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General Plan Study Session on Community Design and Preservation Policies, Community Services and Facilities Policies, and General Plan Map Preview

This is an informational report only and no Planning Commission action is required. The City of San Leandro is in the process of updating its General Plan. Eight study sessions with the Planning Commission have been held to date. Previous General Plan study sessions have focused on the other elements of the plan, including housing, land use, transportation, parks/open space/conservation, and environmental hazards. The September 17 study session will focus on policies pertaining to community design, historic preservation, and community services and facilities. The study session will also include a “preview” of the new General Plan Map.

BACKGROUND

As was noted at the previous Study Sessions, the process now being undertaken is a General Plan **Update**, and not a brand new General Plan, as was prepared in 1998-2002. As such, the starting point for policy discussions is the existing General Plan (the 2002 Plan). The City has completed an audit of the policies and actions in the 2002 Plan to provide a baseline for the Update.

The 2002 San Leandro General Plan includes seven elements. An eighth element on Economic Development will be added through the current update.

One of the General Plan Elements (Housing) has already been updated and was adopted by the City Council in January 2015. Two of the Elements (Land Use and Transportation) were covered at the May 21 Planning Commission study session. Two more Elements (Open Space/Parks/Conservation & Environmental Hazards) were covered at the July 16 Planning Commission study session. The final two Elements will be covered on September 17.

Attachments “A” and “B” are the policy audits for the two elements to be discussed on September 17. Attachment A is the audit for Historic Preservation and Community Design. Attachment B is the audit for Community Services and Facilities. The policy audits are formatted as spreadsheets, with existing goals, policies and actions from the 2002 Plan listed on each row. The final column of the spreadsheet (Evaluation) includes a determination as to whether the statement should be carried forward, edited, or deleted. It also references possible new policies or actions that should be considered. The audits are supplemented by a review of more recent planning documents, including the Downtown Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Strategy, the East 14th Street South Area Development Strategy, the Shoreline Development Plan, the Next Generation Workplace District Study for the industrial area, the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, and the Climate Action Plan.

There are 120 goals, policies and actions in the existing Historic Preservation and Community Design Element and 108 goals, policies, and actions in the existing Community Services and Facilities Element. Because the Planning Commission study session does not provide time for discussion of all 228 statements, we will focus on the issues where feedback is needed the most. Comments on the other statements may be provided by the Commissioners and the general public via email or subsequent discussions. The key issues requiring feedback are highlighted in this staff report.

The September 17 meeting will also include a preview of the Draft General Plan Map, which has been updated to reflect current land use data and forecasts, as well as input from the Planning Commission, City staff, community meeting participants, and others (such as local stakeholders and interested parties). Key changes between the “existing” General Plan Map and the “proposed” Map will be reviewed at the meeting. The Map and revised definitions of land use categories will be posted to the project website after September 17.

ANALYSIS

Historic Preservation and Community Design Element

The San Leandro General Plan includes an “optional” element on Historic Preservation and Community Design. Cities are encouraged to include “optional” elements in their general plans to address issues of local importance. Once a city adopts an “optional” element, it carries the same legal weight as a mandatory element. Although a Historic Preservation and Community Design Element is not mandated by State law, the issues it addresses are critical to the future of San Leandro.

The Historic Preservation and Community Design Element seeks to preserve San Leandro’s legacy of historic resources, enhance the aesthetic character of the city, and maintain the features that make San Leandro unique. The Element begins with a summary of historic and archaeological resources in the city, including a map of structures and sites listed on local, state, and national registers of historic places. The Element makes the case for an expanded preservation program, noting that preservation can create a stronger sense of local identity, invigorate the local economy, and increase awareness of history and culture. The second part of the Element focuses on community design. The features that contribute to the city’s character and identity are discussed, including gateways, views, visual landmarks, and architecture. The text also addresses scenic highways, street trees, public art, utility undergrounding, sign control, lighting, and urban open space.

As in all elements of the General Plan, the first part of the chapter includes narrative text and the second part includes goals, policies, and actions. Attachment “A” indicates that most of the policies

remain relevant and should be carried forward. New policies should be added to reflect recent efforts such as the Next Generation Workplace study and the Downtown TOD Strategy. Many of the actions in the Element also should be carried forward. However, some have been completed or require revision. There may also be a need for new actions to reflect issues raised during the General Plan Update process.

Attachment “A” notes policies where additional discussion may be warranted; these will be highlighted in the Planning Commission presentation on September 17. For instance, the 2002 Plan suggested that a historic district be created in the vicinity of Casa Peralta and possibly on Orchard Avenue, and that certain residential areas be designated as “neighborhood conservation districts.” This was not done between 2002-2015, in part due to limited staff resources, but also because there was not compelling evidence that such changes would have community support.

The 2002 Plan also suggested an expanded role for the City’s Library and Historic Commission. A fresh discussion of this role is warranted. The 2002 Plan also called for a “Historic Preservation Action Plan.” Although such a Plan has not yet been prepared, it may still be worthwhile as a way to articulate the City’s preservation goals and provide a realistic strategy for their implementation.

Overall, the 2002 Plan envisioned a very pro-active role for the City in historic preservation initiatives. Given city staffing and budget limitations, some of this role has been assumed by local non-profit and volunteer organizations, or shared between Departments such as Library and Community Development. A general discussion of the City’s role in historic preservation by the Planning Commission would be helpful to determine if the City should “stay the course” or change its policy focus.

