

General Plan Community Workshop Comments East Valley Community Center April 16, 2009



COMMENTS RECEIVED AT THE GENERAL PLAN COMMUNITY WORKSHOP

Comments regarding city identity / vision / goals:

1. The General Plan needs to reflect a vision of what Escondido wants to be
2. Citizens need to determine what Escondido is and why
3. There should be a focus on assets and opportunities
4. Analyze existing General Plan goals to determine those that have been successful and those that have not in order to avoid repeating mistakes
5. Keep the current Quality of Life response times
6. Cost of maintaining Quality of Life Standards needs to be sustainable - QOL standards may need amending if they are too costly to maintain
7. Identify and bolster gateway areas

8. Provide features that will draw people into town and get them to stay
9. Provide facilities that will help retain the younger population
10. There are no major issues with Smart Growth Concepts providing they are done well and buildings and properties are properly maintained
11. General Plan should be strategic regarding where higher densities will be allowed to avoid haphazard collection of tall buildings dispersed around town
12. Priority for higher density residential should be around Grape Day park and other appropriate locations
13. Downtown multi-family development needs to be senior friendly with elevators and other design features to attract empty nesters
14. Higher density is not objectionable if a project is designed properly with quality, aesthetics and long term maintenance in mind – (Centre City Row (de Freitas Project) was cited as a poor design with substandard maintenance; row homes at Midway near Grand Avenue were cited as out of character for the area, Project at Centre City Parkway and Second Avenue was cited as an attractive project that is appropriate for the area)
15. Address blighted conditions in older apartment areas
16. Smart Growth might actually improve response time because units are clustered
17. Historic areas need incentives that make people want to live in older neighborhoods
18. Incentives should be established to encourage more ownership
19. Population “cap” is less critical if infrastructure is in place and can adequately serve residents
20. Address overcrowding-ensure that infrastructure is provided – (Flower Streets are a concern)

Comments regarding parks / open space / habitat:

1. Coordinate with the County’s habitat planning efforts
2. Provide more pocket / urban area parks

Comments regarding traffic / circulation / transit:

1. Coordinate city/county roadway improvements
2. Narrower roadways to enhance pedestrian experience may be a trade-off for reduced vehicle level of service and increased congestion
3. Transit schedules must provide more frequent service

Comments regarding utilities / infrastructure:

1. Ensure reclaimed water is factored in the Quality of Life Standard
2. Consider use of grey water
3. Infrastructure (sidewalks and streets) need to be installed and or maintained in older areas

Comments regarding land use:

1. Need to be mindful of properties within Planning Area but outside City Limits...these areas are guided by county GP and zoning
2. Evaluate Nordahl / Autopark Way corridor as a potential transitional area for medical uses now that PPH is locating in ERTC
3. Control industrial uses next to “smart growth” development
4. Includes small commercial areas on corners serving high density neighborhood
5. Residential areas should be supported in their existing areas, don’t create isolated pockets of residential in existing commercial areas (Lowes / Residential mixed use was cited as a poor example)

Comments regarding City appearance:

1. Incentives should be considered for apartment owners to improve the appearance of their units
2. Improve existing aesthetics and curb appeal of properties, particularly along thoroughfares (Hwy 78 east of Broadway – was cited as an area that needs attention)
3. Enforce property maintenance and address abandoned structures

Comments regarding economic development:

1. Focus more on land uses that provide jobs rather than sales tax
2. Attract large scale commercial uses and provide opportunities for new business to open

General Comments:

1. Update should include City pre-zoning outlying areas within the General Plan
2. Lack of development community participation in the General Plan Update during the recession may result in skewed input

OBSERVATIONS

1. There was overall acceptance for incorporating Escondido's portion of the anticipated regional population growth in the proposed Smart Growth areas
2. The character and densities of existing single family neighborhoods should be retained
3. Older neighborhoods need more sidewalks, street repair and maintenance in order to make them desirable places to live
4. The concept of higher densities / intensities in Smart Growth areas was not negatively received, provided that projects are attractively designed, maintained and can be provided with appropriate public services
5. There was no consensus of how to disperse the anticipated regional population growth in the proposed Smart Growth areas
6. Providing nodes of intensity was mentioned as more desirable than indiscriminately dispersing tall buildings throughout the community.
7. There is desire to strengthen policies on aesthetics and improving property appearances
8. There was sensitivity to amending the Quality of Life Standards but a recognition that the costs of maintaining those standards may warrant fine-tuning, particularly in more dense areas

The following correspondence was received by a community workshop participant:

Escondido Planning

Planning for Escondido has to be more than deciding what building should be put where. In order to know what the city will need, we have to consider several trends.

