

Ridgecrest General Plan Update

Meeting Minutes

October 23, 2007

5:30 PM – 7:00 PM

Ridgecrest City Council Chambers

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 5:35 p.m.

Chairman Taylor spoke to any public watching advising they were welcome to attend any of the GPAC meetings and/or GPAC Sub-Committee meetings. He reiterated that the meetings were public and an open invitation was issued for members of the public to attend both the GPAC and the GPAC Sub-Committee Meetings.

2. Refinement of Land Use Alternatives

City Planner Matthew Alexander briefed the Committee on the activity for the evening. He described it as a compilation of concepts from the three sub-committees – working with the sub-committee consensus maps to get wide agreement on the following:

1. Identify preferred common elements
2. Commercial – west to 395?
3. Mixed Use beyond the center?
4. Should BLM land be urbanized in next 20 years? Where?
5. Identify a Trail System to meet the future needs of residents
6. Is there enough land for Multi Family Housing for next 20 years?

Planner Alexander referred to a map provided to the Committee showing existing Mobile Home Parks, existing Multi-family use, vacant multi-family and proposed vacant land for multi-family use. He said there were several parcels removed from multi-family housing zone in 2006 and that further parcels would be before the Planning Commission in November - in order that the Commission consider a zone change. Therefore he said, there would be a considerable reduction in vacant land available for multi-family housing.

Planner Alexander provided graphics showing areas staff proposed be zoned vacant land for multi-family use. He said he hoped that these graphics would generate discussion. Member O'Gara asked what zoning the proposed areas were currently and Planner Alexander stated that he believed they were currently zoned for single family residential use.

Chairman Taylor referred to the Map Atlas and asked Planner Alexander if there was a general recommendation in regards to how much land should be available for multi-family housing in a City the size of Ridgecrest. Planner Alexander responded stating approximately 20% would be appropriate. Chairman Taylor then asked where the County's responsibility was in terms of providing multi-family housing in the Valley. Member Biddlingmeier went on to ask if they had the same requirements as the municipality does in terms of the Housing Element

and ratios for different types of housing. Planner Alexander responded that given the quite severe restrictions – in terms of developing multi-housing in the unincorporated county – things such as septic etc – the County did not have the same requirements. Chair Biddlingmeier asked if the right “vehicles” – agreements etc. were in place would it make sense to look at that concept – for instance through annexation.

Member Kauffman asked that it be noted in the minutes that there had been no follow up from the City on annexation, he said that he understood initially there were discussions started between the City and the County in terms of annexation and he thought it was important for planning purposes to find out where that process was. He was concerned that unless the GPAC was aware of the likelihood of annexation they could not make informed choices in regards Land Use. Member Biddlingmeier agreed saying that it made sense given the layout of the town and the possibility of County land being “right across the street” from City land.

Chairman Taylor summarized stating that GPAC needed closure via an update on the annexation process and further asked if land use designations could be included – as some County Land was within the sphere of influence.

Chairman Taylor gave direction to staff to arrange for County staff to attend a meeting with GPAC to discuss and hopefully make like zoning decisions in regards to County land bordering with the City.

Member Jeglum said that GPAC could, as parts of the County were within the sphere of influence, suggest land uses but could not designate zoning in areas outside the City.

Planner Alexander responded stating that there is a poor property tax split between the City and the County and therefore there has been no incentive to encourage annexation as it worked to the City’s disadvantage. He said he believed this was at the center of the issue.

Member Roulund added that he felt annexation impeded infill and was not as high on the list of priorities as factors such as Military sustainability.

Planner Alexander then directed discussion back to the six questions as outlined by Matrix Consultants:

Preferred Common Elements - Planner Alexander started with Employment. Member Beres said she did not see a problem with the placement of Future Employment on the Land Use map presented. She said that GPAC needed to come up with some areas and those cited seemed like reasonable choices. Chairman Taylor asked for clarification of “Employment” as being **Commercial** as opposed to higher-density “office-type” employment.

Planner Alexander asked the GPAC for consensus on **Mixed Use**. Member Beres said she liked the idea saying that the newer shopping centers were doing just that and she felt it would assist with infill and what she saw as the City’s landlock issue. Planner Alexander asked if there was any interest in Mixed Use for the area behind Home Depot and East along China Lake Boulevard. Member Kilikauskas responded stating that the area near the new Wal-Mart and the downtown Balsam Street area would be a better area for mixed use. Planner Alexander said there was a standing approval for townhouses near the new Wal-Mart approved by the Planning Commission last year.

