

RESPONSES TO GPAC QUESTIONS ON THE DRAFT GENERAL PLAN BACKGROUND REPORT (Part 1)

San Benito County General Plan Update | May 20, 2010

The following are County staff and GPU Consultant responses to questions raised by the General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC) on the Draft General Plan Background Report. This part includes questions/comments related to the Introduction, Demographics and Economic Trends, Land Use, Agriculture, and Transportation and Circulation chapters.

GENERAL COMMENTS

Question G.1

Key terms are scattered throughout the document. You might consider placing key terms at the front of the chapter so that people know where to look for them.

***Response:** The Background Report is divided into various topical sections in order to organize existing data and information. Each topical section includes an Introduction, Key Terms, Regulatory Setting, Major Findings, and Existing Conditions. The primary reason for this is to allow the Background Report to be easily integrated as the existing settings piece of the Environmental Impact Report that will be prepared later on the draft General Plan. While this does become tedious with Key Terms, this structure will make it easier to prepare the EIR later on in the process.*

Question G.3

I believe that accuracy is important, not just nitpicking; small errors are often seized upon to discredit an entire document or proposal.

***Response:** Agree. The majority of the data presented in the Background Report is derived from existing, current, and available public documents prepared by various local, regional, State, and Federal agencies. To help reviewers to independently confirm the accuracy of information used in the report, we will update all table sources and include a more detailed bibliography in the Public Review Draft Background Report.*

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

No comments

CHAPTER 2 – DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC TRENDS

Question 2.1

Chapter 2, Section 2.1, "Major Findings" at the bottom of P. 2-3 – Report gives data that indicates a 24% increase in population between 1990 and 2008, adding about 500,000 people in 18 years. The projections for future growth are that the county will add another 530,000 people over the next 25 years--do we know why they are projecting a slower growth rate in the future than we saw in the immediate past?

Response: The source data is from the U.S. Census and the California Department of Finance. We will do some research and try to identify their assumptions.

Question 2.2

In Tables 2-1, 2-2, and 2-4 the figures in the “Absolute Growth” column do not match the figures in the other columns; that is, the figures in the first “year” column subtracted from the figures in the last “year” column do not yield the “absolute growth” figures. In Tables 2-3 and 2-5 the figures do match. Why?

Response: Table 2-1 shows absolute growth figures from 1990-2008. We will revise this table to show absolute growth from 1980-2008 to minimize confusion. Tables 2-2 and 2-4 show absolute growth from 2010-2030. We will revise these numbers to reflect growth from 2010-2035.

Question 2.3

On page 2-5 Table 2-1 shows County population at 57,784. Table 2-2 estimates County population in 2010 at 62,431. Why would the County have gained almost 5,000 people in the last two years?

Response: The data is from two different sources. The 2008 population estimate is from the California Department of Finance. The 2010-2035 population projections are from the Association of Monterey Bay Governments. Both agencies use different modeling assumptions when estimating and projecting. For consistency, we will revise the 2008 estimates using recent AMBAG data.

Question 2.4

Page 2-6 paragraph 2 line 2: San Benito County added 2,800 jobs total over eleven years, not 2,800 per year.

Response: We will correct this in Public Review Draft Background Report.

Question 2.5

In Table 2-5, page 2-9: The projected Median Household Income figures for 2013 are unlikely to be near accurate given the meltdown and unemployment of the last two years. According to State figures 51% of students in the County qualify for free or reduced price lunches. (www.ed-data.k12.ca.us)

Response: The State has recently (since the chapter was written) issued updated Household Income projections for 2009 and 2014 which have been adjusted to reflect slower growth. We will revise this table with these updated projections.

Question 2.6

Page 2-11, third bullet: Apparently, the statement that San Benito County household incomes have been higher than the State average since 1990 is true, but it was not true before then. My recollection is that in the 1970 census San Benito County had the highest mean and lowest median household incomes in the state. I cite this only to say that the picture of general prosperity painted by the statement is not entirely accurate.

Response: Agree. As a general practice, we are using a timeframe of 1990 to 2035 for data summarized in the Background Report. This broader historical information, however, is relevant

to the discussion. We will add a statement summarizing this historical data in the Background Report.

Question 2.7

Table 2-7, page 2-12: Once again, the “Absolute Growth” figures do not correspond with the rest of the chart. Again, why?

Response: *We will correct these numbers to reflect growth from 2010-2035.*

Question 2.8

Pages 2-16 to 2-19: I am confused by these figures. I would think that the number of County residents employed plus county residents unemployed should pretty much equal the total work force, but it doesn't seem to work out that way. For example, in Table 2-13, for 2007 the labor force is given as 25,100 and the unemployment rate as 7.2% or about 1,800 unemployed. That leaves about 5,000 workers unaccounted for. Is that the number of people who commute out of county? According to Table 2-12 (page 2-15) in 2000 37.8% of employed residents (or a little over 10,000 workers) commuted more than 30 minutes to work. If you find this confusing think how I feel.

Response: *The Labor Force and Unemployment Rate figures count the number San Benito County residents who work, including residents that travel to jobs outside the county. Employment by industry figures count the number of jobs in San Benito County, including jobs that are held by commuters who live outside the county. We will add a footnote to clarify this.*

Question 2.9

On page 2-17 It is claimed that San Benito County had about 1,900 construction jobs in 2006. The city of Hollister was midway through a multi-year building moratorium at that point, and the rest of the County was not growing rapidly. What were these construction workers doing? If they were working out of county then these were not San Benito County jobs even if they were held by county workers. This is important when it comes to working out the jobs-housing balance, which is an important issue for most people here.

