



CITY OF LONG BEACH

DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

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CHAIR AND PLANNING COMMISSIONERS

City of Long Beach

California

RECOMMENDATION:

Recommend that the City Council certify Final Program EIR 04-15; Repeal Planned Development District 29 (PD-29); Adopt an Ordinance establishing the Midtown Specific Plan; and Approve a Zone Change from PD-29 to Midtown Specific Plan. (Districts 1 and 6)

APPLICANT: City of Long Beach
Department of Development Services
333 West Ocean Boulevard, 5th Floor
Long Beach, CA 90802
Application No. 1503-23

BACKGROUND

Over the past several years staff has worked to prepare a Specific Plan to replace PD-29 with a goal of bringing new high-quality development to the transit corridor along Long Beach Boulevard. The Midtown Specific Plan is proposed as the primary tool for redevelopment of opportunity sites along this corridor to create new transit-oriented development. Development of these opportunity sites is essential to meet the City's economic and housing production goals. Implementation of the Specific Plan through new private and public development will lead to new goods, services, and housing while improving mobility, beautifying the streets, open spaces, parks, parklets and the overall built environment.

Long Beach Boulevard, once known as American Avenue, and the adjacent corridor has a long history within the City. The area, originally served by the Pacific Electric red cars from 1902 to the system's peak operation in 1927 and decline and abandonment during the 1930s and 1940s, shifted to be a premiere destination for car purchases, services and accessories during the 1960s and 1970s. The area experienced a significant decline in terms of activity, disinvestment and blight during the 1980s, from which it has never fully recovered.

Planning began during the late 1980s to transform the corridor into a transit-oriented community. In 1990 the Metro Blue Line opened and in 1991 the City adopted PD-29, establishing the broad framework for renewed investment through intensive mixed-use development along the corridor. While laudable in its goals and scope, PD-29 failed to attract the investment needed to transform the corridor.

The Planned Development District (PD) is a tool that has been widely used in the City of Long Beach over time. A Specific Plan is similar in function but is specifically enabled in State planning and zoning law. Staff has prepared the Specific Plan as it provides the best mechanism to achieve the City's goals for the area. The Specific Plan is also specifically referenced in State law regarding CEQA, as well as regional planning documents such as the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG)'s Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS). Use of a Specific Plan allows the City to provide a specific vision and detailed plan for a specific area, as well as to be eligible for streamlining and funding opportunities over time. It allows precise rules that are tailored for the specific location and circumstance and may vary from the citywide zoning code. Upon approval of the proposed Zone Change by the City Council, the zone map will reflect the new Midtown Specific Plan designation and the rules contained within the plan will be binding on all the parcels within the Specific Plan area.

The proposed Specific Plan seeks to learn from those lessons. The proposed plan does more than simply allow development, it rethinks the entire public realm, establishes guidelines and standards for the look, character and function of new public and private improvements. A Program Environmental Impact Report (Program EIR) will provide CEQA clearance for future development providing the development community with reduced time and entitlement risk for potential projects.

The Planning Commission held its most recent study session on this matter on March 17, 2016. At that meeting, staff provided a general overview of the Plan and the Commission received public testimony. The comments received from the public and the Commission have been addressed and are reflected in the draft Specific Plan.

THE PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

The Plan presents a comprehensive approach for achieving the community's vision for a vibrant and thriving community. The vision states that Midtown will be known for its unique blend of parks, strong businesses, and transit-oriented housing. Additionally, Midtown will be an early leader in multi-modal transportation practices where a person can safely and easily travel by walking, riding a bike, catching a bus, taking a train or driving a car.

Based on this community vision, the Plan includes six primary objectives: stimulating new investment, reducing auto dependence, improving active transportation (bicycle and pedestrian) safety, promoting sustainable building, promoting active living and streamlining future project implementation. The purpose of the Plan is broad and ambitious; it seeks to transform the current auto-oriented and low-intensity uses along the transit corridor into a thriving community with high-intensity mixed use and residential uses.

