



Metro Hosts Immersion Tour with Arts District

By Matthew G. Marquez

As Metro builds the transportation future of Los Angeles, Metro Community Relations and Planning staff are taking steps to foster enriched relationships with community leaders in the Central Los Angeles Area, where many planning, and construction projects are underway. The goal is to gain better insights on neighborhood visions history and culture. This past February staff set aside time from the routine community meetings and project updates for an immersive tour in the Arts District with three neighborhood leaders who shared their perspectives about the community's past, present and future.

The tour kicked off at Daily Dose, a café wedged between two buildings where a railroad spur once existed. Upon arrival, staff was joined by Yuval Bar-Zemer, Vice President of the [Los Angeles River Artists Business Association](#) (LARABA), for a chat about his life in the Arts District. Bar-Zemer has played a key role in shaping the Arts District as an investor in live/work spaces, such as the Toy Factory and Biscuit Lofts, which were both built in the early 2000s. He is an advocate for the preservation of the Art District's industrial, railroad, and artisan roots. With the Arts District booming into a hot zone for development, Bar-Zemer noted challenges in ensuring that the character and spirit of the Arts District are maintained as development progresses.

Gabrielle Newmark, co-founder of [Industrial District Green](#), walked staff through the alleyways of the Arts District near 7th and Mateo. She, along with David Winslow of the San Francisco Planning Department and Mark Borman, Treasurer of LARABA, shared their work and visions in developing "Green Alley" systems in today's concrete jungles. Newmark, through Industrial District Green, is working to activate these alleyways into walkable open spaces that enhance ecological and economic health. Gabrielle hopes that by continuing the dialog about green alleys with the City of Los Angeles and Metro, it will one day lead to a potential unique first/last mile solution for pedestrians and bicyclists within the Arts District.

The last leg of the excursion was to The Corner Store, located at the corner of Traction Ave. and Hewitt St., where store owner Vivian Um shared her views on the ever-evolving Arts

District from the lens of a business owner and resident. The Corner Store was once home to Bloom's General Store, a shop opened in the mid-90s by the unofficial mayor of Arts District, Joel Bloom. Joel Bloom, who passed away in 2007, was a well-known figure head who advocated for artist live/work spaces and played a hand in naming the Arts District. Bloom's General Store served local artists and residents, a tradition that Um now proudly carries on. Um noted that when she first started living in the Arts District, there were no local markets or stores prior to her opening the Corner Store. The Corner Store now has become a center piece for the Arts District. Um noted that the Arts District is a community where everyone knows each other's name and where fellow residents and business owners look out for one another.

As the tour concluded, staff left with a greater understanding of the vision, history, values and challenges that the Arts District faces as it progresses forward. Metro is grateful to the leaders who volunteered their time to share their views and perspectives. Metro looks forward to expanding this program to other communities to better understand local community values, history and culture.

Background:

The Arts District is a vibrant and growing community of artists, residents and business owners located on the eastern edge of downtown Los Angeles alongside the LA River. To learn more about upcoming Metro projects within the Arts District, please see the links below:

[Regional Connector Transit Project](#)

[Eastside Access Improvements Project](#)

[Division 20 Portal Widening and Turnback Facility Project](#)

[Division 20 Maintenance of Way Building](#)

[Emergency Security Operations Center](#)

[West Santa Ana Branch Transit Corridor Project](#)

[Link Union Station \(Link US\)](#)

