

GPAC Meeting #10 Summary

January 18, 2022



Introduction

On January 18, 2022, the City of Ventura General Plan Update (GPU) team convened the 10th meeting of the General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC). The primary meeting objectives were to:

- Review the revised Vision Statement, Core Values, and Strategies
- Review and discuss the revised draft Areas of Discussion map
- Discuss existing land use regulations that form the existing “vision” for each area of the city

The meeting was open to the public and live-streamed to YouTube. This document summarizes the key content presented and themes discussed in the meeting.

Meeting Participants

The following participants attended the meeting:

General Plan Team

- Matt Raimi, Raimi + Associates
- Lilly Nie, Raimi + Associates
- Gabriela Zayas del Rio, Raimi + Associates
- Susan Harden, Circlepoint
- Peter Gilli, City of Ventura
- Neda Zayer, City of Ventura

GPAC Members

- Doug Halter, GPAC Vice Chair
- Philip Bohan, GPAC
- Nicholas Bonge, GPAC
- Stephanie Caldwell, GPAC
- Kyler Carson, GPAC
- David Comden, GPAC
- Joshua Damigo, GPAC
- Nicholas Deitch, GPAC
- Peter Freeman, GPAC
- Kacie Goff, GPAC
- Kelsey Jonker, GPAC
- Stephanie Karba, GPAC
- Louise Lampara, GPAC
- Scott McCarty, GPAC
- Bill McReynolds, GPAC
- Abagale Thomas, GPAC
- Dana Worsnop, GPAC

Absent: Daniel Reardon, Alejandra Tellez, and Erin Kraus

Meeting Format

Doug Halter welcomed GPAC members and the public to the 10th GPAC meeting. Susan Harden followed with a brief overview of the meeting agenda and then handed it over to Matt Raimi to share staff updates. Notable updates included the Draft Housing Element going out to City Council for adoption on January 31st and recent engagement efforts from the GPU Team, including a meeting with environmental justice organizations on the Westside.

Matt then provided an overview of the revised General Plan vision (including the vision statement, core values and guiding principles) drafted by the GPU team. After this presentation, Susan moderated a discussion asking GPAC members to reflect on whether the vision accurately reflected community input to date and whether anything needed to be changed or removed. Following this discussion session, Matt summarized revisions made to the "Areas of Discussion" map since the last GPAC meeting and noted any final comments from GPAC members.

The GPU team originally planned to conclude with a presentation on the existing land use regulations for each Area of Discussion. However, because there was not enough time, GPAC members were asked to review this background information on their own time. The meeting concluded with public comment.

GPAC Feedback and Discussion

Vision, Core Values, and Strategies

The General Plan vision is comprised of three components: a vision statement, core values that define the City's culture and priorities, and a set of strategies to help implement the General Plan. In this discussion session, GPAC members provided feedback on each component of the revised General Plan vision.

Vision Statement

Vision Statement - Overall Comments and Concepts That "Rang True"

- Overall, the vision statement and core values were comprehensive and generally captured what GPAC and members of the public have talked about.
- "California beach town character," "close-knit community feel," and "diverse neighborhoods" all ring true.
- Commitment to arts, culture, innovation, and creative energy are important components of the vision, because they are our common human denominator.
- Agree that "housing for all people" is an important core value that Ventura must continue to be explicit about. Otherwise, there is the risk of continuing the City's legacy of exclusionary housing.
- Agree with "balanced growth" as a core value; it addresses the challenge of seeing Ventura grow while preserving its character.

Vision Statement Structure and Style

- Multiple GPAC members commented on the structure of the vision statement. A few members recommended that the vision should be bullets but the majority felt that paragraphs better communicate the vision and differentiate it from the core values and strategies.

- Most GPAC members felt that the vision statement was too long and could be condensed. This will make it easier for the public to read. However, some said that the length is not as important as the quality of the writing.
- There were some concerns that the language is too complicated and should be written for an 8th grade audience. The team will attempt to simplify the language and shorten sentences while preserving the content and tone.

Content of the Vision Statement

- Remove the phrase “almost perfect” from the vision statement; there are plenty of aspects about Ventura that can be improved. Consider replacing with “special place” (Note: all GPAC members agreed on this.)
- Call out that the City will evolve in a way that enhances what we love about our community.
- Add more on the City’s rich history and identify opportunities for plaques, dedications, and other educational materials.
- Climate issues need to be better addressed in the vision statement. Sustainability is not only about jobs and houses, but also about sustaining life.
- Include the concept of a “welcoming city,” where everyone is made to feel welcome no matter how long they have lived in Ventura.
- The third paragraph of the vision statement should also include “preserving our views of the ocean” since Ventura is a beach town.
- Add improving access to the oceans, beaches, and other natural areas.
- Reframe “change” as something we can use to enhance the City as opposed to something to be “molded into the identity of the City.”
- While “wide diversity of housing options” is important, we need to make clear that not everyone can live in Ventura because of finite resources and land.
- Concern that the vision statement and core values feel incongruent – vision statement talks about more housing, growth, and development, while the core values emphasize Ventura’s small-town beach community and unique character.
- There is an overuse of the word “diverse” in the vision statement (i.e. diverse residents, diverse housing, diverse neighborhoods).
- “Diverse housing stock and neighborhoods” doesn’t ring true to me because the City is still struggling with a lack of affordable/executive housing and an older housing stock.
- Include “avoiding gentrification in housing” and “becoming a model community.”
- Include “commitment to learning”. Ventura has a community college and strong schools, but it is losing school-age kids and families. Recapturing that demographic is important to the future of the City.
- Vision statement should mention agriculture as an important industry and part of the City’s identity and lifestyle.
- One thing that makes Ventura unique is its vibrant small business community. Embracing and supporting local businesses should be emphasized in the vision.

