broader questions of governance, identity, and public order were negotiated. While the city used comprehensive planning (as is required of all cities) nothing else comes close to symbolizing, and manifesting, the city's vision for itself. In doing so, it also became a vehicle through which to manage and address constituencies' concerns. As such, the perceived problems–prostitution, homelessness, and general blight–became central challenges to the city's self-image. If Santa Monica Boulevard served as the city's urban plan in miniature, then the politics of its remaking reveal the core tensions at the heart of West Hollywood's project: how to be both a sanctuary and a showcase, a progressive haven and a marketable brand. Understanding this street not just as infrastructure but as ideology is key to grasping the full implications of the gay city experiment that West Hollywood embodied.

8. CONCLUSION: THE PROJECT OF GAY CITYHOOD

By the early 2000s, the built environment along West Hollywood's main commercial corridors and public environs had been dramatically reshaped. These physical transformations reflected the political and economic objectives that shaped the city's governance, and also reflected a self-conscious image-making process that was inseparable from the city's evolving gay identity. Over time, the project of building the city, politically, economically, and physically, was shaped by the shifting meanings and uses of gay identity in municipal governance. In tracing these developments, this dissertation set out to respond to the following research questions:

How did cityhood serve as a spatial and political strategy to advance gay rights in West Hollywood, and what tensions and trade-offs emerged in constructing the "first gay city"?

- *Why did gay advocates pursue cityhood as a means of political empowerment, and what did this strategy afford that was distinct from other forms of gay activism?*
- *What were the material and symbolic outcomes of cityhood, and how did West Hollywood's identity as a gay city shape its governance, planning priorities, and impact on both gay and nongay residents?*

The case of West Hollywood illustrates how gay advocates viewed cityhood as an opportunity to attain an unprecedented level of political power at the time of incorporation, exemplified by the

election of three openly gay candidates to the City Council, including one who became the first openly gay mayor of any city. Symbolically, the gay city was further evidence that gays and lesbians could be elected to political positions, including in municipalities with significant gay and nongay populations. Materially, the power afforded by cityhood enabled key civil rights advances–domestic partnership protections and nondiscrimination ordinances–as well as achievements in public health and social services that represented proactive responses to the AIDS crisis. Cityhood also unlocked several planning and policy tools that impacted key domains of municipal governance: affordable housing, public health, public safety, and redevelopment economics.

The affordances of cityhood not only benefitted gay constituencies, but measures like rent control, the provision of affordable housing, and investments in social services more clearly benefited the broader population. This is evidenced by the fact that West Hollywood has remained relatively affordable in terms of cost of living in comparison to neighboring cities. At the same time, not all the outcomes of cityhood were equally applied, and in some cases, particularly regarding redevelopment, may have exacerbated the marginalization of gender and sexual minorities within the LGBTQ+ community. Some of the documented consequences include the displacement, closure, or removal of public and private locales–bars, fast food joints, alleys–where many sex workers, including gay men and transgender women of color, frequented to make a living, seek refuge, or simply find community.

These outcomes are as much a consequence of governance and planning as they are of image-making. In the process of pursuing cityhood–running an incorporation campaign, setting up effective governing institutions, and responding to intense media scrutiny and an empowered citizenry–advocates found it necessary to tailor the city's gay identity to satisfy multiple,

oftentimes competing interests and desires. The decisions taken by advocates and city leaders often split members of the gay community, and did not always sit well with those who viewed the city's evocation of the gay city as not conforming to their particular idea of what it meant to be gay. Ultimately, the dissertation finds that West Hollywood demonstrates how *gay cityhood* can be mobilized as a political and spatial tool: one that simultaneously reinscribes and resists dominant configurations of space, identity, and power. The project of gay cityhood that West Hollywood represents is one that is ongoing; what gay means and who is included and impacted in the gay city have and continue to constantly evolve, and are intertwined with the tools and processes of making a city.

