

GPAC Meeting #15 Summary

September 20, 2022



Introduction

On September 20, 2022, the City of Ventura convened the 15th meeting of the General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC). The primary meeting objective was for GPAC members to ask questions to better understand the land use alternatives and engagement process. This document summarizes the key themes discussed and relies on notes from City staff to supplement parts of the meeting that were not recorded.

The meeting was open to the public and held in person at City Hall in the Community Meeting Room (Room 202). The meeting was livestreamed on [YouTube](#); however, due to a technical malfunction with the recording equipment, a portion of the meeting was not captured. Because of this technical issue, some GPAC questions and public comments may not be fully captured in the summary below.

Meeting Participants

The following participants attended the meeting:

General Plan Team

- Matt Raimi, Raimi + Associates
- Peter Gilli, City of Ventura
- Neda Zayer, City of Ventura

GPAC Members

- Lorrie Brown, GPAC Chair
- Doug Halter, GPAC Vice Chair
- Philip Bohan, GPAC
- Nicholas Bonge, GPAC
- Stephanie Caldwell, GPAC
- Kyler Carson, GPAC
- Joshua Damigo, GPAC
- Nicholas Deitch, GPAC
- Peter Freeman, GPAC
- Kacie Goff, GPAC
- Kelsey Jonker, GPAC
- Stephanie Karba, GPAC
- Louise Lampara, GPAC
- Bill McReynolds, GPAC
- Daniel Reardon, GPAC
- Sabrena Rodriguez, GPAC
- Dana Worsnop, GPAC

Absent: David Comden, Erin Kraus, Scott McCarty Alejandra Tellez

Meeting Format

Lorrie Brown welcomed GPAC members and the public to the 15th GPAC meeting. Matt Raimi followed with a brief overview of the meeting agenda and a status update on the General Plan Update process, including past and upcoming engagement activities. The bulk of the meeting was spent on an informal Q&A session with the GPAC members. During this session, each GPAC member had the opportunity to ask one question. The meeting concluded with 45 minutes for public comment.

Q&A Session

The following section summarizes questions from GPAC members and accompanying responses from the General Plan Team. Note that the meeting recording ends part way through the session.

- **Will the General Plan Team conduct an analysis of the land use alternatives?**
 - Yes. The Team is working on development projections for each land use alternative. *(Note: On October 5, 2022, the General Plan Team released an [analysis of development projections](#) that estimates a range of potential jobs and housing units for each land use alternative. With the exception of the SOAR areas, the alternatives generally have the same range of projected residential and job growth).*
- **How were the transect zones in the City's form-based codes translated into land use designations?**
 - The current approach correlates all transect zones with the land use designation that matches the maximum density and/or allowed number of stories, regardless of whether the top floor can be built at 100% of the building. More specific restrictions on the percentage of the top floor that can be built will remain in the zoning code. This approach is typical as the dimensional requirements of buildings are mostly found in zoning codes and not General Plans. The General Plan would not supersede the zoning code by allowing a whole top floor; instead, it would have a policy that implements the zoning for the City's specific plans and development codes. The General Plan Team is also considering alternative approaches for translating the form-based codes into land use designations, such as having more specific land use designations that indicate the percentage of the top floor that can be built.
- **In *YIMBY v. City of Los Angeles*, the courts found that the General Plan superseded zoning regulations. What legal protections are there that would guarantee that the General Plan would not supersede the zoning code by allowing a whole top floor (see question above)? Some of the low-density residential designations already allow half stories (2.5 stories), so why were half stories not carried through to the mixed-use designations?**
 - That case law is referring to the General Plan superseding zoning regulations when there are conflicts in allowable density. Local governments must accommodate the maximum density in the General Plan, even if zoning classifications dictate lower densities. The intent is not for the General Plan to supersede the City's specific plans, and the Team will have conversations with the City Attorney's Office to make sure that

is the case. The half stories allowed in the low-residential designations are a carryover from existing zoning. We generally wanted to maintain the residential zoning districts in the city.

