

Summary of comments and concerns during the General Plan Update Focus Group Session #7 SACOG's Blueprint Project

On Thursday, September 1, the General Plan Update Team held the seventh Focus Group Session designed to allow for public input and participation in the Update process. This session was convened to focus on SACOG's Blueprint project and how its principles and vision may be considered for Sacramento County's General Plan Update.

Staff began the workshop with a brief summary of the past 6 workshops and focus groups, followed immediately by a recap of the 7th Board workshop and associated discussion. Once staff's review was complete, a series of questions were raised by focus group participants relating to the County's general Plan growth accommodation strategy and SACOG's Blueprint Vision. The following summarizes these questions and captures general group discussion.

BLUEPRINT VISION'S GROWTH ALLOCATION AND HOLDING CAPACITY NUMBERS

1. *Why/how did the housing unit demand number jump from approximately 30,000 (as determined by Staff in 2004) to almost 100,000 (based on the Blueprint Vision)?*
2. *How were the Natomas Joint Vision area and the Sphere's of Influence/Planning Areas of Folsom, Rancho Cordova and Elk Grove treated when deterring the growth allocation numbers for the County under the Blueprint Vision? Were these areas included in Sacramento County's allocation numbers?*
3. *Growth projections are very difficult to make and may vary widely. SACOG's demand numbers are based on an economist's "crystal ball" estimates.*
4. *Why was the 2030 growth allocation number frontloaded?*
5. *How did SACOG address the absorption rate? The actual rate since 1993 was closer to 4.4 units per acre, whereas the County expected closer to 6 units per acre.*
6. *The Water Forum is based on the 1993 General Plan and its demand numbers. It doesn't account for Blueprint's larger numbers.*
7. *When will we see holding capacity numbers that consider rezoning?*
8. *What is meant by Blueprint's desire to redevelop vacant commercial and industrial parcels? What is meant by "underutilized"?*
9. *We need to expand the UPA rather than develop industrial and commercial land for residential uses.*
10. *Who has adopted Blueprint?*
11. *San Juan School District is closing schools. How does Blueprint relate to their situation?*
12. *Many people in the east County support Blueprint and more growth in previously urbanized areas.*

Response: The amount of growth allocated to Sacramento County under the Blueprint Vision is much higher (~100,000 units) than what staff had calculated last year (~29,000 units). It is important to note that staff's analysis in 2004 was based on the same data that resulted in SACOG's "Base Case Scenario" which showed a large portion of future growth going to jurisdictions in other counties. Since the Blueprint Vision is based on a more compact regional footprint, it advocates for much more growth near the metropolitan core (i.e. Sacramento County) and less on the regional fringe. While anticipated regional growth remains the same (840,000 units by 2050) in each scenario, exactly *where* these units will be accommodated changes dramatically. Under the Blueprint Vision, Sacramento County is allocated much more growth than under the Base Case Scenario, while outlying jurisdictions are allocated much less growth. Again, the expected overall regional growth remains at 840,000 in both scenarios, but where the growth would occur changes significantly in order to reduce the overall urban footprint of the region.

Growth within the unincorporated areas within the Natomas Joint Vision Area and City's Spheres of Influence were allocated to the County, since these areas are presently under the jurisdiction of the County. If any of these lands are annexed in the future, the corresponding growth allocation for that area would be transferred to the annexing city. Accurate growth projections (and corresponding allocations) are based on very complex models and are quite difficult to formulate. However, although they are not always 100% accurate, such studies are necessary to provide a framework for what to expect in the coming years and to plan for the County's and the region's future. SACOG's numbers are based on a 2050 timeframe. To extrapolate data for 2030, SACOG assumed that two thirds of the 2050 growth would occur by 2030.

The Blueprint Vision calculates the residential holding capacity of the existing Urban Policy Area as ~75,000 units. This unit is based on a number of assumptions, including:

- Buildout of vacant parcels at existing residential zoning
- Redevelopment of underutilized parcels zoned for residential uses
- Rezoning of vacant commercial/employment/industrial parcels to residential uses
- Reinvestment/reuse of existing commercial/employment areas for mixed use projects that include residential uses
- New growth areas built at planned densities

This holding capacity study does in fact consider rezones of land, whereas the County's study did not. SACOG's Blueprint Vision recommends that excess commercial and industrial properties be rezoned to accommodate mixed use developments, combining residential with commercial and

employment uses. With the closure of two Air Force Bases and the County's declining reliance on heavy industry, there are a number of commercial and industrial properties that may be better used to house future residents due to their location near existing residential properties and job centers. SACOG also recommends that "underutilized" parcels, or parcels not built out to their existing densities, can be redeveloped to accommodate more units than currently exist on the property.

