



COUNTY OF SONOMA

575 ADMINISTRATION
DRIVE, ROOM 102A
SANTA ROSA, CA 95403

SUMMARY REPORT

Agenda Date: 10/15/2024

To: Sonoma County Board of Supervisors

Department or Agency Name(s): Permit Sonoma

Staff Name and Phone Number: Tennis Wick, Director, (707) 565-1925, Haleigh Frye, Planner II, (707) 565-2477, Ross Markey, Comprehensive Planning Manager, (707) 565-2543

Vote Requirement: Informational Only

Supervisorial District(s): Countywide

Title:

1:45pm General Plan Sonoma: General Plan 2020 Audit and Community Engagement Plan

Recommended Action:

Hold a public meeting to review and provide feedback to Permit Sonoma staff on the broad engagement topics presented in the Draft Community Engagement Plan.

Executive Summary:

The General Plan guides land use decisions and development throughout unincorporated Sonoma County and reflects the shared values of the community. Permit Sonoma is initiating an update to the existing General Plan, known as Sonoma County General Plan 2020, which has served the Sonoma County community since 2008. The update will address current State law requirements and shifts in community values brought on by recent events such as flooding and wildfire recovery. In December 2023, the Board approved a preliminary work plan and scope for the General Plan Update, which will be known as General Plan Sonoma and will be split into two phases, the Community Vision Phase (Phase 1) followed by the Policy Development Phase (Phase 2).

This informational item presents the Draft Community Engagement Plan for the Community Vision Phase of General Plan Sonoma which includes an extensive and robust outreach engagement effort including broad topics designed to gather feedback to inform the scope and engagement necessary for the Policy Development Phase.

Discussion:

The General Plan is a shared community vision that reflects community priorities and values while shaping the County's future growth, encourages housing and job development, fosters healthy and resilient communities, guides the protection and management of natural resources, and promotes social and economic equity. The State General Plan Guidelines recommend that General Plans be updated every 5 to 10 years to ensure they remain relevant and reflect local physical and demographic changes as well as broader changes in culture and technology. Permit Sonoma is initiating an update to Sonoma County General Plan 2020, which has served the County since 2008, to address current State law requirements and more closely reflect shifts in community values that have been shaped by recent events, including flooding and wildfire recovery.

In December 2023, the Board approved a preliminary work plan and scope for the General Plan Update. The Community Vision Phase is underway and includes:

- Preparation of a Community Engagement Plan (Draft Community Engagement Plan; Attachment 1)
- A detailed audit of General Plan 2020 (Draft Audit; Attachment 2)
- Implementation of the Community Engagement Plan. Note that most of this implementation will occur after the Board reviews and provides direction on the Community Engagement Plan, but some components are already being implemented, including the project branding and website. This branding work includes naming the project "General Plan Sonoma," which is referenced throughout this report.
- Preparation of a General Plan Scope Report based on the outcomes of the General Plan Audit and community engagement to set up the Policy Development phase of General Plan Sonoma.

This staff report presents the Draft Community Engagement Plan (Attachment 1) and includes the draft General Plan 2020 Audit (Attachment 2). Utilizing direction from the Board, a refined set of broad engagement topics will be presented to the Permit Sonoma Planning Agency in the next few months with the goal of defining a final set of broad engagement topics. A schedule of the Community Vision Phase work is presented as Attachment 3.

The Community Vision Phase focuses on gathering input and guidance from the community to shape the vision and identify key policy issues that will inform the policy development process of the General Plan Update. Policy development will occur after the visioning phase and will include preparation of the updated General Plan guided by the insights and outcomes gathered during the visioning process. This phase will include additional community engagement and technical analysis on key policy topics as recommended in the selected approach from the Community Vision Phase General Plan Scope Report.

Community Engagement Plan

Strong and meaningful community involvement throughout the development of General Plan Sonoma will be critical to the successful adoption and ongoing implementation of the General Plan. The community engagement conducted now will be critical to frame the update in a way that speaks to the needs and interests of the Sonoma County community while also earning and building trust in the process. The Draft Community Engagement Plan presents staff's recommended approach and proposed focus topics for an extensive and robust engagement effort that is designed to gather feedback to inform the scope and engagement needed for policy development (Attachment 1).

