

MINUTES - DRAFT

SPECIAL MEETING OF THE LANCASTER PLANNING COMMISSION

September 29, 2008

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Vose called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

INVOCATION

Commissioner Burkey did the invocation.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Commissioner Jacobs led the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag of the United States of America.

ROLL CALL

Present: Commissioners Burkey, Haycock and Jacobs, Vice Chairman Smith and Chairman Vose.

Absent: Commissioners Ervin and Mahli

Also present were the Deputy City Attorney (Joe Adams), Planning Director (Brian Ludicke), General Plan Project Manager (Dave Ledbetter), Associate Planner (Chuen Ng), City Engineer (Carlyle Workman), City Traffic Engineer (Michelle Cantrell), Recording Secretary (Tess Epling), and an audience of approximately 2 people.

PRESENTATION

PRESENTATION ON THE DRAFT LANCASTER GENERAL PLAN POLICY DOCUMENT.

Chairman Vose opened the public hearing at 6:00 p.m. to review and discuss the City-wide General Plan Update. The special meeting will provide for an overview and discussion of the General Plan Policy Document. Brian Ludicke stated that the focus of tonight's meeting would be on the General Plan Policy Document and that Dave Ledbetter would lead the presentation. Brian turned the meeting over to Dave Ledbetter.

Dave Ledbetter explained that over the course of the next several meetings, staff would introduce draft components of the General Plan to the Planning Commission for review and discussion. He reminded the Commission that their review of the Draft Housing Element during June and July actually resulted in the first recommendation regarding the General Plan program. Dave related that as one of the seven state mandated elements, the Housing Element is actually a component of the General Plan Policy Document. Therefore, review of the remaining sections of the draft Policy Document is a logical next step in the Commission's consideration of the General Plan. Dave noted that the Policy Document represents the foundation of the General Plan program, and that the goals and objectives contained in the Policy Document embody the long-term vision for the development of Lancaster.

Dave explained that the Policy Document consists of eight chapters. The first chapter contains the introduction which gives a detailed overview of the Lancaster General Plan. Dave indicated that a thorough discussion of the introduction was necessary in order to have a good understanding of what the draft General Plan entails. With the aid of a PowerPoint presentation, Dave explained that the General Plan represents the constitution for the long-term development of the City. He noted that the General Plan represents the heart of ongoing City planning efforts. Dave briefly reviewed the legislative requirements for General Plans, and noted that each city and county in California is required to adopt a jurisdictional General Plan that contains seven state-mandated elements. Dave also noted that General Plans may address as many optional issues as necessary in order to achieve required comprehensiveness. Dave informed the Commission that Lancaster took a non-traditional approach regarding the General Plan format during the 1992 update, and elected to incorporate the state-mandated elements as well as several optional elements into the seven separate plans that comprise the Policy Document. Dave presented a chart that explained the correlation between the Policy Document format and state-mandated elements.

Dave gave definitions of a goal, objective, policy and specific action and how each functioned within the hierarchy of the General Plan. Dave noted that that Goals and Objectives tend to be long-term statements of ideal outcomes that represent the community's vision for future development, while policies and specific action programs give direction and means for accomplishing the long-term vision through various implementation programs and strategies. He also explained the definitions of the various priorities that are assigned to specific actions and how these direct the timing of specific action implementation.

Dave Explained that the General Plan must address a broad range of issues and that there must be consistency between elements, within elements, and between the General Plan and the various implementation programs.

Chairman Vose commented that some people may not view elements in an equal way and inquired how that judgment could be made. He asked if equal status meant equal number of pages in the document. Dave Ledbetter responded that the definition of 'equal status' is contained in the State General Plan Guidelines, and that under this definition, every goal, objective, policy and specific action has the same bearing and weight in importance. One issue cannot be given a greater level of importance to the detriment of another issues and one element is not superior to another.

Dave presented a slide which depicted the General Plan Planning Area, which includes the incorporated City limits and the adopted Sphere of Influence. Chairman Vose noted that Plant 42 Edward Air Force Base, which is part of our sphere of influence, is not identified on the map. Dave stated that Palmdale, San Bernardino and Kern County also have some geographic relation to our Planning effort but are not contained within the sphere of influence. As for Plant 42, it is within Palmdale's sphere of influence, but is definitely important in the context of our planning efforts, and it is addressed in the General Plan.

Dave noted that the City currently contains 94 square miles but that when combined with the Sphere of Influence, the Study Area consists of some 268 square miles. Dave noted that while it is important that the General Plan address all relative issues relating to its study area, it is also necessary to address issues like air quality, and transportation that are regional in nature.

