

MINUTES - DRAFT

SPECIAL MEETING OF THE LANCASTER PLANNING COMMISSION

November 3, 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, Ervin and Haycock, Vice Chair Smith and Chairman Vose.

Absent: Commissioners Jacobs and Malhi.

Also present were the Deputy City Attorney (Joe Adams), General Plan Project Manager (Dave Ledbetter), Associate Planner (Chuen Ng), City Engineer (Carlyle Workman), Traffic Engineer (Michelle Cantrell), Recording Secretary (Tess Epling), and an audience of 6 people.

PUBLIC BUSINESS FROM THE FLOOR

Regarding a previous concern expressed by the Commission regarding greenbelts and water use, Richard Wood, Lancaster resident, wanted to clarify that the use of the word "greenbelt" as intended by private citizens and GPCAC members did not really mean greenbelt per se, but native vegetation as buffer zones for native animal life and bike trails.

PURPOSE

Chairman Vose opened the public hearing at 6:00 p.m. for the review and discussion of the City-wide General Plan Update. He noted that the commission is currently reviewing Section 7, which is Plan for Economic Development and Vitality.

Vern Lawson, Redevelopment Director, gave a PowerPoint presentation of the Lancaster Economic Development/Redevelopment Strategic Plan adopted by the City Council in 2006. He

discussed the four strategic pillars, such as solving jobs/housing imbalance, developing a 21st century workforce, revitalizing local commerce, and promoting a sense of community. He expounded on the major challenges that face the community in achieving these goals and actions that are being undertaken to meet them.

Following the presentation, Vice Chair Smith asked what programs the City has with schools. Vern Lawson replied that work ethic is an important characteristic that companies consider so it is being taught in elementary and high school. It was discovered that work readiness is clearly lacking, medical and technical skills are needed more and aptitude building is necessary. Currently, there is a local pilot program that recognizes children's special skills. Commissioner Burkey noted the importance of adequate jobs to accommodate the work force and asked what steps are being taken to go after these jobs, and how is Lancaster being marketed outside of this area. Vern Lawson noted that one of the important efforts is the attraction of new job creating industries. Vern Lawson related that a big part of this is the marketing of available sites, but that a site has to be developed first before it can be marketed. He noted that much of the Antelope Valley was divided into small parcels before incorporation. Much effort has gone into land assemble in the Foxfield Industrial Corridor Specific Plan, and the third phase of the Lancaster Business Park to make these into viable working business parks. But he noted that the task of land assemblage continues to be challenging.

Commissioner Burkey inquired if there are any entrepreneurship programs in our schools. Vern Lawson answered that to the level that they should be. There used to be a Junior Achievement program that no longer exists. Through Parks Recreation & Arts, there is a baby business program offered to people starting a business. Commissioner Burkey commented that the challenge is developing a frame of mind among younger students. Chairman Vose thanked Vern Lawson for the presentation and congratulated him for a fine department and success throughout the years.

Regarding Specific Action 16.2.3(a), Commissioner Burkey asked how the City is pursuing the preparation of suitable business sites. Vern Lawson explained that a site is put together, and work is coordinated and done with staff. He noted that the 200-acre business park is a good example. Chairman Vose inquired about the pending expiration of the Enterprise Zone in 2012. Vern Lawson replied that work is already in the process to renew it. Regarding Objective 16.3, Chairman Vose noted that the word "maintain" seems to be a weak word. Dave Ledbetter responded that a stronger word could be considered here.

Regarding Specific Action 16.3.1(b), Chairman Vose noted the use of the phrase "aggregation of small lots", and asked if the Foxfield Corridor Industrial Specific Plan was a target area for application of this. Vern Lawson confirmed that this had been accomplished within the Foxfield Specific Plan area, but that much work remains to be done and that the specific plan will need to be updated. He further noted that there is a fair amount of interest in the larger parcels but the water issue has to be contended with so it is a difficult situation.

