

MEMORANDUM

DATE April 26, 2022

TO Will Nelson, Principal Planner
Contra Costa County Department of Conservation and Development

FROM Joanna Jansen, Tanya Sundberg, and Lindsey Klein

SUBJECT 4/13/22 Planning Commission Study Session

During its meeting on Wednesday, April 13, 2022, the Planning Commission held a study session to discuss and provide feedback on the draft goals, policies, and actions (“GOPAs”) for the Health and Safety Element. There were approximately eight participants in the meeting during this discussion item.

This memorandum summarizes the questions and comments from the Planning Commission, as well as the comments made by members of the public. Additional written comments are attached to this memorandum.

Initial Planning Commission Questions and Comments

- » Commissioner Van Buskirk
 - Is electric vehicle (EV) battery storage and disposal addressed in the General Plan? With increased EV use, the County should plan for this need.
 - Requested that the County use current extreme heat standards, if possible, regardless of the State’s recommendation to use the extreme heat baseline set from 1960 to 1991, to set more stringent requirements.
- » Commissioner Bhandari
 - How do the noise exposure requirements laid out in Table HS-X relate to other requirements, such as the CalGreen Building Code?
 - Requested that the green color in the legend of Table HS-X match the green color in other parts of the table.
- » Commissioner Hillesheim
 - What are the definitions of extreme heat and climate change?
- » Commissioner Mankin
 - Expressed support for policies and actions related to extreme heat. Would cooling centers coordinate with school districts?
 - There is land zoned for mixed use in Discovery Bay around the Discovery Bay Boulevard and Sand Point Road intersection. There is a groundwater plume underground in that area. Would there be policies in place to address this potential hazard?
 - The Cypress Corridor area was incorporated into Oakley years ago, but the area’s evacuation routes remain constrained. Does the County have a responsibility to provide emergency planning and evacuation routes, or is it solely Oakley’s responsibility?

Public Comment

- » Eric Back
 - Requested that a policy be added in the Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Evacuation section such as, “Any changes to zoning or densification in a neighborhood with one evacuation route should ensure that the route has adequate ingress and egress, complies with current road width requirements, and emergency vehicles can respond.”
- » Heather Hamilton
 - Asked where to find the maps of the current and draft General Plan Land Use maps for North Pacheco.
- » Kenneth Hoffman
 - The built density of residential uses should not be increased unless access roads meet existing the Fire Code requirements for road width and turnaround areas.
 - In some places, increased density would also increase traffic induced during construction. Additional traffic caused by construction should not be encouraged in areas where roads cannot accommodate additional demands, even in the short-term, without creating a safety hazard. For example, Upper Ridgewood Road does not have the infrastructure to support increased density.

Additional Planning Commission Comment

- » Commissioner Van Buskirk
 - Expressed appreciation for the “How to Use the General Plan” guide.
 - Would a project proposing an increase in density on land in the High and Very High Wildfire Hazard Severity Zones go through the normal planning process? Would the normal planning process evaluate the proposed change for inadequate evacuation routes?
- » Commissioner Hillesheim
 - Has the County reduced the allowed density in any areas of the county with the updated land use designations?
 - There is a trend of building housing above existing commercial uses. Is that something that we are planning for in the updated land use designations and projected buildout of the county?

Additional Public Comment

- » Eric Back
 - If the area around Upper Ridgewood Road is rezoned to A-2, would that significantly increase density in that area?
- » Kevin Burke, representative for East Bay for Everyone
 - The General Plan Environmental Impact Report (EIR) is not required to evaluate all health and safety concerns in Contra Costa County, and health effects on residents won’t be accurately measured because the EIR will only review future changes, not the health effects of existing conditions like the refineries.
 - The Planning Commission should go above and beyond what is required by State and federal law to protect their community from lead paint in the existing housing stock.
 - The County should locate new housing in areas with clean air.

April 12th, 2021

RE: Comments on the Health and Safety Element presented to the Planning Commission on 4/13/2022

Dear Planning Commission and Planning Staff,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft Health and Safety Element of the Contra Costa General Plan. We applaud the depth and breadth of this draft element and the inclusion of many of our suggestions from previous letters. In particular, we are happy to see language around limiting development in high hazard areas, promoting multi-benefit nature-based solutions, adopting a SLR overlay zone, establishing community resilience hubs, and funding and maintaining increased tree cover, among others. **This Draft Health and Safety Element is comprehensive, progressive, and equipped with tangible next steps to achieve the delineated goals** – we are excited to share this as a model for neighboring jurisdictions in the future.

