



CITY OF MARTINEZ

**CITY COUNCIL AGENDA
July 15, 2009**

TO: Mayor and City Council

FROM: Terry Blount, AICP, Planning Manager
Karen Majors, Assistant City Manager and Director of Community & Economic Development Department

SUBJECT: General Plan Update Status Report

DATE: July 7, 2009

RECOMMENDATION:

Provide staff with feedback and comments regarding the initiation of the update to the City's General Plan.

BACKGROUND:

At the Planning Commission meeting of February 26, 2008, the Commission participated in a discussion on updating the City's General Plan. The staff report, PowerPoint presentation, and meeting minutes of the session are attached (Attachment A). At the end of that meeting staff summarized the preferences of the Commission. The preferences were:

- The General Plan Update process should employ a hybrid of the traditional "top-down" and community conversation "bottom-up" approaches.
- Staff should conduct an internal General Plan audit to determine which elements are still functioning, and where major gaps exist.
- Once the internal audit is complete, a small advisory group should "issue spot" and provide guidance regarding the community conversation (public discussion) process to follow.
- With the assistance of a facilitator, a community conversation (public discussion) with the public should be undertaken to discuss potential changes in land use policy.
- Input received from the community conversation (discussion) should then be summarized and reported back to the advisory group.
- Finally, with the assistance of a consultant, the City should proceed with formulating the Update.

Because this study session was held more than a year ago, staff returned to the Commission on June 23, 2009 to confirm that their preferences remained the same. The process of updating the City's General Plan was to begin last year, however due to the principal staff person in charge of the undertaking left the City it was delayed. The Planning Division is now fully staffed again and thus the process can begin.

DISCUSSION:

General Plan Audit (Internal Review)

In order to do a comprehensive internal audit, a number of persons with different areas of expertise are required. Under state law, every general plan must include seven elements. General Plans can have additional elements, but seven specific ones are required. They are:

- **Land Use**, the most basic part of the plan, which deals with such matters as population density, building intensity, and the distribution of land uses.
- **Circulation**, which deals with all major transportation improvements. It serves as an infrastructure plan and also must be specifically “correlated” with the land use element—that is, the infrastructure must address the development patterns expected by the land use element.
- **Housing**, which must assess the need for housing for all income groups and lay out a program to meet those needs (already underway).
- **Conservation**, which deals with flood control, water and air pollution, and the need to conserve natural resources such as agricultural land and endangered species.
- **Open Space**, which is supposed to provide a plan for the long-term conservation of open space in the community.
- **Noise**, which must identify noise problems in the community and suggest measures for noise abatement.
- **Safety**, which must identify seismic, geologic, flood, and wildfire hazards, and establish policies to protect the community.

Since many of the required elements cover topical areas outside the expertise of the Planning Division, other City staff, as well as pertinent individuals from outside agencies and organizations will be invited to participate in the audit. Other City staff will include persons from the City’s Finance, Engineering, Recreation, and Building Divisions, as well as the Public Works Department. A representative from the City’s Police Department, the East Bay Regional Park District, Contra Costa Transportation Authority, as well the County Fire Department will also be invited to participate. Part of the discussion will involve the possibility of additional elements, with topical areas such as Economic Development, Fiscal, and Parks, Recreation, and Culture. This internal discussion will allow staff to determine what the major issues are regarding the City’s current General Plan. Items to be addressed include:

- Organization and content of the existing General Plan and current state requirements.
- Wholesale review of the existing document.
- Additional optional elements to consider.
- Incorporation of a number of older specific plans into the General Plan.

The City will also have to address new State laws regarding climate action planning including Senate Bill (SB) 375 (Transportation Planning and Global Warming) as part of the update process. SB 375 requires the California Air Resources Board (ARB) to set regional targets for the purpose of reducing greenhouse gas emissions from passenger vehicles, for 2020 and 2035.

The implementation of this legislation is still being worked out, but it will likely require the integration of land use, housing, and transportation plans that meet the SB 375 targets.

Advisory Group

The Planning Commission agreed with staff that a group similar in concept to the Task Force assembled for the Housing Element Update be put together for the General Plan Update. As with the Housing Element Task Force, a broad representation of community members and interests are necessary. Persons invited to participate in the group will include one or two members of the City Council, as well one or two members from each City commission that has purview over an area of the General Plan. The group should also include a staff representative with expertise in those topical areas of the Update that do not have a corresponding City commission or committee. For example, since the City does not have a Public Safety Commission a representative from the City's Police Department and the County Fire Department will be invited to participate.

Once the advisory group is assembled, the initial meeting will involve review of the internal audit's findings. This meeting will also serve as the platform for reviewing and finalizing staff's proposal regarding the public participation and outreach component of the General Plan Update process. It is possible that more than one meeting of the advisory group will be required to accomplish these tasks.

