

**Summary of San Rafael General Plan 2040 Steering Committee Meeting
Meeting #4 May 9, 2018
6:00-9:00 PM at 750 Lindaro Avenue**

Attendance

- **Members Present:** *Jenny Broering, Bella Bromberg, Maribeth Bushey, Bill Carney, Omar Carrera, Berenice Davidson, Richard Hall, Eric Holm, Linda Jackson, Margaret Johnston, Bonnie Marmor, Drew Norton, Stephanie Plante, Kate Powers, Pam Reaves, Jeff Rhoads, Jackie Schmidt, Roger Smith, Eric Spielman, Karen Strolia, Cecilia Zamora*
- **Members Absent:** *DJ Allison (excused), Sparkie Spaeth (excused)*
- **Alternates Participating:** *Joakim Osthus (for DJ Allison), Hilda Castillo (for Sparkie Spaeth)*
- **Alternates Present in Audience:** *Samantha Sargent*
- **Staff Present:** *Raffi Boloyan, Anne Derrick, Allison Giffin, Paul Jensen, Barry Miller*
- **Note: Members of the public were also present at this meeting**

Welcome/ Roll Call

Chair Plante called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM. Project manager Miller took roll call and reviewed the agenda. Miller introduced Planning Intern Allison Giffin.

Acceptance of Meeting Summary

The meeting summary for the March 14 meeting was approved (Motion: Holm, Second: Jackson).

Public Comment on Items Not on the Agenda

There were no comments received.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION ITEMS

A. Resilient by Design Update

Steering Committee member Jeff Rhoades gave an update on *Resilient by Design* (RBD), including the program's objectives and work completed to date. RBD is a national program that came out of the response to Superstorm Sandy; its aim is to help communities become more resilient in the face of sea level rise. San Rafael was chosen to participate in this program in part because there is a large community of lower income families and immigrants in the Canal neighborhood that are vulnerable (geographically and socio-economically) to major flood events and sea level rise.

Jeff provided the local context for RBD, including maps showing the original San Rafael shoreline, current flood plain boundaries, and projected future areas at risk. Cost estimates of different flood scenarios have been developed through the program, along with possible mitigation scenarios. The Bionic Team (consultants leading this effort) generally advocate for "managed retreat" (e.g., moving existing development out of harm's way), but emphasize that policy is ultimately up to the community. Jeff noted that raising the levees to protect against sea level rise would be very costly.

Committee members discussed the information presented:

- Will future flood defenses be built based on the information presented in RBD?
- Our land use strategies should accept the fact that this area will be flooded—we should plan for floating buildings and infrastructure, and relocation of certain vulnerable uses.
- Flooding in San Rafael WILL occur by 2030 and the cost to build higher and higher levees is in the billions and will only create a “bathtub”—leading to floods like those that just happened in Houston. We need to plan now to prevent a catastrophe. This is not hypothetical—it is going to happen, and we have an opportunity to plan ahead. There are alternatives that we should think about and discuss.
- How can Committee members access the RBD presentations? *Response: There is a link to YouTube videos in the material presented.*
- The RBD program is about raising awareness. We are all learning as we go. We look to places like Denmark about how to prevent disasters and respond to flooding.
- Is FEMA updating their flood maps to reflect these hazards? *Response: The FEMA Flood map was updated in 2016 for the Central San Rafael area. Compounding the issue of rising sea levels is the fact that the land mass is sinking (due to settlement and subsidence).*
- How is this addressed in the General Plan, given that we have a 20-year horizon and this is a 100-year issue? *Response: That is up to the community—what are we willing to do and how much can we spend? Are we planning for the next generation, or several generations from now?*
- Our planning seems to suffer from cognitive dissonance if we are siting future transit-oriented development in the middle of areas that are going to be underwater.
- How can RBD presentations be made more widely available to the impacted communities? *Response: Information will be forwarded to the Committee when it becomes available. RBD is just the first step.*

B. San Rafael Planning and Development Pipeline

Planning Manager Raffi Boloyan provided an overview of currently proposed development projects in the City and plans that are currently underway. Questions and comments from the Committee were encouraged at a number of points during the presentation.