Regarding Specific Action 16.3.3(b), Chairman Vose asked Vern Lawson to define "underserved regional retail demand." Vern Lawson explained that the future of retail will be lifestyle centers. The City currently does not have these types of centers but the City wants to be

prepared to take advantage of this demand. He noted that the Amargosa Creek Specific Plan is an important candidate for addressing this demand.

Regarding Specific Action 16.4.1(b), Chairman Vose inquired if the transit village district is specifically identified within the Zoning Ordinance. Dave Ledbetter responded that a number of years ago, the Transit Village Overlay Zone was adopted for the downtown area. It was not addressed within the zoning ordinance at that time, but that this will be considered as part of the zoning ordinance update that will follow adoption of the General Plan. Dave noted that Specific Actions 16.4.1(a) through 16.4.1(f) encourages the creation and expansion of the transit district, and the Downtown Specific Plan is included within the boundaries of the Transit Village District.

Regarding Policy 16.4.5, which talks about the expansion of government/civic services within the Downtown area, Chairman Vose noted that unless additional area is provided, current facilities here will be well undersized as the City grows. Dave Ledbetter said that it was a good observation and that this is the reason for the noted policy and accompanying specific actions. Regarding Policy 16.5.3, Chairman Vose commented that it is incumbent upon the Commission to support the attraction and development of entertainment to the City which will stimulate tourism. Regarding Specific Action 16.5.3(d) pertaining to the development of a conference and supporting hotel in Lancaster, Chairman Vose wanted to confirm that the specific action's status as implemented is correct. Vern Lawson noted the loss of the conference center within the Essex house and that no facility has replaced this. Chairman Vose then suggested that the status of the specific action should be changed to "existing program", rather than "implemented". Dave Ledbetter said that it will be reflected as a revised existing program.

Regarding Objective 16.6, Chairman Vose noticed that the verbiage is more negative than positive in that implies that the cost of development is paid for in full by the development team. Dave Ledbetter explained that a many of the programs in this section were included at the time that the Urban Structure Program was developed and these policies and action programs supported its adoption and implementation in the early 1990s. Dave noted that although the City intends to phase out the USP and replace it with a more current fees system, the intent of the objective and supporting policies and action programs remains valid.

Regarding Specific Action 16.6.3(a), Commissioner Haycock asked for an explanation on financially self-supporting plans. Dave Ledbetter replied that this specific action is referring to large master planned communities that include a balance of uses, especially if they are located away from established urban services. With these large communities, a self-supporting relationship is important; otherwise the City incurs the cost of maintaining the development in perpetuity. Commissioner Haycock clarified that this is more than just the initial building and continues beyond occupation. Dave indicated that the intent is not to create a situation where the development becomes a burden to the community in that the benefits from the development do not offset the costs to the community. Commissioner Haycock was concerned that developers not be unduly burdened with development costs that might curtail the construction of homes which in turn creates jobs. Dave Ledbetter replied that it is important to reach and maintain a level where there is a sufficient balance between the number of homes and the number of local jobs. Right now there is imbalance in that there is much more available housing then local jobs which is projected to continue into the future. However, it is not the intent of this specific action

to impact residential construction in general, but rather to ensure that large planned communities are self-supporting.

Chairman Vose requested public testimony for Plan for Economic Development & Vitality.

Jason Zink, resident of Lancaster, commented that he has seen the whole area grow. Lancaster needs to have a visionary plan in the same vision as the LA Aqueduct, Golden Gate Bridge, and Palmdale Airport. He suggested bringing rails to the Antelope Valley to create jobs. He also wondered why we do not have a rail going to Fox Field airport and proposed getting something attractive in the area. He brought up the idea of putting Highway 138 west on Ave. H-8 off 14 Freeway and to create a more dynamic base for Lancaster.

Albert Praw, CEO of Landstone Community, said that he thought that the land use plan would be discussed tonight. With regard to the earlier discussion on self-supporting communities, he opined that there are potential differences between a large scale development that pays for itself with respect to municipal services and providing infrastructure as against setting up some criteria that this type of community should also create jobs, as this is a difficult standard to impose.

