

Sacramento County General Plan Update Workshops Answers for Public FAQs

If the General Plan Update has been underway since 2004, why are these workshops occurring now?

The General Plan Update process was originally scoped as a “mini update” to make relatively modest changes to the existing General Plan, which was adopted in 1993. While the existing General Plan is built upon a high quality policy framework, minor policy changes were envisioned to make the Plan more current and more effective. Even though the scope of the project was somewhat modest, there was a strong public outreach component. To date, Planning staff has made presentations to all Community Planning Advisory Councils (CPAC), conducted 12 focus group sessions with interested community members, and held 16 public workshops before the Board of Supervisors.

In August 2005, SACOG gave the County growth projections based on its adopted Blueprint Vision land use plan for the Sacramento Region. Based on this region-wide plan, unincorporated Sacramento County was asked to capture a larger share of the regional growth in order to reduce sprawl and reinvest in existing communities. County Planning staff held numerous workshops with the Board of Supervisors to discuss whether or not to embrace Blueprint’s principles and the growth associated with the plan. The Board has since conceptually endorsed the Blueprint, thereby changing the scope of the General Plan Update project considerably. The Board and Planning staff felt that this change necessitated expanded public outreach, resulting in the current series of workshops. A major component of these workshops is to receive input on the conceptual strategies discussed during the Board workshops held during the last year.

Will what I say here make any difference?

Absolutely! Although the Board has *conceptually* endorsed the Blueprint Vision, no decisions have been made. During the Board workshops held over the past year, Planning staff recommended two new growth management strategies to the Board that support implementation of the Blueprint’s principles. The first change to the existing General Plan would be a new strategy that calls for focusing County efforts on improvements to 14 existing commercial corridors to increase jobs, retail and housing and link those new uses to transit. The second change to the existing General Plan is a strategy that expands the urban area of Sacramento County in several locations by moving the General Plan “Urban Policy Area (UPA)”. However, the Board made it clear that before creating this new Draft General Plan, members of the unincorporated community should be engaged in a discussion regarding these strategies. The Board will use your input from these workshops to make informed decisions about how Sacramento County will grow over the next 25 years.

How do the workshop exercises address the SACOG Blueprint project?

SACOG’s Blueprint project provided the region with a vision for addressing anticipated job, retail and housing growth out to the year 2050. Given this regional, long-range vision, each jurisdiction, including Sacramento County, must now decide how to shape their land use

policies. For example, how does Sacramento County wish to modify our existing General Plan policies to address Blueprint principles including quality design, use of existing assets, housing and transportation options? Ultimately, these workshop exercises will determine how the Blueprint's principles should be implemented at the County-wide level.

I don't use transit. Why would I want transit oriented planning in my neighborhood?

Transit oriented planning is more than just planning for transit and perhaps could be called *pedestrian, bicycle and transit oriented planning* (but that's just too much to say!). Transit oriented planning is about creating a "sense of place" and a gathering point for community members; it is about creating places where people can live, work, shop and find entertainment all within walking distance or within a short transit ride; it is about requiring high quality design and creating inviting public spaces. All of these elements can help make a location into a destination worth visiting – turning a nondescript area into a real community center with a sense of place.

In addition, transit oriented planning can help to attract a critical mass of resources, people and talent necessary to support high quality stores, entertainment venues and restaurants. Whereas conventional strip malls and commercial corridors often attract businesses like fast food restaurants auto repair, storage and discount stores, transit oriented places will draw the people necessary to attract businesses like fine restaurants, theaters, and boutique stores. Also, by creating communities that encourage walking, biking and transit, transit oriented planning will positively affect our region's air quality by reducing automobile traffic and congestion.

Is the County pushing for higher density development in my neighborhood?