Public Participation and Outreach

For the public participation and outreach component of the General Plan Update process staff recommended and the Planning Commission agreed that a number of similarly-organized events should be held at various locations around the City as an open house type event. The events will include a presentation of what a General Plan is, an overview of the process of updating the City's General Plan, and forums for the public to brainstorm and comment on a number of issues related to the General Plan Update process. These events will likely be held at the following locations:

- Martinez Senior Community Center
- Alhambra High School
- Hidden Valley Elementary School
- Bethany Baptist Church (or some other facility in the Virginia Hills/Forest Hills area of the City)

These locations were chosen to encourage greater public participation—something that is highly desirable for this process. Once these events have been held, a summary of the input will be compiled and brought to the advisory group for review and comment.

General Plan Formulation

Once the above steps have been completed, staff will put together a Request for Proposal (RFP) for the formulation of the General Plan. The RFP will be brought to the advisory group for review and approval. Once the RFPs are received and an initial review conducted by City staff, a sub-committee of the advisory group and Community & Economic Development Department staff will meet to review the most appropriate RFPs and participate in the interview process. Finally, once a consultant is selected the formulation of the General Plan will begin.

General Plan Update Timeline (Approximate)

Audit	August-September 2009
Advisory Group Meetings	October-November 2009
Public Participation and Outreach	January-February 2010
General Plan Formulation (Initiation of RFP process)	March 2010

FISCAL IMPACT:

Originally, the City's Capital Improvement Program had allocated up to \$600,000 for the General Plan Update process. However, due to a number of financial reasons related to the current budget challenges, that amount was reduced to \$400,000. For the General Plan Update to be accomplished within this budget, a more limited and cost-effective approach needs to be taken regarding the public participation and outreach program. Staff believes and the Planning Commission agreed that this phase of the General Plan Update process can be successfully completed using a revised program that works within the reduced budget.

ACTION:

Provide staff with feedback and comments regarding the initiation of the update to the City's General Plan.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Planning Commission General Plan Update Study Session Staff Report, PowerPoint Presentation, and Meeting Minutes (February 26, 2008)