Additionally, we are pleased to see increased accountability and clarity in the language of this element with the addition of language around a 2100 SLR scenario and the use of best available science.

While this Draft is very strong, **it contains no mention of groundwater rise** as it relates to sea level rise (see briefing and critical actions to take now in our [Resilience Playbook](#)). As sea levels rise, places with shallow groundwater tables may experience emergent flooding that can expose harmful pollutants, threaten vital infrastructure, and threaten the health and safety of the community. We recommend the addition of language around monitoring, planning for, and mitigating the impacts of rising groundwater in relation to the risks and impacts of sea level rise. Some possible language could include:

- Prepare for the impacts of rising groundwater levels on private and public property. Develop a model of groundwater levels across the city, either by expanding and adopting regional groundwater models or creating a new model with more locally specific data. Model the impact of sea level rise and drought on groundwater and project its elevations and salinity at mid- and end-of-century levels (Alameda Climate Action and Resilience Plan).
- Increase awareness of sea level rise, groundwater rise, liquefaction, and flooding risks in vulnerable areas, as well as the importance of adaptation measures (San Rafael General Plan).
- Adapt the existing park and open space network to rising sea levels, more severe storm events and wave energy, and rising groundwater (Sausalito General Plan).

We appreciate the immense work that has gone into this General Plan update and the willingness of planning staff to incorporate comments and suggestions at various points along the way.

Sincerely,

Sadie Wilson
Greenbelt Alliance

From: [Will Nelson](#)
To: [Lindsey Klein](#)
Cc: [Joanna Jansen](#); [Tanya Sundberg](#)
Subject: FW: Comments on Agenda Item #4 - April 13, 2022 ENVISION CONTRA COSTA 2040 (County File #GP18-0001):
Date: Friday, April 15, 2022 9:19:15 AM

Hi Lindsey,

Below is public comment received during Wednesday's Planning Commission meeting on the H&S Element.

-Will

-----Original Message-----

From: DCD PlanningHearing <PlanningHearing@dcd.cccounty.us>
Sent: Friday, April 15, 2022 9:16 AM
To: Will Nelson <Will.Nelson@dcd.cccounty.us>
Subject: FW: Comments on Agenda Item #4 - April 13, 2022 ENVISION CONTRA COSTA 2040 (County File #GP18-0001):

Good morning:

This was emailed during the meeting on Wednesday evening.

Danielle

-----Original Message-----

From: Meredith Back <mereditheback@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, April 13, 2022 6:35 PM
To: DCD PlanningHearing <PlanningHearing@dcd.cccounty.us>
Subject: Comments on Agenda Item #4 - April 13, 2022 ENVISION CONTRA COSTA 2040 (County File #GP18-0001):

Dear Commissioners and Staff,

The draft 2040 General Plan - Safety Element policies and actions do not sufficiently protect our community from the inherent risks of wildfire. It is not enough in the section on Evacuation Routes and Plans to merely identify the neighborhoods that have only one emergency exit route. While this action is an important first step, it will not on its own protect our community in these areas. The draft policy should reflect that zoning in areas with only one emergency exit route will not be changed to increase housing density unless the emergency exit route is adequate for evacuation of residents and access by emergency vehicles, including standards for road width. Without these requirements, the new General Plan could result in the horrific consequences we have seen with other wildfires where there is only one way out. The County should take action to ensure that we learn from these tragedies and not exacerbate the challenge of only having one emergency evacuation route.

The Upper Ridgewood Road community is a prime example of an area where housing density should not be increased. This community is in a High Fire Hazard Severity Zone on a ridge with steep slopes on both sides and heavy vegetation and trees. It is well-established that in these sloped areas fires burn faster. Our community only has one emergency evacuation route that is narrow (16 to 18 feet), steep and windy. In an emergency, such as a wildfire, minutes matter for evacuation and access by emergency vehicles, and increasing traffic on this road during an emergency could be disastrous.

The draft policy should therefore be revised to state that zoning in areas with only one emergency exit route will not be changed to increase housing density unless the emergency exit route is adequate for evacuation of residents and access by emergency vehicles, including standards for road width.

Nothing matters more than the safety of our community and we need to take action now to avoid future tragedies.

Thank you for your consideration.

Meredith Back