

REPORT TO GENERAL PLAN 2040 STEERING COMMITTEE

Subject: Guiding Principles

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the March meeting, a request was made to consider “Guiding Principles” for General Plan 2040. These would either replace or supplement the General Plan “Vision.” A set of guiding principles has been drafted and was provided to Committee members on April 9. Additional Committee input is requested.

REPORT

On March 8, 2018 the General Plan 2040 Steering Committee was asked to revisit the Vision Statement in San Rafael General Plan 2020, with consideration given to how that statement might be updated. We divided into four breakout groups, and reported out at the end. The breakout groups came to similar conclusions about the prior Vision Statement, namely:

- It should acknowledge issues associated with climate change and resilience
- It should reflect the way technology is transforming the way we live, travel, shop, and work
- It should more proactively address equity and income inequality

Each breakout group formed additional conclusions. One felt the Vision should focus more on innovation, fiscal responsibility, and preparedness. Another felt it should be less nostalgic and more focused on striking a balance technology and humanity.

A number of Committee members expressed that it would also be useful to have a set of guiding principles for the General Plan. Guiding Principles are used in some General Plans to express the overarching values and commitments that underpin the Plan as a whole. Whereas a Vision statement paints an aspirational picture of what we hope the city will be like in 20 years, guiding principles are foundational statements that express how we as a community will respond to change. In effect, they provide a “compass” to guide the goals, policies, and actions at the heart of the General Plan.

The discussion at the prior two meetings, coupled with the written responses to the “eight questions” about the City’s future provided a starting point for guiding principles. The Draft principles are included on the next few pages. Committee members are asked to review this document and be prepared to discuss it at the next meeting. To date, two Committee members have provided written comments. Other Committee members are encouraged to do the same, either before the May 9 meeting, at the meeting, or shortly afterwards.

Guiding Principles for Shaping San Rafael's Future

1. **Managed Growth.** San Rafael's role as the civic, cultural, economic, and transportation hub of Marin County will be sustained through 2040 and beyond. Future growth will be carefully managed and directed to protect the quality of life and fiscal health of the city. Development should reflect the limitations of the built and natural environments, including traffic, utilities, water supply, public services, sensitive habitats, and susceptibility to natural hazards. Growth should occur where it will be least impactful and disruptive, leverage available infrastructure, and provide the greatest benefit to surrounding communities.
2. **Neighborhood Conservation.** Our neighborhoods are the building blocks of our city—they create a "hometown" feel and a sense of belonging and pride that makes San Rafael a great place to live. Reinvestment in our existing housing stock and neighborhood commercial centers will be strongly supported. New development in our neighborhoods should be sensitive to its surroundings and occur without compromising the services and amenities we enjoy today. Downtown is a neighborhood too—and it should be enhanced and strengthened as a place to live, work, shop, dine, and connect.
3. **Equity.** San Rafael is a diverse, inclusive city. We will work toward a future in which all residents have access to quality housing, employment, and education. We aspire to bridge cultural and language divides, reduce economic disparities, give voice to under-represented populations, recognize the growing needs of our aging population, and increase the prosperity and well-being of all households. All residents should share in the responsibility of making San Rafael a more just and prosperous city.
4. **Health and Wellness.** We aspire to live well in San Rafael. We recognize the link between land use decisions and the health and well-being of our community. San Rafael will be a healthy city, where residents can walk and bicycle safely, enjoy beautiful parks and active open spaces, experience a sense of security and stability, find accessible health care and medical services, and thrive in a safe environment free of toxins and pollution.
5. **Sustainability.** We will tread lightly on our planet, reducing our collective carbon footprint and respecting the limits of our natural environment. Greenhouse gas emissions will be reduced through energy and water conservation and a continued shift toward renewable energy, greener buildings and businesses, alternative fuels and transportation modes, and zero waste.
6. **Resilience.** San Rafael will respond to the challenges of a warming planet, including rising sea level, increased fire hazards, and greater environmental stress. The City will become more resilient to climate change through its land use and transportation decisions, as well as its capital improvement and resource management strategies.

7. **Environmental Stewardship.** Open space provides a frame for our city. It is a defining and treasured feature that must be protected and carefully managed to sustain environmental health, reduce natural hazards, and maintain the beauty of our community. We will work to restore and care for wetlands, creeks, and forests, recognize the role of natural systems as green infrastructure, and protect the intrinsic value of nature.
8. **Economic Vitality.** San Rafael will continue to be the economic center of Marin County. Planning policies should sustain and support local businesses, maintain a healthy and fiscally sound tax base, and enable San Rafael residents to find most of the goods and services they need without traveling to other cities. Economic well-being will be improved through job training, job creation, and move-up opportunities for local residents.
9. **Innovation.** We are a city of innovators, entrepreneurs, and pioneers. While technology is transforming the way we live, and creates uncertainty about the future, we rise to the challenge. We anticipate, adapt, and evolve as the world around us changes. We use technology to our benefit, investing in infrastructure that makes us a “smarter city” with more efficient, cost-effective services.
10. **Design Excellence.** Development should contribute to the sense of place and identity in each San Rafael neighborhood, and elevate our reputation as a place of thoughtful, high-quality architecture and design. Landscaping, street trees, gardens, and public space should enhance the built environment and community aesthetics. Our design standards should result in great buildings and places of lasting value, while enhancing the views and natural features that define our city.
11. **Education.** Our education and library systems should respond to the diverse needs of the community. Children of all ages and backgrounds should be provided with access to high-quality public educational facilities, outstanding academic resources, and a safe, supportive school environment. We are committed to lifelong learning and opportunities for continued self-improvement and personal growth for all San Rafael residents.
12. **Mobility.** San Rafael will develop cost-effective, environmentally-conscious approaches to addressing traffic congestion, traffic safety, speeding, and mobility issues. Residents should feel safe and comfortable walking from their homes to a bus stop, school, store, or park nearby. The City will balance the needs of cars, bicycles, pedestrians, and transit users in the design of its transportation system, and will recognize the different mobility needs of San Rafael residents and workers. It will embrace the potential for technology to make traveling through the city easier, faster, more affordable, and less impactful on the environment.

13. **Housing Opportunity.** San Rafael will create a range of housing opportunities for its residents. Housing construction should be responsive to local needs, including the needs of low and moderate income households, seniors, and persons with disabilities. Affordable housing should be added in new and creative ways, including accessory dwellings, modular units, co-housing, small multi-unit buildings, and renovation of older apartments, as well as new multi-family construction. The City will strive to house its unsheltered residents, and provide the supportive services needed to create housing stability for all. Housing solutions should come from the “bottom up,” rather from the State down, with the City determining its own destiny.
14. **Legacy.** San Rafael’s historic legacy will be honored and preserved. This includes greater awareness of local Native American heritage, as well as the preservation and sensitive restoration of historic buildings and cultural landmarks. San Rafael’s legacy as a waterfront city also will be improved, with stronger connections to the shoreline, and recognition of the Canal as one of the city’s most important and iconic physical features.
15. **Creativity.** We will celebrate and nurture the creative spirit of our community, recognizing the power of creative thinking, art, music, performance, film, special events, and community festivals to bring people together and create common ground.
16. **Governance and Leadership.** San Rafael will be a model of good government and authentic, meaningful civic engagement. Policies and programs will be grounded in data and reflective of fiscal realities and constraints. City staff and elected officials will be accessible and responsive, and will act with integrity and transparency. The community will be actively engaged in decision-making, with greater involvement of under-represented groups, and outcomes that reflect the public’s voice.