

MEMORANDUM

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TO Vacaville General Plan Update Steering Committee
FROM City staff and The Planning Center | DC&E
RE **Policy Issues for Steering Committee Meeting #9**

This memo explains the goal of Steering Committee meeting #9; describes how the meeting fits into the overall General Plan Update policy review and revision process; and summarizes a few main policy issues identified by the General Plan Update process.

Goal of Steering Committee Meeting #9

Steering Committee Meeting #9 will focus on a few of the complex issues that the General Plan Update will address. While there are many policy topics that will be covered in the General Plan, this meeting is intended to focus on policy topics that have generated the most public concern and/or have a range of possible approaches. The main objective of this meeting is to identify the range of policy issues that should be discussed with the Steering Committee. City Staff and The Planning Center | DC&E (TPC | DC&E) is seeking preliminary thoughts on options to address identified policy issues. Later this year, we will bring these issues back to the Steering Committee for further discussion. There are two additional Steering Committee meetings, and one public workshop, planned to address General Plan policies.

Overview of the Process to Develop Policies

The General Plan Update is expected to carry forward many of the policies in the existing General Plan, which are working well for the City. However, there are some important topics in which the current General Plan policy language is vague, missing, or inadequate to respond to current conditions. The process to address these policy gaps by refining existing policies and/or creating new ones, is as follows;

- ◆ **Review existing General Plan policies.** The City has a General Plan Update Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) composed of representatives from various City departments. The TAC has, and continues, to review existing General Plan policies. As previously referenced, the purpose of this review is to identify policies that contain language that might need to be amended or removed. This review also provides the opportunity to identify potential new

policies for consideration during the General Plan Update. TPC I DC&E is also reviewing existing policies to identify changes necessary to respond to State requirements and for consideration of best practices in other California communities.

- ◆ **Identify and discuss problematic policies and policy issues.** To date, a few major policy issues have been raised through the General Plan Update process. City staff and TPC I DC&E believe these require discussion with the Steering Committee; therefore they have been identified and discussed in this memorandum.

After the Steering Committee reviews these policies issues, City staff and TPC I DC&E will facilitate a community workshop on Saturday, August 20 to obtain additional public input on the key policy issues.

Explore options for amending existing General Plan polices and/or adopting new policies. Based on the input received from the public, the Steering Committee, and the Technical Advisory Committee, City staff and TPC I DC&E will prepare a range of options for preliminary goals, policies, and actions that would respond to the identified key policy issues. The preliminary policies will be presented to the Steering Committee for discussion later this year.

- ◆ **Review the Draft General Plan.** After receiving Steering Committee direction on policy options, the consultant team will incorporate the selected policies into the Draft General Plan. The Steering Committee will review the Draft General Plan during three meetings scheduled in summer 2012.

How to Prepare for Steering Committee Meeting #9

The following sections provide our recommendations on how to prepare for Steering Committee Meeting #9.

Preparation Task 1: Review Identified Policy Issues

City staff and TPC I DC&E have identified seven policy issues for discussion with the Steering Committee. For Steering Committee Meeting #9, our goal is to introduce these issues, receive initial feedback, and discuss potential ideas that may address the identified policy issues. To prepare for this meeting, please review the information provided in the memo, and think about possible policies and actions the City should consider to address these issues. Also, please identify any questions that you might have about these topics so we can address them at the meeting. Over the course of two future Steering Committee meetings, we will ask for your feedback on the specific policy options presented to you for consideration.

Preparation Task 2: Identify Additional Policy Issues

After you review the seven issues discussed in this memorandum, please think about any other policy issues you would like to discuss with the Steering Committee. Unfortunately, we will not have time to discuss every policy in the

General Plan, so please limit your issues to those that need to be discussed with the Steering Committee (i.e. controversial topics or topics for which there are competing viewpoints on how to address). Please come to the meeting with a list of policy issues, and be ready to discuss them with the Committee.

