



Agenda Item No: 7.a
Meeting Date: March 4, 2019

SAN RAFAEL CITY COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

Department: Community Development
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City Manager Approval: 

TOPIC: GENERAL PLAN 2040

SUBJECT: GENERAL PLAN 2040 PROGRESS REPORT #1

RECOMMENDATION:

Accept report.

BACKGROUND:

The San Rafael General Plan 2040 is well underway and is roughly at the halfway point in the process. This effort has been guided by the General Plan 2040 Steering Committee (Steering Committee), which, to date, has held 11 monthly meetings. The technical consultant team has been hired and their work has commenced.

It is important to keep the City Council and public informed of milestones and actions through the course of the General Plan 2040 process. For this reason, the City Council will receive periodic reports on the progress and actions. These periodic reports will also: a) provide the City Council with an opportunity to weigh-in on the milestones and actions; and b) inform and educate the Council on critical, technical and policy information during this process. To date, the following actions have been taken, which have incorporated the input from and recommendations of the Steering Committee:

1. Guiding Principles- Guiding Principles have been developed to serve as the framework for the General Plan 2040. These principles are presented in the attached graphic (Attachment 1) and have been posted on the General Plan 2040 webpage ([here](#)). The central core of the Guiding Principles is "A Thriving City," which is supported by:
 - a. "Economic Vitality," which addresses, among others, promoting a positive business climate and sustaining a healthy tax base;
 - b. "Housing a Growing Community," which addresses, among others, promoting more housing development and improving housing;

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- c. “Adapting to the Future,” which includes, among others, preparation for and accommodating climate change;
- d. “Mobility,” which addresses, among others, the management of congestion and improving all modes of travel; and
- e. “Opportunity for All,” which addresses, among others, reducing income inequity, ending homelessness, and improving health and wellness.

The Guiding Principles also recognize “Our Foundation,” the community achievements that have been made, such as open space preservation, creating great neighborhoods, and preserving historic legacy.

- 2. Format - Table of Contents- The format/organization for the General Plan 2040 has been finalized and can be accessed [here](#). While a majority of the current General Plan 2020 elements will be retained and carried over, several elements will be combined (Open Space and Conservation Elements) or renamed (e.g., Circulation Element changed to Mobility Element; Safety Element changed to Resilience Element). A new element, the Education, Wellness and Environmental Justice Element has been added.
- 3. Land Use Categories and Definitions- The draft land use categories and definitions for the Land Use Element can be accessed [here](#). For the most part, the land use categories and definitions are proposed to be carried over from the current General Plan 2020. The following is a summary of major changes:
 - a. For the residential land use categories, the current General Plan 2020 sets limits using “gross density per acre,” which differs from the City’s zoning districts which set limits using “net density per acre.” Gross density includes streets and is about 25-30% lower than net density (which is limited to within the property boundaries). It is not uncommon for a General Plan to use the gross density metric particularly where the community has large undeveloped areas necessitating a planned circulation/street network. However, it is not practical or logical to use the gross density metric for built-out communities. As San Rafael is essentially built out and no new major circulation/street network is planned or proposed, it is logical to switch to the net density metric. This action will make City zoning match the General Plan land use densities.
 - b. A new Downtown land use category is proposed which will cover the Downtown Precise Plan area. The current Downtown land use designations, which originated from the Downtown San Rafael Vision (1993) are proposed to be collapsed into one Downtown land use designation. The Downtown Precise Plan will address the sub-areas for allowable uses and land development standards. For residential development in the Downtown, it is envisioned that density limits (referenced in 3.a above) will be replaced by a range of floor-area-ratio (FAR) standards.
- 4. Land Use Element Goals, Policies and Programs-
 - a. Most of the land use policies and programs of the current General Plan 2020 are proposed to be carried over with minor revisions in formatting and text. However, a number of policies and programs are proposed for revision or expansion to address more current issues such as climate change, sustainability, and circulation/mobility.
 - b. While the current height limits are proposed to be carried over from the General Plan 2020, there are some substantial changes to Land Use Policies LU-17 (Building Heights) and LU-

18 (Height Bonuses). Proposed changes to Policy LU-17 include a provision to allow for an increase in building heights by six feet above the base height limit to mitigate exposure of properties to sea level rise and flooding risks. Regarding Policy LU-18: 1) the height bonuses for Downtown have been removed from the policy and will be specified in the Downtown Precise Plan; 2) an expanded height bonus (from 12 feet to 24 feet) for affordable housing is proposed for the Marin Square property to match the zoning ordinance; 3) a citywide height bonus of 12 feet is proposed for housing projects that are 100% affordable; and 4) the citywide height bonus for hotel uses has been eliminated. Regarding the latter, the current Land Use Element allows a 54-foot height limit for hotel uses outside of Downtown, so it has been determined that an additional height bonus is not necessary.

- c. A new Program LU-19b is proposed to evaluate an overlay zone or “innovation” district to be considered for certain light industrial/office areas in which multi-family residential uses would be conditionally allowed. The current General Plan 2020 Light Industrial/Office land use designation does not permit residential uses. This proposal generated a lot of discussion by the Steering Committee as there are “pro and cons” to this concept. The Steering Committee expressed concerns about use compatibility and the need to preserve the current, local- and regional-serving businesses in these areas.

The proposed Land Use Element policies and programs can be accessed [here](#).

5. Downtown Precise Plan Boundaries-

The boundaries of the Downtown Precise Plan boundaries have been set. The final boundary map is attached (Attachment 2). The boundaries of the Downtown Precise Plan consider and incorporate the following;

- a. All the districts established by the Downtown San Rafael Vision (1993) and included in the current General Plan 2020;
- b. The areas covered by the Downtown San Rafael Station Area Plan (2012), a one-half-mile radius from the SMART rail station and San Rafael Transit Center (with some exceptions such as residential and industrial);
- c. The areas covered by the Downtown Parking & Wayfinding Study (2018); and
- d. Key properties/land uses that are immediately contiguous and integral to Downtown such as Albert Park/B Street Safeway property and Glass & Sash to the south and Montecito Shopping Center to the east.

In addition to the progress reports, staff will periodically bring forward to the City Council major General Plan 2040 policy issues for review and early direction. The intent is to get policy direction from the City Council before technical studies are completed and policy is drafted for Steering Committee review. For example, in early Spring, the City Council will be requested to review and provide direction on circulation and mobility policies required to address changes in State law. As previously reported, by 2020, State law requires that the City transition from using the current level of service (LOS) traffic methodology to a “vehicle miles traveled” (VMT) traffic methodology for circulation planning. A “white paper” on VMT is being prepared by Fehr & Peers, transportation consultants. This white paper will be presented to the City Council along with specific policy questions.

ANALYSIS:

As this is a progress report, there is no analysis of the above issues and topic areas. However, this report provides an opportunity for the City Council to comment on the progress and the direction of the work to date.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH:

As this is a progress report, there was no formal noticing for this item. However, notice of this report has been posted on the General Plan 2040 [meetings and events webpage](#).

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact associated with this item.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Accept report.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Final Guiding Principles
2. Final Boundary Map for Downtown Precise Plan Area

ATTACHMENT 1

Draft General Plan 2040

GUIDING PRINCIPLES



ATTACHMENT 2

Draft General Plan 2040

DOWNTOWN PRECISE PLAN BOUNDARIES

