



Casa de Oro “Village”

***Our community matters. It’s time for us to
turn deterioration into revitalization.***

A Casa de Oro Business District
Revitalization Request
for
Professional Urban Planning Assistance

A formal request to Supervisor Dianne Jacob for professional revitalization planning assistance

This document provides some background on the Casa de Oro Community Alliance and the basis for a formal request for professional revitalization planning assistance from San Diego County Supervisor Dianne Jacob. We are enthusiastically requesting professional urban planning assistance to develop a revitalization plan that identifies the most feasible and sustainable path forward to revitalize the business district along Campo Road in Casa de Oro.

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The Casa de Oro Community Alliance

The Casa de Oro Community Alliance is a broad-based group of volunteer stakeholders including long-term residents and community leaders, including representatives from the business community, community planning groups, nearby schools and churches, property owners, and community organizations that are invested in the revitalization of Casa De Oro Businesses.

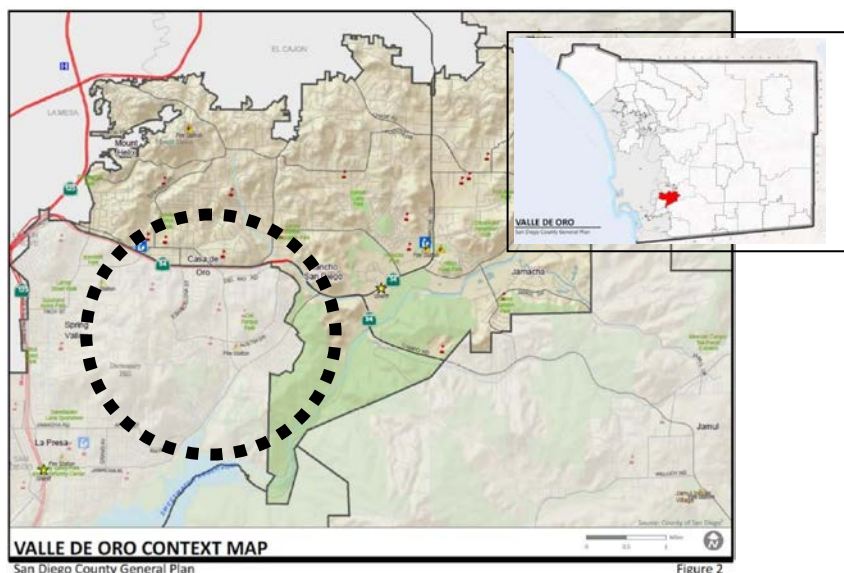
Our vision is a historically rich, culturally diverse community that is safe, pedestrian-friendly and a popular destination for dining, entertainment and shopping.

The Alliance was originally convened in October 2015 by the East County Community Change Project of Institute for Public Strategies as a forum to provide information to the community on the negative impacts an excessive concentration of high-risk businesses in a small geographic area and introduce some research-based tools that other communities have used to prevent or mitigate these problems.

Since then, the Casa de Oro Alliance was formed and we have about 100 members. In order to advance the entire vision of the Alliance, a chairperson was elected and the Alliance formed a Steering Committee and several subcommittees, including Strategic Planning, Business Improvement, Beautification and Event Planning, Media and Outreach, and Policy. The Institute for Public Strategies continues to be a resource for the Alliance along with the Rancho San Diego Sheriff's Department and Code Enforcement.

At the same time, our community needs professional urban planning assistance to effectively transform this once-convenient and vibrant business village into a safe and thriving place that attracts and benefits businesses, nearby residents, school children, and visitors.

Nearby residents, businesses and other stakeholders are remarkably invested in Casa De Oro but we realize there is serious need for major revitalization along Campo Road. The CDOCA has agreed to focus our efforts on the stretch of Campo Road beginning with Bancroft on the West to South Granada on the East. This business district, known as Casa De Oro, is in the Valle De Oro Community Planning District, at the southwest corner of the planning area, located in the valley between the Mt. Helix residential neighborhood to the north and the Spring Valley/Dictionary Hill neighborhood to the south. Part of our development efforts are to establish an identifiable 'Place' within the County, to be branded as a village center located within the Valle de Oro planning area.



How We Got Here

Casa De Oro (CDO) has remained largely unchanged since the late 1970's. Prior to the 94-eastbound extension to Avocado Boulevard in early 1969-1970, Kenwood Drive was the end of the road on the 94 and was the only shopping area for miles around until other nearby shopping centers opened during the mid 1970's. Unfortunately, the Casa De Oro property owners could never compete with other retailers and this community has been in slow decline ever since.