Dave displayed a slide of the Urbanizing Area and explained that the Urbanizing Area was not intended to be a development boundary but rather notes the demarcation between the "urban/rural interface". The area within the Urbanizing Area is comprised of land that is designated for "urban density" land uses like urban residential, and that with the exception of a few isolated urban residential areas, most of the land outside the Urbanizing Area is designated for rural residential land uses. Dave noted that land use studies performed early in the General Plan update indicate that there is enough vacant land within the Urbanizing Area to support the 2030 projected population growth without the necessity of converting additional rural land to urban density land uses. Therefore, all three of the land use alternatives propose to accommodate the projected growth within the Urbanizing Area.

Dave continued the presentation with a brief overview of the steps involved in reviewing and amending the General Plan. He noted that the City must continually monitor the relevance of the General Plan to ensure that it remains in touch with the community's vision for long-term growth. He noted that under state law, a jurisdiction can amend each element of the General Plan up to four times per year. He related that amending the General Plan requires discretionary action by the City Council but that modifying the priorities within the specific actions are a staff level function that sometimes is performed during the annual review of the General Plan.

Chairman Vose asked whether staff's review count as one of the four under the statute or not. Dave responded that it does not because it is a ministerial action. He indicated that if the long-term visionary goals, objectives or standards (i.e., park standards) or the land use map are being changed, for example, that is something that would be considered an amendment. Chairman Vose said that in reality, when the document is adopted by the City Council, it is a given date in time. All these milestones could be triggered. Dave explained that when the City Council initiated the General Plan process, they put a temporary hold on the filing of General Plan amendments. Normally, those applications are received and heard twice a year. The uniqueness of the General Plan update process is that it gives people the opportunity to have their input taken into consideration as part of the City-wide update without the necessity of filing for an individual amendment.

Dave subsequently gave the Commission an overview of the major long-term growth assumptions and explained that these represent important issues that the City currently faces and which will continue to affect the long-term growth of the community to the horizon year of the

General Plan. Generally, these include projected population growth, resource availability, such as water resources, the growth of local jobs and housing, land use considerations, long-term transportation issues, and fiscal impacts and considerations. Dave explained that the major assumptions are further addressed as “Issues”, “Opportunities”, and “Constraints” at the individual plan level. In reference to fiscal impacts and considerations, Chairman Vose noted that sales tax dollars is the only major source of financial revenue.

Dave reviewed the fundamental importance of the Community Vision Priorities as the underlying foundation of the new General Plan and explained the connection between the Vision Priorities, and the application of sustainable development principles in the process of updating the goals, objectives, policies and action programs of the draft General Plan, and in development of the land use alternatives. Dave emphasized that the General Plan recognizes and supports the implementation of smart growth principles and practices, and noted several examples of how the City is currently requiring the incorporation of “smart growth” practices into new development projects and City programs.

Dave explained the importance of the various master planning efforts that have occurred or which are underway, and the connection between these master plans, strategic plans, specific plans, revitalization efforts, and the implementation of the General Plan long-term goals and objectives. Chairman Vose commented that the definition of the Balanced Growth Priority in the presentation includes the word “and rural history in Lancaster”, yet these words are not included in the definition on page I-18 of the Policy Document. He said he did not have any objection; he just wanted to point it out for consistency.

Dave concluded the PowerPoint presentation on the Policy Document Introduction with a short discussion of the fundamental importance of community involvement in the success of the General Plan and in the long-term planning efforts of the City. Vice Chair Smith asked how the community outreach worked, if a certain area of the population was targeted, and if it was more reactive or proactive. Dave explained that a great deal of effort was put into the public outreach program for the General Plan. The first eight or nine months of the program focused on the various outreach efforts. The first outreach function was the conducting of a public agency forum, which involved both public and private entities like the school districts, water agencies, the electric company etc. There was a massive media campaign (TV, radio, mass mailed brochures), and the establishment of an interactive General Plan website. CDs explaining the importance of public participation in the General Plan process were seat-dropped on Metrolink and the AVTA buses in an attempt to reach the commuter population.

In July and August of 2006, Visioning workshops were held for youth groups and adults. A second series of workshops were held in April of 2007 to gain input for development of the land use alternatives, and a virtual version of this workshop was administered on the General Plan website. During the later part of 2006, staff distributed applications for formation of the General Plan Citizen’s Advisory Committee. Staff received approximately sixty five applications, many from members of the public who had attended one or more of the workshops. The GPCAC was approved by the City Council in November of 2006, and met monthly during most of 2007 to review and revise the goals and objectives, and help in the development of land use alternatives. Dave stressed that community involvement is fundamental to a successful General Plan update.

