March 22, 2011

Chair and Steering Committee Members,

I have reviewed and considered the viability of the preliminary list of sustainability measures that was included in staff’s report for your upcoming meeting on Thursday, March 22. There are a few areas where I have concerns that I would like to share with you.

The City of Vacaville has developed over time and has a wonderful variety of land use patterns and streetscapes. Some areas are a result of the era during which they developed while others relate more to the topography of the area prior to development. Regardless of what created the fabric of each neighborhood, it is important to understand that what may work well in downtown Vacaville, might not work at all in South Town or East of Leisuretown Road. The sustainability measures that might be appropriate and feasible within the Downtown area might not work in the more suburban or hillside developments Vacaville envisions. I will also say that some measures might not be feasible anywhere in Vacaville, rather they may be more suited to an urban area with much higher housing densities.

While I understand that staff cannot parse the measures to be perfect for every circumstance in a high level document such as this, when elements are listed as absolute the discretion of the policy makers is lost. If that discretion is removed, the City will not be able to tailor the solutions to individual projects in an effective manner.

LU-1 is a good example of a measure that works well in a more densely populated area where parking is at a premium and many patrons are on foot. **Require** all new residential, commercial, and public buildings and places of assembly to include a principal functional entry that faces a public space such as a street, square, park, paseo, or plaza, in addition to any entrance from a parking lot. In the suburban setting, stores are oriented towardathe parking field. There is a very good reason why that is the case. In the rear, where the stock rooms typically would be located, the majority of shoppers would be required to park, walk around the building and return. Most stores would need to have two checkout locations which would create staffing or security problems for smaller shops.

LU-2 does allow for some discretion which is helpful, but the discretion appears to be limited to constraints, this ignores the question of what the cul-de-sac might be connecting to and whether the interface is appropriate.

LU-5 **Requires interconnected streets or a grid pattern** this type of design should be applied selectively as it can create opportunities for short cutting and lead to unintended traffic issues.

LU-12 should allow for phasing because often perimeter parcels are zoned with uses that are not needed until an area matures, they later become gateway parcels, but are often not able to move forward until. Demand for their services is realized.

The parking reductions discussed in TR-7 can be very effective tool that allows for uses that have different peak parking needs to share parking spaces so that they see greater utilizing. This reduces the land requirements for urbanization and can be very effective for infill areas were physical constraints don’t allow for exclusive parking. Parking maximums however can create issues that prevent healthy commerce. Having an effective mix of tenants is a key component to the viability of a commercial center. Parking constraints are often a dilemma for a landlord as centers near full capacity. Often a landlord cannot find a tenant with a low parking and the space sits vacant. Reduced parking for the sake of forcing residents out of their cars...
might be an effective strategy in a downtown or large city where the housing densities allow for truly effective transit or pedestrian lifestyle, but strategies for reducing dependency on car travel should be geared toward the community they are serving. The Plan should be reflective of the types of development that Vacaville envisions for its future. Look for creative opportunities that have a reasonable expectation of success. For example having a combination safe bicycle connections from residential to local shopping with bicycle racks at the destination is a reasonable opportunity in suburban areas. Parking however still should be available, because during inclement weather most residents will prefer to drive to the store. Use is important as well, for instance reduced parking in favor of transit or extra bike racks at a lumber yard would make sense. Likewise it would be short sighted to foreclose the opportunity for children to walk to their neighborhood schools and parks.

In summary, it would appear that the propose measures need additional discussion and customization to make them compatible with what Vacaville envisions for its future.

Regards,

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