

## MEMORANDUM

DATE September 29, 2022  
TO San Mateo City Council  
FROM Joanna Jansen and Angelica Garcia, PlaceWorks  
SUBJECT Summary of Planning Commission Input on the Draft Policies and Actions

This memorandum summarizes the Planning Commission (PC) input on the draft policies and actions from their meeting on September 27, 2022. The PC reviewed and provided feedback on the policies and actions for the Land Use, Community Design and Historic Preservation, and Safety Elements.

### LAND USE ELEMENT

- General agreement with the General Plan Subcommittee's input on the Land Use Element.
- The following comments were made about Goal LU-1:
  - Replace "orderly" with "balanced" and "citizens" with "residents" in Goal LU-1.
  - Replace "plan carefully for orderly growth" with "implement sustainable and equitable growth" in Goal LU-1. Add "environmental" after "economic."
  - One Commissioner was okay with keeping "orderly" but recommends adding "balanced."
  - Include an action or policy in the General Plan that give the PC a tool to ensure that the City has balanced jobs and housing growth over the next 20 years. Examples of specific plan policies were provided:
    - East Whisman Precise Plan encourages a healthy jobs and balance ratio by requiring 3 units of housing for every 1,000 square feet of commercial.
    - Redwood City's Downtown Specific Plan specified maximum limits for new residential units, office space and new retail space.
  - One Commissioner was unsure if the General Plan should set requirements or caps for the number of new residential units and commercial or retail office space. Instead, they recommended adding an action that says "study the possible implementation of jobs-housing balance guidelines."
- The following comments were received about Policy LU-P1.1:
  - Consider how we can lift up places like North Central and gain parity with more affluent neighborhoods without displacement. Look at actions that will meaningfully achieve this issue. Provide examples from other jurisdictions.
  - Add "place an emphasis on desegregating high-value neighborhoods through innovative approaches and by integrating affordable housing into those areas."
- The following comments were received about Action LU-A1.1:

- Make the language more specific.
- Change “periodically” to “yearly” or set a time period. The City could track office and retail development on a yearly basis, consistent with how housing is tracked.
- Flesh out what community benefits we are looking for as early as possible. Do not aggregate the jobs-housing balance. Community benefits in exchange for taller heights could include fair labor provisions, or metrics for maintaining a jobs housing balance, and below market rate housing above the required amounts. One Commissioner suggested a new action to “study community benefits prioritization or standards.” These comments are in response to Policy LU-P2.2.
- Revise Policy LU-P3.1 to say “individuals, families and households.”
- Add a new action in connection with Policy LU-P3.5 that says “study, and as feasible, implement economic incentives to encourage and sustain the development of support services, particularly in underserved areas.”
- Add “incentivize through fee reduction and visitor perks, sustainable modes of travel, to and from the city, to reduce both the use of air travel and gas powered vehicles” at the end of Policy LU-P3.7.
- Change the word “accessible” in Policy LU-P3.8 since the word can be used to refer to access for people with disabilities, which does not appear to be what this policy is referencing.
- Revise Policy LU-P3.9 to make the uses more general, instead of specifying uses. Recommended changes to air quality policies would add clarity to the statement that residential uses should be located as far as possible from roadways.
- Disagree with “establish residential densities consistent with surrounding densities” in Policy LU-P3.14 about school site reuse. Clarify and simplify this policy. Maintaining open space in the neighborhood is important as well.
- Agree with Policy LU-P5.2.
- Add language ensuring new plans for Bridgepoint include “robust and safe access for pedestrians, bikes, and transit riders to connect with the City’s transit corridors such as Caltrain and El Camino Real” in Action LU-A7.1.
- Incorporate the language Commissioner Nugent previously provided at the General Plan Subcommittee meeting for Action LU-A8.5. It is also important to improve housing conditions in North Central without displacement.
- Consider if Action LU-A8.1(d) could be a burden for small businesses.
- Add “focus the effects of climate calamities on the less advantaged communities and how to protect them from eminent danger and displacement, and just as importantly, how to rebuild their community after major incidences” at the end of Policy LU-P10.1.
- Change “five years” to “three years” for greenhouse gas inventories in Action LU-A10.3.
- Revise Action LU-A10.4 to include “map out potential microgrid locations and partner with Peninsula Clean Energy to implement a sustainable and resilient system that can be used as a pilot program for locally generated power not reliant on outside power sources. The

districtwide system would also serve as a safe zone during times of interruption to the typical power sources.”

