



STAFF REPORT

TO: Planning Commission
FROM: Albert Lopez, Deputy Community Development Director
DATE: February 26, 2008
SUBJECT: Study session on General Plan update process

RECOMMENDATION:

Informational report only

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:

To be determined

BACKGROUND

In 2008 the City of Martinez will begin the process of updating its General Plan, and as a first step will begin engaging the local community in crafting a vision for Martinez through the year 2025. This effort is long awaited, yet many of the existing policies of the General Plan continue to function well and provide decision makers with the information needed to make critical land use decisions. Many controversial recent projects have relied upon, (with some success) policies adopted nearly 30 years ago as past City leaders grappled with many of the same problems we now face, such as providing more housing, protecting scenic resources and maintaining the ambiance of Martinez throughout various neighborhoods. Since that time, Martinez has become largely built-out, and most if not all new growth will occur within our existing boundaries.

An updated and relevant General Plan is required by State law, and is comprised of various elements (Traffic, Land Use, and Housing among others). Taken as a whole, the document serves to guide the orderly development of the City, as well as make future projections for municipal services such as water, public transit and open space/parks. The Land Use element is usually at the core of a General Plan, and establishes residential densities, allocates land for commercial and industrial use, delineates open space and park areas, and identifies areas of transition and mixed use.

Many cities also choose to include General Plan elements not necessarily required by law, but that are locally relevant. For Martinez, these could include a Marina and Waterfront Element, an Economic Development Element, or an element discussing Smart Growth, Green Building and addressing Global Warming. Other ideas for new elements could arise from the update process.

It is expected the overall process will take up to 18 months, and funds have been allocated through the City's Capital Improvement Program of up to \$600,000 to cover a two year process.

Selecting a Process

In Martinez, one of the very first steps is development of an appropriate process to undertake this project. The experience of other cities can guide us, yet there are distinct choices to make in deciding which process to take. In this staff report and the accompanying PowerPoint presentation, staff has identified two different approaches to the General Plan Update process for consideration by the Planning Commission and City Council. They are both viable methods to utilize, differing only in how information is collected and the level of control maintained by City Staff, Commissions and Councilmembers.

Mostly it is a question of managing the information gathering process, and making sure the work products completed by a technical group (likely a planning consultant) accurately reflect the information collected. The two processes are:

- TRADITIONAL “Top-Down”
 - Steering committee made up of elected officials, boards and commissions to make policy decisions that guides the technical group and then seeks public input
- COMMUNITY CONVERSATION “Bottom-Up”
 - Inclusive community representation to deliberate the future vision of the City, discussing shared values that lead to recommendations to be translated into a planning document.

There are benefits to going the traditional route, as any Steering Committee composed of elected officials and/or existing boards and commissions is likely to be familiar with General Plan concepts and the overall decision-making process. The downside to using a steering committee is that it can be challenging to engage the general citizenry and be able to creatively brainstorm in an efficient, meaningful way. Inclusivity is the strong point of using the Community Conversation model as it simply is a broad, city-wide effort to engage residents and learn what they consider important issues. It's also a good way to listen to new ideas that may be difficult to hear otherwise. The downside of a community-wide model is that it may be hard to figure out where there is common ground, it may not provide the level of detail needed for General Plan policy language, and it could take more time.

In considering the selection of a particular process to pursue, it's important to consider the community of Martinez as a whole, and to determine which process would work best given the existing political and neighborhood environments. Either process requires significant effort from the staff perspective, (although the Community Conversation

model may take longer), and they both require a parallel technical process to translate and shape the inputs into planning language and documents. Staff is not recommending a particular method to use but simply believes it is a worthwhile exercise to discuss the way decisions will be made early in the process.

Creating the Policies

Once a process is selected, moving onto the policy questions of the General Plan is next. Already there are some assumptions being made by staff that needs to be validated at this stage of the process; some of them are:

- The Downtown is where most growth will happen
- Other areas will continue to grow and will need more housing at all affordability levels
- Martinez is built-out and going to grow within existing footprint
- We should preserve and enhance other retail centers
- We can consolidate/update older Planning Areas that are now built out
- We can update existing policies that are working well

Generally it is believed there will not be wholesale changes to the current land use pattern of Martinez. However, the pressure to provide more housing units at all affordability levels will continue to exist, as will the need to provide more opportunities for leisure, commerce and economic development. As recent projects have shown the remaining sites left for development are challenging, and hopefully the new General Plan can be clear on the community's desire for accommodating growth in these areas.

Although examining all the possible policy questions is beyond the scope of this preliminary report, it is worth restating that all those involved will undoubtedly bring their own values and assumptions to the table when asked to participate. It will be the job of staff (and our consultants) to translate this information into policy that can serve the City well for the next 15-20 years.

