March 22, 2006

MINUTES OF A GENERAL PLAN WORKSHOP #12
OF THE TORRANCE PLANNING COMMISSION

1. CALL TO ORDER

The Torrance General Plan Planning Commission Workshop #12 convened in a regular session at 7:06 p.m. on Wednesday, March 22, 2006, in City Council Chambers at Torrance City Hall.

2. FLAG SALUTE

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Commissioner Fauk.

3. ROLL CALL

Present:	Commissioners Browning, Busch, Drevno, Fauk, Gibson, Horwich, and Chairperson Uchima.
Absent:	None.
Also Present:	Senior Planning Associate Lodan, Planning Associate Joe, and Environmental Administrator Cessna.

Chairperson Uchima explained that the purpose of this workshop was to present Torrance Unified School District data and to introduce the goals and policies portion of the General Plan update.

5. PRESENTATION FROM SCHOOL DISTRICT

This item was considered out of order.

Senior Planning Associate Lodan introduced the item and welcomed Dr. Donald Stabler, Deputy Superintendent of Administrative Services, Torrance Unified School District. He noted that Dr. Stabler needed to leave the workshop at 8:00 p.m. and requested that audience members submit their questions on speaker cards.

Dr. Stabler presented general information regarding Torrance Unified School District (TUSD), noting that between 2001-2002 and 2005-2006 TUSD has had to reduce its budget by over $18 million to address local and state funding issues. He stated that these reductions have required TUSD to reduce staffing, increase class size, reduce library books, and reduce or eliminate programs, and that the total dollar amount lost to TUSD has been in excess of $28 million. He noted that $17 million might be repaid over the next few years, depending on actions by the Governor and legislature. He reported that the 2005-2006 adopted budget is balanced and has an adequate reserve for economic uncertainties. Issues that have been addressed this year include: managing the fiscal resource of TUSD, providing for salary enhancements, and providing health and welfare benefits for employees. He added that for 2006-2007 the Governor is proposing a cost of living adjustment, further reduction of the deficit factor,

and beginning the repayment of mandated costs and equalization; however, he has not acknowledged the full repayment of funding taken from education in 2004-2005.

Dr. Stabler discussed enrollment trends, noting that since 2002-2003 TUSD has grown by 500 students, or 2%. He stated that TUSD was projecting no enrollment increase for 2006-2007, and that approximately 1,900, or 7%, of its total student population of 25,000 are permit students. He stated that TUSD operates 17 elementary schools, 6 middle schools, 4 comprehensive high schools, 3 alternative high schools, 3 adult education campuses, and 4 preschool sites, and employs over 2,300 individuals. He advised that the total budget for TUSD is over $170 million, noting that 84% of this amount is for employee salaries and benefits.

He discussed the suggestion to eliminate inter-district permit students to save funds and reduce the need for facilities. He stressed the importance of living in a district that has a growing rather than declining enrollment, noting that dollars saved by having fewer students is significantly less than dollars lost because of those fewer students. For example, if TUSD sent back 30 permit students, the only savings would be the cost of one teacher, or approximately $55,000; the funds lost for those students would be in excess of $186,000. He reported that each year TUSD completes an enrollment projection for the coming year, and permit students are only accepted once all Torrance students are allocated space.

Dr. Stabler concluded his presentation by providing information about the District Board of Education general obligation bond issue in the amount of $280 million on the June 6, 2006 ballot; funds would be used to upgrade classrooms to meet current science and technology needs, make needed repairs, and construct classrooms.

Senior Planning Associate Lodan welcomed comments and questions from the Commission.

Commissioner Busch noted for the record that he is TUSD Personnel Commissioner. Responding to his inquiry, Dr. Stabler provided clarification that inter-district permits are issued to students who live outside TUSD boundaries for primarily academic or employment reasons. He advised that under the current policy of open enrollment, contracts are developed with parents requiring students to meet high academic and disciplinary standards.

In response to Commissioner Busch's inquiry, Dr. Stabler explained that TUSD does not qualify to collect mitigation payments under the Mira-Hart-Murrieta Decisions because its school generation factor is not great enough. He discussed the two levels of developer fees that school districts can collect, noting that TUSD has been collecting up to $1 million per year.