Committee members discussed the information presented:

- What percentage of the units at Northgate Walk (Terra Linda) will be affordable? *Response: 20% will be affordable senior units. It was further noted that the project had been scaled back from what was originally proposed and that one story was deleted from the initial concept.*
- How many units are allowed on the Northgate Walk site under the current General Plan? Why is the number of units ultimately approved so much lower? *Response: Theoretically, that number is close to 300—it is a large site. However, there are other factors that come into play in determining allowable units on a given site, like existing uses (in this case, a hotel that is remaining). Also, parking, height limits, environmental impacts, setbacks, and design elements like bulk and mass usually reduce the number of units that can actually be built.*
- How do impacts to the surrounding neighborhoods (like traffic studies) come into play when a project is proposed, and would these impacts potentially reduce the number of units allowed? *Response: The General Plan studies are broader than the studies for a specific project. We will model various development scenarios for the year 2040 and use this information to determine how traffic should be mitigated. More specific studies take place when a development is proposed.*
- Can the Steering Committee create policies that shape the outcome of whether a large project gets approved based on its traffic impacts? *Response: The decision to approve a project must take multiple factors into consideration—not just traffic impacts. Policies also consider the need for*

housing, economic growth, impacts on infrastructure, etc. It is a balancing act. This is one of the reasons that General Plan 2040 will undergo an Environmental Impact Report, with mitigation measures developed to reduce adverse impacts. After the General Plan is approved, subsequent developments will still be subject to further review depending on their size and location.

- The impact of land use designations on jobs also needs to be considered. If we are creating local jobs at the same time we are adding housing, that can potentially reduce traffic and shorten commutes.

Raffi described the ongoing redevelopment process of Northgate Mall, which is under new ownership. It is possible that it may be re-developed with a use other than a mall. The following comments were made:

- How many units do the developers of Northgate want to build? What is the maximum build-out of the site in housing units (based on the existing General Plan)? How do we know whether these residents will work in San Rafael? It seems more likely they will be high cost units, with residents commuting to jobs in San Francisco, significantly adding to traffic congestion. *Response: There is no formal application for housing at Northgate at this time. The prior General Plan traffic model made assumptions about the number of units that would be built at Northgate.*
- It was noted that the CAC meeting in January 2018 included a discussion of the Mall and a conversation with the new owners. There was information presented at that time.

Raffi described projects in Downtown San Rafael. The following comments were made:

- How many employees will work at the new BioMarin building?
- Can a project be approved through a master planning process where all the future buildings re considered concurrently, but not issued building permits right away? i.e., could BioMarin do a campus master plan instead of having each building reviewed individually? *Response: There is a “Planned Development” process for such projects. Design review is still required. The General Plan Update provides an opportunity to consider height and Floor Area Ratio changes in this area.*
- Will the loss of parking at BioMarin impact the Pacifics?
- How is sea level rise being considered in the review of projects in this area? Can the City impose stricter requirements than FEMA? *Response: Buildings must have habitable floor space elevated above the 100-year flood elevation. However, FEMA flood maps do not yet factor in sea level rise. The City could impose a higher standard to reflect sea level rise, or limit the types of uses that can go on the first floor.*
- When Loch Lomond was approved, we were told that sea level rise issues were too speculative to require the developers to elevate the site more than 1.5 feet. How do we prevent this from happening again and again, leading to flooding or costly fixes after a project is built?
- If new development is required to add fill to raise the base elevation, how does that affect the flood risk on surrounding properties? *Response: There are provisions in place to address this issue.*
- Using sea level rise issue to impose costly building requirements on property owners is a hard sell. Property owners seek immediate benefits (e.g., improvements to their home), and we are asking them to pay to mitigate a condition that they will likely never see, i.e., flooding in 50 to 100 years. Requiring owners to raise their structures could “kill” a project due to excessive costs.
- Committee members should take note that all the pending projects are infill, and no open space or ag areas are being converted to development; this is the legacy of our past plan.

