

From: Kenneth E Abreu < >

Sent: Sunday, May 16, 2021 10:34 PM

To: Clerk <clerk@cityofsanmateo.org>

Subject: May 17 San Mateo City Council meeting – General Plan and Housing Element update; Agenda # 13

May 16, 2021

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Dear Mayor Rodriguez and Council members,

The City and the region are in a deep housing crisis which leads to additional crises in community diversity, traffic and environmental impacts. The General Plan (GP) and Housing Element (HE) updates are vital tools to address these crises. The Staff report raises two key issues that should be addressed.

First, is regarding Outreach Activities. While there has been some success in this area, there are also major failures. The April 10 Spanish language event having no attendee is a failure that must be fixed. A highly focused effort to get major input from the Spanish speaking community is a must, to have a valid GP and HE. This community is where much of the housing deficiency exists and you must have strong input from that community. A similar effort is needed for the renter community, youth and people who work in San Mateo but don't live on the Peninsula. These are all major constituencies that need to be targeted to have a high-quality GP and HE update.

The second issue is the HE targeting all of the new capacity to just the study areas. The RHNA numbers must be met by the whole city, not just fitting the 7,000+ new units into a few narrow areas. If this plan is followed it will further divide the city into two distinct communities. This is not good for building a strong, cooperative community or for cost effectively addressing the need for more housing. A broader look is needed at where additional units can be added throughout the city.

Thank You,

Ken Abreu



May 17, 2021

Eric Rodriguez, Mayor
Rick Bonilla, Deputy Mayor
Amourence Lee, Council Member
Joe Goethals, Council Member
Diane Papan, Council Member

City of San Mateo
330 West 20th Avenue
City Council Office
San Mateo, CA 94403

Re: General Plan outreach to community members

Dear San Mateo City Council,

On behalf of the Housing Leadership Council of San Mateo County (HLC) and as a lifelong San Mateo resident, I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the City's approach to reaching community members for input on the General Plan. HLC's mission is to work with communities and their leaders to build and preserve affordable housing.

I would like to thank the City for the diligent work that has already been done in engaging the community to provide comments on the General Plan. However, as proven in the lack of attendance at the April 10 Spanish meeting on an introduction to the General Plan, HLC believes the City should consider more targeted approaches to reaching all members of the community. In order for the General Plan to reflect all of San Mateo, it is critical the City does its part to reach all members of the community outside of homeowners associations. We do not want to restrict the conversation to only those who are comfortably housed.

HLC would like to suggest that the City focus its efforts by working with community groups that have genuine and established relationships with members who are not usually heard. Community groups are already aware of the needs of their members and can provide the City with valuable input on the General Plan. Through community organizations, the City can coordinate town hall meetings where community members feel safe in providing their experiences, concerns, and needs to City staff.

We urge City staff to provide the same importance and attention to these community groups as they do homeowner's associations. It is vital to the fabric of our community to include all voices in the General Plan.



We again would like to express our appreciation for the work that San Mateo City staff, elected officials, and community members have already done in gathering community feedback for the General Plan.

Sincerely,

Ángela Solis, Organizer and San Mateo Resident

From:

Sent: Monday, May 17, 2021 11:56 AM

To: Amourence Lee <alee@cityofsanmateo.org>; Diane Papan <dpapan@cityofsanmateo.org>; Eric Rodriguez <erodriguez@cityofsanmateo.org>; Joe Goethals <jgoethals@cityofsanmateo.org>; Rick Bonilla <RBonilla@cityofsanmateo.org>

Cc: Patrice Olds <polds@cityofsanmateo.org>

Subject: General Plan 2040

Mayor Rodriguez and Councilmembers:

I am concerned about the lack of community input in this General Plan process and I wholeheartedly agree with the comments of Lisa Diaz Nash. It's a challenging time for most and but now that there is the ability to do so there should be more person to person communications about the future of our city. I am in favor of small community meetings and/or appointing a lead communicator for each neighborhood. I never understood why the citizen's committee was abandoned for this process; there are plenty of volunteers willing to engage with the community and work with the GP committee. Right now it seems our future is being determined in a vacuum. We need to make this a strong and well supported plan to be a success.

Thank you,
Lisa Maley

From: Raayan Zarandian Mohtashemi < >

Sent: Monday, May 17, 2021 3:49 PM

To: Clerk <clerk@cityofsanmateo.org>

Subject: May 17th city council meeting public comment, agenda items 12 & 13

Agenda Item #13: General Plan Update

I strongly urge the city council to direct better outreach to Spanish-speaking neighborhoods and working class communities. Historically in urban planning, and in this city especially, majority-white, affluent neighborhoods, have been overrepresented in the public input process. This is because hearings, workshops, and other longer meetings, as well as often long online English-language surveys, are inaccessible to folks who do not speak English or do not have enough time on their hands. This applies especially to workers who work all day and have little time to attend or follow up on longer-term city planning processes. It is long past time to make a change, and to affirmatively further fair housing by conducting more equitable outreach.