Towards a theory of gay cityhood: Synthesis and implications

Rather than represent a singular, dominant gay identity and agenda, West Hollywood as a case underscores the dialectic nature of gay cityhood. The project of forging a gay identity that satisfied all gay constituents never fully materialized, but adapted to suit the political and material needs of the given moment. For example, a more normative or 'respectable' gay image took precedence when economic development was at stake, such as was the case with the "Creative City" rebranding and subsequent redevelopment initiatives. At the same time, the onset of AIDS and the demands of activists placed West Hollywood's response to the crisis front-and-center, embracing the reality that one of its primary constituencies was uniquely suffering from the disease. The push-and-pull over how and when gay issues rose to the surface meant that the gay city's identity was, and continues to be, in constant flux.

The first "test" of how cityhood advocates would handle the "gay issue" occurred during the 1984 municipal incorporation campaign. Before prominent gay advocacy organizations such

as MECLA, the Stonewall Democratic Club, and the Harvey Milk Democratic Club joined the cityhood effort, the first issue driving cityhood was land use: residents sought to prevent the conversion of apartments to hotels, which County law would have made easier. Rent control also became a driving issue, reflected by the leading role of the Coalition for Economic Survival (CES), a renter advocacy organization, in both the incorporation campaign and early city governance. With 88% of residents renting (compared to just 50% countywide), and a county-wide rent control measure set to expire, renters' rights shaped the political agenda. As a result, both incorporation advocates and candidates for City Council had to build coalitions that appealed to the priorities of these diverse groups.

During the campaign, advocates publicly embraced and advertised the benefits of the first gay city to gay residents through the gay press. Gay advocates positioned cityhood as an opportunity to demonstrate on a national stage the competence and capacity of a gay-run city to govern effectively and responsibly. Yet, advocates simultaneously downplayed the gay city to mainstream audiences, allaying concerns of a "gay takeover". Concurrently, aspirations for economic prosperity and a visually appealing city foreshadowed a convergence between gay cultural aesthetics and strategies of urban economic renewal. This discourse unfolded against a near-unanimous consensus among cityhood advocates that rent control and renters' rights were non-negotiable.

For gay constituencies, the immediate impacts of cityhood were clear. Immediately following incorporation, the City Council swiftly passed some of the most progressive ordinances in the country, such as an ordinance that established a domestic partnership registry that granted partners certain legal recognitions within the city, including visitation rights in healthcare and detention facilities (Minutes, January 24, 1985). Emerging in the early years of

the AIDS epidemic, the Council responded with relative speed to an unfolding public health crisis that disproportionately affected gay men, especially at a time when governmental action at all levels was frequently slow, inadequate, or absent. The Council implemented some of the first municipal AIDS policies in the United States, allocating funding for services such as free or low-cost testing, hospice care, and legal assistance for individuals living with AIDS, while also enacting anti-discrimination ordinances to protect their rights.

From an inclusive and progressive governance standpoint, these early actions made West Hollywood a local and national model. That West Hollywood became a model for advancing gay civil rights and for progressive governance generally speaks to the significance of cityhood as a novel tactic for achieving gay rights in the first place. Cityhood enabled direct control over key policy areas, such as housing, health, policing, and civil rights protections, that would otherwise have remained under the purview of Los Angeles County, whose leadership at the time was significantly more conservative and less responsive to the needs of gay residents.

At the same time, the hyper visibility that cityhood afforded its gay identity brought other risks. The city faced a public backlash based on the perception that its politics and policy priorities were overly focused on progressive issues like gay rights and renters' issues at the expense of business development. The image was exacerbated by the perception that the City Council was unserious, incompetent, and corrupt, traits that were often stereotypically attributed to the city's gay reputation. The stigma of AIDS and its association with gay men and sex workers further fueled concerns that the city was not an attractive destination for businesses and tourism. Post incorporation, the city's leaders walked a fine line defending, on one hand, the city's gay identity and progressive accomplishments, while acknowledging, on the other, that it could do more to support business development and city branding. The late 1980s marks the

beginning of a shift: issues regarding economic development increasingly took center stage. Relatedly, the issue of public safety and 'blight' began to emerge as a core concern among West Hollywood residents, particularly along the city's east end.

