

**MINUTES OF GENERAL PLAN WORKSHOP #18
THE TORRANCE PLANNING COMMISSION**

1. CALL TO ORDER

The Torrance Planning Commission convened in a General Plan Workshop at 6:02 p.m. on Wednesday, August 27, 2008 in the Council Chambers at Torrance City Hall.

2. SALUTE TO THE FLAG

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Commissioner Gibson.

3. ROLL CALL

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

Absent: None.

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 Workshop #17

Commissioner Weideman offered a correction to the General Plan Workshop #17 minutes.

MOTION: Commissioner Weideman moved for the approval of the minutes from General Plan Workshop #17, July 9, 2008, as corrected. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Gibson and passed by unanimous roll call vote.

5. INTRODUCTION OF DRAFT HOUSING ELEMENT

Planning Manager Lodan introduced staff members present at the meeting.

Deputy Community Development Director Cessna provided an overview of the updated Strategic Plan recently approved by the City Council. She explained that a new strategic priority was added entitled, "Stewardship of the Environment," which focuses on environmental issues, including "green building" and energy conservation. She reported that during discussions of the Economic Development priority, business owners expressed concerns about the lack of "Class A" office space that meets the needs of modern business operations, as well as the lack of workforce rental housing, and it was suggested that older non-functional office space be recycled into small mixed-use developments that combine retail uses and rental housing. She noted that a phone survey conducted to gather data for the Strategic Plan update revealed that the vast majority of residents believe that Torrance is a good place to live and will continue to be so in the future.

Planning Associate Cutting advised that the Housing Element is one of seven mandated elements in the General Plan; that it is subject to detailed statutory requirements and must be updated every five years; and that State law requires that local governments plan for existing and projected housing needs via the Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) process. She reported that Torrance's RHNA allocation is 1828 units for the time period January 1, 2006 to June 30, 2014, with 40% of the goal already satisfied, including all of the allocation for "above moderate" income housing. She explained that Torrance has not had a problem meeting the total RHNA number, but has not met the quota for low income housing, which may affect the City's ability to get the Housing Element approved by the State, therefore, staff has looked at suitable properties that could be re-designated in the General Plan to accommodate a density of 31 units per acre because land with this density is assumed by the State to be suitable for low-income housing.

Planning Associate Joe reported on the City's jobs/housing balance, noting that of the approximately 97,000 jobs in Torrance only 13% employ City residents and only 21% of residents who are employed hold jobs located in Torrance. He discussed the need to provide a variety of housing options, explaining that an insufficient supply of workforce housing makes it difficult for local companies to attract quality employees and remain competitive in today's economy. He noted that providing housing for the elderly and disabled is particularly challenging because they typically live on a fixed income and often have the added expense of caregivers.

Planning Associate Richardson explained that failure to have a certified Housing Element could have serious consequences for the City, including the loss of grant funding and State funding for housing and transportation; vulnerability to lawsuits filed by housing advocacy groups; and the loss of local control over development. Additionally, she noted that when there is a lack of adequate housing, there tends to be an increase in illegal or bootlegged units, overcrowding and substandard housing.

6. DISCUSSION OF THE HOUSING ELEMENT

Chairperson Browning invited comments from the Commission.

Commissioner Skoll asked about the City's position on SB375, which links regional planning for housing and transportation with California's greenhouse gas initiative that calls for greenhouse gases to be reduced to the 1990 level by 2020.

Planning Associate Cutting advised that the City has opposed the bill in the past along with the League of California Cities, however, the League recently changed its position and now supports the bill.

Deputy Community Development Director Cessna reported that Torrance is already working on this issue as part of the Cool Cities Program and in conjunction with the regional effort by the South Bay Cities Council of Governments.

Commissioner Weideman stated that he understood the focus on having the Housing Element certified, but expressed concerns that the City has not been able to accomplish the goal of providing affordable housing. He noted that the City has not required that a certain percentage of low income units be incorporated in new developments and that federal funding for the Section 8 Rental Assistance Program

continues on a downward trend. He stated that he was not certain whether citizens have the political will to do something about this issue, but he personally believes there needs to be more follow through in this process.

Commissioner Gibson questioned whether Torrance has faced any consequences for not meeting RHNA goals for low income housing.

Planning Associate Richardson reported that the City has had a certified Housing Element and therefore has not been subject to lawsuits that have been filed against other cities that do not have one.

7. COMMUNITY INPUT

Chairperson Browning invited public input.

John Mirassou, Susana Avenue, noted that he is involved in real estate development and is familiar with State legislation on this issue. He reported that Lieutenant Governor Jerry Brown has threatened to sue cities that do not build "green," which means compact, high density projects. He commented on the positive aspects of high density projects, noting that such projects have revitalized Carlsbad, Brea, San Diego and Baltimore. He suggested that the Del Amo mall area would be an ideal place for this type of development as residents could walk to movie theaters, restaurants and shopping.