Since the Blueprint Vision advocates for more growth within previously urbanized areas, a large numbers of interests stand to benefit from its implementation, including inner city school districts, and advocates for protection of agricultural and rangelands, open space, and natural resources. San Juan School District may benefit by the implementation of Blueprint since more residents within the urban core would mean more children (and thus more funding) coming into the school district. In addition, less growth on the urban fringe would lessen the threat of urban development on the County's agricultural and rangelands, open space, and natural resources.

GROWTH ACCOMMODATION WITHIN SACRAMENTO COUNTY

- 1. If we can only accommodate 75,000 new housing units within the existing UPA, based on the Blueprint Vision, where would the rest of the growth go?*
- 2. Can the County wait to decide on SACOG's growth allocation numbers until other jurisdictions decide?*
- 3. Is the County considering moving the USB? What about Greenbriar? What happens after it is annexed by the City of Sacramento?*
- 4. Has staff looked at how close we are to building out the UPA that was established in 1993? Growth has occurred faster and less dense than previously anticipated.*
- 5. Has staff looked at whether transit, infrastructure and water supplies can accommodate anticipated growth?*
- 6. The Land Use Element speaks of distributing a "fair share" of growth to communities within the County.*

Response: If the County chooses to accept the Blueprint Vision's growth allocation (~100,000 units through 2030) and holding capacity numbers (~75,000 within existing UPA), the area inside the UPA would have to accommodate 25,000 more than Blueprint has identified as the capacity, or areas outside the UPA will have to be considered to accommodate future growth. Since the County is in the midst of an update to its General Plan, now is the ideal time to plan future land uses and decide on the amount of growth to accommodate. While the County may wait to make its decision regarding growth accommodation, it does not necessarily benefit the

County to wait until other jurisdictions make their decision, since the opportunity to revise strategies in our General Plan may be significantly delayed.

The Board of Supervisors has yet to significantly discuss possibly movement of the Urban Services Boundary (USB). However, this action may be considered through the General Plan Update process. If an area is annexed by a city that falls outside of the USB, the city would be responsible for providing services to the area, not the County.

Both staff and SACOG have conducted studies of the UPA's holding capacity to look at the present extent of build-out and remaining capacity for development. These analyses have identified different levels of accommodation that can be accomplished through implementation of certain principles and programs, including greater densities and changes in land uses.

The 1993 General Plan does not specifically address "fair share" of growth within the County; instead, the plan identifies strategies for growth accommodation, including infill, redevelopment, build out of planned communities and new growth areas. Several large new growth areas were identified in the Land Use Element of the General Plan. These areas are concentrated in Elk Grove, Rancho Cordova and Vineyard.

ZONING AND LAND USE ISSUES

- 1. The will is there for smart growth, but the County can't process such complicated requests.*
- 2. Use-based (Euclidean) zoning and planning does not address the current marketplace. Form-based codes facilitate good growth.*
- 3. Are there any financial incentives to do the "right thing" (i.e. smart growth)? It is much cheaper and easier to develop greenfields than it is to do infill development.*
- 4. SACOG should set an example for government transparency, especially in regards to the costs for infill vs. greenfield development.*
- 5. How does staff define what a "corridor" is? Where are they?*
- 6. Do land use planning efforts consider where the jobs are?*
- 7. Flood control is a huge issue that needs to be addressed before thinking about new growth, especially in Natomas.*
- 8. The General Plan Update should address protection of natural resources and historic assets.*
- 9. We need more smaller agriculture parcels and agriculture-residential parcels to satisfy the demand while retaining larger agricultural parcels that can actually be commercially farmed.*

Response: There is growing support for “smart growth” development across the nation, as well as within Sacramento County. Sacramento County recently approved two projects that exemplify smart growth principles advocated by the Blueprint Vision: Antelope Place and Victoria Station. Both are compact, mixed use developments fronting on their respective streets. Although processing these projects may be more complex when compared to typical single-use proposals, the County is certainly capable of dealing with developments of this nature. The County is working diligently to simplify these processes wherever possible.