From: Lisa Nash <>

Sent: Thursday, May 13, 2021 3:28 PM

To: citycouncil@cityofsanmateo.org; Drew Corbett <dcorbett@cityofsanmateo.org>

Cc: Clerk <clerk@cityofsanmateo.org>

Subject: Improving the Value and Importance of Community Input To The San Mateo General Plan Process

Dear Council Members and City Manager Corbett,

Attached please find a letter concerning the General Plan 2040 Community Outreach effort I sent on Tuesday to Community Development Director Horrisberger and Principal Planner Julia Klein. Their efforts, and those of their teams, on our General Plan 2040 is greatly appreciated.

After speaking with neighbors across the City, small businesses, and community groups, however, the letter outlines the shortfalls we see in community outreach efforts regarding the General Plan, the impact of these shortfalls on the General Plan, and specific solutions we recommend to fix this serious problem quickly.

City staff has increased the number of educational meetings about the General Plan in the past few months. That is not the problem. The problem is that there is not a clear definition of the objectives and details behind the outreach efforts to evaluate program success against. Why do we want public input? Which segments of our community are we trying to reach and what are the identifiers of these segments, i.e. demographically, economically, ethnically, gender-wise, age-wise, geographically, vis a vis their relationship with San Mateo, etc.? How do we report out on this community input and how will it be used to develop the General Plan? Will we return to these groups with the General Plan ideas generated by their input and see if they match their needs? If we don't know whose input is missing, how do we identify ways to reach and engage them?

We don't all agree on every aspect of the General Plan. But we should all agree that the General Plan must include a statistically valid and comprehensive way to gather nuanced community input based on needs, as well as a commitment to transparently report back on the input received. We do not need a community outreach process that is only used to "check the box." We need a robust, two-way community input process that drives the development of our General Plan in a way beneficial to current and future San Mateans.

I look forward to hearing back from Director Horrisberger and Principal Planner Klein, as well as to hearing their presentation at the May 17th City Council meeting; presenting my public comment then, and working with all involved to create robust community outreach that will drive a successful San Mateo General Plan 2040.

Regards,
Lisa

May 12, 2021

Christina and Julia,

First, thanks for all the work you and your team are putting into our General Plan 2040. It is an enormous undertaking, not to mention happening during a pandemic and on top of all your regular responsibilities. I truly appreciate the effort.

I, and many residents, small businesses and community groups that I speak with, however, are extremely frustrated and concerned about the direction of our General Plan 2040. We believe it cannot be successful unless there is a new approach taken quickly to conducting “community outreach.” This approach must be focused on **greater transparency, specificity of outreach and report out**, and understanding the layered needs of the diverse communities within San Mateo. While I am sure it is not your intention, the outreach process we are using now feels like getting cursory feedback on the mechanics of the General Plan process alone so that the requirement of community input is met.

There needs to be a much more detailed definition of **what the objective of “community outreach”** is so that you can evaluate whether or not you have been successful. Which segments of our community are we trying to reach and what are the identifiers of these segments, i.e. demographically, economically, ethnically, gender-wise, age-wise, geographically, vis a vis their relationship with San Mateo, etc.? How do we report out on this community input and how will it be used to develop the General Plan? Will we return to these groups with the General Plan ideas generated by their input and see if they match their needs?

Without this level of specificity and transparency, we won’t know if we are hitting our goals or how to create an action plan that will address any shortfalls. We also need this specificity and transparency to ensure General Plan input is not just overwhelmingly from people who have the time and inclination to participate. If we don’t know whose input is missing, how do we identify ways to reach and engage them?

There have been several zoom General Plan informational outreach meetings in the past couple of months to different neighborhoods, business groups, etc. That has been a good step, but they largely have been one-way, i.e. giving information. People remain very confused about what information you are seeking, what you will do with it and how they can influence the Plan outcome. You are under time pressures brought on by the State and exacerbated by the pandemic. But giving information is not the same as understanding needs. No planning process can be successful if people feel they are not being heard and can have a real impact. I would like to propose concrete steps to improve the General Plan community outreach effort after detailing our concerns.

Now that we are cautiously opening up in-person gatherings, we should take advantage of people’s desire to “get out of my home” and channel that into needs-based, in-person, “give and take” community needs identification sessions.

To re-engage people and get them excited about participating in the General Plan, there should be multiple convenient, approachable, loosely organized events, organized with recognized community leaders, to solicit detailed feedback on the needs and realities of San Mateo’s various communities. Zoom meetings have made giving input easier and must continue to be an option for community outreach. Zoom sessions, however, do not create the conversational, people-to-people environment of in-person meetings that lead to the insights you need to do your planning jobs.