To help you generate policy issue ideas, we suggest that you review the existing General Plan and consider any past experience where General Plan policy issues were discussed as part of a proposed project and clear guidance seemed to be lacking to support your decision-making. In addition, please refer to the dot exercise results from Steering Committee meeting #2 (Attachment 1). The dot exercise, identified issues that the Steering Committee and public thought should be addressed through the General Plan Update. These dot exercise results might also help to jog your memory about major policy issues that you would like to discuss.

If you have other policy issues and concerns that you would like to see addressed in the General Plan, but that do not require discussion with the Steering Committee, we still welcome that input. Please submit those issues directly to Tyra Hays, the General Plan Update Project Manager, at thays@cityofvacaville.com or (707) 449-5366.

Policy Issues

1. Agricultural Buffer

The existing General Plan and 1995 Master Water Agreement with the Solano Irrigation District (SID) establish a permanent, 500-foot wide buffer between agricultural lands and residential uses. The buffer is currently located 1,000 feet east of Leisure Town Road, south of the Locke Paddon subdivision, and north of the Union Pacific Railroad tracks. The buffer is coterminous with the existing Urban Service Boundary, the boundary that denotes the City's planned urban development area. Development of the East of Leisure Town Road growth area will require an amendment to the Master Water Agreement that will permit the expansion of the Urban Service Area, shown in Figure 2-3 of the existing General Plan (Attachment 2). The new agricultural buffer will be located along the boundary of the Urban Service Area Boundary.

The agricultural buffer protects viable agricultural operations from the intrusion of urban uses by providing a safe distance between residential uses and agricultural fields, which are subject to activities such as chemical spraying and the discing of soils that would be considered unsafe or unpleasant in or near residential neighborhoods. Under current policy, permitted uses within the agricultural buffer include: public or private recreational facilities, stormwater detention ponds, tree farms, wholesale nurseries, and other specified uses in an approved policy plan. However, SID has recently indicated that they may desire that the City further restrict uses within the buffer to uses that would not allow human activity; for example, stormwater detention ponds may be acceptable, while parks would not.

As mandated by the Master Water Agreement with SID, any consideration involving the expansion of the Urban Service Area Boundary, must consider expanding the width of the existing 500-foot wide agricultural buffer. However, SID has recently indicated that a narrower buffer may be acceptable. In addition, the Master Water Agreement only requires a buffer adjacent to residential uses. We would like to discuss whether the buffer should also be applied to non-residential urban uses, such as commercial or industrial development.

Finally, we would like Steering Committee input regarding the the location of the new agricultural buffer. The buffer is currently located inside the Urban Service Area boundary. Options for the location of the new agricultural buffer are as follows:

1. Within the amended Urban Service Area boundary – This option would reduce the amount of land available for development, but would preserve agricultural land. To address the reduced development potential resulting from the location of the existing buffer, the current General Plan permits a residential density transfer from the buffer to the adjacent residential lands.
2. Within the existing PG&E Transmission Tower Easement – The 385-foot easement is located outside the Urban Growth Boundary, thus it will likely remain in the Agricultural Service Area Boundary. This option would maximize the amount of land available for development, but would also result in prime agricultural lands being removed from agricultural production within the PG&E easement.
3. Straddle the Urban Service Area Boundary and PG&E Easement – This option is a compromise between options 1 and 2.

Ultimately, SID will need to approve the agricultural buffer policy in order to expand the Urban Service Area Boundary which is necessary for the of the East of Leisure Town Road growth area. However, to assist with the City's ongoing communications with SID regarding this matter, we are seeking the Steering Committee's guidance. To help facilitate this discussion at the Steering Committee meeting, please consider the following:

- ◆ How wide should the agricultural buffer be?
- ◆ What uses should be allowed within the buffer?
- ◆ Should a buffer be required adjacent to non-residential urban uses?
- ◆ Where should the agricultural buffer be located: inside the urban service area? In the agricultural service area? Or straddling both?

