



SUMMARY REPORT

Agenda Date: 12/12/2023

To: Sonoma County Board of Supervisors

Department or Agency Name(s): Permit Sonoma

Staff Name and Phone Number: Tennis Wick (707) 565-1925; Scott Orr (707) 565-1754; Ross Markey (707) 565-2543

Vote Requirement: Majority

Supervisorial District(s): Countywide

Title:

2:00 PM - Sonoma County General Plan Kick-Off

Recommended Action:

Review and provide comments to Permit Sonoma staff on the Department's proposed initial work plan to scope the General Plan update and plan to solicit a consultant to commence the update.

Executive Summary:

The General Plan is a shared community vision that reflects community priorities and values while shaping our 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 five to ten years to ensure that they remain relevant and reflect local physical and demographic changes and broader changes in culture and technology. The Sonoma County General Plan 2020, that has served our community since 2008, needs a comprehensive update to address State law requirements and more closely reflect shifts in community values that have been shaped by recent events such as including recent flooding and wildfire recovery.

This item presents a preliminary work plan to scope the General Plan update which includes the following components:

- Recruit and hire a consultant to begin scoping for the larger project and planning work with an initial phase to:
 - Perform a detailed audit of General Plan 2020, including specific and area plans, and its consistency with current State guidance for General Plans;
 - Market the planning effort, conduct community outreach, and establish a reliable engagement platform that will carry through the entire planning process;
 - Establish a timeline and budget for the General Plan update and associated Environmental Impact Report. This includes evaluating any grant or other funding that may be available to support plan development.
 - Permit Sonoma reported to the Board on 5/17/22 that the expected cost for the project will be \$7.8 million (Attachment 2) and the Board set aside \$2.8 million as part of the FY22-

23 budget to supplement existing general fund allocations and the general plan administration fee balance; and

- Return to the Board with a final project scope including a review of potential options for the project scale from least-to-most comprehensive along with staff recommendations.

Discussion:

Since the adoption of Sonoma County's first General Plan on January 10, 1978, a key challenge has been striking a balance between conservation and sustainable development. To achieve this goal, it was necessary to coordinate with the incorporated cities to focus growth where infrastructure was available to provide utility services such as water and sewer, transportation, jobs, and educational needs of a population which would grow from fewer than 200,000 in 1970 to just shy of 500,000 today. This approach emphasizes community-centered growth management and policies to protect agricultural lands, open spaces, and diverse community character. These principles formed the foundation of the 1978 General Plan and its subsequent updates in 1989 and 2008.

The 1989 update expanded the scope of the plan, leading to the establishment of the Agricultural Preservation & Open Space District, which has successfully conserved over 100,000 acres of farmland, open space, and natural resources, benefitting both the environment and regional parks through the acquisition of additional land. This positive outcome is a result of the 1978 plan's initial vision, further refined in the 1989 update, and successfully implemented in 1990.

Commonly referred to as the General Plan 2020, the most recent update of the General Plan was adopted by the Board of Supervisors in 2008. In addition to carrying forward the primary goals and objectives of the 1989 General Plan, new policies reflected new and elevated issues such as affordable housing, expanded resource protections, and water resources. In addition, General Plan 2020 included an audit of existing specific plans which resulted in the retirement of the Windsor and Penngrove Specific Plans, and modifications to several remaining specific plans to relocate those policies as Specific Area Policies under the Land Use Element.

Since the last comprehensive General Plan update in 2008, the county and region have experienced significant changes on issues such as public health, climate change, and equity. The costs of land, plus the costs of materials and labor to produce housing, have reached their highest rates ever which in turn have increased prices, including supply chain issues, supply and labor shortages made worse by the rebuilding needs following the wildfires in 2017, 2019, and 2020; recent floods in 2019 and 2023; and the COVID-19 pandemic.

