

March 8, 2006

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE TORRANCE
GENERAL PLAN PLANNING COMMISSION WORKSHOP #11**

1. CALL TO ORDER

The Torrance General Plan Planning Commission Workshop convened in a regular meeting at 7:05 p.m. on March 8, 2006, in City Council Chambers at City Hall.

2. FLAG SALUTE

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Commissioner Busch.

3. ROLL CALL

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

Absent: Commissioner Drevno.

Also Present: Planning Associate Cutting, Planning Associate Richardson, Planning Associate Lodan, Planning Associate Joe, and Environmental Services Administrator Cessna.

Planning Associate Joe reported that Commissioner Drevno had requested an excused absence from the meeting.

Chairman Uchima provided an overview of policies and procedures for the meeting.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

None.

5. OVERVIEW OF THE GENERAL PLAN UPDATE PROCESS

Planning Associate Cutting explained that the General Plan is the city's vision for where and how it will grow over the life of the Plan which is typically 15 to 20 years. A set of goals, objectives and policies is then written into the Plan to implement that vision. The Plan is used to provide guidance for local government decision-making on future development, so, it's important that it reflect what the Community wants while balancing State law requirements. In California, general plan are required for all cities including Charter cities like Torrance. The Land Use element is usually considered to be the most important element because its policies guide the future development of the city. For example, policy 3.1 states: The City shall require new commercial development to be compatible with adjacent residential development. The General Plan map does not show exactly what is to be built on each parcel like the zoning map does, but, rather, it designates the general distribution and intensity of land use categories throughout the city. For example, neighborhood commercial or low-density residential are two of the 14

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land use categories in our existing general plan. The Zoning Ordinance and map are the primary tools for implementing the General Plan through the use and zoning of individual parcels. With the exception of the Housing Element which was updated in 2001, all other elements were updated in 1992 and will be updated as part of the current update process.

Planning Associate Richardson explained that the Zoning Ordinance implements the goals, policies and objectives identified in the General Plan by creating districts that correspond to various land use categories contained in the land use element. She noted that in some cases more than one zoning district may correspond to the same General Plan category such as the R-2 and Residential Town House (RTH) zones which both implement the medium density residential category with R-2 for parcels with 2 dwelling units and RTH designed for larger parcels, but both zones corresponding to a low medium density designation in terms of units per acre. The Zoning Ordinance establishes development standards and other regulations promoting the policies identified in the plan which can be done with development standards for a specific zone such as the setback and open space regulations contained in the R-1 or it can be designed with standards that apply to uses or standards of uses like the parking regulations for commercial and industrial development which apply throughout the city regardless of the zones.

Planning Associate Richardson indicated that consistency between the General Plan and the Zoning Ordinance is encouraged where possible. She noted that in 1992 city owned sumps were required to manage drainage in the city throughout the 20 year General Plan so all sumps were re-designated quasi open space and changed from R-1 to A-1 (Public Use) in 1993 to implement the program. Compatibility between commercial and residential developments was promoted with the code relating to fence height changed to allow for 8 feet between abutting residences and business for better buffering between the two uses.

Planning Associate Richardson indicated that just because a land use designation changes in the General Plan, that does not mean that a parcel must be rezoned, rather the General Plan is a guide for future development. Zoning governs what can happen in a property but property with a viable use that differs from the General Plan does not change until it recycles and that may not happen within the 20 years covered by the General Plan.

The Hospital Medical Dental (HMD) designation is being considered and if it were to be implemented, the current development standard for HMD would need to be modified. Properties in those areas could be rezoned to HMD if not already zoned that way, and other properties in the area could be rezoned as they recycle. Any properties developed with other uses that did not recycle would retain the current, mostly commercial designations and would not be considered non-conforming uses.

Commissioner Busch questioned whether the city had ever used eminent domain and Environmental Quality Administrator Cessna discussed a recent court decision which supported a city that took private property for economic development purposes and then handed it to a third private party. She indicated that California allows eminent domain only in cases of economic blight and that Torrance had used eminent domain with the 25 acres where Honda now stands as there had been ground contamination issues. Commissioner Busch received clarification that the principle of eminent domain

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is fair legal value for the property and Environmental Quality Administrator Cessna stated that there was an appeals process and one property that was not happy with the process went through the courts for resolution.

