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INTRODUCTION

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101. HISTORY

The natural topography of the San Clemente coast transforms from the vertical coastal bluff face into a large arroyo with gentle slopes forming a natural amphitheater to the ocean. The founder of San Clemente, Ole Hanson, in designing his blueprint for the “Spanish-Village by-the-Sea” decided that this place would be the perfect location to build the San Clemente Pier. Hence, this area is referred to today as the “Pier Bowl.”

In 1928, Ole Hanson had the San Clemente Pier erected as a gift to the town. Hanson designed the street Avenida Del Mar to gracefully meander down from El Camino Real to the beach and base of the Pier. Taking advantage of the natural topography, roads and lots
were designed to view out over the Pacific. To prevent San Clemente from becoming “a heterogeneous mixture of terrible structures,” Ole Hanson established strict architectural guidelines that required all buildings in the City to be Spanish. In keeping with his vision for the town, Ole Hanson built his own Spanish villa, the “Casa Romantica,” on top of the bluff above the Pier Bowl. The residence enjoys white-water ocean views and panoramic views of Dana Point, Catalina Island, Cotton's Point, San Clemente Island, and San Diego on clear days.

During the depression, Ole Hanson's influence in San Clemente subsided. In the years that followed, the architectural design theme prescribed by Ole Hanson was abandoned. Despite the relatively unplanned development that followed from the 1950’s through the late 1970’s, the Pier Bowl has retained much of its village character. This character retention is because Ole Hanson laid the groundwork for a successful village design, the components of which are still in place today. These components include: the Casa Romantica and other historic buildings; the architectural integrity of many of the buildings; the Pier; the panoramic views; the mix of residential and commercial uses; recreational activities; the street and lot design with the natural topography; the interwoven street pattern; and the area's sunny Mediterranean climate.

Since the mid 1970's, the City has made several attempts to enhance the Pier Bowl and to Re-establish Ole Hanson's vision of making the Pier Bowl a “Spanish-Village-by-the-Sea.” These efforts continue today.

102. THE PROCESS

January of 1975 marked the City's first formal attempt since Ole Hanson to revitalize the Pier Bowl when the City Council approved Ordinance 642, designating the Pier Bowl as a redevelopment area. Soon after the establishment of the redevelopment area, the firm of Keisker-Johnson was retained by the City to develop a master plan for the redevelopment area. A Master Plan was developed including a commercial plaza over parking, a beachfront park, parking-lot improvements, and streetscape amenities. The Master Plan was approved by the City; however, implementation and development of the plan was never carried through due to controversy over the purchase of private land to develop the project.

In 1983, the City adopted San Clemente's Downtown Plan 2000. The Plan 2000 established goals, policies, and guidelines for Pico/North Beach and Del Mar/Pier Bowl. In the Del Mar/Pier Bowl portion of Plan 2000, design concepts for the Pier Bowl are discussed. These design concepts address Spanish architectural design, open space, and parking and circulation. Specific improvements that are recommended include a subterranean parking structure with a garden and park above, and a beach walk.
In the summer of 1988, the City met with local merchants and residents from the Pier Bowl and began developing a comprehensive Master Plan for the area in conjunction with the firm of Thirtieth Street Architects. Midway through this process, the City purchased the Casa Romantica. Purchase of the Casa achieved an important goal of the City, which was to protect historic and significant architectural properties. As a consequence of this purchase, the Pier Bowl Master Plan was put on hold until a development plan for the Casa Romantica could be completed.

The City conducted a process for selection of a developer for the Casa. The Ratkovich Company, a Los Angeles development firm, was selected as the best qualified developer. The Ratkovich Company, working with the City, proposed a development plan for the Casa Romantica, the City Parking Lot, and the Alameda property. This plan, which included 275,000 square feet of development, was presented to the public at several workshops. Due to the lack of public support for the project, the Ratkovich Company withdrew its proposal. With the end of the public-review process for the Casa Romantica in May of 1990, the City committed to continuing the Pier Bowl planning effort including a renewed effort for development of the Casa Romantica site.

Based on this commitment, staff re-initiated the Pier Bowl Planning process in February, 1991. In August, 1991, the City Council endorsed a three-phased planning approach for the Pier Bowl. Phase I includes the development of a conceptual plan to provide the guidelines and project description; Phase II, the development of the Pier Bowl Specific Plan; and Phase III, the development of a Casa Romantica Development Plan.

Phase I, the Pier Bowl Conceptual Plan, was developed from data gathered through past planning efforts in the Pier Bowl, information developed from the General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC) and the Pier Bowl Advisory Committee, and through numerous public workshops. The purpose of the conceptual plan (Phase I) was to build a consensus among the community on the general policy direction for the Pier Bowl Specific Plan. The purposes of Phases II and III are to provide the specific framework and enabling legislation for physical improvements which will revitalize the area and address issues and concerns that have been identified by the local community. These issues include: a desire to retain and enhance the Spanish-Village theme; to maintain the existing character of the area; a need for more beach parking; preservation of the Casa Romantica and other historic resources; preservation of public view corridors; development of City-owned property; better directional signage; street landscaping; more economic opportunities; and improved access and traffic flow.
103. PROJECT LOCATION

The Pier Bowl Specific Plan encompasses approximately fifty-six (56) acres of land adjacent to the San Clemente Municipal Pier in the western portion of San Clemente (see Figure 1). The approximate boundaries of the project area are Linda Lane Park to the north, Trafalgar Canyon to the south, the Pacific Ocean to the west, and the inland residential neighborhoods to the east. The boundaries of the Pier Bowl Specific Plan are the same as the Pier Bowl Redevelopment Project Area No. 1. (See Figure 2.)
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