



CITY OF SAN MATEO

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Agenda Report

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TO: City Council
FROM: Drew Corbett, City Manager
PREPARED BY: Community Development Department
MEETING DATE: August 16, 2021

SUBJECT:
General Plan Update – Overview of Draft Land Use and Circulation Alternatives

RECOMMENDATION:

Approve the three Land Use and Circulation Alternatives for the General Plan Update and direct staff to proceed with a comparative evaluation of the Alternatives.

BACKGROUND:

The General Plan Update (GPU) kicked off in fall 2018 and began with a series of visioning workshops and community meetings. From April 2019 through March 2020, the General Plan team held a series of meetings and events to establish the General Plan study areas, create the range of alternatives, and confirm the draft alternatives with the community. Then, in early March 2020, the San Mateo County Health Officer began issuing Shelter in Place orders due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and City staff canceled all remaining in-person community outreach events scheduled in March and beyond. On June 15, 2020, the City Council directed staff to pause outreach activities until after the November 2020 election due to two competing land use related ballot measures, the Shelter in Place orders, and other external factors that could create public confusion or require duplication of efforts. While outreach activities were postponed, the GPU team reversed the order of tasks to prioritize non-outreach related tasks and made substantial progress on the internal review and evaluation of the Goals and Policies of the General Plan.

In late 2020, San Mateo voters passed Measure Y, which limits building height and density of new developments in the City through 2030. Additionally, the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) released the draft Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) numbers, which indicate San Mateo will need to provide a clear path forward for the development of at least 7,015 new housing units at various affordability levels, plus a buffer in case some allocated sites are ultimately developed without housing or without the housing at the prescribed affordability level.

At the January 19, 2021 City Council meeting, staff provided a status update to the Council and asked for guidance on next steps. The Council directed staff to resume General Plan community outreach activities and kick off the Housing Element Update.

The remainder of this report provides an overview of the draft alternatives process, summaries of community outreach on the GPU and Housing Element, the June 17, 2021 General Plan Subcommittee (GPS) meeting and the July 27, 2021 Planning Commission, a preview of the discussion for this meeting, and an overview of next steps in the GPU process. Note, the alternatives process is the third of six formal opportunities for the public, General Plan Subcommittee, Planning Commission, and City Council to weigh in on General Plan 2040 development milestones before any final decisions are made by City Council on the entire General Plan, which is anticipated in 2023.

DISCUSSION:

Overview of Draft Alternatives Process

The land use alternatives will explore different possible futures for how to accommodate future housing, jobs, commercial and retail establishments, and parks and open space. The City is proactively planning now to meet the requirements of State housing law, identify solutions to transportation and housing affordability issues, be prepared for the projected population and job growth in the region and locally, and address other issues such as improving community health, equity, and access to services. This work is guided by the General Plan Vision and Values established at the outset of the project as shown in Attachment 1.

The process to create the land use alternatives and to ultimately select a preferred land use scenario will take approximately two years and will be shaped by community input at every significant step of the process. In general, each step of the alternatives process includes a similar series of meetings: first, community workshop(s) and outreach events, then General Plan Subcommittee meeting(s), followed by Planning Commission meeting(s), and culminating in City Council direction. While in many cities this process is completed by technical experts without community input, San Mateo's decisionmakers desired to include the community in this phase of the GPU process in recognition of the value of hearing the community's voice on all key aspects of General Plan development.

A summary of the steps to create the land use alternatives and ultimately a preferred land use scenario is listed below. We are currently at Step 2 in this process, and the preferred land use scenario will not be selected until spring 2022.