Areas of Focus

Lastly, staff would like to draw attention to some areas that we believe should get special attention during the update process:

- Implementing Downtown Specific Plan
- Marina and Waterfront Improvements
- The future of industry in Martinez
- Neighborhood Preservation
- Martinez's role in the County, and specially central county
- Finding other areas for mixed use development
- Preserving and enhancing other retail centers

As the Planning Commission discusses the process and makes a recommendation to the City Council on a preferred method to take, it's important to note that Martinez is embarking on an exciting venture with this General Plan update, a process that is sure to be rewarding, challenging and with an eye toward providing future generations with a high quality of life, an economically vibrant, human-scaled downtown and healthy neighborhoods with housing at all income levels. Growth to the year 2025 is sure to bring challenges not yet known, but the planning effort anticipated by this update will set the foundation for growth that can be sustainable, equitable and economically viable.

ATTACHMENTS:

Powerpoint Presentation

F:\Community Development\PLANN\General Plan Update\Martinez GP Update\Gen Plan PC Report 01-22-08.doc

General Plan Update 2010-2025

- In 2008 the City of Martinez will undertake a comprehensive update of its General Plan
- A legally required document that guides the development of the City, and plans its infrastructure while protecting sensitive resources
- Things unique to Martinez:
 - Very outdated General Plan
 - Haven't "checked in" with the city-wide community on land use issues
 - Lots of interest in land use and development
 - The remaining development sites are challenging to build on, or require demolition and rebuilding

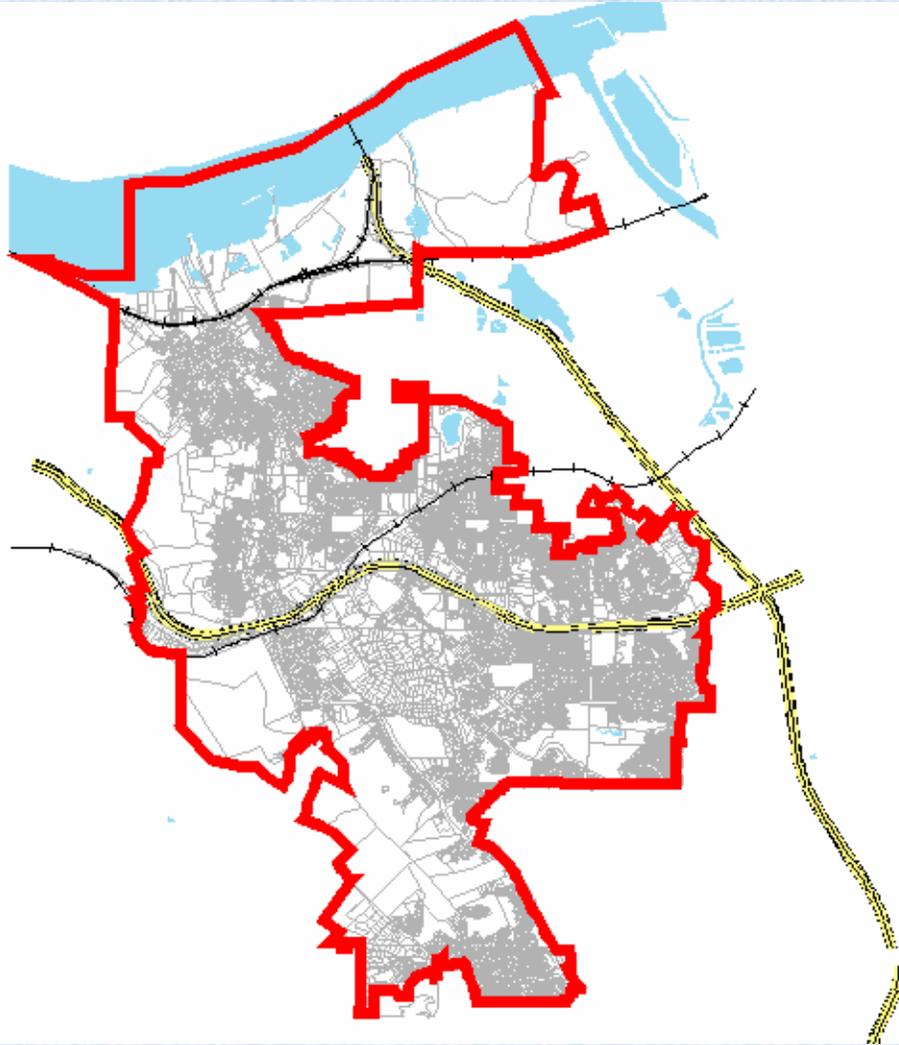
Program and Process

- At outset, two main things to consider:
 - What do we want to change, if anything?
 - What will be the decision-making process?

