

Commissioners:

The purpose of the workshop is for staff to introduce three separate, interrelated projects and their corresponding DEIR (as described below), provide information on the schedule, discuss next steps in the process, and gather public and Commission input. No decisions or final recommendations on these items are being requested at this time. Staff is prepared to make a presentation on the workshop items. The Planning Commission may want to consider the manner and format in which to solicit public comments, and the possibility that specially scheduled Commission meetings may need to be held in order to maintain the projects on schedule.

CASE NUMBERS: PHG 09-0020, PHG 10-0016

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: A workshop to discuss the Draft General Plan, Draft Downtown Specific Plan, Draft Escondido Climate Action Plan (E-CAP), and Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) that was prepared to assess these projects.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Review materials, receive public testimony, and forward any comments to the City Council in anticipation of their workshop on February 1, 2012.

PREVIOUS ACTIONS: The Draft General Plan, Downtown Specific Plan, and E-CAP were released for public review on January 12, 2012. The Notice of Availability (NOA) for the DEIR that assesses these projects was filed with the County Clerk on January 13 for its minimum 30-day posting period. Copies of the DEIR were also mailed to the state clearing house for a 45-day public review/comment period that will conclude on February 27, 2012. Information is available on line at:

<http://www.escondido.org/general-plan-update.aspx>

BACKGROUND:

Draft General Plan:

State Law requires General Plans to be updated periodically. The State's Office of Planning and Research (OPR) monitors the status of General Plans and begins to encourage cities to update their plans after 8 years. Escondido's Draft General Plan update establishes a 2035 planning horizon year, meets current legal requirements, refines the city's vision for 2050, and will establish a basis for current and future City Council Action Plans. Staff worked with a City Council-appointed General Plan Issues Committee who met numerous times to discuss various issues as part of the update process. In addition, staff held a series of public workshops and neighborhood meetings (involving 5,000+ notices mailed to area residents), conducted surveys, and solicited input from the public at the city's annual street fair, from school children at local schools, and from neighborhood representatives.

The General Plan Update includes an updated Housing Element, which has a separate, specific update schedule established by the State. The next required Housing Element update has been extended to December 2012 so it can be coordinated with other Regional Planning efforts. However, Escondido's Housing Element has been coordinated with the General Plan Update to ensure they are consistent.

The General Plan Update preserves residential densities and intensities in most single family neighborhoods, as directed by City Council and preferred by residents who participated in workshops held throughout the process. New features in the General Plan Update include:

- 1) Reorganizing existing Elements, and establishing two new Elements related to Community Health and Services, and Economic Prosperity, (General Plan Elements IV and IX).
- 2) Refining General Plan Quality of Life Standards:
 - a. Traffic and Transportation: Maintaining Traffic Level of Service (LOS) "C" as the threshold for planning and developing street and establishing LOS "D" as the threshold for implementing mitigation, which is consistent with engineering standards (page I-13).
 - b. Parks System: Identifying efforts to expand Grape Day Park acreage north of Woodward Avenue as a priority (page I-15).
 - c. Library Service: Reducing the library stock and staffing of three (3) collection items per capita to two (2) collection items per capita in recognition of every-expanding collection materials that are available on-line (page I-15).
 - d. Air Quality: Establishing a Climate Action Plan with feasible and appropriate local policies and measures aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions (page I-16).
 - e. Water System: Modifying the city's capacity to provide water on a per household basis from 600 gallons per day to 540 gallons per day in concert with state mandates to reduce water usage by 10% (page I-16).
- 3) Including Floor Area Ratios to establish development intensities for non-residential and mixed use General Plan designations (page II-8 and pages II-23 – II-28).
- 4) Establishing new land use designations for Urban V (multi-family, up to 45 units per acre), Planned Office (areas for larger R&D, corporate office uses in a campus-like setting), Parks and Open Space, Tribal Lands (recognizing federally designated Native American land holdings), and Overlay Areas (identifying residential mixed use development, and public facilities) (pages II-22, II-25, II-29).
- 5) Incorporating Smart Growth principles that focus on: enhancing existing neighborhoods and existing infrastructure, incorporating Complete Street features, expanding housing choices, and enhancing transportation choices (pages II-14, 15, II-4 – II-18).