Community Engagement Plan Goals

The Draft Community Engagement Plan aims to solicit input from a wide range of Sonoma County residents that reflects the spectrum of opinions and demographics across the county. The stated goals from the Draft Community Engagement Plan are to:

1. Ensure all Sonoma County residents are aware of the General Plan update and understand why the General Plan matters and how their input is valuable to the update process and the future of Sonoma County.
2. Hear from people who represent the full range of demographics, perspectives, and experiences in Sonoma County and engage with traditionally underrepresented and marginalized communities.
3. Offer a comprehensive range of engagement activities that can reach community members at their comfort level.
4. Remove barriers to engagement by providing accessible, culturally appropriate information and

resources for community members.

5. Promote transparency and accountability in the community engagement process by providing language translation and interpretation to the residents of the county who need such access to equitably participate in this process.
6. Assess and document progress on the planning and implementation of community engagement efforts.
7. Build public trust and ownership in General Plan Sonoma.

Community Engagement Plan Contents

The Draft Community Engagement Plan outlines the County's approach for community visioning of General Plan Sonoma through key sections: Community Engagement Approach and Engagement Focus Topics.

The Community Engagement Approach sets the framework for all engagement efforts, including coordination with the Outreach Program Manager at Permit Sonoma and the County's Office of Equity, and the development of a recognizable brand. The plan identifies focus topics for community discussion, target audiences-especially underrepresented groups-and strategies to address engagement barriers such as language and accessibility. It highlights potential community partners and ambassadors, engagement activities like workshops and neighborhood chats, and promotional methods. The plan also covers potential engagement locations, a schedule of activities, roles and responsibilities, methods for tracking success, and how feedback will be reported to participants to ensure transparency and trust.

In preparing the Draft Community Engagement Plan staff consulted the recently adopted Community Engagement Toolkit, Community Engagement Plan, and Language Access Policy and Implementation Plan prepared by the County's Office of Equity, working to ensure consistency with these existing community engagement plans.

Engagement Focus Topics

The Draft Community Engagement Plan includes a preliminary list of focus topics to discuss with the community as part of the update. Through robust community engagement on these topics, General Plan Sonoma will comprehensively address the significant changes and critical issues facing the region. Staff requests the Board's input to further refine the topics listed below. Refer to the Draft Community Engagement Plan for more information about each focus topic (Attachment 1).

The preliminary list of focus topics is as follows:

- **Growth Management and Development:** Includes the density and size of new development, how it fits with existing communities, the right boundaries for growth, and the public services and infrastructure needed to support it.
- **Accessibility and Circulation:** Includes the movement of residents, businesses, and visitors, focusing on how the local transportation system serves all users and modes. Emphasis is placed on safety, accessibility, and efficient travel between starting points and destinations.
- **Ecology, Sustainability, and Climate:** Includes preserving open space and natural resources, as well as addressing impacts from climate change such as severe drought, wildfires, flooding, and rising temperatures.
- **Utilities:** Includes water supply and waste management, along with development of new water systems and expansion of sewer services to underserved areas.

- **Economy and Tourism:** Includes consideration of updated information and trends about the county's economic sectors, including the arts, to guide economic development policies that balance growth with community needs and priorities.
- **Culture, History, and Community:** Includes the consideration of how to celebrate the rich history and ongoing culture of Native American tribes in Sonoma County, protect archaeological and historic resources, and preserve and enhance the identity and vitality of individual communities.
- **Resource Protection:** Includes water resources, soils, forests and timberlands, biotic resources, geothermal resources, mineral resources, and energy resources, to ensure stewardship of Sonoma County's natural environment.
- **Agriculture and Food:** Includes the consideration of how General Plan Sonoma can continue to support a thriving agricultural base given current conditions and community concerns.
- **Open Space and Scenic Qualities:** Includes discussions to understand community values and preferences for the conserving open space and scenic resources, enhancing residents' quality of life through access to outdoor spaces and nature, and promoting tourism while preserving scenic beauty.

As community engagement activities progress, the project team will continue to refine the list of focus topics and key issues for the policy development following the Community Vision phase work. This collaborative process will ensure that the focus topics reflect the needs and priorities of Sonoma County residents and stakeholders. The final refined focus topics from the Community Vision Phase, shaped by public engagement and input, will serve as foundational elements guiding policy development of General Plan Sonoma and will inform further discussions and strategies for the future of the region.

General Plan 2020 Audit

An integral part of the General Plan Sonoma process is to review the existing General Plan 2020, along with the County's area and specific plans, design guidelines, and Local Coastal Plan. This draft General Plan 2020 Audit will be refined throughout the visioning phase of the project and finalized at its conclusion to guide policy development in the following phase. The audit aims to identify necessary changes for compliance with State law, ensure consistency, eliminate redundancies, and reflect current conditions. The review considers State law, General Plan Guidelines from the California Office of Planning and Research, best practices, and staff experience. The General Plan Audit will serve as one of the starting points for policy development following the Community Vision phase by providing an initial set of goals, objectives, policies, and implementation programs from General Plan 2020 to carry forward into General Plan Sonoma.

