

# REPORT

To the Honorable Mayor and City Council  
From the City Manager

April 4, 2005

## **Subject**

Joint Study Session on the General Plan Vision and Process

## **Recommendation**

That the City Council and Planning Commission provide staff with general feedback on the General Plan vision and process.

## **Background**

This report does the following:

1. Briefly outlines the Downtown Area Plan and the Bayfront Study and describes their relationship to the General Plan and to the Downtown Precise Plan.
2. Reviews the progress on the General Plan to date and describes the next steps in the work program.
3. Reviews the progress on the Downtown Precise Plan to date and outlines the remaining work program.
4. Describes the necessity for consistency between the General Plan and the Downtown Precise Plan and for coordination between the work programs of both plans.

## **Relationship Between General Plan and Other Plans and Studies**

Since 2000 the City has prepared the following planning documents that interact with the General Plan and the proposed new Downtown Precise Plan:

- Downtown Area Plan in October 2001
- Bayfront Study in late 2001

## **Downtown Area Plan**

The Council began the Downtown Area plan process in late 1999. You may recall the Downtown Idea Exchange held in the former "Way-to-Go" building in late 1999. The planning area was broad, bounded by Woodside Road, El Camino Real, Whipple Avenue and Veterans Boulevard – virtually identical boundaries to the Downtown Redevelopment Area.

Council decided to establish a broad-based task force to work with staff, and fifteen residents from diverse backgrounds were appointed. The Task Force held eight meetings

and solicited input from over twenty seven community groups, and City Boards, Commissions and Committees over an 18 month period. The Draft Downtown Area Plan was completed in November 2001.

The draft was distributed to Council and Planning Commission in November 2001. The Planning Commission held a study session on the plan and subsequently staff made a presentation to the Council on the document, but no action was taken to formally adopt the Downtown Plan's recommendations.

The Downtown Area Plan was originally meant to be a planning 'policy' document that would be adopted by the Council. However, after a study session by the Planning Commission and a review by the Council, no further action was taken on the Downtown Area Plan. By 2002 the City was working on implementing language for what would become Precise Plans, and since this type of plan actually made land use changes, this was considered a better vehicle for carrying out the Council's vision for Downtown for the following reasons.

Area Plans are created under state legislation but they are limited to broad policy discussion and do not directly change land use and zoning. The Downtown Area Plan, for instance, made recommendations for higher density housing on a number of what were called 'Catalyst Sites' in the Downtown. The Council may recall recommendations in the Downtown Area Plan for up to 3,400 new housing units, at densities ranging up to 60 units per acre on these catalyst sites. An area plan can make such a recommendation but, until a subsequent action is taken to formally change the zoning, the area plan itself does not implement the recommendation. The new planning tool called "precise plans" was thought to be the better implementing tool.

The Council formally amended the City Zoning Ordinance in 2003 to create Precise Plans. As adopted, the Precise Plan ordinance required the creation of a "P" zone that would be placed over the plan area, and the related Precise Plan itself would be the formal land use regulations for the precise plan area.

By late 2003 the staff and Council was considering a Downtown Precise Plan that would cover a considerably smaller area (generally Brewster Avenue, Veterans Blvd, Maple Street and El Camino Real) but that would address this much smaller area in much greater detail.

The Downtown Area Plan, although never formally adopted as City policy, was reviewed by the Planning Commission and has become a planning resource document for the Downtown Precise Plan and the General Plan.

### **Bayfront Study**

In 2000-01 strong pressures for development began in the Bayfront area. In 2002 the City was reviewing applications from Abbott Laboratories, and for Marina Shores Village; and we were aware that change was likely on the site of the Century 12 Cinema. Abbott's proposal was not consistent with the existing zoning, Marina Shore's proposal required

both General Plan and zoning amendments, and if the Century 12 site was to be considered for housing, it, too, would require both General Plan and zoning amendments. The City had not reviewed its General Plan or zoning designations in this area for at least a decade and developers were ignoring both the General Plan and Zoning Ordinance when making their decisions to buy land and submit plans.