2. Parks – Acquisition and Maintenance

The City has established a park standard to provide 4.5 park acres per 1,000 people. However, the City is not currently meeting this standard. The current deficiency is caused due to number of reasons:

- The City has never attained the current standard of 4.5 acres per 1000 residents.
- Part of the previous park inventory included school-owned land (approx. 18 acres) which was available for limited use by the public. These lands are no longer counted as part of the City's park system.
- Vacaville's Park development improvement fees (DIF) were never designed to provide the full 4.5 acres per 1000 residents ratio (for new residents).
- Following adoption of the Comprehensive Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan in 1992, the Park DIF became increasingly deficient largely due to the cost of land, which increased much faster than the automatic inflation factor.
- New residential development has not provided sufficient park land to meet the park standard.

Vacaville needs more developed parkland, particularly in the neighborhoods in the western, central, and northeastern portions of the study area that are currently underserved by park and recreational facilities. In addition, funding for park maintenance is limited.

Vacaville currently requires that Lighting and Landscaping Maintenance Assessment Districts (LLMAD) be formed to help fund the maintenance of neighborhood parks. This process frees up General Fund monies to better maintain the community and city parks. The City may want to consider implementing a citywide LLMAD to balance out public support for park maintenance. This would save money by simplifying the administration of the many existing LLMADs.

In addition, the City may want to consider adjusting the classifications of some parks within the city, changing the park planning process to require the inclusion of parklands earlier in the residential subdivision process, or adopting a Quimby Ordinance,¹ which would require that in-lieu fees for park development be paid by an applicant submitting a subdivision map, based on the value of the land that is being subdivided.

Questions to consider:

- ◆ Should the City implement a Citywide LLMAD?

¹ The 1975 Quimby Act authorizes cities to pass ordinances requiring that developers set aside land, donate conservation easements, or pay fees for park improvements.

- ◆ Should the City consider adoption of a Quimby ordinance establishing new parkland fees?
- ◆ Should the City maintain current park standards?
- ◆ Should the City require that all significant development proposals with a park and recreation component be reviewed by the Community Services Commission (in accordance with City Code Section 2.34.030)?

3. Correlation between General Plan Residential Land Use Designations and Zoning Districts

The City's current policy is that a "base zoning" is applied to parcels designated as residential. This allows the property a guaranteed density at the low end of the density range while allowing the City to consider a higher density when a specific project is proposed. This practice protects the interests of residents in neighborhoods near vacant infill sites. For example, if a property is designated Residential Low Density (RLD, 3.1 to 5 units per acre), that General Plan designation allows single-family residential zoning districts of RL-6 (6,000 square feet), RL-8 (8,000 square feet) or RL-10 (10,000 square feet).. . Table 11-1 in the Implementation chapter of the General Plan (Attachment 3) identifies that the RL-10 zoning district would be considered "consistent" with the RLD General Plan land use designation. A rezoning to RL-8 or RL-6 requires that the zone change be accompanied by a specific project proposal such as a Planned Development. While a property owner could request to have the zoning on their RLD property changed from RL-10 to RL-6, there is added time and uncertainty that come along with the public review process required for a Planned Development, Policy Plan, Specific Plan or City Council determination. Zoning property the property to a higher density without development plans provides greater uncertainty for neighbors of infill sites. There are few infill residential sites remaining that are without project approvals and these are typically sites where a lot more attention is required during the project design process to make sure that smaller lots and higher density is compatible with a surrounding neighborhood.

For areas in newer growth areas (such as North Village and Lagoon Valley), these sites are typically within master planned projects that have up-front entitlements as part of Specific Plans and Development Agreements. For example, the North Village Specific Plan was approved with zoning in place at higher densities and with project specific development and design standards that provide guarantees to the developer as well as residents. For these areas, zoning properties at the higher end of the density range has worked well.

Please consider the following:

- ◆ For new growth areas, should Specific Plans be required and should they allow parcels to be zoned at the upper end of a General Plan land use designation? In these areas should the City apply a zoning district that corresponds to the upper end of the range allowed by a residential parcel's General Plan land use designation? For example, a parcel designated RLD would receive a RL-6 designation instead of a RL-10 designation. If a

property owner wanted to develop larger lots, they could request a zone change to downzone their property.

