

**Summary of San Rafael General Plan 2040 Steering Committee Meeting  
Meeting #15 June 12, 2019  
6:00 – 9:00 PM at 750 Lindero St.**

**Attendance**

Members Present:	<i>DJ Allison, Don Blayney, Jenny Broering, Maribeth Bushey, Bill Carney, Berenice Davidson, Richard Hall, Eric Holm, Linda Jackson, Margaret Johnston, Jeff Jones, Bonnie Marmor, Robert Miller, Stephanie Plante, Kate Powers, Jeff Rhoads, Jackie Schmidt, Roger Smith, Sparkie Spaeth</i>
Alternates Seated:	<i>Jed Greene, Sara Matson</i>
Members Excused:	<i>Omar Carrera, Drew Norton, Cecilia Zamora</i>
Absences:	<i>Jack McGinn, Karen Strolia</i>
Alternates Present:	<i>Jim Geraghty, Amy Likover, Judy Schriebman, Leslie Simons, Joanne Webster</i>
Staff Present:	<i>Raffi Boloyan, Anne Derrick, Lauren Davini, Allison Giffin, Barry Miller</i>
Consultants:	<i>Bob Grandy, Neil Smolen (Fehr and Peers)</i>
Sign-Ins:	<i>Shirl Buss, Chris Hart. Note: Other members of the public were present but did not sign in</i>

**(1/2/3) Call to Order/ Roll Call/ Approval of Minutes**

The meeting was called to order at 6:09 PM. The meeting minutes of 4/10/19 and 5/8/19 were approved without amendment (Motion: Jackson, Second: Spaeth). Project Manager (PM) Miller noted that Eric Spielman had left the Committee and Don Blayney was now representing the Design Review Board.

**(4) Public Comment**

Alternate Judy Schriebman provided an informative creeks map from Santa Rosa and noted that a similar map could be developed for San Rafael. Alternate Amy Likover noted that San Rafael Heritage was keenly interested in how the General Plan was going to address historic resources. She noted that the City's Carnegie (Main) Library was within the Precise Plan boundary.

**(5A) Recap of Charrette**

PM Miller gave a summary of the May 2019 Downtown Plan Charrette. The following comments were made:

- *What are the next steps for the Precise Plan?* PM Miller responded that Opticos will be going to the City Council on July 15, 2019 to get feedback on the preliminary design ideas. Opticos will also be coming back to the Steering Committee in two to three months (August or September) to provide more detailed design options. He mentioned that the Downtown Profile Report is about to be posted on the website, and Steering Committee members are encouraged to review it.
- *How will the Precise Plan impact aspects of the General Plan like the Land Use Element and the Infrastructure Element?* PM Miller responded that the two processes are complementary. Conversations about the Land Use Map and citywide policies are happening concurrently with conversations about the Downtown Precise Plan.

- Can the Steering Committee be notified when General Plan-related items go to the City Council? PM Miller responded yes.
- Some of the ideas presented at the Charette could also be useful for the North San Rafael commercial areas.
- Previous plans also considered public space improvements to 4<sup>th</sup> Street near A and Court, but these were not pursued due to various factors, including topography and cost.
- The charette was very oriented to physical improvements. There are other issues such as zoning and policy choices like those in the General Plan that also need to be discussed. It would be helpful to learn more about how form-based zoning will play out and how it will affect housing production. How will the new regulations impact the community? PM Miller responded that Opticos will be coming back to the Committee later in the year to address these issues.
- It would be helpful to do some outreach to the community regarding how form-based coding works, and how it could affect the community.
- It is not surprising that the Charette focused on design, since that is usually the intent of such exercises. This allowed for a better understanding of what people care about from a design perspective. However, there may be a disconnect between the Bike Pedestrian Master Plan and the direction expressed in the charrette.
- I disagree with the recommendation to locate a bike lane on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Fourth Street is a more logical location.