There was the need for a broad look at the Bayfront area and so work was started on the Study. Initially it was going to be a formal plan requiring environmental review, but the developments were already under consideration and time was of the essence. It was decided that the document would be a planning study that would inform decision-makers but would not require environmental review or formal adoption.

The first meeting on the Study was held in November 2001 and meetings on the Study continued into 2002. The study was completed in 2002 and was considered by the Planning Commission in 2002 and again in 2003. Copies of the Study were provided to the City Council but no action was taken to seek formal adoption. You may recall that the Bayfront Study included a map of the area along East Bayshore Road (covering the area generally occupied by 101 Toyota, Century 12 and the Boardwalk dealership) that suggested a split of land use between auto-oriented uses along the immediate freeway frontage, with housing in back. After further consideration it was staff's opinion that this was not a desirable mix of land uses, because of innate conflicts between housing and auto uses (noise, lights etc.). We are not asking you to make a definite policy decision on this issue at this meeting but simply pointing out the benefit of using informal studies such as the Bayfront Study as a way to inform an eventual decision.

The Downtown Area Plan and the Bayfront Study were never adopted as formal Council policy but staff is using them as background for the General Plan and the Downtown Precise Plan, which are discussed in the following sections.

### **General Plan**

These are the steps that have already been completed in the General Plan work program:

- The Planning Commission started the General Plan process with a study session, held on January 13, 2004.
- The process then went onto a number of parallel tracks, with certain elements e.g. Economic Development being developed by collaboration between staff and the Chamber of Commerce; and the Open Space Element being developed in cooperation with the Parks, Recreation and Community Services Department and the Parks and Recreation Commission.
- Staff is currently drafting the technical backgrounds to the other elements. The General Plan consists of seven 'elements' required by state statute including:
  - Land Use
  - Circulation

- Open space
- Housing<sup>a</sup>
- Conservation
- Safety
- Noise

In addition, Redwood City's last General Plan included a number of optional "elements" and staff recommends that these be updated and also included in this latest General Plan:

- Human Services Element (in conjunction with the Housing and Human Concerns Committee)
  - Economic Element<sup>b</sup> (in conjunction with the Chamber of Commerce)
  - Cultural Element (in conjunction with the Civic Cultural Commission)
  - Historic Resources Element (in conjunction with the Historic Resources Advisory Committee)
  - Infrastructure Element<sup>c</sup>
- A series of neighborhood meetings have been held to elicit input from the community. A total of seven (7) neighborhood meetings have been held starting with Friendly Acres in February 2004 and concluding with Stambaugh/Heller in February 2005. Staff worked with the City's Public Information Officer to plan the meetings, including the following efforts to notify residents in the neighborhoods:
    - Flyers were dropped off at about 1,000 houses within each neighborhood
    - Press releases
    - Email newsletters
    - City web site forum
    - Personal letters to Neighborhood Chairs
    - Flyers in local retail stores, and A-frame signs in shopping centers where possible
    - Free childcare at the meetings; and
    - Discount coupons to park's programs for attendees.

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<sup>a</sup> The Housing Element was certified by the state on March 2, 2004

<sup>b</sup> It should be noted that the 1990 General Plan included material on economic issues but entitled it "Economic Policies" rather than Economic Element. It is included as Appendix 1 in the current General Plan.

<sup>c</sup> An 'infrastructure' element was suggested during the process. This element will examine existing and future needs of the city's water and sewer systems, recycled water and other general infrastructure.

- Attendance at these seven meetings ranged from a low of 10 to a high of 75 people. A total of about 175 – 200 non-duplicated people participated at these meetings over a one-year period. Even though the attendance varied, the comments and discussion at these meetings gave a pretty solid sense of the issues in each neighborhood. All the meeting notes and comments are on the City website under 'General Plan -- Public Meetings and Workshops'.
- Finally, staff has been working on drafting the basic 'boilerplate' parts of the Elements required by State law; and meeting to refine what we have heard from the community.