- Concerned about unintended outcomes that may result from Action LU-A12.1. Do not agree with studying fiscal neutrality on a project by project basis. Study a “balanced” fiscal neutrality policy. Link the study to a jobs-housing ratio and complete the fiscal analysis on a district level instead of parcel by parcel. Revise the action to strike out “that would require developers of projects that[...]Community Facilities Districts.” Add “Any fiscal neutrality policy shall be linked to a jobs-housing balance goal.”
- One Commissioner requested more information on why fiscal neutrality is being included in the General Plan.
- Add an action below Goal LU-13 that says “streamline new residential construction when they meet objective design standards.”
- Add a statement in the General Plan that says “make climate change the overriding factor in amending the General Plan as it pertains to all other elements of the plan. Implement actions to improve and prevent the known and projected affects of climate change”.
- Add a new action to “partner with the County of San Mateo and other jurisdictions to explore the feasibility of a public bank focused on local infrastructure funding and efforts to alleviate impacts of climate change.”
- Use “displacement” instead of “gentrification” in the policies and actions.
- Add an action focused on increasing the urban tree canopy.
- Agree with the environmental justice policies and actions.

## **COMMUNITY DESIGN AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION ELEMENT**

- There was a question about whether Policy CD-1.2 is still needed in the General Plan or if the policy should be deleted. Views of the hills are already being impeded by new development, e.g. in Fiesta Gardens or near Trader Joe’s.
- Define what the criteria is for a scenic roadway in Policy CD-1.3. It is important to see the foothills and the bay, but maintaining scenic views should not stifle housing.
- Policy CD-P2.1 is important.
- Ensure the requirement of replanting trees in Policy CD-P2.2 is not a burden on low-income residents.
- Delete “encourage planting of” and say “plant” instead in Policy CD-P2.7.
- The following comments were made about historic preservation and Goal CD-3:
- Concern historic districts may be a type of downzoning because it limits the use of the property to less than it would otherwise be.
- Add a policy to “fiscally offset a historic district designation that negatively affects affirmatively furthering fair housing due to the reduction of available land resources per the new designation.”
- Add a policy to “explore a moratorium on new historic districts until City has met current and past regional housing needs allocation for affordable housing.”

- Add a policy to “establish an ordinance that would prohibit a new historical district until it has met its fair share of affordable regional housing needs allocation quota within its boundaries.”
- Good objective design standards should recreate what people like about historic buildings. Fear of loss of beautiful buildings should be treated as legitimate and real. Create policies that can produce buildings the community would like to see at a scale that meets our needs and does not prevent development.
- Incorporate public awareness into all the actions under this goal.
- Historic preservation embodies shared community history and how we make meaning in our own lives. Architecture, history, memory, and meaning all come into play. State and federal standards are about events and people, not just buildings.
- Need updated and complete surveys and draft standards about historic resources. Facilitate dialog about what is worthy of preservation to make things less adversarial and more about a shared value of where we live.
- There needs to be clear language in the policies.
- Define the “local historic preservation objectives” mentioned in Action CD-A3.2. Defining the objectives should involve community engagement.
- Make the definition of how resources are designated as historic stronger. This comment was in response to Policy CD-P3.3.
- Add “ensure that the public is aware of all the factors the City must consider in approving or denying a project and how past segregation policies adversely affect disadvantaged communities today and what the City is doing today to address these legacy issues” to Policy CD-P3.4. One commissioner agrees with the revisions requested by the San Mateo Heritage Alliance.
- There were several comments about the word “character” in Goal CD-4 and Goal CD-5:
  - One Commissioner said to be thoughtful and specific about what the City means when we say “character.”
  - One Commissioner asked what is San Mateo’s “unique character”?
  - One Commissioner believes the public thinks “character” means being able to look at example buildings they like and example buildings they do not like and ask for rules to encourage or require new development to produce results that look like buildings most people like.
  - One Commissioner recommended saying “physical characteristics” or a similar term to avoid confusion that “character” refers to people. They also recommended that there should be an action to establish a “brand identity package” for the City.
- Delete “encourage” and replace with “include” in Policy CD-P4.9.
- There was a question about whether we want to keep “maintain the existing quality of all neighborhoods” as mentioned in Goal CD-5. Revise this goal to say “balance the growth and evolution of residential neighborhoods with the need to maintain and enhance their existing characteristics and physical qualities, if and when such are defined in the General Plan, through the appropriate design of new development.”

