

CONCORD GENERAL PLAN UPDATE
SUMMARY of the APRIL 29TH
COMMUNITY VISIONING WORKSHOP on
ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES



Prepared for

The City of Concord

by

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Introduction

On April 29, 2003, the City of Concord hosted a Community Visioning Workshop on Issues and Opportunities as a kick-off event for the City's General Plan Update process. Approximately 50 participants were in attendance at the Workshop including members of the City Council, Planning Commission and City staff, contributing over 200 comments relating to their concerns about a wide range of issues and their ideas for a future vision for Concord. This report is intended to document the community discussion at the Workshop and the comments received that address the concerns and desires of the community. It will serve as a valuable reference during the Update process; it also will be used to frame discussion with the City Council and Planning Commission on policy issues.

BACKGROUND ON THE GENERAL PLAN UPDATE

During the Summer of 2002, Concord began its multi-year, Zoning Ordinance Project, which involves a comprehensive revision of its zoning regulations. The City retained an urban planning consulting firm, Dyett & Bhatia, who began their research and evaluation of City policies and documents, and conducted interviews of residents, business owners, and key decision-makers. A community workshop on zoning issues was also held last September. The result of this workshop revealed the need to also update the City's General Plan, and on March 18, 2003, the City Council approved the joint General Plan/Zoning Ordinance Update Project.

The 1994 Concord General Plan includes a broad array of land use objectives and policies as well as very specific development and design standards. Some of these are now out-of-date, while others conflict with policies in the recently adopted Housing Element or with the City's economic development strategies. Future urban land needs also to be reviewed in relation to the Association of Bay Area-Governments' *Projections 2003* and correlated with the recently adopted Housing Element.

As part of this update, it will be important for the City to consider whether the 1994 General Plan policies will be responsive to the City's current and future needs and reflect the community's vision for Concord, and what new polices are warranted. As part of the process of reaffirming or modifying General Plan policies, the fit with other planning efforts, including the Shaping Our Future Project and the Contra Costa Transportation Authority's Countywide Transportation Plan Update, will be reviewed. Below is a brief description of a General Plan's purpose, who is involved in creating or updating it, and how it is used by a City.

WHAT IS A GENERAL PLAN?

A General Plan is a document proposed by the Planning Commission and adopted by the City Council to guide the City's future. A City's General Plan has been described as its constitution for conservation and development, with several purposes. First, it establishes a

long-range vision for the City, outlining the steps necessary to achieve this vision, while developing long-range development policies that guide the City’s Planning and Economic Development Division, Planning Commission, Design Review Board and City Council’s decision-making. Second, the General Plan provides a basis for judging whether specific development proposals and public projects are in harmony with Plan policies. Lastly, the General Plan allows City departments, other public agencies and private developers to design projects that will enhance the character of the community.

Objectives for the General Plan Update

The following objectives are intended to frame discussion of the General Plan and the policy direction that will emerge. The 2025 General Plan for Concord will be designed to:

Build a vision for Concord as a harmonious place to live, work and play;

Ensure and enhance quality of life;

Encourage and attract productive business/employment opportunities and promote a balanced supply of housing for all income groups residing or who wish to reside in Concord;

Promote responsible use of human and environmental resources; and

Ensure that Plan policies are mutually supportive, internally consistent and in accordance with State law.

The Concord General Plan Update also will provide direction for changes to the City’s Zoning Ordinance to ensure that there is a consistent and reinforcing relationship between the two documents and the Zoning Map is consistent with the Land Use Diagram in the Plan.