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

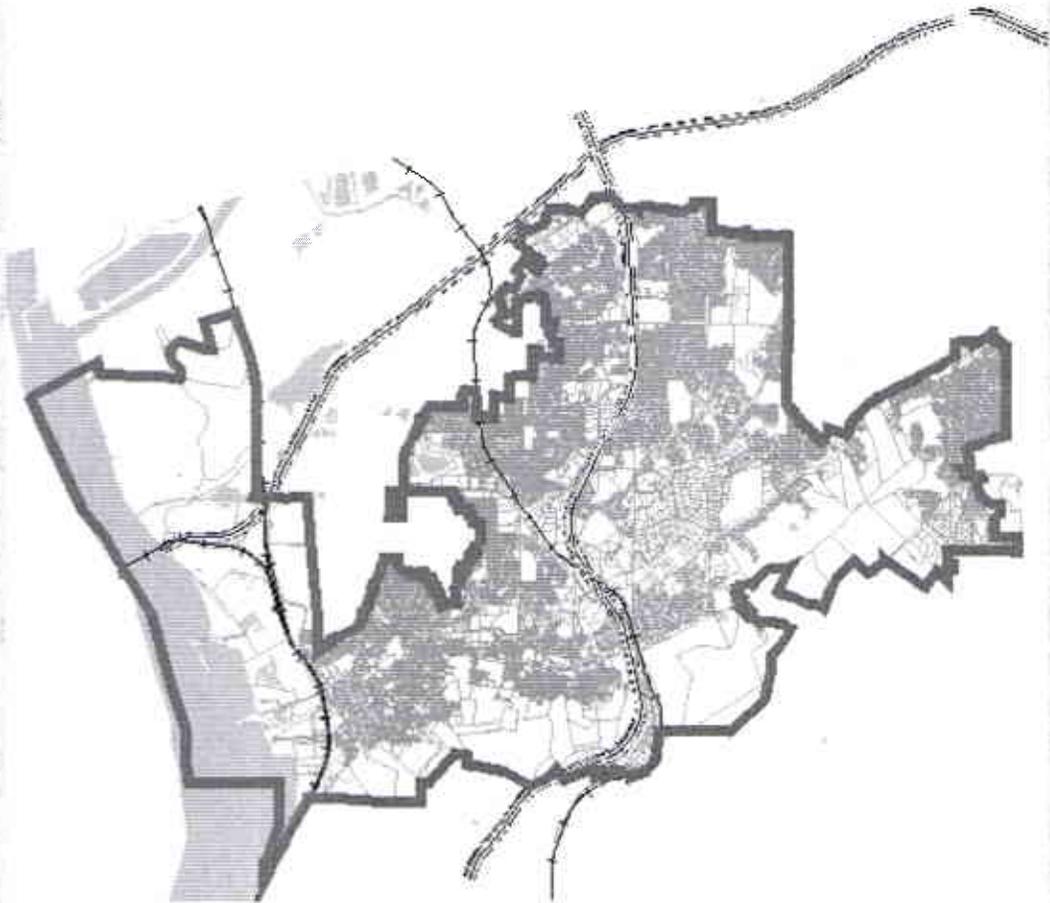
Program and Process

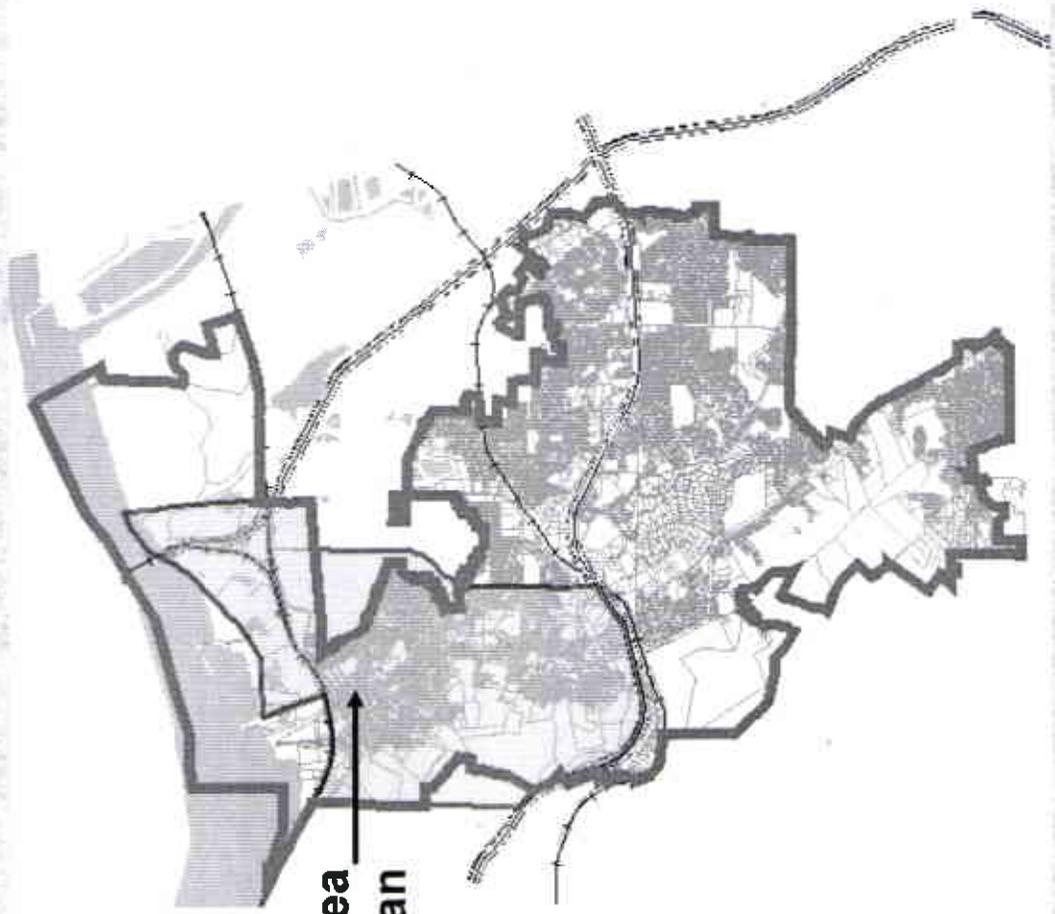
- At outset, two main things to consider:
 - What do we want to change, if anything?
 - What will be the decision-making process?

