

DATE ISSUED: February 11, 2005 REPORT NO. 05-038

ATTENTION: Land Use and Housing Committee and Planning Commission
Agenda of March 9, 2005

SUBJECT: Workshop on the General Plan Update

REFERENCE: Manager's Report Nos. 03-019, 03-115, 03-204, 03-205, 03-206, 04-149
Planning Report Nos. P-03-183, P-03-227, P-03-333, P-04-220

SUMMARY

THIS IS AN INFORMATION ITEM ONLY. NO ACTION IS REQUIRED ON THE PART OF THE COMMITTEE OR THE CITY COUNCIL.

BACKGROUND

On October 22, 2002, the City Council adopted the Strategic Framework Element as an amendment to the City's 1979 *Progress Guide and General Plan* (General Plan). This action was the first significant step in updating the City's twenty-year-old General Plan.

The Strategic Framework Element provides a new strategy for the City's future growth and development, a basis for a new Land Use Element, and a framework for updating existing policies in the General Plan.

On February 12, 2003, the Land Use and Housing Committee (LU&H) approved the General Plan Work Program which laid out the major work activities and a timeline to update the General Plan. (Attachment 1 provides a timeline overview.)

Since adoption of the work program, the Planning Department conducted a joint workshop on October 23, 2003, with LU&H and the Planning Commission, to discuss and seek input on various work products, including the new General Plan format, public outreach strategy, existing conditions data collection, draft Mobility Element policies, and draft community plan amendment/update policies. Additionally, separate workshops were conducted with LU&H and

the Planning Commission to discuss housing/industrial collocation and community plan initiation and amendment criteria. (An overview of progress made since the last joint workshop is included in Attachment 2.)

DISCUSSION

The General Plan Update effort involves incorporating and refining Strategic Framework Element and citywide community plan policies into the General Plan, consolidating the existing fourteen elements into nine, and formatting the document so that it is easy to read and web-friendly. (Attachment 3 identifies the elements and status of each.)

The questions posed in this report are generally addressed in the Strategic Framework Element. However, after two years of implementation, it has become clear that further policy refinement and expansion is necessary to clarify intent and provide direction. The questions are as follows:

1. How should housing be incorporated into areas for industrial use?
2. How can recreation policies be adjusted to address individual community needs?
3. What should be done about the ongoing community facilities deficits?
4. What policy direction can be provided in the General Plan to address the issue of consistency?
5. What role can the updated General Plan play in simplifying the community plan update process?
6. What guidance can the General Plan provide for future general and community plan amendments?

Each of the six questions are addressed below, beginning with relevant Strategic Framework and General Plan policies, followed by a description of the issue, and concluded by a list of proposals for consideration.

1. HOW SHOULD HOUSING BE INCORPORATED INTO AREAS FOR INDUSTRIAL USE?

The adopted Strategic Framework Element and General Plan contain goals and policies which require further refinement regarding the collocation of housing and employment uses.

Adopted policies in the Strategic Framework Element addressing employment land include:

- *Identify areas in Subregional Districts where collocation of employment and residential uses could occur;*
- *Limit the re-designation of employment land except where it will mitigate existing land use conflicts, or when it meets specific criteria to be established with the adoption of the Economic Prosperity Element. These criteria should relate to the availability of land to meet the City's economic development goals, parcel characteristics, adjacency to transit, and urban design; and*
- *Preserve areas for middle-income employment uses including manufacturing, research and development, distribution, and wholesale trade by limiting or excluding multiple*

tenant office uses and corporate headquarters that do not have a research and development or manufacturing component.

Adopted Strategic Framework Element policies addressing housing needs include:

- *Concentrate future residential density increases in the Regional Center, Subregional Districts, and Urban and Neighborhood Village Centers; and*
- *Establish policies to allow areas within Subregional Districts to collocate employment and higher density residential use and adopt design standards to mitigate land use conflicts.*

Since adoption of the Strategic Framework Element, several proposals to change community plan land use designations from industrial to residential have been submitted for City review. Without clear direction in the General Plan, Planning staff conducted a number of workshops and hearings on this topic. (Attachment 4 provides a history of previous actions.) Based upon input received from LU&H, Planning Commission, and various stakeholders, Planning staff is proposing that further policy direction on industrial/residential collocation be included in the General Plan Economic Prosperity Element. (The draft policy is included in Attachment 5.)

