

MINUTES

SPECIAL MEETING OF THE LANCASTER PLANNING COMMISSION

October 6, 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

Vice Chair Smith 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), Principal Planner (Silvia Donovan), General Plan Project Manager (Dave Ledbetter), Associate Planner (Chuen Ng), City Engineer (Carlyle Workman), Recording Secretaries (Tess Epling and Joy Reyes), and an audience of 2 people.

PURPOSE

Chairman Vose opened the public hearing at 6:00 p.m. for the review and discussion of the City-wide General Plan Update, which will provide for an overview of the General Plan Policy Document. Chairman Vose noted that the first four sections of the Policy Document were discussed at the September 29, 2008, Special Planning Commission Meeting, and tonight's meeting is a continuation of that discussion, beginning with Section 5.

PRESENTATION

Dave Ledbetter mentioned that among the materials for tonight's meeting, staff has provided, at the Commission's request, a table that compares the language of the adopted General Plan goals and objectives with those contained in the draft Policy Document. He then continued with the discussion of the draft goals and objectives contained in Section 5 "Plan for Physical Mobility".

At the conclusion of discussion of Section V, Chairman Vose opened the floor for public testimony. Dean Webb, resident of Lancaster, suggested that the City needs to adopt the Master Plan of Trails as called for by the General Plan. He indicated that if the City waits until the next plan update, it may be too late to implement a trails system. In response to inquiries from the Commission, Dave responded that when the city adopted the 1992 General Plan, it included policies and programs that called for the adoption of a Master Plan of Trails. There was also a trails map that was adopted that depicted a trails system. When the General Plan was updated in 1997, much of the outlying areas were reverted back to rural residential land use designations, thereby making the trails map, which was based on urban density development, obsolete. The requirement for the adoption of a Master Plan of trails was retained in the current adopted General Plan; however, the City just has never moved forward to adopt the plan.

Chairman Vose commented that there were references to trails, bike paths and other opportunities for transportation in the previous sections relating to the development process of commercial and residential projects. Dave confirmed that there are references to trails and trails facilities in several areas of the Policy Document including the Plan for Physical Mobility, the Plan for Active Living and the Plan for Physical Development and that the Master Plan of Parks, adopted in 2007, contains policies relating to trail systems within park areas. The Transportation Master Plan will also refer to plans for bike trails within the right of way system, but the real implementing device that will tie all of these together would be the adoption of the Master Plan of Trails.

Commissioner Jacobs stated that it was said at the last meeting that the master plan will be adopted shortly after the General Plan is adopted. Brian Ludicke answered that it would be something that is expected to follow after the adoption of the General Plan. He noted that the City has done things that have addressed alternative transportation modes. What we have not done as much is in the issue of off-street trail system (Class 1). The City is working on the Amargosa Creek area. The master plan of trails will give it more certainty.

Chairman Vose asked if it would be fair to say that trail systems would lend themselves to larger development projects. Brian responded that the Del Sur Ranch project was given its revision, part of which had an internal trail system that connected recreational systems. The City has been more open with the development community, and the Parks & Recreation Department has indicated a willingness to look at smaller development parks. Developers also recognize that it can become a selling point and improve their competitiveness. Hearing no further comments from the public, Chairman Vose opened the discussion on Section Six, "Plan for Municipal Services and Facilities".

Chuen Ng, Associate Planner reviewed the goals and objectives of the Plan for Municipal Services and Facilities. He noted that in Objective 15.1, the performance standard for parkland

the word “population” was inadvertently left out of the standard in the draft. It should read “5 acres of parkland per thousand population.”

Commissioner Burkey asked if there was a comparison between the adopted standards of Objective 15.1 and what is in the draft document. Dave indicated that this comparison is also contained in the handout mentioned earlier. Chairman Vose noted that the standard for response time for police protection has not been modified in the draft but it has been recently reported that the Sheriff’s response time has greatly improved and that they have set a sooner response time as an objective. Commissioner Burkey clarified that when he asked about where we are right now, he was referring to what the current situation is now. Dave noted that the seven-minute response time has not been modified.

Vice Chair Smith asked Commissioner Burkey if he was asking for benchmarks. Commissioner Burkey said that he wanted to know what the reality is right now to compare it with what type of improvements we are looking at. For example, if the response time for fire protection calls for 5 minutes, are we getting 5½ minutes. Dave said that what is contained in the draft document is what was received from the LA County Fire Department as their average response times. Commissioner Burkey indicated that he wanted to know if we have benchmarks to indicate where we are right now. Dave replied that he does not have current response time information but would be happy to obtain whatever information is available for the Commission’s review. Chairman Vose requested that staff check into the level of service currently as it relates to the General Plan.