Chairman Vose asked if there were any comments from the public, and noted that a written communication was received from Alex Baharlo representing Del Sur, LLC and the Larwin Company. Mr. Baharlo commented that the vesting tentative tract map for the Del Sur project was approved in 1990, originally for 25,000 units. Due to redesigns, currently, Del Sur Ranch has shrunk in size to 2,000 units. It would include a lake, school site, two parks, trail, retail site, fire stations and a number of amenities. Engineering and sewer plans are in process. He wanted to emphasize that this community would be a node in itself, a self-sustained community. They are interested in the ideas of sustainability and LEED certification at the building/construction level. He wanted to introduce the project, and he thinks it will be one of the largest in the city. There were two parcels left out by GPCAC (they were looked at as in the outskirts of the city), and there are plans by the Larwin Company to incorporate them to Del Sur Ranch. Commissioner Burkey asked Mr. Baharlo to confirm that the letter from the applicant is requesting to change the zoning from R-15,000 to R-7,000. Mr. Baharlo answered that that was correct; Larwin Company is requesting that the two parcels to be given an R-7,000 zoning.

Chairman Vose noted that as a reminder, the process the body is embarking on will take place in this venue over a number of evenings, and once that task is completed, mapping issues will be tackled. Brian Ludicke answered that a draft EIR will be circulated, and the Planning Commission will need to evaluate the information regarding it prior to making recommendations. Public comments are expected to be received during this time, as well as during the public hearings. As the process moves further, the Commission can expect to have more of a discussion-type format. Chairman Vose inquired if the commission was expected to make a final recommendation to City Council on the document prepared and circulated based on inputs received. Counting the special meetings, the process will probably take up to early 2009, to which Brian Ludicke concurred. Dave noted that one of the special meetings will be allocated for public comments on the draft EIR.

Chairman Vose asked if it was possible to incorporate General Plan related agenda items into the regular meetings. Brian stated that this might be difficult since other important items on the regular agendas might compete for time with the General Plan; however, this is a possibility and staff will definitely keep an eye on this for opportunities. Chairman Vose said that he was concerned about the public's opportunity to be informed about these special meetings, knowing that these meetings have been posted on the website and a news release. Dave added that everyone on the direct mailing list received a postcard informing them of the date and times of this and upcoming meetings. Information is also posted on the General Plan website. Dave agreed that it is very important to keep the public notified and involved in the process.

Chairman Vose commented that on page I-18 of the Draft Policy Document, under the Balanced Growth Priority that the words "an urbanizing area is clearly defined in the map. Chairman Vose noted that regarding the Promote Active Living vision priority (top of page I-20); it is interesting to note that greenbelts and desert ambience were considered by residents. They are totally different concepts. In understanding water shortage, this plan is predicated on the fact that the city will have ample water supply. He wanted clarification on the statement on the bottom of I-21 stating, "The basic concept of sustainability is meeting the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Dave explained that measures have to be taken and addressed now so that the impacts will not be bigger issues for future generations.

Chairman Vose requested clarification regarding the sentence on page I-26 that states: "...modern development codes can help to facilitate smart growth practices by incorporating these principles into the normal approval process. He inquired if zoning regulations will be a normal way to address that. Dave answered that this is correct and that in fact, that they are being implemented now as part of standard conditions for tract maps. He gave the example of the requirement for all new projects to install a purple pipe system within the landscape maintenance districts that will use recycled water for irrigation purposes. Chairman Vose inquired about the language at the top of I-28, which states that there is no agency that oversees drilling of water in the area. He assumed that it meant water wells, to which Dave concurred.

Chairman Vose asked if there were any comments from the public regarding the introductory chapter to the Policy Document. Hearing none, the Planning Commission next turned to review and discussion of the individual plans of the Policy Document. Dave indicated that staff intended to present an overview of the purpose of each plan within the structure of the Policy Document, and then would review the goals and objectives that related to each sub-section. He further noted that both staff and the GPCAC had found the Policy Document to be generally sound at the goal and objective level, and that major revisions were not required in most areas of the document. The underlying policies and specific actions did undergo thorough review by staff and the General Plan consultant in order to comprehensively address current issues relating to the City but that many of the policies and action programs also required little or no revision.

Dave then commenced with the presentation of the Plan for the Natural Environment. He indicated that the Plan for the Natural Environment contained the following major subsections:

- Water Resources
- Air Resources
- Biological Resources
- Land Resources
- Energy Resources
- Mineral Resources
- Scenic Resources

Dave reviewed the goals and the related objectives pertaining to the above subsections. Chairman Vose inquired if there was a way to compare the modifications with the text in the adopted Policy Document. Dave indicated that the recommendations made by the GPCAC are contained as Appendix F in the GPCAC Final Report which was submitted to the Commission members at the meeting of September 2nd. However, staff will prepare a table that compares the text of each draft goal and objective with what is in the adopted Policy Document (both GPCAC and staff recommendations) for submittal to the Planning Commission at their next special meeting. Brian Ludicke added that it is important to note that GPCAC only dealt with goals and objectives, not with policies and specific actions, which came about from work with city staff and work with experts. Chairman Vose said he appreciated the clarification.