Traditional “use based” zoning, the universal zoning tool used by the vast majority of urbanized jurisdictions in the US, does indeed have its shortcomings. The County is currently looking at updating its zoning code to address some of these issues. In addition, the County is also considering the creation of “form-based” zoning codes that are more conducive to more compact development and mixing of uses. Recently, form based codes have had great success spurring redevelopment of vacant and underutilized properties in existing urban areas, especially downtowns, commercial corridors and other centers of community and commerce.

Nevertheless, developers often find it much easier to develop on “greenfield” sites - land not previously built upon – contributing to more development on the urban fringe. The County is actively pursuing strategies to facilitate redevelopment and infill of vacant and underutilized parcels within existing communities to reign in the unincorporated area’s urban footprint. There are a number of grants available to the County intended to facilitate planning and capital improvement projects that spur smart growth, especially within existing communities. The County is currently pursuing a number of grants, including those offered by SACOG and Caltrans.

The term “corridor” can take on different meanings, including commercial corridors, transportation corridors, habitat and open space corridors, etc. While the General Plan will be addressing all of these, “corridor” in the context of the Blueprint Vision and growth accommodation will focus on commercial and transportation corridors that can be redeveloped and accommodate more residential and commercial growth.

Planning processes are extremely dynamic and multi-disciplinary, involving input regarding land use, transportation, open space, agricultural and rangelands, housing, retail/commerce, safety, etc. Jobs, flooding and natural resource protection issues are very important factors that must be considered in any planning exercise, whether addressing redevelopment of existing communities or planning for new growth areas. The County recognizes that every planning process must address these issues in depth, and balances must be struck between often competing interests to insure

that communities are designed to be livable, safe, inviting places in which residents can live, work, shop and play.

CIRCULATION ISSUES

- 1. Congestion and narrower streets may actually help improve air quality by discouraging more people to drive and slowing traffic.*
- 2. Two sets of two lane roads is more safe an efficient that a single four lane road.*
- 3. There is a pedestrian level of service standard that should be incorporated into the General Plan.*
- 4. How does the Circulation Element deal with high capacity roads with single family homes fronting on them?*
- 5. Are vertical curbs, skinnier streets and wider sidewalks being explored by the County? The City of Sacramento adopted standards on these strategies called "complete streets."*
- 6. How seriously is the County trying to address pedestrian, bicycle and ADA safety and mobility? Will the County Department of Transportation address walking and biking more directly in future plans?*
- 7. We need major circulation and land use changes to reach new federal air quality standards.*

Response: Sacramento County's Department of Transportation (DOT) is taking the lead on updating the General Plan Circulation Element. However, DOT will be working very closely with other County agencies and departments, as well as non-County organizations and the public, to ensure that a multitude of concerns related to transportation are addressed, including pedestrian, bicycle, automobile and public transit issues, as well as holistic circulation systems, air quality goals and the connection between transportation and land use.

A specific focus of the updated Circulation Element will be to take a holistic look at the County's circulation system and to plan improvements accordingly. More attention will be given to providing pedestrian and bicycle facilities, as well as improvements to public transit, including the addition of Bus Rapid Transit within specific corridors. DOT has also just finished work on their Pedestrian Master Plan and ADA Transition Plan, which will be integrated into the element. Other methods for calculating "levels of service" will also be explored.

GENERAL COMMENTS

1. *Will planning staff go back to the CPACs to discuss the General Plan Update?*
2. *Can we start a Yahoo group to spur discussion amongst community members regarding the General Plan Update?*
3. *We need to focus on increasing density and walkability while decreasing vehicle miles traveled to improve the health of our communities.*
4. *A Board of Supervisors cannot adequately govern an unincorporated area the size of Sacramento County.*
5. *The website www.smartcommunities.org shows how to leverage telecommunications to lessen the impact of having housing far from employment centers.*
6. *Sacramento has a great airport and fast encroaching development is threatening its viability.*

Response: Planning staff will go back to the CPACs once a draft General Plan is ready for review. CPAC and community members will be given a chance to comment on the draft General Plan throughout the environmental review phase, as well as through hearings at the Policy Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors. Staff is also exploring the use of online discussion groups to spur conversations between community members. The revised Land Use Element will directly address the connection between land use, transportation and public health.