THE UPDATE PROCESS

Key participants in the updating of Concord’s General Plan include:

The Concord Community;

The Planning and Economic Development Department; and

The Planning Commission and the City Council

The Concord Community, including residents, business owners, and jobholders, are important stakeholders and will help City officials and staff in framing the issues and choices to be addressed in the General Plan Update. The City’s consultant, Dyett & Bhatia, Urban and Regional Planners of San Francisco, will lead technical work on the Plan update in close coordination with their work on the Zoning Ordinance Update. The City Council and the Planning Commission is responsible for reviewing and making decisions about the General Plan. The Concord’s Planning Division will review the Draft Plan and make recommendations to the Planning Commission and the City Council. The Planning Division at the City will take the staff lead.

RELATIONSHIPS TO OTHER PLANNING EFFORTS

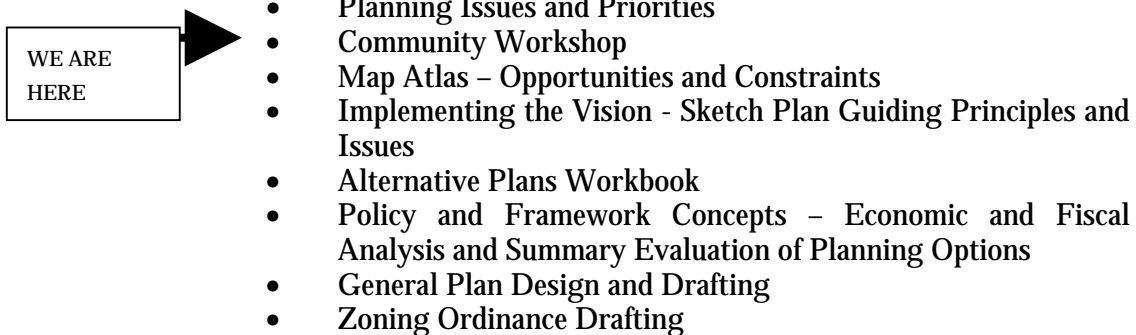
There are several planning efforts currently underway in Contra Costa. *Contra Costa: Shaping Our Future*, is one such effort, providing a common vision and a coordination system for the local governments in Contra Costa County. *Shaping Our Future* is involved in researching and shaping growth management policies via the use of public opinion polls, community outreach, transportation-land use modeling, and the creation of a group dialogue between government interest groups and citizens. A preliminary set of regional land use maps have been prepared, including a proposed Urban Limit Line, and a draft “compact” has been circulated for comment. Community and jurisdiction comments are now being reviewed by the *Shaping Our Future* consultant team and steering committee.

The Contra Costa Transportation Improvement and Growth Management Program (Measure C) was adopted in 1988 and is up for renewal in 2009. Under Measure C, the City of Concord has been able to leverage local sales tax revenues to complete major transportation projects and participate in new forums for cooperative planning with neighboring jurisdictions. Concord’s successes in managing growth are allied with the vision put forth by Measure C. Over the coming months, the City will be participating in the Measure C renewal effort and the update of the Countywide Transportation Plan.

WORK PROGRAM AND SCHEDULE

The General Plan Update will be comprehensive; the Plan will have a long-term focus and a 2025 horizon. Integral to the Update will be the identification of new growth and redevelopment areas, with specific attention to transportation, community design, economic development and environmental conservation as key supports to the Plan’s land use component. Strong policies and clear direction for implementation (new zoning and capital improvements) will characterize the Plan.

The work program can be tracked according to the following order:



ORGANIZATION OF THE WORKSHOP

The Community Workshop was organized to allow broad public input through small group discussions. The idea was to allow participants to address all of the issues and opportunities that they felt needed to be addressed in the General Plan Update in an informal setting. After a brief presentation describing Concord's current Update process, workshop attendees divided into small groups for roundtable discussions. All of those participating in this process were asked to address the following questions:

What do you like & dislike about Concord?

What about Concord makes you proud?

What are the greatest threats to the quality of life in Concord?

Where and how can new housing and new jobs be accommodated in Concord?

What is your vision of Concord in the year 2025?

What do you think should be a priority for the General Plan Update?

