REPORT TO GENERAL PLAN 2040 STEERING COMMITTEE

Subject: **Introduction to Place Types and Form-Based Codes**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Steering Committee will participate in a two-part discussion related to community design. Both segments will include a PowerPoint presentation and a discussion facilitated by Opticos Design. Part One (Agenda Item 5.C) will present the concept of "place types" as a way of understanding the form and structure of San Rafael. Part Two (Agenda Item 5.D) will provide an overview of "form-based codes." The Committee has had some discussion of form-based codes at its prior meetings, but without the benefit of a presentation as to how and why such a system might be proposed. Opticos will walk us through the logic of form-based codes as an alternative to traditional zoning, providing examples from other cities. Steering Committee direction on this approach will be solicited.

REPORT

Place Types (Agenda Item 5.C)

The existing San Rafael General Plan recognizes that the city is comprised of unique and distinctive neighborhoods. However, like most general plans, its design policies are organized around specific land uses (residential, commercial, industrial, etc.) rather than the way these uses combine to create uniquely identifiable places in the city. The idea behind "place types" is that areas with similar physical qualities may be grouped together, with common design principles applied. For example, a typical suburban neighborhood might contain homes, a shopping center, schools, parks, and local-serving offices. Rather than thinking of each of these individual uses separately, the "place type" approach looks at the sum total of these uses and the way they combine to create a complete and special place.

Transportation corridors may be regulated with a similar approach. Some corridors may be auto oriented, with large surface parking lots and commercial uses set back far from the street. Others may be more pedestrian-oriented, with buildings close to the street, smaller parcels, and greater coverage of each parcel by structures. Regardless of the specific land uses along each street, different guidelines would apply to a busy auto-oriented thoroughfare with high traffic volumes than one with low volumes and many pedestrian amenities.

At the Steering Committee meeting, we will discuss how this concept may be applied as a tool to encourage more sustainable development. We will discuss precedent examples of how place types have been used in other plans, looking ahead to how they might be used in the San Rafael General Plan.

Ultimately, the place type approach can distinguish between walkable neighborhoods and auto-oriented neighborhoods and identify where transitions that improve walkability may be possible. Such transitions can support efforts to reduce vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gas emissions, while encouraging safer streets and a stronger sense of community.

For an example of a "place type" model used in another General Plan, click here. This example is from the City of Fremont. Note that the emphasis is on commercial districts and corridors, as the city did not anticipate changes in the form of its established single-family neighborhoods. The place types designations have helped that city sustain the "organic" and historic qualities of its older commercial districts, while creating a more "urban" quality in what was formerly a very auto-oriented city center.

Form-Based Codes (Agenda Item 5.D)

The second part of the Steering Committee presentation will focus on form-based codes as an alternative to traditional zoning. The presentation will cover the organizing principles behind a form-based code, the concept of a "transect", and the related regulatory components. Form-based codes will be compared against conventional zoning, with a discussion of the typical types of development that result in each case. The Steering Committee will have an opportunity to ask questions and express their views on how and where the form-based approach might work in San Rafael. We will review several examples of form-based codes in other places, such as Hercules and Petaluma, and show the outcomes in each case.

Rather than providing an explanation of form-based codes in the body of this report, we have provided a series of links below. Please peruse these links—which will take you to short, easy-to-read articles—to become more familiar with this approach to regulating land use:

- A four-part intro to form-based codes by Mary Madden and Joel S. Russell of the Form-Based Codes Institute
  - Part 1: http://plannersweb.com/2014/12/fbc1/
  - Part 2: http://plannersweb.com/2014/12/fbc2/
  - Part 3: http://plannersweb.com/2014/12/fbc3/
  - Part 4: http://plannersweb.com/2014/12/fbc4/

- A list of the top 10 misconceptions about form-based codes by Tony Perez of Opticos Design, from the CNU journal
  - https://www.cnu.org/publicsquare/2016/05/12/top-10-misconceptions-about-form-based-codes

We encourage you to jot down questions and observations and bring them to the meeting for discussion.