

**MINUTES OF GENERAL PLAN WORKSHOP #17
THE TORRANCE PLANNING COMMISSION**

1. CALL TO ORDER

The Torrance Planning Commission convened in a regular session at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, July 9, 2008 in the Council Chambers at Torrance City Hall.

2. SALUTE TO THE FLAG

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Commissioner Busch.

3. ROLL CALL

Present: Commissioners Busch, Gibson, Horwich, Skoll, Weideman and Chairperson Browning.

Absent: Commissioner Uchima (excused).

Also Present: Deputy Community Development Director Cessna, Planning Manager Lodan, Sr. Planning Associate Chun, Planning Associate Richardson, Planning Associate Cutting, Planning Associate Kevin Joe and Transportation Planning Manager Semaan.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES - General Plan Workshops #15 & #16

MOTION: Commissioner Weideman moved for the approval of the minutes from General Plan Workshop #15, January 30, 2008, as submitted. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Horwich and passed by unanimous roll call vote, with Commissioner Skoll abstaining.

MOTION: Commissioner Busch moved for the approval of the minutes from General Plan Workshop #16, April 23, 2008, as submitted. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Horwich and passed by unanimous roll call vote, with Commissioner Weideman abstaining.

5. INTRODUCTION OF DRAFT LAND USE ELEMENT

Deputy Community Development Director Cessna provided an overview of the Draft Land Use Element, noting that the Land Use Element provides the framework for the Housing Element. She advised that in order to have the Housing Element certified by the State, the City must show that there are housing opportunities for all income levels. She reviewed the City's Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA), explaining that the City is charged with providing 1828 new residential units, including 760 for very low/low income and 312 for moderate income. She reported that the City typically does not have a problem meeting the overall number, but has never been able to meet the low and moderate income housing allocation, however, land that is zoned for a density of 31 units per acre or more is automatically assumed by the State to meet the requirement for low income housing. She discussed the benefits of having a Certified Housing Element and stressed the need to plan for population growth in order to maintain a high quality of life.

Planning Associate Joe reported that the Land Use Element includes two new General Plan designations – Residential Office and Hospital Medical. He explained that Residential Office permits administrative and professional offices, neighborhood-serving commercial/retail uses, and residential development up to 31 dwelling units per acre, as well as mixed-use commercial/residential developments. He advised that the maximum floor area ratio (FAR) for solely commercial or residential projects will be 0.60 and the maximum FAR for mixed-use projects will be 1.0. He noted that this designation will serve as a transitional zone for properties along major arterial or collector streets such as Crenshaw and Arlington and provide a buffer for single-family residences from higher impact uses. He advised that Residential Professional and Limited Professional Office will be the implementing zones for this designation and that the Local Commercial designation throughout the City will be incorporated into either the Residential Office or General Commercial designations in order to allow for greater flexibility.

Planning Associate Richardson explained that the new Hospital Medical designation was devised to provide for the orderly development of hospitals and other medical facilities, noting that both Little Company of Mary and Torrance Memorial will be expanding their campuses in the near future to better deal with the City's aging population and to address State seismic requirements. She advised that the designation will be implemented by the Hospital Medical Dental (HMD) zone and is appropriate for hospital campuses, medical offices and other support facilities that are located within their spheres of influence. She reported that properties adjacent to the two existing hospital campuses, or in close proximity, are considered to fall within their sphere of influence, however, since it is not known which parcels will eventually recycle to medical-related uses, properties in these areas that are not currently developed with medical uses will retain their current General Plan designations. She noted that any new medical-related developments would be subject to the Planning review process.

Planning Manager Lodan reviewed the seven focus areas that were identified through the workshop process as being underutilized, blighted or in transition: Redondo Beach Boulevard Corridor; Western Avenue-North; Border Avenue; Western Avenue-South; Crenshaw/Amsler; Jefferson/Oak; and the east Victor Precinct.

