



**DATE:** May 8, 2009

**TO:** Planning Commission

**SUBJECT:** PROGRESS REPORT ON THE GENERAL PLAN UPDATE; (District: All)

**SUMMARY:**

**Overview**

This report provides a summary of the progress that has been made by the Department of Planning and Land Use on the General Plan Update during the past year. Additionally, it presents major issues associated with the project that have been raised by stakeholders and provides an opportunity for the public and Board of Supervisors to provide comments on the project as it progresses.

**Recommendation(s)**

**DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & LAND USE**

Receive this report.

**Fiscal Impact**

N/A

**Business Impact Statement**

N/A

**Advisory Board Statement**

The General Plan Update is served by two advisory committees: the Steering Committee and the Interest Group. Multiple meetings have been held with both these committees and meeting minutes are available on the General Plan Update website: <http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/gpupdate/committees.html>.

**Involved Parties**

The County of San Diego is considered the applicant. The General Plan Update will apply to all lands that are under the land use jurisdiction of the County of San Diego.

**BACKGROUND:**

In early 2008, the Department of Planning and Land Use (DPLU) completed an updated project schedule for completion of the General Plan Update in fall 2010. Since then, significant progress

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has been made and the project remains on schedule. The next critical milestone, public review of the draft Environmental Impact Report, will occur in the next months.

**PROJECT PROGRESS:**

During the past year, staff's efforts have focused on the preparation of the two major documents for the General Plan Update project: the General Plan and the General Plan Environmental Impact Report.

**General Plan Document**

Preparation of the General Plan followed a process that was developed as part of the project work plan prepared in early 2008 with the planning/environmental consultant. That process consisted of completing initial drafts of the elements and then coordinating with internal and external specialists for their review and input. Once all elements underwent technical review, a consolidated draft document was assembled for review by the advisory groups, public agencies, and other stakeholders. The draft General Plan was made available for general public review on November 14, 2008. Comments on the documents were accepted through the end of January 2009 for a review period of 77 days. A total of 88 comment letters were received. Copies of all comment letters, as well as the draft General Plan, are available on the General Plan Update website.

Staff is now working on revising the General Plan as a result of the comments and preparing written responses. The responses and the revised General Plan will be made available for review at the same time that the draft Environmental Impact Report is made available. At that time, other important components of the General Plan will also be available for review. These include the revisions to the community and subregional plans, and the General Plan Implementation Plan.

**Environmental Impact Report**

Preparation of an Environmental Impact Report is an iterative process requiring several cycles of reviews due to its complexity and volume. As previously reported, a number of alternatives are being analyzed for the Environmental Impact Report including: the Existing Conditions, the No Project (Existing General Plan Build Out), the Proposed Project (Referral Map), the Draft Land Use Map, the Hybrid Map, the Environmentally Superior Map, in addition to the Cumulative Project analysis. Initial modeling and analysis for these scenarios was completed in early 2009, which allowed for completion of the 1st internal draft (or screencheck) of the Environmental Impact Report. A 2nd screencheck of the draft Environmental Impact Report was completed February 27, 2009, and staff and the consultant are now working on revisions to that draft. Once completed, the draft Environmental Impact Report will be made available for a 60-day public review and comment period. Initiation of this review period is anticipated for late Summer 2009.

**Conservation Subdivision**

Recent progress has also been made on the Conservation Subdivision concept, a component of the General Plan Update intended to facilitate compact residential design (such as clustering) in order to set aside areas of open space to preserve natural resources and/or agriculture. Staff developed a simplified approach to this concept which was presented to the advisory groups in late June 2008. In May 2009, the advisory groups were presented with a detailed proposal for the

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ordinance amendments required to enact the concept and a rural subdivision design and processing manual to assist applicants with the requirements. The Steering Committee has remained adamant in its position that clustering should not be allowed by-right. The current draft reflects this direction by requiring a Lot Area Averaging Administrative Permit or Planned Residential Major Use Permit (which both require findings of compatibility) to alter minimum lot size restrictions.

**PROJECT ISSUES:**

As with the previous project updates, staff has identified significant issues raised recently by stakeholders so that the issue and the method for addressing the issue is clearly communicated. These and other issues are described in greater detail in the comment letters on the draft General Plan available on the General Plan Update website.

