
REPORT TO GENERAL PLAN 2040 STEERING COMMITTEE

Subject: Summary of General Plan 2040 Round 1 Community Workshops

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City has just completed the first round of community workshops on General Plan 2040. The purpose of the workshops was to provide information about the General Plan Update and seek feedback on key planning issues. Approximately 100 people attended the three workshops, which took place on October 3, 17, and 27.

REPORT

Background

Community workshops are an important part of the General Plan Update community engagement strategy. Three “rounds” of workshops are planned over the course of the project. The first “round,” comprised of three “town hall meetings,” took place during October 2018. Each meeting used the same agenda and format. The final meeting consisted of two concurrent workshops in adjacent rooms, with one in English and the other in Spanish.

Each meeting included:

- Welcome and introductions
- A 15-minute presentation explaining the purpose of the General Plan and the Plan Update process, followed by Q&A about the project
- A 90-minute polling and discussion exercise related to city planning issues in San Rafael and thoughts about San Rafael’s future
- Concluding remarks, including door prizes (three \$10 gift cards to small local businesses)

As noted at the previous Steering Committee meeting, the polling and discussion exercise provided an innovative way for audience members to weigh in on various policy questions. Audience members were furnished with 10-button digital “clickers” for real-time electronic polling. A question appeared on the screen (for example, How would you rate the quality of life in San Rafael?), with multiple choice options appearing below (A. Excellent; B. Good; C. Fair; D. Poor; E. Other). At the close of the polling period for each question (15 seconds or so), the outcome of each vote appeared on a large screen. Audience members were then given a chance to verbally express why they voted the way they did, and elaborate on relevant issues. The result was a robust discussion about the future and long-range planning issues in the city.

The polling questions also include demographic statistics about the audience (i.e., How long have you lived in San Rafael? etc.) and “trivia” questions about San Rafael history and demographics. The electronic polling added a fun element to the meeting, and allowed for more dialogue and interaction than the “colored dot” preference exercises that have been used in the past. Other means of feedback also were provided at the meeting, including Comment Cards, a “post it note” map exercise, and a “mad libs” exercise.

The meetings were advertised through social media, including Facebook and Nextdoor, the City’s website, the General Plan website, the General Plan mailing list, the Marin Independent Journal, postcards (handed out at the Farmers Market and other venues), and flyers posted at public buildings around the City. In addition, the City partnered with Canal Alliance to promote the Spanish language meeting.

Outcomes

Excluding staff, consultants, and elected officials, there were 34 participants at the October 3 meeting, 37 at the Terra Linda meeting, and 20 at the Al Boro / Pickleweed meeting. With only 91 participants, the results of the polling exercise are not statistically significant and do not necessarily represent the views of the community at large. However, they do provide one benchmark for evaluating current and future policies, and identifying opportunities and issues of concern.

Based on demographic data collected during the polling, the meeting attendees were:

- Mostly San Rafael residents (91%)
- Mostly homeowners (72%), although 58% of those at the Al Boro workshop were renters
- Mostly long-term residents (32% lived in San Rafael for 30+ years and 17% lived in the City 20-30 years)
- Mostly older (53% were 60 or older and only 11% were under 40)
- A mix of persons who work in San Rafael (31%), those working elsewhere in Marin (13%), those working in another county (14%), and retired persons (30%)

Responses to the key questions are highlighted below:

1. How would you rate the quality of life in San Rafael?

Excellent (18%); Good (64%); Fair (17%), Poor (1%)

Note: The percentage indicating Excellent/Good was highest at the Terra Linda meeting (89%) and lowest at the Al Boro meeting (64%)

2. What would you like to see more of in San Rafael in the next 20 years? (10 different land uses were offered and respondents were asked to pick up to three).

The top three choices (among those listed) were:

Housing (60%); Entertainment/Cultural Facilities (59%); Restaurants (33%)

The bottom choices (among those listed) were:

Professional Offices (7%); Nothing (6%); Shopping (12%); and Industry (12%)

Note: Housing was the top choice at the B Street and Al Boro meetings, and Entertainment was the top choice at the Terra Linda meeting.

3. What do you think would be an optimal rate of housing growth in San Rafael during 2020-2040?

42% indicated 200+ units per year; 34% indicated 100 units per year; 17% said less than 50 units a year.

Note: Faster growth rates were favored at the B Street and Al Boro meetings. At Terra Linda, fewer than one-third supported 200+ units per year, and 42% supported 100 units per year.

4. What are your greatest concerns about growth in San Rafael? (nine choices were given and respondents were asked to click all that apply)

57% selected traffic, 41% selected effects on public services; and 30% selected changes to community character.