To address these concerns, from the late 1980s through the 1990s, the City Council used the tools afforded by cityhood–zoning, redevelopment authority, taxation, contracting with public and private entities, the establishment of boards and commissions–to pursue a range of initiatives. These included strengthening law enforcement partnerships, a city-wide rebranding campaign, and large-scale urban redevelopment. The city funded a marketing campaign that sought to rebrand West Hollywood as "The Creative City" which, alongside redevelopment and policing, helped to "clean up" the city's image and make it a more appealing place for tourists and businesses.

While this rebrand was criticized by many within the gay community as sidelining the city's gay identity, the Council and business leaders justified the initiative by claiming that "creative" was also a nod to the gay community's creative traits, and by pointing to the increase in tax revenues. With a growing tax base–largely fueled by the tourism and entertainment industries–the city was able to fund social services and affordable housing, particularly for people living with HIV/AIDS. The rebranding and redevelopment of major boulevards were framed as necessary economic development strategies designed to expand the city's budget in order to support progressive initiatives.

While city leaders were well aware of the disproportionate impact of AIDS on gay men, there was scant mention of the fact LGBTQ+ people–particularly low income transgender women of color–were overrepresented among unhoused and sex worker populations. Thus, while the city hailed its economic development strategy as a success, not least because it allowed the

city to fund AIDS services (and become a municipal leader on the issue), it failed to acknowledge how redevelopment–and embrace of policing–may have impacted low income gay and transgender constituents.

Further complicating West Hollywood's gay identity was the way cityhood amplified its symbolic status as the epicenter of the gay community in the Los Angeles region. This heightened visibility brought increased resources in the form of tax income from business revenue, but also in the form of health and social services: organizations such as the Gay Community Services Center and AIDS Project Los Angeles chose to locate in or near West Hollywood, drawn by its real and perceived concentration of gay residents. Yet this concentration of attention and infrastructure also invited critique. West Hollywood's location on the Westside of Los Angeles and its predominantly white demographic profile (nearly 90% white at 1980 Census) has raised questions about whose experiences have been centered, and whether racial and gender minorities within the LGBTQ+ community, both within West Hollywood and elsewhere in the region, were being overlooked or excluded.

Thus, while cityhood, and the governance and planning tools it unlocked, enabled progressive achievements across civil rights, public health, safety, redevelopment economics, affordability, and memory, it also risked marginalizing some of the community's most vulnerable members. Cityhood uniquely delivered these outcomes through the hyper-visibility of being governed by the first gay-majority municipal council and the resulting political empowerment. However, despite its progressive commitments, the city's prioritization of an economic and urban development model rooted in a curated, tourism-friendly gay identity meant that it risked overlooking identities, experiences, and spaces falling outside this narrow framework. This takeaway does not suggest that the city's economic strategy should not embrace

a “creative city” or otherwise hip branding; rather, it underscores the necessity for progressive cities to intentionally ensure that redevelopment processes do not inadvertently marginalize already vulnerable groups (See Table 8.1for a summary of goals, tools, outcomes for gender and sexual minority groups, and unique outcomes of cityhood).

Table 8.1. Summary of goals, tools, outcomes for gender and sexual minority groups, and unique outcomes of cityhood.

Domain	**Goals**	**Tools afforded by cityhood**	**Outcomes for diverse gender and sexual minority groups**	**Unique outcomes afforded by cityhood**
Civil rights	Ensure LGBTQ+ protections (domestic partnerships, nondiscrimination ordinances)	Explicit local laws codifying civil rights protections	Benefits broadly, though domestic partnerships tend to be more accessible to middle-class gay residents	Accelerated local passage of civil rights legislation
Public health	Expand services and advocacy for HIV/AIDS, including housing and healthcare	Social service funding; housing specifically for HIV/AIDS residents; allowing protests (ACT UP) without permits	Broad benefits; however, economically marginalized or displaced LGBTQ+ residents saw fewer advantages. Criticism: resources geographically concentrated in WeHo	Swift and robust response to AIDS crisis, contrasting county/federal response; created a replicable local model.
Public safety	Address and reduce police violence and "gay-bashing" incidents	LGBTQ+ education and recruitment task force; neighborhood watch groups	Decline in crime post-cityhood, though causal connection uncertain; marginalized groups (sex workers, unhoused LGBTQ+) disproportionately criminalized.	Localized policy attention and direct response to crime perceptions

