

MEMORANDUM

TO: San Benito County General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC) Members

FROM: Dan Amsden, Project Manager, Mintier Harnish

DATE: June 3, 2009

SUBJECT: Overview of the San Benito County General Plan Update and GPAC

CC: Art Henriques, Planning and Building Inspection Services Director, San Benito County
Michael Kelly, Associate Planner, San Benito County
Larry Mintier, Principal, Mintier Harnish
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Dear General Plan Advisory Committee members:

We would like to thank you for volunteering to assist San Benito County with the General Plan Update by serving on the General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC). The GPAC is scheduled to meet five times during the 2009 calendar year (with more dates pending in 2010 and 2011). The GPAC will provide County staff and the consultants feedback on information gathering, issue identification, and policy development.

The GPAC does not have independent authority to take actions that bind the Planning Commission or the Board of Supervisors. Rather, the committee will serve in an advisory capacity to the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors. The GPAC will complete its work once a draft General Plan is prepared and ready for review by the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors (estimated early 2011).

GPAC Purpose and Function

The GPAC was created by the Board of Supervisors to advise the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors on needs and concerns for the comprehensive revision of the San Benito County General Plan. The designated functions of the GPAC, as outlined in the Bylaws (dated 11/08), include:

- a. Guiding the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors in understanding San Benito County community members’ preferences for policies that need to be considered in the new, comprehensively updated General Plan;

- b. Examining the County's needs for planning in the areas of land use, circulation, housing, open space, conservation, noise, safety, economic development, sustainability, agriculture, and other topics of need, recognizing that policy changes in these areas may necessitate modifications to the General Plan's regulatory implementations, such as the subdivision ordinance;
- c. Making suggestions in the form of recommendations to the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors;
- d. Serving as the countywide advisory committee; and
- e. Assisting the County in publicizing and encouraging public comment and involvement in this process.

GPAC Meeting Schedule

The GPAC recently approved the following schedule of meeting dates for the remainder of 2009:

- Thursday, June 11
- Thursday, August 6
- Thursday, September 10
- Thursday, October 29
- Thursday, December 10

All meetings will be held in the San Benito County Board of Supervisor Chambers, 481 Fourth Street in Hollister and will begin promptly at 6:00 PM. All meetings will be noticed on the project website and be open to the public.

General Plan Update Parts, Phases, and Schedule

The General Plan Update is being conducted in two parts as follows:

Part 1: Strategic Plan for the General Plan Update

Part 1 was conducted between January 2007 and March 2008. During this time the County conducted extensive public outreach and prepared a Strategic Plan. Part 1 is now complete and includes the following work products:

- Stakeholders Interviews Report summary (September 2007)
- General Plan Update Workshops Report (February 2008)
- Community Mail Survey Report (March 2008)
- Draft Work Program Report (March 2008)
- PowerPoint presentation for a Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission joint study session (March 6, 2008)

Part 2: General Plan Update

Part 2 includes the comprehensive update of the County's 1995 General Plan and is divided into the following 11 phases:

- Phase 1: Reconnaissance and Organization
- Phase 2: Existing Conditions
- Phase 3: Opportunities and Challenges
- Phase 4: Alternatives
- Phase 5: Preferred Alternative Selection and Refinement
- Phase 6: Fiscal Impact Analysis
- Phase 7: Draft Goals and Policies Report
- Phase 8: Draft Environmental Impact Report
- Phase 9: Public Review and Adoption
- Phase 10: Final Documents
- Phase 11: Housing Element Update Coordination

Attachment A shows the estimated project schedule for the General Plan Update. The project is expected to take approximately 2½ years.

General Plan Update Public Outreach Program

The General Plan Update includes an extensive public outreach program designed to increase public awareness of County needs and options, solicit public opinions and input on countywide growth issues, and enhance public involvement and support for the update process. Integrating resident, business, stakeholder, and decision-maker concerns regarding the future growth and development of the county will be a key aspect of the update program to ensure that the new General Plan supports the vision of the county.

San Benito County already initiated the public outreach process during Part 1 with stakeholder interviews, three community workshops, and a community mail survey. During Part 2, County staff and the consultants will build upon these initial outreach efforts and use the findings to inform the opportunities and challenges assessment and other tasks of the GPU. This includes:

- **Community Workshops/Open Houses.** County staff and the consultants will hold three series of interactive Community Workshops/Open Houses at two different locations within the county (six total workshops/open houses). These include the following:
 - Two Interactive Community Workshops on defining Alternatives
 - Two Interactive Community Workshops on comparing Alternatives
 - Two Open Houses on the Draft General Plan
- **Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission Joint Study Sessions.** County staff and the consultants will facilitate six Board of Supervisor and Planning Commission Joint Study Sessions to discuss:
 - Opportunities and Challenges
 - Alternatives

- Preferred Alternative Selection & Refinement
- Key Goals
- Draft General Plan (two study sessions)

- **Adoption Hearings.** County staff and the consultants will facilitate two Adoption Hearings, one with the Board of Supervisors and one with the Planning Commission.