Whether I have spoken with residents in Beresford or North Central, homeowners or renters, small business owners or employees, young people, visitors, etc., I hear the same questions:

- 1) What is the goal of getting “community input” for the General Plan? Is it to truly understand community needs and use the input to drive the process, or is it merely to “check the box” so you can say you’ve talked to the community?
- 2) Why aren’t we being asked about our specific needs on a day to day, rather than a theoretical, basis? I don’t understand all this “planning stuff,” but I can tell you what my life is like, what I need, what I like, and ideas I have to make our City better. It’s the planners’ job to translate our feedback into the General Plan, but they need our input to create a solid General Plan that will serve our city well;

- 3) How can I give good feedback when it's hard for me to understand how my feedback is going to be used?
- 4) I came to an earlier General Plan meeting where they asked us to put dots on wall posters and build Lego models of what we wanted to see. What happened to that input? All I heard was "We gathered community input." But I never saw a write up of my particular session or heard an explanation of how that input influenced the Plan.
- 5) How do the things I am being asked to comment on, e.g. the draft alternative scenarios, reflect the needs of my community or the input I already have given?
- 6) We participated in the last General Plan, or in feedback sessions since then, and don't feel that our input was taken seriously. Why should we participate now?
- 7) I don't have time to read City newsletters, etc. Why don't the planners come to where I am...the supermarket or farmers market; my business; my kids' school, our parks, places of worship, etcwhere they can better understand my needs and get more people's feedback? And don't just do it once...come back so word of mouth gets more people.
- 8) How are the opinions of different parts of our community weighed, e.g. renters, homeowners, business owners, employees, developers, young people, visitors, people wanting to live in San Mateo? Are you clear on which opinions are coming from whom and how are you evaluating them to ensure the best decisions are being made for the whole community? Show that to us, don't just ask us who we are.
- 9) You're asking me about housing needs, but not about the needs of schools, public transit, transportation, open spaces, support businesses, water supply, public safety, etc. that would arise from the changes these housing needs would create. How can I tell you about housing needs without also telling you, at the same time, about the needs in all these other areas?
- 10) What about design standards to ensure we have an attractive, as well as a vibrant, City?
- 11) You say, "We'll address that later" ("that" being impact on all the non-housing areas). But what the level of support of these non-housing areas is will have a big impact on what I say about which housing options I like. Why can't we share all our needs up front? Won't it make your jobs easier, the Plan stronger and the ability for San Mateans to understand and support it better?
- 12) Our lives, our businesses, our schools, our (you fill in the blank) have changed so much due to the pandemic. While some things will go back to the "way they were" before, many won't (e.g. work habit, traffic patterns, demographics, etc.). So why aren't you asking about how our lives/businesses etc. have changed and take that into consideration? (Note: no one's believing it when they hear at the General Plan sessions that "experts have studied this and believe that, over the long term, there will not be major shifts in personal or work patterns, etc.)
- 13) Why can't we talk about the opportunities and challenges that the pandemic has created and how the General Plan can take advantage of/address these?

The recent set of meetings on the 3 Alternative Study Scenarios demonstrated how the community outreach process has gone off track. Participants were told not to share what they liked, or didn't like, about the scenarios but, instead, whether there were considerations being left out of the scenarios that should be added. This was an unrealistic request when this was the first time most people had to talk about the General Plan in a year, and the first time most of them had seen the 3 alternative draft scenarios. It also sounded like the planners had already made up their minds in many areas. The fact that the presenters and facilitators said repeatedly that "we understand these maps are very difficult to understand via Zoom" should have made the Planning team guess that participants would be frustrated and confused from the start, and not give good feedback.

Both meetings were rushed and too much information was shared. Participants couldn't digest the information thoughtfully and consider the impact of the scenarios on their current lives and the future lives they would like to see available in San Mateo. There was no room for thoughtful discussion. The break-out room facilitators did what they could, but they had to keep pushing their agendas forwards due to time constraints. I kept hearing "Well, we don't have

time to talk about that." Even I, who knows more than the average San Matean about all of this, found myself overwhelmed at times and unable to give more than cursory feedback.

If the objective of the meetings was to "check the box" about talking to the public, then they were successful. But if the objective was to hear from many different parts of our community how different types of growth would impact their daily lives and help or hurt them, and what the scenarios left out, then these three meetings failed. The feedback I received from the variety of groups I already have mentioned was uniformly negative, as was their sense, as a result, of the overall General Plan process.

I hope you take my feedback as constructive input to make the General Plan process stronger. What are my suggestions as to how to re-engage the various segments of our San Mateo community and build public support for the General Plan process?