Redevelopment economics	Develop economically viable city leveraging its gay identity	Planning/redevelopment authority; Creative City marketing campaign	Intended broad benefits, but increased gentrification likely impacted lower-income LGBTQ+ groups.	Streamlined planning aligned more directly with resident preferences
Affordability	Keep West Hollywood affordable, particularly housing costs	Strict rent control; creation of affordable housing via West Hollywood Community Development Corporation	Mixed outcomes; affordability challenging to measure; evidence indicates displacement of low-income LGBTQ+ residents, particularly on Eastside.	Relative affordability compared to neighboring cities, despite significant gentrification pressures
Memory	Honor AIDS crisis victims and LGBTQ+ activism	Funding/support for memorials; simplified permitting for public art and memorial sites	Two memorials established; third planned for 2025; easier and quicker memorialization processes.	Easier staging of public protests and memorial creation processes

Embodiment and space

In terms of theory, the case of West Hollywood reaffirms and extends discourses concerning the relationship of planning to embodiment, where planning both produces and resists embodied hierarchies in space (see Table 8.2 for a summary of the various implications of the findings). Concerning embodiment and space, the case of West Hollywood shows how the creation of the gay city, or the processes of citymaking that gay cityhood entails, both reinforced hierarchies by separating ‘respectable ‘gay bodies from marginalized groups, as was evidenced through the Creative City marketing campaign. At the same time, gay cityhood embraced AIDS activists at a time when stigma was rising alongside the epidemic. The politics of AIDS activism in Los Angeles, particularly relating to issues of racial representation, complicated neat “inclusive” or

"exclusive" frames. That West Hollywood was caught up in these often fraught negotiations speaks to the real power, materially and symbolically, of the gay city as a stage for gay activism.

The larger implication is that gay cityhood, conceptualized as a planning phenomenon, planners should consciously consider intersectionality when designing justice-oriented interventions. This implication resonates with the work of scholars writing from diverse disciplinary perspectives such as planning, history, sociology, and geography have shown how LGBTQ+ are diverse and intersectional, with varied social and material needs and aspirations (P. Doan 2010; Frisch 2015; Irazábal and Huerta 2016; Goh 2018; Turesky 2022). LGBTQ+ communities are located across varied geographies–urban, suburban, and rural–and include and extend beyond traditional gay enclaves like West Hollywood (Gieseking 2020; Herring 2010; Martinez 2015; Nash and Gorman-Murray 2015; Tongson 2011). Recognizing this empirical fact is an important first step for planning and governance, as exclusions often arise out of assumptions about who lives, visits, or relies on the spaces and services provided by gay enclaves.

That West Hollywood's leaders have continued to fund and support services, including youth services, addiction and recovery, and affordable housing, are indicators that its leaders are aware of the City's enduring destination for intersectional queer lives, many of whom seek refuge from discrimination or ostracization due to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. This also applies to unhoused populations and sex workers, many of whom, in addition to being low-income, are queer, transgender, and gender nonconforming.

Neoliberalism and homonormativity

Theories of homonormativity help to explain the alignment of mainstream gay politics and spaces (gay neighborhoods) with political and economic agendas grounded in neoliberalism. Homonormativity helps to explain the emergence of gay neighborhoods, particularly at the end of twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries, as privileged sites of gay identity building, ones that reinforces race, class, gender, and disability hierarchies. The 'homonormative turn' in gay politics also aligns with the beginning of the use of conventional planning tools in constructing and upholding gay neighborhoods in the U.S.