Commissioner Busch questioned whether the school district had the power to make use of eminent domain and Environmental Quality Administrator Cessna said she thought any government entity could make use of eminent domain but she was not sure what findings were necessary.

Chairperson Uchima asked for public comment but there was none.

6. DISCUSSION ON HOUSING

Planning Associate Lodan observed that housing is a complicated issue which raises many questions with answers tempered by the larger needs of the region and state while at the same time reflecting the desires of the community.

Environmental Quality Administrator Cessna reported that staff was working to determine housing needs beyond the five years in the housing element to over the next 20 years. She explained that the Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) numbers generated by SCAG help communities determine how much housing they will need in the future and plan for it by providing an overall number that is then broken down into income levels so cities are not taken by surprise.

Environmental Quality Administrator Cessna indicated that the population in the region would grow by an estimated 5-6 million people between 1997 and 2020 and the city needs to determine how to best accommodate the projections. So far Torrance has met the raw number for RHNA housing units although not the income stratifications as all of the new housing as been at the high end and the question of where entry level housing can be put needs to be addressed.

The RHNA numbers generated by SCAG are based on state estimates taking into account forecasted employment and population growth as well as vacancy and unit loss and the numbers are then broken down then into existing need and construction need. Construction need is based on household growth and the percentage of vacant units needed at any time to keep a healthy market rate, and the number of units lost to demolition or conversion to other uses. Mobility and loss rates for the SCAG region over all are included and are then broken down into the county, South Bay and then Torrance itself with each projecting a slightly different number based on overall mobility and loss rates.

Planning Associate Joe asserted that the State takes the need for housing very seriously and he reported that the 1987 Attorney General opinion emphasized that the RHNA numbers must consider projected, not just existing housing needs for all income levels. In addition localities must look beyond existing land uses and zoning classifications to identify areas for potential for growth under alternate land use regulations as well as suitable and available sites. Localities must take things into consideration such as market demand for housing, employment opportunity, availability of sites, commuting patterns, and type and tenure of housing types while attempting to avoid further impacts to areas of high concentration of lower income residents. The

Attorney General stated that the intent of the legislature is to identify adequate sites that could be made available and expand housing opportunities at all levels.

Planning Associate Joe explained that that as planners they have to identify those areas that could best accommodate additional housing and affordable housing in particular, and he suggested that if housing needs are not adjusted there could be a proliferation of garage conversions, substandard housing and overcrowding. By projecting housing locations over the next 20 years as part of the land use update the city can better control destiny and prevent the state from intervening. He added that it is important to plan for public services and infrastructure by identifying areas where potential growth may occur which will facilitate planning of public infrastructure needs, public services and where there may be a potential need for schools and parks.

Planning Associate Joe reported that staff has identified areas in transition and areas that could accommodate housing.

Responding to Commissioner Busch, Environmental Quality Administrator Cessna indicated that the population in Torrance was projected to grow about 2% per year from 1995-2005 but she did not have the actual numbers available.

Commissioner Busch questioned the percentage of property owners and Environmental Quality Administrator Cessna agreed to provide the answer at the next workshop.

Responding to Commissioner Busch, Planning Associate Lodan indicated that the last significant development heard before the Planning Commission was the Fairfield residential development in 2003 and he noted that most rental housing does not go before the Planning Commission if it is in an area already designated for multi-family housing and he added that most projects had been infill projects with nothing very large over the last 20 years.

In response to Commissioner Busch, Planning Associate Richardson indicated that the vacancy rate for rental units in the City is less than 3% and the only significant apartment construction she was aware of was a senior project in the mid-1990s with 195 units.

Commissioner Busch encouraged staff to investigate an interesting article in the Wall Street Journal about housing development in the State of Florida.

Commissioner Horwich asked about the consistency between the different jurisdictions that have input into Torrance housing requirements, which are compulsory, and what the penalties are for non-compliance. Environmental Quality Administrator Cessna explained that the state requirements were the most applicable to the city and SCAG works to fit the requirements to the region. She added that in theory consequences for non-compliance can be severe but in practice there are usually no consequences and she noted that staff needed to present expectations before a decision can be made on how seriously to take everything.