Member Jeglum asked Planner Alexander if there was a mixed use designation in the General Plan what would be identified as acceptable zoning – she asked “how does that work?” Planner Alexander said that a lot of people thought of only vertical mixed use but you could have horizontal mixed use. He indicated that a special mixed use zoning district would be required.

Member Jeglum asked for clarification saying “so mixed use would rule out having a multi-family or a professional office or a residential designation – you wouldn’t have that kind of a zoning included in the mixed use – is that what I am hearing?” Planner Alexander responded saying that it would be complex and gave an example of Balsam Street being zoned mixed use saying that Member Jeglum’s home would be exempted under set terms because of the lot size.

Chairman Taylor asked for a quick tutorial for all on land use versus zoning.

Planner Alexander explained that a General Plan had a Land Use Element included in the future land use map and within this map were broad designations to represent where the City was best going presented by densities – from residential to estate etc. etc. He said zoning was far more definitive breaking down the areas into specifics and included for instance rules on how far a fence should be set back. In summary he said General Plan Land Use is very broad – to present a picture of where the City is going and zoning is set up by ordinance and is much more definitive and detailed.

Member Jeglum then asked if an area was designated residential, would the zoning would be identified as residential and therefore the residential uses in that area could be identified. She went on to say that a mixed use zoning would be very confusing as a multi-use development would require more than one type of zoning without having to have a designated multi-use zoning. Planner Alexander responded stating that all non-residential areas could have a written clause stating that if zoning was approved mixed use could be allowed.

Member Roulund said he agreed with Member Jeglum’s comments and referred back to the process that worked for the Guns 4 Us application – saying that the current General Plan was flexible enough to accommodate that application. He said he would not like a mixed use zoning to be allowed.

Chairman Taylor said he felt it made sense on major arterials not residential areas and this should be emphasized.

Planner Alexander acknowledged that mixed use could be written into the Zoning Ordinance without designating an actual zone - but the key would be to make the Ordinance easy to comprehend so as not to generate frustration.

There was general agreement that there would not be any specific land use identified as mixed use – rather it should be written into appropriate zoning ordinance.

BLM was addressed next. There was general agreement that the area to the South was appropriate designation for this land. Chairman Taylor spoke to the Committee in regards to the area near the College remaining open as a recreational area. Member Kauffman clarified Chairman Taylor’s comments indicating that with a more specific map there was allowance for growth to the South and at the same time protection for the residents. He said that he felt that a lot of people agreed with Chairman Taylor’s comments.

Member Roulund said that he felt development obviously needed to happen to the South but acknowledged that he too would not want the area to be over-developed. Member Kilikauskas said that the whole Rademacher Hill area was a wonderful recreational use area and hoped that the area would be kept open for such. Member Biddlingmeier gave a more specific plan outlining what he felt would be an appropriate boundary for development versus recreational areas. Member Roulund acknowledged his comments and agreed and added that he hoped the Rademacher Hills area would be a protected area. Member O’Gara said that he felt the Rademacher Hills Area was considered a “jewel” by BLM – a highly prized area. Further he said that there are several areas in town and in the County that BLM have identified for access and that should be the first point of departure as those lands will be subject to consideration for accessing and sale in the future. Chairman Taylor suggested that the Parks and Recreation Sub-Committee should be aware of what land was available from the BLM, and those lands are not optimal, steering the City towards negotiations for more appropriate land.

Trail System was addressed next. Planner Alexander asked if the Parks and Recreation Sub-Committee were suggesting by their consensus map that a wider right-of-way be allowed for green strips/bicycle paths etc should be allowed. Member Kilikauskas said that the Committee was suggesting a green strips/running path down Brady – a wide path with access for bicyclists etc – a walking trail – a little bit off the road enough to give access. Planner Alexander asked if College Heights was also identified as an area for that type of use suggesting that this would assist greatly when the City was dealing with future developers.