Dr. Stabler provided clarification that "relocatables" on TUSD campuses are not trailers and have been approved through the Department of the State Architect, noting that they are primarily put on piers or concrete foundations. He stated that the use of "relocatables" is primarily the result of the 1996 Class Size Reduction Program. He briefly discussed the 11 school sites that were closed in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Commissioner Browning noted that as of February 6, 2004, there were in excess of 1,342 students over what could be accommodated and asked where the funds for

these students went. Dr. Stabler explained that the State does not pay TUSD to house students, and that TUSD needs to apply for grant funding when there is a housing issue. He stated that they currently receive their revenue limit of $5,087 per student for ongoing operational costs, including those 1,342 students who are housed in rented or leased classrooms, noting that temporary housing is primarily paid by developer fees. He stated that he was able to provide enrollment figures for 2005-2006 and that TUSD was currently preparing enrollment projects for 2006-2007.

Commissioner Horwich inquired if there was any size of residential development that would impact the housing of students in TUSD. Dr. Stabler advised that very large housing developments could be a problem, but that typically small to medium developments could accommodate additional students. He noted that TUSD does not want to be in a declining enrollment district and are committed to filling spaces with permit students; however, residents are given first priority, followed by intra-district students, then inter-district students.

In response to Chairperson Uchima's inquiry, Dr. Stabler stated that there have not been any impacts on TUSD from developments that have been approved so far, noting that they are willing to work with staff to determine potential impacts when projects are proposed.

Responding to Chairperson Uchima's inquiry, Dr. Stabler explained that there are more requests for inter-district permits for high schools, and that permit students could be transferred from one school to another if necessary. In order to make room for new students generated from a large development, TUSD could negotiate with the developer for additional funds to build more classrooms or install "relocatables."

At Commissioner Fauk's request, Dr. Stabler clarified that the reason for permit students was not purely economical but for educational considerations as well. He explained that, with categorical funding, the average amount received is $6,500 per student, reiterating that only staff at the classroom level would be affected by eliminating permit students.

Commissioner Fauk noted that the majority of permit high school students are at Torrance High School and North High School. Dr. Stabler responded that acceptance of permit students is based on space availability, and that schools have a say if there is sufficient space and if students meet the academic, attendance, and disciplinary criteria.

Responding to Commissioner Drevno's inquiry, he explained that an inter-district permit could be terminated if a student does not meet the necessary criteria.

In response to Commissioner Gibson's inquiry regarding impact on honors classes, Dr. Stabler stated that last year TUSD Board adopted an open enrollment procedure for its honors program.

Commissioner Browning thanked Dr. Stabler for his excellent report.

Commissioner Fauk commented that the Commission has previously had difficulty getting representation from TUSD when considering approval of developments. He requested commitment from TUSD to be more fully engaged and provide direct input on the District's position on future proposals.

Dr. Stabler assured him that the new Superintendent was very supportive and made a commitment to work closely with City staff when looking at proposed developments.

In response to Commissioner Fauk's inquiry, Dr. Stabler speculated that installation of relocatables on high school campuses were for additional computer and science labs as well as ninth grade class size reduction for English and math students.

Commissioner Fauk thanked Dr. Stabler for his presentation.

At 7:50 p.m., Senior Planning Associate Lodan read questions submitted on speaker cards.

Jack Mitchell, Redbeam Avenue, asked how much money TUSD spends on overtime. Dr. Stabler responded that, due to budget reductions, overtime has been significantly reduced and requires approval from District administration.

Sandi Monda, Talisman Street, asked what areas in TUSD would not be able to accommodate more students without modulars and if there are elementary or middle schools that would close without permit students. Dr. Stabler responded that he did not foresee any District schools closing, noting that the State required that 30% of any newly built campuses be modular. He stated that TUSD could send back rented or leased portables or move portables from one campus to another if there was reduced enrollment. He stated that some schools could not accommodate additional students without modulars, depending on how classrooms are used, noting that any creative principal will make good use of rooms at a school site.

Responding to a resident's (no name on speaker card) concern about loss of playground and bathroom space at Fern Elementary due to portables, Dr. Stabler advised that single story portables would be replaced by a two story classroom building at the school with funding from the bond issue.