**Role of Community Character**

A continuing subject of debate is on the role of community character in the implementation of the General Plan Update. Many of the communities want assurances that their unique identities and individual character are maintained. As a result, the draft General Plan contains numerous references to ensuring consistency with community character when reviewing development and creating new plans and policies. However, some stakeholders such as the Building Industry Association and Endangered Habitats League are concerned that this tie to existing community character will interfere with implementation of the General Plan Update, especially Conservation Subdivisions. Recommendations for addressing this range from mandating design aspects, such as smaller lot size, to minor language modifications. While staff is considering some minor language changes, it maintains that the objective of “consistency with community character” is a creditable one. Staff believes that Conservation Subdivisions and some high-density developments can be developed in a manner consistent with community character through careful design and collaboration with communities.

**Proposed Density Decreases (Downzoning)**

Concerns continue to be expressed by various groups and property owners over the proposed changes in land use designations that will result in lower density designations on certain properties when compared to existing designations. Many of these concerns are accompanied by suggestions of improprieties (i.e. property takings, lack of notice, inaccurate background data, resulting project inconsistencies) and/or undesirable consequences (i.e. economic failure of communities, loss of tax revenue, inability to create self-sufficient communities). Staff appreciates the concerns that have been raised by these stakeholders and has researched and considered all of these points. However, through this process no concerns have been identified by staff that warrant a recommended change in the overall project approach.

Staff continues to receive inquiries regarding equity mechanisms associated with the General Plan Update. Many individuals and some community groups have expressed that their previous support of the downzoning proposed by the General Plan Update was based on the understanding that a broader equity mechanism would be developed. Staff’s position has remain consistent with what has previously been reported to the Board, which is that the only equity mechanism

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currently being pursued is a purchase of development rights (PDR) program for agricultural lands.

**Senate Bill 375 – Sustainable Communities Legislation**

In 2008, the State legislature passed Senate Bill (SB) 375. SB 375 requires the California Air Resources Board (ARB) to develop regional greenhouse gas emission reduction targets to be achieved from the automobile and light truck sectors for 2020 and 2035. Regional planning organizations, such as SANDAG, throughout California will prepare a "sustainable communities strategy" to reduce the amount of vehicle miles traveled (VMT) in their respective regions and demonstrate the ability for the region to attain ARB's targets. There is widespread speculation on how SB 375 will or should affect the General Plan Update. To date, there is no indication that the General Plan Update will require modification. Staff is coordinating with SANDAG, monitoring the implementation of the legislation, and will advise the Board if revisions are necessary. SANDAG is not expected to release the draft sustainable communities strategy until late 2010.

**Linkage to the County of San Diego's Strategic Plan**

The General Plan Update is consistent with the County's Strategic Initiatives for Kids, the Environment, and Safe and Livable Communities by implementing goals and policies for the physical development of the unincorporated County in support of these initiatives.

**WAIVERS AND EXCEPTIONS:**

N/A

**ENVIRONMENTAL STATUS:**

A Program Environmental Impact Report will be prepared for the General Plan Update and its various components. A Notice of Preparation (NOP) soliciting input on the scope of the EIR was issued first in 2002 and again recently from April 28, 2008 to May 28, 2008. A copy of the NOP is available on the project website:

[http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/gpupdate/docs/gpupdate\\_nop.pdf](http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/gpupdate/docs/gpupdate_nop.pdf).

**PREVIOUS ACTIONS:**

A Director's Report was provided to the Planning Commission on May 30, 2008, briefly describing the project status. History on other previous Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors hearings is available on the project website:

<http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/gpupdate/hearing.html>.

**ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN WITHOUT APPROPRIATE PERMITS:**

N/A

**PUBLIC INPUT:**

Input from the public and Community Planning and Sponsor Groups specific to this progress report was not requested. Recent input received at Steering Committee and Interest Group meetings can be found in the meeting minutes which are available on the project website:

<http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/gpupdate/committees.html>.

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**DEPARTMENT REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:**

This progress report is intended to be an informational item. Therefore, no action is necessary.

cc:     All Community Planning/Sponsor Groups  
          Interested Parties (via email)  
          Lisa Robles, Case Closure, Department of Planning and Land Use, M.S. O650  
          Carl Hebert, Case Tracking System, Department of Planning and Land Use, M.S. O650

**ATTACHMENTS:**

N/A

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**AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE:**



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ERIC GIBSON, DIRECTOR