

Planning Commission

PREPARED BY: Tina Gallegos, City Planner

DATE: August 31, 2011

SUBJECT: SAN PABLO AVENUE SPECIFIC PLAN AND FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT (STATE CLEARINGHOUSE SCH NO. 2010112062) – PUBLIC HEARING TO REVIEW, DISCUSS AND PROVIDE COMMENTS ON THE PROPOSED BACKGROUND TEXT, GOALS, PRINCIPLES, POLICIES AND EXPLANATORY TEXT CONTAINED IN THE SAN PABLO AVENUE SPECIFIC PLAN DOCUMENT. THE PLANNING COMMISSION WILL CONSIDER MAKING A RECOMMENDATION TO THE CITY COUNCIL TO CERTIFY THE FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT FOR THE SPECIFIC PLAN AND ADOPT THE SAN PABLO AVENUE SPECIFIC PLAN.

PROJECT TITLE AND REQUEST

The Commission is being asked to review, discuss and consider adopting Resolution No. 11-17 (Exhibit A) recommending that the City Council certify the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) prepared for the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan and adopt the Statement of Overriding Considerations. In addition, the Commission is also being asked to adopt Resolution No. 11-18 (Exhibit B) recommending that the City Council approve the Specific Plan for San Pablo Avenue.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission approve the attached Resolutions recommending that the City Council:

- Approve the Environmental Impact Report (SCH No. 2010112062) and Statement of Overriding Considerations.
- Adopt the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan

BACKGROUND

Applicant: Zoning Administrator - City of San Pablo

Project Location: The San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan Area which encompasses 261 acres; the extent of the San Pablo Avenue corridor within the San Pablo city limits and some adjacent parcels.

ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTATION

The City has prepared a Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) pursuant to CEQA to evaluate the potential impacts of the proposed San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan as required by the California Environmental Quality Act.

A Notice of Preparation for the EIR was published in May 2010 and recirculated on November 19, 2010, and a public scoping meeting was held June 1, 2010. The public review period for the Draft EIR was from April 19, 2011 through June 2, 2011. At the conclusion of the review period a total of four letters were received by staff from reviewing agencies, including: The Department of Toxic Substances Control, The Department of Transportation, East Bay Municipal Utility District, and The Lytton Rancheria of California. To address the concerns brought forth by these agencies, a Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) addressing the concerns of the responding agencies. The FEIR is attached to this report for your review.

Further discussion on the Environmental Impacts is contained in the Analysis section of this report.

PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE

A notice of this public hearing was published in the West Contra Costa Times on Saturday, August 28, 2011. Additionally, notices were mailed to all the residents and property owners within 300 feet of the project area. To date, no one from the public has contacted staff regarding this amendment.

BACKGROUND

The Metropolitan Transportation Agency (MTC) and the Association of Bay Area Governments designated over 100 areas in 60 jurisdictions as FOCUS Priority Development Area's (PDA's). The program is an incentive-based effort to promote increased housing and smart growth principles along routes of regional significance and properties adjacent to transit. The program is supported in part by the Regional Blueprint Planning Grant from the State of California.

The San Pablo Avenue corridor was designated a regional FOCUS PDA in November of 2007. The San Pablo Avenue corridor PDA extends beyond the San Pablo city boundaries and includes portions of San Pablo Avenue that traverse through the following cities: Oakland, Albany, Richmond, El Cerrito, San Pablo, Pinole, Hercules, Rodeo and Contra Costa County.

The PDA designation set San Pablo's eligibility for grant funding through MTC's Station Area Planning Grant. The Station Area Planning program is intended to increase transit ridership by creating wholesome communities and encouraging an intensification of land use near transit stations and high quality bus service. The program was originally developed to advance MTC's Transit Oriented Development (TOD) policy. However, in October of 2007 the MTC Commission expanded the grant program to also include FOCUS Priority Development Areas (PDAs) in their consideration for the Station Area Planning Grants.

On February 28, 2008 City staff submitted an application to MTC seeking funding for the preparation of a Specific Plan for the portion of this corridor that is within our City limits. The Specific Plan is proposed to include goals and policies that encourage the development of a sustainable mix of uses and improvements to public transit to help the City achieve revitalization of its principal spine. Ultimately, the City envisions the San Pablo Avenue corridor as a highly livable and pedestrian-friendly urban space, with a healthy mix of uses easily accessed by a variety of modes of transit. The Grant application was accepted by the MTC Board and that the City received \$500,000 for the preparation of the Specific Plan which is now the subject of this hearing item.