1. **Choose study areas.** During the summer and fall of 2019, San Mateo community members were asked to provide input at workshops, meetings, and online to help identify areas of the City to study first for potential change over the next 20 years. Study areas are those areas that have the greatest potential to experience land use changes over the next 20 years. Examples of potential study areas include areas near transit; areas where current buildings are aging, vacant, or not maintained; or areas where people have expressed interest in considering redevelopment of the property through the General Plan Update process. Although most of the change will occur within the study areas, the General Plan will encompass the entire city, including residential neighborhoods. For example, any residential and commercial parcel outside the study areas may continue to develop or redevelop based on its General Plan land use designation and zoning designation. And, General Plan policies and actions regarding furthering fair housing, transportation and infrastructure improvements, public services, community health, economic development, public safety, and other topics will be applied citywide.
2. **Create a range of alternatives for each study area.** In the winter of 2019, community members shared their ideas on the different types and ranges of development that should occur in each study area. Using public feedback gathered in-person and online, and General Plan Subcommittee, Planning Commission, and City Council input on the range of alternatives, the City and project consultants prepared three draft land use and transportation alternatives. These draft alternatives consider different locations and intensities of development that could occur over the next 20 years for each identified study area. The three alternatives reflect recently built and approved projects and do not propose change to properties zoned R-1 (One-Family Residential), whether or not they are located within a study area. We are currently in this step and are collecting community input to refine the range of three alternatives. This is further discussed in the "Draft Alternatives Community Input" section below.
3. **Evaluate and compare alternatives.** By fall 2021, the land use alternatives will have been finalized, and City staff and consultants will begin to compare the differing outcomes of these alternative scenarios against a set of metrics. The evaluation will consider things like:
 - Overall character;
 - Environmental sustainability;
 - Traffic and circulation impacts;
 - Development feasibility and amount that would be allowed;
 - Impacts on utilities and public services;
 - Public health;
 - City's fiscal health;

- Potential community benefits; and
 - Applicable state laws/regulations.
4. **Select a preferred alternative for further study.** In winter 2022, the City will present the results of the alternatives evaluation to the community and decisionmakers to choose a preferred scenario for each study area after considering the relative benefits, trade-offs, and potential impacts of each alternative. The preferred scenario will likely be created by mixing and matching different combinations of housing and commercial development in each study area.
 5. **Refine the preferred scenario to become the updated General Plan Land Use map.** In spring 2022, the preferred scenario will be developed through a robust public engagement process. The preferred land use scenario will be the combination of the individual preferred scenarios for each study area. City Council will provide final direction on the preferred scenario, and it will become the basis for the land use and circulation maps in the Draft General Plan and will undergo additional analysis in the Draft Environmental Impact Report.

Overview of the Draft Alternatives

The draft land use alternatives explore a range of residential growth within ten Study Areas based on both response to community input, and to accommodate the draft State mandated Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) of 7,015 housing units for the 2023-2031 Housing Element Cycle. The City of San Mateo must ensure that there is enough land zoned at appropriate densities to accommodate the assigned RHNA, plus a buffer, which is distributed among a range of income categories (market rate and affordable). A buffer is necessary to ensure that if the sites listed in the Housing Element are developed without housing, or are developed with less than the full amount of housing claimed in the Housing Element, there is sufficient remaining capacity to ensure an ongoing supply of sites for the full RHNA during the eight years of the Housing Element Cycle. The State Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) recommends a buffer of least 15%-30%, but many jurisdictions provide a buffer of up to 50%.

Preliminarily, the draft alternatives are exploring approximately 10,000, 15,000, and 20,000 new residential units. By comparison, San Mateo today has just over 39,000 homes. Table 1 provides a summary of the draft land use alternatives. All alternatives keep job growth constant despite varying residential growth, with the assumption that the City would not implement policies to either significantly stimulate, nor significantly dampen, job growth. The draft alternatives evaluation will include an assessment of future jobs/housing balance given these assumptions.

The draft land use alternatives, shown in Attachments 2 and 3, are generally described as follows:

- **Land Use Alternative A**
Has the least change in designations, the lowest residential growth, and is consistent with Measure Y.
- **Land Use Alternative B**
Has the second-highest residential growth and spreads growth and midrange heights more evenly across all 10 study areas. Outlying Study Areas like 6, 10, and 2 become small villages that incorporate office, residential, and mixed-use development. Alternative B assumes some targeted exceptions to Measure Y on sites in the Mixed-Use High or Residential High categories.
- **Land Use Alternative C**
Has the highest residential growth and concentrates growth, change, tallest heights, and density near transit in Study Areas 3 and 4, and is not consistent with Measure Y.

The building blocks of the land use alternatives are the land use categories described and illustrated on the Place Types Menu in Attachment 4.