- **What is the difference between the three alternatives? Which one has the most height throughout the city?**
 - Compared to existing zoning, all of the alternatives reduce the area of the city where six-story buildings are allowed. *(Note: please see slide 19 on the [Development Projections deck](#), released October 5, 2022, for the complete chart).*
- **What is the purpose of having 6-story buildings? What benefits do they bring in terms of revenue, aesthetics, etc.?**
 - In earlier surveys, there was input from many community members who were interested in exploring more intense growth in some areas of the city. The alternatives respond to this input by serving as a starting point for conversations around where and how much certain areas of the city should grow. 6-stories is the highest height proposed in the alternatives, because the City already allows that height in certain parts of the existing zoning code. Overall, the proposed alternatives significantly reduce the areas that allow 6 story buildings.
- **If a mistake is identified on the alternative maps, are corrections made on all materials or just the interactive online map?**
 - Generally, corrections will only be made to the interactive map, and it will always be the most up to date map. *(Note: since the September GPAC meetings, the citywide static maps, along with the maps in the Downtown Alternative Summary, were revised to address issues in the Downtown and Westside areas. A full log of corrections is recorded on the [project website](#) and will continue to be updated as needed).*
- **Why do we have to go through this planning effort when we are so concerned about water supply? What happens when we run out of water?**
 - The intent of the General Plan Update process was to create a plan that guides the evolution of the city 25-30 years into the future. Planning for future growth and development allows the City to anticipate necessary infrastructure improvements, including considerations for water availability. Ultimately, the City needs to plan for whatever amount of growth the City Council decides on. There may come a point when the City cannot grow because there is not enough water. Communities have tried different strategies to solve this issue. For example, some cities have required new developments to offset increases in water use from the project with reductions in water use in other places in the City. Other cities have halted development completely. *(Note: the October 18 GPAC meeting will be an educational forum on water supply and availability).*

- **How much affordable housing of various kinds can we write into the General Plan?**
 - The General Plan cannot dictate who moves into the city or how many units get built, since that is dependent on the market. However, the City is working on an Inclusionary Housing Ordinance (IHO) to help increase affordable housing units in the city. The IHO will quantify the percentage of affordable housing required for every new project, as well as the level of affordability that needs to be constructed (i.e., moderate-income, low-income, very low-income, extremely low-income).

- **How is the General Plan addressing impacts of increased traffic?**
 - Once a preferred land use direction is selected, the Team will create a traffic model to analyze Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) and Level of Service (LOS) across the city. Traffic modeling is costly and time-intensive, so it is generally only done once. When development projects come forward, a localized analysis is also conducted to mitigate traffic impacts. Combined, the traffic model and development projections will inform the City's capital improvements program, which levies traffic mitigation fees from new projects. Further, the City is working on an Active Transportation Plan to improve walking, cycling and transit use.

- **Why would we need more housing if there is a population decrease in the city?**
 - There are always fluctuations in population. While the statewide population has decreased in recent years, we do not expect that the population is going to continue to decrease over the next 20 years. In addition, since 1980, the State has had a shortfall of housing units that has led to today's housing crisis. A slight decrease in population has not decreased the price of housing or offset all the pent-up demand and overcrowding caused by decades of housing shortage.

- **Can the General Plan contain policies related to building design? Community members are concerned about square, flat top, boxy buildings that have been developed in the city.**
 - The General Plan will have broad design guidance about the character that the City wants to achieve. The specific design standards, including architectural style, massing, setbacks, etc. will be left to the development and zoning codes. Parallel to the General Plan Update, the City is also working on an Overlay Zones project that would apply design standards to areas that aren't governed by a form based code. There could also be policies in the General Plan that call for new specific plans or corridor plans in areas that need additional study.

- **What is the State Density Bonus Law?**
 - California's Density Bonus Law gives housing developments with affordable housing the right to concessions such as an additional floor or reduced parking. The exact level of concessions depends on the percentage of affordable units at different affordability levels in the housing development (i.e., moderate-income, low-income, very low-income, extremely low-income).

- **How much discretion does City Council have over development projects in the city?**
 - Five years ago, the State passed legislation that prohibits cities from denying a housing project that is consistent with its General Plan. For example, if the General Plan allows 20 du/ac on a parcel, the City cannot deny a project that meets that maximum density allowance. Before this legislation, the City had full discretion to reject a project, even if it met all of the zoning requirements.

- **If the General Plan is planning for 2-3 Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) cycles, are we locking ourselves into a pace of development that can't be stopped in the future, even if we don't have enough water?**
 - *Background: Every 8 years, each City in the State of California is given an amount of housing units it needs to plan for through the Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) process. The City of Ventura was asked to plan for approximately 5,300 housing units in the current 8 year period (2021-2029). In the 25-30 year time horizon of the General Plan Update, the City is projecting between 10,600-15,900 housing units, or about 1% growth per year. This estimate is based on the expected Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) for the next 2-3 housing element cycles. The approach was unanimously endorsed by City Council on July 11, 2022.*
 - This range of projected housing units is a general target, not a number the City is required to build. The final preferred land use direction could ultimately plan for a lower number of units. Note that the current General Plan planned for 8,300 units. Considering that the current General Plan only had a time horizon of 20 years and the General Plan Update has a time horizon of 27 years, the growth projection pace is actually about the same.