- **Newsletters.** Three newsletters will be prepared during the General Plan Update to help educate and inform the public about the process; advertise upcoming community workshops, meetings, and hearings; and advertise the release of project documents. The newsletters will cover the following topics:
 - Newsletter #1 - Overview of Opportunities and Challenges Report
 - Newsletter #2 - Alternatives
 - Newsletter #3 - Draft General Plan Update

- **E-updates.** County staff and the consultants will maintain a contact list of key stakeholders, community groups, local organizations, and interested community members and periodically send out e-mail updates on the GPU process and invitations to upcoming community workshops, meetings, hearings, and other events.

- **Project Website.** County staff and the consultants have developed a project website for the General Plan Update. The website includes up-to-date information on the status of the project, the ability to download project documents and presentations, a link to sign up to receive program updates, and an easy means for the public to send comments to the County and the consultants. The project website is available at: www.sanbenitogpu.com

Part 2 Milestone Work Products

The following is a summary of the two component documents that make up the San Benito County General Plan:

- **Background Report.** The Background Report takes a “snapshot” of San Benito County’s current (2009) trends and conditions. It provides a detailed description of a wide range of topics (see Section 1.6) within the county, such as demographic and economic conditions, land use, public facilities, and environmental resources. The report provides decision makers, the public, and local agencies with context for making policy decisions. Unlike the Goals and Policies Report, the Background Report is intended to be objective and policy-neutral. The Background Report serves as a setting for the Environmental Impact Report prepared for the General Plan.

- **Goals and Policies Report.** This report is the essence of the General Plan. It contains the goals and policies that will guide future decisions within the county. It also identifies a full set of implementation programs that will ensure the goals and policies in the General Plan are carried out.

County staff and the consultants will prepare the following support documents during Part 2:

- **Opportunities and Challenges Report.** The Opportunities and Challenges Report identifies key physical, environmental, economic, cultural, social, and planning issues affecting San Benito County. These key conditions and issues will be derived from the Background Report and input received during community workshops, the community survey, and other sources of information collected during the initial phases of the General Plan Update process. The information summarized in this Report and the Background Report will provide a framework for developing guiding a vision statement
- **Alternatives Report.** The Alternatives Report will consist of the development, evaluation, and selection of land use and policy alternatives. The Report will be designed to frame an active discussion among stakeholders, community members, and county decision makers, leading to direction from the Board of Supervisors for the preferred policy direction for the Draft Goals and Policies Report. The vision statement will be further refined following the selection of the preferred alternative in Phase 5, and ultimately placed in the preface of the Goals and Policies Report.
- **Environmental Impact Report.** The environmental impact report (EIR) responds to the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) as set forth in Sections 15126, 15175, and 15176 of the CEQA Guidelines Act (CEQA). The Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors will use the EIR during the General Plan Update process to understand the potential environmental implications associated with implementing the General Plan.

Emerging Policy Issues

The following “emerging themes” were identified during Part 1 of the project:

1. Balancing growth and agricultural preservation
2. Protecting natural resources
3. Maintaining a place-based identity
4. Increasing economic opportunity
5. Repairing and expanding infrastructure

The following six major issues were also identified during the public outreach process of the Strategic Plan:

1. Amount and distribution of growth
2. Preserving agrarian culture
3. Economic development “in synch” with community character
4. Preserving water quality and natural resources
5. Infrastructure upgrades and maintenance
6. Policy framework with implementation emphasis

In addition to these issues, County staff identified the following major issues: open space preservation, city-focused growth, affordable housing, and alternative energy sources.

While these lists of themes and issues are preliminary and will likely be updated as the GPU is conducted, they do represent a strong start in terms of identifying the focus of community concern going into the GPU.

Key Decision Points for the GPAC

Each GPAC meeting will be facilitated by County staff and designed to provide feedback on specific issues and information. County staff and the consultants will summarize GPAC input in a series of memoranda to the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors. The GPAC will focus on providing input on key decisions points throughout the General Plan Update, including:

- Providing input on growth assumptions and projections;
- Reviewing existing conditions information presented in the Background Report;
- Identifying opportunities and challenges to be addressed during the General Plan Update;
- Evaluating land use and policy alternatives.

Attachments:

Attachment A: Estimated Project Schedule

Attachment B: General Plan 101

ATTACHMENT B GENERAL PLAN 101

What is a General Plan?