Table 1 – Summary of Draft Land Use Alternatives

	Existing (2018)	Alternative A (Net New)	Alternative B (Net New)	Alternative C (Net New)
Homes	39,200	+10,910	+15,820	+20,830
Population	104,500	+33,050	+39,235	+58,320
Jobs	52,800	+15,430	+15,430	+14,990

Source: PlaceWorks, 2020

The draft circulation alternatives explore different ways people could travel throughout San Mateo, improving bicycle, pedestrian, and transit access to connect residents to regional transportation systems. All the draft circulation alternatives assume pedestrian and bicycle improvements consistent with existing City planning documents. The draft circulation alternatives, shown in Attachment 5, are generally described as follows:

- Circulation Alternative A – A Walkable City**
 This alternative aims to create walkable communities throughout San Mateo by prioritizing pedestrian corridors, pedestrian improvements to challenging intersections, and implementing traffic calming and safety improvements near highway onramps. This alternative envisions a two-block pedestrian-only street downtown.
- Circulation Alternative B – Prioritizing Regional Connections**
 This alternative aims to increase and improve transit access to and from major connections in San Mateo by adding new shuttle or bus connections from Study Areas 3, 6, and 10 to the Hillsdale Caltrain station, prioritizing dedicated HOV and bus lanes, and adding Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) improvements to El Camino Real.
- Circulation Alternative C – Supporting, Walking, Regional Connections, and Emerging Mobility Solutions**
 This alternative combines the local and regional transportation improvements of Alternatives A and B, while using inventive urban design downtown, inspired by Barcelona’s “superblocks” that allow vehicle access, while diverting cut-through vehicles to create a pedestrian focused, car-light space downtown. In addition, this alternative would explore an automated micro-mobility circulator (such as an autonomous vehicle shuttle) within the City limits.

The Draft Circulation Alternatives explore different ways people could travel throughout the city, including the 10 study areas. Any of the Draft Circulation alternatives could be tailored to support the development proposed in the three Draft Land Use Alternatives. As required by State law, the preferred circulation scenario will show existing and proposed circulation routes and improvements that are sized and located in order to efficiently serve the preferred land use scenario. This means the preferred circulation scenario will identify how to connect housing to jobs and services, likely through a combination of bicycle, pedestrian, and transit improvements in addition to improvements to the existing roadway network.

Relationship Between Measure Y and Draft Land Use Alternatives

Measure Y was passed by voters in November 2020 and has a sunset date of 2030. It extended height and density limits on new residential development. This General Plan looks out beyond that sunset date to the year 2040. Therefore, some ideas in these alternatives explore land use designations that would allow buildings with six or more stories, particularly in Study Areas 3 and 4 near the Caltrain stations. If a preferred land use scenario is selected that considers implementing heights and densities above what is allowed by Measure Y before the sunset date of 2030, then the City would need to ask voters to approve those changes before they could be implemented.

Relationship Between Housing Element Update and Draft Land Use Alternatives

The housing element is a required section of the General Plan that provides policies and programs to ensure that San Mateo can accommodate housing for all members of the community at all income levels. That work is required to include an analysis of fair housing in all neighborhoods of San Mateo. Although the Housing Element is legally a part of the General Plan, the two projects are on parallel but separate tracks in order to ensure that the Housing Element meets State-

imposed deadlines for adoption by the end of 2022. The General Plan team is working very closely with the Housing Element team to ensure that these two important efforts are integrated and that the land use alternatives process is consistent with all statutory requirements that the City must meet in the Housing Element update. Staff is comfortable that all three draft land use alternatives, as proposed, can support the City's ability to meet all applicable fair housing requirements in the Housing Element. It should also be noted that while the General Plan update will identify potential changes in land use in the alternative scenarios, the Housing Element will evaluate specific sites citywide and establish programs and policies to address fair housing conditions citywide.

Draft Alternatives Community Input

As discussed above, the General Plan team is asking the community and decisionmakers if we are considering a sufficient range of alternatives and/or whether there are any ideas missing that should be studied during the alternatives evaluation process.

