



Agenda Item No: _____

Meeting Date: July 15, 2019

SAN RAFAEL CITY COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

Department: Community Development

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City Manager Approval: _____

TOPIC: GENERAL PLAN 2040/ DOWNTOWN PRECISE PLAN

SUBJECT: GENERAL PLAN 2040 PROGRESS REPORT #2

RECOMMENDATION:

1. Accept Report
2. Adopt Resolution approving changes in the General Plan Steering Committee membership

BACKGROUND:

Staff is providing its second Progress Report (Progress Report #2) to the City Council on the San Rafael General Plan 2040 Update. The Progress Report provides an opportunity to brief the Council on the status of the project and solicit input on key policy and procedural issues.

The Progress Report #1 was presented to the City Council on March 4, 2019 and focused on work completed in 2018 and January-February 2019. This Progress Report #2 focuses on activities completed between March and June 2019. It is organized into the following categories:

- (1) Policy Development
- (2) Data Collection and Analysis
- (3) Steering Committee Activities
- (4) Other Community Engagement Activities
- (5) Land Use Map
- (6) Steering Committee Changes
- (7) Downtown Precise Plan

Progress Report #2 includes a Resolution for Item (6) and an Analysis discussion of Item (7). The Council meeting will include a presentation by the Downtown Plan Consultant on key decisions and next steps in the Precise Plan process.

FOR CITY CLERK ONLY

File No.: _____

Council Meeting: _____

Disposition: _____

Each of the listed categories is discussed below:

1. Policy Development. Table 1 shows the status of General Plan Policy development as of June 30, 2019. Staff is using an iterative process to update General Plan policies, beginning with an “audit” of each element. The audit includes a staff assessment of each existing goal, policy and program, including a recommendation to move it forward, edit it, or eliminate it. The audits also note where new policies may be needed to respond to emerging issues, state laws, or recently completed plans. Staff’s assessment, coupled with comments from the General Plan Steering Committee, provides the basis for revised goals, policies, and programs.

As Table 1 indicates, audits have been completed for all Elements except Neighborhoods and Community Design.¹ First Draft policies have been prepared for four of the eight mandated elements of the General Plan, including land use, safety, open space, and conservation. Staff is also revising the First Draft land use policies in response to comments from the Steering Committee. It is anticipated that policies for all elements, including the new JEDI Element (Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion) will be drafted by Fall 2019.

Table 1: Status of General Plan Policy Development

Element	Policy Audit Completed	First Draft Policies Released
Land Use	X	X
Neighborhoods		
Safety	X	X (Environmental Hazards)
Open Space	X	X
Conservation	X	
Air and Water Quality	X	
Governance	X	N/A
Sustainability	N/A	N/A
Noise	X	
Arts and Culture	X	
Parks and Recreation	X	
Circulation	X	
Infrastructure	X	
Economic Vitality	X	
Community Design		
Housing	N/A	N/A
Justice Equity Diversity Inclusion (“JEDI” Element)	N/A	

¹ The Sustainability Element is not being audited because its policies have largely been superseded by the 2019 Climate Change Action Plan, and the JEDI Element is a new element being prepared in response to the state requirement to address Environmental Justice in the General Plan. Housing Element policies are not being updated as part of General Plan 2040.

Policy audits are reviewed by the General Plan 2040 Steering Committee at their monthly meetings. Each Committee member is also invited to submit comments in writing. To date, the issues generating the most Steering Committee discussion have been:

- General growth and development issues, especially issues relating to the location and density of new housing, and related traffic congestion
- Building heights and allowances for height bonuses, especially Downtown
- The use of floor area ratio (FAR) standards instead of density standards to regulate mixed use development in Downtown San Rafael
- Development timing, i.e., the findings required to allow new development (e.g., traffic levels of service, infrastructure capacity, etc.)
- The most appropriate (and cost-effective) strategies for adapting to rising sea level
- Wildfire prevention and preparedness
- Creek restoration
- Allowing residential uses in industrial areas (or changing specific industrial areas on the General Plan Map to allow housing)
- The balance between “active” transportation improvements (bicycle, pedestrian, and transit) and auto capacity improvements—and the cost/benefit of these improvements
- The use of LOS (Level of Service) vs VMT (Vehicle Miles Traveled) to measure the traffic impacts of new development, as well as the measures that are prescribed to mitigate traffic impacts (this was also discussed by the City Council at its June 4 meeting).

