



CITY OF POMONA COUNCIL REPORT

June 12, 2017

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Linda Lowry, City Manager

Submitted by: Mark Lazzaretto, Development Services Director

Subject: Pomona Corridors Specific Plan and Updated General Plan

OVERVIEW

Recommendation – Staff recommends that the City Council receive this staff report and a presentation and then conduct a discussion on the Pomona Corridors Specific Plan and the General Plan.

Fiscal Impact – There is no fiscal impact associated with discussing these topics.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2014, the City Council adopted an updated General Plan and the Pomona Corridors Specific Plan (PCSP). The City's General Plan had not previously been updated since 1976. The entire process took over ten years and included numerous public workshops and meetings. The culmination of the process resulted in two documents that were designed to guide development and redevelopment of the City through 2030. The City Council has asked staff to facilitate a discussion on both documents to review the general guiding principles in both documents and, specifically, the process for adopting projects in the PCSP.

DISCUSSION

In approximately 2001, the City began the process of updating the outdated General Plan. In addition to the need to bring the document up to current standards and to create a refined vision for the future of the City, the General Plan needed to be revised to show how the City can accommodate additional housing units required by the Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA). Every four years, the area's regional planning entity, the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), is required to identify what the unmet housing need is for the entire Southern California region and assign a portion of that need to each city. In turn, each city is required to update the Housing Element of its General Plan to identify parcels where the additional housing units could be produced. Pomona's RHNA numbers in the past few cycles

have been approximately 3,000 housing units. In order to accommodate that number of units without adding density to the City's single-family residential districts, it was decided that it would most benefit the City to allow those units in Downtown Pomona and along the City's existing commercial corridors.

At the same time that the City was updating the General Plan and determining how to meet the City's required housing needs, Governor Brown enacted legislation that effectively ended redevelopment agencies in California. Without the ability to use redevelopment funds to eliminate blight and fund infrastructure improvements along the City's aging commercial corridors, the City needed to explore new ways of attracting private investment to Pomona into areas that had not previously seen investment in decades.

The City engaged Freedman, Tung and Sasaki (FTS), a planning firm who had a proven past of developing planning documents that were effective in rejuvenating commercial corridors in cities throughout California that are very similar to Pomona. FTS proposed to create a new General Plan and a specific plan for the commercial corridors that would allow for the additional housing units to be built, attract private investment to undervalued properties, and ensure that the quality and style of development would protect the City from subpar projects yet invite new investors to the City. Staff believes that the updated General Plan and the PCSP accomplished those goals. As proof, there are currently over 100 projects in the planning pipeline, many of which are on the corridors.

General Plan Principles

The following excerpts are taken from pages 10 to 13 of the General Plan, which detail the guiding themes of the document that were used to create the policies. It is important that the themes are periodically reviewed to remind the community of the goals of the Plan and what the assumptions were when the documents were created.

Guiding Themes

The guiding themes outline the community's definition of a prosperous future. They also lay the foundation for the General Plan's policy framework. They build on major points of agreement that emerged from community discussions about valued qualities of Pomona, hopes and aspirations for the future, and strategies for achieving the vision. Overall, the Plan emphasizes a renewed Downtown and redefined corridors, it proposes focus areas and activity centers to help shape and distribute new development, it promotes protecting the character of existing residential neighborhoods, and it outlines the future role and form of Pomona's public realm. The guiding themes are as follows:

1. A Diverse City with a Complete Array of Uses and Amenities for Local and Regional Needs.

Pomona is a dynamic and varied place that has evolved over its 150-year history. The City's historic Downtown origins and the pattern of diverse districts that incrementally grew out from it distinguish Pomona from the more recent master-planned cities in the region. The General Plan embraces Pomona as a flourishing City with a full complement of urban components – residential, commercial, industrial and civic activity, schools and universities, medical services, parks and open space, and established infrastructure.

Future development will be complementary to the community fabric and coordinated with new parks, amenities, and infrastructure to ensure balance and livability.

2. A Development Plan Responsive to New Opportunities That Embrace Change and Innovation.

A recurring theme throughout Pomona's history is the embrace of change. Over the decades, Pomona has successfully capitalized on trends in transportation, technology, industry, culture, education, and housing. Examples of the City's industrious spirit include the establishment of an innovative municipal water well and distribution system in the late 1800s that instigated the first business boom, and the cutting-edge aerospace industry of the 1960s and 1970s.

The citizenry's enthusiasm for progress and improvement continues today. The General Plan focuses on capturing the spirit of innovation in a development plan responsive to new opportunities. Aging areas will be redeveloped in step with contemporary trends and community needs, and neighborhoods and districts will be woven together for improved accessibility and connectivity.

