

**Summary of San Rafael General Plan 2040 Steering Committee Meeting  
Meeting #7 September 12, 2018  
6:00-9:00 PM at 750 Lindaro Avenue**

**Attendance**

- **Members Present:** *DJ Allison, Jenny Broering, Maribeth Bushey, Bill Carney, Berenice Davidson, Richard Hall, Linda Jackson, Margaret Johnston, Bonnie Marmor, Robert Miller, Stephanie Plante, Kate Powers, Jeff Rhoads, Jackie Schmidt, Eric Spielman*
- **Alternates Participating:** *Hilda Castillo (for Sparkie Spaeth) Paula Doubleday (for Karen Strolia), Sara Matson (for Omar Carrera), Samantha Sargent (for Eric Holm)*
- **Excused Absences:** *Bella Bromberg, Omar Carrera, Eric Holm, Roger Smith, Sparkie Spaeth, Karen Strolia, Cecilia Zamora*
- **Non-Excused Absences:** *Jeff Jones, Drew Norton*
- **Alternates Present in Audience:** *Leslie Simons*
- **Staff Present:** *Raffi Boloyan, Anne Derrick, Allison Giffin, Paul Jensen, Barry Miller*
- **Public:** *Bob Brown, Shirl Buss, Dan Hillmer*

**Welcome/ Roll Call**

Chair Plante called the meeting to order at 6:10 PM. Project Manager (PM) Miller took roll call and reviewed the agenda.

**Acceptance of Meeting Summaries**

A Motion and Second (Marmor/Jackson) was made to approve the Minutes from July 11, 2018. The motion passed unanimously.

**Public Comment on Items Not on the Agenda**

None

**BUSINESS ITEMS**

**A. General Plan 2040 Youth Engagement Initiative**

Chair Plante introduced Shirl Buss, who made a presentation on involving fourth grade students in the General Plan process through a collaborative effort between Youth In Arts and Y-Plan. Shirl described a similar initiative completed in conjunction with Resilient by Design involving 45 students at Laurel Dell Elementary. She noted that involving youth was not only good planning, it also adds color, liveliness, humanity, and fun to the process. She framed the discussion question that would be posed to the students, and provided the timeline for the initiative. It was further noted that the question would include a focus on resilience.

The following questions and comments were made by Committee members:

- What is the time commitment from the classroom and instructor?
- Be careful in the way the question is posed to the students—the word “growth” means different things to different people. Are we talking about natural growth or human-induced growth?
- Perhaps frame it in terms of “change” rather than growth?
- Potentially bring the student presentation to the Steering Committee, and/or to the School Board
- This initiative is also a good way to get the word out about the General Plan
- The prior initiative (through Resilient by Design) showed that San Rafael doesn’t fully capitalize on its shoreline, and is good food for thought as we consider how to use our waterfront in the future.

A number of Committee members (Castillo, Rhoads, Powers) volunteered to assist.

## **B. Presentation and Discussion on Land Use Categories**

Staff gave a presentation on past and current Land Use Categories and the proposed changes to these categories. The following questions/ comments were raised:

- Are the Land Use maps available on-line? What about this presentation? *Yes, the General Plan Map can be viewed on the project website? The presentation on the Land Use maps will be placed on the project web site.*
- Can you clarify the difference between the General Plan Map and the Zoning Map? *PM Miller explained that the General Plan Map is more generalized and depicts where we want to be in 2040, whereas the Zoning Map is parcel specific and regulatory and describes what is allowed right now. The Zoning Map is tied to more prescriptive standards and is more detailed.*
- Is there a way of looking at the maps through a different lens, which helps us determine which areas of the City are most prone to change over time based on emerging trends, changing patterns, etc. Perhaps we focus our map discussions on these areas?
- The City should be proactive in planning for the reuse of commercial sites with activities that are rendered obsolete by technology. For example, driverless cars may lead to a decrease in car dealerships. We need to avoid blight, and think now about what types of uses would be good replacements for these diminishing uses – what does the City envision to have at these sites that would attract people and keep San Rafael’s tax base and economy vital.