Compounding CDO's challenges, the newer and larger Rancho San Diego Shopping District has virtually sucked out the life of all its competitors. What was once a vibrant and thriving commercial hub is now struggling to compete with newer, safer and more attractive businesses in adjacent communities.

However, just roughly a mile long and surrounded by approximately 7,200 households, Casa de Oro is bordered by a demographic that would greatly benefit from an attractive and thriving commercial district. Furthermore, many of the foundations of 'Community Identity' already exist: elementary and middle schools, churches, banks, a library, and a national grocery store and pharmacy. There are also other businesses such as auto repair shops, coffee shops, veterinary clinic, dentistry, cleaners, car wash, take-outs and restaurants, insurance and tax preparation services as well as several neighborhood support businesses.



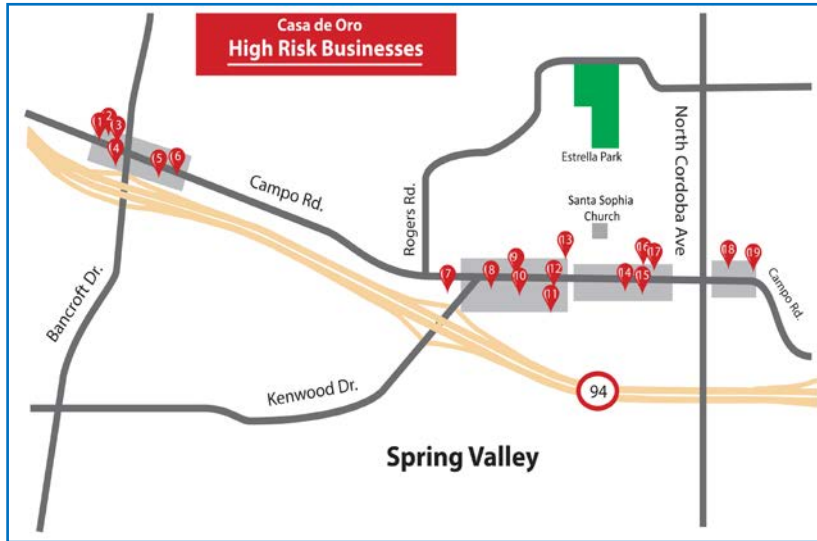
Unfortunately, the buildings and other structures have aged significantly with few improvements made because zoning codes actually discourage redevelopment. This zoning was put in place at a time when it made sense, but that time is long over.

In addition, there is also a saturation of high-risk businesses in CDO, which over time has led to both perceived and real degradation. Compounded by a steady amount of drive-through traffic, unimproved County property, awkward, disconnected parking lots and a hodge-podge of unrelated, older buildings and signage, and a multitude of vacant storefronts, many residents often decide to shop elsewhere.

This has a circuitous effect and CDO has largely lost its appeal to both merchants and shoppers. This reduces the rent property owners can charge, and their ability to attract a diverse array of desirable business tenants, resulting in empty store fronts and properties that are not maintained or improved. The Casa De Oro Business/Shopping District has steadily seen a decline in desirable businesses and decay in community character. It needs major revitalization. Until this happens, it is unlikely Casa De Oro will attract much in the way of new investments.