2. Data Collection and Analysis. Data-related tasks completed since March include:

- *Land Use Inventory.* Staff has completed a digital (GIS) inventory of existing land uses on every parcel in San Rafael using tax assessor data and aerial photographs. Data is being summarized by land use and subarea to develop a land use profile of the city, and to ground truth existing General Plan and zoning designations
- *Addressing Sea Level Rise.* Staff continues to explore solutions to addressing sea level rise in the General Plan. We are preparing an “Adaptation White Paper” that lays the groundwork for more detailed adaptation planning to be completed after the General Plan is adopted.
- *Traffic Counts.* 24-hour traffic counts were collected at approximately 40 locations in early May 2019. These counts will provide the foundation for traffic modeling and forecasts of future traffic conditions in the General Plan and EIR. A “Transportation White Paper” is currently in production.
- *Noise Monitoring.* Noise monitoring for the General Plan and General Plan EIR was completed in April and May 2019. The data establishes the existing decibel levels for short-term (15-minute) and long-term (24-hour) time periods at various locations around the city.
- *Economic Data Collection and Analysis.* BAE Urban Economics completed an economic profile of San Rafael, including real estate activity, job growth, office and retail space absorption and vacancy trends, and forecasts. This was presented to the General Plan Steering Committee at their July 10, 2019 meeting.

- *Resources and Hazards.* PlaceWorks has documented “existing conditions” and the regulatory context for biological resources, hydrologic resources, geologic hazards, and air and water quality in the city. This information will be used in the General Plan/ Precise Plan EIR.
- *Infrastructure.* PlaceWorks has documented “existing conditions” and the regulatory context for water, sewer, storm drainage, and telecommunications infrastructure.
- *Historic Resources.* Garavaglia Associates has begun the process of updating the inventory of cultural resources in Downtown San Rafael. We are working collaboratively with San Rafael Heritage on this task.
- *Downtown Profile Report.* The Downtown Profile Report has been completed and posted to the project website. This report is discussed below.

3. Steering Committee Activities. Since the March Progress report, the following Steering Committee meetings have been convened:

- *March 13, 2019: Meeting #12.* The Committee took part in a “visioning” discussion about Downtown San Rafael. Members also reviewed the policy audits for the Culture and Arts Element, the Noise Element, and the Air and Water Quality Element.
- *April 10, 2019: Meeting #13.* The Committee discussed “existing conditions” information for Downtown San Rafael. There was also a discussion of parks and recreation issues (with the Community Services Director) and a review of the Draft Environmental Hazards policies.
- *May 8, 2019: Meeting #14.* The Committee’s meeting was merged with the opening event of the Downtown charrette. Committee members participated in a Downtown walking tour, a community workshop, and breakout groups.
- *June 13, 2019: Meeting #15.* The Committee discussed transportation issues. This included an overview of existing transportation policies and a discussion of how traffic impacts are measured. The Committee also discussed changes to the way density is regulated in Downtown San Rafael.
- *July 10, 2019: Meeting #16.* The Committee discussed economic development issues and received the open space and conservation policies.

When feasible, staff has incorporated electronic polling in the meetings. This allows the Committee to “vote” on key policy questions as they are discussed.

Staff continues to rely on the Steering Committee as a sounding-board for vetting policy direction. Much of the input has been provided through written comments (e.g., “homework assignments”) outside of the meetings. There is some interest among members to dive deeper into issues through sub-committees, additional meetings, or an extension of the schedule. Staff believes this would be inconsistent with the goal of finishing the General Plan by mid-2020, and the philosophy that this is principally a tune-up of the General Plan 2020 and not a major overhaul.

