

## **Summary of comments and concerns during the General Plan Update Focus Group Session #2**

### ***Growth Management and Commercial Corridors***

On Thursday, October 7, the General Plan Update Team held the second of four Focus Group Sessions designed to allow for public input and participation in the Update process. This session was focused on growth management and reinvestment in commercial corridors. Discussion included a brief synopsis of the “Corridor Conditions and Opportunities Assessment” report produced by planning staff and consultant Tom Trzcinski, an overview of how commercial corridors relate to growth management, and a summarization of the opportunities for revitalization that exist in these corridors. Once the introductory remarks were made, the focus group was asked to provide input on issues regarding growth management and redevelopment of commercial corridors.

#### **COMMERCIAL CORRIDORS CONDITIONS & ASSESSMENT REPORT:**

**Comment:** General comments and questions were raised regarding the Corridor Conditions and Opportunities Assessment report.

- 1. In what element(s) will discussion of commercial corridors be included?*
- 2. Development has driven planning in the past. It is exciting to see planning starting to drive development through the commercial corridor revitalization process.*
- 3. Commercial corridors are not just commercial in nature. We need to consider and encourage mixed use developments and residential uses within these corridors as well.*
- 4. Elkhorn Boulevard (west of Power Line) is another corridor that could benefit from future planning and development efforts.*

**Response:** The main discussion of commercial corridors will take place in the Land Use element of the General Plan, but will be referenced in other elements as well, such as the Circulation and Economic Development Elements. The County recognizes its role and responsibility in shaping development in the unincorporated areas; residents and other stakeholders are being encouraged to participate in the commercial corridor planning process so that development reflects the community’s needs and desires. While the corridors do generally accommodate a large concentration of commercial and retail enterprises, they are not exclusively commercial in nature. The County supports the incorporation of residential uses within these corridors to provide a larger customer base for local businesses, to help create the critical mass needed to make public transit options viable and to accommodate portions of future growth within compact, walkable, transit-oriented nodes.

**Comment:** Questions were raised regarding the land in and around the former McClellan Air Force Base.

1. *Since McClellan's closure, how is the surrounding area being developed, and how fast is this development occurring?*
2. *Industrial areas around McClellan can be used to build vocational training facilities.*
3. *Why does the Corridor Assessment report identify so little vacant land in the North Watt area?*

**Response:** In the McClellan area, property control is currently being transferred, but there are some contamination issues that need to be addressed. The County is proactively readying these sites for development, preparing them for quality tenants looking for an opportunity to locate within the area. Noise contours around McClellan airfields prevent intense development, reducing possible reuse and revitalization opportunities within these designated areas. Industrial areas around McClellan are being developed to accommodate a variety of commercial and industrial uses, but their specific uses are mainly market and consumer driven, not dictated by the County.

#### **TRANSPORTATION AND CIRCULATION ISSUES:**

**Comment:** There were general concerns regarding transit and transportation within the commercial corridors.

1. *More housing and office developments are needed to create the critical mass necessary to support public transit.*
2. *Transportation is key in corridor planning.*
3. *Caltrans is supportive of Transit Oriented Development (TOD's and is very interested in the Mobility Strategies Study.*
4. *Caltrans and SMAQMD should be involved in County transportation planning efforts.*
5. *Does the general plan address oil/ energy prices and/or conservation?*
6. *Transit has peripheral costs associated with its use, including greater travel time as compared to cars.*

**Response:** The quality of any public transportation system is based on ridership. Incorporating more housing and office developments along these commercial corridors can raise ridership numbers, helping to make public transit a more viable and cost-effective option. Many transportation-related agencies and organizations are supportive of the Transit Oriented Development (TOD) concept, including Sacramento Regional Transit District and the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans.) The County is working with both entities to ensure quality transportation development and redevelopment within these corridors and throughout the County. The County is also working closely with the Sacramento Air Quality Management District (SMAQMD) on the General Plan update regarding transportation and land use issues that have a direct effect air quality. As a long-range policy document, the General Plan does not address oil or energy prices specifically, but it does focus on conservation and efficient use of natural resources. While some modes of public transportation may take longer than driving, they offer other benefits to the rider, including: less wear on personal

automobiles, no parking fees, reduced fuel costs, and a relaxed atmosphere while traveling. Public transportation may also be the only option for people who do not own a vehicle.

