

GPAC Meeting Summary

August 15, 2024, 6:30 PM



CITY OF PETALUMA
GENERAL PLAN UPDATE

Introduction

Meeting Access

All GPAC Meetings are public, and this meeting was held at the Petaluma Community Center. Meeting information, presentation slides, and other materials are posted on the City's Meetings site and the Petaluma General Plan website: www.cityofpetaluma.org/meetings/ and <https://www.planpetaluma.org/>.

Agenda

- Welcome
- Project and Staff Updates
- Public Draft Land Use Policy Framework
 - Presentation
 - Clarifying GPAC Questions
 - Public Comment
 - GPAC Discussion
- General Public Comment

Attendance

There were 12 total members of the General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC) members in attendance, as well as members of the public. The following GPAC members were present:

1. Dave Alden
2. Phil Boyle
3. Mary Dooley
4. Ali Gaylord
5. Yensi Jacobo
6. Sharon Kirk
7. Iliana Inzunza Madrigal
8. Roberto Rosila Mares
9. Kris Rebillot
10. Bill Rinehart
11. Joshua Riley Simmons
12. Bill Wolpert

The following GPAC members were absent:

1. Stephanie Blake
2. Roger Leventhal
3. Lizzie Wallack

The following City and consultant staff were present at the meeting:

City of Petaluma:

Heather Hines – Special Projects Manager, *M-Group Consulting Planner serving the City of Petaluma*

Consultant Team:

Ron Whitmore – *Raimi + Associates*

Michelle Hernandez – *Raimi + Associates*

Meeting Summary

The focus of the 33rd GPAC meeting was to initiate the GPAC's discussion of strategies in the Draft Land Use Policy Framework.

Opening

Heather Hines started the meeting by taking roll call attendance for GPAC members.

Project and Staff Updates

Heather Hines and Ron Whitmore presented project and staff updates on the following topics:

- City staff are reviewing the Final Draft Blueprint for Carbon Neutrality, and it will be presented for adoption to the Climate Action Commission, Planning Commission, and City Council in September, October, and November.
- The consultant team is reviewing the feedback from the community, commissions, committees, and boards (CCBs), the Planning Commission, and the GPAC on the Public Draft Policy Frameworks. The planning team will present a synopsis of the feedback to City Council, and all the input will inform the revisions and development of the draft General Plan elements.
- The Land Use Policy Framework will be released soon and be available for public review through September. The community engagement focused on the Land Use Framework will consist of online resources, an online feedback form/survey, and in-person events such as pop-ups, area meetings, and focus group meetings.
- GPAC members are ambassadors for the General Plan Update and can help spread the word through existing community networks, by staffing pop-ups, community events, and workshops, and by hosting review meetings of their own. In response to a previous request from the GPAC, City staff are working to provide stipends to GPAC members in order to host community members and engage in review and conversation of the Land Use Policy Framework.
- The GPAC's review of the Land Use Policy Framework will be supported by drop-in, virtual office hours hosted by City staff and consultant team members. Written feedback from the GPAC Land Use Working Group is expected by September 15th, with the September 19th meeting focused on discussing GPAC feedback.

Please see the presentation slides and the project website (<https://www.planpetaluma.org/>) for more information about the project and staff updates.

GPAC Clarifying Questions

- For the community workshops, please keep all of the materials and stations in the same room. At Plan Fest, the Infrastructure Framework did not receive many comments because it was separated from the rest of the event.
- Will we be able to zoom into the maps or make them bigger?
 - A: We can provide all of the maps in separate files that can be opened individually, so they are more accessible. City staff will add poster-sized maps at City Hall.
- Will there be any interactive, online feedback maps like what was available for the Active transportation Plan? They were maps where you could add a comment, and others could see it. This could be helpful if it's a single map that asks for specific feedback.
 - A: The pop-ups collect feedback in this way but in person. There is a possibility of replicating this online.
- Many people were intimidated by the size of the Policy Frameworks, and knowing that this document is so much bigger, it would be helpful to have a summary of the Framework.
- It will be important for the team to communicate early and often the State requirements for land use and explain what the current allowed uses are in order to give people more context.
- Can the GPAC have a joint workshop with the Planning Commission? You mentioned that the Planning Commission will focus on this intensely, and we are too. If we were with them discussing the Framework together, they can get all the benefit of all these last couple of years of discussion and planning.
 - A: City staff are unsure about the logistics of a Brown Act and non-Brown Act body having a discussion like that, but they can look into it.
- Given the importance of this Framework, it seems like a very tight deadline, and if it is over 100 pages long, this is asking a lot for us to review.
 - A: City staff understand but there is the need to stay on schedule in order for the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) process to start and adopt the General Plan by the end of 2025.
- Can we push the PC meeting back by one meeting so that we have more time to review the Framework?
 - A: The scheduled date was the only meeting with space on agenda for this topic.
- In our discussions of land use, we have talked a lot about mixed use and flexibility. The definition of mixed use is different for each person, so when we're talking to the public that an area is being considered for mixed use, what should they be taking away from it?
 - A: It can help to first establish the types of mixed use (horizontal vs vertical, live/work, etc.) that are being discussed and to ask people what mix of uses they want to see in an area. Hearing this type of feedback can help the team understand what people want to see and translate it into the land use designations.
- It's critical that the definition of mixed use is clear and enforceable, so everyone understands it and the vision the Framework is proposing.
 - A: The Land Use Framework does have definitions for different types of mixed use designations because of the need to align with zoning.
- Are there examples of other cities that have been able to consistently implement mixed use so that the street is always occupied and has people interacting at all times of day?

