

TOWN OF WOODSIDE

Report to Town Council

Agenda Item 7

From: Susan George, Town Manager

December 9, 2008

SUBJECT: CONSIDERATION AND APPROVAL OF PROPOSED GENERAL PLAN REVIEW AND UPDATE PROCESS

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Town Council consider the attached overview of a proposed approach to the pending General Plan Review and Update project, accept public input on the proposal, and direct staff to proceed with implementation of the proposal.

DISCUSSION

The Town's Interim Director of Planning and Building has developed a thoughtful proposal for providing a process for the review and update of the Town's General Plan. His proposal is included as **Attachment A**.

The General Plan Review project will require the allocation of Town resources over the course of an extended period of time. The proposal includes a suggestion that an ambitious schedule be adopted for the review process, with weekly meetings of a proposed Task Force. The Task Force would serve as the General Plan Advisory Committee and I would be subject to the requirements of the Brown Act, with noticed public meetings. The Task Force would have 25 to 30 members and would include representatives from the Towns advisory bodies, as well as members solicited from the population at large. The Planning Director would be the facilitator for the review process, working with the Task Force to identify issues and to develop community objectives, goals, and action plans. The staff would assist with this process. Outside resources will be needed to undertake special studies for certain of the elements of the General Plan, such as the Noise and Circulation Elements. Outside assistance would also be needed for the environmental review of the draft General Plan, to ensure that it complies with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

The Town Council should discuss the proposed composition of the Task Force, the proposed schedule, and any other aspects of the proposal that it deems appropriate. The public should be invited to provide its input. At the conclusion of all discussion, the Town Council should direct the staff to start the process moving. If the concept of the Task Force is accepted, the first order of business would be to develop a mechanism for soliciting participants and for identifying representatives of the Town's various advisory bodies. The framework of that mechanism would be brought to the Town Council in January of 2009.

The Town's new Planning Director will begin her tenure on December 15th. She has had an opportunity to review the attached proposal and she is supportive of the approach.

CONCLUSION

The review of the General Plan and its update will be a significant undertaking for the Town. Providing a solid public process to guide the review is critical. The attached proposal serves as food for thought in determining the Town's approach to this important project.

To: Susan
From: Irwin
Subject: Suggested Process for General Plan Update

Updating the General Plan: Woodside's "Constitution for all Future Development:"

Approach to the General Plan

The size of the community, the fact that it has managed to maintain its core values, and that its options have not been foreclosed so that its future is still ahead of it, distinguish Woodside from many communities. Coupled with the level of interest, talent and involvement of the residents of Woodside, the General Plan update offers the opportunity to forge a General Plan that is a useful blueprint for the future. By the same token, inviting full participation and involvement of the community can expect to generate controversy along the way. This is essential, if the General Plan is to be a truly representative community effort. As such, it will be a difficult process to manage, as it will require, among other things, seeking consensus among deeply held, often conflicting values and opinions, maintaining schedules, managing expectations to avoid overpromise and translating the community's vision into a legally adequate General Plan. With the commitment of the community's good will to such a process, the rewards are worth the challenge.

The Planning Process

1. Due to Government Code requirements unique to the Housing Element that set out specific objectives and timetables for adoption that may preempt local policy and establishes specific timelines for updates, the Housing Element will be undertaken independently of the General Plan as a whole. As such, it is likely to be adopted out of sequence with the rest of the General Plan. There will be public hearings and an opportunity to tailor the Housing Element to the goals and policies of Woodside, within the requirements established by State Law.
2. Woodside's Residential Design Guidelines are currently undergoing revisions primarily to incorporate considerations for renewable resources and fire safety. Since the Design Guidelines are one of the implementation mechanisms of the General Plan (the "action plan"), they will be reviewed as part of the General Plan process for consistency in policy between the General Plan and the Design Guidelines.
3. We have in place residents who are deeply committed to the well-being of the community and are knowledgeable in a wide variety of General Plan-related issues who can serve as the backbone of the Planning Process.
4. A Task Force that would serve as a General Plan Advisory Committee can be established with representatives of the various interests that characterize the community to guide the process.
5. Staff can shepherd the process, but outside resources may be needed to add the experience of other communities to the options available for our consideration and to provide the technical services not represented on staff.

6. Staff would play a vital role, based upon their expertise and familiarity with the community, so that between staff and consultants, all the bases would be covered.