- ◆ For residential infill sites within the existing city limits, should the City apply a zoning district that corresponds to the upper end of the range allowed by a residential parcel's General Plan land use designation? For example, a parcel designated RLMD would receive a RLM-C zoning to allow clustered courthomes instead of a RLM-4.5 zoning to allow 4,500 square foot single family lots. If a property owner wanted to develop larger lots, they could request a zone change to downzone their property.

4. Level of Service for Traffic

Level of Service (LOS) describes the operating conditions experienced by drivers. For cars and trucks, level of service is a qualitative measure of the effects of a number of factors, including speed and travel time, traffic interruptions, freedom to maneuver, driving comfort, and convenience. Levels of service are designated LOS A through F, from best to worst, which cover the entire range of traffic operations that might occur. LOS F represents conditions where the volume of traffic exceeds the capacity of the roadways and the flow of traffic breaks down, resulting in stop-and-go conditions and long queues of vehicles.

The Transportation Element of the existing General Plan establishes a goal to maintain a LOS C, but allows for LOS D, LOS E, and LOS F under specified circumstances. Specifically, it states:

6.1-G 1 Strive to maintain LOS C as the minimum standard at all intersections, interchanges and road links. Design improvements to provide for LOS C in the year 2025 based on the City's development forecast.

6.1-G 2 LOS D, for a particular intersection, interchange or road link, shall be allowed by a decision maker on a project as an interim level of service where improvements are programmed by the City which will improve the level of service to LOS C or better. LOS D may also be approved by the City as an allowable standard by the City Council or designee for infill areas or situations where existing development or other practical considerations limit improvements.

6.1-G 3 LOS E or LOS F for a particular intersection, interchange or road link may be allowed by the City Council on the basis of one of the following findings:

Finding 1

- ◆ The interchange, intersection or road link that will experience the projected lower level of service is an infill or isolated area; and
- ◆ There is no practical and feasible way to mitigate the lower level of service; and

- ◆ The project resulting in the lower level of service is of clear, overall public benefit.

Finding 2

- ◆ A capital improvement project is reasonably scheduled to be completed which will improve the projected level of service to LOS D or better; and
- ◆ The interim impact of the projected traffic congestion is offset by the public benefits of the project.

Finding 3

- ◆ The City has entered into a development agreement which legally commits the City to approve the proposed project.

A definitive LOS requirement – meaning that a new development project must build or fund improvements such as wider roadways, new signals, or new turn lanes in order to maintain the flow of traffic at a certain level - can lead to costly infrastructure needs and can deter development. In addition, the changes needed to maintain faster traffic flows, such as widening roads and adding turn lanes to intersections, can increase hazards for bicyclists and pedestrians. However, too much flexibility in the LOS requirement can result in significant traffic congestion, adversely affecting the community.

In considering how the LOS issue should be addressed in the update of the Transportation Element, the following should be considered:

- ◆ CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act) guidelines require the City to determine whether a project conflicts with an “applicable plan, ordinance or policy establishing measures of effectiveness.” It is noted that measures of effectiveness need to account for “all modes of transportation including mass transit and non-motorized travel” also known as the policies for the Complete Streets Act.
- ◆ Typical midweek AM & PM Peak Hour Peak Hour volumes serve as the basis of LOS analysis.
- ◆ Volume to Capacity is the LOS methodology is used to assign LOS. The trend in transportation planning, including Caltrans planning, is to use the Highway Capacity Manual methodology that assigns LOS A thru F based on the level of delay. For signalized intersections, it takes into account signal timing and pedestrian counts. Staff is working towards this change in LOS methodology and the General Plan LOS Policy will need to be consistent with this methodology.
- ◆ Transportation analysis being accomplished for the General Plan Update and EIR will provide more information to fully understand the implications of establishing a given LOS standard.

In addition to the considerations provided above, we would like to hear the Committee's opinion as to the degree of flexibility to be considered as part of the update to the Transportation Element related to the City's LOS policy.