The General Plan 2020 Audit is presented as a memorandum (Attachment 2), which includes the analysis and findings of the audit.

Consistency Reviews

A broad overview of the findings is provided in the Draft General Plan Audit Memorandum (Attachment 2). The memorandum presents consistency reviews of General Plan 2020 and includes the full list of County plans that were reviewed.

The consistency reviews identified conflicts and redundancies between General Plan policies and other plans such as area plans, design guidelines, the Housing Element, and the Local Coastal Plan. Ensuring internal consistency, as required by State law, allows County plans to align with the General Plan, reducing conflicting policies, minimizing confusion or delays, and streamlining decision-making. Eliminating redundancies also

simplifies planning documents and prevents future conflicts when amendments are made.

The General Plan 2020 Audit consistency review does not include a review of the Airport Industrial Specific Plan, which is being updated separately, nor does it include the Springs Specific Plan that is currently under development.

Findings

At a high level, the findings of the draft audit offer recommended changes to the policy structure and content related to the following:

- Streamlining the General Plan by removing redundancies, using cross-references, and eliminating duplicate policies. Revise or move site-specific policies and detailed standards to maintain a broad level of policy guidance for the General Plan.
- Removing policies and implementation programs that have been completed or are no longer relevant and ensuring implementation actions are feasible.
- New and revised policy guidance to comply with current State law.

Board Discussion

This item requests Board feedback on the preliminary focus topics presented in the Draft Community Engagement Plan. In the near term, the first set of centralized community workshops will be organized around these broad topics, so they will have a direct impact on how we engage the community. As noted above, throughout the Community Vision Phase, staff will continue to refine these focus topics to set up the policy development work, so this list will continue to be subject to change based on community input and direction.

Next Steps

Based on Board direction, staff will:

1. Refine the list of engagement focus topics and present them to the Sonoma County Planning Agency before finalizing the list for inclusion in the Final Community Engagement Plan.
2. Revise and complete the Final Community Engagement Plan.
3. Implement the Community Engagement Plan through engagement activities occurring through June 2025.
4. Finalize the General Plan 2020 Audit.
5. Complete the General Plan Scope Report and Phase 1, Community Vision Phase, (anticipated in summer 2025). Return to the Board of Supervisors with a final project scope including a review of potential options for the project scale from least-to-most comprehensive with a staff-supported recommendation.

Strategic Plan:

This item directly supports the County's Five-year Strategic Plan and is aligned with the following pillar, goal, and objective.

Pillar: Climate Action and Resiliency

Goal: Goal 5: Maximize opportunities for mitigation of climate change and adaptation through land conservation work and land use policies

Objective: Objective 1: By 2025, update the County General Plan and other county/special district

Agenda Date: 10/15/2024

planning documents to incorporate policy language and identify areas within the County that have the potential to maximize carbon sequestration and provide opportunities

Racial Equity:

Was this item identified as an opportunity to apply the Racial Equity Toolkit?

Yes

This is an informational item. A comprehensive Racial Equity Toolkit analysis will be included in the Board item for adoption of the new and updated General Plan Sonoma.

Prior Board Actions:

December 12, 2023: Sonoma County Comprehensive General Plan Update Kick-Off ([≤](https://sonoma-county.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=6446395&GUID=04FE3E33-FB4D-44B4-A5A8-59CB2E2FBACF)
<https://sonoma-county.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=6446395&GUID=04FE3E33-FB4D-44B4-A5A8-59CB2E2FBACF>>)

June 10, 2023: General Plan Update Project Phase 1 Contract Award ([≤](https://sonoma-county.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=6720195&GUID=EA6AEAD9-96BC-4C3F-A9CE-0E18F3F3B28C)
<https://sonoma-county.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=6720195&GUID=EA6AEAD9-96BC-4C3F-A9CE-0E18F3F3B28C>>)

FISCAL SUMMARY

N/A

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

There are no direct fiscal or general fund impacts associated with this informational item.

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

N/A

Attachments:

Attachment 1: Draft Community Engagement Plan

Attachment 2: Draft General Plan 2020 Audit Memorandum

Attachment 3: General Plan Sonoma Community Vision Phase Schedule

Attachment 4: Presentation

Related Items “On File” with the Clerk of the Board:

N/A