- 6) Designating fourteen (14) “Opportunity Areas” that are focused in the more densely developed urban areas and along transportation corridors where opportunity exists to enhance employment and residential mixed-use development (pages II-61 – II-77). These Opportunity Areas involve:
- a. Amending approximately 450 acres of existing residentially designated properties to employment land uses (Business Park, Office, and Commercial). Note: Re-designating these residential properties to employment land will reduce approximately 1,400 dwelling units from the city’s current General Plan built-out capacity (only a small percentage of these dwelling units are constructed).
 - b. Establishing Specific Plans, Area Plans or other types of “Overlay Districts” on approximately 800 acres of existing employment lands with goals of attracting high-wage employers, intensifying land uses to raise employee densities, improving linkage to transit, upgrading infrastructure, enhancing aesthetics and walkability, etc., while ensuring compatibility with adjacent residential areas.
 - c. Incentivizing educational institutions, vocational schools, and job training facilities to locate along the East Valley Parkway corridor providing residents opportunities to enhance their personal or professional skills resulting in a higher trained, better educated local labor force.
 - d. Establishing mixed-use residential nodes that focus compact, attractive, high intensity urban development in close proximity to employment, transit, services, shopping, recreation, and entertainment in walkable, pedestrian-friendly environments designed to reduce vehicle trips. These mixed-use nodes would be:
 - i. Downtown;
 - ii. East Valley Parkway between Palomar Hospital and Ash Street;
 - iii. S. Escondido Boulevard at Felicita Avenue;
 - iv. Centre City Parkway at Citracado Parkway;
 - v. East of I-15, south of Hwy. 78 in concert with a regional sports and/or employment facility.

Draft Downtown Specific Plan:

An Interim Downtown Specific Plan was approved by the City Council in 2007 to incorporate “Phase I” recommendations from an appointed Downtown Revitalization Committee incorporating smart growth principles, pedestrian oriented guidelines, and an updated land use matrix. These Phase I modifications could be quickly implemented and addressed with minimal environmental review and analysis. The DEIR that analyzed the City’s General Plan Update included the Committee’s “Phase II” recommendations which involved:

- 1) Expanding the Specific Plan boundaries to include areas north of Washington Avenue, south of Fifth Avenue, Palomar Hospital and the Mercado (page II-2).

- 2) Increasing building heights up to 85 feet, densities up to 100 units per acre, and a total capacity of up to 5,275 total residential units, which are 3,275 more units than anticipated in the original Downtown Specific Plan, and refining the locations of where residential development may occur (pages I-5, II-10 – II-12).
- 3) The inclusion of Complete Streets policies that call for design features that accommodate all users – bicyclists, transit, vehicles, and pedestrians (pages III-1 – III-11).
- 4) Establishing a traffic Level of Service (LOS) “E” for Grand Avenue, Valley Parkway, Second Avenue and other intervening streets in the downtown area as the threshold for determining significance for requiring mitigation. This is a consistent engineering practice for downtown areas and will accommodate wider sidewalks, transit vehicles, pedestrian crossings, and other features that will affect traffic volumes and speeds (pages III-17, 18).
- 5) Maintaining front setbacks to a distance of the right-of-way line or 14 feet from ultimate street curb face, whichever is greater, in order to accommodate a more pedestrian-friendly street scape. This setback from ultimate street curb face is consistent for buildings along Grand Avenue (page III-30).
- 6) Minor clean-up editing to remove references to the Design Review Board (pages throughout document), and changing the land use matrix regarding wine and beer tasting establishments in the Historic Downtown and Mercado Districts from a Conditional to a Permitted Use (page II-4).