Commissioner Horwich was not sure how feasible it was for the city to meet the affordable housing goal and he noted that some communities required that a certain percentage of new developments provide low cost or subsidized housing.

Environmental Quality Administrator Cessna observed that it was harder and harder to make projects pencil out while addressing low cost housing issues but she pointed out that this is where increased density is considered and the questions of how much density the city can deal with and where it can be put need to be addressed.

Commissioner Horwich questioned the definition of affordable which has to do with a percentage of the average income and he was not sure how the General Plan was impacted by the region. He also expressed concern that the Federal Government's definition of overcrowding is more than 1.01 persons per bedroom which means that a married couple in a one bed room apartment would constitute over crowding.

Environmental Quality Administrator Cessna clarified that the definition was more about how many people per rooms in the house, not per bedroom so any room that could be used for sleeping is counted.

7. COMMUNITY INPUT

John Mirassou, 22301 Susanna Ave., indicated that he works for Anastasi Development and part of his job is to look at housing availability and future growth and where the demand for housing will be. He commented on the length of time it took to complete the controversial Village Court project which is currently selling very quickly illustrating the demand for housing and he pointed out that 55% of the people who work in the South Bay live outside the area, Nissan left the area because of the high cost of housing and Santa Barbara is having difficulties as a result of their no growth stance for the past 30 years.

Mr. Mirassou reported that the state was encouraging development by allowing increased density if the developer builds 20% low to moderate income units and he expressed concern that if the governor had not vetoed it, every R-1 lot could have been turned lot into an R-2 lot by allowing granny units. He provided examples of successful high density such Old Town Pasadena, Brea, Fullerton, downtown San Diego, and Santa Ana where people park their cars and walk and he reported that California was built for 25 million people but there are now 37 people million people with a total of 55 million projected by 2020.

Chairperson Uchima asked Mr. Mirassou to elaborate on the situation in Santa Barbara and Mr. Mirassou explained that as a result of the 30 year no-growth policy, colleges, hospitals and large companies are moving away because they can not recruit young workers because they can not find affordable housing. Traffic has worsened as a result of the no-growth policy with the average commute at 91 minutes each way as people have to move further and further out because they can not afford to live in the area.

Mr. Mirassou reported that senior housing is required to pay school fees and Commissioner Busch questioned whether the term affordable housing was meant for seniors or families because he felt that the general public thinks of affordable housing for families. Mr. Mirassou felt that the city should require builders to put in 20% moderate income housing for police, fire, nurses, and teachers who live in Torrance and Commissioner Busch observed that Chief Bratton was trying to require affordable housing for police and fire personnel in Los Angeles.

Commissioner Busch noted that more housing was being put on less land resulting in houses that are closer together in an attempt to accommodate people who are tired of commuting.

Mr. Mirassou observed that Manhattan Beach has had a no growth plan and their traffic is horrible and Commissioner Busch commented that the absence of an overlay in that area has resulted in construction which blocks views.

Mr. Mirassou asserted that it was more lucrative to build condominiums and he discussed building fees from various cities. He acknowledged that Village Court was not built to be affordable housing for seniors and he noted the huge need for condos for first time homebuyers, singles and empty nesters who don't want to live in a single family home but want to live in an area where they can walk to services. He noted that after 9/11 residents in Hermosa Beach congregated in the downtown area and he felt that density and the right type of commercial and housing mix could create that type of meeting place for Torrance.

Kurt Nelson, JCC Homes, 2632 W. 237th Street, stated that he lives in Orange County but works in Torrance. He felt that the RHNA formula to determine the proper number of vacant units worked and he pointed out that when there is nothing available prices go higher. Mr. Nelson noted that many municipalities adopt ordinances requiring that 10% of projects are affordable housing but that distinction sometimes scares people because they don't know what affordable means. He noted that many people that fall into that classification make desirable neighbors like school teachers, fire, and police and if there is a reasonable formula requiring a certain number of affordable units that still allows the developers to profit on the other units, that can open up the market to those who otherwise could not afford to buy in the community.

Mr. Nelson explained that his company's niche is usually detached product with a yard as it has been difficult to build attached product due to the lack of general liability insurance in recent years although now that insurance is starting becoming available. He stated that the General Plan provided an opportunity to look at data, traffic studies, where traffic patterns are and why they are there and then look at available transition property and the big picture, and provide reasonable housing without further negatively impacting traffic.

