

## Summary of comments and concerns during the General Plan Update Focus Group Session #4

### *Economic Development*

On Wednesday, December 8, the General Plan Update Team held the final of four initial Focus Group Sessions designed to allow for public input and participation in the Update process. This session was focused on economic development and included discussion on redevelopment, revitalization and job creation and retention opportunities. Troy Givans, a Senior Planner with Sacramento County Department of Economic Development, made a brief presentation on the proposed new Economic Development Element, its purpose, and its objectives. Once the presentation was completed, the focus group was asked to provide input on opportunities to enhance economic development within the County.

### COMMERCIAL AND RETAIL DEVELOPMENT

**Comment:** General comments, questions and concerns were raised regarding commercial and retail development.

1. *Developing McClellan without addressing the associated increase in traffic will lead to congestion and a great nuisance.*
2. *Where will sites for large retail be located?*
3. *Chasing sales tax generators is a fluctuating business. The County should look more for property tax generators.*

**Response:** The redevelopment of McClellan is ongoing. Traffic studies regarding local and regional traffic patterns are usually addressed during the review of development proposals within the McClellan area.

Sites for large retail establishments will have to be chosen based on a number of factors, including but not limited to: transportation and transit access, existing and potential new infrastructure, parcel size, surrounding land uses, environmental concerns, etc. The County will explore designating only those lands that fit a variety of strict criteria for location of such businesses. The County is very sensitive to the issue of new commercial development detracting from established commercial enterprises within existing communities. Commercial corridor planning and an emphasis of revitalizing these communities will actually plan for new commercial growth *within* these communities, rather than on the urban fringe. This strategy is focused on bringing in more assets and tax dollars to existing communities, strengthening and balancing local economies rather than leaching money out of them.

The County's emphasis is shifting from a predominant focus on job creation to concentrating on both job creation and sales tax generation. However, the County has no intention to "chase retail." Unfortunately, Proposition 13 has made it nearly impossible for cities and counties to survive on property tax alone. Although property tax does generate revenue, strong sales tax generation is essential to maintaining and improving municipal and countywide services.

## COMMERCIAL CORRIDORS

**Comment:** There were questions and comments expressed regarding commercial corridors and revitalization efforts.

- 1. Have commercial corridors been defined and targeted for revitalization?*
- 2. Watt is a prime corridor for TODs, BRT and economic development.*
- 3. Has there been a study for a fixed guideway on Watt? How about a monorail?*
- 4. Dedicated transit lanes were removed from the Mobility Strategies Study.*
- 5. Monorail, BRT and Light Rail are all good options, but BRT is the cheapest and most flexible.*
- 6. Mixed use residential along corridors may have a low value because of the traffic. They need to be buffered from the traffic.*

**Response:** Planning staff studied 13 specific corridors in the “Corridor Conditions and Opportunities Assessment” report completed for the second Board workshop held September 22<sup>nd</sup>. This report documents the challenges and opportunities within each corridor and lays the foundation for future corridor planning efforts. The County Department of Transportation (DOT) and Department of Economic Development have also studied key corridors to assess their potential for transportation improvement and economic development opportunities. Once commercial corridor planning efforts get underway, these efforts will be consolidated into a single, multi-disciplinary approach that will address a number of issues, including land use, transportation, economic development, services, housing, social issues, etc. Watt has been studied extensively and would benefit greatly from such planning efforts and associated transit improvements. It is ultimately up to the Board to prioritize the corridors and identify which ones are first to be planned for revitalization.

The County Department of Transportation’s Mobility Strategies Study looked at a number of transportation improvements to Watt, but did not include monorail as an option. DOT is going back to the Board to further discuss mobility issues on January 26<sup>th</sup>. Nothing in the Mobility Strategies Study has been ruled out as a potential option nor have any options been considered by the Board to date. Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is being seriously considered by the County as a cost-effective and flexible addition to the existing transportation system. Since BRT can take on many shapes, regional Transit is currently working with stakeholders to define the various classifications of BRT. Although light rail is a viable and valuable transit option that will be continually expanded, monorail has yet to be explored due to expense and complexity.