- ◆ Is LOS C, meaning a relatively free flow of traffic for vehicles, an appropriate minimum standard for all roadway types during AM and PM peak hours?
- ◆ Should the City stick to a firm requirement for LOS C, considering it is likely that new development proposals will face significantly greater roadway and potentially right-of-way, costs for street and intersection improvements?
- ◆ Should a new LOS standard that assigns different LOS standards to different roadway types (arterials, collectors, local roads) be considered?
- ◆ Should the City reduce or relax the LOS requirement in order to encourage desirable projects, even if it means a significant increase in traffic congestion? What types of projects should receive this treatment?

5. Policy Plans – Infrastructure Constraints and Permitted Uses

Policy plans are one of the primary tools used by the City to strategically plan for new economic growth. Specifically, policy plans provide land use regulations, site development standards, and performance standards for the area in question. Policy plans also detail the infrastructure needs and lay out the phasing of infrastructure improvements. Policy plans can also be used as economic development tools by truncating discretionary review periods.

The City currently has 11 policy plans that focus on non-residential development areas within the city. Of these, four policy plans address the City's business parks: Interchange Business Park, Vaca Valley Business Park, Vacaville-Golden Hills Business Park, and Airport Business Area. These policy plans allow a wide range of land uses in order to allow maximum development flexibility.

While this flexibility can be beneficial to developers, and it can help promote economic development, it can also make it difficult to plan for adequate infrastructure. Planning for infrastructure capable of supporting uses ranging from low-intensity warehousing to high-end research and development facilities, such as Genentech, is challenging. It's important to ensure that the City can support large employers like Genentech, with their high demand for sewer collection capacity, but it's equally important not to overbuild costly infrastructure for areas where low intensity uses such as warehouses are permitted.

Development on much of the vacant land in the business park policy plan areas are limited by inadequate infrastructure. Specifically, there are three policy plans in northwest Vacaville that have approximately 960 acres of vacant land and only limited infrastructure capacity: the Interchange Business Park, Golden Hills

Business Park, and Vaca Valley Business Park Policy Plans.² There is insufficient wastewater collection and traffic capacity to serve the buildout of these areas, or to support all the permitted uses specified by the individual policy plans.

Permitted uses within the Interchange Business Park, Golden Hills Business Park, and Vaca Valley Business Park range from uses with very high sewer demands, such as fast food restaurants, to uses with low sewer demands, such as a warehouse. Most office and warehousing uses have low sewer demands; thus, they can easily be accommodated in the policy plan areas. However, many higher intensity uses, including some commercial, manufacturing, and industrial uses, require sewer capacity beyond that which has been allocated for each parcel. Additionally, there are several cases of “stranded” collection capacity, which is capacity that has been contractually allocated to a single user that will likely remain unused. If this capacity could be transferred to other users, it would greatly improve the sewer situation in the rest of the business park area, although it would not solve the entire problem. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that the business park area is served by multiple sewage collection systems, and much of the remaining capacity is not in the same collection area where capacity is needed.

In addition, due to existing level of service deficiencies on Vaca Valley Parkway, additional development within the business parks will require traffic mitigation to help fund traffic improvement projects that would provide for an acceptable level of service, as defined by the current General Plan. However, the flexibility in allowed land uses provided by the policy plans makes it difficult to accurately predict the transportation infrastructure needs of future development. Therefore, the identified and planned transportation improvements may not be adequate to serve future development.

To address these issues, the City could consider potential revisions to the land use assumptions for the policy plans, as well as new policies that would monitor development levels and ensure that development does not exceed infrastructure capacities. In addition, the City could consider policies to recover stranded wastewater capacity, allow individual users to sell or trade away sewer capacity if they use less than their allocation, recruit “dry” businesses that don’t generate high wastewater volumes, or build a new sewer line.

We recommend that the Steering Committee consider the following:

- ◆ Should land uses in the Policy Plan areas be restricted to lower-intensity uses that would not exceed the existing roadway or wastewater capacity?

² These policy plan areas are included in the land use alternatives, and future possible land uses changes will be discussed at the Steering Committee meetings in September.

- ◆ Should the City undertake significant expansions of the roadway and wastewater capacity in the Policy Plan areas in order to accommodate or encourage more intense development?
- ◆ Should existing users be allowed to trade or sell their allotted sewer capacity?