Gay cityhood in West Hollywood in many ways reaffirms neoliberal and homonormative understandings of how contemporary gay neighborhoods have been produced, and the exclusions therein. The economic and spatial ambitions that underpinned much of West Hollywood's development, both pre-incorporation but accelerated in the late 1980s, aggressively linked a privileged notion of gay identity–one that was hip, creative, and sophisticated–with a marketing campaign to attract tourists and create the foundation for the city's economy. The incorporation campaign, and subsequent marketing campaign and redevelopment of the city, show that planning tools were used to help establish visible gay enclaves before the 1990s, earlier than scholars had previously suggested (Forsyth, 2001). This matters because it demonstrates how the gay city pioneered the use of planning tools, and what it took in order for such tools to be leveraged successfully: an ambitious and carefully curated marketing and redevelopment campaign. West Hollywood's self-styled "Creative City" prefigured the "creative class" thesis (Florida, 2002) by more than a decade, advancing the now-popular notion that the presence of gay men (and, to a lesser extent, lesbians) could catalyze urban revitalization in areas deemed blighted or underdeveloped.

At the same time, West Hollywood's ambitious affordability housing policies, investment in medical and social services, and the installation of monuments honoring activists underscore the idea that the gay city was more than just an engine for economic growth. These efforts reflected a broader commitment to social equity, public health, and historical memory. They also speak to the normative idea that planning and policy as they relate to gay neighborhoods and spaces consider gay or queer populations beyond their potential for economic development (Winkle 2015). As Winkle argues, planners must "plan for LGBTQ communities even when economic development is not at stake" (2015, 35). As a city, West Hollywood has had more tools at its disposal to achieve intended outcomes. West Hollywood has indeed been a leader in providing access to health services, community spaces, and safe and affordable housing. The takeaway here is not that these resources should be concentrated exclusively in gay neighborhoods but rather that these neighborhoods' enduring value largely lies in their capacity to provide spaces of belonging and support for diverse gender and sexual minorities..

Planning theory

Planning theory has long examined how various actors–whether professional planners, policy makers, urban designers, activists, bureaucrats–shape knowledge production and translate it into policy and spatial practice. While cityhood expands the concept of "planning" beyond traditional land-use and economic development frameworks to include governance, identity-building, and ongoing institutional evolution, the processes behind cityhood, as the case of West Hollywood demonstrates, speak to multiple strands of planning theory. The gay cityhood project most closely aligns with the traditions of social reform, social learning, and social mobilization, as articulated by Friedman (1987). Gay cityhood took hold of bureaucratic structures such as

municipal incorporation as a means to pursue social reform. The pragmatism of this approach exemplifies a social learning orientation, as they framed their efforts in terms of economic viability and local self-governance to persuade both state authorities and the broader public of their capacity to manage a city. Cityhood also evinced a social mobilization approach in mobilizing a diverse political coalition to achieve progressive political transformation.

The process of creating the gay city necessarily involved not only city government and elected representatives but also activists at the local and regional level. Neighborhood activists took a stand on issues of development and public safety, and activists at both local and regional levels staged public demonstrations calling for government action on AIDS and gay civil rights. Thus, cityhood is less a singular bureaucratic tool of municipal incorporation, but a potentially much larger cultural, political, and spatial vehicle through which to achieve intended outcomes. The implication here is that urban planning and governance should adopt flexible, inclusive frameworks that acknowledge the ongoing, iterative nature of cityhood, emphasizing participation, identity, and responsiveness to evolving community needs.

Gay cityhood expands planning theory in another way: It offers a framework for understanding the material and symbolic outcomes of city-making, and how these outcomes are distributed across diverse constituencies. While "cityhood" is often understood narrowly as the legal act of municipal incorporation, the case of West Hollywood requires a broader conceptualization: cityhood as an abstract construct that enables analysis of the processes, actors, and meanings that constitute the city. This expanded notion of cityhood allows for the examination of a range of elements: the actors involved (politicians, planners, bureaucrats, activists, and residents); the strategies they employ (incorporation, spatial design, planning, and policy); and the evolving meanings attached to the city (identity, representation, and memory).