Setting the Stage

1. Although the General Plan is required by law, we are really doing it for ourselves. As such, regardless of which aspect of the General Plan is under discussion, there is only one question the community needs to answer for itself, which is, "What sort of community do we wish to leave to our grandchildren?" The community process should not be constrained by the legal requirements of a General Plan and should focus on the goals, policies and objectives to answer the question. (To some extent, it should be staff's responsibility to identify potentially conflicting provisions and to encourage the Task Force to go into issues in greater depth than contained in the General Plan in order to provide more substance where they feel the General Plan does not provide adequate guidance.)
2. It would be staff's responsibility to translate the community process into a document that meets the legal requirements of a General Plan.
3. As diligent as we may be, we know that external influences and unforeseen circumstances will require that the General Plan be revised from time to time.
4. There is also subtle change from within, which are the gradual shifts in the culture and values of the community itself that are the inevitable by-product of generational and demographic change.
5. Over time, we can expect circumstances to alter the outcome of the Plans we prepare today, so the first step in the planning process would be to identify what is sacred and must be protected, irrespective of any future plans. Much of this is likely to be a restatement of existing goals and policies, but it might be useful to isolate that which is sacred and must be protected, from the initiatives the community takes as it plans for its future.
6. Before we can plan for change, we need to recognize the signs of change.
7. An important function of a broad-based community process is to identify emerging trends that are moving to the fore, so that change can be anticipated and accommodated in ways that preserve the community's core values.
8. To do this, the community process should be used to explore what residents feel is right and what is wrong in the direction of the community. This process should involve the long-term residents as well as the newer residents, representatives of the student population as well as the older generations.
9. Trend is not destiny, but the degree to which we exercise control over our destiny varies with each General Plan Element. As we are well aware, we function within a political, social, environmental and economic environment that doesn't end with the Town's corporate boundaries. For example, the community has a great deal of control over residential design, but with Highway 280 traversing the community, we have more limited control over noise issues. We should focus on those aspects over which we are able to exercise a degree of control, but, while recognizing the difference, we should set long-term goals to articulate what is needed to complete the vision for the Community. This would provide a clear sense of direction that would unify the overall effort.

10. It would be useful to begin with a review of which goals we have accomplished and which we haven't and ask ourselves why. In other words, we should give ourselves a Report Card, so we have a better idea of what we might do to create a more meaningful General Plan.

The Community Process

A cross-section of community interests would be assembled to serve as a Task Force to propose the goals, policies and programs to be considered in an updated General Plan. Each of the Town's standing advisory bodies, with the exception of the Planning Commission, should be represented on the Task Force. They should each select two members who can articulate the goals and objectives of the groups they represent, but who also have a commitment to the community as a whole. In addition to these members, who formally represent specific community interests, there needs to be members selected from among the general population who represent the different geographic districts in the community as well as youth and other identifiable segments of the community not otherwise represented, such as the commercial property interests. It also would be valuable to invite applications from individuals who have no formal affiliation and who wish to serve. This might open the door to other viewpoints, such as that of new residents who represent an important segment of the Town's future. In order to have both full participation and a manageable process, the Task Force should be comprised of about 25 people, but no more than about 30.

During the Community Process and after its completion, staff and consultants will prepare the technical reports needed to support the policy recommendations. A draft of the entire document will be produced for review by the participants in order to resolve potential inconsistencies that may have arisen as a result of needed technical studies. Once the review of this draft is completed, it would be presented to the Town Council for review and consideration. The timing of the preparation of the environmental documents needed to comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) would be determined at that point. The draft would then be referred to the Planning Commission for its review. At such time that the environmental documents are in hand, the Commission would set the draft General Plan for public hearings to formally begin the adoption process.

The Schedule

An ambitious schedule has the advantage of involving people who are more willing to commit their time if they have a finite schedule. It should be clear at the outset that an end is in sight, providing a process that will pay greater attention to goals and policies than to minutiae. An ambitious schedule will result not only in a product at the end of the process but can build momentum and maintain interest. It also has certain disadvantages and may cause participants to feel that not enough time was spent on a particular subject. There may be the occasional scheduling conflicts that occur at crucial times in the process. On balance, the advantages usually far outweigh the disadvantages. The up and down sides should be explained to participants before they agree to join the Task Force, so that their mutual expectations are clear and responsibilities are acceptable. The following is an ambitious schedule, which should be presented to the community participants for their review and modification, so that they are willing to commit themselves to a schedule and are involved in the process of working toward consensus at the outset.

Rather than to divide into subcommittees representing individual topics or Districts, it is suggested that the entire working group meet regularly on a weekly basis (for about two hours per meeting) so that all the participants are involved in all aspects of the planning process. With weekly meetings (except for holidays) the process can be completed over a period of approximately eight months. If other than weekly meetings were held, the timeline would adjust accordingly, depending on the frequency of meetings.

Each meeting should begin with an assessment of the extent to which the Town has achieved the Goals of the current General Plan, followed by a discussion of the relevance of specific proposals of the General Plan. This would lead to a discussion of how circumstances may have changed and what should and should not be included in an updated General Plan.