Note that the recording stops after the above question. The summary below relies on Staff notes and memory and does not capture everything that was stated.

- **Where are we in the Housing Element process?**
 - The updated Housing Element was adopted by City Council on January 31, 2022. The State is currently reviewing the element for final certification.

- **What happens if we stop the General Plan process?**
 - The State requires that a General Plan be up-to-date but there is no requirement for jurisdictions to prepare comprehensive updates to the General Plan on a regular schedule. There are State laws that require that the City would need to update its Safety Element and to prepare an Environmental Justice Element when 2 or more Elements are updated.

- **Are we looking at food deserts on the westside and eastside?**
 - Yes, food access and availability is part of the Environmental Justice Element.

- **Where are we planning for parks and open space?**
 - The General Plan can recommend general locations for new parks and open space based on deficiencies in service. However, it is not possible to redesignate private parcels as parks and open space. The General Plan can also include policies that

mandate open space requirements for parcels over a certain size. This topic will be addressed at future GPAC meetings.

Emailed Questions

The General Plan Team also received some questions received via email prior to the meeting. Responses to these questions are summarized below.

- **At the Land Use Forum, as a part of signing in we had to mark our age and other demographics. Can you share those results? I'm specifically wondering how well the younger 18-30 year old residents were represented at that meeting.**
 - 10% of participants indicated that they were between 25 and 34 years of age. No participants indicated that they were 24 years old or younger. This demographic was underrepresented by these meetings.

- **I was looking at the Draft Historic Resources Survey that was posted as an advance agenda item for the next council meeting. I thought it was interesting that this isn't the first time in our history we've experienced a severe housing shortage. Because of the Oil Boom in the 20s we tripled our population. During the Post war Baby boom (1940s-60s), we grew 120%, and then again from the 60s-80s we grew another 153%. I'm just trying to place how we're addressing the similar Housing Shortages. Based on the outrage I'm hearing, it sounds like we're in for another crazy growth period. What percentage of growth are the Land Use Alternatives projecting?**
 - The land use alternatives are looking at a maximum of a 1% growth rate. However, the actual growth rate is determined by the market and is typically less than projected. For example, the current General Plan assumes a 0.88% growth rate but the actual growth rate in recent years is closer to 0.54%.

- **Concerns about water keep coming up. I understand that water can't be used to justify not planning for growth. But at what part of the General Plan process will these concerns be addressed? Can you remind me about the projects and initiatives the city has in the pipeline to enhance water security? Who pays for it?**
 - The question about water availability will be addressed by Ventura Water at a future meeting. *(Note: the October GPAC meeting will be an educational forum on water supply and availability).*

- **I've heard it suggested that the General Plan should only be planning for one 8-year RHNA cycle. Let's say we do that. Can you play out what would happen in 8 years if we took that approach?**
 - At the next RHNA cycle, the City would need to identify sites for housing units based on the allocation and rules dictated by the State Department of Housing and Community Development. If there is not sufficient capacity, the City would need to identify sites for increased densities at that time.