**(5B-1) Overview of the Circulation Element and Policy Audit (part 1)**

PM Miller presented an overview of the Circulation (Mobility) Element. He delivered a PowerPoint presentation with data on existing transportation conditions and an “audit” of existing policies. Barry also introduced Bob Grandy and Neil Smolen from Fehr and Peers, the City’s transportation consultants. The slides showing the places of work for San Rafael residents, and the places of residence for persons working in San Rafael generated a lot of discussion. Comments are highlighted below:

- An essential piece of data is where residents of new housing development in San Rafael are working. Many of the residents in new developments are commuting to San Francisco. Thus, building housing in San Rafael does not necessarily reduce vehicle miles traveled or provide housing resources for local employers.
- What is the difference between the Census data and the Transportation Authority of Marin data. PM Miller responded that Census data represented a sample of respondents from 2012 to 2016 (the average data over a five-year period) while the TAM survey used cell phone data.
- How is the cell phone data collected and used? Bob Grandy from Fehr and Peers answered that cell phone providers sell their data to a second party firm. That data is then aggregated by area and analyzed over about a six-month window of time. He remarked that this method is not perfect, but a lot better than it used to be.
- How are students tracked versus employees, etc.? Committee members also asked how the data dealt with persons who work in a different city each day or have multiple jobs. Grandy remarked that the information is tracked over a long period of time, and that algorithms are used to identify trends.

- Can we at least use the same categories in the pie charts for the two data sources so they can be more easily compared? Miller replied that we could do this to some extent, but the two sources used different geographies, so they would not match exactly. He noted that the differences would ultimately be reconciled in the City’s traffic model, which looked at much more granular areas.
- The concept of a “balanced multi-modal system” is flawed, as this is an auto-oriented city. If you try to serve everyone with different modes equally, then you will underinvest in the mode that benefits the most people. Simply investing in bike lanes will not result in the number of bicyclists increasing proportionally. PM Miller remarked that the intention is not to provide equal levels of investment for all modes of transportation, it is to ensure that the needs of all travelers are addressed.

PM Miller described the different modes of transportation and levels of service, etc. He noted that the state has adopted several pieces of legislation that affect the policy focus of the Circulation Element. He noted that after 2020, cities will not be able to use LOS as a threshold for determining if a project has a significant impact on the environment. Miller asked for additional comments from the Committee.

- The current population is aging rapidly. Bike lanes do not serve the senior population well.
- Our policy decisions should be informed by cost/benefit analyses. How much does bicycling impact carbon reduction, for example, versus spending the same amount of money on some other carbon reducing mode of transportation? It is difficult for the Committee to decide on the most effective mode of transportation without knowing how much it will cost, how effective it will be, and who is paying for it.
- Given the new focus on equity and resilience, how are we going to address the effects of climate change on transportation—for instance, evacuation needs and flood hazards. PM Miller responded that the transportation needs of lower income and disadvantaged neighborhoods will be assessed in the Mobility Element and in the new Environmental Justice Element. Further, sea level rise and climate issues will be addressed throughout the plan, with a particular focus in the Safety Element (Environmental Hazards).
- What is the process for changing the General Plan to reflect a focus on new issues such as “last mile” trips, moving away from combustion engines, providing electric charging stations, and adding “green streets” principles into road design. We should plan to redesign our streets so they can absorb runoff before it reaches creeks and waterways. Also, we need to think of infrastructure holistically. We should integrate transportation with other forms of infrastructure rather than treating roads separately.
- We keep hearing that millennials don’t drive and don’t want to own cars—but what happens when they get older and have families? We need to have realistic expectations. Also, we will have more seniors in 20 years and need to consider how this will affect transportation. Don’t just plan for 25-year olds.
- Flooding is a critical transportation issue, as much of our infrastructure (including SMART) is vulnerable. Can roads and rail double as levees? Can we use rights-of-way more efficiently?
- We should not give a “free pass” to transit when it comes to greenhouse gas emissions. We have demonized cars when, in fact, the empty articulated transit buses running through the city and half-filled diesel trains and ferries are worse. These modes of travel generate a lot of emissions and are not a good solution for reducing carbon emissions.
- Is road flooding a circulation issue or a safety issue? We need to build redundancy into our transportation systems, especially in East San Rafael. Redundancy also means planning for multiple modes, like cars and bicycles. Also, this Element should address egress and access to certain parts of the city. For example, Pt San Pedro Road could be important as a second means of access if 101 is closed.