Chairman Vose opened the discussion for Plan for Physical Development. Chairman Vose noted that this section of the Policy Document contains policies and action programs that discourage annexations to the City. Dave Ledbetter concurred and indicated that the policies and programs were added with the 1997 General Plan update as a way to discourage unnecessary annexations. He noted that these policies and programs were added following the period of rapid annexation that occurred during the late 1980s and early 1990s and resulted in the current discontinuous boundaries on the east and west sides. Dave also noted that one additional specific action is being proposed here that recommends going back and looking at current city boundaries and even considering deannexation of some areas in order to create more coherent boundaries.

Commissioner Haycock ask for clarification regarding the seven Redevelopment projects under the heading "Land Use Inventory" on page VIII-3. Dave indicated that the development project areas were established early in the City's history and provide the framework under state redevelopment law for the various activities that are carried out by the Redevelopment Agency. Dave noted that currently most of the Urbanizing Area in located in one of the seven redevelopment areas. Chairman Vose requested for a copy of the project areas when the commission considers the land use map.

Regarding Objective 17.1 Chairman Vose asked if the City actually has an inventory of available land to support the next generation. Dave Ledbetter replied that according to the land use survey completed for the General Plan program, there is enough vacant urban density land available to support projected growth.

Chairman Vose noted that the Commission had talked about demand for health assisted living facilities and asked if it would be an appropriate land use to add under the multi-family residential designation. Dave Ledbetter stated that the zoning ordinance is the more appropriate

place to clarify this and that this needs to be addressed in the zoning ordinance update that will following General Plan adoption. Chairman Vose commented that the issue needs to be addressed in some fashion especially if you have older folks in your home and you become aware of the needs. Dave Ledbetter responded that the need is certainly understood and there will be alternatives to develop this and create enough latitude for these projects to come to the City.

Regarding Specific Action 17.1.1(d), Commissioner Haycock asked what was implied by the phrase “discourage premature fragmentation”. Dave Ledbetter responded that this is what Vern Lawson referred to by the premature subdivision of properties, that is, the subdividing of land prior to the demand which often creates areas of small hard to develop properties. One of the earlier occurrences of this was the Herald tracts located east of the downtown area which created very small lots. Much of this area is now zoned for industrial use and the Redevelopment Agency has extended much time and effort in the past trying to assemble parcels here to make them viable for development.

Regarding Policy 17.1.3, Chairman Vose noticed that the word "hierarchical" in this document was used several times and asked for its definition. Dave Ledbetter explained that we want to provide a full range of commercial development which will have services and amenities and will offer a wide range of products needed. This policy emphasizes the importance of a full array of commercial services at all levels. Chairman Vose said that the commission will be identifying locations for either neighborhood, regional or commercial uses under the proposed land use document. Dave Ledbetter noted that this program addresses the need to balance commercial development throughout the communities and is what the Balanced Growth and GPCAC Preferred Plan alternatives are attempting to do.

Pertaining to Specific Action 17.1.4(c), Chairman Vose noted Vern Lawson’s earlier comment that the Fox Field Specific Plan was in need of updating and that this program addresses this but only assigns a priority of 3 to the specific action which appears to be rather low. Chairman Vose noted that Specific Action 17.1.6(a) and (b) pertain to consistency between the zoning ordinance and General Plan and both have a priority of one which means it is immediate. Dave Ledbetter concurred that a timeframe of priority one means initiate upon adoption of the General Plan.

Commissioner Burkey asked if the concept of form based code is relatively new. Dave Ledbetter stated that it is and that one of the things we want to like at under the zoning ordinance is a form based code that can be applied to areas designated for mixed use. Regarding Specific Action 17.1.6(e), Commissioner Burkey asked about the bullet under this action program that pertains to the reduction of standard street width in relation to the design of specific plan areas. Dave Ledbetter cited Downtown Lancaster as an example where the City would want to look at modifying the standard street width and incorporate traffic calming measures in order to make it pedestrian friendly. Commissioner Haycock asked if removing alleys behind the houses and redoing the streets have come to mind when considering a transit village. Dave Ledbetter said that he was not familiar with all of the details of the Downtown Specific Plan but that addressing of alleys is a consideration and noted that as the specific plan develops, there will be significant changes to the way the downtown will look.