In the next chapter of this paper, issues and concerns raised by those attending the April 29 community workshop are presented. Comments have been organized into the following topical categories:

Growth and Community Character

Neighborhoods and Residential Land Use

Downtown and Commercial areas

Jobs and Employment

Transportation

Concord Naval Weapons Station

Community Facilities and Community Services

Environmental Conservation

Quotes from participants at the Workshop, presented following the discussion in each section, are intended to convey specific ideas or the range of concerns expressed at the Workshop. We have not included all of the comments made, but selected those that reflect the diverse viewpoints represented.

Key Issues Identified

Key issues that will help guide work on the General Plan Update are presented in three sections: Community Assets, Visions for 2025, and General Plan Issues and Opportunities.

COMMUNITY ASSETS

Workshop participants identified a wide range of community assets in their descriptions of what makes Concord a wonderful place to live and work, as well as what instills civic pride. The community assets include housing affordability, quiet neighborhoods with distinctive character, a strong sense of community, a diverse population, convenient shopping, broad choice in employment and entertainment, a family atmosphere with good recreational activities, job opportunities close to where people live, and a location close to “all the good things in life!” Some workshop participants underscored the rural appeal of parts of the City; others noted that the image of the City seems to be improving. Concord is seen by many as a comfortable place for people to live and work.

Good transportation access was mentioned by many as a community asset, including not only access to BART but also good pedestrian and bike facilities.

On the subject of City government, a number of participants were complimentary, noting that city staff is eager to work with homeowner groups, and that the City Council is working with schools, that parks are well maintained, and that it is relatively easy to get a permit processed in comparison with other jurisdictions in the County.

Lastly, the open spaces around the City, access to Mt. Diablo, and the park system, Pixie Playland, Camp Concord, and Lime Ridge are all highly valued.

Quotes:

“Concord—a great place to work, live, and play! ”

“A great location with proximity to all of the good things in life.”

“Concord isn’t pretentious—and it has a better mix of people than Carmel.”

“Concord is a comfortable place to live.”

“Historically, Concord has been one of the easiest cities to work with.”

“The Permit Department has come a long way!”

“The Skateboard Park is outstanding!”

“I love having an airport!”

“The City’s image seems to be improving.”

VISIONS FOR 2025

The exercise of envisioning Concord in 2025 encouraged participants to assess what their primary issues are, and suggest a big picture vision of what they desire for Concord in the next twenty years. Some of these visions conflict, and a balance will need to be struck during the General Plan update involving choices between conflicting objectives.

Growth and Community Character

Growth does not adversely affect the 'Quality of Life'.

The City avoids large commercial developments.

The City does not accept growth projections set by others, but determines its own future.

Neighborhood and Residential Land Use

The City strikes a balance between over-development and under-development, so current residents' children can live here in the future.

Neighborhood mixed-use is encouraged, while retaining the quality of neighborhoods is maintained.

Housing around BART is improved.

Downtown and Commercial Areas

Concord continues to have a vibrant Downtown with free parking.

The Park N' Shop site is redeveloped with a mix of uses.

The Bel Air, Holbrook, Estates, and several Lucky's shopping centers are improved.

North Concord (the Bates Avenue area) office development is expanded.

More housing is built Downtown and in existing commercial areas.

Jobs and Employment

The City should set a goal to have fifty percent of residents work in Concord.

There is more training so residents can get access to jobs, particularly entry-level.

Transportation

Traffic impacts, particularly cut-through traffic in the neighborhood, are minimized.

Transportation facilities are improved.

Land use planning keeps up with traffic generation.

Concord Naval Weapons Station

An open space corridor is created through the Naval Weapons Station, linking the Suisun Bay to Mt. Diablo.

New transportation facilities through the Naval Weapons Station that provide traffic relief.

Jobs are provided along transportation corridors at the Naval Weapons Station.

Sensitively planned development occurs adjacent to existing neighborhoods.

Community Facilities and Services

A unified school district is created.