Plans merely consume space on bookshelves unless they lead to actual development and change. This Specific Plan seeks to create the conditions necessary for investment and change by creating clear rules and direction not only for private investment but also for public. A visual survey of existing conditions quickly reveals that the existing public realm is not attractive for present or future users or developers. This is visually manifested in conditions that include narrow sidewalks with obstructions, a lack of shade, few places to sit or rest and a dearth of landscaping. This fact is also evidenced by the high number of vacant or under-utilized parcels, the lack of new investment into the area, the low density of the built environment relative to its adjacency to transit and the over-concentration of

automobile-related uses along a transit corridor. These are precisely the conditions the Specific Plan seeks to address and change.

Accommodating growth and providing a range of housing and employment opportunities is also an important purpose of the plan. A certain amount of population growth is forecasted and inevitable for the City of Long Beach. How and where we accommodate that growth is a critical planning decision. Providing housing in higher-intensity buildings around projects, both in Midtown and Downtown, relieves demand and removes any pressure to provide for that population growth by increasing densities within existing low-density residential neighborhoods.

ORGANIZATION AND CONTENTS OF THE PLAN

Within the Specific Plan seven individual sections provide the basis and regulations for the project area. These sections include context, land use plan and development standards, mobility and streetscape, design guidelines, infrastructure, and administration and implementation. The Plan is intended to be read holistically, for example a theoretical new mixed-use development would be limited in terms of uses, open space, height, floor area (bulk), parking and setbacks under Chapter 3. That same project will also be required to include adjacent street improvements and links to bicycle and transit facilities pursuant to Chapter 4, specific design features, landscaping, signage, and lighting standards pursuant to Chapter 5 and infrastructure improvements such as storm drains to satisfy Chapter 6. Chapter 7 guides the City's procedures in processing projects and accomplishing the broad goals within the Plan.

PUBLIC OUTREACH, ENGAGEMENT AND VISION

The impetus for the Midtown Specific Plan relates back to a 2007 grant-funded study under the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG)'s Compass Blueprint program. That infill analysis and redevelopment strategy led to a 2011 effort to update PD-29 regulations. Stakeholder and neighborhood meetings began in earnest in 2012. The overall outreach included residents, property and business owners, major medical centers, social service providers, educational institutions, transit providers and other interested stakeholders.

While some divergent opinions are inevitable in a sampling of public opinion, there were eleven points of consensus among the participants. These include reducing the impacts of the street width. While the transit on Long Beach Boulevard is an asset, the resulting enormous width of the street is not. The street is not only wide, at up to 130-feet, it is bewildering and it includes long blocks with no way to cross the street mid-block. The plan seeks to resolve this issue, within the realm of possibilities, by enhancing those locations where crossings are possible, improving the overall look and condition of the sidewalk, vehicle area and medians, as well as installing parklet and green space where feasible to soften the starkness of the large street.

Stakeholders also focused on enhancing the pedestrian environment and improving bicycle access. This is accomplished through the installation of shade (as opposed to Palm) trees, adding bicycle lanes, amenities and landscaping within the right-of-way, as set forth in Chapter 4 of the Plan. The stakeholders were also passionate about changing the impression and respect of Long Beach Boulevard. As the City's namestake street, a major

travel corridor in and out of the City and a integral piece of the City's history, the Plan attempts to completely transform the environment into one everyone can be proud of. The Plan also mentions concepts such as a Business Improvement District, which while not contemplated at this time, could provide marketing, branding, clean, safe and beautiful programs in the future if the property owners along the corridor agreed to enact such an assessment district.

Participants in the outreach process also focused on increasing park space throughout the Midtown area. The public understands that finding new large areas for public parks is unlikely and financially infeasible but the Plan focuses on solutions such as creating small parklets, incorporating usable open space into new development and making the best use possible of our existing park space. Many of these improvements will be contemplated as demonstration or pilot projects consistent with the community request to show progress in the short term while also planning for the long term future.

The community requested to remain involved as the Plan is implemented, this will be particularly true as public improvements such as bike infrastructure and parks are installed. Stakeholders asked that the Plan focused on making it possible to live and work all within the same Midtown area while leveraging the existing medical center and uses. These priorities are reflected in the land use plan. Many participants also stressed the need to make Midtown safer, which the Plan attempts to do by bringing lighting and activity to the corridor, incorporating crime prevention into building and site design and improving the overall pride and "buy-in" in the area by residents and visitors. The final point of consensus was to reduce the cost of change (development), which is reflected in the streamlined approval process for projects that are consistent with the Plan.

DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS

The Specific Plan divides the midtown area into four districts: transit nodes, corridors, medical and open space. The transit node area relates to those locations in proximity to the three Metro Blue Line stations within the project area. This district is contemplated for dense mixed-use buildings with vibrant ground floor retail uses. Density is concentrated on Long Beach Boulevard and is prescribed to decrease for development on Anaheim, Pacific Coast Highway and Willow.

Areas between these transit nodes fall within the corridor district. This district is differentiated from the transit nodes by reduced intensity and the possibility of purely residential rather than mixed-use development.

The medical district includes the Long Beach Memorial campus, as well as surrounding parcels. This district allows for intensive development of a variety of uses consistent with the concept and vision for utilizing the medical center as an anchor and spark for future development along the corridor.

The open space district includes existing open space including Veterans Memorial Park, 14th Street Park and Fellowship Park. Once the Plan is implemented it will also include future parklets and green space.

In establishing uses (Table 3-2 of the Plan), the goal is to transform the Specific Plan area into an attractive, walkable, mixed-use environment. The proposed use mix is a major

change from existing conditions. Uses such as gasoline stations, bus yards and drive-through restaurants will continue only as existing non-conforming establishments and new locations will not be permitted. The proposed mix of uses are conducive to pedestrian activity, safety and new residential development. Automobile-oriented uses will continue to exist as non-conforming establishments for some time and in the long-run those uses will remain allowed on Anaheim, Pacific Coast Highway, and Willow, immediately adjacent to the Specific Plan area.

The Plan sets up a system of setback and streetwall standards that prioritize buildings brought to the street along Long Beach Boulevard contrasted with larger setbacks along Atlantic and interior streets. Minimum streetwall requirements will help the corridor to establish a consistent rhythm of building mass and appearance over time.

The Plan also includes standards for open space, which are less demanding than the citywide zoning code. This decision reflects the nature of urban high-intensity development and the future availability of parklet and other amenity space. All projects are required to incrementally improve the public realm and connection to transit, as well as meet high-quality standards for design and materials.

MINIMUM PARKING REQUIREMENTS

While creating an improved pedestrian environment and encouraging travel by foot, bicycle and transit, the Specific Plan also recognizes that most individuals currently travel alone by private vehicle and many will continue to over time. As such the Plan establishes parking standards appropriate to the area.

The majority of the Specific Plan is not within the City's Parking Impacted Area map. The four census tracts surrounding the Long Beach Boulevard and Pacific Coast Highway intersection (see Exhibit F) have only 58.7 percent of residents commuting alone in their vehicle. In fact over 18.0 percent of residents in these census tracts use transit, 4.4 percent walk and 5.2 percent use a bicycle, taxi or uber/rideshare. Among those 16-24 only 51.6 percent commute by driving alone. This is consistent with national trends where fewer individuals are choosing to drive and even declining to obtain driver's licenses.¹ Parking per unit is also impacted by decreasing family and household size.²

The parking standards in the Specific Plan decrease the minimum parking requirements compared to the citywide zoning code. The proposed parking standards continue to require more parking than downtown (PD-30), and considerably more parking than in similar light-rail adjacent areas elsewhere in California, such as Sacramento and Oakland. In staff's evaluation the proposed parking standards provide more than sufficient parking to provide for future residents, employees, shoppers and visitors. Parking standards reflect the fact that some households will have one car, others will have two and some will even be car free. Some trips will be made by car but other trips will be made by foot, bicycle, carpooling, rideshare services and public transit.

¹ Rogers, C & Nagesh, G (2016, Jan 20). Driving is losing its allure for more americans. *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from <http://www.wsj.com/articles/driving-losing-its-allure-for-more-americans-1453285801> on March 20, 2016.

² U.S. Census Brureau (2016) Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplements, 1940 and 1947 to 2015. Figure HH-6. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/hhes/families/files/graphics/HH-6.pdf> on March 21, 2016.

