



## Creating Policy, Systems, Environmental Change: Hesperia Success Story and Lessons Learned

### Hesperia Residents Aspire to Communities of Excellence and “Let Their Voice Be Heard”!

#### Intervention Summary

On Mother’s Day in 2014, a young mother, her husband and their three young children planned a day at Disneyland. It would be their first visit to the famous theme park. However, tragedy struck that morning as they drove east on Main Street. Minutes after leaving their home, a fatal accident took the lives of the entire family. The community rallied together to mourn the loss of this young family. They rallied together to let their voices be heard by advocating for safer streets.

Just a few months after the fatal accident, on August 22, 2014, the change movement commenced in the High Desert community of Hesperia, with the residents at the center of the initiative pressing for changes that would help a community improve public safety and save lives. On this day, a group of residents participated in a community forum to let their voices be heard and to decide on the priority issues in their community that needed to be addressed. Residents decided that improving street safety was critical because many streets lacked sidewalks or a safe means of crossing busy intersections. There are also many intersections to navigate.

Residents began advocating for physical improvements in the street intersection at Balsam Avenue and Main Street in Hesperia, the very intersection where a makeshift memorial acknowledges the loss of the young family. The residents contacted officials in the city’s engineering department, started attending city council meetings and even set up “one-on-one” meetings with city council members to present their concerns and ideas for change. The CX<sup>3</sup> Resident Community Leader, Pastor Raul Medina, became a representative and one of the voices advocating for change as, the five people who perished were members of his church. More support came from using the local newspaper to raise awareness of the street safety issues. In fact, the Victor Valley Daily Press Newspaper printed an article publicizing what residents were able to accomplish as a benefit to the entire community. As a result of their efforts, a median

will be installed to slow traffic and eliminate northbound turns onto Balsam. The City Council asked staff to include a lighting study along the median as well to help enhance safety in that area. Residents have now experienced how their voices can be heard and how they can influence change and take action.

## **Description of Barriers Encountered and Identified or Proposed Solutions**

A key lesson learned for residents was the understanding of how influencing change in local government decisions requires patience, persistence and consistency. Moving the issue of street safety from the lips of residents in a neighborhood and grassroots effort to a written item on the City Council agenda requires time and continued commitment to the issue. Residents learned that change is not immediate. Residents discovered their advocacy voice needed to be used multiple times to be heard, understood and to stay the course.

They also came to understand the cost for improvements and the art of compromise. The original request was for a traffic signal to calm traffic. This was too expensive and not feasible given the city's budget. A median was proposed as an alternative solution.

## **Future Directions/Sustainable Success**

The results of these advocacy efforts for safe streets have not only impacted the intersection where the fatal accident occurred, but it prompted residents to identify other intersections with high safety risks for pedestrians and motorists. This will continue and now that there is open dialogue between residents and city officials, this partnership has potential to improve street safety across the entire City of Hesperia, one neighborhood at a time.

The key accomplishment celebrated by residents is the installation of a raised median from Cottonwood Avenue to 11th Avenue. This is an adopted street section for a major arterial highway. The median installation improves safety along Main Street and driveways along the corridor between these major intersections.

The Public Safety Advisory Committee considered this matter on April 14, 2015, after which it recommended that the City Council consider this option. This project will cost \$350,000 according to Hesperia city reports. Residents will continue to attend city council meetings and follow the street improvement to completion and ribbon-cutting.

## Contact information about this Narrative

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