Movement from city to suburb is reversing. In the 1960s people moved away from cities to the suburbs for affordable housing with room for children to play and make noise. Now those people have grown children, large yards they can no longer tend, huge homes and declining physical abilities. So the needs of a large segment of the population are changing. Now they need convenience, decreased maintenance, less space but active retirement activities. For these reasons it seems logical to expect people to want to move back toward a revitalized downtown living style. The recent trend to restoration of historic homes in downtown is the beginning wave of this trend. As the Baby Boomers move out of the suburbs, the homes in older housing tracts that may now need some rehab will become available to young families looking for starter homes. Incentives to rehab will become important.

A new model of retirement living is emerging. Don't mistake Boomers for renters. Living on fixed incomes, they won't be interested in escalating rents. They want the stability and benefits of ownership and will bring ownership pride to downtown. They have also had to warehouse their parents in assisted living facilities and won't want those high costs for themselves. A slightly different independent living model will emerge with more choice and convenience, less cloistering and convenient transportation being the cornerstones.

Transportation is at a major change point. While decreased gas prices may have given us a breather during the election, prices are edging up again and it is clear that we will be pushed to mass transportation usage. Our roads are already gigantic and future population growth can't be accommodated by continuously adding lanes. So whether we like it or not, the future for most of us will include some mass transportation, even if it means driving our cars a short distance to a hub and leaving them in parking while we take a bus, train, etc. for the longer distance. The problem to be solved is getting around on the other end. Employer operated van pools have sprung up and will probably continue, but my bet for short distances is on personal scooters on sidewalks. No driver's license or fossil fuel needed. They are quiet and don't pollute. The trend in big box stores is to temporary use portable scooters. This trend is here to stay and growing. We need to consider a future where many people will use them for shopping, and small radius transport. They go on busses and trains. Where once we had coat check rooms, we may someday need scooter and bicycle storage areas. Bicycles and the personal scooter solve the problem of how to get around at the end of your mass transit trip.

Automobiles are also at a major change point. We won't give up our gas hogs without a struggle but the future is clear. Lighter weight and more efficient personal carriers are on the horizon, at least for around town use. "Smart" (small) cars, electric cars, street legal golf carts are but a few options for local driving.

Housing will change. The need for mass transportation will make living near a transit center attractive. The high cost of building and population growth will make high density living necessary. The one-story three bedroom home in the suburb may become the one story three bedroom condo in a multistory building. Multistory townhouses might be cheap building, but the stairs aren't going to be attractive to an aging population. Quality of life issues must be considered so we don't build the ghettos of the future. High density living requires green spaces, sports fields, shade trees, and supervised youth activities. We may already have enough rental units. What we need are ownership units downtown, more sports-oriented parks and youth programs.

Health Care will change. Our present system costs more and provides poorer outcomes than many other countries around the world. Whether we call it socialized medicine, affordable health care or something else doesn't matter. Our system is broken. Count on change coming. That will have some impact on our old Palomar Medical Center. Urgent care is a model the public likes, but the emergency room can't handle that walk in care and catastrophic injury also. The two need to be separated. So does acute and chronic care. The ideal place to center chronic care is the old hospital. Physical therapy, cancer care, rehab, mental health, routine lab work, elder care etc. don't need to be housed with acute care and are ideal in the center of downtown.

Technology is bringing more entertainment into the home. Theatre and live performances are adult and boomer entertainment. But the younger generation is geared to music and movies on hand held devices or home theatres. Socioeconomic status is creating a huge gap in youth entertainment. Live celebrity concerts are priced out of the range for most young people. Allowing teenagers to have unsupervised time with nothing to do breeds gang membership and graffiti we have to prevent. Senior citizen centers and boys and girls clubs have met the needs of large segments of the population. But teenagers are underserved. They will need affordable date type entertainment venues; gone to yesterday are pool halls, bowling alleys, and teen clubs. Movie theatres and the skating rink aren't enough entertainment under \$25 geared for young people. We also need more ball fields and sports areas, especially in the older core areas that don't have easily accessed sports fields.

These trends make Escondido uniquely situated to become a baby boomer and young working adult hub. The intact central downtown area has mass transportation closely aligned. Recreational activities boomers enjoy include theatre, cafés, walking, bicycling, senior citizen activities, and recreational art outlets within blocks. Elder centered health care could be within walking or scooter range and major shopping is within a short car or bus run. The beach can be accessed by Sprinter, and hopefully soon the fair grounds as well. If the airport connection once envisioned by train from the transportation center becomes a reality, Escondido could become the number one choice for boomers and young working adults.

In summary, I believe Escondido has spread out enough and that we need to revitalize the core, but not with rental units.