On August 22, 2023, the Board of Supervisors unanimously approved an update to the Housing Element, which will ensure the county meets its obligation to create 3,824 additional housing units by 2031. The element includes housing policies and creates an inventory of sites in unincorporated areas that can accommodate new housing to meet state mandates and ensures that its laws and programs affirmatively further fair housing by taking meaningful actions, in addition to combatting discrimination, that overcome patterns of segregation and foster inclusive communities free from barriers that restrict access to opportunity based on protected characteristics.

Staff last updated the Board during a General Plan Workshop on April 19, 2022. Discussion items included

scoping and potential budget needed to launch the update project and committed to returning with a scope of work within 18 months. Since April 2022, staff have been working to complete ongoing work, thereby creating capacity for the General Plan update. This work includes the items listed below (Table 1).

Table 1 - Completed Permit Sonoma Projects

Item	Board Action
Vacation Rental Ordinance Update	8/2/22
Temporary Housing (Tiny Homes)	3/14/23
Gas Station Ban	4/24/23
Vacation Rental Exclusion Zones	4/24/23
Vacation Rental License	5/16/23
Local Coastal Plan Update	7/17/23
6 th -Cycle Housing Element Update	8/22/23 (HCD certification 10/26/23)
Tree Ordinance Update & Oak Woodlands Ordinance	11/28/23
Housing Action Plan Item 1	12/5/23
Annual Technical Corrections	12/5/23
Public Safety and Environmental Justice Elements	<i>Spring '24 (Tentative)</i>
Springs Area Plan	<i>Summer '24 (Tentative)</i>
Airport Area Plan	<i>Summer '24 (Tentative)</i>

General Plan 2020 Structure

California Government Code Section 65300 mandates each county and city to adopt a General Plan. The law details required components for General Plans, which are typically organized into “elements”. The Sonoma County General Plan 2020 was adopted by Resolution No. 08-0808 on September 23, 2008, with a focused update in August 2016. General Plans are intended to guide development and investment through high-level policy direction over a period of 20-30 years. The General Plan is the 'constitution' for changes to allowed land uses throughout the unincorporated county and these changes are implemented following adoption of the General Plan through updates to the existing zoning ordinance.

Since 2008, the County has evolved significantly. State law governing General Plan update requirements also have expanded. In accordance with State law, the Governor’s Office of Planning and Research (OPR) publishes *General Plan Guidelines*, summarizing required and optional components, to assist jurisdictions in implementing State law requirements. Table 3 below provides a summary of the County’s current General Plan Elements, and whether they are required or optional under current State guidance.

General Plan 2020 currently has four optional Elements: Agricultural Resources; Air Transportation; Water Resources; and Public Facilities and Services. The Open Space & Resource Conservation Element covers the mandatory topics under OPR’s Open Space, Conservation, and Air Quality Elements. OPR lists several optional

Elements that are becoming increasingly commonplace as county governments across the State update their General Plans: health, equity, community development, climate change, and resiliency. Elements are an organizational method for policies; there is no limit to the types of policy discussions or elements that a community can adopt in a General Plan so long as the policies are internally consistent, consistent with State and Federal law, and actionable. For instance, Sonoma County may wish to include a Tribal Element in the next General Plan update to organize related policies.

Each year Permit Sonoma prepares an Annual Progress Report (APR) on the Implementation of the General Plan, as required by State law. The APR is provided to the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) and the Office of Planning and Research (OPR). The Report summarizes the implementation efforts of all General Plan programs and is required to contain certain housing information, including the County’s progress in meeting its share of regional housing need and local efforts to remove governmental constraints to the development of housing. Table 2 below provides a summary of the 2022 APR (Attachment 1).

Table 2: General Plan Implementation Progress 2022

Program Status	Total Number	% of Total
Complete	54	33%
Ongoing	72	43%
Partially Complete	11	7%
Underway	8	5%
Not Started	17	10%
On hold	4	2%
Total	166	100%

What elements should and could be included in a general plan update?