Robert Feldman, Cathann Street, stated that school grounds are open space and should be maintained as such for the benefit of the community. He asked if TUSD takes this into consideration when placing portables or selling school property. Dr. Stabler stated that it is taken into consideration when determining where portables are needed, noting that the Board of Education's primary responsibility is providing and governing the education of students. He stated Education Code requires TUSD to develop a 7-11 committee made up of local residents any time the sale or lease of its property is being considered.

Arthur J. Plourde, West 169th Place, suggested that the general obligation bond request be reduced from $280 million to $70-90 million to lessen the burden on homeowners. Dr. Stabler discussed the bond that was passed twelve years ago and noted that the current bond issue should actually be $430 million for TUSD to do everything that it needs to do. He stated that the amount being proposed was less than $60 per $100,000 of assessed valuation and is less than over 50% of the school districts in Los Angeles County, adding that $280 million would take care of TUSD critical needs.

Chairperson Uchima welcomed comments and questions from the Commission and audience.

Mike Romo, West 187th Place, inquired if local schools could accommodate new students if the zoning designation was changed to residential at the Roadium site as discussed at prior workshops.

Chairperson Uchima explained the proposal to Dr. Stabler, noting that other land use designations for the site were also discussed.

Senior Planning Associate Lodan advised that the item would be brought back in the draft General Plan discussion and that there would be opportunity for public review and input.

Dr. Stabler stated that TUSD was more than willing to work with staff to determine potential impacts.

At 8:00 p.m., Dr. Stabler apologized for having to leave and Chairperson Uchima thanked him for attending the meeting.

6. DISCUSSION OF GOAL AND POLICIES

Planning Associate Joe provided an overview of the General Plan update process to date. He stated that input collected over the past year would be used to develop the Goals, Policies, and Objectives of the General Plan. He advised that the next two workshops would be facilitated by General Plan consultants and be devoted to reviewing Goals, Policies, and Objectives in depth. He stated that Goals is a broad statement of community desires that provides direction for each General Plan Element and that Objectives and Policies are developed to meet the goals. He explained that an Objective represents the desired outcome and provides standards and methods for achieving a particular goal while a Policy is a course of action that supports the achievement of an Objective and serves as a guiding principle for decision makers. He advised that Goals, Objectives, and Policies of the Land Use Element would be discussed at the April 26, 2006 General Plan Workshop.

He noted that workbooks were included in the agenda material to assist Commissioners in discussing and reviewing existing Goals, Objectives, and Policies. He stated that Land Use Element Goals, Objectives, and Policies cover four basic Citywide issues: 1) existing development patterns, 2) past trends and those that are likely to influence future development, 3) land use issues, including areas of concern to be resolved through the General Plan implementation process, and 4) and future development. He requested that Commissioners familiarize themselves with the current Land Use Element and complete the workbook before the April 26, 2006 Workshop.

Commissioner Busch received clarification from staff that spot zoning is the practice of changing a zone from one designation to another to provide land use consistency.

In response to Commissioner Busch's inquiry regarding land for oil recovery operations in Policy 3.7, staff stated there were approximately six locations throughout the City where primary oil operations exist.

At Commissioner Busch's request, staff explained that integrated plans referred to in Objective 4.0 meant that zoning designations, the Specific Plan, and General Plan are internally consistent with each other.

Referring to Policy 4.3, Commissioner Busch received clarification that design guidelines are standards that look are architecture, design, color, lighting, and materials.

Commissioner Busch expressed concern about Objective 5.0 and 5.1 and requested that staff provide additional information at the next Workshop.

Responding to Commissioner Busch's inquiry regarding maintenance of alleys in Policy 7.3, Senior Planning Associate Lodan stated a broad definition of maintenance would include trash maintenance and landscaping, and a specific example would be requiring a developer to rebuild an alley if in need of reconstruction. He noted that there were several ways that the City looks to both require property owners to maintain alleys as well as the City to participate.

Senior Planning Associate Lodan pointed out that workbooks were available to members of the audience and would be posted on the website.

7. COMMUNITY INPUT

At 8:12 p.m., Chairperson Uchima welcomed public comments.

