

REPORT TO GENERAL PLAN 2040 STEERING COMMITTEE

Subject: Community Design Element Policies

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Staff is preparing Draft Community Design policies for the 2040 General Plan. The policies incorporate feedback from City staff and the General Plan Steering Committee, as well as an “audit” of the policies in the prior (2020) General Plan. The new Community Design Element will be somewhat longer than the existing Element, as it includes an expanded discussion of place types, principles of “good design,” and additional guidance on historic preservation.

The proposed 2040 community design policies are not included in this staff report but will be provided via email (and web posting) on Monday February 10. The historic preservation policies are still being developed and will be presented at the March 2020 Steering Committee meeting.

REPORT

Background

The Community Design Element is considered an “optional” element of the General Plan. The element was added in 2004 to underscore the importance of good design to the image of the city, as well as the desire to create and sustain attractive neighborhoods, business districts, and public space.

Overview

The Draft 2040 Community Design Element includes four goals:

- Goal 1 addresses the image of the city and its sense of place. Policies address respect for the natural landscape as well as the elements of San Rafael’s form, including neighborhoods, centers, employment districts, landmarks, and gateways. This goal is carried forward from General Plan 2020.
- Goal 2 addresses design quality. The focus of these policies and actions is on what constitutes “good design,” and the importance of quality, context-sensitive architecture. Policies in this section also address the design review process. This goal is carried forward from General Plan 2020.
- Goal 3 addresses the public realm, including landscape design, street trees, lighting, signage, and street furnishings. Some of the content is being carried forward from other parts of General Plan 2020, and some is newly added. The Goal itself is new, and does not appear in General Plan 2020.

- Goal 4 addresses historic preservation. It is currently found in the Arts and Culture Element of General Plan 2020 but is being moved to Community Design to recognize the role of historic buildings in defining the character and image of San Rafael. This also enables preservation policies, which are currently found in both the Community Design Element and the Arts and Culture Element, to be concentrated in one place.

The Draft Element incorporates feedback from the Steering Committee and City staff. Several Committee members submitted written comments on the Community Design Element. In addition, oral comments from the August 14, 2019 Steering Committee meeting were reviewed to identify potential policies and programs.

In addition to the goals, policies and programs, the Community Design Element will include an expanded discussion of design issues, principles, and guidelines. New maps, diagrams, and illustrative sketches will be included. This material is now being developed and will be finalized after the Steering Committee discussion on February 12.

As noted in the Executive Summary, the Draft goals, policies, and programs will be emailed to committee members on Monday February 10.