- Agreed that cost/benefit analysis is critical, but it is not the only variable. There may be good reasons to invest in an improvement even if it costly.
- We need better facts about transit ridership and costs. Are there specific transportation improvements the City should be including in the General Plan 2040, as we did in General Plan 2020? It would be helpful to see what projects in GP 2020 (Exhibit 21) have been built. It would also be helpful to look at a list of proposed improvements and their costs and use this data to determine updated traffic mitigation fees. PM Miller noted that Fehr and Peers will be doing this as part of their work on the General Plan.

### **(5B-2) Overview of the Circulation Element and LOS/VMT (part 2)**

Bob Grandy of Fehr and Peers delivered a PowerPoint presentation about new State requirements as they relate to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). He explained the concepts of LOS (Level of Service) and Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT). Grandy talked about SB 743 and the reasoning behind this bill:

- 1) To reduce greenhouse gases
- 2) To encourage infill development near transit centers
- 3) To encourage active transportation like walking and biking.

LOS is a local metric that measures congestion at intersections, whereas VMT is a regional metric that measures how much we drive. He noted that the average VMT in the Bay Area is 15.3 miles per day per capita. For San Rafael residents, VMT is close to the regional average. However, for persons who work in San Rafael, VMT is 30 to 40 percent above the regional average. In other words, many of the people who work in the city live elsewhere and have long commutes. One factor behind this is the high cost of housing in Marin.

Grandy noted that the VMT metric tends to favor projects near transit. For instance, people may take a bus or train to an office in Downtown San Rafael, but they are likely to drive to an office on Lucas Valley Road. Grandy also noted that there has been an increase in VMT due to the explosion of delivery vehicles (food delivery, Amazon, etc.) so that even as we drive less, VMT continues to increase. He also noted that parking revenues have been flat since 2015.

The following points were raised during the discussion of this item:

- Can we adopt a system where we use VMT for commercial development and LOS for residential development? This would account for the fact that people who are moving here don't generally work here. Grandy noted that multi-family units in the downtown generate 40% fewer trips than single family homes. since less cars are owned by residents in apartments versus residents in a single-family home.
- It appears that LOS is a localized quality of life measurement and VMT is a regional quality of life measurement and that both are needed. Bob Grandy remarked that the City Council appeared to be moving in the direction of retaining some form of LOS, even as we moved toward VMT.
- Is there such a thing as "peak hour" VMT, as there is for LOS? Grandy responded no, VMT is not a measurement of congestion like LOS is. It is measured daily, and it is regional. Grandy explained that with future CEQA studies, one would look at the VMT for a specific project and compare it on a per capita basis to either a regional or City average.
- Is it true that even though we must use VMT for CEQA we can still use LOS for planning entitlements? In other words, can we adopt an LOS "D" standard and then disallow development if it will cause an intersection to fall below the standard? Grandy noted that the new law did not preclude cities from using LOS as a factor in approving or denying a project. Also, LOS can continue to be used as the basis for identifying needed improvements, which then becomes the basis for traffic mitigation fees.

Boloyan remarked that the City is doing that with projects right now. It is analyzing traffic impacts with both VMT and LOS. However, as of July 2020, we will no longer be able to look at LOS in the CEQA document.

- I am concerned that abandoning LOS in CEQA documents means that communities will no longer be able to object to projects on the grounds that they will generate too much traffic. How will the public be able to weigh in?