**This is what has happened to-date. The following is what staff recommends as the process from this point forward.**

- The next step is this joint study session. There may need to be additional such meetings to discuss all the issues. We are asking for your guidance regarding process from this point on.
- Ultimately, staff will draft the General Plan and bring the draft back to the Commission and Council for review, probably some time in September depending upon your input at the study session. The Commission and Council will make comments and then the Council will forward the document to the Planning Commission for formal hearings.
- The Planning Commission will hold hearings to consider community input, the recommendations from other groups and Boards and Commissions, and staff. They will also consider and certify the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and then make a recommendation to the Council on the General Plan. The EIR cannot start until the Council and Commission have seen and given some feedback on the overall 'vision' for the General Plan because the content will not be certain; and the Planning Commission cannot recommend and the Council cannot approve the General Plan until the EIR is certified. The EIR process takes from 8-9 months and so final action to approve the General Plan will be in the first quarter of 2006.
- The City Council will hold a series of hearings on the General Plan, receive input from the Commission, staff and the community, make any amendments they wish and then approve the General Plan amendment.

This is the suggested process. There has been some discussion that the neighborhood meetings held to date have not involved sufficient people in the discussion about the General plan. Staff believes that the public input process used so far has produced good feedback on the planning issues but if the Council wishes to hold additional meetings some things to consider are:

1. What is the agenda for the meeting(s)? What are the desired outcomes?
2. A community meeting or meetings will take additional time. Is the extra time it will add to the schedule an issue (i.e. the General Plan draft will get to the Council later than September 2005)?

### **Agenda for the April 4, 2005 Study Session**

Staff and the City's consultant -- Terry Bottomley -- will use the attached synopsis of City-wide themes as the starting point to generate comments and questions from the Commission and Council. These themes emerged from the many comments made at the Neighborhood workshops over the course of the past year.

This is a study session and thus not the forum to make final policy decisions. Staff is looking for broad direction and process suggestions before we craft the draft General Plan and bring it back for more formal review some months hence. There may need to be additional joint meetings.

This is technically an amendment to the General Plan. We think that the structure of most General Plans makes it hard to get a clear picture of what is being recommended. Accordingly, we are proposing to draft a document that summarizes the vision in clear and simple terms. We also think that a vision really needs to be expressed in pictures and photographs. The final vision statement should therefore focus around graphics. The formal General Plan elements listed earlier would be appendices to the vision document and would ensure that the overall document meets the state requirements for general plans.

### **Downtown Precise Plan**

These are the steps that are completed or under way.

- Three community workshops hosted by the Downtown Advisory Group (DAG) and led by Michael Freedman and FTB have been held.

The next steps are:

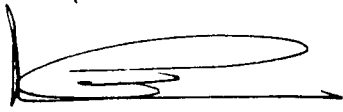
- City Council/Planning Commission joint study sessions led by FTB to cover:
  - What was learned at the community workshops;
  - background information on the General Plan issues that are relevant to downtown;
  - discussion of the major issues; and
  - Feedback/direction from the Commission and Council.
- FTB will then prepare the draft Downtown Precise Plan based on Council's feedback.
- The Council alone would then hold a study session on the Precise Plan, led by FTB. The Council would ask questions, make comments and then refer the plan to the Commission and any other boards for consideration and recommendation.
- The Planning Commission will consider the Precise Plan and hold public hearings on it. They will also review and certify the EIR and then recommend the Precise Plan to the City Council.

## Consistency

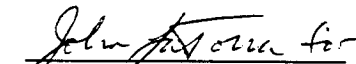
The processes for the General Plan and the Downtown Precise Plan are tightly interwoven. The work effort on the Precise Plan has been far more extensive than that on the General Plan and so the General Plan will incorporate the Precise Plan by reference. However, to accomplish this it is necessary to know what the Precise Plan is going to recommend and some level of assurance that the Council will adopt the plan recommendations. It is therefore necessary that the Council and Commission have held one or more study sessions on the Precise Plan and had some chance to become comfortable with the recommendations before the General Plan can safely incorporate the Precise Plan. The General Plan must also deal with areas adjacent to, but outside the Precise Plan area; and these recommendations must obviously be consistent with those made for the Precise Plan. The review processes for the two documents are therefore inextricably linked.

