



Legislation Text

File #: 15-453, **Version:** 1

General Plan Study Session on Open Space, Parks, Conservation, and Environmental Hazards Policies

SUMMARY

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. Seven study sessions with the Planning Commission have been held to date. Previous General Plan study sessions have focused on the Housing Element, the Land Use Map, economic conditions, the City's long-range vision, and land use and transportation policies. The July 21 study session will focus on policies pertaining to open space, parks, and conservation; and environmental hazards, including noise.

BACKGROUND

As was noted at the previous (May 21) Study Session, 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. One of these 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. The next two Elements (Open Space/Parks/Conservation & Environmental Hazards) will be covered at the July 16 study session. The final two Elements will be covered on September 17. The City is also adding an eighth element (covering Economic Development) as part of the Update.

Attachments "A" and "B" are the policy audits for the two elements to be discussed on July 16. Attachment A is the audit for Open Space, Parks, and Conservation. Attachment B is the audit for Environmental Hazards. The September study session will cover the Community Design and Preservation Element, and the Community Services and Facilities Element.

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 116 goals, policies and actions in the existing Open Space, Parks, and Conservation Element and 143 goals, policies, and actions in the existing Environmental Hazards Element. Because the Planning Commission study session does not provide time for discussion of all 259 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 and will be incorporated into a PowerPoint presentation at the July 16 meeting.

ANALYSIS

Open Space, Parks, and Conservation (OSPC) Element

The OSPC Element includes the state mandated “Open Space” and “Conservation” Elements of the General Plan and an optional component addressing parks and recreation. The Element begins with a definition of “open space,” followed by a discussion of the various types of parks in the city. The discussion notes that in 2002 there were 4.86 acres of parkland in San Leandro per 1,000 residents. It sets the goal of maintaining that ratio in the future (Policy 22.01). The text concludes that this will require creation of an additional 27 acres of parkland by 2015. Policy 22.01 indicates that there should be a park within one-half mile of every San Leandro resident.

One policy issue to be addressed is whether the existing service standards should be maintained. The City did not add parkland between 2002 and 2015, although improvements were made to existing parks. Current forecasts indicate a projected increase of 15,000 residents between 2015 and 2035. At 4.86 acres per 1,000 residents, this equates to a need for almost 73 acres of new parks. Changes to the current standard may be considered as part of the General Plan process. The City may also consider new types of parks (linear parks, plazas, etc.) as it expands its inventory. New policies may be needed to address how park needs and opportunities will change as more development in the city is multi-family (rather than single family) in format.

Other park-related topics addressed by this Element include park rehabilitation, park maintenance, the relationship of the East Bay Regional Park District to the City park system, and joint use agreements with the San Leandro and San Lorenzo Unified School Districts. Joint Use Agreements are critical to meeting the need for athletic fields, playgrounds, and other facilities that are in short supply on City-owned parkland. Existing policies and actions support expanded benefits to the City from the Regional Park District through investments at Oyster Bay Regional Shoreline, trails along San Leandro Creek and the Bay, and improved access to hillside open space. These policies continue to be relevant, but should be revisited to ensure they provide adequate direction.

The remainder of the OSPCD Element addresses Natural Resources and Conservation. The Element includes several policies advocating for restoration of San Leandro Creek and improvements to water quality, vegetation, and public access along its course through San Leandro. Most of these policies will be carried forward, but there is an opportunity to weave in a stronger vision for San Leandro Creek as a major amenity, wildlife and recreational corridor, and defining feature of San Leandro. The Plan also includes extensive discussion of the shoreline marshlands and hillside grasslands, including an overview of special status species (salt marsh harvest mouse, least tern, etc.).

At the time the 2002 Plan was written, it was assumed the Dredge Materials Management Site east of the Tony Lema Golf Course at Monarch Bay would continue to receive dredge spoils from the San Leandro Marina and channel. With the cessation of regular dredging, the policies for this site may be revisited. Other long-term open space uses of this site could be considered. Policies on mineral extraction activities (quarries, etc.), soil conservation, and groundwater management in the 2002 Plan remain current.

The Conservation section of the OSPCD Element focuses on three topic areas: water, solid waste reduction, and energy. While the discussion of water conservation in the 2002 Plan is forward-thinking, new policies could be considered in light of the drought and climate-related concerns. The existing Plan includes policies encouraging bay-friendly landscaping, expanded use of reclaimed water, public education, and more conscientious water use by consumers. Additional policies or actions might be added to reflect best practices in water conservation. Similarly, policies on recycling and waste management should be updated to reflect recent programs (construction and demolition debris recycling), and potential areas for improvement (expanded recycling in multi-family apartments and at commercial businesses, etc.).