The least commonly selected options were effects on property values (14%) and construction impacts (12%). A number of residents selected "other" and subsequently stated that they felt the question had a negative spin because it focused on "concerns" about growth.

5. For me, getting around San Rafael is:

40% selected "moderately easy"; 40% selected "moderately difficult", 11% selected "very difficult" and 8% selected "very easy"

Note: The percentage choosing "moderately difficult" or "very difficult" was 61% in Terra Linda, 36% at B Street, and 53% at Al Boro.

6. If you did not answer "very easy" to the last question, would be the one change to make it easier? (seven choices were provided)

33% selected better transit, 17% selected better bike lanes, 16% selected surface street improvements, and 12% selected freeway improvements.

Note: the percentage selecting "better transit" was highest in Terra Linda (48%)

7. What do you see as the greatest transportation opportunity for San Rafael in the next 20 years? (seven choices were provided)

The largest single category selected was “other,” with many respondents explaining that they could not choose a single category. About 20% chose improvements to 101/580 and the Richmond Bridge (this was by far the top choice at the Al Boro meeting). The least chosen option was driverless technology (5%).

8. The greatest natural hazard facing San Rafael in the next 20 years is: (six choices were provided)

Wildfire (31%), Sea Level Rise (29%), Earthquake (28%), Drought (8%)

Note: Results varied by meeting. At B Street and Terra Linda, wildfire was the clear top choice. At Al Boro, only 10% chose wildfire with most choosing earthquake or sea level rise. Sea level rise was the top choice at the Spanish language workshop.

9. The maximum height of new buildings in Downtown San Rafael should be:

Seven stories or more (28%), Four stories (23%), Six stories (21%), Five stories (18%), Three stories or less (8%), no maximum (3%)

Note: Results varied by meeting. Attendees at the B Street and Al Boro meeting were more likely to choose seven stories or more, while “four stories” was the most frequently selected answer at the Terra Linda meeting.

10. The maximum height of new buildings in the Northgate Mall area should be:

Four stories (31%), Five stories or more (31%), Three stories (15%), No maximum (12%), Two stories (9%).

Note: Most of the “two story” votes were at the Spanish language workshop. The taller height limits were most heavily favored at the Al Boro English language workshop and the B Street workshop. One-third of the Terra Linda attendees selected two or three stories, and one third selected four stories.

11. Downtown needs more... (choose your top three of the 10 choices listed)

51% selected public space and plazas, which was the top vote getter. 48% selected cafes and restaurants and 38% selected cultural venues. 17% selected “other”, with most expressing that “housing” was desired but not listed among the choices. The least selected options were offices (7%) and national brand stores (9%).

12. The natural feature in San Rafael I’d like to see improved the most is: (7 choices listed)

Shoreline (33%), Creeks (24%), Urban Forest/ tree canopy (16%) were the top choices. Creeks ranked highest at the B Street and Terra Linda meetings, while shoreline ranked highest at the Al Boro meeting.

13. How would you rate San Rafael's parks and recreational facilities?

Fair (50%), Good (37%), Poor (11%), Excellent (3%)

Note: The only "excellent" ratings were given at the Al Boro meeting. The ratings at B Street were more positive than those at Terra Linda.

14. San Rafael needs more of the following recreational facilities: (select top three choices of 9 listed)

41% suggested that the City should focus on maintaining what it already has rather than building new facilities. Among those who felt new facilities were needed, the top vote getters were tot lots/ playgrounds (29%), community gardens (25%), and athletic fields (24%). The strongest support for more tot lots was at B Street, the strongest support for community gardens was in Terra Linda, and the strongest support for athletic fields was at Al Boro.

Spanish Language Workshop

The City solicited the assistance of Communities in Collaboration, an Oakland-based community engagement firm, to convene a Spanish language General Plan workshop at the Al Boro Community Center concurrently with the English language workshop on October 27. All of the materials used at the English language workshop, including the PowerPoint presentations, the polling questions, the agenda, comment cards, "mad libs" exercise, and the maps, were translated into Spanish. The meeting itself was conducted entirely in Spanish. Although attendance at the meeting was light, the discussion raised awareness of the General Plan and opportunities to participate in the year ahead.

The Spanish language meeting was videotaped and will be posted to the project website in the coming weeks. In addition, a promotional event the week prior to the meeting aired on Facebook Live and has received more than 1,400 views. Committee members may view the video (in Spanish) at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F3RsTucDJUg>. The City will continue to partner with the Canal Alliance and other community based organizations serving Spanish speaking residents to expand outreach and engagement opportunities on the General Plan.