The most time consuming part of the schedule for either document will be environmental review. While the final schedule may change based on feedback you give staff at the April 4 study session, the general sequence right now is as follows:

- Broad concept review from April – June 2005
- Staff and consultant prepare draft documents from June to August 2005
- Planning Commission and Council hearings on both documents from September to December 2005
- Planning Commission Certification of EIR and Council adoption of the plans in March 2006.



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## Attachment

Summary of Themes Emerging from the Neighborhood Workshops

**City of Redwood City  
General Plan Vision**

**Neighborhood Workshops – Citywide Themes**

**1 - Preserve Redwood City's History and Diversity**

- Preserve historic commercial and residential buildings
- Maintain the historic character of Downtown
- Celebrate and retain the diversity of ethnic groups, age groups
- Incorporate affordable housing to maintain diversity
- Provide options and variety in housing types, especially for young families and seniors
- Create more community programs and facilities for youths and seniors
- Maintain diversity of jobs; industrial as well as office, retail, and government

**2 - Protect and Improve the City's Single Family Neighborhoods**

- Maintain quiet, family-oriented character
- Focus on safer streets and intersections for pedestrians and bicyclists
- Preserve and increase the number of street trees
- No changes to density for R-1 areas
- Strengthen code enforcement re: yard storage, cars, etc.

**3 - Revitalize Downtown**

- The Fox, Little Fox, Main Library, and Courthouse Square are major assets
- More people and commercial activity are needed downtown
- The number of retail businesses should be increased; all businesses should have later hours
- Continue and increase renovations and upgrades of older buildings
- The streets downtown are confusing; better directional signs are needed
- Higher density mixed-use with housing is appropriate in Downtown; e.g. City Center
- Balance new development and businesses with concern for traffic congestion and parking
  - Consider a shuttle that loops between neighborhoods and Downtown

**4 - Connect Neighborhoods, Commercial Areas, and Public Places**

- The railroad and "barrier streets" currently divide the city, separating neighborhoods from community destinations; e.g., El Camino, Jefferson, Woodside, Middlefield, US 101,
- A pedestrian network that includes safe street crossings is needed throughout the city
- More bike lanes are needed throughout the city

- The Bayfront is cut off from the rest of the city
- Traffic is too fast on some streets (e.g. Farm Hill), others are too congested (e.g. El Camino)
- Transit should be improved (e.g. routes, times) to link neighborhoods and local destinations

#### **5 - Change the Character of El Camino Real**

- Install safe and visible pedestrian street crossings, especially near Downtown
- Improve the overall appearance – building frontage and streetscape
- Consider if bike lanes along the roadway are feasible
- Encourage new, higher quality commercial buildings
- Consider ECR as a place for “transit-oriented development,” with housing over retail  
(similar to Franklin Street Apartments)
- Reduce congestion on the street; e.g., phased signals, more transit use
- Plan for future transit improvements
- Consider somewhat taller buildings with “step-downs” to adjacent neighborhood areas

#### **6 - Increase Access to Parks and Open Space**

- The city needs more public open space, both natural and recreational
- The city has a number of popular parks that can become overused; these include Red Morton and Stulsaft
- Not all neighborhoods have pedestrian and bicycle access to a popular park; i.e., cut off by streets, RR, etc
- The Bayfront is a unique open space opportunity that is not realized and very difficult to access; much more public open space should be provided there
- The city’s creeks should be cleaned up, “day lighted” where possible, and incorporated into the city’s open space network

#### **7 - Concentrate Development in the Right Places**

- New development should be located near transit and/or where street congestion can be minimized
- New development should not change the character of existing single family neighborhoods
- Downtown is recommended for new housing that supports the district’s revitalization and transit use
- Transit-oriented development should be considered for El Camino Real