The two new growth management strategies were created in part to address community member's concerns about new "high density" development – including apartments and condominiums – being built in their neighborhood. The existing General Plan calls for minimum residential densities, such as apartments and condominiums, within 1/4th and 1/8th mile of a large number of roadways throughout the County that either currently have or may someday have transit. The new commercial corridor strategy is intended to modify this existing approach to instead focus on creating a sense of place in a fewer number of corridors and to focus County efforts on revitalizing these corridors. The existing General Plan would then decrease the emphasis that exists in the current policies that might affect many existing residential neighborhoods. However, the Plan will not abandon its call to consider higher densities in areas that have existing or foreseeable high quality transit service. Therefore, the General Plan infill strategy would be *less* aggressive than in the existing General Plan.

It is very important to note that the amount and style of future development in the corridors and new growth areas would be decided through separate comprehensive planning processes for area. The General Plan would only set the policy basis to allow planning efforts in the corridors to happen in the future.

What does corridor planning involve?

Revitalizing commercial corridors will focus on urban design, economic development opportunities, transportation improvements, and housing, with special attention given to strengths and opportunities of individual communities. The goal is to achieve a distinct sense of place for each area, provide new opportunities for mixed use projects, town centers, community gathering places, and other new housing, retail and office projects. Each corridor planning effort will have a substantial public outreach process that will involve residents, business interests, County staff, and numerous other agencies and organizations.

The final result of each corridor planning process will be a comprehensive plan that addresses land uses, urban design, economic development, circulation and housing availability. Corridor plans will be a direct result of community input and participation and reflect the desire of the surrounding community. Corridor planning efforts for North Watt Avenue, Fair Oaks Boulevard in Carmichael and Florin Road are set to begin shortly.

Will corridor planning involve zone changes or use of eminent domain?

Corridor planning will most likely involve changes to existing zoning, since most of the identified corridors have an excess of land zoned for industrial and heavy commercial uses. Zoning changes may be necessary to attract desired uses, such as high quality stores, homes, offices, and entertainment options. As with all zone changes, uses established under previous zoning will be allowed to remain, while new uses will be required to follow new zoning. Any changes to zoning will be the result of a comprehensive public participation process and will directly reflect the desire of the community surrounding the corridor.

Some corridors are located within existing redevelopment areas designated by the Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency. This means that for abandoned, economically dislocated or otherwise blighted parcels, the community may choose to use eminent domain as part of a rehabilitation process. However, eminent domain is used very sparingly and only as a last resort. The County does not have any plans to use eminent domain – it would only be used as a means to realize the vision created by the community for the corridor in question. The General Plan does not advocate for or against eminent domain; it is used very rarely, and only in a case-by-case basis.

Why should I care how land uses outside of my community are planned?

The effects of changes to land uses are not necessarily limited to the area immediately surrounding the change. Allowing additional growth in new areas on the fringe, either within the unincorporated County or in other cities and counties, can affect levels of congestion on local highways and on thoroughfares inside of your community. However, the entire region can benefit from land use changes that allow options for some trips to be taken by bicycle, walking, or transit because those choices lead to less traffic congestion and fewer air quality impacts to all of us. Therefore, when county residents provide direction on the County's plan for future growth, they must consider the wide-ranging impacts of their decisions, rather than just local impacts.

What is the difference between the Urban Policy Area (UPA) and the Urban Services Boundary (USB)?

The Urban Services Boundary or USB is intended to be the ultimate boundary of the urban area in the unincorporated County. It is the limit to which urban services, such as public water and sewer, will be provided; as such, it defines the ultimate “footprint” for urban development in Sacramento County. It is intended to be a permanent boundary not subject to modification except under extraordinary circumstances. (It should be noted that the Cities of Sacramento, Folsom, Citrus Heights, Rancho Cordova, Elk Grove, Galt and Isleton do not have a similar restriction within their General Plans and could propose to annex and urbanize land outside of the USB.)

The Urban Policy Area or UPA is a “flexible” boundary inside of the USB that is intended to manage near-term growth – only land within the UPA can be developed with urban uses. The existing General Plan states that the area within the UPA must be able to accommodate growth projected for the 20-year planning period. If it cannot, the UPA must be expanded to accommodate the anticipated growth. These two growth boundaries work in tandem to manage and direct future development, as well as provide infrastructure and service providers with intermediate and ultimate growth boundaries to use to plan for future expansion.