Table 3 represents a summary of elements existing in the current General Plan 2020, including elements mandated by State law, and optional elements. There is no limit to the types of policy discussions or elements that a community can adopt in a General Plan so long as the policies are actionable, consistent with State and Federal law, and internally consistent.

Table 3 - Sonoma County General Plan Elements and State law/OPR Guidance

General Plan 2020 Elements	OPR Guidelines	Status	Description
Land Use	Land Use	Review	Designates the type, intensity, and general distribution of uses of land for housing, business, industry, open space, education, public facilities, waste disposal facilities, and other public and private uses.

Circulation & Transit	Circulation	Update	Correlates with the land use element and identifies the general location and extent of existing and proposed major throughfares, transportation routes, terminals, and other local public utilities and facilities.
Open Space & Resource Conservation	Open Space, Conservation, Air Quality	Update	Details plans and measures for the long-range preservation of natural resources, the managed production of resources, agriculture, outdoor recreation, and public health and safety.
Noise	Noise	Update	Identifies and appraises noise problems within the community and forms the basis for land use distribution determinations.
Public Safety	Safety	Expected 2024	Establishes policies and programs to protect the community from risks associated with seismic, geologic, flood, and wildfire hazards, as well as from other concerns such as drought.
Housing*	Housing	Update adopted 8/22, certified by HCD 10/26 (required, update on 8-year cycle)	Assesses current and projected housing needs for all economic segments of the community. In addition, the housing element embodies policies for affirmatively furthering fair housing, providing adequate housing and includes programs to serve those purposes.
N/A	Environmental Justice	Expected 2024 (new requirement)	Identifies objectives and policies to reduce pollution exposure, improve air quality, promote public facilities, improve food access, advance access to housing, and increase physical activity in identified disadvantaged communities.
Agricultural Resources		Review	Establishes policies to ensure the stability and productivity of the County's agricultural lands and industries and provides clear guidelines for decisions in agricultural areas. Express policies, programs and measures that promote and protect the current and future needs of the agricultural industry.

Air Transportation		Review	The Air Transportation Element serves to establish direction and standards for judging consistency of proposed actions involving airports with the General Plan, including the Airport Master Plans.
Water Resources	Water	Update	Ensures that Sonoma County’s water resources are sustained and protected. Considers the amount of quality water that can be used without exceeding the replenishment rates over time or causing long term declines or degradation in available surface water or groundwater resources.
Public Facilities and Services		Review	Lays the groundwork and policy for future decisions related to public services and infrastructure and is designed to increase the likelihood that public services will be available when needed to serve the residents and businesses in the County.
N/A	Climate Change	Optional	See below
N/A	Tribal Resources	Optional	

Examples of Optional New Elements and/or Policies (2018 OPR Guidelines)

Climate Change

The county’s climate has gone through unprecedented change since 2008. Natural disasters such as sea-level rise, wildfire, floods, and drought have impacted our lives and require a new framework to look at land-use policy. Bridging prior efforts with new County commitments on Climate Action and Resiliency could be formalized in a new element of the General Plan. Drawing from the Local Coastal Plan for inspiration, inland policy could be developed and adopted within a new element to address climate change countywide.

Tribal Resources

Since time immemorial, lands within Sonoma County have been home to indigenous people and sovereign Tribal nations. The County recognizes the historic imbalances of power that have underpinned much of modern land-use planning.

The County is committed to building and deepening relationships and trust with local tribal partners. Towards that end, creating a more meaningful structure for land use decision-making that considers tribal interests and perspectives is important as part of the General Plan update. The State passed SB 18 (2004) that requires that

the County offer tribes the opportunity to consult when the adoption or amendment of a general or specific plan is proposed, and when the Board of Supervisors designates open space in a general or specific plan. The County also regularly engages in a variety of formal and informal discussions with tribes concerning land stewardship, comangement of a regional park, tribal development projects on and off trust lands, private development permits and county projects and associated environmental impacts (i.e. AB 52 tribal consultation under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)), and protection of sacred sites and cultural resources. Beyond the SB 18 mandate, the County may wish to consider a tribal or cultural resources element to the General Plan, alone or in combination with another element, in order to promote effective land-use planning by expressly recognizing the benefits of tribal consultation and consideration of “Tribal ecological knowledge.” Tribal ecological knowledge encompasses tribes’ special cultural history, knowledge of, and connection to the land.