Response: *The data summarized in these tables is from the California Employment Development Department, Labor Market Information Division (2009). They summarize data based on the North American Industry Classification System, which generalizes industry categories. In 2000 some mining and gravel classifications were changed and placed under the “Construction” category. This is why the data shows no “Natural Resources and Mining” after 2000 and a large jump in “Construction” after 2000. We will add a footnote clarifying this issue to the table.*

Question 2.10

Table 2-13 on page 2-18 shows no county employment in natural resources-mining for 2001-2007. Doesn't Granite Rock's Wilson Quarry count as mining? And I believe there are several other sand-and-gravel operations in the county.

Response: *See response to the previous question.*

Question 2.11

Chapter 2, Section 2.4, "Lodging" at the bottom of P. 2-23 - I'm confused by the language around the new interchange going in at the Big Red Barn: "the development will likely take place soon after the

completion of the interchange." Is there a hotel project already slated for that corner that we don't know about? The language seems prejudicial at the least.

Response: *This section analyzes the market demand for future land uses. The statement only acknowledges what the largest future economic demand would be that site.*

CHAPTER 3 – LAND USE

Question 3.1

Chapter 3, Section 3.1, "Existing Conditions", second paragraph on P. 3-4 - "Existing land use categories do not correlate with zoning or general plan land use designations..." What does this mean in practical planning terms? What can be done to resolve the lack of correlation?

Response: *Every parcel in the county has a land use designation and zoning. These two criteria identify a parcel's intended use and development standards (i.e., what someone can do with their property). Existing use just refers to what is actually on the parcel today. For example, a parcel may have a Commercial land use designation and C-1 zoning, but the existing use of the site is a single family home.*

Question 3.2

FYI - San Juan Bautista amended their SOI earlier this year to include 400+ acres of agricultural land. This information was not available but I think the committee should know that it has happened, and that San Juan Bautista stated at a LAFCO meeting they will be submitting more SOI amendments.

Response: *We will confirm current sphere of influence boundaries with LAFCO.*

CHAPTER 4 – AGRICULTURE

Question 4.1

How accurate is the information on farmland acreage? Is it taken from assessor's rolls? If so, are they updated each time a land use changes?

Response: *The farmland acreage numbers were derived from San Benito County's Geographic Information System (GIS). This system includes parcel boundaries from various sources (development plans, State, AMBAG) and also information on each parcel's current use. The use information is from County Assessors data, which is updated based on a parcels tax record.*

Question 4.2

I understand a great deal of statistical information is a "snapshot in time" but I do think the farmland numbers need to be fairly precise if we are going to recommend preservation, TDC's etc. Incorrect information could be used against proposal by people wanting to develop this land.

Response: *Agreed. The acreage numbers are based on the best available data.*

Question 4.3

Chapter 4, Section 4.1, paragraph 2 of "Regulatory Setting", P4-3 – With agriculture so central to our county's character and future, why do we now have a separate Agriculture element? What would be the advantages/disadvantages of carving it out and giving it its own element?

Response: *State law requires every general plan to address seven topics ("elements"): Land Use, Circulation, Housing, Open Space, Conservation, Safety, and Noise. However, these elements (with the exception of Housing) can be combined or broken into several elements at local discretion. For instance, Safety and Noise can be combined into a single element. San Benito County also has the discretion to create any additional elements. The benefit of having a separate Agriculture Element is that it can be one place for all agriculture-related industry, economic, safety, and education goals and policies. While it is not essential to have a separate Agriculture Element, it may be helpful for County staff, Planning Commission, Board of Supervisors, and the general public to have all agriculture-related goals and policies in one place. In the end, however, it's the policies that are important, whether they are included in a land use element or in a separate agriculture element.*

Question 4.4

Chapter 4, Section 4.1, "Existing Conditions: Land Use Element Policy 1" talks about developing ag lands at a low density level (5-acre minimum), but Hugh Bickels' presentation on the proposed TDC program made it very clear that 5-acre minimums put our prime ag land at risk. How and where do we begin to change language like this to reflect the inclusion of a TDC program in the General Plan?

Response: *This section summarizes the Land Use Element of the existing 1992 San Benito County General Plan. The GPAC will have the opportunity throughout the General Plan Update process to make recommendations to the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors on policy changes to the existing General Plan. The first steps in the process are the development of the Vision and Guiding Principles, and the subcommittee's evaluation of the existing general plan.*

Question 4.5

It seems like there are a lot of places where TDC language can be substituted for existing sections of the agriculture chapter.

Response: *We will incorporate TDC data where appropriate to describe existing conditions.*

Question 4.6

And on page 4-24, the second bullet points out that SBC "ranked 1st in the percentage of new urbanized land that was high quality farmland (50 percent)." That seems disturbing, in light of our goal of preserving agriculture as our economic base and cultural heritage. It is important that we craft changes as part of the GP update that will help us do a much better job of planning our growth in the future?

Response: *Comment noted. This issue will be addressed in detail during upcoming stages of the General Plan Update program.*

CHAPTER 6 – TRANSPORTATION AND CIRCULATION

No comments