- **At the presentation to the VSSTF, some folks asked about pocket, incremental density in Neighborhood Low areas (things like ADUs, back units, etc.) You mentioned that it could be dealt with down the road, but it's not necessarily a question that gets answered at the Land Use Alternatives Stage. Can you elaborate on how that'll get addressed?**
 - Over the past year, the GPAC led the development of the Areas of Discussion, which are the focus of the land use alternatives. The GPAC did not identify the low-density residential areas as part of this process. The question of allowing 2+ unit buildings in areas current zoned for single family housing can be discussed at future GPAC meetings.
- **I've heard calls to keep the DTSP intact, but I also know that the DTSP is the document that gives developers the authority to ask for exceptions and warrants. How will that be addressed going forward?**
 - Updates to the Downtown Specific Plan (DTSP), if needed, will be made following adoption of the General Plan.
- **The Vons is the nearest large plat grocery store for the entire westside. I'm concerned that a redevelopment of the site might create a food desert. Is there a mechanism available to us to allow redevelopment while requiring the site to maintain its grocery use?**
 - Yes, the General Plan can include a requirement to maintain a grocery store at that site.
- **Likewise for the sites on Olive Ave, can the Mixed Use designation require some commercial?**
 - The General Plan and zoning can identify areas where active ground floor uses are required in new mixed-use buildings. However, the real estate market will determine which uses move into those buildings.
- **Freeway Cap: Should the land above the 101 be designated? Is it like SOAR, where we plan for it even if it's a stretch?**
 - The idea of a freeway cap can be included in the General Plan, even if there are significant barriers to implementation.
- **I'd like to see more pocket density, incremental development out in East Ventura. I think allowing uses that benefit small property owners have wider appeal than multi-family/mixed use. I think SOAR is a stretch, but it isn't a bad idea to plan for it. Multi-family in the areas immediately adjacent to those neighborhood centers to create some transects and variety. Based on the feedback you've heard so far is there likely any thoughts of revising these areas?**
 - This is a potential topic for future GPAC meetings.
- **Would this process re-visit the boundaries of some of the Overlay Zones? I notice the ESG overlay zone is in an area that under all alternatives, would not permit residential housing. I**

think its inhumane that we're saying that folks transitioning out of homelessness can only live in areas that aren't suitable to live in normal circumstances.

- Overlay zones are part of the implementation of the General Plan. The General Plan can include goals and policies to direct where certain uses can be located but the specific overlay zones will be included in any amendments to the City's zoning code.

Public Comments

Below are the individuals who spoke during public comment. Note that because comment cards are handwritten, some of the names transcribed may be misspelled.

- Nathan Griffin
- John Sanders Jones
- Kappy Paulson
- Liz Campos
- KC Rodriguez
- Karen Flock
- Natalie Bruton
- Scott Zimmerman
- Sonja Flores
- Wendy Lofland
- Janette Daniel-Whitney
- Nan Waltman
- David Armstrong
- Krystalin Giles-Bullicer
- Wendy Sauter
- Robert Guthrie
- Mary Ann Brewewer
- Carol Spector
- Christy Weir
- Tanner Shelton
- Jonathan Duran
- Kathy Bremer
- Spencer Noren
- Helen Eloyan

The public comments covered topics such as the need for more housing and affordable housing, allowing for more heights, reducing heights, allowing for more growth, and limiting growth. The notes below summarize general themes heard and do not capture everything that was stated.

- Access to the beach from Downtown is paramount. The pedestrian access bridge needs to be replaced.
- Can the City provide clarification on if there are high fees for development projects requesting density bonuses that is restricting development versus is it the cost of the construction. There is contradicting information about the impact of development fees on housing production.
- Clarification is needed on whether reducing building heights constitute a regulatory taking of properties.
- The community should support taller buildings (up to 6 stories) and more housing to address the housing need. Housing costs are too high and more housing and affordable housing are needed in Ventura.
- Areas such as Thompson, Front Street, the west end of downtown, and other key areas should be explored for more housing.
- Better transit and walkable and bikeable infrastructure is needed. This includes wider sidewalks.
- Can the City provide more information on current rental costs for studio, one bedroom, and two bedroom apartments and how those exceed the costs of what most have paid for mortgages in the past? Long-time homeowners are trying to stop new development and prohibit those who need housing now and in the future.

- Where is there information on discussions that the GPAC had on expanding into the SOAR areas? The SOAR areas should stay protected and not expand into open space.
- The General Plan should preserve and protect our open space and views of the ocean.
- The City should only plan for one RHNA cycle of growth with this General Plan Update. The City can reassess land uses at the next RHNA cycle to see if changes are needed.
- Buildings along the corridors in Midtown should be 2-3 stories. Do not change from what the current regulations allow.
- Survey only allows one IP address; can that be changed so multiple people in one household can take it?
- The Chumash and indigenous people were here first and we are on their lands. We should recognize that and protect the land.
- The heights should be further broken down to match the zoning and account for partial floors, such as, 3.5 stories, versus saying 4 stories, etc.
- Design guidelines and standards are needed for the City to guide development.
- There is a need for more housing, more affordable housing, rent control, and protections for current tenants.
- The technical report in the Housing Element discusses the potential of sewer problems. That needs to be addressed.
- There is support for more R&D designated land but not at the 6 stories proposed. Could there be a new designation for R&D at 3 stories?
- The City Council should not have provided \$1 million in funding to the golf course and that should have been directed toward affordable housing.