Cityhood, in this sense, encompasses multiple stages of development, including incorporation, redevelopment, branding, and activism. Framed this way, the gay city is not a static or isolated entity, but a dynamic, evolving process shaped by competing visions, shifting motivations, and ongoing negotiations over space, power, and meaning.

Table 8.2. Summary of the various implications of the findings

Theory, findings, and implications			
	Discourse on embodiment and space	**Theories of neoliberalism and homonormativity**	**Planning theory**
Theoretical framework(s)	Spatial dynamics shape and resist hierarchies of oppression through embodied relationships; planning historically reinforces these hierarchies but can also challenge them.	Gay enclaves produce and reinforce normative gay politics aligned with neoliberal agendas, contributing to unequal outcomes.	Planners mediate between knowledge and action; outcomes are shaped by diverse actors (planners, policymakers, activists) and planning processes (policy analysis, social mobilization).
Research findings	Gay cityhood both reinforced hierarchies by separating 'respectable' gay bodies from marginalized groups and resisted these hierarchies by supporting activism (particularly around AIDS and civil rights).	Elements of gay cityhood align with homonormative politics (economic development and gentrification), but other actions (AIDS activism, robust social services) challenge neoliberal and homonormative frameworks.	Cityhood expands the concept of "planning" beyond traditional land-use and economic development frameworks to include governance, identity-building, and ongoing institutional evolution.
Implications	Planning interventions can both challenge and reproduce embodied inequalities; planners should consciously consider intersectionality and spatial justice when designing interventions.	Urban policymakers and activists must critically evaluate alignment with neoliberal agendas and actively counteract exclusionary outcomes, prioritizing marginalized queer communities in economic and social	Urban planning and governance should adopt flexible, inclusive frameworks that acknowledge the ongoing, iterative nature of cityhood, emphasizing participation, identity, and responsiveness to evolving community

		planning.	needs.

Future directions

There is much about the queer history of West Hollywood that this dissertation does not cover. Future research ought to take a closer look at the historical and present-day experiences of sexual and gender minorities within the LGBTQ+ community. As mentioned above, the City of West Hollywood has taken an important step in supporting such efforts, evidenced by the *Historical Context Study* it commissioned in 2021 and published in 2023. Additional effort should be placed on highlighting stories of communities whose histories are frequently omitted in studies of gay enclaves, yet whose marginalized status is frequently invoked in studies like this one. Histories of unhoused people, sex workers, and transgender women of color, and other queer livelihoods would undoubtedly further complicate the way we think about spaces like West Hollywood and their historical and ongoing relevance.

Such research is often difficult to conduct given the lack of adequate data on queer populations (Frisch 2021; Ghaziani and Brim 2019). Following Ghaziani and Brim (2019), a "queer method" for studying queer populations and histories would rely less on quantifiable strategies and traditional sampling techniques, and instead embrace the messiness, often fragmented nature of queer lives and spaces. They reference Plummer's "scavenger methods" (2021, 367), a call to "raid" textual methods, film theory, field research, historical surveys,

archival records, and taxonomies to produce unique, albeit fragmented depictions of queer spaces and subjects. This approach is akin to Muñoz's "ephemera as evidence" (1996) that seeks to capture the fleeting moments and experiences of queer lives and performances. Taking inspiration from these approaches, scholars and practitioners can seek a deeper sense of the queer histories of spaces, including those within traditional gay enclaves like West Hollywood.

Coda: West Hollywood at 40

On November 21, 2024, the City of West Hollywood marked its 40th anniversary with a public celebration at the Pacific Design Center. The event showcased the city's distinctive history and honored the key figures who helped establish and guide the municipality in its formative years. Drag queen Pickle–West Hollywood's inaugural "drag laureate"--kicked off the program with a performative welcome that set the celebratory tone. The evening was emceed by comedian and longtime resident Bruce Vilanch, whose irreverent humor and camp sensibility brought levity to what could have easily resembled a civic history seminar.