Grandy noted that his office will be preparing a “white paper” which lays out alternative approaches to measuring congestion. One option is a delay index—how long does it take to get from point A to point B during the peak hour? Off-peak hour? How does this change over time? Planning Manager Boloyan remarked that LOS has an “inverse” effect on pedestrian safety. For example, if you increase pedestrian time to cross the street, you are adding more delays in car traffic which could cause level of service to go down.

- Is LOS “E” the standard anywhere in Terra Linda? Boloyan responded that in Terra Linda all the signalized intersections are LOS “D”. However, freeway intersections are exempt.
- Will we still collect traffic fees based on the number of trips a project generates? Grandy stated that trip generation is the basis for both LOS and VMT calculations, but this is a good point in that the traffic mitigation fee is now based on trips.
- Is LOS based on a particular time of the year? Grandy responded that LOS is traditionally based on mid-week conditions during non-summer, non-holiday, fair weather days.
- LOS E may be appropriate downtown because it is better for pedestrians and bicycles. Grandy remarked that many cities want to incentivize development in their downtowns but not widen the streets, so they have exempted these areas from Level of Service.

Grandy further explained what LOS can and cannot be used for. He again explained that the State law does not preclude using LOS for planning purposes, entitlement review, or impact fees. Grandy reviewed the alternatives to LOS that were presented to the City Council on June 3.

- We should not accept multi-modal transportation as a foundational concept. Are we simply accepting that traffic is going to get worse by 2040? Grandy explained the process for forecasting trips on the network based on our growth forecasts, then identifying improvements and their costs, and then allocating the costs to future development.
- The material is hard to understand. Can you walk us through a hypothetical example, like the difference between evaluating redevelopment of the Montecito Shopping Center versus redevelopment of the Rock Quarry? The former is close to transit while the latter is not. How will the general plan take the differences into consideration? Grandy responded that we are planning to do modelling for three different land use alternatives in the fall. This testing will indicate what happens if you allocate land uses in different proportions around the City, e.g., what does it mean in terms of added trips and congestion? Planning Manager Boloyan remarked that General Plan 2040 might consider low growth, mid growth and high growth models and will show what the impacts are for each.
- How accurate have our past forecasts been? Grandy responded it depends on where you are. In areas that were already heavily congested, the degradation of service is often lower than expected. The models presume a 30 to 40 percent variation in accuracy.
- I don’t think we should write off the idea of shifting entirely to VMT and dropping LOS. We need to focus on reducing cars, and VMT is the best way to do that. Once we see the White Paper, the options will be

clearer. Grandy responded that what we are likely to see a combination of both VMT and LOS (or some form of delay index or monitoring system).

- What other cities have shifted to VMT and how is it working? And who is doing a mixed version of both VMT and LOS? It would be helpful to look at some best practices.
- My understanding is that in the Precise Plan Area, there is a certain quantity of development that will be presumed in each zone, and as long as development occurs within that envelope, the applicant would be exempt from traffic modeling. PM Miller remarked that we are going to make assumptions about build out in the EIR, but are not there yet.

*The Committee took a break from 8:00 to 8:10 PM*

### **(5C) Continued Discussion of Key Land Use Policies**

PM Miller introduced the next item, which was a continuation of the discussion of draft land use policies. He noted that based on Committee member comments, staff had identified about a half-dozen issues requiring further discussion. He indicated that in the interest of time, tonight's discussion would focus on switching from a density standard to a floor area ratio standard in Downtown San Rafael. Planning Manager Boloyan walked the Committee through several PowerPoint slides illustrating the difference between these two measurements, and the rationale for switching from one to the other.