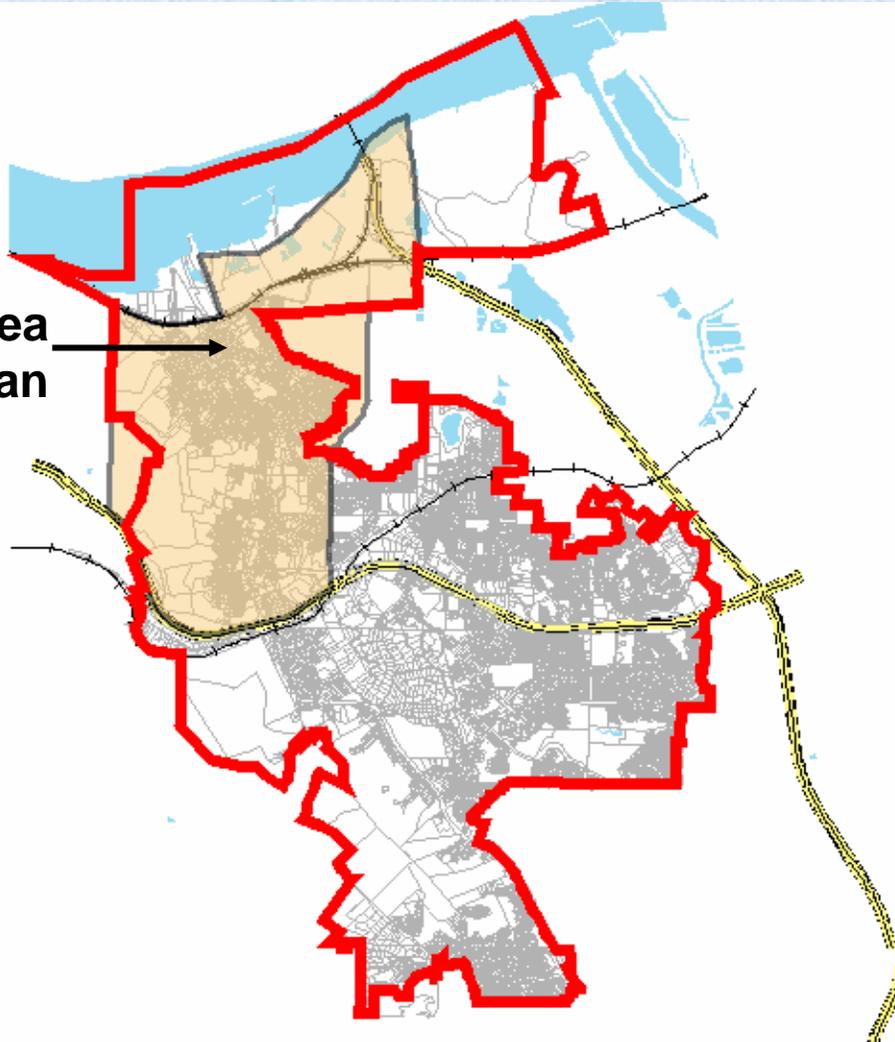
But first...a little history

History of current General Plan

- Plan was developed over 30+ years with dozens of amendments
- Not necessarily piecemeal but reflective of changing emphasis
- Current plan comprised of 1973 plan, plus six area plan documents, EIR's and maps
- Some of the area plans have been realized and are now built out stable neighborhoods
- Other areas continue to need long range planning (i.e. Downtown, Alhambra Hills)