Staff is recommending and seeking input on the following proposals which are included in the draft policy:

Specify Issues to be Addressed. Any proposed community plan amendment to allow industrial/residential collocation and/or conversion would be required to address specific issues, including economic importance of the employment land, location, and public health concerns.

Discourage Residential/Industrial Collocation in Areas Most Attractive to Middle-Income Employment. These functions are characterized by manufacturing, research and development, warehousing, and distribution functions, and are key to supporting economic growth which benefits the local economy. The determination of whether land is attractive to these types of uses is based on a variety of factors including physical site characteristics, parcel size and configuration, surrounding development patterns and uses, and long-term market trends. The specification of these functions may discourage collocation and conversion in many industrially-designated lands in the northern part of the City which currently support high-technology and biotechnology manufacturing, research and development, and support uses. However, the policy would be less restrictive in employment areas characterized by predominantly office uses or where there has already been encroachment of non-industrial uses.

Require a Distance Separation to Address Public Health Concerns. The San Diego County Air Pollution Control District has indicated that a required distance separation of 1,000 feet between residential and industrial property lines is adequate to allow businesses a margin of safety, whereby they could expand and change industrial processes without concern over adversely impacting new nearby residential developments. The 1,000-foot distance separation is considered large enough to severely limit the residential uses in areas where indirect impacts to human health could occur. A reduced buffer could be considered in locations where studies indicate public health would not be compromised.

2. HOW CAN RECREATION POLICIES BE ADJUSTED TO ADDRESS INDIVIDUAL COMMUNITY NEEDS?

The current Recreation Element of the General Plan provides three overarching goals for recreation. Simply stated the goals are:

- *Provide a range of opportunities for all recreational activities, in an equitable manner, throughout the City;*
- *Enhance the built environment through development of an extensive and varied system of open space and recreation facilities; and*
- *Acquire and preserve all public beaches for public uses.*

These goals apply to population-based parks, resource-based parks, and other recreational accommodations such as swimming pools, plazas, and mini-parks. To achieve these goals, the General Plan established guidelines and standards. (See summary in Attachment 6.) However, the General Plan acknowledges that meeting the standards in urbanized communities is difficult and that efforts should be directed toward providing staff and facilities to compensate for acreage.

Specific policies in the Strategic Framework Element include:

- *Develop alternative methods of providing parks and recreational areas to meet the needs of urban and built-out communities, recognizing available land constraints and seizing opportunities for the creation of more accessible parks and the integration of public space and recreation; and*
- *Develop a citywide parks system master plan.*

In order to understand the existing baseline attitude of the public toward recreation facilities in the City, and to provide insights to the development of refined standards and a future park master plan, the Planning Department commissioned a Public Attitude Survey of San Diego City Parks and Recreation. Results from the survey are outlined in Attachment 7 and point to the following:

- The City as a whole has nearly all of the recreation facility-types that residents want;
- Regional parks (beaches/Balboa Park) and neighborhood parks are the most visited;
- A better distribution of specialized facilities such as dog parks, swimming pools, sports courts and skate parks is desired; and
- Residents would prefer to improve, and maintain existing facilities rather than build new facilities.

Given the overall positive response to the existing recreation facilities, the challenge will be to maintain and improve the level of satisfaction while accommodating future population growth.

In order to address this issue, the survey suggests the City develop policies that:

- Place greater resources into the maintenance and improvement of existing facilities;
- Locate recreation facilities, especially general purpose passive parks with facilities such as playgrounds, walking trails, swimming pools, or sports courts, in regions of the City perceived as lacking;
- Improve accessibility and overall maintenance of existing facilities; and
- Capitalize on the City's natural environment, beach/ocean access and open spaces.

Given the survey results, other research and public input, staff is seeking input on the following possible approaches to meeting community recreation needs:

Establish a Matrix of Standards. City staff is considering the development of a matrix/menu that provides mechanisms for meeting the recreation needs of the growing population, and would set the stage for a park master plan. (Note: a discussion of a Parks System Master Plan was held with LU&H on June 4, 2003. See Manager’s Report No. 03-115 for more details.) This approach could establish a varied set of standards that would be flexible enough to meet community specific facility needs while providing a mechanism for creating equity in facilities throughout the City.

Establish Regional Service Areas. The location, distribution, and needs of recreation facilities have historically been dealt with at the community planning level. This practice locates recreation facilities based on the needs and demands of residents within the boundaries of a community planning area. Determining service areas or areas of benefit for recreation facilities would allow flexibility in meeting demands in a more reasoned manner. This approach could also provide flexibility in funding where more than one community benefits from the recreation facilities. Additionally, it could allow pooling of funds to build needed facilities.