Mixed use projects with residential units may be planned along commercial corridors to help accommodate anticipated growth, facilitate transit usage and support local commerce. Being located near transit, employment and retail attracts certain people and can actually improve property values. Noise and traffic would

need to be considered through the commercial corridor planning process in order to minimize such effects on future residents.

## TRANSPORTATION

**Comment:** There were comments and concerns expressed regarding the current and future transportation system and modes of travel.

1. *Increase of freight traffic is a big issue.*
2. *Has the County studied how we intend to move goods in the future?*
3. *Sacramento is missing a major beltway around the central city. There needs to be a way to get around the city without going through it. It is inhibiting growth.*
4. *Some environmental efforts that fight additional highway and freeway capacity, forcing traffic onto local streets, can lead to worse air quality.*
5. *Cars traveling at high speeds on freeways increase NOx output, while slower stop-and-go traffic on local streets increase CO2 emissions. Sacramento has a problem with NOx, not CO2.*
6. *We need more transit to accommodate new growth and reduce Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMTs)*
7. *There is a lack of communication between the County and RT and a lack of transit funding.*

**Response:** Increased freight traffic is a big issue that must be addressed by numerous agencies, including the County DOT, the Sacramento Area County of Governments, and Caltrans. While the County has not undertaken a study on how goods can and/or will move in the future, Caltrans has completed such a report. Beltways and bypasses can help to alleviate such traffic and provide a means to move around the city without traveling through it, but there are serious implications associated with such roadways, including increased sprawl development, worsening air quality, more vehicle miles traveled, more tax money devoted to maintenance, weakened economy within the bypassed area, etc. Although development of such infrastructure has not been ruled out, extensive multi-jurisdictional planning efforts would be necessary before considering such facilities.

There are air quality and ozone-related problems with all travel modes powered by fossil fuels. While some emissions increase with faster driving and some increase with stop-and-go driving, total emissions decrease when travelers are concentrated into buses or light rail, or when people choose to walk and bike instead. The County's goal is to reduce VMTs by providing a multi-modal system with light rail, different levels of bus service, and walkable and bikeable communities and streetscapes. Sacramento County and RT work together very closely to plan for future transit improvements throughout the County and the region.

## INCORPORATIONS

**Comments:** Questions and comments were expressed about past incorporations of former County jurisdictions and the possibility of further incorporations.

- 1. What planning was done to plan for and/or minimize the effects of incorporation?*
- 2. More incorporations are likely – how do we plan for them?*
- 3. Other counties learn to live with incorporations.*
- 4. The Board chose decentralization over incorporation of the County.*
- 5. The County should look to incorporate the remaining unincorporated areas and contract with them. LA is a leader in this realm.*

**Response:** The County is taking a very proactive role in addressing economic, service and governance related issues that were at the core of past incorporations. The Department of Neighborhood Services (DNS) was created as a part of the Municipal Services Agency (MSA) to consolidate neighborhood-oriented components of existing county agencies and become the focal point of all community-based interaction with the County. Under the DNS, Community Service Areas are being created to facilitate service delivery at the community level. Each Service Area will be served by a Community Service Center with county staff available on site to handle a variety of issues facing residents of existing communities. “Walk up” counters will be established to expedite routine administrative needs, including issues related to land use, transportation, code enforcement, animal services, building inspection and others.

The County is currently studying options that could lead to a potential reorganization of the Community Planning Advisory Councils (CPACs) into eight Community Councils. The new Councils would have greater decision-making authority on neighborhood issues, particularly with respect to local land-use issues. While the CPACs’ role was largely advisory, the new Community Councils’ decisions on land use issues would be final, unless formally challenged. They would also work with community groups and businesses to identify neighborhood projects and issues and devise plans for dealing with them. The Community Councils will give residents of mature communities increased authority regarding planning and land use decisions that affect their neighborhoods.