The library system is improved.

There is more local control of schools.

Attention to crime prevention makes neighborhoods safer.

Environmental Conservation

Loss of Heritage Trees (particularly street trees) is halted.

Open space is protected around the City.

New trees are planted.

GENERAL PLAN ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

To realize the vision described by Workshop participants will require work on a number of General Plan issues.

GROWTH AND COMMUNITY CHARACTER

Can Concord grow without becoming a “big city” and sacrificing the comfortable hometown character that residents so highly value? A critical determinant will be whether the community can accommodate new jobs and housing without destroying the diversity that Concord’s residents frequently cite among the City’s most attractive characteristics. Concord’s diversity is reflected not only by its population, which includes citizens of widely different economic levels from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, but also in the choice of neighborhood environments.

Concord offers a range of housing choices from semi-rural neighborhoods that have undergone little change over several decades and to moderate density suburban residential areas that were built after World War II to higher density Downtown apartment living. Citizens are concerned that development pressures will bring about changes that will destroy the special qualities that make their neighborhoods distinct. Can neighborhoods be upgraded without the introduction of out-of-scale McMansions? Some citizens are critical

of the City’s responsiveness to their concerns about planning issues. Should the City adopt policies to promote broader community involvement in the planning process?

Other specific issues that will need to be addressed include:

Timing and location of growth;

Density and intensity of development, including growth around the BART stations and density downtown;

Links between Downtown and industrial jobs ;

Redevelopment of transportation corridors, such as the Monument Blvd. corridor for mixed use development; and

Whether Willow Pass Road, from Parkside to Colfax, could be a growth corridor.

Quotes:

"It makes sense for people to live closer to where they work."

"We should not only try to recruit new businesses to Concord, we also need to make sure we maintain the businesses we have."

I moved here because Concord offers a strong employment base and residential mix."

"The planning process isn't coordinated with the building process."

"Concord doesn't have to become a big city just because it's growing."

"We're growing too fast--Cowell Rd is becoming a 6-lane highway!"

"Monument Boulevard corridor has become a difficult area. It's high density with too many people hanging out and too many auto oriented businesses with too many driveways."

"Monument Boulevard corridor can be redeveloped with a mixture of uses—more retail with housing above—and well-designed to make people feel proud. The area needs places for people to come together, community centers like Salvio Pacheco Square."

"It makes sense for people to live closer to where they work."

NEIGHBORHOODS AND RESIDENTIAL LAND USE

Can new housing be designed to fit into or be buffered from existing neighborhoods so that infill development can occur without changing the neighborhood character? Some citizens think that a better option may be to focus efforts to accommodate housing needs with higher density development in Downtown and to promote mixed-use development on large sites like Olympic High School site, or areas like Monument Boulevard corridor where redevelopment could revitalize an area that suffers from poor planning and excessive auto-related uses.

Should the City change its policies to stimulate mixed use development arterials on underused or abandoned retail sites such as portions of Park ‘n’ Shop, the Monument Boulevard corridor, Willow Pass Road east of Port Chicago Highway, the eastern part of Clayton Road, and other areas now characterized by strip commercial and auto-oriented development? Are there other older shopping centers that are good candidates for mixed-use development? Can these retail areas and underutilized parcels around the BART stations and along transit corridors be developed with higher density residential development and neighborhood-serving retail uses without changing the adjacent lower density neighborhoods?

Some workshop participants fear that the continuing demand for new housing close to jobs, BART, and Downtown, may threaten the character of older neighborhoods that were developed with relatively small homes on smaller parcels. They point to inappropriate residential additions and “tear-downs” that have resulted in the construction of homes that are out-of-scale with existing development. Should the City have policies and regulations to prevent this type of change? What kinds of incentives could the City provide to foster improvement of existing neighborhoods?

Other concerns voiced at the Workshop include:

Some neighborhood groups sometimes infringe on residents’ property rights in protests of development. This has occurred where there are potential view impacts.