PLANNING PROCESS

The development of the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan involved a step-by-step process with interaction between the community, elected City officials, City staff, and project consultants.

In addition, concurrent with the creation of the Specific Plan, the city was also undergoing an update of its citywide General Plan. As a result, a General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC) was formed early on composed of interested community members, business owners, and agencies serving the residents of the City. The GPAC was also primarily responsible for overseeing the planning process for the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan by providing leadership; reviewing Staff and Consultant research and technical analysis; and providing input for and confirming key issues, visions, and land use planning policies.

Some of the milestones in the planning process for the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan are detailed below:

Task 1: Community involvement Strategy/outreach

Objective: Solicit input from stakeholders, community, and decision-makers to ascertain all the major issues of concern, and determine if any changes should be made to the scope of work or approach.

Task 2: Existing Conditions Maps

Objective: Involved mapping existing land use patterns, resources, key development constraints, transit routes, and development opportunity sites. That stage was concluded with the completion of Existing Conditions Maps that showed the existing land uses within the planning area.

Task 3: Market Demand Analysis

Objective: To analyze the market demand for different types of land uses along San Pablo Avenue. The results provided input for developing the land use/urban design alternatives for the Specific Plan and served to evaluate the market factors supporting development within the project area, especially those factors supporting increased transit demand and increased neighborhood livability.

Task 4: Alternatives and Preferred Plan

Objective: Prepare land use/urban design alternatives. Conducted community workshops and meet with decision-makers (City Council and Planning Commission) to present the alternatives and review the Preferred Plan.

Task 5: Specific Plan Key Components: Land Use, Parking, and Connectivity and Circulation

Objective: Develop specific recommendations on goals and policies to be included in the Specific Plan related to land use, parking, and connectivity and circulation.

Task 6: Draft Specific Plan

Objective: Prepared the full Draft Specific Plan, incorporating the major substantive content developed during the previous tasks.

Task 7: Environmental Impact Report (EIR)

Objective: Prepared the Draft Environmental Impact Report for the Specific Plan. Because the EIR on the General Plan was prepared concurrently, this EIR relied on and built on material collected for the General Plan EIR as appropriate.

Task 8: Public Review and Adoption; Final Specific Plan

The objective of this task and this public hearing is to conduct the public review and successfully take the Draft Specific Plan and Program EIR through the public hearing process. The Specific Plan will be revised after adoption to reflect the Planning Commission and City Council's decision.

ANALYSIS

San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan Analysis

The principal objective behind the Specific Plan for San Pablo Avenue is to foster the revitalization of the corridor. The plan includes provisions to allow for mixed-use, transit-oriented development that will help to address regional housing demands and will also serve to enhance the city's jobs/housing balance through the development of new residential units and the creation of employment opportunities. The Specific Plan provides an organized document that delineates the community's vision for the corridor through the establishment of goals, policies, guidelines, and standards for higher density, pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use development along this existing transit corridor.

The Plan is organized into ten sections titled as follows:

- Context and Vision
- Land Use
- Access, Circulation, and Parking
- Land Use Regulations and Development Standards
- Urban Design and Building Development Standards
- Utilities and Public Services
- Community Facilities
- Affordable Housing Strategy
- Environment, Health, and Safety
- Implementation

Generally, each section begins with an introduction that states the purpose and scope of that section and any pertinent background information. Each section also includes guiding policies that reflect the desired outcome of the community and implementing policies that give specific direction to how these guiding policies can be achieved.

The Specific Plan was prepared based on guidance from the community, the GPAC, Planning Commission, and City Council. The Public Review Draft of the Specific Plan, and the related Draft Environmental Impact was presented to the Planning Commission and City Council at a joint meeting held on June 6, 2011. At this time notice was also sent to all affected agencies for review and comment.

Environmental Impact Analysis

The Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan is intended to disclose to City decision makers, responsible agencies, organizations, and the general public the potential impacts of implementing the proposed Plan. The report that was prepared for the Specific Plan is a "programmatic" EIR. A programmatic EIR examines the potential effects resulting from implementing designated land uses and policies in the proposed Plan. As a programmatic document, it identifies mitigation measures to minimize any significant impacts. This document can also be used as a reference for subsequent

environmental review of specific regulating plans, infrastructure improvements, zoning amendments, impact fees and specific development proposals, and as such, will reduce the amount of time and cost of analyzing future applications.

The EIR identifies potentially significant impacts that can be avoided or reduced to levels that are not significant through implementation of the policies or mitigation measures identified in the EIR.