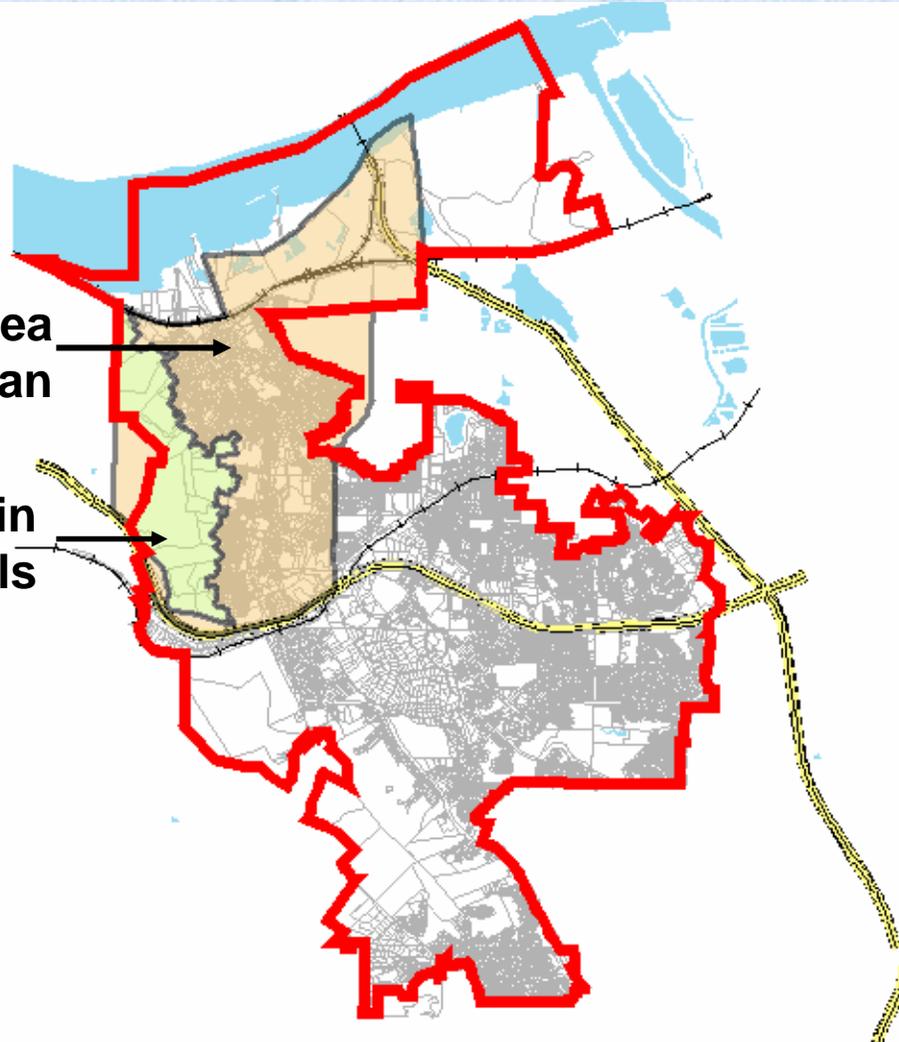


**Downtown Area
Plan**



**Downtown Area
Plan**