Require Redevelopment Area Set Asides. As previously stated, the area set aside for recreation facilities in older urbanized areas is more likely to fall below the current guidelines than the area in the more recently developed master planned communities. However, blighted conditions in portions of older urbanized areas have encouraged the creation of redevelopment areas to assist in improving neighborhood viability and livability. California Redevelopment Law includes requirements for provision of affordable housing within redevelopment areas. A similar requirement for recreation facilities could be developed to achieve equity within redeveloping urbanized neighborhoods.

Establish Level of Service Standards (LOS). One mechanism for achieving a flexible set of standards that reflect community character is the LOS standard adopted by the city of Gainesville, Florida, in 2002 as part of that city’s Recreation Element and outlined in Attachment 8. The standard is needs-based, facilities-driven, and land-measured. Similar to our City’s existing guidelines, determination of the LOS is stated in acres per 1,000 population. The difference is that the LOS reflects the instances of use of the activity areas and the facilities necessary to satisfy the actual demand. A process would be required to determine the LOS of a community.

3. WHAT SHOULD BE DONE ABOUT ONGOING COMMUNITY FACILITIES DEFICITS?

The adopted Strategic Framework Element states, “The provision of adequate infrastructure and public facilities is the key component to the entire (City of Villages) strategy.” Additionally, the Strategic Framework Element and Action Plan establish the following policies and recommended actions:

- *Maintain service levels as population growth occurs;*
- *Provide public facilities and services to assure that adequate levels of service standards are attained concurrently with development;*
- *Consider alternative methods of financing to provide public facilities; and*
- *Adopt a financing strategy that identifies new revenue sources and encourages the formation of partnerships to remedy the public facilities shortfall.*

In short, the adopted Strategic Framework policy directs that new development should not make the deficit greater and that the existing \$2.1 billion deficit (2002 estimate) be addressed.

The City is continuing to collect development impact fees from new development to pay for the facilities needed to support the new development accounted for in adopted community plans. This existing policy was expanded upon in the Strategic Framework Element and will remain in the General Plan. Additionally, the Planning Department is continuing to update community facility financing plans to update needs and impact fees. However, impact fees collected do not keep pace with the growing facility need.

To keep the deficit from growing, staff is seeking input on the following options:

Maximize Use of Development Impact Fees. Explore possible modifications to development impact fee methodologies to fully address public facility needs resulting from new development. The Planning Department is actively involved with a consultant (Pacific Municipal Partners) who is currently evaluating the City's development impact fee methodologies. A report is expected in the spring and recommendations could be incorporated into General Plan policies.

Establish New Permit Findings. Establish new discretionary permit findings that address the adequacy of public facilities and infrastructure on a project by project basis. In order to make permit findings, additional exactions from development proposals may be required. For example, in the Central Urbanized Planned District Ordinance (San Diego Municipal Code Chapter 15) development proposals located more than 600 feet from a public park are required to provide additional exterior recreational space for every housing unit constructed. This model could be used to establish similar standards for police and fire service, libraries, parks and transportation improvements.

Establish New Community Plan Amendment Processing. For new development proposing a community plan amendment to exceed density or intensity specified in the community plan, require that specific issues be addressed including provisions for public facilities concurrent with need and a provision of extraordinary benefit. (A list of the issues is included in Attachment 12 under Planning Amendment Processing section.)

Establish Development Thresholds. Establish development thresholds so that additional development beyond what is accounted for in the community plan could only occur concurrent with new facilities. This could be accomplished by establishing set thresholds (perhaps numbers of housing units) in a community plan area which could not be exceeded unless specified facilities were provided. Phasing plans similar to those utilized in the former Future Urbanizing Area could be considered. This would be done as part of a community plan and facilities

financing plan update.

Note: Due to potential increases in costs, any of the above approaches could be an obstacle to new development. Additionally, this effort could impact the City's ability to meet required housing goals in accordance with state housing element laws. Further investigation would be required to determine the impact.