- The following comments were made about Policy CD-P5.1.
  - Unclear what “compatible” means.
  - Avoid stark differences in building mass within a single block. As we update zoning throughout the city we should make blocks internally consistent. .
  - Another Commissioner noted that very tall multi-family homes could cause privacy issues for adjacent single family residences.
- Change the language in Policy CD-P5.3 and/or Policy CD-P5.4 to make these policies similar to one another since they are both discussing design standards, except one policy is for single family and the other is focused on multi-family. Could say “encourage” instead of “ensure” in Policy CD-P5.4.
- Revise Policy CD-P6.2 to say “locate windows and active uses along ground floor.”
- The PC provided the following comments about Policy CD-P6.3:
  - Façade breaks and setbacks in upper floors do not necessarily result in architectural designs that the community likes. Public preference tends to favor pre-war buildings that are designed beautifully and include intricate human-scale details, even when they are tall and upper stories do not step back
  - This policy is important but has to be based on more refined architectural and sociological understanding. The way to respect existing scale is by focusing on the architectural detail and the building width and rhythm. Develop objective design standards that avoid massiveness and monotony at ground level for new development anywhere we expect people to walk.
  - Do not overdo step-back requirements in San Mateo.
  - Delete text after “by providing breaks...”. One Commissioner did not agree with striking out this text.
  - This policy should be specific but maybe stepping back upper floors is not the right solution.
- Revise Policy CD-P6.5 to instead say “encourage commercial projects to avoid providing required parking that is visible from the ground floor or results in blank walls along any visible façade.”
- Policies CD-P3.1 and CD-P3.2 are too vague. Incorporate stronger language similar to what is included in the letter from San Mateo’s Heritage Alliance.
- The following comments were made about the letter from San Mateo Heritage Alliance related to historic resources:
  - Agree with including Goal CD-3.1. Maybe this goal can replace Policy CD-P3.1.
  - Goal CD-3.2 goes too far and should not be included.
  - There was a discussion about Action CD-A3.1, which should have been labeled as a policy in the letter. One Commissioner believes the 45-year threshold is too restrictive and the other Commissioners agreed.
  - Agree with Action CD-A3.3 (public appreciation) and Action CD-A3.5.
- Add a policy or action in the General Plan that encourages minor commercial uses, such as corner stores, in residential neighborhoods.

- One Commissioner asked if the City has defined the local historic preservation objectives mentioned in Action CD-A3.2 or if the objectives will be defined at a later date. City staff confirmed the City defined objectives in 1989, but this action brings up the need to update the objectives and fill in gaps with the City's historic preservation program.

## **SAFETY ELEMENT**

- Add “focus primarily on areas identified by the City as underserved and most vulnerable to loss of life and property due to proximity to hazardous incidences. Work to ensure funding is available to these communities as a key component of emergency readiness.” to Policy S-P1.1.
- Add “water treatment plants and pump stations” to Policy S-P1.3.
- Add “with special emphasis on the areas of concentration with less advantaged communities who are primarily located in areas of high degree of displacement due to climate catastrophes” to Action S-A1.4.
- Ensure that the safety of vulnerable road users like pedestrians is also factored into Policy S-P1.8.
- There was a question of whether the City has an inventory of unreinforced masonry buildings. If the City does not have an inventory, add an Action to “create an inventory.”
- Delete “as needed” in Action S-A3.4.
- Add “study feasibility of the formation of a sea level rise overlay zone which would allow for the creation of adaptation policies, rule, or construction codes unique to this area” to Policy S-P4.1, or create a new policy. Add a statement to coordinate this work with the Climate Action Plan.
- Change “continue” to “commit” in Action S-A4.2. Make sure the City is using the best information available.
- Revise Action S-A4.3 to include “create an independent staff position.” However, the Commissioner noted that the needed coordination would likely require multiple staff.
- Unsure if Action S-A4.5 applies to San Mateo.
- Add “continue” to the beginning of Policy S-P5.2.
- Add a policy under Goal S-7 focused on reducing per capita energy use.
- Consider how the need for cell coverage is increasing. May want to rephrase Policy S-P7.4 since it may no longer be a good idea to balance cell coverage with the desire to minimize visual impacts.
- In response to Policy S-P7.5, consider adding a policy or action about public wifi. Other cities have available and free public wifi. The PC agreed with adding a new policy to encourage free public wifi.
- The slope stability and shaking amplification maps are concerning, especially when considering where the City has placed public safety infrastructure. The substation in Zone A is providing the City with 65% of it's power. This substation is below sea level and subject to extremely high shaking amplification. A brand new wastewater treatment facility is also

being built in Zone A. Every police and fire station is in a high hazard area. The sea level rise map uses 45.5" inundation by 2100, but that figure will probably be tripled. San Mateo County is the most vulnerable county in the State to sea level rise.

- Continue working with OneShoreline. Sea level rise and inland flooding will determine San Mateo's survival over the next 20 years. Need regional help on shoreline, but the City has a responsibility to look at all public safety facilities and figure out best way to mitigate problems or move the facilities. The City should reach out to partners and put together plans to upgrade facilities. The General Plan is an extremely important document and needs to make substantial changes in how we program and site our critical public infrastructure safety components. Narrative about sea level rise will be very important for the public to understand. Explain what the role of the City is. Will take comprehensive and holistic planning that extends beyond City limits.
- Add a new action to "study options for, and set aside stable, dedicated general fund dollars, to support the efforts within the General Plan including sufficiently supporting OneShoreline."
- Some hazards are also covered in the California Building Code.