“Significant unavoidable impacts” are those that cannot be mitigated to a level that is less than significant. According to CEQA Guidelines 15126(b), an EIR must discuss any significant environmental impacts that cannot be avoided under full implementation of the proposed program. Environmental review for this project revealed two significant unavoidable impacts in the areas of transportation and air quality.

IMPACT 1: TRANSPORTATION

Implementation of the proposed San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan, in conjunction with anticipated regional growth and development, could cause conflicts with existing MTSO’s (Multimodal Transportation Service Objectives) for Routes of Regional Significance presented in the West County Action Plan. In particular, intersections on Routes of Regional Significance may operate below the acceptable MTSO standards during one or both peak hours. According to the I-80/San Pablo Dam Road Interchange Project IS/EA, the San Pablo Avenue/San Pablo Dam Road intersection would operate at a Level of Service (LOS) of “F” in the future with no project, as well as with Caltrans’ proposed reconfiguration of the interchanges. (The transportation LOS system uses the letters “A” through “F”, with “A” being best and “F” being the worst level of service). This means that while the Caltrans interchange reconfigurations may improve traffic flow overall, those improvements do not substantively change performance of this intersection under future local and regional growth conditions. The cumulative impact at this intersection of regional growth, Caltrans efforts, and the proposed San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan is therefore considered potentially significant.

The proposed Plan offers a policy to convert the southbound through lane on San Pablo Avenue to a left-or-through lane to provide a total of one left-turn-only lane, one left-or-through lane and one through-or-right lane; and modifying the traffic signal timing to allow “split phases” for the northbound and southbound movements. The current modeling suggests that implementation of this policy would allow the intersection to operate at LOS “B” with a v/c of 0.68 in the AM peak hour and LOS “E” with a v/c of 0.95 in the PM peak hour.

Despite the potential benefits of the lane designations and signal timing improvements, there is still too much uncertainty around the impacts of the Caltrans ramps improvements on traffic flow into this intersection. Without more data on changes in actual traffic flow between I-80 and the intersection of San Pablo Avenue and San Pablo Dam Road, the signal timing and/or lane designation changes necessary to improve future performance, and their effectiveness, remain uncertain. Therefore, even with implementation of this proposed policy, this analysis still finds a significant and unavoidable cumulative impact on traffic LOS at this intersection. However, the project’s contribution to this significant cumulative effect is found to be less than considerable with the proposed mitigation reducing Contra Costa Transportation Authority-based modeled LOS within an acceptable range for the planning period (to 2030).

IMPACT 2: AIR QUALITY

Implementation of the proposed San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan could result in an increase in Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) at a rate that would exceed the rate of population increase within the City. The proposed General Plan includes many of the measures identified by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD) as applicable to reduce air quality impacts of general plans. Unfortunately, transportation modeling is still unable to account for the positive influence of these policy and land use design choices. Based strictly on the transportation modeling conducted for the proposed Project in accordance with BAAQMD CEQA Guidelines, vehicle travel is forecast to increase at a faster rate than population, and therefore this impact would be considered significant and unavoidable.

CEQA Conclusion and Recommendation

The proposed San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan is consistent with the Metropolitan Transportation Commission's (MTC) and the Association of Bay Area Government's (ABAG) transit oriented development goals in which urban development is directed toward existing urban infill sites near transit corridors in order to avoid the loss of open space. The proposed San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan overall seeks to achieve this goal through growth management tools and policies that give high priority to density, connectivity, jobs-housing balance, and preserving open space and ecological areas.

The proposed San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan is being offered despite these significant impacts because the City is in need of updated land use plans that can thoughtfully and creatively accommodate projected population growth, as well as provide for jobs and economic development.

The significant impacts related to the proposed San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan would not be considerably different under any other likely growth scenario for San Pablo that accommodates planned approved residential and non-residential development proposed for the City. Moreover, as noted in the Draft EIR (Attachment A to Exhibit A) emissions of several criteria pollutants are expected to decrease even with population growth and increased VMT because of fuel efficiency standards. This suggests that the plan will actually create only a minimal contribution to the overall regional cumulative impacts of criteria air pollutant emissions.