Right sizing parking requirements is directly related to the Plan's goal of increasing investment and attracting new development. In 2012, a single underground structured parking space integrated into new development cost \$34,000.³ on average. Requiring additional parking increases development costs and serves as a strong disincentive to investment. (ibid) The cost of constructing parking continues to rise at rates in excess of inflation.⁴

IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation of the Plan will occur over time through public and private sector investments. The improvements to the public right-of-way, such as parklets, bike lanes, new shade trees and public art will be pursued through competitive grants and as part of the City's Capital Improvement Program budget. It is hoped that this public investment will create the physical environment for private development to create new residential and retail opportunities in the area. Private development, in the form of new buildings, will complement this public investment and complete public improvements immediately adjacent to their development.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

In accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the CEQA Guidelines, a Program Environmental Impact Report (Exhibit C – EIR 04-15) was prepared for the proposed project. An Initial Study prepared in March 2015 determined that a Program EIR would be the appropriate level of CEQA environmental review pursuant to Section 15168 of the CEQA Guidelines. Although the legally required contents of a Program EIR are the same as for a Project EIR, Program EIRs are more conceptual and may contain a more general discussion of impacts, alternatives, and mitigation measures than a Project EIR. Use of a Program EIR allows the City, as Lead Agency under CEQA, the opportunity to consider broad policy alternatives and program-wide mitigation measures. Program EIRs are commonly used for long range planning policy documents such as Specific Plans.

The Notice of Preparation (NOP) and Initial Study were made available for public comment during a 30-day public review and comment period that started on March 9, 2015 and ended on April 7, 2015. During this NOP comment period, the City received written comments the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD), the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro), Southern California Edison, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), the County Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County, Southern California Gas, and the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG). In addition, several written comments were submitted by the public at a Scoping Meeting held on March 25, 2015, at the Veteran's Memorial Park Community Room. The purpose of this comment period was to allow the public and responsible agencies the opportunity to provide suggestions on the scope of analysis and environmental issues to be addressed in the EIR.

3 Shoup, D (2014) The high cost of minimum parking requirements. *Transportation and Sustainability*. Volume 5, 87-113. Retrieved from <http://shoup.bol.ucla.edu/HighCost.pdf> on March 20, 2016.

4 Cudney, G (2015, July) Parking Structure Cost Outlook for 2015. *Carl Walker*. Retrieved from <http://www.carlwalker.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Carl-Walker-2015-Cost-Article.pdf> on March 20, 2016.

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The Notice of Availability (NOA) and Draft Program EIR were made available for public comment during a 45-day public review and comment period that started on January 13, 2016 and ended on February 26, 2016. During this Draft Program EIR comment period, the City received written comments from Caltrans, Metro, the Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD), and the County Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County. Issues raised in these comment letters addressed potential traffic impacts to the regional transportation system (Caltrans), potential impacts from development occurring within 100 feet of a Metro facility and Transportation Impact Analysis requirements of the State Congestion Management Program (CMP) statute (Metro), project impacts to school facilities (LBUSD), and minor corrections to average daily wastewater generation and treatment quantities (County Sanitation Districts). All issues raised in the Draft Program EIR comment letters have been adequately addressed in the Final Program EIR, which determined that no new significant environmental impacts or issues were raised in the comment letters that would require a recirculation of the Draft Program EIR.

While mitigation measures have been proposed to reduce the level of environmental impacts, the Final Program EIR identified certain impacts that would remain significant, unavoidable, and adverse even after all feasible mitigation measures have been incorporated into the project. These environmental impacts involve short-term construction related air quality, long-term operational related air quality, construction related air quality impacts to sensitive receptors, inconsistency with the South Coast Air Basin Air Quality Management Plan (AQMP) assumptions on increases in criteria air pollutant emissions, greenhouse gas emissions, and construction related noise impacts. Due to these significant unavoidable adverse impacts, certification of this Program EIR would require approval of a Statement of Overriding Considerations that determines the project economic, legal, social, and/or technological benefits would outweigh the unavoidable adverse environmental impacts and the adverse impacts may be considered acceptable.