- A: Form based codes were developed in a way as a response to this desire, but it takes more than just allowing for a mix of uses to be created and thrive in an area. It takes economic investment and other strategies to support and transform an area.
- The team should look at mixed use projects in Petaluma and Sonoma County to see what has worked and what types of mixed use have created mixed use area that work.
- The GPAC would be interested in a special GPAC meeting that could occur between the next GPAC meeting and the end of the public engagement period.

Public Draft Land Use Policy Framework

Ron Whitmore made a short presentation to frame the GPAC's discussion; see the presentation slides for more detail.

The Public Draft Land Use Policy Framework follows the land use direction provided in the Vision, Pillars, and Guiding Principles for the General Plan Update. The final General Plan will contain policies and strategies to guide the future growth of Petaluma over the next 20 years, but the challenge is selecting the correct combination of strategies that are needed to achieve the community's vision for the future. The Land Use Policy Framework incorporates strategies from many different sources, including analysis done by consultant team members, GPAC Working Group ideas, and community-based initiatives like the SDAT process. One of the overarching questions of the upcoming public review of the Land Use Policy Framework is: "Does the Framework include the right mix of strategies to achieve community goals?"

Clarifying Questions

GPAC members had the following clarifying questions.

- In this past General Plan cycle, the City worked on the Central Petaluma Specific Plan and the Station Master Plan, but it has not been a productive cycle for housing production. We shouldn't think about making massive changes to all the good planning that has already happened. It might just be the timing that hasn't led to actual development.

Public Comment

The following comments were made by members of the public.

- Everyone has a different idea of what mixed use means. Can we change the language to talk about compatible uses instead and make that the focus of these community conversations, and bringing up what's already existing in these areas?
- Thank you for all the work the team and the GPAC have been done so far. We need to think more about why development expected in the last General Plan was not built out. What is the stuff that gets waived when developers propose projects, making them exempt from the existing zoning and standards? What can we do so that the City Council does not just say yes and approve any project that does not follow what the General Plan says? Can we communicate in the actual General Plan that this process and the ideas in it have been formulating for a long time? If developers want to come in and do something different, it should be a more arduous process for them.

- A: The Governance Framework answers some of these concerns, and the Land Use Framework has an implementation section about how the City will use and currently uses the General Plan.
- How will we be notified of the framework being released?
 - A: The public will be notified via the City newsletter, email list for the General Plan, and social media.
- Are the office hours open to the Planning Commission?
 - A: Yes.

GPAC Discussion

The GPAC was asked to discuss what combination of strategies they believe are needed to apply to the following areas:

East Washington Corridor

- The Community Character GPAC Working Group had ideas at the beginning of this project on transforming East Washington. For example, if there was a civic center at one end of the corridor, it could be a big resource and incentivize change.
- This is the hardest area to transform.
- It needs lane reductions on the street itself and a complete makeover of the streetscape and public realm improvements.
- Portland for example, has many neighborhoods that have lots of mixed use development and multiple types of housing types right next to each other, and all on small-sized parcels.
- The size of a neighborhood center in my mind is even smaller than what was shown as examples. Some of that Portland pattern can be seen in Petaluma, especially in areas that have a mix of houses and apartments.
 - The roads in Portland were narrower and felt safer; there were bike lanes and bus pullouts, and bikes had right of way intersections. Their streets feel human-scaled. Portland has well defined neighborhoods and was developed before this version of planning really came about.
- Washington Avenue is an auto arterial and was designed to be exactly that.
- To transform this corridor, it won't take any land use changes, it's more about public realm improvements and transportation and mobility changes.
- This whole corridor is technically mixed use but in a way that each parcel is an individual type of use, and unfortunately, not working with each other to create a cohesive environment.
- A reimagined Washington Avenue wouldn't all have retail at the ground scale, since it requires residential density to get the market to come later. There would need to be residential and streetscape changes.
- Washington could better connect residential areas and the SMART Station to the Fairgrounds, to incentivize walking to events held there.
- We need to improve safety for pedestrians and bikes relative to the vehicles on this street.
- We need to make it more human-scaled; we have to provide frequent and reliable transit service up and down the corridor. Otherwise we won't get people out of their cars.
- We need to understand what changes could happen at the Fairgrounds to understand what improvements need to happen on this street considering that it is already difficult to get across

town and this is one of the key roads that has that function. Agree that it should be more beautiful but without losing the functionality of it.