4. Other Community Engagement Activities

The General Plan Team continues to provide opportunities for outreach and public engagement. The major engagement event since Progress Report #1 was the Downtown Charrette (discussed later in this report). Since March, Staff has also made presentations to the Downtown BID, the Planning Commission, and the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC). An EIR Scoping Session was held on April 23, 2019. We continue to solicit on-line input using the “Neighborland” web platform (<https://neighborland.com/sanrafael2040/>). In addition, Steering Committee agendas and related publications are posted on line, with electronic noticing of meetings to a list of interested parties.

We are currently planning “Round 2” of General Plan outreach. This will include pop-up events at locations around the city, attendance at the regular meetings of existing neighborhood and community organizations, and focused outreach to the Spanish-speaking community, in partnership with the Canal Alliance.

5. Land Use Map

An updated General Plan Land Use Map is being developed. Most of the changes to this map reflect changes to the General Plan Land Use categories and will be non-substantive. However, a few substantive changes may be considered.

The City issued a “Call for Amendments” in April 2019, notifying property owners of the opportunity to present their case for Map changes. An application form was mailed to about 15 property owners who have expressed interest in new designations. To date, no completed applications have been received. A few property owners have expressed interest in changes to General Plan narrative text as it relates to their properties.

6. Steering Committee Changes

The General Plan 2040 Steering Committee was appointed by the City Council in December 2017. The Committee includes 24 members and 22 alternates. The Committee Bylaws allow alternates to move into member seats in the event of a member resignation. Council approval is not required in such instances. However, Council approval is required to backfill the vacated alternate position.

There are presently two vacant alternate seats, including the Design Review Board (DRB) representative and the Youth representative. The circumstances leading to these vacancies are summarized below:

- The DRB appointee to the Committee was Eric Spielman. Mr. Spielman relocated out of San Rafael in May and resigned from the Steering Committee. His alternate, Don Blayney, has taken his place as the DRB representative. A new DRB alternate is needed.
- The youth appointee to the Committee was Bella Bromberg. Ms. Bromberg has relocated to attend college out of state and has resigned from the Committee. Her alternate, Jack McGinn, has taken her place as the youth representative. A new youth alternate is needed.

Staff appeared before the DRB at their June 18, 2019 meeting and requested an alternate nominee. Stewart Summers was nominated and has agreed to serve in this role.

Staff has yet to find a new Youth alternate. Representatives from both high schools and several non-profit organizations serving local youth were contacted in June 2019, but no nominations have been made.

A Resolution appointing Don Blayney and Jack McGinn as new primary Committee members, and appointing Stewart Summers the new DRB alternate, is attached to this Staff Report.

7. Downtown Precise Plan

Work on the Downtown Precise Plan has continued since Progress Report #1. A [Downtown Profile Report](#) has been submitted by the Opticos Design Team and may be downloaded via the project website. The Profile Report includes a summary of Downtown historic resources, demographics, economic conditions, urban design, transportation issues, utilities, and natural resources and hazards. The Report is an important milestone and provides the “baseline” for future Plan policies and actions.

As noted, the City convened a Downtown Planning Charrette on May 8-11, 2019. The purpose of the charrette was to have a dialogue about how Downtown can become a more successful and dynamic place in the future. Key components of the charrette included:

- Focus Group Discussions (Preservation, Merchants, Service Providers, Development)
- Downtown Walking Tour (May 8)
- Charrette Opening Workshop (May 8)
- Open Studio (May 9-10)
- Brown Bag Lunches on Historic Preservation and Economic Development (May 9-10)
- Second Friday ArtWalk Pop-up Workshop (May 10)
- Charrette Closing Presentation (May 11)

During the Open Studio, the public was invited to drop by a storefront space at 4th and B (the former jewelry store at 1200 4th Street), where the Design Team was on hand to discuss ideas. Graphic displays were set up throughout the Studio, and public feedback was encouraged through post-it notes, comment cards, and verbal comments. Over the two days of the studio, 285 post-it notes were applied to the exhibits.

The opening presentation for the charrette may be viewed [here](#). It includes an overview of the planning process, a summary of Downtown assets and challenges, and a Downtown Profile. Results of the table exercises at the opening presentation may be viewed [here](#). Participants were divided into eight groups of 6-8 people each and were asked to summarize their comments for the larger group at the end of a 45-minute breakout session. The link above summarizes what we heard.