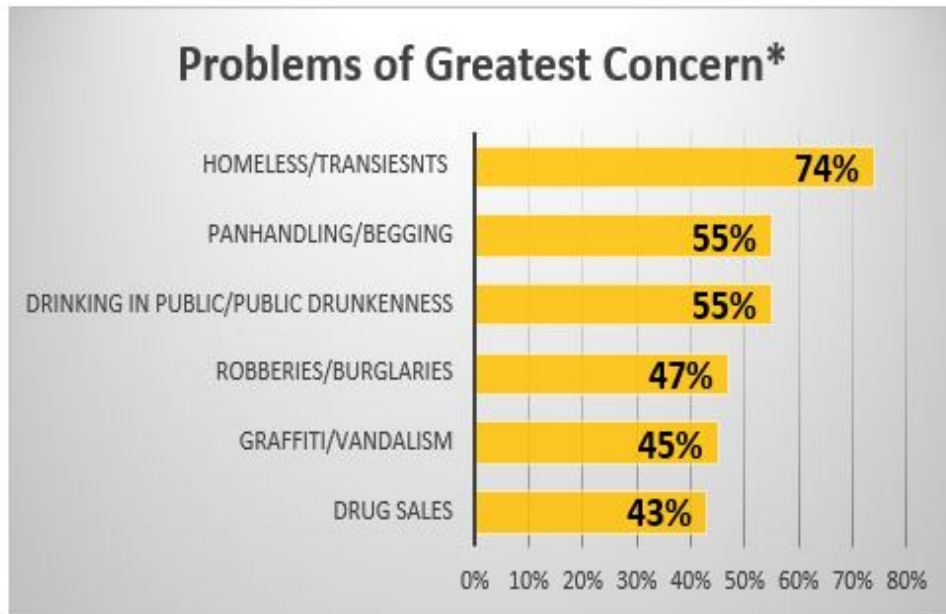
High-Risk Businesses in Casa de Oro

The over-concentration of high-risk businesses in Casa de Oro is evident. Along a 1.5-mile stretch of Campo Road, there are more than 20 of these businesses, including smoke shops, tattoo parlors, pawn shops, check cashing businesses, hookah/vape bars, liquor stores and bars. At least eight of these are clustered closely together in a one three-block segment of the road, located near the Santa Sofia Church and school (see map below). The more these types of businesses continue to locate in Casa de Oro, the less appealing the area becomes for quality investors.



According to GIS crime mapping provided by the Sheriff's Department, more crime takes place in the three-block segment previously mentioned than in any other area in Casa de Oro. This alone has had a significant impact on the business community (see crime map below of Campo Road).

A local business survey conducted by the East County Community Change Project of the Institute for Public Strategies in 2016 had 47 respondents and their greatest areas of concern are summarized in the chart below.



*Casa de Oro Business Survey, 2016 |

Additionally, the survey showed that 32 percent of people working alone in Casa de Oro feel unsafe after dark. Even during daylight hours, 11 percent said they felt unsafe while working alone in their business.

Long-Term Economic Decline

Naturally, when consumers do not feel safe in a given area (due to issues such as aggressive panhandling, public drunkenness or urban blight) they take their business elsewhere.

Consequently, family-oriented businesses have to close—and are replaced by high-risk businesses—the kind likely to survive in that type of climate. Once started, this dangerous process can be difficult to reverse, culminating in the decay of community character and economic decline.

Redevelopment Priorities

Zoning & Redevelopment

Consider zoning designations or other land use mechanisms that will encourage property redevelopment or upgrades that are consistent with the community character described in the CDOCA vision. Considerations may include:

Specific zoning which is out of sync and hindering redevelopment projects. Current regulations do not encourage development of the large number of small 50x100 lots along Campo Road due to parking, landscape buffers and setback requirements. Our analysis indicates that only 1/2 of the existing useable square footage can be newly constructed on small existing lots. Additionally, there is at least one unsightly light industrial use fronting Campo Road, allowed by the C36 Zone. This previously-convenient 'Roadside' use is a leftover from when Campo Road was a main access to the East County and beyond.

Redevelopment incentives.

Site-specific overlays for the small lots to ease development restrictions.

Ways to streamline, wherever possible, the permitting and development processes for desirable businesses that are consistent with that character CDOCA is striving for also needs to be examined.

Zoning that will limit or place conditions on the ever-increasing concentration of high-risk businesses located in Casa de Oro. High-risk businesses are those that have the potential to negatively impact public health and safety of communities. They include smoke shops, pawn shops, check cashing businesses, tattoo parlors, vape bars, hooka lounges, liquor stores and bars. In high concentrations they are linked to crime and nuisance activities that can deter consumers and new businesses.

Village-specific design guidelines and a design review board with the training and expertise needed to provide informed recommendations on development proposals. Almost every Community Planning Group Region in unincorporated San Diego County has design guidelines including Spring Valley, Alpine, Ramona, Fallbrook and San Dieguito.

Opportunities for mixed-use to energize the street and create safe, defensible spaces.

Public Infrastructure

It seems that the County Planning Department regularly requires new property owners and existing property owners that wish to upgrade their properties to make improvements to infrastructure on county controlled property. This is a costly deterrent for developers and property owners that are willing to make improvements in Casa de Oro. Considerations may include:

An analysis of all existing infrastructure for efficiencies and upgrades and identification of resources to address infrastructure needs that directly affect businesses Casa de Oro.

Burying or otherwise re-configuring the open storm drain on the south side of Campo Road. Any properties backing onto the storm drain are essentially frozen out of re-development due to lot size, parking and access.

Replacement of old and faded street signs

Street Beautification

Public land in Casa de Oro is increasingly unsightly and has been long ignored. This amplifies the blight and sets a low standard for upkeep on private property. Beautification considerations on public land may include:

- 'Gateway Elements' at Kenwood and Campo (West) and South Granada and Campo (East).

- Removal of chain linked fencing

- Low maintenance landscaping on the center median on Campo Road.

