

IMPERIAL COURTS AND RAMONA GARDENS,
LOS ANGELES:
FROM PROJECTS TO COMMUNITIES
THE RETHINKING AND RESHAPING OF
PUBLIC HOUSING

Tim Van Meter

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INTRODUCTION: SELECTIVE INFILL AND SITE ADAPTIVE REUSE

These two troubled public housing projects are part of dysfunctional but vibrant inner city neighborhoods within comprehensive metropolitan patterns well served by mass transit and city services. Public policy has dictated that these and other public housing developments move toward market rate communities. With the present condition and layout of these projects, achieving this policy goal is very unlikely. With the rejection of complete site demolition and associated displacement, the question undertaken in these proposals is "Can specific design and planning strategies [New Urbanism] help transform these inner city slums, while helping to solve real life problems, with the real life residents in a process of discovery as well as one of non-displacement in two very culturally diverse public housing communities."

IMPERIAL COURTS AND RAMONA GARDENS: COMMON LINKS

These projects like so many inner-city urban renewal projects of the late 1940's and early 1950's have become far worse places than the perceived slums they replaced. The 30+ acre sites hold 488 to 498 identical dark barrack-like row house units in structures of 4 to 12 units. This basic building is replicated with little variation throughout the projects areas. The outdoor spaces are amorphous, poorly landscaped, undefined spatially and uncontrolled. Blank windowless ends of building units front the few streets and many parking lots with poor surveillance. Many residents must walk a full block through non-supervised pathways from their car to their units. Because of the weak visual link between apartments and streets and the projects' undefined and uncontrolled open spaces, vandalism and crime are rampant, safety and security are compromised and these projects have deteriorated into a far less-than-desirable place to live.

IMPERIAL COURTS, SOUTH CENTRAL LOS ANGELES: PROJECT SUMMARY

This Imperial Courts Master Plan proposes a comprehensive transformation of buildings, yards, parks and streets with the end result being a functioning, safe and vibrant housing community. This is achieved by introducing the familiar scale of a smaller street grid pattern of blocks, parks and neighborhoods. The streets will have a hierarchy of wider, more traveled tree-lined streets and smaller neighborhood lanes. Imperial Courts will refocus its individual neighborhoods on a community center and promenade located along the existing baseball and athletic field. This will provide a location for children and adults to play, meet and discuss shared issues and concerns. The buildings will have a more defined front door / back door orientation so that all housing units will face the streets and have individual back yards. Each unit will have its own parking space with direct front door access from the public sidewalk. Comprehensive modifications of the existing units with new bathrooms, kitchens, front and back porches and new roofs further define

the entries of individual units and improve Imperial Courts' residential image. Selective demolition and scattered infill of new construction will create smaller, reconfigured and more defined housing blocks.

RAMONA GARDENS, EAST LOS ANGELES: PROJECT SUMMARY

The solution for the Ramona Gardens master plan emphasizes small scale implementation and intervention measures to achieve a comprehensive site and spatial transformation. The end result is a positive change in the creation of a safe, secure and highly functional housing community. This is achieved by introducing the familiar scale of a smaller pattern of blocks, streets and neighborhoods. The resulting urban fabric provides a clearer definition of both public and private space and a greater overall sense of community. This plan adds new connective street patterns, designed for slower moving traffic, defined curbside street parking in proximity to front doors, private outdoor space, a new centrally located community center, and reconfigured open spaces from public to private to create smaller, more defined housing blocks. This new connective street pattern will establish planning continuity with the surrounding residential neighborhoods, reducing the public housing isolation and stigma.

PROJECT DATA

Imperial Courts

Site Area	31 Acres
Existing and Proposed Units	498 Units [112 new units / 386 renovated units]
Density	16 Units per Acre
Site Building Coverage	15%
Parking per Unit	1.2 cars per unit

New Community Center: 10,000 sq. ft.

Ramona Gardens

Site Area	32 Acres
Existing and Proposed Units	488 Units [488 renovated units]
Density	15.2 Units an Acre
Site Building Coverage	17%
Parking per unit:	1.34 cars per unit
New Community Center	7,500 sq. ft.

Tim Van Meter
Van Meter Williams Pollack
520 Third Street, Suite 525, Box 15
San Francisco, California
tim@ymwp.com
Phone: 415.974.5352
Fax: 415.974.5238