Commissioner Busch reported that Carlsbad has a massive ten-year project in the works, which includes commercial and residential components, and requires that 15% of a development be designated for low income housing. He noted, however, that Carlsbad has a lot of open land as opposed to Torrance, which is essentially built out.

Irene Griffith, 229th Street, stated that there is a simple approach to affordable housing called "home sharing" whereby unrelated people enter into an agreement to share a home. She explained that such agreements often involve seniors who can no longer live in their homes without assistance and college students, interns or recently divorced people with limited incomes; that participants are matched for compatibility; and that the agreement clearly outlines the responsibilities of each party. She suggested that it would greatly help with housing needs if an enthusiastic volunteer or part-time employee could introduce the program to Torrance.

Commissioner Weideman, echoed by Commissioner Gibson, voiced support for the idea of home sharing.

In response to Commissioner Weideman's inquiry, Planning Associate Joe advised that home sharing could be credited toward Torrance's RHNA allocation for affordable housing if it can be demonstrated that it preserves existing affordable housing.

Lola Unger, Bluff Street, called for the Housing Element to be more compatible with the Strategic Plan. She explained that the Housing Element mentions promoting green building, however, she would like green building to be required and that she felt parking requirements and open space requirements were inadequate for multi-family

developments. She related her belief that the lack of low income housing needs to be addressed and that there should be a transportation center adjacent to housing.

Don Clouch, 238th Street, expressed concerns that there are no regulations that require people to use their garages for the parking of vehicles and that the recently passed Recreation Vehicle Ordinance has only moved RVs off the street into front yards.

Gail Morgan, Madrid Street, urged more stringent parking standards, noting that there are a lot of illegal conversions in downtown Torrance, which add to parking problems. She called for a clearer definition of the term "open space," questioning whether it is green space, concrete patios, or a combination of both. She stated that she was not surprised that so many people who work in Torrance do not live here due to the high cost of housing. She noted that Torrance has always enjoyed a high quality of life, which some residents feel could be threatened with the addition of low income housing.

Caroline Elam, Toluca Avenue, reported that she volunteers with Focal Point, an information/referral service for seniors and the disabled, and information about housing is always among the top requests each month. She related her belief that it would be very beneficial if the City would create a staff position to administer a home sharing program for seniors as mentioned by Ms. Griffith.

Janet Payne, Engracia Avenue, suggested that the item on Population Growth (page H-6) include a notation that Torrance was founded in 1912, not just that it was incorporated in 1921. She questioned the absence of a listing for Lomita in Table H-1, Population Growth: Torrance and Surrounding Cities (page H-7). Referring to page H-30, Assisted Housing, she stated that she was not aware that the City received any funding from HUD for housing. Referring to Zoning Districts (page 43-44), she expressed concerns that R-3 zoning has been misconstrued. She requested clarification of the two sites in the Downtown Redevelopment Project Area identified as Underutilized Residential Land on Table H-42 (page 69).

Planning Associate Richardson clarified that funding for the Section 8 program is provided by HUD. Planning staff offered to meet with Ms. Payne to provide clarification on the other issues she discussed.

Kamaren Henson, Andreo Avenue, received clarification of the type of housing being targeted for the Downtown Redevelopment Project Area, Table H-42. She stressed the need to address traffic issues should higher density housing be built on Crenshaw, between Moreton and Amsler Streets. She voiced support for doing more to promote "green building."

Sharon Imel, Border Avenue, urged that commercial/industrial properties along the City's main corridors remain designated for this use rather than converting them for residential use. She expressed concerns that overly strict regulations were preventing residents from splitting their lots to add a second unit, which could help satisfy the need for more housing in keeping with green building guidelines that call for more compact housing.

Charles M. Deemer, Talisman Street, suggested that Tables H-3 and H-4 concerning population, age distribution and ethnicity, would be more indicative of shifts in demographics if a listing for 1970 was added because that was the last decade

Torrance experienced a major population boom. He requested clarification of income categories and household income distribution. He noted that most Torrance residents with low incomes are retirees who also have very low expenses because their homes are paid for and their medical expenses are covered by Medicare, which is quite different from a younger person who makes only \$15,000-20,000 annually with much higher living expenses.

The Commission recessed from 7:30 p.m. to 7:40 p.m.

Don Barnard, Gramercy Avenue, expressed concerns that that the Small Lot, Low-Medium Overlay Zone was being eliminated and that the Housing Element makes no mention of historic preservation.

Planning Manager Lodan explained that the Small Lot, Low-Medium Overlay Zone was not included in the 2008-2014 Housing Element because it has already been implemented and confirmed that it will remain in place.

Deputy Community Development Director Cessna clarified that the issue of Historic Preservation is addressed in the Community Resources Element of the General Plan.

Mary Ann Reis, Engracia Avenue, voiced objections to high density housing in Torrance; urged that areas zoned for business and areas zoned for housing remain unchanged; and expressed concerns about the impact of new curb cuts on pedestrian safety.

Kay White, Via Los Miradores, stated that she would like to see the City require "green building" rather than simply promoting it. She expressed concerns about the lack of adequate funding for the Section 8 Housing Assistance Program.