The following comments were made:

- Parking does not count toward the FAR. So, if you have a 3.0 FAR building plus three floors of parking, it looks like a 6.0 FAR and the statistic can be misleading.
- This shift would result in a loss of certainty regarding the number of units we can expect in a project, which will result in too many units and too many school-aged children. This will worsen school overcrowding. This approach is not appropriate in North San Rafael. Another Committee member noted that enrollment in the Dixie School District had declined.
- How does this proposal align with the idea of a form-based code? What is the point of regulating FAR if we are moving to a form-based code? Why don't we just use height limits and design standards?
- Agree with prior speaker. We should focus on place making and the desire to create an attractive place. Also how can we get a Downtown "skyline" with variation in height and design? We don't want a city of continuous flat 4 and 5 story buildings. The real question is what is the look and feel of the downtown we want to have?
- Some additional definition of a Form Based Code would make this conversation more productive. Planning Manager Boloyan noted that a Form Based Code would determine the size and shape of the "box" that could go on any given parcel (e.g., the height, setbacks, parking, etc.), and the design features of that "box." There would be much more flexibility about what could fill the box (including the allowable number of housing units). The concept is that if you stay inside the "box", you streamline the entitlement process.
- What cities have adopted these kinds of codes, and are they happy with them? Boloyan mentioned Downtown Petaluma as an example. Miller noted that some cities have taken a hybrid approach—they have form-based codes but still regulate bulk using floor area ratio. However, the reason to move away from a density cap is that it tends to discourage smaller units, which are more affordable by design.

- Since State bonuses are based on density, what happens if we switch to FAR? Miller noted that there are other acceptable methods to incentivize affordable housing, such as allowing an extra story for projects with affordable units.
- What is it we are trying to achieve by doing this? How will it affect other goals, like creating a better quality public realm and getting better architecture? PM Miller responded that the reason for doing this is to incentivize housing production.
- We should remain cognizant of the impacts of more housing on our quality of life. How will this impact other aspects of our Downtown? Traffic, etc? Boloyan noted that this is the purpose of the Precise Plan—to improve the quality of life Downtown while achieving multiple objectives.
- Can staff provide some real world examples? Seagate? Whistlestop? Boloyan explained that the Whistlestop project involves a 15,000 square foot lot. Under current density limits, 25 units are permitted. With the state density bonus, 33 units can be built. But the applicant wants to build 67 units, which is double the allowable density. However, the developer is only asking for a 4 foot height bonus, because zoning already allows for quite a large “box” on the site. There is a disconnect between the size of the building allowed and the number of units allowed. Switching to FAR would remedy that, and also encourage smaller units.
- We are giving up local control if we give up our density standards. AB 1515 dictates that we can’t deny a project if it meets our standards, and if we don’t have density standards we won’t be able to say no.
- If what we want is ground floor retail with three stories of housing above, we should say that. This can then be modeled in the EIR so we can determine the impacts and mitigation measures. Miller noted that at the end of the day, this is essentially what we are doing. The EIR will be based on a set of assumptions about what is going to be built where over the next 20 years. But we can get there using FAR in lieu of density.

Electronic polling devices were distributed and members voted on the matter at hand. The choices and number of replies are listed below (18 members voted).

1. Change to FAR for Downtown is a good idea (6 votes)
2. Change to FAR for Downtown is a good idea and we should do this in other commercial areas also (5 votes)
3. Change to FAR for Downtown is a bad idea. Keep it the way we’ve been doing it. (1 vote)
4. I have another idea for this (2 votes)
5. Need more information (4 votes)
6. Not sure/don’t know (0 votes)

#### **(6/7) ALTERNATE COMMENTS/ GENERAL BUSINESS ITEMS**

##### **A. Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be on July 10, 2019 and will focus on Economic Development.

##### **B. Staff Announcements**

Staff is taking a General Plan progress report to the City Council on July 15. This will include a briefing on Downtown Design options by Opticos, based on the charrette.

##### **C. Member Announcements**

Kate Powers commented that the Laurel Dell Fifth grade has their display of the General Plan 2040 at the Youth and Art building on Fourth street

#### **(8) PUBLIC COMMENTS**

There were no additional comments.

**Adjournment** – the meeting was adjourned at 9.05 PM