Sr. Planning Associate Chun reported that with the assistance of the Coalition of Homeowners Associations, Torrance was divided into five residential neighborhood districts – West Torrance, North Torrance, East Torrance, Southeast Torrance and Hillside. She explained that focus groups were held with representatives from homeowner associations in each of the five areas; that participants were asked about what they liked best and least about their neighborhood and their vision for the future; and that this information was used to formulate the discussion of Torrance's residential environment included in the Land Use Element (pages 34-38).

Deputy Community Development Director Cessna reported on the progress of the Strategic Plan update, noting that a draft will be forwarded to the City Council in August.

6. DISCUSSION OF THE DRAFT LAND USE ELEMENT

Chairperson Browning invited comments from Commissioners.

Commissioner Skoll noted that the Housing Element is not mentioned in the discussion of the Land Use Element's relationship to other General Plan Elements (page 3) and suggested that an explanation of its relevance be included. He clarified that the RHNA goal of 1828 new housing units is for the time period from January 1, 2006 to June 30, 2014.

In response to Commissioner Skoll's inquiry, Planning Manager Lodan provided clarification regarding proposed changes to General Plan designations for the focus area Crenshaw/Amsler and confirmed that the recently approved health spa was consistent with the proposed designations.

In response to Commissioner Skoll's inquiry, Planning Manager Lodan provided an update on the status of the citywide Environmental Impact Report.

Commissioner Busch asked about the vacancy factor of apartments in Torrance and the most recent new construction.

Planning Associate Richardson reported that the vacancy factor is under 3%; that the last significant apartment project was a senior complex built on the former Columbia School site in the mid 1990s; and that the last apartments built for the general population was 1972.

Commissioner Busch pointed out that the document mentions that American Honda's North American headquarters is located in Torrance, but neglects to mention that Toyota's North American headquarters is also located in Torrance.

Commissioner Busch commented on the increased demand on Torrance hospitals due to the closure of hospitals in Los Angeles. He acknowledged that the expansion of hospital campuses was inevitable for a variety of reasons, but stressed the need to carefully consider new medical facilities due to the potential impact on traffic.

Commissioner Weideman noted that he was not on the Planning Commission when the General Plan update process began but has reviewed the minutes from prior meetings and it was his impression that the overall message from both the public and Planning Commissioners was that they did not want an increase in density or floor area ratios. He pointed out that the Local Commercial designation, which allowed a maximum FAR of up to 0.40, was being incorporated into the General Commercial and new Residential Office designations, both of which allow a FAR of 0.60 for commercial projects and up to 1.0 for mixed-used projects. He also noted that the Medium Density Residential designation has been increased from a maximum of 28 units per acre to 31 units and expressed concerns about these increases. He also expressed concerns that the City has not established criteria for mixed-use developments, therefore, they will have to be considered on a case-by-case basis, which is contrary to the purpose of the General Plan, which is to create a coherent overall plan for the City.

Commissioner Weideman commented on the possibility that since the new Hospital Medical designation specifies that properties adjacent to hospitals or in close proximity are within their "sphere of influence," this could lead to the taking of these properties by eminent domain.

In response to Commissioner Busch's inquiry, Planning Manager Lodan briefly explained the rezoning process.

The Commission recessed from 8:15 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Commissioner Horwich commented on continued attempts by the State to dictate to cities concerning the building of new housing and commended staff for establishing new standards that thwarted the State's attempt to eliminate R-1 zoning by requiring that cities allow second units to be built on R-1 properties.

Deputy Community Development Director Cessna clarified that identifying areas near hospitals as being within their "sphere of influence" was meant to provide flexibility by designating these areas as having the potential for future land use designation and zoning changes to accommodate medical uses. She noted that all developments would be subject to the Planning review process and that there was no intention to take properties by eminent domain.

7. COMMUNITY INPUT

Chairperson Browning invited public input.