When San Mateo County began to shelter-in-place in early March 2020, the General Plan team was in the process of vetting three draft land use alternatives that consider a range of possible growth scenarios and land use designations within ten study areas. The General Plan team hosted an in-person open house on March 3, 2020 just before the Shelter in Place orders were established. After Shelter in Place occurred, outreach for the General Plan Update was paused as described above. In March 2021, the City resumed outreach efforts for the General Plan and Housing Element, hosting 11 virtual workshops and launching an online survey between March and May. Table 2 provides a summary of the number of participants at the open house, virtual workshops, and for the online survey.

In total, 211 community members participated in the draft alternatives open house and virtual workshops. At the March 2020 open house, visitors could arrive at any point during the event and choose to visit stations that explained the draft alternatives by subsets of the study areas. There was also a station on the draft circulation alternatives. Each station had a facilitator and a notetaker to capture comments.

The April and May 2021 draft alternatives workshops began with an overview of the General Plan and a summary of the outreach process. Participants also learned about the steps to create land use alternatives and how reviewing the draft alternatives was one of many early steps in an extensive process to decide upon a preferred land use and transportation scenario. A question and answer period followed the presentation which focused on clarifying information about the draft alternatives process.

Using the Zoom breakout rooms, participants were broken into four breakout rooms and were visited by rotating facilitators who presented information about the draft alternatives by subsets of the study areas or the draft circulation alternatives. There were a total of four breakout room discussion cycles that were roughly 25 minutes each. The discussions were grouped as follows:

- Study Areas 1-North, 4, 5 and 7
- Study Areas 1-Central, 1-South, 3, and 8
- Study Areas 2, 6, 9, and 10
- Draft Circulation Alternatives

Table 2 – Draft Alternatives Community Engagement

Date	Outreach Event	Participants
Tuesday, March 3, 2020	Draft Alternatives Open House	29
Wednesday, March 24, 2021	Introduction to the General Plan Workshop #1	93
Saturday, March 27, 2021	Introduction to the General Plan Workshop #2	65
Tuesday, March 30, 2021	Introduction to the Housing Element Workshop #1 (San Mateo County)	321*
Saturday, April 3, 2021	Introduction to the Housing Element Workshop #2 (San Mateo City)	128*

Saturday, April 10, 2021	Introduction to the General Plan Workshop #3 (in Spanish)	0**
Thursday, April 15, 2021	Draft Alternatives Virtual Workshop #1	95
Saturday, April 17, 2021	Draft Alternatives Virtual Workshop #2	50
Thursday, April 22, 2021	Let's Talk Housing: All About RHNA Workshop	76*
Tuesday, May 4, 2021	Introduction to the Housing Element Workshop #3 (San Mateo City)	86*
Tuesday, May 18, 2021	Draft Alternatives Virtual Workshop #3	37
Tuesday, April 14, 2021 – Monday, May 31, 2021	Draft Alternatives Online Survey	471 responses

**Number of participants for the Housing Element workshops is based on the total registrants. These workshops were hosted in partnership with the San Mateo County Let's Talk Housing Initiative.*

***Although the Spanish workshop had no live participants, the meeting recording has been viewed 45 times.*

Following each presentation of the draft alternatives by study area or the draft circulation alternatives, participants asked questions and provided feedback on the draft alternatives. The breakout room facilitators asked the groups to focus on answering these questions:

- Is this the right range of alternatives to further study?
- Are there ideas missing that you would like to see evaluated?

A summary of the community input from the draft alternatives workshops is included in Attachment 6. This summary documents all comments that responded to the two questions above, regardless of if mentioned by one person or many people, and also summarizes the key themes from the comments received. The workshop materials, meeting recordings, breakout room notes, and other comments can be found at: <https://strivesanmateo.org/workshops-pop-up-events/>.

In addition, the City launched an online survey about the draft alternatives from April 14, 2021 through May 31, 2021. In total, the City collected 471 responses to the survey. Survey participants could submit more than one response. The survey responses can be viewed at: <https://strivesanmateo.org/online-participation-results/>.

Workshop materials, including the meeting recording and summary of questions and answers, from the General Plan and Housing Element Introduction workshops can also be found at: <https://strivesanmateo.org/workshops-pop-up-events/>.