Planning Manager Boloyan gave a presentation on the difference between Net Density and Gross Density. He noted that gross density was appropriate when a city was growing outward and developing on previously undeveloped land. Now that the focus is on infill, net density is more appropriate. This provided the context for a discussion about changing the General Plan land use categories to net density in order to eliminate inconsistencies between the General Plan and zoning. The following points were made during the discussion:

- The Housing Element is based on net density rather than gross, so this change will improve consistency
- The real impact of this change is to avoid having to explain to the public why the city uses two different standards, and what the difference is between the two. Net density is more transparent as it expresses what is really allowed.
- Are Accessory Dwellings included? *No. Under state law, they are exempt from consideration in density calculations.*
- What would be the argument to NOT do this? *There could be concern that the City is somehow increasing effective densities—even though that is not the case.*

- How does this shift affect the City’s practice of allowing extra floors in every Downtown project in order to meet inclusionary zoning standards? *Staff noted that height bonuses for affordable units was a separate issue, not directly connected to net vs gross.*
- How would this affect the quarry, since it is not an “infill” site? *There will be special policies in the General Plan to address the quarry, as it is a very unique site.*
- Projects on larger sites like the quarry are usually developed as Planned Unit Developments (PUD) but we need a basis for calculating the maximum number of units to be distributed across the site.
- The prior General Plan Update also contemplated a shift from gross to net but it didn’t happen. However, it appears to be the time to do it now. Gross density is a legacy of the city’s suburban development period.
- The Committee voted to shift to net density (with exceptions for the quarry and other sites as discussed at the Committee). There were a number of abstentions but no one objected.

Staff’s presentation continued, including an explanation of Floor Area Ratio (FAR) and a discussion of the commercial and industrial categories. The following comments were made:

- Parking structures are not counted in the FAR calculation.
- Do the FAR requirements apply to County land?
- How will the shift to autonomous vehicles affect the FAR calculation—e.g., the need for parking structures may drop and there may be applications to convert existing parking to habitable space. We need to think about how we might repurpose parking, what this space might be used for, and what the impacts will be.
- The market will dictate the best use for the real estate that we have. The most important thing right now is the need for housing; over the next 20 years, the need for retail may decrease. This should be addressed in the Downtown Plan.
- Our discussion of appropriate heights and FARs should be informed by input from an economist. What does the market say? We need to keep the economy in mind when we set standards.
- What about revenue and the potential to generate tax dollars?
- What about ownership patterns—why are we not seeing more turnover? Are trusts, investments, and other forms of building ownership making it harder to get infill sites developed? How can we incentivize? PM Miller remarked that an economist will be brought in to discuss these concerns.
- What types of issues will an economist address? They may be biased, and reach conclusions about transit-oriented development based on flawed logic about the success of the SMART system and its ability to make the city less auto-dependent. The system appears to be losing money, and the city is taking an economic risk on promoting high density there, since the train itself may not be feasible in the long-term.
- If the Downtown expands into areas now zoned for housing, would this trigger rapid changes and /or requirements for future owners to build mixed use? *No, as staff could zone parcels for entirely residential uses even if they appear in the Downtown General Plan category.*
- Perhaps call this district something other than “Downtown Mixed Use” so as not to imply that everything in the boundary has to be mixed use. Perhaps just Downtown, or Downtown Precise Plan area?
- What is being proposed makes sense; streamlining the map will make it easier to read and use.
- Why would we add an entirely Residential area to the Downtown boundary? Wouldn’t it make more sense to exclude this area from Downtown? *Yes, the boundary need not be a regular square or rectangle—we can modify the edges so as to exclude entirely residential blocks.*
- The boundary of Downtown will depend on what happens at the Bettini Transit Center—the land in the area immediately east of the freeway is controlled by different agencies.

The discussion turned to open space and parks. PM Miller remarked that the ideas being presented were preliminary and subject to change, but it appeared some of the open space and conservation categories could be consolidated. The following comments were made:

- We should not put private land in a category that makes it undevelopable.
- Classifying open space into passive and active categories seems to make sense.
- The Conservation category was added to the map in 2004 to protect portions of certain environmentally sensitive sites like Canalways.
- Perhaps categorize some open space as undevelopable and protected, and others as subject to change.
- How will sea level rise affect all of this? It is premature to say what should happen to these categories when we don't know how that will be handled.
- Agree with prior speaker. We may be releasing areas to the Bay during this plan due to flooding. Perhaps put asterisks on the map showing high-risk areas.
- As we classify and designate our open space, we need to ask ourselves about the natural underlying capacity of the land, as well as things like fire hazard, topography, and grade.
- We should take an "Ian McHarg" approach to land use and consider various natural systems as we make these determinations.

The Committee took a 10-minute break before continuing.

### **C. Small Group Land Use Map Exercise**

PM Miller described the Small Group Exercise and divided the Committee into three groups of about 7-8 people each. Each group was given an oversized General Plan Map. He asked the Committee to identify at least three areas where a different Map designation might be considered through the General Plan Update. Also, he asked each Group to think about how it would handle a request from a member of the public to ask for a change in a General Plan Map designation to allow for more units. The third task for each group was to collectively define the boundary of "Downtown".

Following the exercise, each group reported out to the full room.