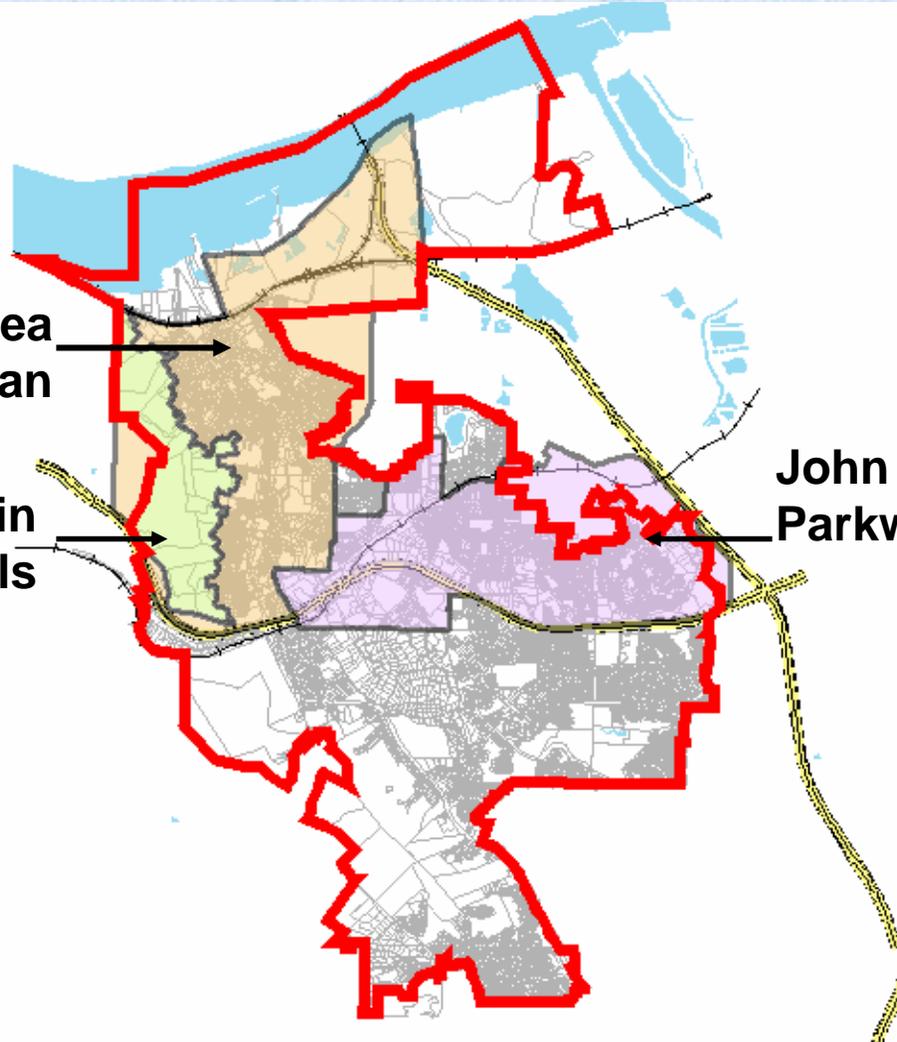
**Franklin
Hills**

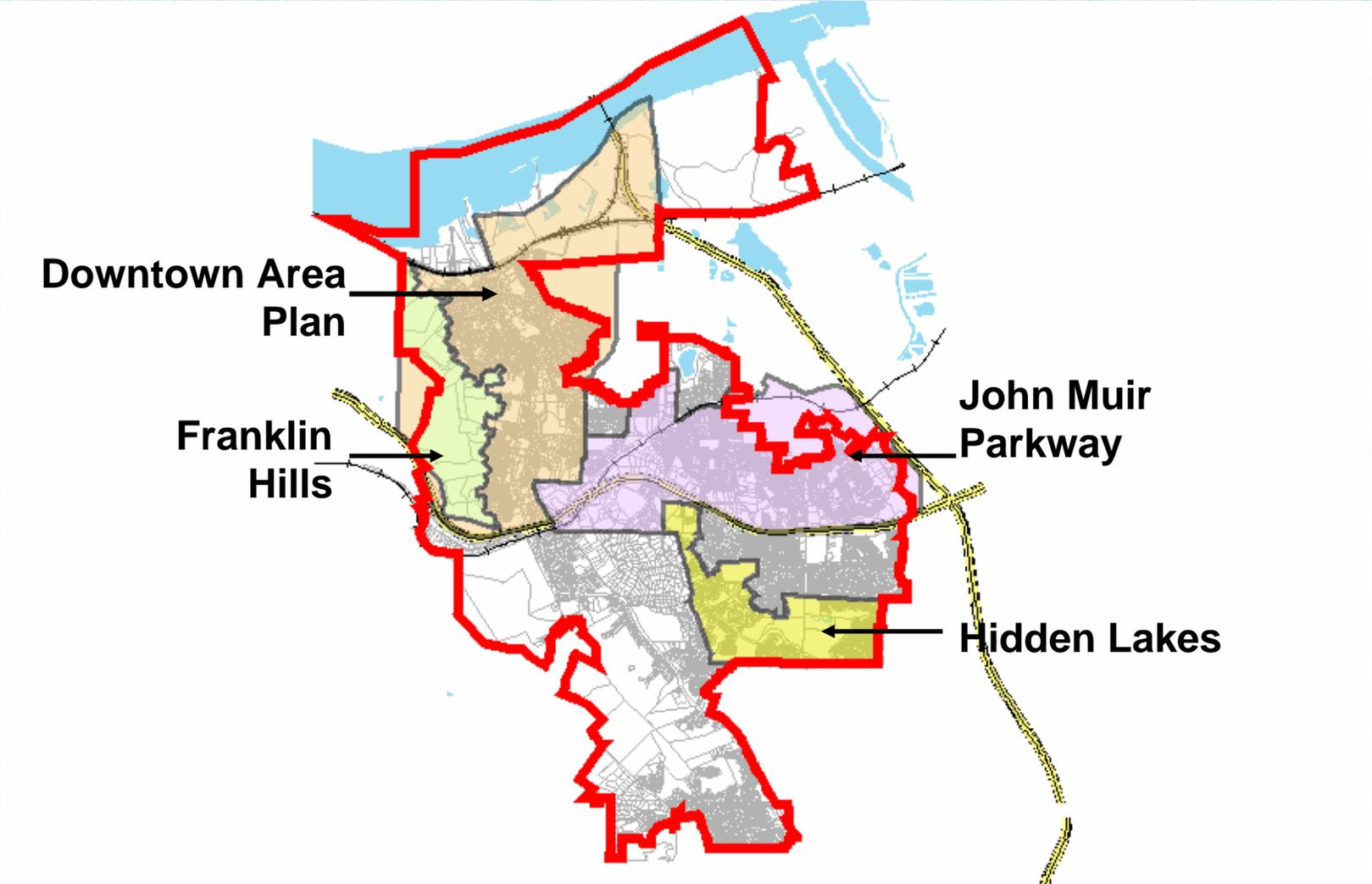