Residential building height: should development be limited to 4 stories or less?

How can the City ensure that new development is compatible with existing uses?

Quotes:

"We are building the wrong type of house. We shouldn't be building these brick McMansions."

"We need to accommodate an aging population through a more diverse range of housing."

"There is an opportunity for more housing on Willow Pass Road east of Downtown."

"Concord is great because it has affordable housing with walking distance of work."

"The City's neighborhoods have a mix of historic buildings and mature vegetation; they also accommodate new development with new trees in an environmentally-sensitive manner."

"The City's Recreation department is good."

"We need a Noise Ordinance."

"City staff is good - they seem eager to work with homeowner groups!"

"We should be building a different type of housing for empty nesters who aren't ready for assisted living but don't need a big house—two bedroom houses."

DOWNTOWN AND COMMERCIAL AREAS

Downtown Development

Concord residents share a vision of what they describe as a “real” Downtown that offers a range of retail opportunities as well as higher density residential development. Residents and decision-makers alike would like to see more high-end retail uses. They appreciate some of the downtown development they have seen in other East Bay communities but, at the same time, don’t want a downtown that imitates neighboring town centers.

Should Downtown growth be focused on residential and retail development rather than the services sector where much of the existing development has occurred? Should Downtown Concord become the retail center for northern Contra Costa County with growth in office employment shifted to locations in North Concord that can be served by improved access to BART? With the construction of more downtown housing like the Legacy project, allow Concord to support the range of downtown retail venues that the community desires without additional office development nearby? How can the City more effectively incorporate its historic structures in Downtown redevelopment plans?

Jobs and Employment

With improved access to the North Concord BART station and I-680, North Concord may have potential for significant growth in industrial jobs and office development. Extending transportation corridors into the Naval Weapons Station area can further increase employment capacity. Some residents feel that the creation of entry-level jobs and providing training for existing lower-income residents should be a city objective. Training opportunities in manufacturing and trades also could be provided at a technical school near Buchanan Field.

Citizens have also emphasized the importance of retaining existing businesses. Should the City promote North Concord as its major employment center and encourage the development of new office jobs as well as manufacturing in this area? Should the City focus on creating jobs for current residents, including those who are unemployed or underemployed, or attract higher paying office jobs?

Other issues noted by workshop participants include:

Monument Boulevard has become a difficult area - high density - people hanging out - many auto-oriented businesses

For all new development, adequate community services are needed (i.e. daycare, policing, street maintenance, etc.).

Quotes:

"Park n' Shop needs improvement."

"Put retail uses, not service uses, in the Downtown."

"I like downtown but I would like more upscale stores."

"We need to upgrade the retail in the downtown."

"Redevelop the Masonic Hall site downtown with upscale stores such as Pottery Barn."

"Another strength of Concord is the diversity in employment and entertainment."

"We should not only try to recruit new businesses to Concord; we also need to make sure we keep the businesses we have."

"We need training so that residents can get access to jobs and entry-level jobs."

TRANSPORTATION

For many residents, increased traffic is an unavoidable result of new development and one of the most common reasons for their opposition to additional growth. Peak hour traffic on heavily-traveled commute routes like Cowell Road is among the most frequently cited example, but residents are also dismayed by increased traffic on neighborhood streets, some of it created by through traffic.

Smaller buses have been identified as a way to improve transit access within neighborhoods. Could improved access to BART including residential construction along transit corridors, accommodate anticipated growth without reducing the level of service on existing streets? Can inter-jurisdictional coordination and transportation planning help to relieve the impacts of commuter traffic on through routes like Cowell Road?

Other issues relate to neighborhood traffic and the potential feasibility of eliminating "cut-through" traffic. Workshop participants also raised the idea of evaluating:

Free shuttles (such as Walnut Creek has); and

Transit like Emeryville's "Emery Go Round"

Quotes:

"Willow Pass Road beyond BART needs something!"

