

Factors Involved with the General Plan Population and Buildout

ISSUE PAPER: QUALITY OF LIFE STANDARDS

BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

The General Plan Quality of Life Standards are used as a basis for prioritizing capital improvement programs, establishing impact fees, and instituting other financing mechanisms identified to provide facilities and services for citywide needs. The Quality of Life Standards were originally adopted as a component of the 1990 General Plan Update's Goals and Objectives that included a series of Standards with minimum thresholds of service levels for various public improvements and facilities. As part of the 1990 General Plan Update the city contracted Hughes, Heiss & Associates to analyze various service levels and the impact that growth has on the requirements for "core municipal services" of police, fire, public works maintenance, libraries, and parks & recreation.

The objectives of the analysis were:

1. To identify, for each of the core municipal services addressed by the analysis, the appropriate measures for defining service levels, and within which meaningful service level standards could be established.
2. For each of the service areas noted above, to identify what constitutes a "B" or above average service level considering:
 - a. Current practice in cities of population levels equivalent to levels projected for Escondido at General Plan Buildout.
 - b. Appropriate industry and/or professional standards relevant to each of the core service areas, and the various service components which make up fire, police, public works, library, and parks and recreation services.
3. To compare these "B" service levels with existing service levels in the city and determine:
 - a. The extent to which existing services in Escondido are above, below, or equivalent to the "B" service level standards.
 - b. As appropriate, costs to bring existing services up to the "B" level standard where deviations exist.
4. To project the future costs (staffing, facilities, major equipment) of delivering "B" service levels at General Plan buildout.

The consultants performed extensive analysis to develop the Quality of Life service threshold recommendations. The analysis included:

1. Reviewing literature, interviewing practitioners, and drawing upon professional experiences of the project team in each service area to identify the most meaningful measures within which service level standards could be established.

2. Surveying 15-20 cities with populations ranging from 120,000 to 170,000 to document service for each of the service areas and service measures. Survey results were combined with the results of the consultant's review of professional literature and interviews to identify and quantify what constitutes a "B" level of service for each measure.
3. Interviewing department heads and appropriate members of city staff to document existing service levels in Escondido and to identify, as appropriate, how existing services compare to "B" service levels as defined above. In those instances where gaps between existing and "B" service levels were identified, additional analyses were completed to address such areas as the following:
 - a. Nature and scope of current service delivery approaches including staffing and operating costs associated with current operations.
 - b. Specific staffing and operating costs required to close identified gaps between existing service levels and "B" service levels.
4. Projecting the operating costs of maintaining "B" service levels and General Plan buildout. This included:
 - a. Establishing service-specific linkages to relate operations and services to community growth.
 - b. Employing these linkages to structure illustrative departmental operations (in terms of staffing levels, costs, facility expansion) necessary to deliver "B" service levels at buildout.
 - c. Basing projected operations at buildout on high and low population projections as developed by Morgan Woollett and Associates, the firm responsible for translating the City's various density and development scenarios into both General Plan population and school enrollment projections as part of the General Plan development project.

The "core municipal services" of police, fire, public works maintenance, libraries, and parks & recreation became the foundation for Quality of Life Standards that were adopted in the 1990 General Plan that ultimately included standards for Air Quality, Traffic and Transportation, Schools, Sewers, Water, Open Space, and Economic Prosperity. Several Master Plans have been prepared that implement the Quality of Life Standards by determining the number and size of specific facilities needed to adequately serve the projected buildout population.

As trends and technology changes how cities provide municipal service to their citizens Master Plans have been refined over the course of time necessitating amendments to the adopted Quality of Life Standards. In order to stay current, the City Council has amended the Standards since 1990 as they are not subject to Proposition "S," which was approved in 1998 as a process for amending General Plan land use changes by popular vote. The Quality of Life amendments include:

1. Changing the Fire Service Standard twice to clarify response times, and to reflect updated "Standards of Coverage" approach for providing service.
2. Amending the Police Standard to reflect the city's on-going Community Oriented Policing and Problem Solving (COPPS) efforts that focuses on enforcement efforts, prevention programs and community involvement.

3. Basing the Parks and Open Space Standards on dwelling units rather than population to determine acreage needs as a result of fluctuating household size
4. Amending the School Standard to reflect “state-mandate” space and teacher/student ratios requirements rather than the “traditional” school-year calendar schedule.
5. Modifying the Sewer Standard to reflect provisions in the Sewer Master Plan regarding treatment, trunkline, pumping facility, outfall and secondary capacities.
6. Adding an Economic Prosperity Standard to provide direction and focus on increasing the community’s median household income and per capita wage compared to the region.

TREATMENT OF STANDARDS IN THE PREVIOUS GENERAL PLAN

Prior to the General Plan’s adoption in 1990 the previous General Plan did not include quantitative levels for the various services provided by the City. Instead, Escondido’s previous General Plan included broad policy language with generalized goals promoting “sufficient coverage,” “effective protection” and “adequate service” that relied on the preparation and adoption of subsequent detailed Master Plans to meet the intent of the General Plan policy. For example, the Escondido’s previous General Plan included the following Public Facility Policy Statements addressing Library Facilities, Fire Protection, Utilities (water, storm drains, sewer):

1. Provide sufficient space to facilitate inter- and intra-department coordination, while assuring the proper implementation of demand (for) governmental services.
2. Locate the facility so that it will be accessible to the greatest number of people and able to serve the public efficiently and effectively.
3. Locate administrative facilities so that they will be integrated with, not isolated from, other offices that use governmental services often.
4. Situate the facilities so that they will create a community image and enhance the symbolic importance of government as representative of the democratic process.

Staff evaluated General Plans throughout the region and found that only Chula Vista incorporates quantitative thresholds for municipal services that are tied to controlling development. General Plans from other cities include “quality of life” discussion in a general sense, but did not claim that a violation of any quality of life goals would result in a decrease in or halt to development within that City.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE QUALITY OF LIFE STANDARDS BUDGET DECISIONS

The General Plan Quality of Life Standards are the basis for developing and implementing capital improvement programs. The level of service specified in the Quality of Life Standards can have major fiscal impacts on the City; the higher the level of service, the greater the potential budget impact. Therefore, Quality of Life thresholds have a direct bearing on the nature and amount of Development Impact Fees, which are a major source of funding. Often, the Council is forced to balance a number of competing objectives during the Budget Process since it is not possible to fully satisfy all Quality of Life Standards at all times.

It should be noted that, as a general rule, new development can only be required to pay development impact fees that offset their own impacts. Therefore, new development cannot be charged for existing deficiencies. Amending the Quality of Life Standards to increase service levels or expand capital requirements could, in itself, create existing deficiencies if these levels do not currently exist. Deficiencies could also be created by development in other jurisdictions that impact Escondido (i.e. traffic generated by development outside the community), or by a lag in the construction of public facilities. Often capital improvements cannot be expanded in precise increments. Additionally, budget issues can affect service levels if the staffing cannot be provided to achieve the desired service standards. These issues are discussed on an ongoing basis through the budget process.