In addition, there are numerous San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan policies being proposed that would reduce the transportation impact. For example, policy's supporting alternate travel modes to the single-occupant auto commuter and policies supporting smart growth land use that would ultimately reduce demand on the roads. However, the CEQA conclusion and recommendation for the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan requires adopting a Statement of Overriding Considerations based on the finding of significant and unavoidable environmental impacts. The following is the basis for the Statement of Overriding Considerations:

- 1) The proposed project has unavoidable and significant adverse impacts associated with transportation because of traffic congestion on the identified Routes of Regional Significance; however the benefits of the project outweigh the significant adverse impacts.
- 2) The implementation of the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan will contribute to traffic congestion on the identified Routes of Regional Significance that are already operating at congested levels that is largely attributed to regional growth in Contra Costa County and adjacent counties.

- 3) Project impacts on transportation will be mitigated to the greatest extent feasible.
- 4) Every viable San Pablo Avenue Specific alternative, as well as the "no project" alternative, would have a significant and unavoidable environmental impact because of traffic congestion on the identified Routes of Regional Significance.
- 5) There are no feasible mitigation measures identified that would reduce the impacts on the Routes of Regional Significance to a level that is less than significant.
- 6) Mitigations, changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the project which avoids or substantially lessens the significant environmental effects identified in the EIR; including policies promoting biking, walking, and alternate modes of transportation.
- 7) The project will provide positive direction for the future development of the City, such as supporting smart growth mixed use development and transit supportive land uses, promoting the economic development of the community, maintaining and improving the quality of life in the community, preserving and enhancing environmental resources, and conserving the natural and built environment.

GENERAL PLAN CONSISTENCY

As was previously mentioned, the planning process for the Specific Plan for San Pablo Avenue ran concurrently with the update of the San Pablo General Plan. The new general has been adopted. Given that both documents were being drafted in parallel, goals and policies in the General Plan were included to support the intent of the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan. The following General Plan goals, policies, and programs support the Specific Plan:

General Plan Guiding Policy LU-G-1

Promote a sustainable, balanced land use pattern that responds to existing and future needs of the City, as well as physical and natural constraints.

Analysis: The proposed Specific Plan provides a balanced land use pattern that supports transit oriented mixed use development to address future population growth.

General Plan Guiding Policy LU-G-11

Recognize the importance of the mixed-use areas along San Pablo Avenue, San Pablo Dam Road, 23rd Street, and Rumrill Boulevard to the vitality and quality of life in San Pablo.

Analysis: In recognition of the importance of San Pablo Avenue to the vitality and quality of life in San Pablo, this Specific Plan was prepared to create a focused land use planning approach particular to this area.

General Plan Implementing Policy LU-I-38

Develop a distinct design theme with defined design standards and guidelines for each of the special planning areas to foster an identifiable image for each area. This will be done with specific plans for San Pablo Avenue and 23rd Street and with design guidelines for other areas.

Analysis: The Specific Plan for San Pablo Avenue contains detailed urban design and building development standards to foster an identifiable image for the corridor.

General Plan Implementing Policy LU-I-39

Use the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan to guide future development in the Circle S site focus area.

Analysis: The Specific Plan for San Pablo Avenue contains general guiding and implementing policies particular to the Circle-S site.

General Plan Implementing Policy LU-I-40

Use design guidelines established by the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan for development review in the San Pablo Avenue corridor.

Analysis: The Specific Plan for San Pablo Avenue contains detailed urban design and building development standards to guide development review along the San Pablo Avenue corridor.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

The Commission's recommendation at this hearing will be forwarded to the City Council for deliberation; the Council will consider certifying the EIR, adoption of the Statement of Overriding Considerations, and approval of the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan. Staff recommends that the Planning Commission approve the attached Resolutions as follows:

- Resolution No. 11-17: Resolution of the Planning Commission of the City of San Pablo recommending that the City Council certify the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan Environmental Impact Report (State Clearinghouse Sch No. 2010112062) and adopt the associated Statement Of Overriding Considerations.

- Resolution No. 11-18 recommending that the City Council adopt the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan

FINDINGS

Findings for Certification of the Environmental Impact Report

1. Full and fair public hearings have been held on the Final EIR and the Planning Commission has considered all comments received thereon, and thus said Final EIR, which is incorporated by reference, is hereby determined to be adequate and complete.

2. In connection with the recommended approval to adopt the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan, that the Final EIR for those actions has been prepared in compliance with CEQA and state and local environmental guidelines and regulations, and that the Planning Commission has independently reviewed and analyzed the information contained therein, including the written comments received during the EIR review period and the oral and written comments received at the public hearings, and that the Final EIR represents the independent judgment of the City of San Pablo as the Lead Agency for the Project.