"We should make the City more pedestrian and bicycle friendly."

"The City should encourage the use of public transportation."

"Not keeping up with traffic is a threat."

CONCORD NAVAL WEAPONS STATION

With careful planning the vast and diverse lands within the Concord Naval Weapons Station (NWS) could serve as an important regional open space resource as well as a place to accommodate Concord's need for new jobs and housing. Some citizens envision the NWS as the link in an East Bay version of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area that includes Mount Diablo and extends from Alamo to Suisun Bay.

By extending transportation corridors into areas that are adjacent to existing residential and industrial areas, the NWS can also be developed to accommodate additional jobs and clusters of new neighborhoods. What policies should be put in place to guide planning for reuse of the NWS? Should residential areas be planned as a continuation of existing adjacent neighborhoods or should the City promote the development of clusters of new neighborhoods with a mix of housing types, including some multi-family housing, around neighborhood serving commercial and civic centers? Which lands should be retained as open space because of their habitat value, development constraints, or potential for inclusion in a regional open space system? What inter-jurisdictional mechanisms will be needed to implement plans for the NWS?

Quotes:

"Native American archeology exists at Naval Weapons Station."

"Plan the Naval Weapons Station with open space, traffic corridors, and housing."

COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES

While many Concord residents give their city government high marks, the adequacy and maintenance of some existing facilities and services and the ability to maintain or improve service standards as the population grows could impact the quality of life.

Public satisfaction with schools and the availability and adequacy of daycare will also influence residents' views of their quality of life as well as affect the City's ability to attract the type of development it desires. Should the General Plan include more specific goals and policies for public facilities and services? What policies are appropriate when agencies other than the city are responsible for public facilities and services such as education? Are there ways to improve coordination with agencies such as the Mount Diablo Unified School District to improve the quality of the services they provide?

Access to social services and new child care facilities may be critical to redeveloping areas like Monument Boulevard corridor with a concentration of lower income households. Especially in light of municipal budget problems, how should the City allocate its available

resources for community facilities and services? Should the City provide the same level of services to all neighborhoods or focus its attention on those areas with the greatest needs?

Quotes:

"We are the only town in Contra Costa County without a history museum."

"I like Concord's family atmosphere and good recreational activities."

"The library is too old, too small, and doesn't match the community."

"Schools are poor and daycare is inadequate."

"We have a mixed population, but ethnic segregation is still a problem."

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

Natural resources and open space preservation, variety of opportunities for passive and active recreation are important components of community quality. The quality of existing municipal parks and recreation facilities and easy access to open space and recreation areas including Lime Ridge and Mt. Diablo State Park are important community assets. Citizens highly value trails for walking and biking. They are also concerned about the preservation of trees and, especially, mature native species.

Given the City's development objectives and financial constraints, what should be the priorities for acquisition and maintenance of parks and open space? Is the existing General Plan standard of 6 acres of parkland per 1000 residents appropriate?

Workshop participants also noted that standards for tree preservation need to be reviewed to address loss of heritage trees, particularly street trees.

Quotes:

"Strengthen the heritage tree ordinance."

"We need a better Tree Ordinance."

"Stay within the City limits."

NEXT STEPS

Issues identified in this report will be presented to the City Council and the Planning Commission and at a Joint Study Session on July 22, 2003; they also will analyzed by the consultant team as sketch plans are prepared. This consultant team also is preparing a Map Atlas that will be used to illustrate existing land uses, public facilities, and environmental conditions within Concord.

Concerns related to the City's regulations and development review process will be incorporated into work on the City's Zoning Ordinance Update that is being updated in conjunction with the General Plan. After the Map Atlas is completed, the next major product is the Alternatives Plan Working paper which will include specific opportunity sites that could change in use or intensity in the General Plan Update. A second public workshop will be scheduled to review these alternative plans.