



San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan Update and Direction

Study Session
El Cerrito City Council – March 7, 2011



Study Session Agenda

- ▶ Review San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan Background
- ▶ Current Status of Draft Specific Plan
- ▶ Specific Plan Options for Completion
- ▶ Direction from City Council and Discussion of Possible Next Steps

San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan Background



- ▶ A City's General Plan provides overarching land use vision and policies for the physical development of the entire city
- ▶ A Specific Plan provides detailed development and design policies, regulations, and implementation measures for a defined area of a city
- ▶ The San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan attempts to create a clear framework for future development that unifies both sides of the Avenue through shared standards between the two Cities of El Cerrito and Richmond
- ▶ The goal is to see both sides of San Pablo Avenue improve, with consistent Transit Oriented Development (TOD) land use and design standards where appropriate

Collaborative Effort

- ▶ The Cities of El Cerrito and Richmond collaborated on the Specific Plan, with involvement from citizens, BART, West Contra Costa Transportation Advisory Committee (WCCTAC) and AC Transit
- ▶ Funding for the Specific Plan provided by City of El Cerrito, City of Richmond, and WCCTAC
- ▶ MIG was contracted to provide consulting services in the development and preparation of the Specific Plan and related activities including public outreach, technical studies, and environmental reports in 2007

Specific Plan Public Input

- ▶ The San Pablo Avenue Advisory Committee (SPAAC) was comprised of 23 members appointed by the City Councils of each City, including officials, residents and business owners from both cities, as well as from BART, AC Transit and WCCTAC
 - Eight meetings were held from 2007-2009
- ▶ Three public workshops were attended by approximately 155 people
 - Workshop 1 (August 2007): Attendees participated in a Preference Survey and rated photographs of buildings and streetscapes
 - Workshop 2 (July 2008): Attendees gave input on land use and design, as well as character and development standards
 - Workshop 3 (August 2009): Gathered community feedback on the Draft Specific Plan that attendees were able to view in its entirety
- ▶ Study Sessions conducted with Design Review Boards and Planning Commissions for both cities

City Council Study Sessions

- ▶ Study session on housing, height, and density held in April 2008
 - Various residential densities, heights and designs from throughout the Bay Area were highlighted
 - City Council was generally comfortable with higher-density development if it was well-designed, situated in appropriate locations, and included features that mitigated the bulk and massing of buildings
 - Features such as step backs, façade articulation, landscaping, and interesting building materials were identified as means to achieve high-quality design in new projects
- ▶ Study session on update of Draft Specific Plan held in November 2009
 - Update on the Specific Plan was presented, including consolidation of concepts, visions and principles, design guidelines, parking, and signage
 - Comments from SPAAC and public included and provided for City Council review

Overview of Draft Specific Plan Direction



- ▶ Based on the study sessions and public input, staff and consultants developed land use, transportation and design recommendations to include in the Specific Plan
 - Focus on TOD, higher densities and heights established as baseline standards allowed by right at BART stations
 - Decreased parking requirements and new parking strategies
 - Evolve from antiquated, lengthy auto-oriented commercial strip between BART stations, to TOD nodes linked by a mixed use corridor with increased residential development, commercial activity and transit connections

Draft San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan Current Status



- ▶ Administrative Draft Environmental Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) reviewed by staff
 - MND prepared in October 2009
 - Project application for Safeway at Del Norte necessitated that the Draft Specific Plan traffic study and MND be revised to include new Safeway traffic generation factors
- ▶ Consultant submitted revised administrative Draft Specific Plan for staff review in September 2010
 - Analysis and responses to over 400 comments
- ▶ City of Richmond still in development of General Plan Update
 - Approval of the General Plan/Specific Plan in Richmond not likely until late summer or fall at earliest
- ▶ Project Budget: \$600,000
 - Sources: \$295,000 EC RDA, \$125,000 Richmond, \$180,000 WCCTAC
 - Balance: MIG - \$17,190, Project Contingency - \$18,872

Impacts on Draft Specific Plan

During staff review of Draft Specific Plan, issues were identified that have impacted the Plan over time:

- Length of time passed since Specific Plan was scoped in 2006 has resulted in dated assumptions
 - Dramatic economic changes have occurred, including collapse of housing market and lack of development capital
- Majority of City Council has changed since Specific Plan process began
- Parking and transit policies have progressed

Impacts on Draft Specific Plan (cont.)

- Draft Specific Plan in its current state may not provide sufficient detail regarding land use standards to immediately influence development in the current economic environment, particularly at BART stations
- Draft Specific Plan may not fully reflect current state of the art practices, state law, or Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) standards of development
- City of Richmond's General Plan Update not complete
- City Council approved Phase I of TOD Strategy for Del Norte (February 2010)
- As time has passed, an El Cerrito General Plan Update is more timely

Ideas for Dealing with Impacts on Draft Specific Plan



- ▶ Parking – Specific Plan could more clearly identify overall parking strategy and policies, including but not limited to:
 - “Park Once” strategy
 - Unbundling parking requirements from development
 - Shared parking across parcels
 - Flexible/Demand-based pricing
 - In-lieu fees vs. reduced parking requirements
 - Implementation of Parking Benefit Districts
- ▶ Economics - Feasibility analysis should be updated to reflect dramatic economic changes by using current assumptions, adding rental and retail components, and further analyzing specific sites

Ideas for Dealing with Impacts on Draft Specific Plan (cont.)