3. Economic Prosperity via Strategic Development in Downtown, the Corridors, Transit Oriented Districts, and Centers

With strategic planning, the diversity of economic development opportunities in Pomona will yield stable, sustained, long-term growth.

Downtown is the rail-served historic center of commerce and government, and now offers a growing arts community and antique district along with higher education facilities, emerging entertainment venues, and new higher density housing.

The once flourishing commercial "strip" development patterns along the corridors are no longer in line with contemporary developer and consumer preferences; as a result, they have become less attractive to new investment and national tenants. Restricted to a limited set of uses, the corridors currently have limited options to respond to market trends. Despite these barriers to new investment, the corridors offer significant potential for change in support of economic prosperity.

Unique development opportunities exist throughout the City, especially in areas served by transit, at regional gateways associated with freeways, and at special sites such as the Fairplex and Lanterman Developmental Center. Pomona's industrial lands were once largely focused on warehouse uses. With these uses attracted to more abundant and less expensive industrial land in neighboring cities to the east, Pomona's industrial lands also offer opportunity for new employment generation.

General Plan policies will focus on strategic infill development and land re-use as only 600 acres (5%) of the City remain vacant. Downtown will be reinforced as the mixed-use heart of the City, taking advantage of its pedestrian orientation and strong transit service. Higher density, mixed use, walkable development will cluster around transit stations. Aging commercial corridors will be transformed with new commercial development in freeway-accessible locations and new mixed-use and residential development where

commercial development has become obsolete. Corridor redevelopment combined with streetscape enhancements will functionally and visually connect Pomona's neighborhoods to the City's center. Areas with major City assets and properties with significant potential for change will be powerful catalysts in the City's overall economic development strategy.

4. A City with Neighborhoods Where People Thrive

Pomona is a community with diversity and energy, where people from a variety of backgrounds and cultures live, work, raise families, learn and contribute to society. Progress relies on healthy neighborhoods that possess the physical and social elements for adults and children to thrive. Pomona is a place for "life-long living," where diversity in housing and activity serves people throughout the successive life stages. A premise of the General Plan is that facilities used on a frequent basis—such as stores, schools, parks, community centers and transportation facilities—should be easily accessible to residents. Of equal importance is maintaining the character of single-family neighborhoods and improving older neighborhoods. The General Plan addresses the special health, safety, and environmental needs of Pomona's various communities. Another important component will be provisions for engaging the diversity of community members in neighborhood planning and decision-making.

5. A Community That Celebrates and Protects its Living Heritage and Culture

Pomona's culture and environment are steeped in heritage and tradition, which is reflected in the abundance of historic buildings, the popularity of the designated historic neighborhoods, and interest in the Downtown's renaissance. Heritage and culture are part of the urban fabric that makes Pomona a distinctive place to live and work. Land use and community design policies in the General Plan are predicated on protection of significant historical resources and compatible integration with new development. The Community Design Component establishes the policy framework to ensure that these valued qualities endure for future generations. The varied backgrounds and experiences of Pomona's citizens also contribute significantly to the City's vibrant culture. Therefore, embracing inclusiveness in community planning is also integrated within General Plan policies.

6. A City Tempered by Nature, Open Spaces, and Beautiful Tree-Lined Streets

Pomona is blessed with beautiful mountain views as well as natural open spaces and hillsides in the western part of the City. Parks, green spaces, and an abundance of beautiful street trees are important qualities of Pomona's environment. Because the City is largely urbanized, protecting and expanding the presence of nature and open spaces is a priority in the General Plan. In addition to environmental benefits, parks with community-oriented facilities are important for the health and recreational needs of Pomona's youth and adults alike. Attractive streetscapes integrating adequate sidewalks, landscaped medians and parkways, buffering for residential uses, and other amenities—constructed with reliable long-term maintenance systems—are essential to complement corridor land use changes. These over-arching goals guide policies for park improvements, preservation of natural open spaces, and streetscapes endowed with trees and vegetation in the General Plan.

7. A Safe and Secure Community with a Proactive Approach to Public Safety

Sustaining Pomona's progressive commerce, nurturing its cultural richness, and supporting pleasant, active and clean neighborhoods requires the maintenance of safe living conditions. People in all parts of Pomona need to feel safe and confident. Planning for a secure environment entails crime reduction, crime prevention, and addressing perceptions and fears. The General Plan policy framework addresses crime from various perspectives, first and foremost through strengthening Pomona's sense of community and positive image. This is supported by code enforcement, redevelopment of declining and blighted areas, crime-detering design, open space design, public safety service standards, alternative activities for youth as diversions from gang activity, job creation, crime-free parks and gathering spaces, and multi-agency cooperation. Finally, public safety and security issues, such as natural hazards and noise, are also considered in the General Plan. Circulation planning proactively addresses safety related to infrastructure for safe walking, bicycling and driving.