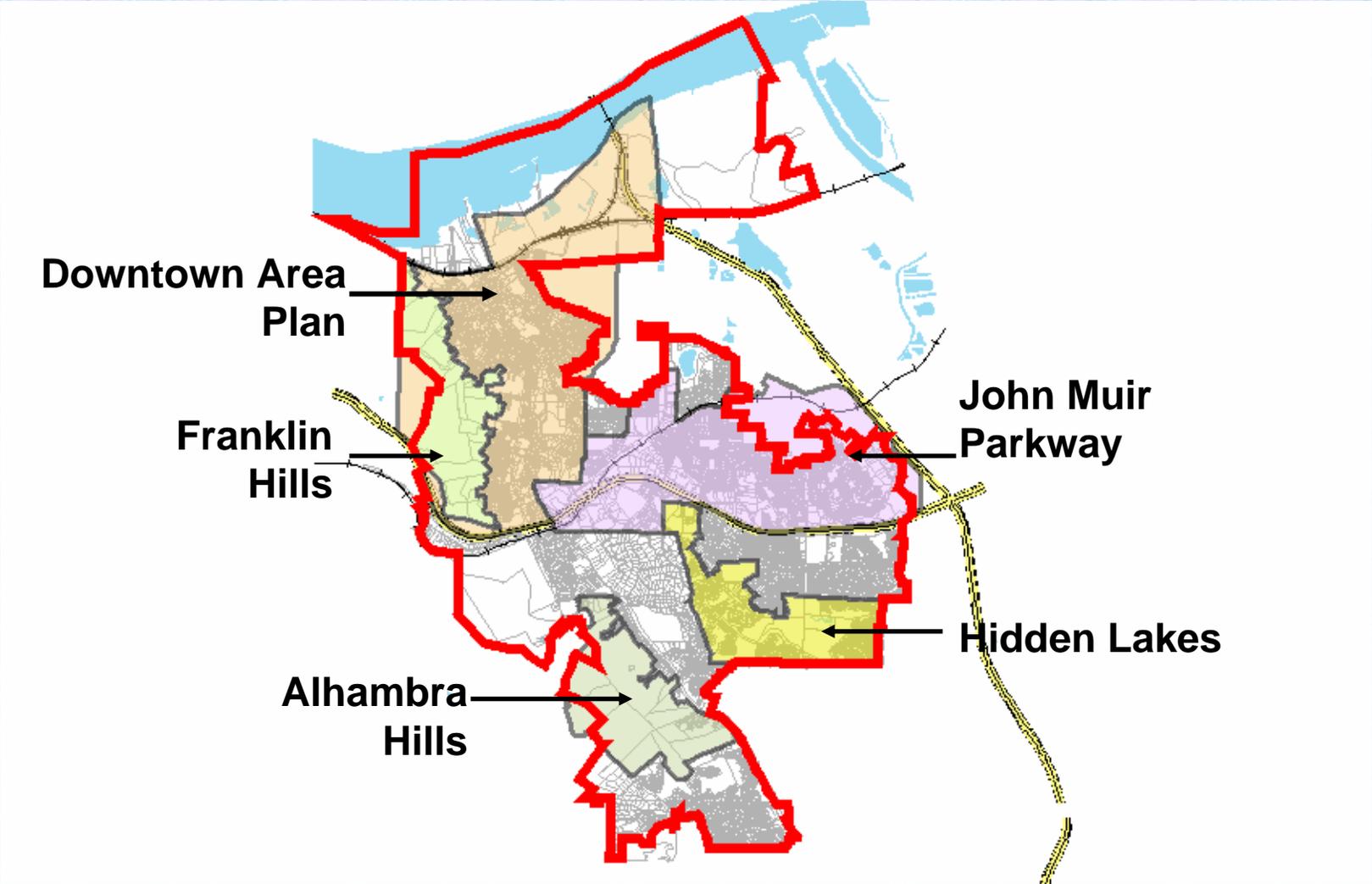