Commissioner Burkey noted that at the previous meeting, the standard 5 acres per 1,000 population was mentioned but we are nowhere close to that. Dave concurred stating that it is the standard the City established. He noted that several years ago, it was 3 acres per 1,000, and when that standard was achieved, the City amended the General Plan standard to 5 acres of parkland per thousand population.

Regarding Objective 15.2, Commissioner Burkey wanted clarification regarding the City accepting solid waste from outside Antelope Valley. Carlyle Workman responded that Waste Management receives solid waste from outside the Antelope Valley, but he is not sure of the amount and frequency. He surmised that it is probably about 1,000 tons a day. The landfill is located in the County of LA. One of the things we are looking into is waste energy conversion, for the future.

Chairman Vose asked for public comments regarding the Plan for Municipal Services and Facilities. Hearing none, the Commission turned to review of Section, “the Plan for Economic Development and Vitality”.

Dave reviewed the goals and objectives of Section 7. With respect to Objective 16.5, Chairman Vose noted that the City municipal complex is tending to be boxed in with the surrounding land use. As a community of this size continues to grow, it is likely that additional municipal floor space will be needed. Brian responded that approximately years ago when the city thought through the General Plan, the opinion was that there was not much room for retail in downtown and so the downtown would be better served with offices and financial services, and government facilities. The City pursued the relocation of the of the public library and sheriff’s station to the downtown. The current change is that the City has begun to recognize the importance of the residential component in the downtown revitalization, and with that come

opportunities for retail and restaurants. The changes in the policies and programs of Objective 16.5 reflect this. Chairman Vose suggested that it would be important to clearly identify an objective to set aside sufficient land for future expansion of the municipal services if the intent is to stay and serve the public in this venue. Chairman Vose asked if there were public comments regarding the Plan for Economic Development and Vitality. Hearing none, the Commission turned to the review of Section 8 “the Plan for Physical Development”.

Dave reviewed the goals and objectives for the Plan for the Physical Environment. He noted that this section represented the state mandated Land Use Element. With respect to Table VIII-1 “General Plan Land Use Categories, Chairman Vose requested staff to explain floor area ratio and how it applies. Dave responded that the term pertains to the amount of lot that is covered by a buildings floor area. A 1.0 FAR would technically allow the entire lot to be covered by the building; however, this is usually restricted by the amount of on-site parking that will be required. The more building area you have, the greater the number of parking spaces required which in itself limits the amount of lot that can be covered by the building. Chairman Vose brought up the possibility of someone proposing an office building with a parking garage. Dave indicated that this is possible but that currently, you do not see that happening very often in Lancaster since it is too expensive to build subterranean parking and excavate the lot. Chairman Vose commented that it is not beyond the realm of possibility to consider that looking at the future. Dave concurred.

Chairman Vose then surmised that the commission would be required to hear a general plan revision if it was outside these parameters. Dave stated that it is something that you could do under the amendment provision of the General Plan. Brian added that the ratios are in place because state law requires that it be defined. Chairman Vose indicated that it might be possible to look at applying an average FAR rather than a maximum ratio to every single site and that this may be something that can be looked into. Chairman Vose noted that in talking about infill projects and encouraging developments of the urban core, it may be worth the discussion. Dave agreed and stated that with the introduction of new concepts such as mixed use and form based codes, it might be one solution for these types of situations. Brian noted that the Downtown Specific Plan gives the flexibility to operate outside the basic parameters of the zoning ordinance.

With regard to the H (Hospital) designation, Chairman Vose inquired if the residential type assisted living facilities would not be appropriate in an MR1 or MR2 designation. Dave responded that this is more appropriate with hospital related uses. Chairman Vose noted that it seems the industry is moving more towards a residential type location, with the amenities of parks. Dave responded that it is not the intent here to limit these facilities to this particular designation. Brian noted that there might be some value in exploring additional language in the MR1 and MR2 to indicate that those types of living arrangements would be permissible under certain circumstances.

Brian reiterated that for Goal 17, it is important to recognize that even though the city proposes no change, it actually embodies the goal that states the City’s vision: it does not want to be a bedroom community, nor does it want to be just a residential community forever. With the adoption of the General Plan, the hope is to expect a mix and variety of land-use types. There are a number of areas that would qualify as an in-fill development that may not be appropriate to designate for moderate or high density residential but might be better used for higher density single family residential products on infill lots designated for single family use. Brian

commented that there might be a need to look in the policy that states that if someone looks at doing an in-fill type residential project, they ought to have the ability to access a density of 8 units to an acre, which would still translate into a single family detached product, without having to go through a General Plan amendment and zone change for an MR designation which would inadvertently give a potential of 15 units to an acre.