The closing presentation for the charrette may be viewed [here](#). The presentation includes conceptual design ideas for key Downtown spaces, as well as preliminary ideas for improving circulation, Downtown gateways, the open space network, and development opportunities. The brown bag lunch presentations from May 9 and 10 may be viewed [here](#). These presentations cover historic preservation and the Downtown economy. Notes from the Focus Groups may be viewed [here](#). Comment cards from the charrette event may be viewed [here](#). These are anonymous comments submitted by participants in various charrette events.

ANALYSIS:

As this is a Progress Report, analysis of the above items is limited to the Downtown Precise Plan. Opticos Design will attend the City Council meeting on July 15 to request feedback from the Council on key issues before moving to the next step of the project, which is the development of policy and map options.

Emerging recommendations coming out of the charrette are summarized below:

- The Design Team has identified four guiding principles:
 - Reinforce gateways and strengthen north-south connectivity
 - Reinforce gateways and strengthen east-west connectivity
 - Create an interconnected network of civic and open spaces
 - Focus development and public investment at key nodes
- The Precise Plan will reinforce the idea that Downtown is comprised of “districts,” each requiring different land use and design strategies. Opticos has identified four districts, including the West End Village, the Core Commercial Area, the Transit Center Area, and the East End / Montecito Commercial Area. Form-based zoning recommendations will be developed for each of these areas. Revisions to current height limits, height bonuses, and allowable building mass may be considered through this process.
- Much of Downtown’s development potential is associated with key opportunity sites. Some of these sites will be the subject of conceptual design studies in the next phase of the charrette. Preliminary ideas were discussed during the charrette and will be refined in the coming months. Sites include the Ritter Street block (between 2nd and 3rd), Montecito Shopping Center, West America Bank, the 1001 4th (Market Hall) property, and the Whistlestop block among others.
- Downtown presents opportunities for public space improvements, particularly near the SMART station and along 4th Street in the Core Commercial Area. Some of these improvements could involve redesigning City streets so they also function as pedestrian-oriented spaces. There is currently no real central gathering space in Downtown San Rafael. Linkages to parks and open spaces on the perimeter of Downtown, including Albert Park, Boyd Park, and the Canal, also could be improved.
- Downtown’s circulation system should be planned in a way that prioritizes different travel modes on different streets. For example, auto movement is the priority on Second and Third Streets, while pedestrian movement is the priority on Fourth Street. The designation has implications for future design improvements and the management of curbside space on each street. Illustrative street cross-sections were prepared during the charrette and are included in the closing presentation.
- There is a need for better cross-town bicycle circulation, particularly an east-west connection between the Miracle Mile and the Montecito area. A number of options for an east-west Class II bike path were explored during the charrette. The loss of on-street parking is an issue for most of the alignments considered. This issue was also addressed in the recently adopted Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan Update.
- Second and Third Streets are presumed to remain one-way arterials in the future, but there are opportunities to improve pedestrian safety at crossings and improve north-south connectivity. Restoration of two-way traffic on B, C, and D Streets may be considered.

- Key findings and recommendations of the recent Parking and Wayfinding Study should be incorporated.
- There are opportunities to enhance natural resources Downtown, including Irwin Creek, Mahon Creek, and the San Rafael Canal. Sea level rise is a critical design consideration that should inform site planning and architectural design, particularly on sites near the Canal.
- New development prototypes should be considered for Downtown, particularly around the SMART station. Best practices from other cities could be considered to determine what ideas and land use formulas might be transferable to San Rafael.

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](#). In addition, members of the General Plan Steering Committee and alternates were notified of this meeting by email, and it was announced at several General Plan-related meetings.

FISCAL IMPACT:

This progress report is informational and has no fiscal impact on the City budget.

OPTIONS:

The City Council has the following options to consider on this matter:

1. Accept report and Approve Resolution, as recommended by staff;
2. Reject report and Resolution and direct staff to return with more information; or
3. Take no action.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Accept Report and Approve Resolution

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Resolution Approving Steering Committee Membership Changes