Sandi Monda, Talisman, expressed disappointment and frustration that Dr. Stabler was unable to stay longer at this meeting, adding that she had hoped to examine potential impacts from developments on different areas and their neighborhood schools. She stated that it was her understanding that more current enrollment figures for 2005-2006 were given to the TUSD Board last month and suggested that the Commission request TUSD to provide that information. She read and distributed copies of excerpts from Resolution #B-6-03-04 adopted by TUSD on February 17, 2004 to increase statutory school fees imposed on new residential and commercial/industrial development projects. She stressed the importance of knowing all of the facts before making a decision on any project that comes before the Planning Commission or City Council. She noted that TUSD made an agreement with Shea Homes requiring them to pay a mitigation payment equal to the product of $2.79 times the square footage as well as to expend up to $157,000 for improvements at Anza Elementary and Jefferson Middle schools and up to $200,000 for West High School. She stated that, in return, TUSD promised not to oppose the development of the Shea project. She stated that if single family units were to be considered, TUSD should be able to provide information on the number of modulars needed, the number of permit students would need to be denied, and if any additional fees would be asked from the developer to help them accommodate the additional students.

Commissioner Horwich stated that he shared Ms. Monda's frustration after trying for several years to get the information and numbers from TUSD, adding that he did not believe there was a housing project of any size, except an extremely large one, that TUSD would not support.

Commissioner Drevno stated that she was not aware of the agreement and inquired if it was standard procedure for a school district to make an agreement with a

developer. Ms. Monda related her understanding that this was the first time that TUSD made an agreement with a developer, indicating that Dr. Stabler would have been aware of it.

Senior Planning Associate Lodan entered into record and distributed copies of a letter from Arthur J. Plourde, West 169th Place offering suggestions for the update.

Mary Steinkamp, Acacia Avenue, related her observation that historic preservation was not included in the Goals, Objectives, and Policies of the General Plan. She also requested information regarding ownership of the triangle park and alleys in Old Torrance.

Senior Planning Associate Lodan advised that historic preservation was mentioned in the existing Conservation Element and that it could be expanded when the Conservation chapter is addressed.

Environmental Administrator Cessna stated that the City owns the alleys but that there was an underlying fee owned by Remco throughout the downtown area, and those properties are addressed on a case-by-case basis.

Irene Griffith, West 229th Street, discussed the importance of addressing senior mobility and housing, noting that they are current and not future problems. She added that the Commission on Aging has only had the opportunity to address future recreational needs with General Plan update planners.

Jack Mitchell, Redbeam Avenue (no speaker card), inquired who was directing the City to be overbuilt.

Commissioner Horwich stated that it was unfair for Mr. Mitchell to blame the Planning Commission for all ongoing development when in fact they have denied several projects. He advised that zone changes or General Plan amendments had to be automatically approved by City Council, and that the Commission considered projects on a case-by-case basis.

When Mr. Mitchell brought up the possibility of Shea Homes proposing a smaller project in the future, Commissioner Horwich agreed that it was not uncommon for a developer to ask for more than he really wants in hopes of a compromise.

Chairperson Uchima concurred with Commissioner Horwich that each case is reviewed on an individual basis.

Tom Rische, Carlow Road, expressed concern about the lack of vision and what Torrance should be ideally like in the future. He stated that the Commission and City Council had the power to “just say no” to some of the proposed projects, noting that Madrona Marsh Preserve and Columbia Park were once visions that have been realized.

Commissioner Fauk asked Mr. Rische for his specific vision for the City. Mr. Rische gave examples of “just saying no,” historic preservation of downtown Torrance, a City that is not overcrowded with traffic, a City where our children and workers can afford to live, and a City with a bus terminal for employees to get into the City.

When Commissioner Fauk noted that many residents expressed opposition to having a bus terminal, Mr. Rische stated that it was ridiculous to eliminate the bus terminal given the traffic situation in the City. He stated that the approval of the condominium development across from Wilson Park was an abomination and discussed increased stop signs at intersections and cut through traffic in neighborhoods. He stated that there needed to be a set of principles to work from and part of the vision for the City should be not allowing certain kinds of development to occur.

Commissioner Fauk requested that Mr. Rische give the Planning Commission credit for the number of times they have denied requests.