On the subject of community design, Planning Commission feedback on existing policies would be very helpful. Of particular concern are design issues such as the compatibility of second story additions to single family homes, scale transitions between multi-family buildings and nearby single family homes, multi-family building design, and the future of older strip malls and commercial centers. The 2002 Plan also called for programs such as citywide wayfinding signage, multi-family design guidelines, development of a street tree master plan, and a prohibition on the paving of sidewalk planter strips. These actions were not completed, and the Planning Commission may wish to weigh in on whether they should be retained in the updated General Plan.

Community Services and Facilities Element

The Community Services and Facilities Element is considered an “optional” element of the General Plan. However, the topics it addresses - including schools, libraries, police, fire, human services, and utilities-are vital to the future of the city. The update of this Element is critical to reflect changes in demographics, resources, the City’s organizational structure, and emerging issues. Much of the update is being guided by input from the various service providers, including City departments and other agencies (school districts, EBMUD, etc.)

The Element is divided into four major topic areas. These are public safety (law enforcement and fire), education and information services (schools and libraries), social services (child care, youth, seniors, and cultural arts), and infrastructure (water, sanitary sewer, and drainage). The first part of the Element profiles each service category and presents the major planning issues; the second part presents goals, policies, and actions.

One of the ongoing issues addressed by this chapter is school capacity and the impacts of future growth on schools. The existing plan includes several policies and actions calling for coordinated planning by the City and School Districts and various measures to mitigate the impacts of growth. The Planning Commission may wish to provide feedback on possible new strategies or policies on this issue at the meeting on September 17. The link between schools and economic development (including vocational training and workforce development) may also warrant additional discussion.

Goal 47 in the General Plan addresses telecommunications and information systems. The policies and actions in this section will need to be comprehensively updated to reflect Lit San Leandro and the opportunities created by broadband. City staff is providing feedback on potential new action items, including the use of technology to facilitate civic engagement.

The 2002 Plan also called for improvements to child care, youth, and senior services. It recommended preparation of a Child Care Master Plan and development of a teen center and a youth “wall of fame.” These initiatives were not carried out, and may be revisited as part of the General Plan update. The update provides an opportunity for possible new human services initiatives to be added, including a Social Services Needs Assessment (planned for 2016). A variety of youth development and employment initiatives may also be added, consistent with existing programs being implemented by the City, the School Districts, and local business organizations (such as the Chamber of Commerce).

The 2002 Plan provided policy direction on infrastructure. Most of the policies are still relevant, but additional policies or actions may be needed to address the need for funding for maintenance, replacement of aging infrastructure, and the pending completion of a new Sewer Master Plan.

General Plan Map

The final item to be discussed at the September 17 meeting is the Draft 2035 General Plan Map. This item is intended to be a “preview” of the new Map rather than an in-depth discussion of definitions or parcel-specific designations.

The presentation will focus on changes to the existing (2015) General Plan Map. Highlights of these changes include:

- Development of a new land use category for high-density residential uses in the 30-50 unit/acre range (the current General Plan caps residential densities at 29.9 units per acre, except in mixed use areas). The new high-density residential category is being mapped in areas where the existing density already exceeds 30 units per acre, and is intended to reduce the number of properties in the city that are non-conforming for density.
- Development of a new “Industrial-Transition” category to recognize areas where existing (industrial) uses have a high potential to transition to new uses in the next 20 years. Industrial uses will continue to be encouraged and supported in these areas. However, these areas are acknowledged to have the potential for other activities such as offices, hotels, and shopping centers by 2035. Housing would only be permitted in Industrial-Transition areas if they are near a BART station.
- Development of a new “Bay Fair Transit Oriented Development” category to recognize the fact that a Specific Plan is being prepared for the Bay Fair area. The new “B-TOD” designation will maximize flexibility for Bay Fair and avoid the need for extensive General Plan Map amendments when the new Plan is completed.

- Elimination of the “Office” General Plan Map category, since the areas with this designation have largely been absorbed into other “mixed use” categories (such as Downtown and Transit-Oriented Development) where office is a permitted use.
- Increase in the allowable density in the Downtown Mixed Use category from 75 units per acre to 100 units per acre, to reflect current real estate trends and market economics.
- Designation of the East Bay “Greenway” as a new open space on the Map
- Minor map changes to reflect development that took place between 2002 and 2015
- Minor map changes to more accurately reflect existing land uses
- Minor map changes on the perimeter of Downtown to reflect existing densities and future transit-oriented development opportunities
- Re-designation of Oyster Bay Regional Shoreline from “Resource Conservation” to “Parks and Recreation” and redesignation of Burrell Field from “Public/Institutional” to “Parks and Recreation.”

NEXT STEPS

City staff and the consulting team have completed many of the key tasks in the General Plan Update work program, including the Housing Element, the “Existing Conditions” inventory, the Policy Audit, and development of the Draft Land Use Map. The next step in the process is to update the General Plan document itself. This requires editing the narrative text from 2002 and incorporating the recommendations of the Policy Audit and feedback from the community, including the Planning Commission. This step also includes development of a new Economic Development Element of the General Plan.

Preparation of the EIR has been underway since the start of the General Plan. However, the most critical EIR task—the assessment of potential impacts—is about to begin. In the coming months, the consultant team will complete modeling of future transportation, noise, air quality, and greenhouse gas conditions based on expected growth patterns. The team will also document projected impacts on public services, parks, biologic resources, water quality, aesthetics, and other topic areas required by CEQA.

A community meeting is planned for early December to review draft policies and actions. Between now and that time, additional opportunities for input will include meetings with community organizations, business groups, and stakeholders. Additional briefings to the Planning Commission and City Council may also take place between now and the end of the year.

The City is working toward the goal of having a Public Review Draft Plan and Environmental Impact Report completed by the end of 2015, with public hearings in early 2016.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A - Historic Preservation and Community Design Element Policy Audit

Attachment B - Community Services and Facilities Element Policy Audit