Regional Planning Efforts

The following regional planning efforts will inform and supplement our General Plan update and do not represent an exhaustive list of project stakeholders Permit Sonoma staff will engage with during the General Plan update. Staff will continue to develop a comprehensive list of regional projects and stakeholders to engage with during the update process.

Plan Bay Area 2050

Plan Bay Area 2050 aims to make the region more affordable, connected, diverse, healthy and vibrant through five Guiding Principles of the plan: envisioning a next-generation network of frequent-service transit lines, tackling the regional housing crisis, creating pathways to middle class through inclusive economic growth, and pioneering a suite of protections against sea level rise.

Bay Adapt

The Bay Adapt Joint Platform is a consensus-based strategy comprised of 9 actions and 21 tasks that will protect people and the natural and built environment from rising sea levels. Rather than specifying individual projects, the Bay Adapt Joint Platform lays out regional strategies that focus on overcoming barriers and identifying factors for successful adaptation outcomes we want throughout the region.

BCDC Plan for Sea Level Rise

San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) is developing Regional Sea-Level Rise Adaptation Guidance for the San Francisco Bay, which advances the Bay Adapt Joint Platform by developing a regional coastal resiliency strategy and guidance document with planning criteria and minimum standards to align Bay Area counties’ sea-level rise (SLR) implementation plans.

Sonoma County Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Community Conservation Plan HCP/NCCP

Permit Sonoma Natural Resources staff are currently developing a Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Communities Conservation Plan will provide a streamlined compliance pathway for projects that would otherwise be delayed by the stringent, complicated, and time-consuming endangered species regulatory approval process once it is developed and implemented. This streamlining is achieved by developing upfront mitigation and conservation standards for specific development projects thereby avoiding time-intensive project-by-project review.

Portrait of Sonoma

The Portrait of Sonoma County 2021 Update revises key measurements of health, wealth and education in Sonoma County and compares these data across race, ethnicity, gender and geography, giving Sonoma County a detailed picture of where preventable disparities persist in the county. This report will continue to provide valuable information to staff on the demographics and overall health of county residents.

Vital Lands Initiative

The Vital Lands Initiative is a long-range comprehensive plan to prioritize the land conservation activities of Sonoma County Ag + Open Space through 2031. The plan was developed with the best available science and data, as well as extensive input from Ag + Open Space partners and the community, to ensure the document reflects the knowledge and expertise of stakeholders and the land conservation goals of the Sonoma County voters.

Local Groundwater Sustainability Plans

Sonoma County’s three groundwater sustainability agencies, Petaluma Valley, Sonoma Valley and Santa Rosa Plain, all unanimously approved Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSPs) in 2021 for each basin. The GSPs are required to be submitted as part of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) for the purpose of assessing the conditions of each groundwater basin, analyzing the basin’s sustainability over a 50-year period, and identifying projects and actions needed to ensure the basin is sustainable by 2042.

Countywide Active Transportation Plan

The Sonoma County Transportation Authority (SCTA) has embarked on an update to the Countywide Active Transportation Plan (ATP; last adopted as the Countywide Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan in 2014) which is expected to be completed in 2025. The Plan will be focused on increasing access to active modes of transportation (like walking, biking, or using mobility devices) through planning for infrastructure as well as supportive programs. This work includes updates to local Active Transportation Plans in Cloverdale, Cotati, Healdsburg, Rohnert Park, Sebastopol, Sonoma, and the Unincorporated County. Permit Sonoma staff is currently working with SCTA to develop the ATP update which will help inform transportation, infrastructure, and Greenhouse Gas policy in the wider General Plan project.