C. Planning the Bus Tour

Chair Plante thanked the Committee Members for responding to the “Doodle” poll regarding preferred dates for the Bus Tour and explained that the two favored dates were June 13 and June 16. The Committee voted and a clear majority selected June 13. Barry indicated the tour would be from 5:00 to

8:30 PM, including a break for dinner. Barry asked the Committee for feedback on potential sites to visit on the bus tour. The following suggestions were provided:

- The area south of 2nd Street near West Francisco, since this area is near transit and could be used to relocate those displaced from the Canal area by sea level rise.
- Please point out affordable housing developments along the route, so we can see that they blend in and can be attractive.
- We should include a strong focus on East San Rafael, including the Canal, Spinnaker, etc.
- Include waterways like the Canal, Las Gallinas Creek, and San Rafael Creek—always look at the water.
- Include open space areas with potential fire danger in the outlying areas of San Rafael like Lucas Valley and Marinwood—note understory danger.
- We should visit the San Rafael Rock Quarry.
- We should go up on San Rafael Hill for a vantage point of the City.
- Drive down Freitas at rush hour and note congestion, speeding, and disregard for traffic laws.

D. General Plan Organization and Outline

Barry Miller gave a presentation on the structure of the General Plan, including state requirements. He made a number of suggestions for reorganizing the document and potentially combining some of the elements. This includes adding a “Resilience” element encompassing natural disaster preparedness, and potentially recasting the “Governance” Element to address environmental justice, health, equity, diversity, and similar social issues. Committee input was requested:

- Where does the Plan address catastrophic events like flooding, earthquakes or fires? *Response: This is in the Safety Element. It is also covered by the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan, which is effectively now part of the General Plan.*
- What is meant by “Environmental Justice” in the context of a General Plan? *Response: The real focus is on “equity” and social justice, and giving a voice to those economically disadvantaged and marginalized individuals that would not otherwise participate.*
- Combining parks and open space in one element seems logical.
- How does historic preservation fit? Also, how does technology (like electric vehicle infrastructure and driverless vehicle technology) affect the General Plan update? How do we assess the probability of change?
- The staff/ consultant team should take the lead on proposing how the Plan is organized, rather than leaving it to the Committee. They are the ones who use the Plan. *Response: One of the key questions is whether certain topics (like sustainability) are threads that run through the whole document, or elements that stand on their own. Certain topics (like equity) lend themselves more to being overarching “themes” than Plan Elements (transportation, land use, etc.). Icons can be used in the Plan to highlight which policies address those themes.*
- The General Plan should start with topics like Climate Change and Sustainability, as they are extremely important. Perhaps it should end with the idea of Environmental Justice, which is the “bottom line” of the Plan.
- The Plan should first establish the city’s “foundation,” citing such things as topography, context within Marin County, the current built environment, and threats such as sea level rise. This section should look at where we have been, and what we value now in terms of land use and character. This would be some amalgamation of the Economic Vitality, Sustainability, Social Equity and Quality of Life/Governance Elements.

- Is the General Plan a “working document”, or a novel about the City? It needs to be a working document that guides our civic leaders.
- The committee’s job should be to articulate our values—everything else should flow from that.
- Will Guiding Principles be part of the Plan? *Response: Yes, see next agenda item*
- The Arts and Culture Element should be retained. The Governance Element can be refashioned, but it should still address the importance of diversity and the concept of community-based governance.
- The Plan should communicate our interest in being a cool, exciting place with a dynamic arts and cultural scene.
- Merging key topics and establishing others as “threads” through the document makes sense. The concept of Sustainability should run throughout the entire Plan as opposed to being a single element. “Sustainability isn’t something you do, it’s how you do everything.”
- Several community members expressed a strong preference for retaining a Neighborhoods Element in the Plan. For instance, North San Rafael is very different than Downtown and has its own issues that need to be addressed. Same with the Canal.
- The Neighborhood plans were created over many years and people in those neighborhoods are vested in those plans; it’s critical to retain that Element.

E. Development of Guiding Principles

Barry Miller noted that 16 Guiding Principles had been drafted based on the Committees responses to the exercises that had been conducted at the February and March Committee meetings. The Principles reflected the collective feedback of Committee members on key issues, and would underpin the Plan.