In order to address the estimated \$2.1 billion existing deficit in public facilities, staff is seeking input on the following recommendations from the adopted Strategic Framework Element:

Remedy existing shortfall in public facilities by considering the following:

- *Fiscal reform at the state and local level;*
- *Regionalization of infrastructure expenses;*
- *Efficient use of shared resources; and*
- *Additional user fee and revenue measures, including residential refuse collection fee, utility user tax, transient occupancy tax, and real property transfer tax.*

As an Alternative, Continue Current Systems Collect fees from new development to build the facilities needed to support the new development. Attempt to remedy deficiencies over an extended period of time through existing resources such as Community Development Block Grant, TransNet, and other grant funding. Under this option it must be acknowledged that service levels will not be maintained as population grows and projects will be approved while facility deficits continue.

4. WHAT POLICY DIRECTION CAN BE PROVIDED IN THE GENERAL PLAN TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF CONSISTENCY?

It is the City of San Diego's practice to apply zoning that is consistent with community plan land use designations to ensure their implementation, despite the fact that state law exempts charter cities from the consistency requirement. Unfortunately, some older community plans contain somewhat ambiguous or overly broad policy direction. Additionally, land use designations and density/intensity ranges vary, sometimes significantly, from community plan to community plan. This has contributed to difficulties for staff reviewers, community residents, project proponents, and decision-makers in reaching a resolution on whether a project, even if consistent with the applied zoning regulations, implements the general (community) plan.

The General Plan update and establishment of a separate Land Use Element provides the opportunity to clearly state the City Council policy on consistency.

Staff is recommending and seeking input on the following to be included in the Land Use Element to address consistency:

Describe Consistency for Zoning and Project Conformance with Community Plans. The Land Use Element will specify that zoning will be applied to implement community plan specified: land use, range of density/intensity, and site design, as appropriate. Similarly, it will require projects to be assessed based upon conformance with general/community plan specified:

land use, range of density/intensity, site design, other general/community plan policy objectives, especially related to open space preservation, community identity, mobility, and the timing, phasing, and provision of public facilities.

Clarify Internal Consistency. The General Plan will comply with state guidelines which require that policies within a complete general (community) plan are internally consistent. Further, there will be equal status among elements, consistency between elements, consistency within elements, consistency with community plans, and consistency between text and diagrams.

Provide Matrix of Standardized Land Use Categories. Existing community land use categories in the City's adopted plans have been reviewed and combined into groupings under consistent categories. New land use categories have been drafted to allow the community to clearly designate where (and where not) particular land uses are desirable. The new, standardized land use categories will remain the same between community plans, but uses can be tailored through plan text and/or footnotes to denote emphasis. The General Plan will now provide a complete menu of land use category options to accurately reflect community needs and desires at the time of community plan updates and amendments. (Attachment 8 provides an example of commercial land use designations.)

5. WHAT ROLE CAN THE UPDATED GENERAL PLAN PLAY IN SIMPLIFYING THE COMMUNITY PLAN UPDATE PROCESS?

Many of the policies in the existing General Plan are out-of-date and have limited value for providing policy direction on citywide issues. As such, community plan updates have necessarily included policy direction on issues that are more citywide, and even regional, in nature. This has had an impact on the length of time that it takes to complete a community plan update, and, therefore, how many updates can occur within a given time period.

The General Plan update provides an opportunity to simplify the community plan update process. With the assistance of interested groups, progress has been made toward refining community plan content to: reduce plan update timelines, ensure that specific guidance is included to clearly govern how development occurs in each community plan area, and to focus upon implementation.

Planning staff have reviewed community and other land use plan documents and asked community planners, planning group members, and planning consultants to provide input on how to produce an effective community plan in a reasonable time frame.

Based upon this input, staff is recommending and seeking input on the following to simplify the community plan update process:

Maintain a Two-Year Timeline. Require that all participants accept a two-year timeline with set deadlines to complete the community plan update.

Use Standardized Format. Establish a standardized outline and format for all community plans to follow. This will simplify the process and narrow what can and cannot be included in a

community plan. (See draft community plan outline in Attachment 10.)

Prepare Operating Procedures. Prepare standard operating procedures for the community plan update process for background, existing conditions and technical studies. This would include using and updating final existing conditions data and maps assembled in 2004.

Focus Plan Content. Focus plan content upon community-specific issues and avoid repetition of citywide and regional policies. Establish implementation as a separate Action Plan document.

An updated General Plan and streamlined community plan update process should allow community residents, business owners, civic groups, and property owners to clearly articulate how they wish their community to evolve and provide direction so that everyone understands how it should be accomplished. The inability to update and maintain community plan documents results in another consequence, the amendment process as a substitute for comprehensive review and update.