- Adding shade to the corridor is important but trees take a long time to provide it. An incremental step could be to build shade structures to begin activating and breaking up the corridor.
- The street is an arterial and functions like that, but because of the small lot size, it's not going to change until they get consolidated into larger parcels that can actually change.
- A median addition would be great but there is a lot of cutting across Washington now to get to businesses on the other side of the road.
- I don't think it can fundamentally change in a big way for the better.
- Are there any lessons learned we can tap into? There is a Sebastopol arterial change from years ago that could be an example.
- Streets with roundabouts can handle cross town traffic in a very good way, but there's a lot of fear about them even though they can help and make a difference.
- We need to publicly commit to making changes on Washington Avenue and doing it in advance so people can develop different habits, like adding bus rapid transit and bus only lanes to make it easier for people to get across town without cars.
- How can you incentivize businesses to change or come in? How do you nudge change or is it just all long term?
 - A: The City can change the allowed uses but a lot of it is dependent on the market
- You can do something fine grain and weird on the small parcels on Washington, but it can be a transitional thing without assembling the parcels.
- Washington and D street are parallel – Washington should remain arterial and beautiful while D Street should be the walkable and bike route.

15-minute activity center – Deer Creek Village

- The tenant mix could help create change.
- Maybe the addition of recreational uses that aren't about shopping, indoor recreation?
- You need a third place for people to hang out without being a consumer.
- The parking lots of a disaster for people on foot and bike to get in and out comfortably.
- There need to be supporting programs to develop these other uses.
- The Bon Aire Greenbae shopping center in Marin County is a shopping center that was redesigned and arranged to have gathering spaces outside of the retail and restaurants, and it has created a mixed and vibrant space. For Petaluma, maybe the intervention is to arrange these spaces like plazas or to make the amenities a destination.
- Santa Rosa worked with a Mexican shopping center and the Sonoma County CDC to activate a large parking lot in a neighborhood with a large Latino population and created Mitote Food Park, an open air gathering destination with food trucks, covered seating, and accessible restrooms. It has been very successful, people nearby walk to this center, and people from around town come here. It has been operating as a pop up use and took a long time to be permitted, but it has become a community destination.
- Deer Creek Village does not have many access points from across McDowell Boulevard.
- When Deer Creek Village was originally presented to the Planning Commission, there was a proposal that the parking lot would have a pop up farmers market. The PC encouraged them to make it permanent so that there would be ways for people to circulate through the development instead of being in danger in the parking lot.

- It's difficult to get across North McDowell, it should connect to that neighborhood on the other side. It's not super easy to get from Lynch Creek to it, or at least not clear how to.
- A difficulty is having these ideas in the GP and then the planning staff later deciding that there's no way to make the developers do all of the things that are asked of them.
- If we want existing shopping centers to change, then we need to incentivize and facilitate housing.
- And if shopping centers are already identified for housing, what else can we do related to land use to create change?
 - A: The City could add code requirements or changes to standards to get the mix of uses or changes that it wants to see, but there have to be other strategies as well to get to that ideal vision.
- I love the hope that Deer Creek moving in a positive direction.
- I have doubts that the owners of these shopping centers would make improvements and that this could get into a legal battle if we get into mandating tenant improvement.
- Why are we limiting 15 minute centers to just the shopping center when they could be expanded into the neighborhood, so there are more uses in the neighborhood and facilitate organic changes and push the shopping center to change.

15-minute activity centers – General

- There needs to be fresh food accessibility to support new residential, and having more services that are walkable and convenient for residents, especially those without a car.
- There need to be more community gardens in these areas.
- Transportation seems key here, should offer sticks to SOV and carrots to mass transit, bikes, and transit.
- For existing centers, some have potential (like Town & country and undeveloped plots near the Target), that the city could incentivize changes. There is potential but need to help program them.
- For communicating this content, I always think about the graphic from the CNU on mixed use and land use changes, and if we could apply that to our discussion of land use and centers, it would be helpful for explaining this to the public.
- The eastside transit center (on Maria drive next to the Safeway) could be nicer instead of just being buses idling next to a shopping center.
- The Leghorn shopping center is new and seems successful, it has the junior college and Leghorn Park nearby, which all support each other.

General Public Comment

The following general public comments were made at the meeting.

- Veronica Olsen has research and images on the reuse of parking lots from the SDAT process that was not in the SDAT report that can be shared with the General Plan team.
- We have to keep remembering that people are attracted to a place that has greenery and looks beautiful as we develop these strategies. Some examples are de-paving a parking lot, adding in pop ups or kiosks, seating, etc.
- There was a Washington Post article about Barcelona changing its corridors through the super block idea. They added open spaces and parks in the middle of the corridors and helped solve

lots of problems of speed, heat, and creating gathering spaces. Something similar could solve the problem along East Washington.

GPAC Member General Comment

- The visual of the layers in physical planning would really help to explain what this is all about, and the different layers to development.
- We could print out visuals of what the shopping center is now and then have people sketch out what they want it to look like over it – make it interactive and have people draw.
- Overall, we should understand what the problems are now and understand how to solve them before we start making major changes.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:00 PM.