**Comment:** There were questions and comments regarding pedestrian/bicycle amenities and safety.

1. *We need better bicycling facilities to be located on streets with less traffic.*
2. *We need pedestrian friendly amenities to make walking more safe and desirable.*
3. *We don't need dense populations to reduce car trips, just pedestrian-friendly communities.*
4. *Less oil and higher prices will cause more people to walk, bike and take transit.*
5. *People don't always want to live near and walk/bike to their workplace.*
6. *People should be given the choice to live near their workplace and retail so they do not need a car.*

**Response:** Providing the necessary infrastructure for walking and biking is a very important aspect of community design, allowing for multi-modal transportation options and active, well connected communities. More people walking and biking can reduce traffic congestion and air pollution, encourage local retail business, and support public transit usage. Safety is paramount when planning for bike lanes and sidewalks and must be a prime concern throughout the planning process. Reducing vehicle miles traveled (VMT) is not dependent on building higher density developments; it can be accomplished to a degree through a well-connected network of sidewalks and bike lanes. On the other hand, supporting public transit may entail higher densities around transit stops to maintain adequate ridership numbers. With oil prices continuing to rise, more people may look to walking, biking and public transit for their travel needs. While many people do not desire to live close to their places of work or business, there are many people who not only choose to live in these areas, but pay a premium to do so. Development should provide a range of housing options and community designs to accommodate all income levels, ages and lifestyle desires.

## **DESIGN ISSUES:**

**Comment:** Concerns were raised regarding building and site design of future development and redevelopment.

1. *Can you plan for quality development using the General Plan, including the physical appearance of buildings, site design and streetscapes?*
2. *Why encourage good building/site design near undesirable development?*
3. *There should not be sound walls near the right-of-way. They make the streets seem less safe and diminish the rural feel of the neighborhood.*

**Response:** Commercial corridor planning would include an urban design component. Specific design guidelines would be established to set the standard for quality

streetscape, signage and building layout, landscaping and building style that is unique to that corridor. Public input would be an essential component in developing the design criteria. Encouraging quality development and redevelopment in blighted areas is necessary to rehabilitate ailing communities. Investing in quality development within these areas can trigger further investment in neighboring buildings and infrastructure, and ultimately, the revitalization of entire communities. During a commercial corridor planning effort, economic incentives that could encourage reinvestment in quality development would be studied as well.

Sound walls are necessary to mitigate the impacts of noise experienced in certain residential developments. Unfortunately, sound walls are commonly used to attenuate noise levels experienced near roadways, and are therefore placed near the right-of-way, which can deteriorate from a pedestrian-friendly environment and rural feel of a neighborhood. Fortunately, good site planning can reduce the need for sound walls or reduce their visual and functional impacts.

## **OTHER ISSUES:**

**Comment:** Other issues were raised concerning the General Plan update.

- 1. Focus groups should be set up with the public and developers.*
- 2. Property owners are sitting on land while the land gains value, giving them little incentive to sell or develop.*
- 3. Are there new regulations that do not hold current landowners responsible for contamination on their land that occurred while in the possession of a previous owner?*
- 4. We need more good employment opportunities*

**Response:** Outreach for the General Plan update targets both the public and developers, as will future efforts concerning planning and development within commercial corridors. The Economic Development Department is also currently receiving input from developers and residents through their research for the new Economic Development Element. With changing market forces, this may be a good time to address revitalization opportunities and strategize for future development of lands currently vacant or re-developable. Although these parcels may not be available for development in the near future, planning must still occur so that a strategy is in place when they are ready for development. Existing law holds all owners of a land parcel, both current and previous, responsible for contamination of the land. Business and Environmental Resource (BERC) staff is looking into the possibility of a new law that would alleviate current landowners of responsibility for past owners' contamination of the land. Planning staff actively works for a balance of jobs and housing within the County, but many external factors play into the quantity and quality of local and regional employment opportunities.