For the fourth bullet point of Specific Action 17.1.6(e), Commissioner Burkey noted that he liked the idea of rewarding somebody for creating a sense of community and inquired how that is measured. Dave Ledbetter replied that examples would be the reduction of setback requirements, or parking, and other types of development criteria but that it is open ended as to what might be applied. Regarding Specific Action 17.1.7(a), Chairman Vose noted that it does not identify that hillside development should consider the terrain as is called out by the related policy. Dave Ledbetter noted that the intent is that this would be considered under the provisions of the RPD which the specific action calls for. However, since there are few hills within the City limits, there are limited applications for this program. Quartz Hill is already being developed and there are some slopes within the City to the west and along Avenue N, which would be subject to hillside development parameters.

Regarding Specific Action 18.1.1(c), Commissioner Ervin asked for a brief background. Dave Ledbetter said that this is an action program that has been in the General Plan for quite some time. There is a long history of concern by Quartz Hill and Antelope Acres residents as to what type of development they would like to see around what they identify as their communities. This specific action recognizes that concern. Chairman Vose asked about those developments proposed in areas that are not in city boundaries. Dave Ledbetter said that there is general support for efforts to retain the area's heritage. Vice Chair Smith inquired how realistic is this goal and who determines what the preferences and character are? Dave Ledbetter answered that it is their town councils that have a strong commitment to maintain what they refer to as the "small town and rural character", and in the past, the City has made an effort to recognize and supported this. Chairman Vose noted that since these communities are located within unincorporated L.A. County, that it is more in support of how the county proposes to allow developments in those jurisdictions and noted that the City's sphere of influence goes into theirs and theirs into ours. Dave Ledbetter concurred with this but noted that it is advantageous for the City to have a good relationship between jurisdictional land uses in order to reduce the potential for conflict.

Regarding Specific Action 18.1.3(a), Chairman Vose thought that the word "prohibit" has a negative connotation. Commissioner Burkey said that word "discourage" would be better.

Chairman Vose asked the Commissioners to put in writing any questions, issues, and suggestions regarding the topics being discussed and email them to Brian Ludicke, Planning Director prior to Thanksgiving, and that staff return with responses to these comments for discussion or recommendation. Dave Ledbetter replied that staff will be happy to respond to any questions the commission may have. Dave Ledbetter said that the commissioners will get the opportunity to make recommendations on the draft documents following the close of the public comment period for the Program Environmental Impact Report when public hearings on the General Plan will be scheduled. Chairman Vose said that he would like to see a document that has the commission's issues and changes proposed. Dave Ledbetter indicated that staff would provide this.

Chairman Vose noted that staff had submitted a revised schedule for the remainder of the General Plan program which indicated that the commission should be able to begin the public hearings for recommendation regarding the General Plan by March or April next year.

Commissioner Haycock related that it seems that Policy 18.1.4 and the related specific actions which discourage triplex and fourplex multiple family projects without full time on-site management would eliminate these types of development within the City and that she views this as a radical departure from current policy regarding multiple family development. Dave Ledbetter replied that these programs were added to the General Plan in 1997 because of code enforcement issues with triplex and fourplex properties on small lots. Many of these lots were located in high crime areas that the City addressed through revitalization efforts. The provision of on-site management was viewed as a way to address this problem. It is not the intent of the policy to do away with this type of development but rather to require on-site management as a requirement of development. Commissioner Haycock asked if it is acceptable for some of these infill projects that would lend itself to affordable housing projects (8-10 units), as long as there is management not necessarily living on site. Dave Ledbetter explained that as long as there is some type of on-site supervision they are not viewed as a problem.