Planning Associate Richardson explained that there are approximately 600 units enrolled in the Section 8 program in Torrance; that the City administers the program but has no control over the funding; and that HUD has maintained the program but has not expanded it since the late 1990s. She clarified that while there are 3000 people on the waiting list, only about 400 of them are Torrance residents and they have priority.

Jack Mitchell, Redbeam Avenue, expressed concerns about the housing density in Torrance and the impact on traffic and questioned whether upscale communities like Palos Verdes and Newport Beach are subject to the same RHNA requirements that Torrance is.

Deputy Community Development Director Cessna confirmed that all cities are subject to the same requirements.

Newt Young, Hickory Avenue, encouraged everyone who opposes the State's meddling in local housing issues to contact legislators in Sacramento and make their views known. He expressed concerns that the addition of low income housing units would cause crime rates to climb and the quality of life to deteriorate. He commented on the failed attempt by HUD to force the City to build low-income housing in 1980. He suggested that Torrance form a coalition with other cities that are unhappy with the State's attempts to force the building of this type of housing. He related his belief that

the State's threats to take away funding amounted to extortion and urged the City not to bow to these threats.

Don Gahng, Redondo Beach Boulevard, noted his agreement with Mr. Young's remarks concerning the connection between low-income housing and increased crime. He expressed concerns about parking problems in the vicinity of El Camino College.

Chairperson Browning thanked audience members for their input.

8. SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

Commissioner Busch requested that staff provide the following information: 1) The specific location of the small strip of land within Torrance designated as MRZ-2, which indicates the presence of mineral deposits (page H-63); 2) Information about the H.O.P.E. (Home Ownership for Personal Empowerment) program (page H-89); and 3) The specific location of the vacant commercial property mentioned under "Vacant Land" (page H-66) as having the potential for the development of 30 residential units.

Planning Manager Lodan indicated that staff would provide the requested information at a later date.

Commissioner Gibson expressed concerns that property taxes greatly add to the cost of owning a home and affect affordability. Planning Manager Lodan stated that he was not aware of anything that would reduce the property tax burden for someone who buys a home in Torrance.

Referring to the objective listed under "Summary of Quantified Objectives" (page H-96), "Facilitate construction of 468 units for very low-income households, 292 units for low-income households, and 303 units for moderate-income households," Commissioner Horwich suggested that changing the word "facilitate" to "subsidize" would make this a more realistic goal, but doubted that anything would be accomplished as long as there are no penalties for not meeting this RHNA quota.

Chairperson Browning stated that while he may or may not agree with everything in the document, he believed staff had done an excellent job of putting it together and commended them for their efforts.

Planning Manager Lodan reviewed the next steps in the General Plan process. He explained that scoping for the Environmental Impact Report will soon begin and after it has been prepared, drafts of the EIR and the General Plan will be returned to the Planning Commission for review before being forwarded to the City Council. He thanked the Commission and the public for their input throughout the process.

Commissioner Weideman requested that changes be highlighted when the final draft of the General Plan is brought back to the Commission. Planning Manager Lodan stated that he wasn't sure how changes have been tracked by the consultants, but would do whatever possible to highlight the changes. Commissioner Weideman suggested that a page summarizing the changes would be helpful.

Commissioner Busch questioned how consultants were apprised of what has occurred at various General Plan Workshops. Planning Manager Lodan reported that consultants are debriefed after each workshop and receive audiotapes, minutes and written material generated by the workshops. He noted that City staff was utilized during workshops due to limited resources, but the consultants will be present for the final hearings before the Planning Commission.

Commissioner Skoll voiced his opinion that the City needs to take advantage of State funding for housing even though strings may be attached. He related his belief that since the City has been mandated to provide low-income housing, developers should be required to include low-income units in any new projects. He stressed the need to improve the infrastructure to support growth, with funding to come from both developers and the City. He voiced his opinion that the City should discourage condo conversions and demolitions and preserve rent-controlled and low-income apartments. He reported that rents at the Knolls Lodge and Knolls Manor mobile home parks have increased every year for the past 12 years and are slated to be increased again and called on the Mayor and the City Council so do something about this once and for all, not only for mobile home park residents but for all low income renters.

Planning Manager Lodan noted that the City recently implemented a new rental assistance program for residents of mobile home parks.

Commissioner Busch stated that while each Commissioner has a right to give his opinion, he did not think this was an appropriate forum for political agendas. He further stated that he would be very reluctant to take State funding if any strings are attached and believes the City has been moving in the right direction and should continue on the same course.

Chairperson Browning noted that the nameplates for City staff were most helpful and suggested that the same be used for Planning Commission meetings. He reiterated his thanks to staff and the public.

9. ADJOURNMENT

At 8:28 p.m., the meeting was adjourned to Wednesday, September 3, 2008, at 7:00 p.m.

Approved as Submitted February 4, 2009 s/ Sue Herbers, City Clerk