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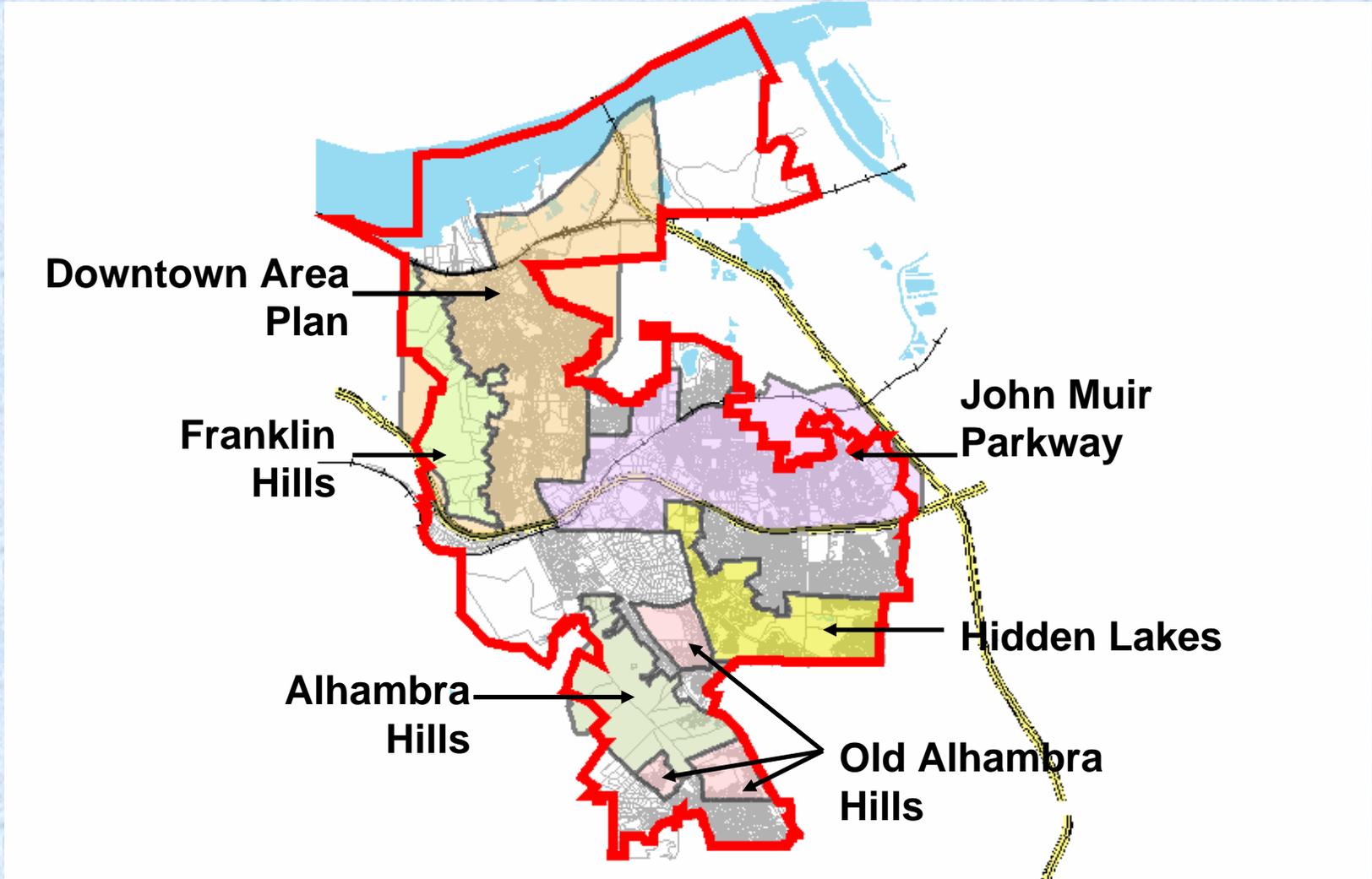
**Franklin
Hills**