But first... a little history

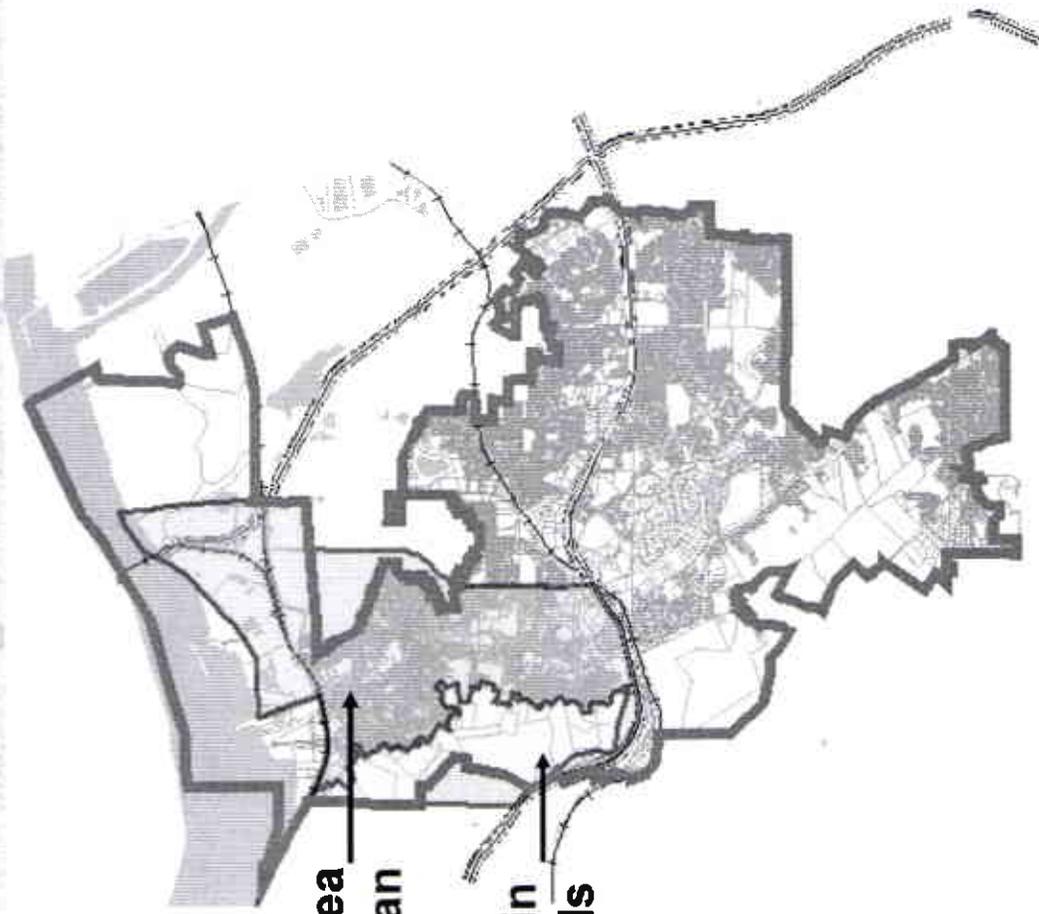
History of current General Plan

- 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)