Robert Thompson, representing Madrona Homeowners Association (no speaker card), discussed the importance of looking at the cumulative effect of approving projects.

Janet Payne, Engracia Avenue, expressed concern that the historic preservation element of the General Plan was relegated to a Conservation Element under the Environmental Quality Commission rather than the Planning Commission.

Bonnie Mae Barnard, Gramercy Avenue, discussed the importance of declaring Old Torrance an Historic District as part of a vision for the City and to be eligible for funding and grants that are available for renovating historic areas. She noted that historic preservation was good for a community economically, socially, culturally, and aesthetically, and concurred with Ms. Payne that it should be under the Planning Commission. She stated that her vision was for Old Torrance to be recognized by the entire nation, to be on the National Register of Historic Places, and where businesses will be revitalized and property values rise. She stated that the General Plan had to look at the vision for the entire City, beyond the next ten years, and distributed postcards about her book on Old Torrance.

Chairperson Uchima commented that he was hearing conflicting concerns about developmental growth and affordability including senior housing, and discussed supply and demand, noting if there were no development at all, property values would skyrocket.

John Mirassou, Anastasi Development Company, Susanna Avenue (no speaker card), noted that it took seven years just to create the vision for the Hawthorne Boulevard Specific Plan, and that developments that were part of that plan, such as Fairfield and Shea Homes, were rejected by the public. He stated that density can create wonderful downtowns and be good for a community. He stated that developers pay a tremendous amount of school fees and questioned where those fees go, and suggested that construction work crews build or enlarge school buildings on campuses instead of paying these fees to the schools. He noted that 55% of people who work in the South Bay live outside the South Bay and that Nissan left the City due to the high cost of housing. He recommended that the Commission look “outside the box” for a vision of Torrance that has centrally located housing, great downtowns, and tremendous schools.

In response to Commissioner Busch’s inquiry, Mr. Mirassou stated that the affordability factor is considered when deciding to build a project, noting that it was a three to five year process. He indicated that the demand for senior housing at Village Court, that took five years to develop, was tremendous.

When Commissioner Busch suggested the possibility of using light rail in the City, Mr. Mirassou stated that existing rail lines would be wonderful for high-speed rail transit but received opposition from MTA when proposed in the past. He stated that there were also opportunities for a rapid bus station in the City.

The Commission was in recess from 9:15 p.m. to 9:29 p.m.

Susan Jendruko, 176th Street, (no speaker card), stated that growth in the City was inevitable and her vision for the future was to respect the history of the area, the residential/commercial/industrial balance, the area as the anchor of the South Bay region, and future growth.

At her request, Planning Associate Joe described the other elements included in the General Plan.

Commissioner Gibson stated that it was important to hear from young people in the community and thanked Ms. Jendruko for her comments.

Commissioner Busch stated that her comments were well spoken and refreshing, and encouraged her to get involved in local government.

Chairperson Uchima noted that she understood the dynamics of supply and demand and that he shared her vision for a balanced community.

Senior Planning Associate Lodan announced that the Southern California Association of Governments Sixth Annual Regional Housing Summit, "Where Will Our Children Live?" will be held on April 20, 2006 at the Toyota Meeting Hall.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

This item was considered out of order.

MOTION: Commissioner Browning moved for the approval of the February 22, 2006 General Plan Workshop #10 meeting minutes as submitted. Commissioner Drevno seconded the motion; a roll call vote reflected unanimous approval.

8. SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

Senior Planning Associate Lodan announced the next General Plan Workshop on April 26, 2006 at 7:00 p.m.

Commissioner Horwich congratulated Commissioner Drevno for being awarded Woman of the Year by the Switzer Center.

He noted that minutes from a Traffic Commission meeting expressed frustration at having no input into Planning matters, and questioned how they could at least feel more included, noting that the Planning Commission often shared the same feelings.

Responding to Commissioner Horwich's inquiry, Planning Associate Lodan stated that the League of California Cities started on March 22, 2006.

Commissioner Horwich expressed regret at the passing of Parks and Recreation Commissioner Dick Perkins.

10. ADJOURNMENT

At 9:41 p.m., Chairperson Uchima adjourned the meeting to April 5, 2006 at 7:00 p.m.

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