Mr. Nelson talked about recent changes in his living situation which led him to move to Irvine because he was able to buy a two bedroom condo in a more affordable range than he could buy in Torrance and he felt that if there were an opportunity for the developers to work with the city, traffic could be improved. Mr. Nelson felt that the worst scenario for Torrance would be loss of local control.

Commissioner Busch asked about the single standing homes on the Magnavox property which are considered condominiums and Mr. Nelson explained changes to statutes in 1992 which redefined the boundaries of condominiums and he discussed different CC&R scenarios noting that these days it is hard not to be part of CC&Rs or a homeowner's association with private streets and common open areas.

Planning Associate Lodan added that Torrance required that newly created lots be 6,000 square feet in area if they are to be considered the same as a single family lot and that is the main driving force in defining single family or town home condominium.

Tom Brewer, 23426 Evelyn Avenue, commented that in the past Torrance had infrastructure to go with development and he asserted that the homeowners coalition was not against development but would like to see planned development. He noted that certain housing developments had been opposed because the coalition did not like to see condominiums built in industrial areas as it puts everything in jeopardy of becoming residential. He cited a Daily Breeze article about factories and manufacturing areas being torn down because housing projects are more valuable and he stated that the coalition wanted the General Plan to spell out where the city is going and how infrastructure is going to handle it as careful consideration is necessary for Torrance to remain a balanced city with jobs kept in the city. Mr. Brewer saw opportunities to redevelop some of the run down areas in the city and he cited a need for more manufacturing rather than housing on each bit of property for sale.

Robert Thompson, President of the Madrona Homeowner's Association, indicated that residents wanted a General Plan that would not be used to rezone Torrance for high density and he reported that 92% of their members were not happy with what elected officials were doing. He observed similar things happening in other areas and noted that a green light initiative had been enacted in Newport Beach whereby any project over 100 units or more than a certain amount of square feet which creates traffic now has to be approved by the voters because elected officials were not responsive.

Commissioner Busch questioned the current demand for commercial and manufacturing because he remembered an M-1 Lot that did not sell and ended up being rezoned to housing. Planning Associate Lodan pointed out that not all areas being considered were slated or recommended for housing and he noted that the character of development is changing with dirty industries and heavy manufacturing leaving the area partly due to environmental regulations and air quality standards. Newer developments that are selling well are smaller spaces of about 10,000-20,000 square feet with flexible areas that can accommodate warehousing, clean manufacturing and office space. He did not have exact numbers available but he noted that generally in Torrance there has been more than enough commercial space to serve the residents' needs because of pass through traffic and large employers like Honda and Toyota which create a large daytime population. Planning Associate Lodan felt that currently there was more demand for owner occupied industrial tenant spaces and medical office space but he pointed out that markets fluctuate so at different times different development is needed.

Chairperson Uchima pointed out a project on Maple and Columbia that was recently approved with small industrial units for sale.

Dee Hardison, 2024 W. 236th Street, asserted that the RHNA process did not work. She reported serving as Chair of SCAG Housing and noted that although Torrance met the numbers for 7 ½ years everything built ended up on the top of the four price categories. Although Ms. Hardison wanted to see affordable housing in Torrance she was not sure if that was possible but she noted that the state was looking at a new process to replace the RHNA process which was in place from 1998-2005. She reported that in 1998 the state decided that the SCAG region had to share 27,000 units

and there were much politics involved with the divvying up of numbers but she noted that in the future cities will be asked to do their share of building housing. She indicated that figures for single family vs. multi family housing were included on page 16-17 in the attachment.

Ms. Hardison observed that the city had not been directing where development should go in the past few years and although there were good projects built, developers were bringing in projects that were accepted and direction was not coming from the city so residential building was happening in some of the good industrial areas that should have been saved. She expressed hope that the General Plan process would be an opportunity to educate the community and she provided a brief history of housing in Torrance including Block Grant Funds and affordable housing.

Ms. Hardison asserted that Torrance is a desirable, safe place to live with good services but senior housing and rentals are desperately needed in the community and she noted that the Council needed to be aware that seniors demand services like transportation and health. She recalled several projects when she was in office where the city bought run down units in the downtown area and refurbished them to provide affordable property for first time buyers and affordable rental housing which is still available for families and seniors. She expressed frustration at being in the minority when she thought she could make a difference with housing in the community and she encouraged others to continue to try.