**John Muir
Parkway**









Downtown Specific Plan

Downtown Area Plan

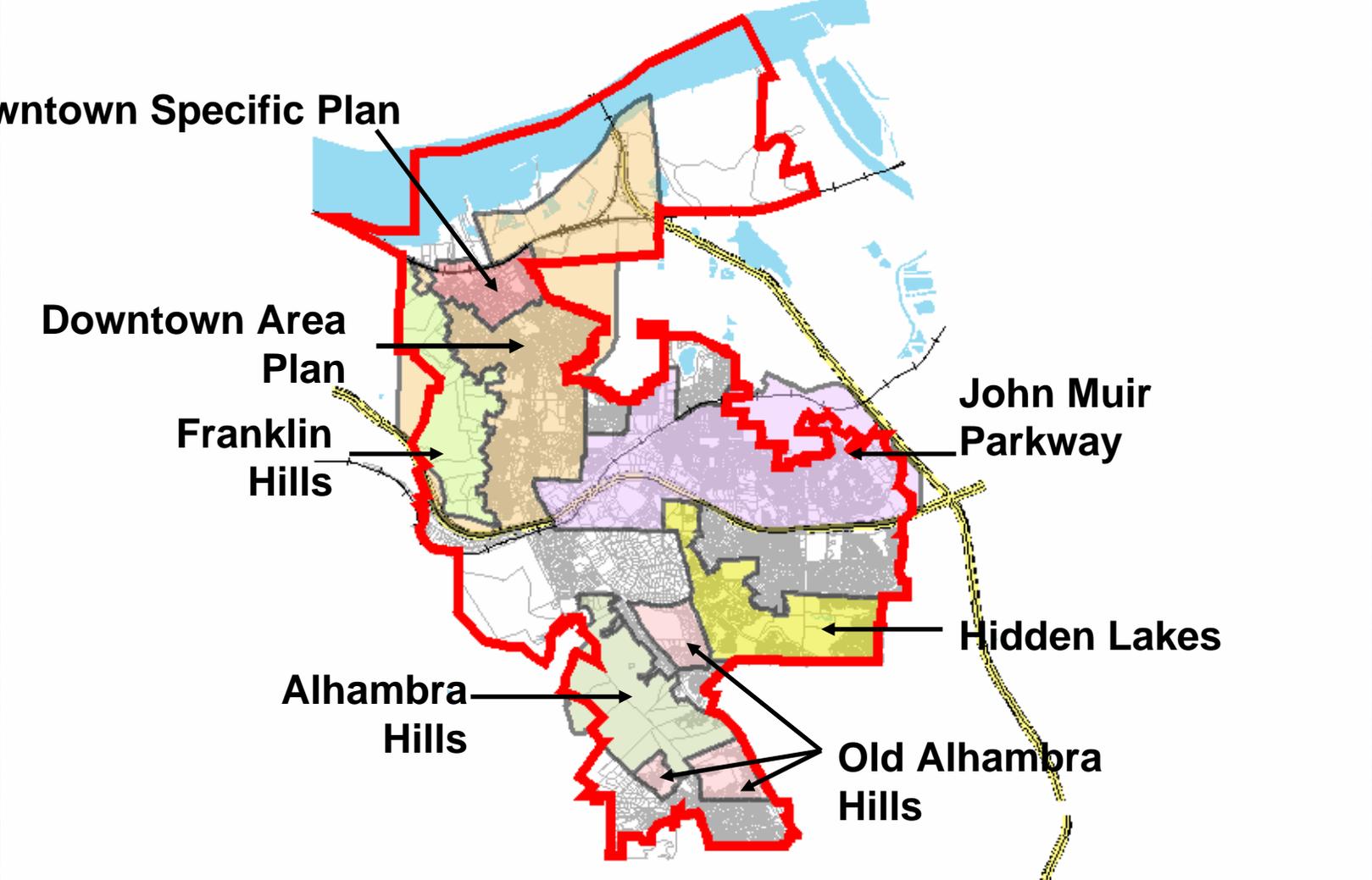
Franklin Hills

Alhambra Hills

John Muir Parkway

Hidden Lakes

Old Alhambra Hills



Now back to those two questions:

- What do we want to change, if anything?
- What will be the decision-making process?

What do we want to change?

- ASSUMPTIONS:
 - The Downtown is where most growth will happen
 - Other areas will continue to grow, need more housing at all affordability levels
 - Martinez is built-out, going to grow within existing boundary
 - We should preserve and enhance other retail centers
 - Can consolidate/update older Planning Areas
 - Update existing policies that are working well
- Need a forum to check our assumptions

= THE PROCESS

The Process

- Two basic approaches to take:
 - TRADITIONAL “Top-Down”
 - Steering committee made up of elected officials, boards and commissions to make policy decisions that guides technical group and then seeks public input.
 - COMMUNITY CONVERSATION “Bottom-Up”
 - Inclusive community representation to deliberate future of City, discuss shared values that lead to recommendations to be translated into a planning document.
- Neither process is supposed to be technical in nature – leave that to hired consultants in a separate parallel process

Traditional Approach

- Steering Committee composed of elected officials and/or existing boards and commissions is likely to be familiar with General Plan concepts and the overall decision-making process.
- Potential downside to using a steering committee is that it can be challenging to engage the general citizenry and be able to creatively brainstorm in an efficient, meaningful way

Community Conversation

- Inclusivity is strong point
- Broad, city-wide effort to engage residents and learn important issues.
- A good way to listen to new ideas that may be difficult to hear otherwise.
- Potential downside is that it may be hard to figure out where there is common ground.
- May not provide the level of detail needed for General Plan policy language.
- Could take more time.

Which ever process we decide on...

- We will need outside assistance on technical studies:
 - Traffic
 - Conservation Areas
 - EIR

Planning Consultant

- Will assist staff in sifting through the inputs.
- Will ensure the results of the process are reflected in final plan
- More technical and wide-ranging

Other Questions to Consider

- How long will this process take?
- What happens to the old General Plan?
- Will we need to do an EIR?
- Who makes the final decisions?