Chairman Vose inquired if Objective 3.2 coincides with the understanding of the City Council ordinance on water conservation, to which Dave said yes. Commissioner Jacobs inquired about determining the point in time when we need to have this amount of resources. Dave answered

that the EIR will examine the potential impacts to water resources. Commissioner Jacobs asked where the information on reduction of water consumption by 200 gallons/day came from. Dave said that this came out of a research conducted by the Public Works Department. Brian added that the amount would represent about a 1/3 reduction of per capita usage that would bring the number in line with other desert community consumption.

Chairman Vose commented that the requirements for Objective 3.4, pertaining to the preservation of important biological systems, would appear to impact the Fox Industrial Job/Housing Focus area since a good portion of this area is affected by such a system. Brian responded that there are areas within the Fox Field area that contains alkali mariposa habitat. The City has been working with State Department Fish and Game as part of a habitat conservation plan. The City in fact has been collecting in lieu fees. Chairman Vose noted that the environmental document should have a substantial section addressing that and its mitigation measures. Brian affirmed this and noted that the City should have a viable conservation plan.

Chairman Vose asked if there were any comments from the public regarding the Plan for the Natural Environment. Hearing none, the Commission next opened discussion on the Plan for Public Health and Safety. Dave noted that this plan contained the following subsections:

- Geology and Seismicity
- Flooding and Drainage
- Noise
- Air Installation Land Use Compatibility
- Hazardous Materials
- Crime Prevention and Protection Services
- Fire Prevention and Suppression Services
- Disaster Preparedness
- Emergency Medical Facilities

Dave then reviewed the goals and the related objectives pertaining to the above subsections. Chairman Vose noted that noise standards identified in Objective 4.3 pertained to sustained levels over periods of time and not just a single occurrence standard. Dave noted that should a project have a noise level that would not be in conformance, mitigation measures would need to be adopted. Chairman Vose asked if it would be appropriate to insert under Objective 4.6 regarding the reducing of crime information about the various commissions that the City Council created. Dave answered that the best level to accomplish this would be at the policy and specific action level.

Chairman Vose asked if there were any public comments concerning the Plan for Public Health and Safety. Hearing none, the Commission opened discussions on the Plan for Active Living. Dave noted that this plan contained the following subsections:

- Population and Housing
- Provision of School Sites/Facilities
- Park Land
- Pedestrian, Equestrian and Bicycle Trails

- Historical, Archaeological and Cultural Resources
- Cultural and Art Programs and Facilities
- Library Facilities
- Social Services Programs

Dave then reviewed the Goals and the related objectives pertaining to the above subsections. Chairman Vose asked what the City's rate of park land in conjunction with residents. Dave responded that the city originally had a standard of three acres of parkland per thousand population but that this was attained a number of years ago at which time the City raised the standard to 5 acres per 1000 population.

Commissioner Burkey asked if anything significant was being done for funding of schools. Dave noted that state law sets the level at which school impact fees can be assessed. Brian indicated that in the early 90's, cities were allowed to do a number of things that were forward thinking. If there was a situation where someone was allowed more density, the city had more latitude to require that the impact to schools be mitigated. In 1998, there was a proposition passed by the voters, a school bond. Buried within the language of the school bond was a requirement by the building industry that if a school district has adopted impact fees, these would be considered adequate mitigation for the impact of the new development. By CEQA and state laws, if a school district is collecting fees, the city cannot deny a residential development on the basis of impacted school facilities. The city has tried to act as a facilitating agency between developers and school districts. Commissioner Burkey said that it is frustrating that it seemed like our hands are tied behind our backs when it comes to the school system.

Chairman Vose asked if there were any comments from the public regarding the Plan for Active Living.

David Sinclair, former member of the GPCAC, noted that Objective 9.1 (school and education) was an issue of contention when he was on the GPCAC. He proposed not to use the word "agency" because it limits the focus to public educational facilities. He wanted to suggest the wording to reflect "educational facilities and institutions" to encompass both private and public schools.

Hearing no further comments, the Commission agreed to continue discussions of the Policy Document, beginning with the Plan for Physical Mobility, to the special meeting of October 6th.

COMMISSION AGENDA

None.

DIRECTOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The next Special Planning Commission Meeting is scheduled on October 6, 2008, at 6:00 p.m.

PUBLIC BUSINESS FROM THE FLOOR - NON-AGENDA ITEMS

None.

ADJOURNMENT

Chairman Vose declared the meeting adjourned at 8:27 p.m. to Monday, October 6, 2008, at 6 p.m., in the Council Chambers, Lancaster City Hall.

JAMES B. VOSE, Chairman
Lancaster Planning Commission

ATTEST:

BRIAN S. LUDICKE, Planning Director
City of Lancaster