- Signature landscape, especially along Campo at (1) Kenwood, (2) Conrad, (3) mid-block between Conrad and South Bonita, (4) South Bonita and (5) North Cordoba.

- Well-planned, convenient, landscaped open spaces.

- Village-specific flags for light poles.

- Additional trash cans throughout Casa de Oro that are attractively enclosed.

Beautification of Private Property

Property owners have ignored code regulations and the look of their property for far too long and it this has led to an unattractive, blighted strip that is inviting to unruly activity including loitering, panhandling, homeless camps, graffiti, and uninviting the thousands of potential consumers that travel through Casa de Oro on Campo Road every day. Even when it may be more convenient to shop, dine or do other business in Casa de Oro, they choose to go elsewhere. Considerations might include:

- Aggressive enforcement of code violations, especially unenclosed dumpsters, illegal signage, graffiti and trash removal.

- Providing incentives to support landscaping projects, paving of parking lots, updated signage that is consistent with new design guidelines, fresh paint, reducing window signs.

- More visible law enforcement presence in such as daily use of the Sheriff's Substation in Casa de Oro by deputies that park their cars in front and RSVP officers that travel Campo Road daily.

Civic Presence

Civic amenities are a critical component of any place-based improvements and will go a long way toward creating a village atmosphere in Casa de Oro. Considerations may include:

- A community center and recreation opportunities e.g., swimming, gymnasium, etc. or at least parity with adjacent communities.

- A new library through annexation of a group of contiguous smaller lots to jump-start this revitalization effort.

- Re-purposing the GHSD Truck Maintenance Facility through a land swap to build the library and community recreation center.

- A pocket park along Campo Road.

Mobility

Currently the only convenient form of travel in Casa de Oro is speeding through Campo Road without the intention to stop anywhere. There are numerous deterrents for those that might stop if Casa de Oro looked like a safe and appealing place, but much has to change to make this happen. Considerations may include:

Safe, pedestrian-friendly, ADA approved crosswalks with pavers and along Campo at (1) Kenwood, (2) Conrad, (3) mid-block between Conrad and South Bonita, (4) South Bonita and (5) North Cordoba.

Evaluation of the amount of drive-through traffic on Campo Road and the relationship to the primary Conrad, Barcelona and Cordoba connectors to the North and South neighborhoods. From experience, it is quicker to exit at Kenwood from the 94 and drive the length of Campo Road eastward to Cordoba than it is to get off the 94 at the much closer Sweetwater Exit. Traffic lights are synched on Campo whereas the three intersections between Sweetwater and Cordoba are not.

Narrow Campo Road, maintaining 5 lanes, but utilizing the insert diagonal parking on the excess land on one or both sides of the street. According to our assessment there is ample room for this and it would allow the parking requirements for new and upgraded businesses on small lots to be reduced dramatically.

Removal of concrete walls in parking lots between businesses, so cars can easily visit multiple businesses without having to leave one business and drive onto Campo Road to go to another business that is in the same parking lot.

A reduction in the number of driveways along Campo Road.

An inter-connected traffic loop within the many properties fronting Campo Road to make shopping more convenient and increase safety at the Campo sidewalk.

Improvements to the degraded San Juan Street to the North and particularly Kenora Drive to the South of Campo, which has dense housing looking into the backside of stores.

New and attractive bus benches with shade covers and no advertising that could contribute to blight.

Promote the missing 94-125 Interchange.

High-Risk Businesses

Research has shown that crime and nuisance activities tend to cluster around high-risk businesses, especially when too many are concentrated in a limited area. Like other communities of San Diego County, Casa de Oro has become a dumping ground for such businesses, resulting in a decline of economic viability and decay of community character. Once established, this dangerous trend is difficult to reverse. However, many cities and counties have met the challenge through the use of local zoning laws. Considerations may include:

Requiring Conditional Use Permits for high-risk businesses that involves a public hearing so community members and other businesses can provide input prior to approval of a local permit. According to a business survey of 47 businesses conducted between November 2016 and February, 2017, 62% of the businesses *Strongly Supported* “placing “placing operating standards” on new adult businesses to prevent nuisance activities on or around their property.” An additional 24% *Somewhat Supported* this.

Improving the business practices of existing high-risk businesses by “placing operating standards” on the businesses. 68% of the businesses surveyed *Strongly Supported* and an additional 17% *Somewhat Supported* this. It might be possible to do this through a Deemed Approved Ordinance.

Ways to shut down the illegal pot shops on Campo Road. We know of at least three at this time.

Ways to persuade billboard owners that advertising high-risk businesses is inappropriate for a community struggling with the fall-out.

Endorsement letters