General Plan Subcommittee Meeting

On Thursday, June 17, 2021, the General Plan Subcommittee (GPS) met to review and discuss the draft land use and circulation alternatives. Following the staff presentation and public comments, the GPS provided comments and feedback, which focused on the same two questions asked at the open house and virtual community workshops. Attachment 7 provides a detailed summary of the GPS feedback on the draft alternatives. The GPS meeting materials and recording are available at: <https://strivesanmateo.org/general-plan-subcommittee/>

Planning Commission Meeting

On Tuesday, July 27, 2021, the Planning Commission (PC) met to review and discuss the draft land use and circulation alternatives. The PC received both written correspondence from individuals/entities before the meeting and verbal public comments at the meeting. Attachment 8 provides a more detailed summary of the PC's feedback and comments on the draft alternatives. The Planning Commission meeting materials and recording are available at: <https://www.cityofsanmateo.org/3971/Agendas-Minutes-Public-Meeting-Portal>

Draft Alternatives City Council Discussion

For this meeting, the General Plan team is asking the City Council to review the community input on the draft alternatives and provide feedback on the same questions addressed by the community, the GPS, and the PC:

- Is this the right range of alternatives?
- Are there ideas missing that you would like to see evaluated?

At this point, our goal is to confirm that we are considering a sufficient range of alternatives before the General Plan team conducts an in-depth evaluation to compare the pros, cons, and outcomes of each alternative on housing, character, traffic, public services, health and equity, environmental sustainability, City's fiscal health, conformance with applicable state laws, and other topics.

The General Plan team will provide an overview presentation at this meeting and a high-level walk through of the three draft circulation alternatives and the draft land use alternatives by study area. More detailed information about the draft circulation and land use alternatives is provided in the attachments to this report. As the City Council considers the draft alternatives and the input from the community, GPS, and PC, staff asks that you consider whether:

- Parcel-specific changes are needed or if an idea is missing in one or more of the alternatives. For example, the draft alternatives might consider the same land use for all three alternatives and you might want to explore one or more different options for that parcel.
- The draft alternatives should consider a different land use category for a study area. For example, you might notice that the alternatives for a study area do not consider office uses and you would like this use to be considered in at least one of the alternatives.

The City Council is not being asked to vote on, rank, or choose among the three alternatives. Choosing among the alternatives, including a blend of various aspects of each alternative, to create the preferred scenario will happen when the results of the draft alternatives evaluation are presented to the community, GPS, PC and City Council in spring 2022.

Next Steps

The final step in this phase of the GPU is for Council to consider all of the input as outlined above and provide direction to staff on finalizing the three draft alternatives. Once the three alternatives have been finalized, the General Plan team will evaluate the draft alternatives over the fall 2021 (Step 3). In winter 2022, the results of the alternatives evaluation will be presented to the community and decisionmakers to choose a preferred scenario for each study area through a robust public engagement process (Step 4). In spring 2022, following reviews by the GPS and Planning Commission, the City Council will provide final direction on the preferred scenario (Step 5). This Council decision will become the basis for the land use and circulation maps in the Draft General Plan.

BUDGET IMPACT:

There are no direct budgetary impacts to taking this action.

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION:

In accordance with Public Resources Code section 21065, the City Council's review and consideration of the draft land use and circulation alternatives for the General Plan Update effort is not a project subject to CEQA because it can be seen with certainty that it will not cause a physical change in the environment. It should be noted that environmental review will be completed for the General Plan Update project as a whole, prior to any formal decision on the project and that noticing will be provided for future public meetings on the General Plan Update.

NOTICE PROVIDED

All meeting noticing requirements were met.

ATTACHMENTS

Att 1 - General Plan Vision Statement

Att 2 - Overview of Draft Alternatives

Att 3 - Draft Land Use Alternatives by Study Area

Att 4 - Place Types Menu

Att 5 - Draft Circulation Alternatives

Att 6 - Summary of Public Comments from Draft Alternatives

Att 7 - Summary of General Plan Subcommittee Comments on Draft Alternatives

Att 8 - Summary of Planning Commission Comments on Draft Alternatives

Att 9 - Frequently Asked Questions about the Alternatives Process

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