Chairperson Uchima called for a recess from 8:32 p.m. to 8:45 p.m.

Planning Associate Lodan provided numbers from the census noting that there had been a 3½ % increase in population from 1990 to 2000 and he reported that in 2000, 56% of housing in Torrance was owner occupied; 44% renter occupied, vacancy rates for homeowners were 1% and rental vacancies were 2.4%. Commissioner Busch commented that the numbers clearly emphasized demand.

Charles Deemer, 22025 Talisman, questioned how median income was determined and whether affordable housing was based on figures for the county or for this specific area and Environmental Quality Administrator Cessna believed that figures were based on the larger area but she agreed to check to verify that was true. Planning Associate Lodan clarified that the 56% figure for ownership was for the entire housing stock including condominiums.

Mr. Deemer observed that the perception is that seniors are retired but since seniors are defined as anyone 55 or over many are still in the work force. He added that back when the definition of senior was created programs were predicated on a shorter life expectancy and a faster turn over in senior housing so he felt it important that longer life expectancy be factored into senior housing and Commissioner Gibson pointed out that the city could not change the age designation for seniors.

Tom Rische, 22920 Carlow Road, asked what the vision was for Torrance in the future. He felt the governing bodies were in a bargaining position and that little attempt had been made to get new business and industry into the city and he felt developers had been allowed to have a field day. Mr. Rische emphasized the importance of building a sense of community and he noted that what is billed as senior housing is often not designed for seniors as most of the condominiums are not friendly places to build a

community. He felt that the question of how a better Torrance can be built was more important than meeting demands or rushing into development because someone wants it.

Commissioner Horwich suggested that Mr. Rische look at the Strategic Plan of Torrance which deals with many of the questions he raised more realistically than the General Plan does and he noted that the Strategic Plan was due for a complete reexamination as the most current issue was from 1999. Mr. Rische encouraged the Commission to be as visionary as they could be, knowing the realities of modern life.

In response to an inquiry from Chairperson Uchima, Mr. Rische urged a slower path and a careful consideration of what development does as there are places where the infrastructure is not up to the growth that is occurring. He noted that traffic is increasing and neighboring cities have to be taken into account as Lomita and Rolling Hills contribute to Torrance traffic problems while lessening their own. He added that Lomita Boulevard had undergone some unexpected changes that were not necessarily in the best interests of Torrance.

Mr. Rische felt that each property developed should be carefully examined and he urged careful consideration of a possible senior housing proposal on Lomita Boulevard to ensure that it really is senior housing. He expressed concern with alleviating growing traffic on Lomita, Crenshaw and Hawthorne and he encouraged everyone to continually watch what is going on in open forums.

8. SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

Planning Associate Lodan noted that their goal was to put housing issues on the table and answer questions posed during the workshop process in order to reiterate issues with the General Plan and how it interrelates to zoning. He explained that Dr. Don Stabler, a representative from the Torrance Unified School District (TUSD) would be present at the meeting of March 22, 2006 to present information and respond to questions. Goals and policies will be examined and the consultants will rejoin to help facilitate discussion at the meeting of April 22, 2006.

Chairperson Uchima thanked the public for their important input in the long process and he wanted to see more community input on all issues before recommendations were made.

Commissioner Busch asked that Dr. Stabler provide TUSD enrollment statistics for each of the last 20 years with his presentation and he also wanted all pertinent minutes available to Commissioners.

Planning Associate Lodan indicated that he would pass on the request for enrollment statistics to Dr. Stabler and he added that it was their practice to make minutes of other related workshops and hearings were available for the Commission.

Sandi Monda, 21506 Talisman, requested enrollment numbers from each school rather than overall district numbers and how many students are out of district students at those schools. Planning Associate Lodan agreed to pass the request along and Ms. Monda asked that the report given to the School Board be made available before the next meeting along with the Executive Summary.

9. ADJOURNMENT

At 9:13 p.m. the meeting was adjourned to March 22, 2006 at 7:00 p.m. in Council Chambers at Torrance City Hall.

Approved as Submitted April 26, 2006 s/ Sue Herbers, City Clerk