The following feedback on the Principles was provided:

- There are too many. Try to consolidate from 16 down to 12. Also, need to resolve the fact that there are different grammatical tenses (past, present and future, e.g. “we are,” “we want to be,” “we should be,” “we must,” etc.)—and some sound more like policies than principles. They should be more consistent in form, and shorter. In addition, the Principles seem to have a somewhat negative bent to them. They should be more positive and aspirational—not just “preserving and protecting,” but also “improving and investing.” This is about making things better. The Principles should be numbered so that the most aspiring and positive comments come first. Individual policies should nest under each aspiration.
- The principles sound negative and are too dictated by the politics of the moment –it creates constraints. A subcommittee of the Steering Committee should revisit this.
- Can a Word version be provided to Committee members so we can mark it up? *Response: This was done the day after the meeting.*
- The last principle ends with troubling words. It refers to “outcomes that reflect the public’s voice”—this is dangerous, and it is thinking like this that led to Japanese internment during WWII. Don’t let the City be governed based on the loudest voices.
- One of our principles should be to get ahead of situations like sea level rise; a phrase used during Resilient By Design is appropriate: “the biggest task at hand is to create change by design rather than by disaster.”
- Disagree with earlier speaker that the principles are too negative—don’t make it a flowery vision. it should defend against the destruction of the community. Yes, the issues of the day are embedded in the statements but we need to keep it strong and assertive. It should reflect residents’ values, and serve as a “balance” to preserve things like Open Space.

- I like the Principles as written because they show the spirit of what we are trying to accomplish.
- There is not enough in the Principles about disaster preparedness and public safety, specifically about costs and economic impacts of disasters and disaster preparedness. Also, the Economic Vitality principle should be stronger with respect to business. Perhaps co-write with the Chamber of Commerce? Acknowledge the presence of the Mission, and that we are a regional center.
- I disagree that the Principles are too negative. There should be more focus on sustainability, resilience, and adaptation to change, however.
- There are too many, and they are a bit too specific.
- Potentially group them—some of them seem to go together (equity and wellness, sustainability and resilience, economic vitality and innovation, managed growth and neighborhoods, etc.)
- There are too many Guiding Principles; fewer would be better and would have more of an impact on the reader. The Principles need to reflect a more integrated City and should encourage the concept of integration as well as what is important to each individual Neighborhood.
- It would be helpful to see where these Guiding Principles sit in context to the entire document. Is there a place in the General Plan for a statement about the present versus a statement about the vision for the future?
- The Principles are not too negative, but the First Principle (“Managed Growth”) sounds awkward.
- We are dealing with fundamentally immense changes related to climate, technology, housing, and traffic. Although we are revising an existing plan, we need to own up to this fact and integrate the concept of change throughout the General Plan. We need to be explicit that we are willing to adapt. “Creativity” or “innovation” may be a useful guiding principle.
- Creativity/ innovation should not stand alone as a principle—it should be a part of all the principles. The principles should be more aspirational.
- Make sure the principles are compatible with the goals and strategies set by the Council on May 3.

PM Miller asked the group to submit comments on the Principles within the next week. He also mentioned staff may form a subcommittee to revisit the Guiding Principles before the next meeting.

Comments from Alternates

Chair Plante called on any alternates present to share their thoughts. Alternate Sargent commented that the Guiding Principles were too specific and used the word “will” too much. She would prefer a higher-level list of aspirational values that can be used as a screen for future policies. On the issue of projects in the pipeline, yes—it is a balancing act, and our task is to accommodate housing at the same time we preserve our community. On the issue of General Plan organization, it is OK to keep the Neighborhoods Element, but don’t use it to perpetuate the idea that we are three separate cities (Canal, Central, and North San Rafael). The voice of the community should be more than just neighborhood associations, but individuals as well.

Comments from Public and Adjournment

No members of the public asked to speak. Chair Plante reminded the group about the upcoming Bus Tour on June 13 and that PM Miller will be sending more information on this.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 PM.