Comprehensive commercial corridor planning efforts will be carried out to take advantage of the opportunities that exist within these areas. Commercial corridor plans will be multi-disciplinary in nature, including planning, economic development, transportation, and municipal service considerations. Utilizing the strategic assets available within these corridors can improve community quality of life, enhance mobility, balance land uses, and increase the local tax and employment bases. These opportunities offer great potential to dramatically improve the quality of life along these corridors and their adjacent communities, as well as the County as a whole.

Ultimately, the Board must define the role of the County and whether it will continue to act as a city government for the unincorporated areas, or to embrace incorporations and perform only traditional county duties.

## **DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS AND REVIEW**

**Comment:** General questions, comments and concerns were expressed regarding the County's development regulations and review process.

- 1. The regulations and review process in the County is cumbersome and very expensive. We need to streamline the process and eliminate the red tape.*
- 2. There should be a new objective in the Economic Development Element to formulate a customer service approach and eliminate bureaucracy.*
- 3. San Jose has a great model to follow for regulations and review.*
- 4. Anaheim has a "fee free" application period to encourage development.*
- 5. Can there be an online application process?*
- 6. A single application that can be used for all projects would simplify the process.*

**Response:** Improving and streamlining development regulations and existing review processes will be addressed in the Economic Development Element's objectives, although exact language has yet to be fleshed out. Improving customer service and reducing bureaucracy will be addressed within previously identified objectives with possible inclusion of specific policies and/or implementation measures. Staff recognizes that a simple and economical process is a strong business attractant, and convoluted processes can drive potential business away. Staff is looking at other jurisdictions' processes to glean ideas that may influence or be directly incorporated into Sacramento County's process. An online application process would be very difficult to implement for a variety of reasons, but is by no means impossible. A single application that can be used for all projects may also lead to a simplified process. Staff will explore these ideas further.

## **ZONING AND URBAN DESIGN**

**Comment:** There were questions and comments on zoning types and urban design issues.

- 1. There is a comment in Attachment A of the Staff Report that mentions that the County should get out of the zoning business and/or use form based zoning. Please clarify.*
- 2. Form based zoning may make infill easier.*
- 3. We need design review.*
- 4. The key to infill is design.*
- 5. We need parking maximums, not minimums.*

**Response:** A member of the Economic Development Element Stakeholder Workgroup provided the comment in Attachment A. While the County will maintain its responsibility and authority over land use within the unincorporated areas, form based zoning is being explored for specific areas to take the place of traditional zoning. Form based zoning focuses more on the form and design of buildings and site plans, rather than on their ultimate use. Form based zoning may facilitate infill development and is being explored for use within commercial corridors planning and revitalization efforts, but is not appropriate countywide. Sacramento County is in the process of developing a commercial design review program that will be extended to regulate residential projects in the future. This program will make certain that development contributes positively to the character of the surrounding community, and integrates well into to existing site and street layout. This program requires that new development and building renovations be built in a manner that will enhance visual harmony, ensure quality design of sites and structures, and contribute to the distinct identity of each community. Parking minimums and maximums will be specified with the commercial design guidelines.

## **OTHER**

**Comment:** Other issues were raised regarding the General Plan Update.

1. Crime prevention should be addressed in the Economic Development Element.
2. The Economic Development Element should address Transportation Management Associations (TMAs).
3. County departments need to work together more.
4. Many people in the Arden/Arcade area feel that the County has not listened to them.
5. Proof of the County changing its ways will be in the implementation of its plans.

**Response:** Crime prevention is addressed in other General Plan Elements, including Safety and Public Facilities and will most likely not be directly discussed within the Economic Element. TMAs are specifically addressed and encourage within the County zoning code and most likely will not be addressed in the Economic Development Element, since it is focused specifically on economic growth and retention, rather than specific programs of individual businesses.

County departments were recently reorganized to facilitate cooperation and collaboration among them. The reorganization has structured County departments in a manner much more conducive to cooperation. Planning staff is working very closely with nearly every County department on the General Plan update process, and will continue to do so once it is complete so that it can implement policies and programs efficiently and effectively. The County is making every effort to include citizens in the planning process, and working to provide better services at the local level, and provide residents with more authority over local governance

issues. The County has every intention on implementing policies and programs that it has established or will establish in the future.