Throughout the event, founding leaders were invited onstage to reflect on the early days of cityhood. One roundtable brought together current city council members, including the "OG" longtime councilmember and incorporation activist John Heilman. Another featured former senior staff, including city managers Paul Brotzman and Paul Arevalo, as well as former city attorney Mike Jenkins. Their remarks were striking not for their celebratory tone, which was to be expected at a municipal anniversary, but for the deep sense of pride they expressed.
What stood out most were the memories of hardship: the legal and administrative chaos inherited from the county, the steep learning curve of forming a new local government, and the emotional toll of the AIDS crisis that shaped so many decisions in the city's early years. Speakers

emphasized that many early city leaders were in their twenties and thirties at the time of incorporation–young, idealistic, and often improvising in response to cascading crises. The pride they conveyed was in how they managed to build a city that could respond to multiple crises, while learning on the job.

One recurring theme was the city's transformation through branding and redevelopment. Former councilmember Steve Martin (1994–2006) referred to this as West Hollywood's "economic miracle." Reflecting on the city's early conditions, he remarked: "I mean, we have a lot of good assets within our 1.9 square miles. But we really at the time had inherited a kind of a mess from the county, and redoing Santa Monica Boulevard was really the first step towards basically revitalizing the city and making the city some place we could be proud of" (City of West Hollywood 2024).

Mike Jenkins, the city's longtime attorney, praised the first city council as "incredibly pragmatic… very businesslike," contrasting to a degree with the narratives I have found expressed by local media coverage at the city's early governance. Former city manager Paul Brotzman also reflected pridefully on the city's dual strategy of social service delivery and economic development: "Externally, we created the West Hollywood Marketing Corporation, which developed the concept of the Creative City to market the city as a creative place. It was a way to market the city that was inclusive—of the gay and lesbian community, the design industry, the entertainment industry." To this, Vilanch added with a wink, "It left out the people who were not creative–the people who went to work for Fox," drawing laughter from the crowd (City of West Hollywood 2024). Noticeably absent from the evening, however, was any sustained reflection on what might have been done differently. This lack of critique echoed many of my interviews with former officials.

In the case of West Hollywood, it has taken some time to challenge assumptions over who constitutes the "gay" or, as we say today, "queer," or "LGBTQ+" community. The city's leaders have begun to recognize this, as is evidenced by the establishment of multiple boards and commissions reflecting the diverse sexual and gender minorities within the LGTBQ+ community. Another path is to publicly embrace the diversity and complexity of the queer community's history in relation to West Hollywood. Again, the city in recent years is making strides towards this goal. In addition to already well-established events like PRIDE, and the inscription of the recently updated Intersex-Inclusive Progress Pride Flag on sidewalks and buildings, the city continues to devote significant resources to public monuments like *STORIES: The AIDS Monument,* the *West Hollywood Memorial Walk,* and *Queer Village*. Also notable was the city's decision to commission the creation of a *Historical Context Study* of the city to provide a better sense of West Hollywood's demographic history and racial and cultural discrimination (Architectural Resources Group 2023). While the report fails to mention more recent experiences of sex workers impacted by redevelopment and policing, it is a useful document for understanding the structural sexism, racism, and homophobia that shaped the pre-incorporation history of the city.

During my earlier interview with Mike Jenkins, he spoke to criticism the city received for its business-focused direction, "I think that's the area where some people might criticize the city as having compromised some of its values in order to maintain a healthy business climate, and a healthy relationship with businesses" Jenkins shared. He framed this as necessary, "But [West Hollywood] had to do so in order to maintain economic vitality and to be economically viable as a city. And so I think that the city found a successful balance among the difficult issues when it

came to, you know, business development".[97] To some extent, this view is unsurprising; few politicians are eager to revisit their missteps in career retrospectives. Still, it remains to be seen whether the city can continue delivering on its progressive promise that its leaders continue to tout, especially amid a growing wave of hostility directed toward queer communities, particularly against transgender and gender nonbinary people, as well as queer people of color and those with low incomes, at all levels of government.

[97] Interview by the author, Los Angeles, March 29, 2024.