#### **Group #1 (spokesperson Eric Spielman)**

The three areas considered for potential General Plan Map changes were:

- 1) Expanding Downtown to include the office / retail district located by United Market, Peet's, and the Shell station, as these areas are close to SMART station and the transit hub, etc.
- 2) The Industrial area adjacent to Andersen Drive southeast of Downtown is underutilized and could use more mixed use or retail uses. The current appearance of this Industrial area is rather shabby and could benefit from more lively uses.
- 3) Northgate Mall could be used for more housing and mixed-use.

With respect to the hypothetical request to change the General Plan to allow for more density on a hypothetical site, it was suggested the City weigh:

- Traffic impacts, including the availability of public transit
- Impacts on Open Space and Views
- Positive impacts such as more housing
- The level of environmental assessment that would be required
- Input from the neighbors

The group also provided a suggested map of Downtown with an expanded boundary including the commercial properties east of 101.

### **Group #2 (spokesperson DJ Allison)**

The three areas considered for potential General Plan Map changes were:

- 1) Northgate Mall – modify to encourage a different kind of commercial use and allow more housing on the site
- 2) Canalways – could have development potential even though there are environmental factors that affect development opportunities
- 3) Arterial corridors--- to encourage high density housing development. This would include: Miracle Mile Corridor, Lincoln Avenue Corridor, Bellam from Baypoint to 101, and Francisco Blvd West. The concern about increasing density in these areas is that there would be potential traffic/ congestion.

With respect to the hypothetical request to change the General Plan to allow for more density on a hypothetical site, it was suggested the City weigh:

- 1) What the project will look like
- 2) The context of the site, including neighboring uses and the potential for impacts on these uses
- 3) The concerns of nearby neighbors

With respect to Downtown, the boundary could be extended eastward along 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> to encompass the existing Commercial properties east of the Highway. Also, the boundary should be expanded Southward to include the areas along Andersen and Rice and along the east side of Highway 101 down East Francisco to Harbor Street and the Terrapin area. Residential areas north of Fourth Street and east of 101 should be preserved and not considered part of Downtown.

This group had dissenting opinions, and was not in full agreement on the recommendations presented.

### **Group #3 (spokesperson Berenice Davidson)**

The three areas considered for potential General Plan Map changes were:

- 1) The area along Las Gallinas near Northgate, to create more higher density opportunities
- 2) Light Industrial and Industrial areas like those along Andersen
- 3) Relocation sites for areas of the Canal neighborhood that may be more prone to future tidal flooding—potentially including “floating homes” on the Canalways site.

It was noted that Canalways also might be a good site for a parking structure, to alleviate the shortage in the nearby residential area. However, the group also felt it was important to not place new development in areas prone to flooding and wildfire.

With respect to the hypothetical request to change the General Plan to allow for more density on a hypothetical site, it was suggested the City identify the environmental impacts, visual impacts, the impact on neighbors, transportation impacts and the availability of transit, the affordability of the units, and if the developer was going to provide community benefits to offset the impacts of more density.

With respect to the boundary of Downtown, this group felt the Lincoln Ave multi-family/ office corridor north of Mission should be added due to its walkability and proximity to Fourth Street. This group also added areas east of the freeway, including Montecito Shopping Center but excluding the residential areas to the north. A pedestrian bridge from the Montecito Shopping Center to the Canal as suggested. Also

Downtown should include the Safeway on B Street and the Community Center, and maybe a bit of Andersen Drive.

## **6. Committee Alternate Comments**

There were no comments.

## **7. General Business Items**

A. The next meeting will be October 10.

### **B. Staff Announcements**

- a. Steering Committee Membership Changes. PM Miller announced that Eric Holm had transitioned from the Parks Commission representative to an at-large member, and that Robert Miller had replaced Pam Reaves as the Climate Change Action Plan representative. He also noted that there were five new alternates, replacing individuals who had termed off their commissions or moved out of San Rafael.
- b. Recent Outreach Meetings. PM Miller noted staff would be meeting with the Marin Food Policy Council on September 18.
- c. Update on On-line Engagement Platform. Committee members were encouraged to continue to use and promote the Neighborland On-Line Engagement Platform.
- d. Fall 2018 General Plan Workshops. "Town Hall" meetings are planned for October 3, 17, and 27 at the City's community centers.

C. Member Announcements. It was announced that the organizer of the 2015 UN Climate Change Conference in Paris was the featured speaker at a free event at the College of Marin on September 15.

## **8. Public Comments (1-3-minute time limit per speaker)**

Dan Hillmer indicated he would like to get Raffi's lecture on Gross and Net Density and he was very impressed with the work of the Committee so far.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:05 PM.