The Final Program EIR evaluated four Alternatives to the proposed project that could feasibly meet most of the project objectives while avoiding or substantially lessening significant project impacts. The Alternatives considered were the No Project/No Development Alternative, No Project/Existing Zoning Alternative, Reduced Intensity/Density Alternative, and Residential Focus Alternative. Based on the analysis provided in the Draft Program EIR, the Residential Focus Alternative was identified as the environmentally superior alternative, with several environmental issues at reduced impact levels compared with the proposed project, including construction and operational related air quality, greenhouse gas emissions, and construction noise. However, the Residential Focus Alternative would not meet two of the proposed project's guiding principles: Providing a Sustainable Future (Guiding Principle No. 3) and Working With and For the Community (Guiding Principle No. 5).

The preparation and public availability of this Program EIR has been done in compliance with the provisions of CEQA and the CEQA Guidelines, and staff therefore recommends that the Planning Commission recommend the City Council certify Program EIR 04-15.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission recommend the City Council certify the Program EIR (Exhibit C) and adopt the accompanying mitigation monitoring and reporting plan with associated findings (Exhibit E). Staff recommends that the Planning Commission

recommend the City Council adopt the Midtown Specific Plan to replace PD-29 and adopt the associated findings (Exhibit D).

GENERAL PLAN CONSISTENCY

The Midtown Specific Plan is compatible with the general goals, policies and designations within the City's General Plan Land Use Element. The existing General Plan Land Use Element identifies the Specific Plan area for mixed-use, commercial, residential, medical and open-space/recreation uses (LUE map grid 9 & 15). These uses are consistent with Table 3-2 which establishes permitted uses in the Specific Plan. Land Use Element goals are also advanced by the proposed Specific Plan, including: economic development, new housing construction, affordable housing, and functional transportation (LUE p. 17-19). The Plan is also consistent with the Land Use Element generalized concept of redirecting and concentrating commercial facilities in significant centers and along major arterials accommodating higher density housing (LUE p.49).

The Plan and Program EIR identify structures of historic significance and those that require further future study consistent with the Historic Preservation Element of the General Plan. The Plan focuses on enhancing existing open space and creating new open space opportunities through private open space, plaza and event space, parklets and flexible space. This is consistent with the Open Space Element goals of adding recreation open space and recreation facilities in the areas of the City that are most underserved (OSE see Goal 4.3 at p. 25), increasing recreation resources and supplement publicly owned recreation resources with privately owned recreation resources (OSE Goal 4.6), and assuring General Plan and zoning protections for open space (OSE Policy 4.4).

Implementation of the Specific Plan will result in new housing opportunities for all types of families, consistent with the Housing Element Goal 4 of providing increased opportunities for the construction of high-quality housing (HE p. 104). Housing Element policy 4.5 explicitly targets transit corridors for new housing, as well as policies 5.3 and 5.4 which relate to flexible zoning and streamlined approval processes (HE p. 105). Likewise, the Specific Plan focuses on facilitating live, work and play by foot, bicycle and transit. These efforts will eliminate vehicle trips and reduce vehicle miles traveled consistent with the City's Air Quality Element (AQE p.7) and the Mobility Element goal of creating an efficient, balanced, multimodal mobility network (ME p. 72).

The Specific Plan area is not within the Coastal Zone, is not a scenic route or highway, and does not contain significant mineral resources, therefore the Conservation, Scenic Routes and LCP General Plan elements do not apply. The Plan does include provisions for lighting and increasing activity to promote public safety consistent with the Public Safety Element goal of promoting the redevelopment of areas, which may present safety problems. (PSE p.14). New projects will also meet current seismic safety regulations consistent with Seismic Safety Element goal of providing a safe urban environment (SE p.9).

The proposed Specific Plan is also consistent with the proposed update to the Land Use Element and Urban Design Element. Those draft documents propose the project area as transit-oriented development with greater intensity around the individual blue-line stops.

The proposed zone change is not only consistent with the General Plan, it is consistent with the findings laid out in Municipal Code Section 21.25.106 and articulated in Exhibit D.