3. The Final EIR contains additions, clarifications, modifications and other information in its responses to comments on the Draft EIR. The Planning Commission does hereby find and determine that such changes and additional information are not significant new

information as that term is defined under the provisions of CEQA because such changes and additional information do not indicate that any new significant environmental impacts not already evaluated would result from the Project and they do not reflect any substantial increase in the severity of any environmental impact. All feasible mitigation measures for the Project identified in the Draft and Final EIR are hereby incorporated into this resolution.

4. Findings of significant and unavoidable environmental impacts

A. The implementation of the proposed San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan could cause conflicts with existing MTSO's for Routes of Regional Significance presented in the West County Action Plan. In particular, intersections on Routes of Regional Significance may operate below the acceptable MTSO standard during one or both peak hours. According to the I-80/San Pablo Dam Road Interchange Project IS/EA, the San Pablo Avenue/San Pablo Dam Road intersection would operate at LOS F in the future with no project, as well as with Caltrans' proposed reconfiguration of the interchanges. This means that while the Caltrans interchange reconfigurations may improve traffic flow overall, those improvements do not substantively change performance of this intersection under future local and regional growth conditions. The cumulative impact at this intersection of regional growth, Caltrans efforts, and the proposed Specific Plan is therefore considered potentially significant;

B. Implementation of the proposed San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan could result in an increase in VMT at a rate that would exceed the rate of population increase within the City. The proposed Specific Plan includes many of the measures identified by the BAAQMD as applicable to reduce air quality impacts of general plans. Unfortunately, transportation modeling is still unable to account for the positive influence of these policy and land use design choices. Based strictly on the transportation modeling conducted for the proposed Project in accordance with BAAQMD CEQA Guidelines, vehicle travel is forecast to increase at a faster rate than population, and therefore this impact would be considered significant and unavoidable.

5. Statement of Overriding Considerations:

The proposed project has unavoidable and significant adverse impacts associated with transportation because of traffic congestion on the identified Routes of Regional Significance, however the benefits of the project outweighs the significant adverse impacts. The implementation of the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan will contribute to traffic congestion on the identified Routes of Regional Significance that are already operating at congested levels that is largely attributed to regional growth in Contra Costa County and adjacent counties. Project impacts on transportation will be mitigated to the greatest extent feasible. Every viable San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan alternative, as well as the "No project" alternative, would have a significant and unavoidable environmental impact because of traffic congestion on the identified Routes of Regional Significance. There are no feasible mitigation measures identified that would reduce the impacts on the Routes of Regional Significance to a level that is less than significant. Mitigations, changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the project which

avoids or substantially lessens the significant environmental effects identified in the EIR. The project will provide positive direction for the future development of the City, such as supporting mixed use development and transit supportive land uses, promote the economic development of the community, maintain and improve the quality of life in the community, preserve and enhance environmental resources, and conserve the natural and built environment.

The significant impacts related to the proposed San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan would not be considerably different under any other likely growth scenario that accommodates planned approved residential and non-residential development proposed for the city. Moreover, emissions of several criteria pollutants are expected to decrease by 2030 even with population growth and increased VMT because of fuel efficiency standards. This suggests that the plan will actually create only a minimal contribution to the overall regional cumulative impacts of criteria air pollutant emissions.

In addition, there are numerous San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan policies being proposed that would reduce the transportation impact. For example, policy's supporting alternate travel modes to the single-occupant auto commuter and policies supporting smart growth land use that would ultimately reduce demand on the roads.

6. A public notice of hearing was given by mail, and was also published in the West County Times, in accordance with the requirements of Government Code Section 65905.

Findings for Adoption of the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan

7. The proposed San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan is necessary to plan for future growth in the City of San Pablo, and will not be detrimental to the health, safety, peace, morals, comfort and general welfare of the city.
8. The proposed San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan is consistent with the policies of the General Plan.
9. The proposed San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan contains urban design and development standards that will result in coordinated development throughout the corridor.

ATTACHMENTS

Exhibit A: Resolution No.11-17: A Resolution recommending City Council certification of the Environmental Impact Report and adoption of a Statement of Overriding Considerations for the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan and includes the following attachments:

- Attachment A: Draft Environmental Impact Report, dated March 2011.
- Attachment B: Final Environmental Impact Report

Exhibit B: Resolution No.11-18: A Resolution recommending City Council adoption of the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan and includes the following attachment:

- Attachment A: San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan, dated September 2011.

All exhibits and attachments to this staff report are available on the City of San Pablo website at www.SanPabloCA.gov/SPASpecificPlan They can also be viewed at the Planning service counter located at 13831 San Pablo Ave, Bldg. 3, San Pablo, CA 94806.