Member Roulund agreed with Planner Alexander’s comments stating that he felt it was important to address how the City should develop now – rather than waiting for encroachment and then ending up with “truncated” development. Member Kilikauskas did note that some areas identified by the Parks and Recreation Sub-Committee were already developed but hoped that could be worked around.

Member Jeglum said she felt that some areas highlighted were basically undeveloped, she outlined where green belts could be placed and said that other areas highlighted would not be feasible given that they were already developed. She said that Brady was not within the City limits and therefore was not a feasible approach. Member Roulund said he felt the Committee had done a good job and that areas as outlined were workable.

Planner Alexander asked why there had not been dissecting lines cutting through undeveloped parcels and Chairman Taylor responded on behalf of the Committee stating that this would inhibit developers and that he was “not comfortable taking people’s land away”. Planner Alexander said that placing a greenbelt through a vacant parcel might be a way to add value to the sale. Member Porter said that in the North East section the Sub-Committee had in fact included an area through undeveloped land on the east side of the Business Park picking up Burroughs and leading to the front gate (of the Naval Base).

Chairman Taylor made a procedural suggestion that the Committee now start working at the detailed level so that they could begin addressing specifics and research if some of these ideas are achievable.

Planner Alexander said he felt there were reservations about making land available for **Multi-Family Use**. Member Kauffman said that he didn’t believe

that GPAC could find potential answers until they knew what the annexation process was and whether or not annexation is a possibility. Member Roulund commented that existing multi-use land as identified on the map provided was not fully developed and therefore potential was still available. He asked if it was possible to provide figures on how much of that land was undeveloped. Member Roulund said he felt that infill and undeveloped land should be used before annexation.

Chairman Taylor then asked staff for a number in terms of what the Committee should be looking for - in metric terms (exclusive of base land) - for capacity of development within the City including the estimated population base. Planner Alexander asked for clarification saying "without annexing any land?" This was confirmed.

There was general agreement that GPAC needed these figures to be successful. The GPAC asked to know how much development could occur within the City without having to look at processes such as annexing. Member O'Gara asked for the analysis to not include base land and to show what the current situation is –in metrics - for each type of development. Member Roulund said he felt showing this information on maps would be very helpful – showing what areas are fully developed versus those that were available for development would be a helpful visual aid, he said.

Planner Alexander said that members should realize that those figures would need to have a percentage deducted to account for people who will not want to develop their land. This was acknowledged and there was general agreement that these metrics were needed in order to plan appropriately for the City.

Planner Alexander asked for member's availability for the next GPAC. The Consultants have suggested that the November and December meeting be combined and held on December 11th - in 6 weeks. Chairman Taylor suggested that there be a vote on 11th versus 4th given that some GPAC members would have to attend the Infrastructure Committee meeting scheduled for the 11th December. There was general agreement that December 4th would be Plan A and December 11th would be Plan B. Member O'Gara asked that maps from Matrix with metrics as just discussed be provided a week prior to the December meeting.

3. Public Comments

None.

4. GPAC Member Comments

Member Kilikauskas commented that there had been a lot of controversy about "the roundabout" and that it had taken focus away from the important issue of the Bowman Channel. He said he hoped that focus could come back to the channel.

Member O'Gara, Member Roulund and Member Laire all said they were in agreement with Member Kilikauskas' comments.

Member Jeglum noted that the Infrastructure Committee had last evening determined that there was not enough information to make a sound consideration on the roundabout and that there was not an active application in the City for a roundabout. She said that to take the staff's time to do all the research to make a good call would not be worthwhile and therefore the Committee had recommended that the roundabout be taken out of the picture.

Member Beres agreed with Member Jeglum and said that there was no point in dwelling on something not yet applied for. She noted that "it remained in the picture".

Chairman Taylor said his frustration with the roundabout was the fact that it was not under consideration in the City because the City was not bringing it forward. He then said "on a positive note" he thought it was good to see that the City of Ridgecrest was polarized on such a "trivial issue". He said the town must be doing well to be able to focus so much energy on this one topic.

Member Kauffman said he wanted to know that there had been progress made in discussion with the County. In particular he wanted to know from City staff – Harvey Rose – if negotiations are going on between City staff and County Staff relative to annexation and a fair tax split between the two.

Member Cooper thanked Planner Alexander and staff for their hard work.

5. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned 6.54 p.m.