

# CITY COUNCIL

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**Agenda Item No.: 10**

**Date: February 1, 2012**

**TO:** Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

**FROM:** Barbara J. Redlitz, Director of Community Development

**SUBJECT:** A Workshop on the General Plan Update, Climate Action Plan, Downtown Specific Plan, Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR)  
Case Nos.: PHG 09-0020, PHG 10-0016  
Documents are online at: <http://www.escondido.org/general-plan-update.aspx>

## **STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

It is recommended that the City Council: 1) Review materials pertaining to the Draft General Plan Update; 2) Receive public input for consideration; 3) Direct staff to conduct community meetings to inform the public about the General Plan; 4) Forward the General Plan, Climate Action Plan, Downtown Specific Plan, and EIR to the Planning Commission in May for their final recommendation; and 5) provide staff direction regarding potential courses of action prior to future public hearings.

## **PLANNING COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION AND SUMMARY:**

The Planning Commission reviewed the information and conducted a workshop on January 24, 2012 ([refer to attached staff report](#)). Three speakers provided input including Pam Stahl, a member of the City Council appointed General Plan Issues Committee. Comments included reference to documents prepared by Ms. Stahl and a minority of the Issues Committee generally opposing recommendations of the majority that should be factored in the General Plan decision making. Concern was raised regarding increased traffic associated with the updated General Plan. All three speakers expressed concern regarding the editing or deleting of certain General Plan policies that were re-adopted and re-affirmed as part of Proposition "S." Questions were raised regarding how the public will be educated about the General Plan Update in order to make an informed decision on Election Day.

The Planning Commission questioned staff on the traffic implications for the General Plan build-out. Commissioner Campbell expressed concern about the proposal to include traffic Level of Service (LOS) "D" in the General Plan, and LOS "E" in the Downtown Specific Planning Area along segments of Grand Avenue, Valley Parkway and Second Avenue. Staff responded that: a) the city's adopted circulation system is not completely built-out, and that further Capital Improvement Program improvements will improve overall traffic conditions; b) the proposed traffic levels of service for the General Plan and Downtown Specific Plan are consistent with current engineering standards; c) Traffic LOS "D" and "E" would only be experienced for brief "peak periods;" d) during most of the day all streets would function at an acceptable level of service; and e) that the consequence of widening streets to accommodate additional vehicle travel lanes to improve traffic flow would sacrifice street parking, sidewalk widths, necessitate costly right-of way acquisitions, and compromise the streetscape and pedestrian environment.

Commissioner McQuead questioned staff regarding the Downtown Specific Plan's Adaptive Re-use Area involving six blocks located in the southeastern portion of the SPA and the ability to allow adaptive reuse opportunities within historic structures in other areas of downtown. Staff concurred that this would be an appropriate consideration.

Commissioners Weber, Gannon and Winton asked about the Climate Action Plan's monitoring system and consequences for not complying with provisions in the Plan. Staff responded that a monitoring system to document Greenhouse Gas reductions would be incorporated in the Phase II component of the document. While direction from the state on how jurisdictions will report their compliance has not been provided, there have been instances where the State Attorney General has threatened litigation against jurisdictions that do not incorporate Greenhouse Gas reduction programs in their updated General Plans.

The Commission discussed options for their final review and recommendation of the documents. An issue with other jurisdictions has been ensuring opportunity for adequate public input while assessing a large amount of information over the course of multiple public hearings. Staff noted that it has been common for Planning Commissions in other jurisdictions to conduct several meetings in concert with a General Plan update. Staff will keep the Planning Commission informed of public participation at community meetings leading up to the Commission's public hearings to gauge the anticipated attendance and public input.

#### **FISCAL ANALYSIS:**

A total of \$205,360 remains available and unencumbered in the city's Capital Account for the General Plan Update. This amount is sufficient to complete the General Plan and related projects through the public hearing process. More funding may be needed in next year's Capital Improvement Program budget for General Plan Implementation efforts. Expenses to date have been for one staff position that includes the salary of the staff Project Manager and minor, incidental expenses.

Three contracts totaling \$1,116,437 (including a \$100,000 contingency) were approved with Atkins Consultants for planning technical studies, developing a Climate Action Plan (CAP) that promotes sustainability and reduces GHG emissions in concert with Assembly Bill 32 (funded by the federal Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) Program), and an EIR to assess these projects in concert with the General Plan Update.

#### **CORRELATION TO THE CITY COUNCIL ACTION PLAN:**

This item relates to the Council's Action Plan regarding Community Outreach; Economic Development; Image and Appearance; Public Safety Facilities and Workforce Development.

#### **GENERAL PLAN:**

The General Plan Update revolves around three core themes that emerged as citizens articulated their vision for Escondido's future: 1) Opportunities to Live, Work and Play; 2) Protect, Preserve and Revitalize Neighborhoods; and 3) Conserve and Sustain Resources. The General Plan incorporates these themes as a central focus and has identified several strategies for addressing these themes to implement the community's vision, which involve:

- a) Incorporating pedestrian oriented smart growth principles;

- b) Implementing new and revitalized opportunity areas for employment;
- c) Establishing mix-use transit oriented development at key locations; and,
- d) Incentivizing educational institutions, vocational schools, and job training facilities to enhance residents' personal / professional skills as a means to raise median income.

The Downtown Specific Plan and Climate Action Plan are identified in the General Plan as components for implementing the General Plan's vision and were prepared in a timely manner that could be incorporated in the EIR. Other General Plan implementing measures (i.e. ordinances, Area Plans, Master Plan, etc.) will be prepared after the General Plan is adopted and can rely on the General Plan EIR as a basis for their approval, saving the city time and resources.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:**

The Draft EIR (DEIR) has been released for public review, which will conclude on February 27, 2012. After that time staff will respond to comments and revise the EIR as necessary. The DEIR concludes that several significant and unavoidable impacts will be associated with the build out of Escondido's General Plan, which is not an unusual conclusion based on staff's understanding of other General Plan updates conducted throughout the state. The Significant and Unavoidable Impacts include Air Quality, Biological Resources, Noise, Population and Housing, Transportation and Traffic, and Utilities and Service Systems. Certifying the EIR will require adoption of Overriding Findings that concluding that the benefits of the projects outweigh the impacts associated with their implementation.

### **ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION AND DIRECTION:**

Issues the City Council may consider include:

- a) The number and format of community meetings to be conducted by staff; and,
- b) A format for educating the public about the General Plan to ensure that voters make an informed decision.

### **STAFF RECOMMENDATION AND NEXT STEPS IN THE PROCESS:**

Staff feels that continued public outreach should be an important component in the General Plan adoption process. Between February and May (prior to Planning Commission public hearings) staff recommends conducting a series of community meetings to continue informing and educating the public. Staff is meeting with the City Attorney regarding appropriate information to include for the election and the wording proposed for the ballot (which is subject to City Council approval). The City Council General Plan public hearings are scheduled to conclude by August in order to meet the Registrar of Voter's timeframe for receiving the General Plan ballot measure language. Staff recommends that a program for continued outreach be conducted after August and leading up the election to keep voters properly informed.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara J. Redlitz  
Director of Community Development

Jay Petrek  
Principal Planner