Core Values

Content of the Core Values

- Another core value should be added to address public safety and safety of all residents and businesses.
- Core value of “housing for all people” should specifically address homelessness with language such as “invest in services to facilitate permanent supportive housing for our unsheltered community members.”
- “Community” should be the very first core value, because it is the most foundational value.
- “Encourage everyone’s voices to be heard” would be more realistic/feasible than “a more inclusive community where everyone’s voice is heard.”

Additional Comments/Questions

- If “accessible government and robust civic engagement” is a core value, then it should also be reflected in the GPU process and GPAC itself, which has largely been conducted online. Online engagement can exclude those who don’t have an ability to participate online.
- What is meant by a sustainable jobs-housing balance?
 - Response from GPU Team: more people who live in the City are also able to work in the City (conversely, more people who work in Ventura can also afford to live in Ventura)
 - Other GPAC member comments in response to the question:
 - Sustainable jobs-housing balance should not just be about more jobs but about attracting the right kinds of higher-quality jobs (i.e. we don’t want Amazon warehousing in the City)
 - Ventura has two of the major hospitals in the County and the County Government Center, which all provide high-paying jobs. Shows that Ventura does not have enough housing options to attract people to live in the City

Strategies

General Suggestions for Improvement

- The strategies don’t feel specific enough.
- Need to build in flexibility in this document to allow for emerging technologies as they happen.

Community Character and Design

- Strategies don’t capture anything discussed about the Eastside, like developing neighborhood centers, increasing accessibility to amenities and attracting more businesses.
- Note that the neighborhood around the East Ventura Metrolink Station is secluded and hard to get to.

Environment

- Instead of “adapt to impacts of climate change,” reframe as “proactively manage impacts of climate change.”
- State target for greenhouse gas emission should be the minimum.
- Need to address public safety in connection with climate adaptation and resilience.

Economy

- Need to think about industries that Ventura is uniquely positioned to adopt and absorb, like aquaculture. Opportunity to expand aquaculture in Ventura Harbor.

Access and Mobility

- Strategies don't mention micromobility or electrical vehicles, and those should also be considered in the GPU.

Equity and Engagement

- Use "minorities" instead of specifically singling out "Hispanic/Spanish-speaking populations."
- Plan for infrastructure that allows for internet access for every community member.
- In addition to engaging with the Hispanic/Latinx community, strategies should also honor other heritages. There is no mention of Indigenous populations in the City or its historic Chinatown.

Additional Comments/Questions

- Need to move to in-person events as soon as safely possible. Online meetings are not accessible for everyone.
- Note that there are also advantages to online meetings and in some ways they are more accessible for people who can't physically attend; hybrid meetings will likely be the future.
- "Preserving Latinx character" seems to run counter to "diverse neighborhoods." Are we trying to achieve diversity within neighborhoods or collective diversity across the City/among neighborhoods?
 - We don't want to lose the flavor of any community by gentrification. The question is how do we achieve both types of diversity?
 - Particularly want to see diversity within neighborhoods
- What does "psychological connections to the ocean" mean?
 - Many residents have expressed that the City does not feel like a beach town. The GPU Team's intention with this phrase was to say that connections to the ocean can be enhanced both psychically and psychologically.
 - Our proximity to the ocean contributes to this psychological connection. Every time I catch a glimpse of the ocean when I'm driving, I have a spiritual experience and it genuinely improves my quality of life
- What is a pro-housing designation?
 - Taking a series of actions to make it easier and faster to build a diversity of housing types in the city. This designation opens up funding opportunities for infrastructure as well. City Council has been talking about obtaining a pro-housing designation as a potential goal for the City

Areas of Discussion

Based on feedback from the last GPAC meeting, the GPU team made a few revisions to the Areas of Discussion map. These changes included taking out the Olivas Golf Course, focusing only on the commercial and industrial areas of the Westside, and adding more areas on the Eastside.

GPAC members agreed that the map is ready to be used for the "alternatives" phase of work. The primary discussion from GPAC members was about the golf courses. Some GPAC members recommended

putting the city-owned golf courses back into the map so they could be discussed during the alternatives phase. Others said that the Buenaventura Golf Course is in a floodplain so that current use might be the best option.

Public Comments

Several individuals spoke during public comment at the close of the meeting. Comments are summarized below:

- Members of the Southwest Regional Council of Carpenters discussed the need to invest in local jobs training and apprenticeship programs, hire locally, provide living wages, and build affordable housing so that residents of the city can continue to work in the city.
- Vision statement should focus not only on what we want to see and don't see, but also how we want to feel (i.e. delighted, comfortable, surprised, safe). Explicitly call out the shoreline, seashore, and ocean front as assets of the city. Add childcare and after-school programs to economic strategies.
- Don't get hung up on wordsmithing the vision. "Sustainability" needs to focus on all three E's: economy, environment, and social equity.
- Considering the importance of beach town character, the vision should focus more on the interaction between the City and the beach. More walkable/bicycle-friendly vision conflicts with the current auto-centric transportation network.
- GPAC engagement would have been improved with feedback from residents with a greater variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. Citizens are effectively excluded from this process when public comments are not taken with full weight. Would like to see more housing with more affordable entry points for younger families and adults.
- Vision statement needs to clearly define the view aspects of the entire city, not just Downtown. Recent developments "hover" over streets and are unaffordable to many residents –vision needs to be rooted in the existing urban fabric.
- The foundation of Ventura is working-class families.
- Need more cultural/racial inclusivity in how we talk about Ventura and its future development, as well as more engagement with the Spanish-speaking and working community.