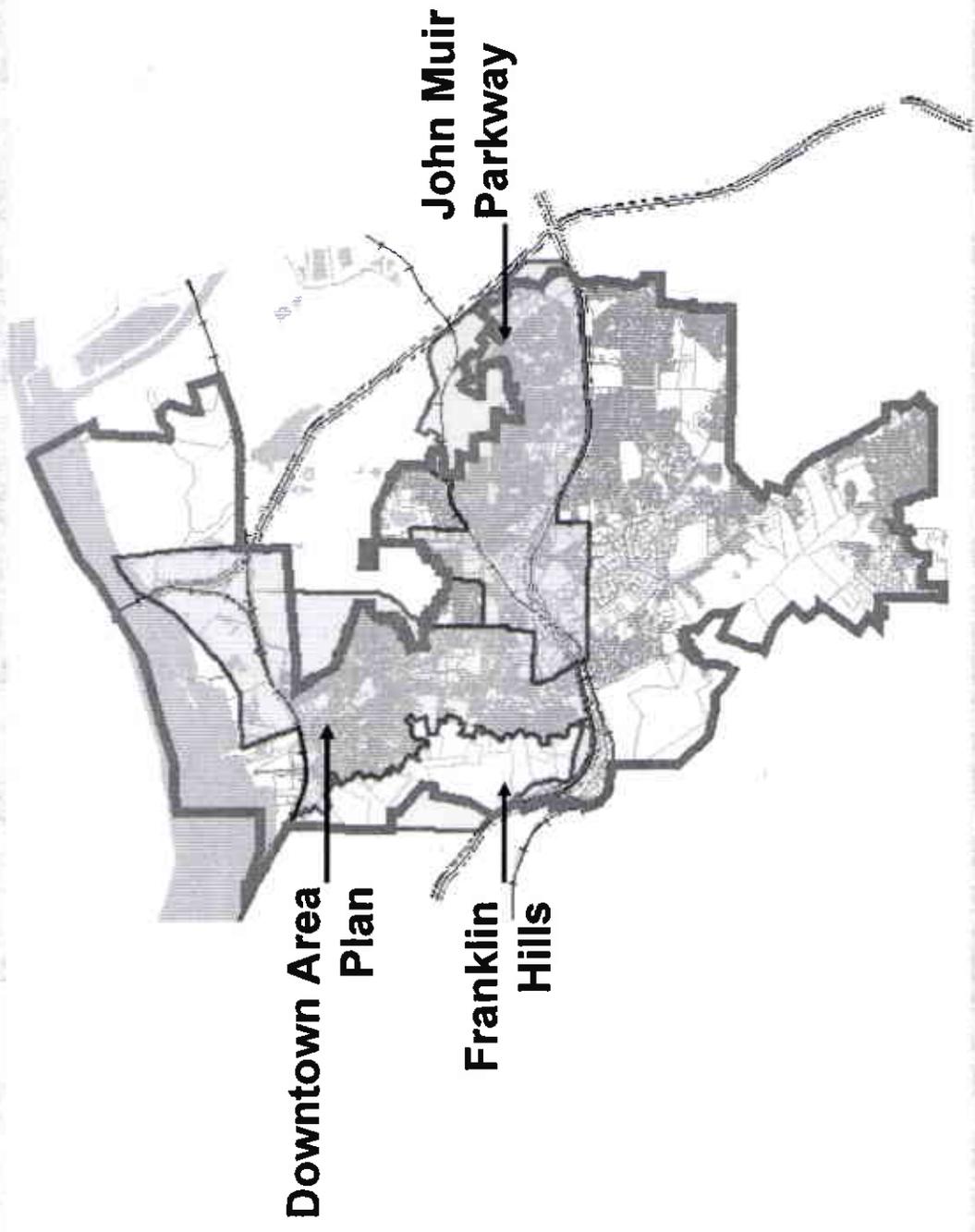


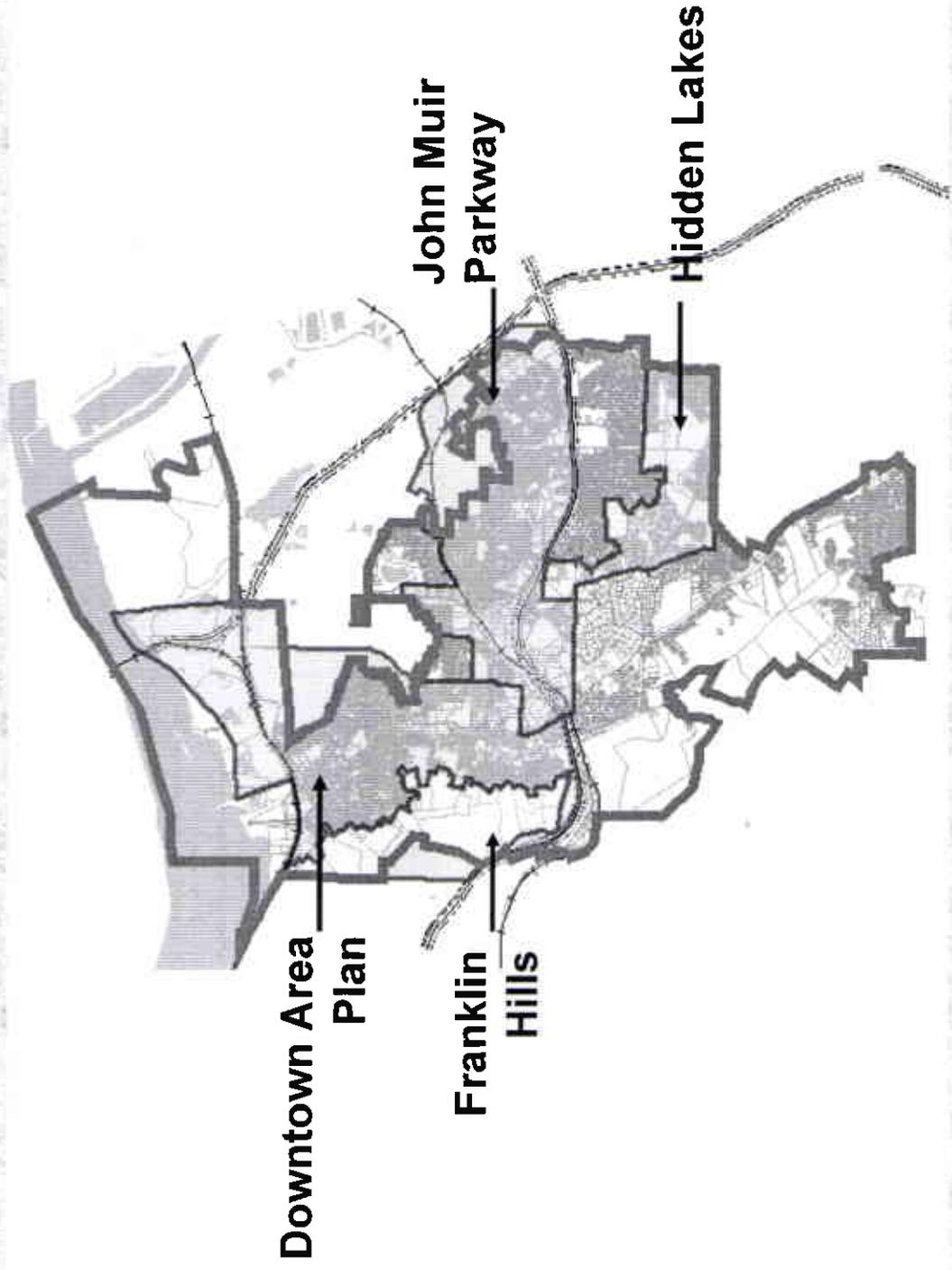
Downtown Area
Plan

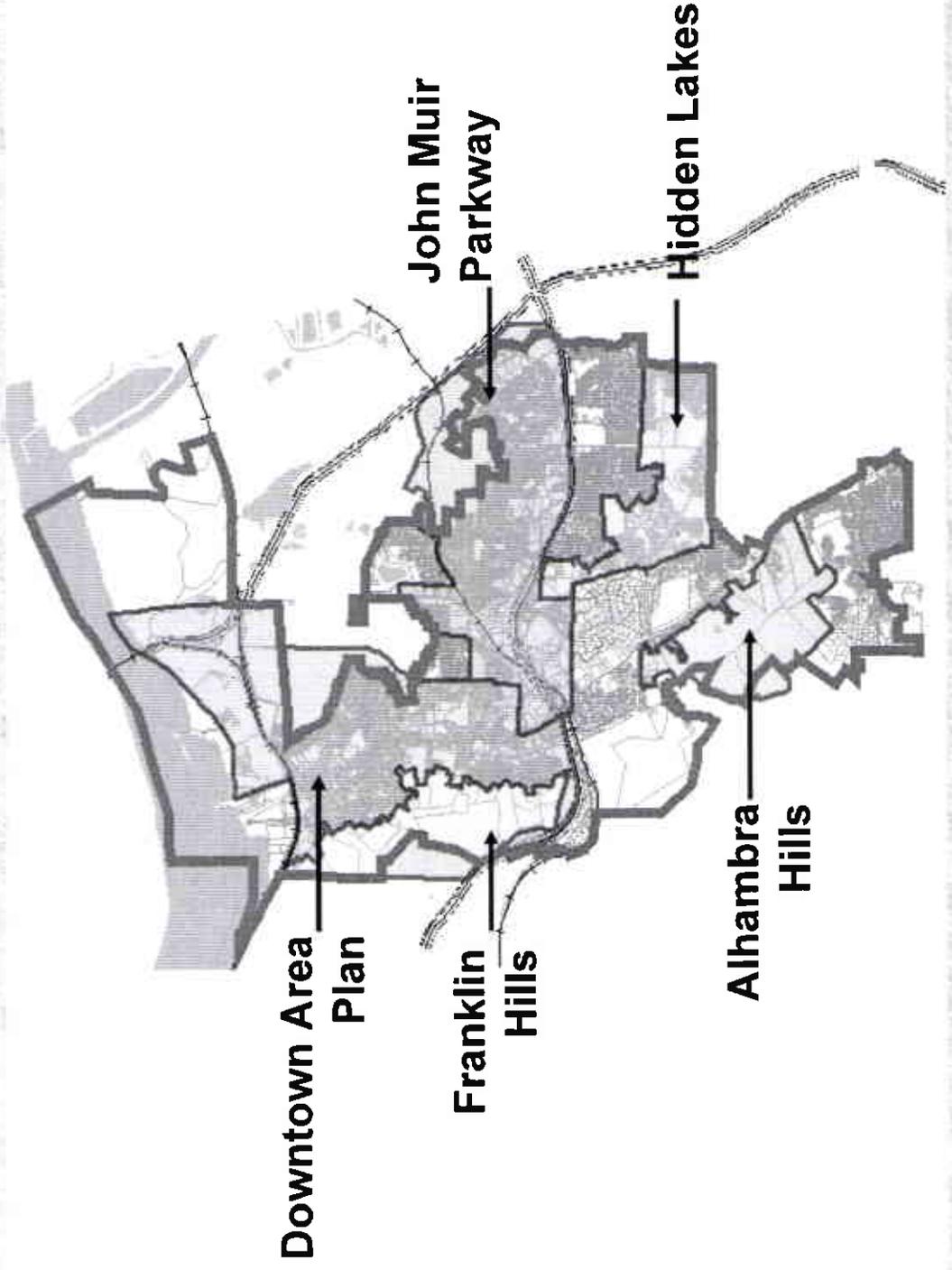


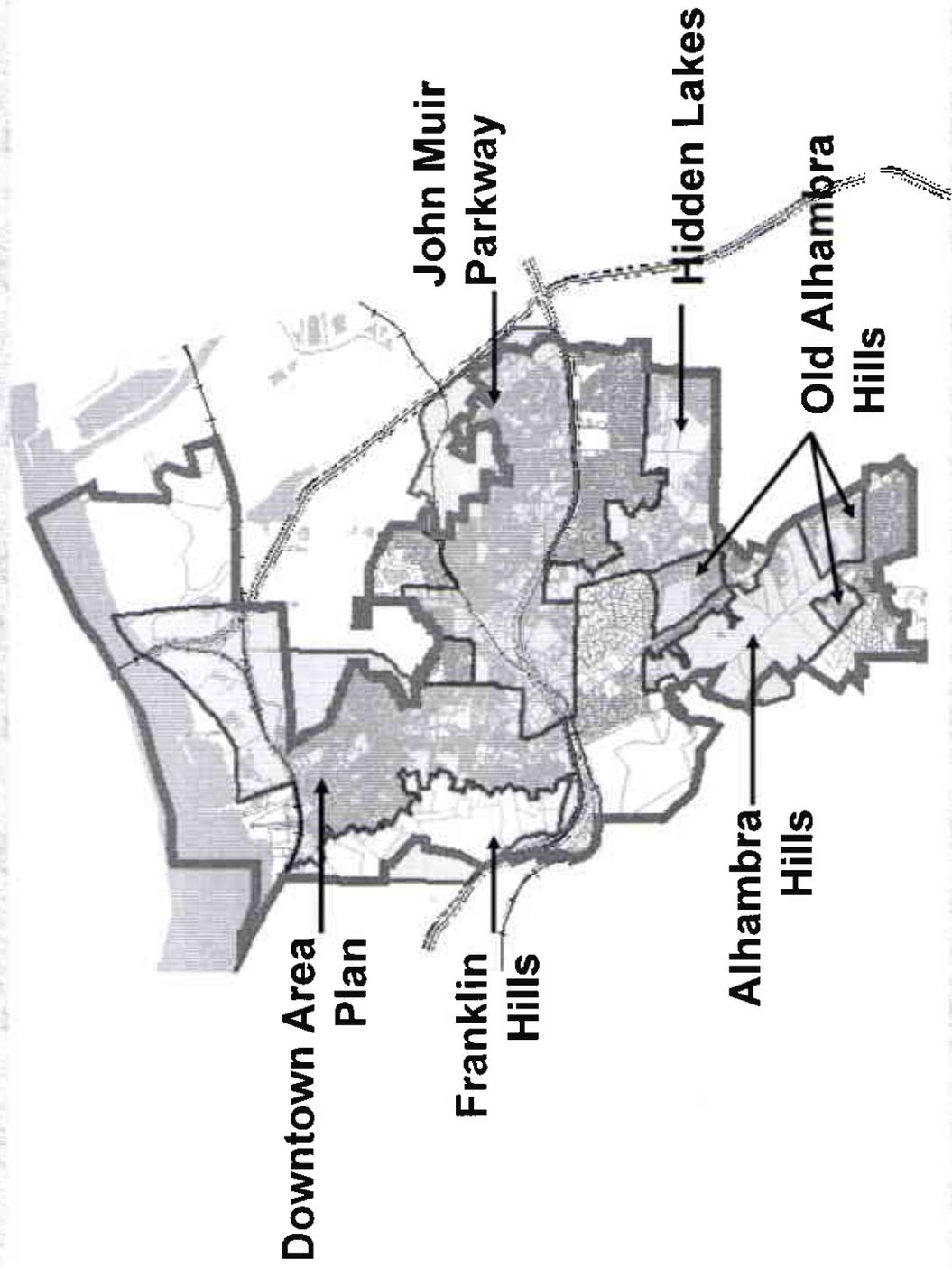
**Downtown Area
Plan**

**Franklin
Hills**









Downtown Specific Plan

Downtown Area

Plan

Franklin

Hills

Alhambra

Hills

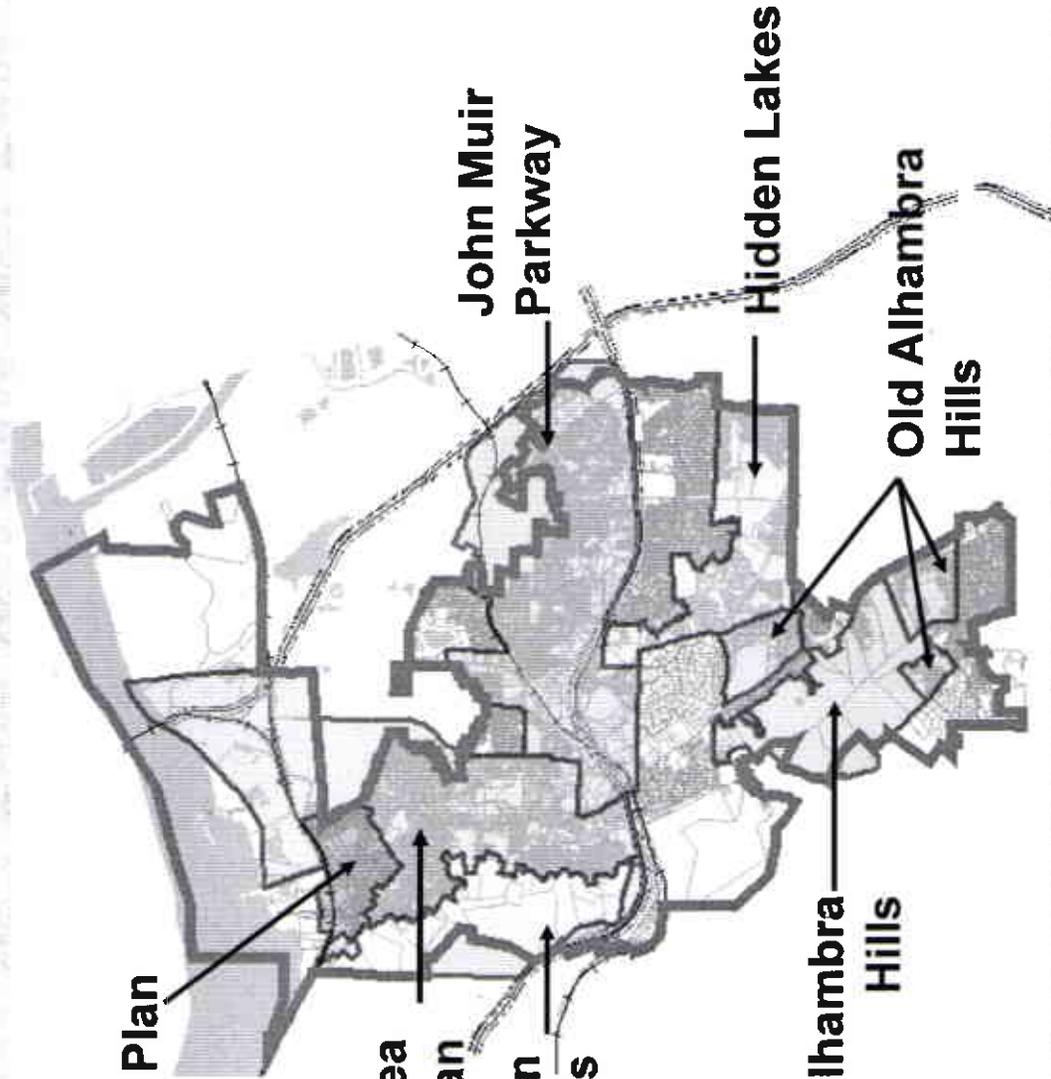
Old Alhambra

Hills

John Muir

Parkway

Hidden Lakes



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?

MINUTES
CITY OF MARTINEZ
PLANNING COMMISSION
February 26, 2008

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Chair Frank Kluber called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. with all members present except Commissioners Avila and Hughes, who were excused, and Commissioner Burt, who arrived after roll call.

Staff present: Veronica Nebb, City Attorney; Albert Lopez, Deputy Community Development Director.

5. General Plan Update - Study session to discuss the General Plan update process- includes power point presentation by Staff. No formal action is taken in the Study Session. (Continued from the January 22, 2008, meeting)

Deputy Community Development Director Albert Lopez presented the staff report and responded to questions from the Commission about the process.