Every city and county in California is required by State law to prepare and maintain a planning document called a general plan. A general plan serves as the jurisdiction's "constitution" or "blueprint" for future decisions concerning land use and resource conservation. All specific plans, subdivisions, public works projects, and zoning decisions must be consistent with the local jurisdiction's general plan.

The general plan expresses the community's development goals and incorporates public policies relative to the distribution of future public and private land uses. California State law requires that each county adopt a general plan "for the physical development of the county and any land outside its boundaries which bears relation to its planning." Typically, a general plan is designed to address issues facing the county for the next 15-25 years.

The nature of a general plan has four defining features:

- **General.** As the name implies, a general plan provides general guidance for future land use, transportation, environmental, and resource decisions.
- **Comprehensive.** A general plan covers a wide range of social, economic, infrastructure, and natural resource issues. These include land use, urban development, housing, transportation, public facilities and services, recreation, agriculture, biological resources, and many other topics.
- **Long-Range.** A general plan provides guidance on achieving a long-range vision for the county's future. To reach this envisioned future, the general plan includes goals, policies, and implementation programs that address both near-term and long-term needs. The San Benito County General Plan looks out to the year 2035 (roughly 25 years in the future).
- **Integrated and Coherent.** The goals, policies, and implementation programs in the General Plan present a comprehensive, unified program for development and resource conservation. The Plan is based on a consistent set of assumptions and projections for population and employment to plan future demands for housing, employment, and public services and facilities (e.g., police, infrastructure). The Plan's coherent set of policies and implementation programs enables citizens to understand the vision of the General Plan, and landowners, businesses, and industry to be more certain about the priorities and standards of the County and how they will be implemented.

Organization of the General Plan

The general plan is presented as a collection of "topical elements," of which seven are mandated by State law. The seven State-mandated elements are: Land Use, Circulation, Housing, Conservation, Open Space, Noise, and Safety. Each of the seven mandatory elements are required to be addressed by the general plan; however, State law allows these to be arranged and consolidated as the local jurisdiction chooses as long as the required issue areas are addressed. San Benito County's 1995 General Plan includes the following sections/elements:

- Environmental Resources and Constraints Inventory (1994)
- Land Use Element (1992)
- Transportation Element (1992)
- Housing Element (2001)
- Open Space and Conservation Element (1995)
- Noise Element (1984)
- Seismic and Safety Element (1980)
- Scenic Roads and Highways Element (1980)

Using the General Plan

The General Plan is used by Board of Supervisors, Planning Commission, and County staff on a daily basis to make decisions with direct or indirect land use implications. It also provides a framework for inter-jurisdictional coordination among officials and staff of other government agencies (e.g., Federal, State, and local). County residents, property owners, and businesses also use the General Plan for a particular geographic area or for a particular subject of interest to them.

The General Plan is the basis for a variety of regulatory mechanisms and administrative procedures. California planning law requires consistency between the General Plan and its implementation programs. Implementation programs and regulatory systems of the General Plan include zoning and subdivision ordinances, capital improvement programs, specific plans, environmental impact procedures, building and housing codes, redevelopment plans, and various financing tools.

As the County's population changes over time, its goals will be redefined and the physical environment in which its residents live and work will be altered. San Benito County will continue to undergo changes and the General Plan represents a depiction of how the planning policies apply to the future. In order for the Plan to be a useful document, it must be monitored and periodically revised to respond to and reflect changing conditions.

The General Plan should be reviewed annually, focusing particularly on implementation. A more comprehensive and thorough review and revision should be done every five or ten years. State law permits the General Plan to be amended up to four times in any calendar year, unless special conditions apply as defined by Government Code Sections 65358(c) and (d). Each amendment may contain more than one change to the General Plan. A comprehensive revision is necessary to recognize changing conditions, both internal and external to the County; the availability of more recent planning data; and shifts in community values.

Additional Information on General Plans

Please view the following sites for more information on the structure and legal requirements of a General Plan:

- **General Plan Guidelines (2003).** Published by the Governor's Office of Planning and Research http://www.opr.ca.gov/planning/publications/General_Plan_Guidelines_2003.pdf
- **A Citizen's Guide to Planning.** Published by the Governor's Office of Planning and Research http://ceres.ca.gov/planning/planning_guide/plan_index.html
- **The California General Plan Glossary.** Published by the California Planning Roundtable <http://www.cproundtable.org/publications/california-general-plan-glossary>
- **Database of City and County Adopted General Plans.** Published by the California Planning and Land Use Network. <http://ceres.ca.gov/planning/genplan>
- **California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines.** Published by the California Natural Resources Agency. <http://ceres.ca.gov/ceqa/guidelines>