Draft Escondido Climate Action Plan (E-CAP):

Assembly Bill 32 was passed by the state legislature in 2006 mandating that California cut its greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020, and 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050. An initial step involves each jurisdiction preparing a local Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory that identifies and documents major sources of emissions affecting climate change within its boundaries. Results of that inventory have been included in the E-CAP and form the foundation for establishing a plan that will guide Escondido toward achieving its GHG reductions goals. Phase II of the document will include screening tables that offer a “cafeteria-style” program of greenhouse gas reducing measures for developers to implement in their projects to meet reduction targets.

Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR):

The DEIR (involving the topics described above) examines the potential environmental effects from implementation of the proposed projects in the following areas:

- Aesthetics
- Agricultural Resources
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural and Paleontological Resources
- Geology and Soils
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use
- Mineral Resources
- Noise
- Population and Housing
- Public Services
- Recreation
- Transportation and Traffic
- Utilities and Service Systems

As required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) the DEIR:

- 1) Assesses the potentially significant direct and indirect environmental effects of the proposed projects as well as the potentially significant cumulative impacts that could occur from implementation of the proposed project;
- 2) Identifies potential feasible means of avoiding or substantially lessening significant adverse impacts; and
- 3) Evaluates a range of reasonable alternatives to the proposed project, including the required No Project Alternative.

Guidelines for determining the significance of environmental effects are primarily based upon adopted CEQA Guidelines, the City's quality of life standards, and regulatory ordinances. The significance criteria for some environmental topics are quantitative (such as for air quality, traffic, and noise), while qualitative standards are used for other topics (such as aesthetics and land use). The DEIR utilizes the following categories to describe the level of significance of impacts identified during the course of the environmental analysis:

- ***Less than Significant.*** This term is used to refer to: 1) environmental impacts resulting from implementation of the proposed project that are not likely to exceed the defined standards of significance; and 2) potentially significant impacts that are reduced to a level that does not exceed the defined standards of significance after implementation of mitigation measures.
- ***Significant.*** This term is used to refer to environmental impacts resulting from implementation of the proposed project that exceed the defined standards of significance before identification of mitigation measures. A "significant effect" is defined by Section 15382 of the CEQA Guidelines as: "a substantial, or potentially substantial, adverse change in any of the physical conditions within the area affected by the project including land, air, water, minerals, flora, fauna, ambient noise, and objects of historic or aesthetic significance. An economic or social change by itself shall not be considered a significant effect on the environment [but] may be considered in determining whether the physical change is significant."

- ***Significant and Unavoidable***. This term is used to refer to significant impacts resulting from implementation of the proposed projects that cannot be eliminated or reduced to below standards of significance through implementation of feasible mitigation measures.

The DEIR concludes that implementing the projects would result in *Less than Significant Impacts* for the following categories:

Aesthetics, Agricultural Resources, Cultural Resources, Geology and Soils, Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Hazards and Hazardous Materials, Hydrology and Water Quality, Land Use, Mineral Resources, Public Services, Recreation.

The DEIR concludes that implementing the projects would result in *Significant and Unavoidable Impacts* for the following categories

Air Quality, Biological Resources, Noise, Population and Housing, Transportation and Traffic, Utilities and Service Systems.

Future efforts in the DEIR include preparation of a Mitigation and Monitoring Plan that allows staff to assign responsibility and track the implementation of Mitigation Measures identified in the document. Because implementing the General Plan Update and Downtown Specific Plan involve significant and unavoidable environmental impacts, a Statement of Overriding Findings will need to be adopted by the Planning Commission and City Council. This document concludes that the benefits of the projects outweigh the impacts associated with their implementation and is required as a component of the Final EIR's certification.

NEXT STEPS IN THE PROCESS:

The DEIR Public Review and Comment Period concludes on February 27, 2012. After that time written responses will be prepared including any amendments to the DEIR and the projects being assessed. Public hearings for the General Plan Update, Downtown Specific Plan, Climate Action Plan, and EIR Certification are anticipated for late spring or early summer 2012. Additional public workshops are being considered at this time. A City Council workshop is scheduled for February 1, 2012 at 4:30 p.m. Staff will be seeking direction regarding future workshops, and whether to reconvene the previously appointed General Plan Issues Committee for their input. A public vote on the General Plan is slated for the November 2012 election.

Respectfully Submitted,

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