Energy policies in the 2002 Plan are focused on the need to decrease reliance on fossil fuels due to market and regulatory issues (e.g., the “energy crisis”). Because the policies were drafted in 2001-2002, there is no mention of greenhouse gas (GHG) issues or climate change. The policies and actions will need to be revisited to incorporate San Leandro’s Climate Action Strategy and GHG reduction targets, as well as recent state initiatives on climate change. Most of the policies are still relevant, but the City is taking additional actions to conserve energy and facilitate “greener” development. The Plan Update provides an opportunity to look ahead to 2035 and think about new strategies to reduce greenhouse gases and support renewable energy.

A new goal on sustainability should probably be added to the General Plan to capture current and future initiatives relating to climate, sea level rise, green building, clean energy, transportation, and similar topics. These issues are not addressed in the current plan, since they have largely emerged since the Plan was adopted.

Environmental Hazards Goals, Policies and Actions

The Environmental Hazards Element incorporates two of the state-mandated General Plan Elements: Safety and Noise. The Element addresses natural and man-made hazards in the city. It also addresses emergency preparedness and noise. The State Government Code requires that this Element identify and evaluate hazards and then include goals, policies and actions to reduce those hazards to acceptable levels.

The first part of the chapter is focused on earthquakes. The Element evaluates seismic conditions and structural hazards, with a focus on soft-story buildings, concrete tilt-up structures, older single family homes, and public facilities. Other hazards, including landslides, wildfire, and flooding are covered. The 2002 Element acknowledges sea level rise as a potential future issue, but only indicates the City will “remain involved in state and regional discussions about the issue” (Page 6-8). There is an extensive discussion of air and water pollution, and a description of hazardous materials issues, including clean-up of contaminated sites, hazardous building materials, hazardous materials handling, transportation, and storage, and household hazardous waste. There is also a discussion of crash hazards in San Leandro related to Oakland Airport operations.

The Emergency Preparedness section addresses the basic components of the City’s emergency management program, including mitigation, training, education, response, evacuation, and recovery. The policies and actions reflect the City’s program as it existed in 2002. Most of the policies remain accurate, but the actions will need to be updated to reflect staffing changes, reassignment of certain responsibilities to the Police and Fire Departments, and the completion of many of the short-term actions listed in the 2002 Plan.

Policies and actions on noise are focused on four basic noise sources: stationary noise from industrial and commercial operations, noise from domestic activities (yard maintenance, power tools, barking dogs, etc.), transportation noise, and aviation noise. There is a heavy emphasis on aviation noise, given the City’s proximity to Oakland International Airport and the various mitigation programs that were underway at the time the 2002 Plan was adopted. Some of the actions listed in the Plan have been completed and some have become standard operating procedure. Most of the *policies* remain relevant but the *actions* are outdated and will require replacement.

Next Steps

The consultant team has completed the “Existing Conditions” phase of the General Plan Update and most of the Policy Audit. Development of new policies and actions will proceed based on the feedback provided by City staff, the Planning Commission, interested stakeholders, and the public. The September 17 study session will focus on policies relating to historic preservation, community design, and community services and facilities.

In April, the City Council approved the addition of an Economic Development Element to the General Plan. Production of that Element will include several stakeholder roundtable discussions, interviews, and development of new policies and actions. The data that underpins this Element will largely be based on the work presented to the Commission by the economic consulting firm, Strategic Economics, in February 2015, along with data collected by City staff.

The consultant team is currently updating the General Plan Map. New designations for the shoreline area will be included to accommodate the Shoreline Development Plan. Changes to designations at the Bayfair Center and nearby BART station area are being considered, in order to provide the flexibility needed for the station area planning study that is now underway. Other changes being considered include new density ranges for the City's multi-family residential areas, and creation of a new "Commercial-Industrial Transition" land use category to provide more flexibility in specific areas where new development opportunities may exist.

Once the Map is finalized, the General Plan EIR consultant will begin evaluating the projected impacts of the expected future growth patterns on natural resources, transportation, utilities, noise, air quality, and other factors. These analyses will take place during Fall/Winter 2015.

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

A progress briefing on the General Plan was made to the City Council on June 15, 2015. The Council expressed interest in the Planning Commission's study sessions, and requested future updates from City staff, including highlighting any issues or policy topics requiring further discussion, prior to receiving the completed Draft General Plan.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A - Open Space, Parks, and Conservation Element Policy Audit

Attachment B - Environmental Hazards Policy Audit

PREPARED BY: Tom Liao, Deputy Community Development Director, Planning Services Division