Dee Hardison, 236th Street, asked for information regarding the number of units built since July 1, 2006 that count toward the City's RHNA number. She related her understanding that focus areas designated for higher density residential uses will have to be rezoned to conform to the new designations in order to satisfy State requirements. She pointed out what appears to be a discrepancy in the number of housing units projected to be added over the life of the General Plan, noting that one section mentions that 3,200 units will be added, however, the graph on page 33 shows that the City had 57,051 units in 2006 and Table LU-2 on page 15 estimates that there will be a total of 57,668 units by the end of the General Plan. She suggested that the name of the neighborhood district "Southeast Torrance" be changed to "South Torrance" because it also encompasses southwest Torrance.

Ms. Hardison recommended that the section on the focus area Jefferson/Oak (page 29) be updated to reflect new residential development, as well as projects that have been approved but not yet completed. She recalled that there was an overwhelming consensus at a meeting approximately 3½ years ago that properties along Crenshaw Boulevard and Carson Street should remain commercial in this focus area.

Referring to 8.2.5 Site Design (page 64), Ms. Hardison recommended that an emphasis be placed on maintaining appropriate setbacks. With regard to the Residential Office designation, she reported that this concept has worked well along Arlington where professionals have located small offices that fit in with the residential neighborhood, but expressed concerns that this new designation was more intensive and about the lack of clearly defined guidelines.

Judy Weber, Border Avenue, voiced objections to labeling the residential district which includes downtown Torrance as "East Torrance" because of negative connotations. She suggested calling it "Central Torrance" or moving the boundaries to conform to the original boundaries of Torrance and calling the district "Downtown Torrance" or "Old Torrance." She expressed concerns about changing the Local

Commercial designation to Residential Office due to the potential loss of business space and opportunities for employment.

Gail Morgan, Madrid Street, requested information concerning the income levels for “low income” and “moderate income,” as categorized by RHNA. Referring to Table LU-4, Top 10 Employers in Torrance, she recommended adding a notation that these are private sector employers because the largest employer in Torrance is the Torrance Unified School District.

Kay White, Via los Miradores, noted that she strongly endorses Objective LU.5, particularly Policy LU5.1, which requires that new residential development be visually and functionally consistent in scale, mass and character with structures in the surrounding neighborhood.

Pamela Maran, Via del Valle, suggested that there be a maximum FAR of 0.50 for residential development citywide to curb “mansionization” and allow for more landscaping.

Lola Unger, Bluff Street, requested that staff reconsider allowing an FAR of up to 1.0 for mixed use projects in the General Commercial designation. Referring to Table LU-2, she suggested that columns be inserted listing the current number of dwelling units and the current population.

John Mirassou, Susana Avenue, reported that legislation was passed but subsequently vetoed by Governor Schwarzenegger that would have closed the loophole which allowed Torrance to establish standards restricting the building of second units on R-1 properties. He noted the availability of State funds for low and moderate-income housing and suggested that people should not fear this type of housing. He stressed the importance of having a certified Housing Element because under certain circumstances, developers are allowed to exceed building standards if one is not in place.

Mary Ann Reis, Engracia Avenue, expressed concerns about the displacement of businesses in the Jefferson/Oak area and called for the installation of crosswalks due to the many new residential units in this area.

Robert Thompson, president of Madrona Homeowners Association, related his understanding that at least one of the businesses included in the list, Top 10 Employers in Torrance, no longer exists. He noted that Madrona Homeowners Association declined to participate in focus groups because they felt public input at previous workshops had been disregarded.

Kamaren Hanson, Andreo Avenue, expressed concerns about the impact of added residential units on traffic congestion and stressed the need to retain commercial/industrial properties so Torrance remains a balanced city. She suggested that grant money be spent to revitalize the downtown area.

Robert Feldman, Cathann Street, called for the preservation of the limited open space that remains in Torrance, particularly with regard to school campuses. He suggested that Torrance be cautious about adding more hospital facilities to compensate for closed facilities in Los Angeles.