- 1) Partner with key community groups (e.g. SMUHA, San Mateo Area Chamber of Commerce, DSMA, faith-based groups, SMFCUSD, San Mateo schools and PTA's, youth organizations and others) to hold sessions, hosted by these groups and focused on determining their current needs, their issues with San Mateo and what they'd like to see in future. Then solicit specific solutions that the General Plan could incorporate to address these needs and opportunities (keep these solution-oriented, rather than gripe sessions). Share the output of every outreach session and refer back to them;
- 2) Fan out to all the public forums opening up across the City, e.g. farmers markets, food markets, youth sports games, 4th of July celebrations, targeted cultural events, etc. and set up tables to talk, gather ideas for solutions and get reactions to Planning scenarios;
- 3) Make these listening sessions regular, e.g. every Little League game, every week at the farmers markets, etc., so people catch on to what you'd doing and participate;
- 4) Staff events with Planning staff, Council Members, members of the City Boards and Commissions and other City staff, as well as members of the groups you are partnering with to run the event. This job should be everyone's responsibility, not just the job of the Planning staff. We all must learn about our communities' needs and wants;
- 5) Expand the General Plan Sub-Committee to include one representative of each partner group so that they can educate their community throughout the General Plan process...share the work!;
- 6) Make General Plan updates and upcoming events a monthly agenda item for the San Mateo City Council, just as is done with COVID-19 updates, to build further public awareness, confidence and engagement in the Plan.

Council Member Papan has called for door-to-door community outreach in support of the General Plan. I welcome that idea, as well as the statistically significant surveys proposed by the Planning staff. The actions I have recommended would make those actions stronger.

Christina and Julia, the General Plan 2040 is too important to our City's future not to have strong and diverse public input. The various members of the public will not always agree with each other or with City staff. But, if the public feels they have been heard, there is a much greater chance to create active public engagement in a constructive manner, and stronger buy-in for the final General Plan 2040 recommendations.

Thank you for listening to my General Plan 2040 concerns and suggestions. I look forward to your response and to helping the General Plan 2040 process in any way I can.



Lisa Diaz Nash
San Mateo Resident

From: Robert Whitehair <>
Sent: Monday, May 17, 2021 2:43 PM
To: Clerk <cityclerk@cityofsanmateo.org>
Subject: Agenda Item 13 tonight

To The San Mateo City Council and staff

Thank you for the opportunity to address the City Council on Agenda Item 13 on the May 17th agenda – General Plan and Housing Element update.

I very much support “Potential Outreach Approach” option 3 – an approach to reach out to community members whose views we may be missing. Working directly, not just indirectly, with local non-profit community groups and other established organizations will be most effective.

Before COVID, many of us attended in person, most of the General Plan Subcommittee meetings, the review sessions and the workshops. I have also been following along with the online meetings, fortunately having the time to devote to this.

You will be happy to know that for the meetings I attended, Council and staff have created a robust process, one that is dynamic and thorough. Special kudos to staff and council for its new direction and additional funding that started almost 2 years ago. That new direction was quite noticeable in its effectiveness.

Council now has another opportunity to make further improvements to its outreach.

So far, the outreach at widely advertised public meetings has included highly technical but sometimes barely understandable jargon and technical language, available mostly online only.

As good as the process has been so far, it has not always been easy for attendees to draw a direct connection between the Housing Element/General Plan, to the personal lives of every San Mateo resident. That has been true even for those with a background in city planning. Often, the current round of outreach has been, by default, more monologue than engaging dialogue directed towards problem solving. I would like to see that change.

There is an example locally of an outreach process that has worked to increase the dialogue and problem solving process.

Half Moon Bay is currently updating its Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP). The outreach undertaken there is an example of what many believe would work in San Mateo for the General Plan and Housing Element update.

For the CAAP, Half Moon Bay received a grant from the County of San Mateo Office of Sustainability. This grant allowed the city to meet residents in the places where they live, meet, and work, held at times and places when the largest number of people were available.

Half Moon Bay reached out to already established Latinix, youth and senior groups. These included Senior Coastsiders, the Latinix group Ayudando Latinos A Soñar or ALAS, and an established youth group. The grant funded non-profit staff work, meeting space and food for the meetings.

Because known non-profits were reaching out, climate action was made personal – describing the impact to lives of the members. The dialogue was powerful and intense.

Bluntly, you have heard enough from long time homeowners, including me. In order to reach out to a very broad cross section of San Mateo residents, new steps are necessary. This will make the housing situation personal, and better information will be gathered.

Anything you can do to reach out to a broader range of people would be fantastic for all residents.

Please reach out directly to non-profits and other San Mateo organizations to engage them, to have them engage their members. Nothing beats residents meeting in familiar settings with familiar people.

Thank you

Robert Whitehair
San Mateo