- ▶ Distinguish between the character of the two BART Station development nodes
 - Add “subareas” within Specific Plan Areas (SPA) at the Plaza and Del Norte stations to provide a more specific level of appropriate parking, density and height regulations
 - Some adjustment of SPA boundaries could more closely match block and development patterns
- ▶ Adjust Development Priorities for parcels adjacent to BART subareas to allow for market-driven flexibility
- ▶ Update components of Draft Specific Plan that are out of date and to reflect current City Council priorities

Specific Plan Related to the General Plan



- ▶ Specific Plan is a tool for systematic implementation of the General Plan and must be consistent with adopted General Plan (Govt. Code)
- ▶ General Plans should be reviewed every ten years to ensure they are not out of date
- ▶ When a Specific Plan is adopted, amendments to the General Plan may be necessary to ensure conformity
- ▶ Amendments to the General Plan could lead to inconsistencies or defects; to avoid this the state recommends considering a General Plan Update to address these issues

Specific Plan Related to the General Plan (cont.)



- ▶ Staff is currently beginning to prepare for a **General Plan Update for El Cerrito (General Plan adopted in 1999)**
 - Scope of work must be defined
 - Funding must be identified
- ▶ **Draft Specific Plan will necessitate a General Plan amendment**
 - Changes will depend on final scope of Specific Plan (i.e., amount of density & height, planning areas identified, changes to maps)
 - Must conform to General Plan
 - Goal: Minimize duplicating efforts for General Plan Update

Specific Plan Options for Completion



Option I: Specific Plan “Clean-Up”

- ▶ Revise Draft Specific Plan to deal with open issues and comments received
- ▶ Expand parking study
- ▶ Expand and update economic analysis
- ▶ Add subareas for location-appropriate density, height, and land use in El Cerrito to reflect priorities of City Council and consistency with current urban/transit land use standards

Option 1: Pros, Cons, & Cost Impact

Pros:

- ▶ Consistent land use & design standards with Richmond
- ▶ Ready within ~6 months depending on consultant(s) availability
- ▶ Updates land use, design guidelines, density and height (with greater focus on subareas around BART stations)
- ▶ Requires less parking in subareas
- ▶ Reflects substantial public, Council, PC, DRB and SPAAC input
- ▶ More up to date parking policies and economic analysis
- ▶ Minimizes needed General Plan amendments
- ▶ Improves flexibility for developers
- ▶ Little to no additional analysis needed for environmental reports

Cons:

- ▶ May not go as far with land use, density, height, and neighborhood character as current City Council desires
- ▶ May need to be revised/updated with next General Plan Update

Cost Impact:

- ▶ ~\$50,000
 - ▶ Funds available from Redevelopment Agency Program Budget

Specific Plan Options for Completion



Option 2: Separate and Adopt Design Guidelines Only

- ▶ Separate out the Design Guidelines as its own document that can be adopted by both cities
- ▶ Do not change density, height, or land use at this time, in order to be addressed instead in a future General Plan Update
- ▶ Could consider parking strategy and economic analysis separately or as part of General Plan Update

Option 2: Pros, Cons, & Cost Impact



Pros

- ▶ Consistent design standards with Richmond
- ▶ Will enable design guidelines to steer the design and aesthetics of future development immediately
- ▶ Allows for concurrent preparation of General and Specific Plans

Cons

- ▶ Substantial delay for higher density, height & revised parking requirements (~2-3 years or more)
- ▶ New development in meantime misses out on SP land use, parking, density, height standards
- ▶ Development processed on case by case basis requiring multiple GP and ZO updates

Cost Impact

- ▶ General Plan Update:
 - ▶ ~\$500,000-\$700,000
 - ▶ Currently Unfunded

Specific Plan Options for Completion



Option 3: Stop Specific Plan Process

- ▶ Do not adopt any Specific Plan provisions
- ▶ Roll all issues into a future General Plan Update

Option 3: Pros, Cons & Cost Impact

Pros

- ▶ No additional time or cost expended on Specific Plan
- ▶ General Plan Update would use all information contained in Draft Specific Plan as a baseline
- ▶ New standards would be developed with most up-to-date information, data, and public input

Cost Impact

- ▶ General Plan Update:
 - ▶ ~\$500,000 - \$700,000
 - ▶ Currently Unfunded

Cons

- ▶ No consistent standards with Richmond
- ▶ No shared design guidelines to guide development
- ▶ No updated land use, parking, design, density or height for ~2-3 years
- ▶ New development in meantime misses out on new SP land use, parking, density, height standards
- ▶ Development processed on case by case basis requiring multiple GP and ZO updates

Specific Plan Direction from City Council



- ▶ City Council Discussion of Options
 - Priorities
 - Content
 - Timing
 - Cost
 - Questions, Comments, Alternatives
- ▶ Staff preference is Option I
- ▶ Provide Staff with Direction
- ▶ Potential Next Steps