Chairman Vose noted that the document clearly says to amend the zoning and subdivision ordinance to “discourage”. Dave Ledbetter concurred but indicated that the ordinance has yet to be updated to reflect this. Chairman Vose said that care and caution should be exercised not to eliminate a viable housing type just because there is a perception of a crime problem. He suggested that evidence that indicates that triplexes and fourplexes are more crime ridden than other projects should be provided. Dave Ledbetter clarified that it is not the intent of this specific action to eliminate a certain type of housing product, just to encourage a level of supervision.

Chairman Vose noted that Specific Action 18.1.4(b) directs that the zoning and subdivision ordinances be amended to require a minimum lot size in multiple family projects which would make it infeasible to develop individually owned triplexes and fourplexes. He inquired how this fits in with previous staff comment. Dave Ledbetter replied that he believed that this specific action relates to large subdivisions which would create many triplex and fourplex units not small projects or individual lots, but noted that the language of the specific action might be restructured so it is worded more clearly.

Regarding Specific Action 18.1.5(a), Chairman Vose commented that it is very far reaching. It could be a tool for use to buffer surrounding land uses that are impacted by the state prison or proposed county jail expansion. Dave Ledbetter responded that a potential may exist for that. However, this specific action relates more to the application of buffers at the rural/urban interface. Pertaining to the seventh bullet under this specific action, Commissioner Haycock asked for an example how building height would be reduced. Dave Ledbetter explained that urban density areas tend to have taller buildings than rural areas so a requirement to reduce building height within a certain distance from a rural zone might help to soften the interface between the two areas.

Regarding Specific Action 18.3.2(a) pertaining to the deannexation of areas, Commissioner Haycock asked what would qualify a part of the City to be deannexed. Dave Ledbetter said that areas not needed for long term development might be looked at. There are discontinuous areas on the east and west sides of the City many of which do not represent coherent boundaries. In some instances, annexation may help to square off boundaries or fill in areas, but in others deannexation may make better sense.

Chairman Vose asked for clarification on the new Community Design subsection. Dave Ledbetter explained that this section replaces an earlier section known as "Community Form" which was added to the document in 1997 and was an early attempt to address community design. In 2005, the City Council called for the formation of an ad hoc design committee to make recommendations on community design issues to be addressed by the General Plan and most recently has been the formation of the Architectural & Design Commission (ADC). Following this direction, the new Community Design section establishes policies and programs that call for the adoption and implementation of community design guidelines. Chairman Vose commented that this commission and the ADC will have a primary role in this. Dave Ledbetter concurred and said that the Planning Commission will review the draft design guidelines once they are put together.

Regarding Specific Action 19.2.4(a) pertaining to buffers between conflicting land uses, the Commission asked for clarification. Dave Ledbetter indicated that this refers primarily to situations where you have adjacent unlike land uses such as industrial abutting residential that would need some buffering. Commissioner Haycock was concerned that developments will be discouraged just by being so specific and being very careful with each aspect. Dave Ledbetter clarified that goal would not be to discourage development but rather create an attractive community through the application of design guidelines. Regarding Specific Action 19.2.6(a) pertaining to the undergrounding of utility lines, Chairman Vose stated that the City does not have an ordinance to require this. Dave Ledbetter noted that the specific action indicates to underground where feasible.

Chairman Vose noted that Section 20 has no apparent changes. Dave Ledbetter said that if any changes were made, they were very minor in nature.

Chairman Vose opened the session for public testimony on Plan for Physical Development. There was no public comment regarding this section of the Policy Document.

COMMISSION AGENDA

Chairman Vose announced that the next special meeting is December 1.

DIRECTOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

None.

PUBLIC BUSINESS FROM THE FLOOR - NON-AGENDA ITEMS

Jason Zink, Lancaster resident, suggested that it would be good to reference projects as they are being discussed by the Planning Commission on televised broadcast so that viewers can follow the meeting better. He also asked the commission to scale back on their scrutiny and discussion of alcohol CUP as applicants for a liquor/convenience store would just like to make a living. His suggested that the City not allow churches and schools be built in commercial districts and that liquor stores should be allowed to operate from 6:00 am to 10:00 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

Chairman Vose declared the meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m. to Monday, November 10, 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