Local Region General Plans

Several neighboring jurisdictions have recently embarked on their own general plan update processes (Table 4). Staff will work closely with our neighbors to ensure that our policies remain in alignment and to see the realization of existing policy such as infrastructure improvements and the development of Subregion for 7th Cycle Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) for a more equitable RHNA allocation process leading into future Housing Element updates.

Table 4 - Local Region General Plans

Jurisdiction	GP Status	Current Stage
Cloverdale	Adopted 2009	
Cotati	Adopted 2015	
Healdsburg	Adopted 2009	

Petaluma	In progress	Visioning
Rohnert Park	Draft released 2022	EIR Prep
Santa Rosa	Draft released 2023	EIR Prep
Sebastopol	Adopted 2016	
Sonoma	In progress	Visioning
Windsor	Adopted 2018	
Marin County	Adopted 2007	
Napa County	Adopted 2008	

Project Budget

Permit Sonoma projected that a General Plan update would cost \$3.5 million when it established the General Plan Administration (GPA) account in 2009 to cover half the cost of the update. The general fund was expected to cover the remaining half. The GPA account is funded through building and planning permit fees.

Since the creation of the GPA, the scope of General Plan requirements has expanded, new State law requirements have been implemented, and our own public outreach standards have increased which will require an expanded scope for the General Plan update. Permit Sonoma staff provided a May 17, 2022, updated cost estimate to the Board totaling \$7.8 million, which includes both in-house staffing and external services. The work is expected to be conducted over 6 years, specifically from FY 2022/23 through FY 2027/28 (Attachment 2). Staff has been working in Fiscal Year 22-23 to start on updates of individual elements including an adopted Housing Element update, an update to the Public Safety Element, and a new Environmental Safety Element. These updated elements once adopted will be incorporated into the larger General Plan project.

Board Discussion

Staff recommends that the Board receive this informational item and provide comments to Permit Sonoma staff on the proposed initial work plan to scope the General Plan update, and plan to solicit a consultant to commence the update.

The consultant will be responsible for scoping the larger project and planning work with an initial phase to:

- Preform a detailed audit of General Plan 2020, including specific and area plans, and its consistency with current State law and guidance for General Plans;
- Market the planning effort, conduct community outreach, and establish a reliable engagement platform that will carry through the entire planning process; and,
- Establish a timeline and budget for the General Plan update and associated program Environmental Impact Report. This includes evaluating any grant or other funding that may be available to support plan development.

Strategic Plan:

As the County embarks on its fourth comprehensive overhaul of its General Plan, the Board of Supervisor’s current Five-Year Strategic Plan has created a starting point to shape the next generation of Sonoma County residents.

On January 28, 2020, the Board held a planning retreat to develop a strategic direction for the County. The process is centered around several topics (Healthy and Safe Communities, Racial Equity and Social Justice, Climate Action, Organizational Excellence, and Infrastructure) that are all relevant to the General Plan update and can ultimately be reflected priorities, or as new or refined policies within the plan. The strategic plan was adopted March 02, 2021. The Board's strategic plan provides valuable direction and framing to community conversations that would occur for General Plan 2040.

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 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?

No

Prior Board Actions:

Fiscal Year 2022-23 Budget Board of Supervisor Inquiry Number: *BIR-02 (4/29/2022)*

FISCAL SUMMARY

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

There are no direct fiscal or general fund impacts associated with this informational item. The department will determine funding needed during FY 2024-25 budget development, based on available plan admin funds, and the \$2.8 million general plan set aside fund.

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

N/A

Attachments:

Attachment 1: 2022 General Plan Annual Implementation Progress Report

Attachment 2: FY2022_23_BOS_Budget_BIR-02

Attachment 3: Staff Presentation

Related Items "On File" with the Clerk of the Board:

N/A