8. A Dynamic Regional Center for Commerce, Education, Health Care, Culture, and Entertainment

Revitalization of Downtown, the corridors, and employment and special project areas, combined with growth of major institutions, will result in a prosperous and thriving city. Private investment and economic specialization is valued in this community-driven effort, as is coordinated leadership of civic stakeholders and officials. As commerce, productivity, and innovation grow in newly renovated districts, the City will regain its status as a dynamic regional center, a place where people and businesses gravitate. Part of this renewed regional role involves collaboration with nearby cities and regional governments on sustainable economic development strategies as well as with environmental stewardship.

9. A Commitment to Vision and Excellence

Leadership and high quality standards will direct Pomona's development efforts. The community expects that changes will substantially improve the City's environment, its physical appeal, and its quality of life. Development-related decisions are to be predicated on progress as well as expecting and requiring the best. Commitment to high quality projects and programs will give large and small investors alike the confidence to move forward; the resulting community benefit and pride will set the stage for further efforts. City officials are committed to the development vision established by the General Plan and will hold steadfast to the vision when faced with potential conflicting options.

Pomona Corridors Specific Plan

As discussed above, the overarching goal of the PCSP was to attract private investment to the City's aging commercial strip corridors and to ensure that development was of the highest quality. The PCSP attempts to achieve the goal in two ways. The first is by widening the list of the types of uses allowed in the commercial areas and allowing the market to determine what makes sense for investment. The former way of planning communities was to separate the different use types into distinct areas, keeping commercial with commercial, residential with residential, and industrial and office with industrial and office. The PCSP follows a newer thinking which allows those uses to commingle as long as they are designed correctly so that the uses can successfully co-exist.

The second way that the PCSP attempts to achieve the goal is to give developers certainty that if they purchase a property they can develop it as the plan envisions, and to give them certainty that their neighboring properties will be held to a similar standard. Though the plan allows a wide variety of uses, it is very strict in the way that those uses are built. The plan includes details down to the inset of windows, the length, width and height of buildings, the types of storefronts that must be included, where the parking lots must be located, and the quality of materials that must be utilized. If a developer is willing to meet the high quality standards, there is an approval process that requires only a review at a public meeting by the Development Services Director instead of the traditional Planning Commission review. The purpose of the hearing is only to determine whether the proposed development meets all of the minimum strict standards of the plan. If the minimum standards are not met, the project must go to a Planning Commission hearing.

There have only been a few projects that have gone through this process as the plan is relatively new, but early feedback from the development community has indicated that the process is working as it was envisioned and has been a deciding factor for investors as they consider making an investment in the community. They have indicated that not only are they assured that they will be able to develop what they intend as long as they meet the standards, but they also have a comfort level in knowing that their neighboring property owners will be held to the same standard when those properties redevelop.

Neighborhood Edges

One major concern of the community as the General Plan and PCSP documents were developed is how single-family neighborhoods would be protected. To respond to this concern, the areas of major change were limited to the commercial corridors, Downtown Pomona, and a few other large districts, like the TOD areas. Single-family neighborhoods were largely untouched. To further protect them, the General Plan creates zoning areas that buffer the existing industrial areas from the neighboring residential zones. The edges of the industrial areas are required in the plan to be office and workplace uses as they redevelop over time instead of heavy industrial. The thought is that homes are better buffered by lower intensity uses than having the heavier uses across the street or behind residential neighborhoods.

The PCSP goes one step further in protecting neighborhoods. Many of the City's most established residential areas back up to the strip commercial corridors. The plan has very stringent standards for how high buildings can be when they are built adjacent to residential. New buildings must be stepped up in height away from the existing uses so as not to create towering buildings with windows overlooking residential backyards. In addition, requiring buildings to be built closer to the street with parking behind building creates a further buffer from the building and moves the negative aspects of commercial buildings, like trash containers and truck loading further from homes.

Study Session

Since the time of adoption of the documents, staff has received concerns from councilmembers and the public related to the staff-level approval process of the PCSP, as well as the flexibility in

the plan which allows rental units along the commercial corridors and adjacent to single-family neighborhoods. During the Study Session, staff will be presenting examples of the types of development that are currently in the application process in the City, as well as examples in the area that are the quality of investment that Pomona deserves and is trying to attract. Staff will be prepared to discuss the approval process for PCSP projects and the detailed requirements of the plan. In the meantime, links to the General Plan and the PCSP on the City's website are included below.

Attachments:

General Plan - <http://www.ci.pomona.ca.us/index.php/forms-and-docs/planning-division/241-government/city-departments/community-development/planning/1310-general-plan>

PCSP - <http://www.ci.pomona.ca.us/index.php/component/phocadownload/category/65-specific-area-plans?download=620:corridors-specific-plan>