Charles Deemer, Talisman Street, suggested that the City could have been divided into seven residential districts with roughly the same population using school boundaries. He questioned whether the R-1, R-2, and R-3 designations were being replaced by the residential designations listed in Table LU-1. He recommended that the maximum FAR for new mixed-use projects not exceed the FAR of existing mixed-use projects. He related his understanding that Torrance encompasses approximately 13,000 acres, however, Table LU-2 lists a total of 10,506, and asked about this discrepancy. He related his belief that the City has two commercial centers, Del Amo Fashion Center and the corridor along Crenshaw between Lomita Boulevard and Pacific Coast Highway, and that both should be given consideration for future retail projects. He suggested that the Crenshaw/Amsler focus area be reserved for the future expansion of Robinson Helicopter. He stressed the need to address the deficiency of parking in the downtown area.

Sharon Imel, Border Avenue, expressed concerns about the impact of replacing commercial/industrial properties with high density residential developments. She called for the preservation of historic downtown Torrance.

Bonnie Mae Barnard, Gramercy Avenue, related her belief that the City needs to come up with a long-range vision for development rather than the hodge-podge that has been taking place and expressed concerns that Torrance was losing its balance of residential and industrial/commercial properties. She objected to allowing an FAR of 1.0 for mixed-use projects due to the lack of open space. She stated that mixed-use developments are meant to be built around a nucleus of businesses that provide goods and services for nearby residents and locating mixed-use projects along busy streets does not meet this goal.

Janet Payne, Engracia Avenue, requested that Old Torrance be listed as a separate residential district like the Hillside District due to its unique characteristics.

Tom Rische, Carlow Road, called for a strong vision for the future rather than considering projects on a piecemeal basis; expressed concerns about the loss of Torrance's uniqueness; and urged the enhancement of the Old Torrance area.

Don Clouch, 238th Street, recommended that there be more stringent requirements for off-street parking in new residential developments. He expressed an interest in knowing what the City would be losing if it does not have a certified Housing Element.

Don Barnard, Gramercy Avenue, commented on the growing popularity of walkable communities. He urged limiting the FAR to 0.50 for all residential developments in Old Torrance and designating it as a separate residential district.

Don Khan, Redondo Beach Boulevard, expressed concerns that he is unable to expand his small 1100 square-foot home because of the property's zoning.

Planning Manager Lodan explained that certain properties along Redondo Beach Boulevard are zoned Restricted Commercial, which only allows commercial uses, therefore existing non-conforming residences cannot be altered. He noted that Redondo Beach Boulevard was included as one of the focus areas in an effort to allow more flexibility for residents like Mr. Khan.

Chairperson Browning thanked the public for their input, and Planning Manager Lodan invited anyone with additional comments to submit them in writing.

8. SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

Transportation Planning Manager Semaan reported that the next component to be reviewed by the Commission will be the Housing Element, tentatively scheduled for August, after which scoping for the Environmental Impact Report will begin. He estimated that it would take approximately 6 months for the draft EIR to be completed.

Commissioner Busch stressed the need to closely monitor the process should there be any school closures in the future to protect the City's interests. He expressed the hope that the new General Plan will be adhered to once it has been adopted.

Commissioner Skoll voiced his opinion that historic Old Torrance should be designated as a separate Residential District. He indicated that he strongly supports mixed-use developments, as a matter of convenience and because they save fuel, and believes it is something the City should encourage. He requested that staff inform the Commission of any changes that are made to the Land Use Element as a result of this workshop.

Commissioner Weideman reiterated his concerns about the lack of a clear definition or criteria for mixed-use developments and about replacing the Local Commercial designation, which has a maximum FAR of 0.4, with designations that allow an FAR of up to 1.0.

Commissioner Horwich commended staff for a well prepared document and thanked the audience for their comments, noting that he took extensive notes and would review them along with the document and forward any suggestions he had to staff.

Commissioner Gibson also commended staff and echoed Commissioner Skoll's request for information about any changes to the Land Use Element as a result of this meeting.

9. ADJOURNMENT

At 10:13 p.m., the meeting was adjourned to Wednesday, July 16, 2008 at 7:00 p.m.

Approved as Amended August 27, 2008 s/ Sue Herbers, City Clerk
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