

March 18, 2021

CHAIR AND PLANNING COMMISSIONERS

City of Long Beach
California

RECOMMENDATION:

Find that this action is exempt from the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act; and

Receive and file the 2020 Land Use Element & Urban Design Element Implementation Report and instruct the Director of Development Services to submit the Implementation Report to the City Council and State Office of Planning and Research. (Citywide)

APPLICANT:

City of Long Beach
Department of Development Services
411 W. Ocean Boulevard
Long Beach, CA 90802

DISCUSSION

The General Plan Land Use Element (LUE) update and companion Urban Design Element (UDE) were adopted by the City Council on December 3, 2019. The City of Long Beach's General Plan is a policy document required by State law, which establishes the goals and policies that will guide growth and development in the City through 2040. The aim of these documents is to guide Long Beach to a more sustainable future, improve mobility choices, expand transit access, improve air quality, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and accommodate growth projections in accordance with state law. The LUE and UDE accommodates the City's population and employment projections through the horizon year of 2040 while also advancing General Plan goals for open space, active living, improved urban design, sustainability and overall quality of life.

California law [Government Code §65400] mandates that all cities and counties submit to their legislative bodies and the Governor's Office of Planning and Research (OPR) an annual report on the status of their general plan and the progress toward its implementation, with specific reporting requirements for the housing element portion of the annual report. Specifically, the annual report assesses the effectiveness of its



implementation, in accordance with adopted goals, policies, and implementation measures (General Plan Guidelines, 2017, p. 259)¹. The intent of this statute is to ensure that the General Plan directs all land use decisions and remains an effective guide for future development. 2020 marked the first year of LUE/UDE implementation, and the 2020 LUE/UDE Implementation Report (Attachment A - 2020 LEU Design Element Annual Report) was developed to meet this reporting requirement. The report outlines major achievements to date and demonstrates which LUE and UDE goals, strategies and policies are being implemented through each action.

The LUE provides a policy framework for creating sufficient housing opportunity to address both the City's existing housing need due to overcrowding as well as accommodating the City's population and employment projections through the horizon year of 2040. In addition to focusing new development near transit, the plan seeks to transform under-utilized commercial, transit-served corridors to denser, more mixed-use corridors and nodes. This creates development opportunity while helping recycle under-performing strip malls, improving the pedestrian experience, increasing access to jobs and minimizing direct displacement. The LUE advances several goals and policies for addressing equity in access to housing, jobs, community resources, and open space, while creating more opportunities for active living, improved urban design, sustainability, and enhanced quality of life.

Implementation of this ambitious, citywide plan requires a multitude of strategies, the primary of which is updating the City's zoning code. While the General Plan establishes broad, long-term policies that guide future development, the Zoning Code implements General Plan policies by specifying detailed development regulations that accomplish the General Plan's goals. As outlined in Exhibit A, several zoning code updates have been adopted to implement the LUE. Most notably, twelve new zones to implement the three LUE PlaceTypes were adopted in December 2020. Six of these new zones were applied to select properties on two commercial corridors in North Long Beach through a City-initiated rezoning of properties, both in accordance with the LUE and in response to community input through the Uptown Planning Land Use and Neighborhood Strategy (UPLAN) process to prioritize and incentivize identified community needs including access to housing, jobs and places to purchase essential goods and services. In addition to developing new zones, the City updated specific portions of the zoning code citywide to help implement the LUE, including enhanced regulations for the development of new drive-throughs, and the adoption of a process for temporarily activating vacant lots for community serving uses such as food production.

In addition to updates to the zoning code, there are a wide variety of other policies, programs, planning strategies and initiatives that support implementation of the LUE/UDE. For example, the City released the final Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP) in 2020. The CAAP provides a pathway for implementing and maximizing the sustainable development and resilience strategies laid out in the LUE/UDE. The City has continued its pioneering efforts to further multi-modal mobility, including sidewalk and

¹ http://opr.ca.gov/docs/OPR_C9_final.pdf

bikeway improvements, as well as the adoption of a vehicle miles traveled (VMT) approach to transportation impact analysis.

In response to the changing needs of the Long Beach community due to the COVID19 global health pandemic, implementation of some LUE/UDE policies and strategies was accelerated. For example, the City implemented a new Open Streets program to create additional public outdoor open space for people to safely recreate while social distancing. The expansion of sidewalk dining and parklets implements the LUE and UDE, and in 2020 was critical to allowing more businesses to remain open. Through federal and state funding in response to COVID19, the City has been able to help address housing needs through conversion of motels into supportive housing and through provision of rental assistance. Residents and businesses have also benefited from enhanced renter protections during the COVID19 crisis in the form of eviction moratoria. COVID19 recovery funding was also used to support food security projects in Long Beach communities without sufficient access to healthy food. Consequently, however, implementation of some LUE/UDE policies slated to be led by the departments most impacted by COVID19, such as the Health Department, Economic Development and Parks Departments, had to be postponed as urgent needs were prioritized.

Several new housing policies that help implement the LUE have been adopted, including new rules to allow interim and supportive housing, allowing the conversion of motels to supportive housing, and the adoption of a micro-unit pilot program. Prior to the COVID19 pandemic, housing was already the number one social determinant of health in Long Beach. Housing became even more critical of a health issue as it related to housing affordability for already struggling populations and the tens of thousands in the City who became unemployed, as well as housing quality, particularly for children and older adults who have had to spend more time at home during the pandemic and are more vulnerable during heat waves and to poor air quality. The issue of household overcrowding, which the LUE seeks to address, turned out to be a significant vulnerability factor for community spread of COVID19 in Long Beach and across the Country. Due to the housing crisis, overcrowding impacts more than 12 percent of all households in Long Beach, but it is most predominant in Long Beach neighborhoods with the least access to parks and open space, and the worst environmental health indicators.