Relating to the density ranges allowed for in the multiple family designations, Chairman Vose commented that concerns have been raised over the years to Planning Commission and City Council relative to the 15-unit and 30-unit to the acre developments. Brian said that he would appreciate any thoughts on this subject from the Commission. Chairman Vose asked if the subject could be discussed at the next meeting, and see if there are examples in the community that can be discussed. Brian responded that it could be included as a discussion item, and there will be the same discussion as the land use alternatives are explored. Dave noted that the current specific action that most closely relates to this issue is 18.2.1(c) which calls for the amendment of the zoning ordinance to allow and encourage the development of housing on infill sites designated for urban density single family residential use through RPD process.

With respect to Objective 18.3 “Establish and maintain City boundaries which are logical in terms of service capabilities, social and economic interdependences” Chairman Vose asked if that was the General Plan policy when the Del Sur project came forward. Dave said that there was little or no annexation policy at that time. Brian added that it is important to note that this particular objective and the accompanying policies and specific actions came out of a council adopted policy regarding annexations that was added to the General Plan in 1997 following the series of annexations that occurred during the late 1980s and early 1990s. This is a good reflection of what the council’s thought process was in the 1990s, which is still relevant up to today.

Chairman Vose asked if there were any public comments regarding Section 8, the Plan for Physical Development. Dean Webb, Lancaster resident, asked if staff could elaborate more on the land use for open space, primarily on Prime Desert Woodland. He wanted to know if there is anything on the eastside that is being considered. Dave responded that the open space land use designation as proposed would include parks and recreation facilities, existing parks and also The Prime Desert Woodland, joint use type flood basins, cemeteries, etc. The recently adopted Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Cultural Master Plan is the guiding document that sets out the programs that would occur within the city. Dave elaborated that since the No Project Alternative is the existing land use plan, it does not show all of the new park facilities that were adopted under the Parks Master Plan and which are shown on the other two alternatives. However, if the City were to move forward with implementing the current land use map, the map would be amended to include the new park sites as detailed in the master plan. The other two alternatives have all of the master plan parks sites shown because they were developed after adoption of the Parks Master Plan.

Brian added that where the City either has ownership or control of a site for the express purpose of making it into a park, it will be shown on the plan. However, the City cannot simply designate private land as an open space, as there are legal ramifications to it. Commissioner Burkey noted that the City is putting aside an amount, and asked if that money could be used to buy open space. Brian responded it is at the City Council’s discretion where to use that money, and that the council has only authorized spending out of that fund once to acquire land in the vicinity of the poppy preserve. Commissioner Burkey inquired if there is anything planned on

the eastside. Brian responded that the City has been attempting for a while to identify areas to further buffer the perimeter of Edwards Air force Base that could be used for mariposa lily or other habitat. The City has not been successful with that but it is continuing to work with pertinent organizations.

Commissioner Burkey asked Mr. Webb if he had a particular area in mind. Mr. Webb responded that on 20th Street East and Avenue K, there are a lot of Joshua trees. Commissioner Burkey answered that part of the challenge is that they are privately owned properties. Dave noted that there is another element with relation to preservation of open space, which is the County's Significant Ecological Areas, which include for example the Littlerock Creek Wash and the General Plan does support maintaining those county policies which affect the City as open space.

Chairman Vose noted that that it will be important to insure that all land containing public land uses be designated as (P) on the land use map and to consider where appropriate designations for public facilities might be located. Staff concurred with this.

Brian noted that there are a lot of important details contained in the policies and specific actions below the goal and objectives level of the draft document and encouraged the Commission to look in more detail at these areas. He suggested that further discussion might be prudent once the Commission has had the opportunity to explore the document in more detail. He suggested that the Commission look at further discussions of the Plan for Physical Mobility, the Plan for Economic Development and Vitality and the Plan for Physical Development at the next special meeting. Brian also encouraged the commissioners to look into other topics that they would want to discuss in detail. Chairman Vose said it would be more appropriate to advertise to the community the different topics the commission is holding special meetings for. He also said that the Building Industry Association and Association of Realtors and other entities should be made aware of the meetings.

PUBLIC BUSINESS FROM THE FLOOR - NON-AGENDA ITEMS

None.

DIRECTOR'S ANNOUNCEMENT

Brian Ludicke requested the commissioners to consider dates for the regular January and February 2009 Planning Commission Meetings, as the third Mondays of those months are official holidays.

PUBLIC BUSINESS FROM THE FLOOR - NON-AGENDA ITEMS

None.

ADJOURNMENT

Chairman Vose declared the meeting adjourned at 7:50 p.m. to Monday, October 13, 2008, at 5:30 p.m., in the Planning Large Conference Room.

JAMES D. VOSE, Chairman
Lancaster Planning Commission

ATTEST:

BRIAN S. LUDICKE, Planning Director
City of Lancaster