Schedule	Topic	Review material	Comments*
Week 1.	Foundations of the Plan	General Plan, Ch. I	Open Discussion/Recommendations
Week 2.	Foundations of the Plan	General Plan, Ch. I Summary Notes of previous meeting	Open Discussion/Recommendations
Week 3.	Mandatory Element: Land Use	General Plan, Ch. II Summary Notes of previous meeting	Open Discussion
Week 4.	Mandatory Element: Land Use	General Plan, Ch. II Summary Notes of previous meeting	Open Discussion
Week 5.	Mandatory Element: Land Use	General Plan, Ch. II Summary Notes of previous meeting	Recommendations
Week 6.	Design Guidelines (Review and Comment)	Design Guidelines Report: Summary Notes of previous meeting	Staff will make presentation
Week 7.	Commercial Districts: Skylonda Center Local Plan; Town Center Local Area Plan;	General Plan, Ch. III Local Area Plans: Summary Notes of previous meeting	
Week 8.	Woodside Glens Specific Plan; Emerald Lake Hills Specific Plan	General Plan, Ch. III Local Area Plans: Summary Notes of previous meeting	Review primarily for General Plan Consistency
Week 9.	Mandatory Element: Open Space	General Plan, Ch. II Summary Notes of previous meeting	
Week 10.	Mandatory Element: Open Space	General Plan, Ch. II Summary Notes of previous meeting	
Week 11.	Mandatory Element: Conservation	General Plan, Ch. II Summary Notes of previous meeting	
Week 12.	Mandatory Element: Conservation	General Plan, Ch. II Summary Notes of previous meeting	
Week 13.	Mandatory Element:	General Plan, Ch. II	

	Circulation	Summary Notes of previous meeting	
Week 14.	Mandatory Element: Circulation	General Plan, Ch. II Summary Notes of previous meeting	
Week 15.	Mandatory Element: Natural Hazards/Safety	General Plan, Ch. II Summary Notes of previous meeting	Resource staff to be available to discuss
Week 16.	Mandatory Element: Natural Hazards/Safety	General Plan, Ch. I Summary Notes of previous meeting	
Week 17.	Mandatory Element: Housing (Review and Comment)	General Plan, Ch. II Summary Notes of previous meeting	Staff will make presentation
Week 18.	Mandatory Element: Noise	General Plan, Ch. II Summary Notes of previous meeting	
Week 19.	Mandatory Element: Public Utilities	General Plan, Ch. II Summary Notes of previous meeting	Resource staff to be available to discuss
Week 20.	Mandatory Element: Public Utilities	General Plan, Ch. II Summary Notes of previous meeting	
Week 21.	Optional Element: Historic Resource Preservation	Report of Historic Committee Summary Notes of previous meeting	Historic Committee to be invited for presentation
Week 22.	Optional Element: Historic Resource Preservation	Report of Historic Committee: Summary Notes of previous meeting	Discussion of Recommended Policies
Week 23.	Review for Statutory Criteria Required by Court Interpretation	Summary Notes of previous meeting	
Week 24.	Action Plan	Summary Notes of previous meeting	
Week 25.	Action Plan		
Week 26.	Unfinished Business		
Week 27.	Unfinished Business		
Future Date	Reconvene to receive General Plan Draft and to discuss the presentation to the Town Council		

*Town Hall Staff will be available to discuss issues, when necessary

Before the Planning Commission can conduct public hearings, technical studies may be needed to determine the feasibility of certain policy recommendations that may be impacted by such considerations as traffic or geology and to assess the environmental implications to meet CEQA requirements. Whenever possible, the technical studies would be scheduled concurrently with the Community process. This process might add between six months and a year.

Resource Needs

For the Community Process

- Facilitator. Ideally, this would be the Planning Director, who has an ongoing vested interest in the success of the process.
- Administrative Support (to advise participants of upcoming meetings and to distribute materials needed for meetings, to set up for the meetings, take notes, prepare summaries, keep attendance records, etc.).
- Town Hall Staff: Building, Public Works, Planning, Town Clerk, Town Geologist, only as needed to provide support for discussions of specific General Plan topics.
- Other Staff resources, which may include the Sheriff's Department, Fire Marshal, County Public Health, also to provide support for discussions of specific General Plan topics.

For drafting the Report

- Planning Staff, with facilitator oversight. This would include preparation of the Draft General Plan, an outline of recommendations for revisions to the Municipal Code that grow out of the General Plan process, review for legal adequacy, internal consistency and consistency with other land use documents (e.g. zoning, design guidelines).
- Town Attorney, to advise and respond to legal concerns, review and comment on any materials that will be considered for public hearing, and to draft Municipal Code revisions that grow out of the process.
- Town Hall Staff, including Town Engineer, Building Official, Town Geologist to draft technical segments of the General Plan and to review technical material prepared by Consultants

Additionally, External Resources will be needed to provide technical support not available on staff, such as:

- Special studies, such as may be needed for historic resources, noise, or traffic.
- Environmental support to prepare the necessary environmental documents required for CEQA.