The Commission commented on the need for an expedited timeline, including sufficient community input and qualified facilitators for the community meetings.

Commissioner Burt asked if a hybrid of the "top-down" and "bottom-up" processes was possible. She also commented on the piecemeal GPA amendments previously done. She agreed there is a definite need for community input - especially if they are really listened to.

Chair Kluber agreed, especially with the need to hire skilled professionals to manage some of the public input process. Commissioner Allen agreed that the expedited process mentioned by Commissioner Busby could work.

Commissioner Allen asked if there is any way to put together a summary of what is currently in effect.

Vice Chair Korbmacher said he thought the focus should be on cleaning up the current General Plan. He expressed concern about open space, especially in residential areas, indicating that changing them should require a public vote. He also noted that the downtown area is the most difficult issue, but since the Downtown Specific Plan will be part of final General Plan and it's already done.

City Attorney Nebb noted that most successful facilitators should not have preconceived ideas about the outcome of the Plan - suggesting that the City separate the facilitator from the consultant who writes the Plan.

Chair Kluber expressed concern about preconceived ideas about the community. Mr. Lopez

agreed separating the writing from the facilitating is a good idea.

Commissioner Allen expressed concern about too extended of a process, so that re-education of the public is lessened. She also asked how to decide what needs to be amended. She suggested a summary of the current policies, then looking at the Plan itself for redlining, etc.

Mr. Lopez said he would draft a summary of the Commission input and bring it back to the Commission for confirmation. He expressed concern that there be enough time to gather input from all segments of the community.

There was some discussion of the best way to advertise public meetings.

Mr. Lopez asked for clarification on the process preferred by the Commissioner. Commissioner Burt said an advisory group appointed by the Mayor might be good to decide the elements that need to be included and/or revised.

Commissioner Busby concern that that might be too technical, noting that the consultant or staff might be better qualified, although she acknowledged the need for public input at some point in the process.

Chair Kluber suggested that the selection process for the consultant should involve some Planning Commissioners, Councilmembers, etc. There was discussion of the best way to choose consultant/facilitator.

Mr. Lopez summarized the preferences of the Commission as to the process: that a hybrid approach be utilized, that involves the community once the City has completed an internal General Plan audit to determine which elements were still functioning, and where major gaps exist. Once the audit was complete, a small advisory group can "issue spot" and focus the efforts of the Community Conversation process to follow. At the point the larger community (using facilitators) can be involved to discuss more broad changes in land use policy. The input from the Community Conversations can then be distilled and returned to the advisory group, at which point with the help of a Planning consultant can develop the actual plan.

COMMISSION ITEMS

Vice Chair Korbmacher asked about the upcoming League of Cities conference . After a brief discussion, Mr. Lopez said he would pass the information on to the Commission when he receives it.

STAFF ITEMS

None.

COMMUNICATIONS

There was some discussion of sound difficulties with the City Council meetings.

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Kluber adjourned the meeting at 10:17 p.m., to the next regularly scheduled meeting of March 11, 2008.