The adoption of a Long Beach Framework for Reconciliation in 2020 was another important initiative that supports many LUE policies and provides further direction for LUE implementation. After George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man, was killed by four Minneapolis Police Officers, people in Long Beach and across the nation took to the streets in public outcry to condemn the violence and racial inequities that have systematically and historically impacted Black people. The Long Beach City Council directed staff to conduct a listening process and develop a Framework for Reconciliation in response. During the listening process conducted in the summer of 2020, community members expressed outrage over inequities impacting their lives, many of which are causally related to the land use and zoning practices, that have led to a lack of access to quality and affordable housing, well-paying jobs, environmentally safe neighborhoods, and healthy food. The community survey conducted as part of that process found that

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“housing discrimination/redlining” was the top way in which people in Long Beach who responded to the survey have experienced racism.

Adopted unanimously by City Council, the Framework for Reconciliation report details actions to address anti-Black racism, advance racial equity, and create a vision for the City’s future where race does not determine social and economic outcomes. Many of the strategies and actions focus on addressing the housing crisis, lack of access to quality jobs, environmental racism, lack of access to healthy food and health resources, and lack of access to parks and open space in communities of color in Long Beach, all of which relate directly to land use policy and practices.

At the time the Framework was developed and adopted, Planning was already well underway with the Uptown Planning Land Use and Neighborhood Strategy UPLAN, a collaborative effort between the City and the North Long Beach community to come up with laws and policies to guide future development and create a new vision in North Long Beach. North Long Beach, a community containing 93 percent of residents of color, was prioritized as the first area of the City to be rezoned to be consistent with updated LUE. As described above, twelve new zones were adopted through UPLAN in 2020 to implement the LUE. UPLAN represents a planning process done through an equity framework that geographically prioritizes communities of color with the greatest need for new strategies from the LUE, including flexibility and incentives for community-prioritized uses and amenities. UPLAN is the first process for implementing the LUE through development of new zones tailored to meet the specific community goals prioritized by North Long Beach residents. UPLAN’s equity framework is focused on both the planning process and the changes in planning regulations. UPLAN has been grounded in a community empowerment and capacity building process in which communities most impacted by planning decisions, including young people and people of color, were prioritized in the process, which ensured that the specific feedback and concerns of these stakeholders were incorporated in to context-sensitive regulations that incentivize desirable uses such as grocery stores, banks, more affordable housing, locally serving jobs, civic institutions and other identified needs. UPLAN also includes strategies to help residents, workers, and businesses remain in North Long Beach.

In addition to feedback from the North Long Beach community that has informed the UPLAN recommendations, North Long Beach community members called for new housing opportunities to be created across all parts of the city. Relatedly, the issue of housing segregation came up consistently through the Framework for Reconciliation process described above. Long Beach is one of the most diverse cities in the country, but it also remains one of the most segregated cities in the country. Although there are a multitude of equity-focused policies and strategies in the LUE/UDE, the fact remains that historic patterns of development have resulted in concentrated poverty and racial segregation, and implementation of the General Plan in the future should focus on remedying the legacy of exclusionary zoning and redlining. The areas with limited opportunity for new housing are those with the best schools, the greatest number of parks and open space and the healthiest environments.

Ensuring fair and equitable distribution of housing for all income levels is an important goal that is being further analyzed as part of the Housing Element update which began in 2020, as the State of California requires the City to provide sufficient opportunity for new housing, but also to address issues of fair and equal housing opportunity. The LUE vision is for a City that thrives, and although great progress has been made towards implementing the LUE/UDE plan towards that vision, achieving it is not possible without addressing these equity issues. Land use regulations represent one of the most important tools the City can use to create access to opportunity, particularly in today's fiscally constrained budgetary environment. These considerations must be central to developing the forthcoming Housing Element update, zoning code recommendations, and all other implementation actions for the LUE/UDE moving forward.

As with any such Citywide, long range plan, refinements will be needed to address issues that arise during implementation. For example, staff has identified the need refine PlaceType boundaries where a parcel may be split between two PlaceTypes, for example, or where a PlaceType was erroneously applied. In the UPLAN effort, for example staff identified a small block of existing low-density residential housing that was designated as the Neo-Industrial PlaceType, but should be have a Multifamily PlaceType based on the existing development. Additionally, issues such as how average densities contained in Table LU-3 apply to specific projects, requires clarification. Finally, staff has identified a specific change to Table LU-3 for the Multifamily low-density PlaceType that is needed to ensure conformance with regulations by the State Housing and Community Development (HCD) department. For these reasons, staff anticipates returning to the Planning Commission later in 2021 with at least one batch of minor amendments.

Each year, City staff will prepare an annual report summarizing progress made in implementing the LUE/UDE. This is important to ensure the City is moving forward to achieve the vision outlined in the plan. The annual report is intended to guide the Planning Commission and City Council on developing policy, establishing priorities and providing direction to staff.

PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE

This item is not a public hearing; therefore, no public hearing notice is required. However, this item appeared on the Planning Commission meeting agenda that was provided in accordance with the provisions of the Municipal Code. No public comments have been received as of the preparation of this report.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

This annual report is exempt from the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15378 as this action is not defined as a project. The annual report is an administrative activity and does not authorize new development. Furthermore, a Program Environmental Impact Report (EIR 03-16) was prepared in accordance with the CEQA Guidelines for the adoption of the LUE/UDE. The LUE/UDE helps the City achieve its vision and goals for creating a more sustainable community.

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Respectfully submitted,



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Attachments: Attachment A - 2020 LEU Design Element Annual Report