APPENDIX I: List of interviews conducted

John Heilman; March 20, 2024 (in person); December 12, 2024 (phone)
- Former and current mayor and city councilor

Michael Jenkins, March 29, 2024
- Former city attorney

Gilda Haas, December 5, 2024
- Former incorporation activist affiliated with the Coalition for Economic Survival (CES)

Steve Schulte, December 10, 2024
- Former mayor and city councilor

Barbara Grover, January 29, 2025
- Former incorporation activist, aid to former mayor Abbe Land; independent writer, journalist

Abbe Land, February 26, 2025
- Former mayor and city councilor

Paul Brotzman, April 30, 2025
- Former city manager

Paul Zimmerman, June 4, 2025
- Former director of the West Hollywood Community Housing Corporation (WHCHC)

Henry Scott, June 10, 2025
- Former resident and journalist for WeHo Times

Mark Lehman, June 11, 2025
- For incorporation activist, gay rights activist, city planner; current businessman

John Duran, June 13, 2025
- Former mayor and city councilor

Sam Phillips, July 15, 2025
- Former bar manager and healthcare worker

Jon Ponder, June 25, 2025
- Long-time West Hollywood resident and local historian

Mariana [Last name omitted at request of interviewee], July 17, 2025
- Long-time West Hollywood resident and LGBTQ+ activist

APPENDIX II: Sample interview instrument

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Name and title of interviewee:
Time and date:
Location:

[Briefly describe study and interview process]

- The purpose of this project is to tell the story of West Hollywood's formation, from the incorporation campaign, to post cityhood, to subsequent policy and redevelopment, and to understand the different actors involved in each stage of the city's formation.
- I'm particularly interested in the role of municipal incorporation and subsequent planning and policy decision-making, how West Hollywood became the "first gay city," and what that means to different actors involved in West Hollywood's historic formation.
- As part of this research, I am interviewing key actors and constituents who can speak to the different time periods of West Hollywood's development. This includes elected representatives as well as representatives from government agencies, nonprofit and activist organizations, business owners and real estate developers, as well as everyday residents of West Hollywood.

[Oral consent process]

[Seek permission to audio record meeting]

- If you are comfortable, I would like to audio record this conversation, which will help ensure the accuracy of the information gathered and will assist with transcription. This recording will not be published or shared beyond the research team.

Interview questions: [generic instrument]

Background and role

- Can you please share your name, age, pronouns, and [if comfortable] how you identify your sexual orientation and/or gender identity?
- Can you broadly share your relationship to West Hollywood's history?
- When were you / your organization active [dates]?
- Whom else did you advocate with and are they still around today?
- Can you tell me anything else about the historical circumstances that surrounded your activism in West Hollywood?

Motivations and objectives

- What were the motivations or objectives of your role/activism?
- How were your motivations or objectives tied to the formation of West Hollywood [either incorporation period or post-incorporation]?
- Did it matter that West Hollywood was to become the "first gay city"? Why or why not?
- What was the significance of West Hollywood's status as the first gay city to you and/or your organization?
- How did your motivations or objectives align, or not, with those of other activists or activist groups? How did you navigate differences in motivations or tactics?

Means and tactics

- How important was incorporation and/or redevelopment to pursuing your goals or the goals of your organization?
- How important was incorporation and/or redevelopment in making West Hollywood the "first gay city"?
- What other means or tactics were important in making West Hollywood the "first gay city"?

Outcomes

- In your mind, who was the "first gay city" for?
- Who was included in the process of creating the "first gay city"? [could be along class, race, gender lines]
- Was anyone excluded, and if so, who do you think was? [could be along class, race, gender lines]
- If anyone was excluded, what are the reasons for their exclusion? [due to implicit or explicit exclusion in the planning process, or some other set of factors]
- Broadly speaking, how would you characterize the outcomes of [insert phase of West Hollywood, e.g. "Incorporation effort," "1990s redevelopment"]. Were there any shortcomings? If so, how would you characterize them?

Snowball sampling

- Are there any key contacts who were active in your organization or network that you recommend I reach out to?

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