6. WHAT GUIDANCE CAN THE GENERAL PLAN PROVIDE FOR FUTURE GENERAL AND COMMUNITY PLAN AMENDMENTS?

In November 2003, LU&H and the Planning Commission held a joint meeting to discuss the initiation and community plan amendment process. The general consensus at that meeting was that the initiation process serves a valuable purpose for the City, applicant, and the community. Council and commission members voiced support for retention of the initiation criteria and the hearing with significant revisions. The council members and commissioners both recognized that land use plan documents require amendments from time-to-time and that the initiation process must retain some flexibility. The amendment process may also be used to identify neighborhood village centers. Frequent amendments, however, have the potential to diminish the community plan's original vision.

It is clear that revisions should focus upon strengthening the initiation criteria to ensure that amendment proposals are consistent with the overall vision of the General Plan, the Strategic Framework Element, and the community plan. The ideal initiation criteria will not only allow worthy proposals to proceed for further study and amendment processing, but serve as an impediment to those that are clearly inconsistent with the City's overarching goals and policies. Both LU&H and the Planning Commission objected to consolidated hearings or "batching" amendment requests according to geographic sectors. A blackout period or moratorium on initiations during and/or for some period after a community plan update was also suggested as a possible policy.

Staff has met with both the Land Use Element Working Group and a Community Planners Committee subcommittee to discuss potential revisions to the criteria and council and commission direction. (Subcommittee membership lists are provided in Attachment 10.) On November 18, 2004, the Planning Commission held a workshop to discuss the issues and to provide direction to Planning staff on revised initiation criteria and the plan amendment process.

Based upon input received, staff is seeking input on the following to provide guidance on

community plan amendments:

Relocate Initiation Procedures. Relocate initiation procedures from the Land Development Code (LDC) to the Land Use Element. The plan amendment hearing process will remain in the LDC.

Allow Technical Initiations. Allow technical initiations for amendment requests meeting certain criteria, such as health and safety, that will not result in general/community plan policy changes.

Revise Initiation Criteria. Revise initiation criteria to ensure that proposed changes to the general/community plan be consistent with the Strategic Framework Element/Land Use Element, City of Villages strategy, and major community plan policy recommendations.

Establish Standardized Issues. Establish a standardized and required list of issues for analysis to govern the community plan amendment process. Planning Commission and City Council resolutions would reference the standardized list of issues to ensure that they are an important component in reaching a final decision to approve or deny a plan amendment.

An updated General Plan, more frequently updated community plans, and a revised plan amendment process should reduce the number of future amendment requests. The draft text that would be included in the Land Use Element is contained in Attachment 12.

CONCLUSION

Adoption of the Strategic Framework Element and Action Plan in 2002 set the stage for a comprehensive update to the City's 1979 *Progress Guide and General Plan*. The Planning Department plans to distribute an updated Draft General Plan for public review in April 2005.

As part of the General Plan update process, guiding policies in the Strategic Framework Element are being expanded and refined in specific General Plan elements. This workshop report has focused on policies specific to the Economic Prosperity, Recreation, Public Facilities and Safety, and Land Use elements. Previous reports and workshops have been focused on other elements including Mobility and Conservation. The Planning Department will continue to seek input on the policies discussed in this report as well as the additional policies that will be included in the Draft General Plan in the coming months.

A General Plan workshop on these topics is scheduled with Community Planners Committee on February 22, 2005. A workshop specific to the Economic Prosperity element is scheduled with

the Planning Commission for March 10, 2005. Future workshops will be scheduled with release of the draft General Plan in spring 2005.

Respectfully submitted,

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FRAZIER/SGG/CAC/je

Note: Attachments 1 through 12 are available in electronic format. A complete copy for review is available in the Office of the City Clerk.

Attachments:

- [1. General Plan Update Timeline](#)
- [2. General Plan Work Program Progress](#)
- [3. General Plan Elements Status Table](#)
- [4. Previous Actions on Collocation](#)
- [5. Draft Collocation Policy](#)
- [6. Existing Recreation Standards Summary Table](#)
- [7. Recreation Survey Results](#)
- [8. Service Standards for Parks](#)
- [9. Example Land Use Designations](#)
- [10. Recommended Community Plan Outline](#)
- [11. Land Use Element Subcommittee Rosters](#)
- [12. Draft Criteria for Community Plan Amendments](#)
13. General Plan Strategic Framework Element (provided to PC, and LU&H members only)
14. Strategic Framework Element Action Plan (provided to PC, and LU&H members only)