



City of Woodland

**REPORT TO MAYOR, CITY COUNCIL, AND
REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY BOARD**

AGENDA ITEM

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR, CITY
COUNCIL, AND REDEVELOPMENT
AGENCY BOARD

DATE: January 29, 2008

SUBJECT: Direction regarding the updating of the General Plan, updating the
Downtown Specific Plan and providing a vision for the Downtown
Area

Report in Brief

The City needs to update two critical planning documents that will guide Woodland's future growth and development. These documents are the General Plan and the Downtown Specific Plan. On December 11, 2007, staff presented the City Council with a summary of Policy, Leadership and Management Initiatives that need to be implemented in order to support the City's transition to a highly effective and efficient local government organization. One of these initiatives suggested that the City immediately update the Downtown Specific Plan prior to updating the General Plan. Staff committed in the December 11 report to providing the City Council with further discussion of this initiative in January.

In addition to considering the need to update the critical planning documents, staff has received comments from Council members and members of the community regarding the need for more City focus in the downtown area. These comments have included suggestions that City staff actively facilitate and support the efforts of downtown businesses to promote the area, provide funding for infrastructure improvements that will enhance the appearance of the area and assign City staff to guide high priority public/private development projects. Staff believes these suggestions need to be considered as part of a larger vision for the downtown area in order to be pursued in an organized and cohesive manner. Without such a vision, the activities and projects will lack a strategic focus and purpose.

Staff recommends that the City Council and Redevelopment Agency Board approve the update of the Downtown Specific Plan in advance of the update to the General Plan as described herein and provide direction regarding specific activities that will support the establishment of a vision and priorities for the Downtown Area.

Background

The General Plan

California state law requires each city to prepare and adopt a comprehensive, long term general plan for the physical development of the city and any land outside its boundaries which bears relation to its planning. The California Supreme Court has called the general plan the “constitution for future development.” The general plan expresses the community’s development goals and embodies public policy relative to the distribution of future land uses, both public and private.

General plans are required to be internally consistent. The concept of internal consistency holds that no policy conflicts can exist, either textual or diagrammatic, between the components of an otherwise complete and adequate general plan. Different policies must be balanced and reconciled within the plan.

Most jurisdictions select 15 to 20 years as the long-term horizon for the general plan. The horizon does not mark an end point, but rather provides a general context in which to make shorter-term decisions. The local jurisdiction may choose a time horizon that serves its particular needs.

A general plan is made up of text describing goals and objectives, principles, standards, and plan proposals, as well as a set of maps and diagrams. Together, these parts paint a picture of the community’s future development.

In statute, the general plan is presented as a collection of seven “elements,” or subject categories. These elements and the issues embodied by each are briefly summarized below.

The *land use element* designates the type, intensity, and general distribution of uses of land for housing, business, industry, open space, education, public buildings and grounds, waste disposal facilities, and other categories of public and private uses.

The *circulation element* is correlated with the land use element and identifies the general location and extent of existing and proposed major thoroughfares, transportation routes, terminals, and other local public utilities and facilities.

The *housing element* is a comprehensive assessment of current and projected housing needs for all economic segments of the community. In addition, it embodies policies for providing adequate housing and includes action programs for that purpose. By statute, the housing element has some very specific requirements and **must be updated every five years**. We are currently proceeding with this required update

The *conservation element* addresses the conservation, development, and use of natural resources, including water, forests, soils, rivers, and mineral deposits, if applicable.

The *open-space element* details plans and measures for the long-range preservation and conservation of open-space lands, including open space for the preservation of natural resources, the managed

production of resources (including agricultural lands), outdoor recreation, and public health and safety.

The *noise element* identifies and appraises noise problems within the community and forms the basis for land use distribution.

The *safety element* establishes policies and programs to protect the community from risks associated with seismic, geologic, flood, and wildfire hazards.

A local general plan may also include other topics of local interest. For instance, a city may choose to incorporate into its land use element a detailed program for financing infrastructure and timing capital improvements. The safety element of a city that suffers from flood hazards may contain strategic flood protection planning policies to mitigate such hazards.

In addition to the mandatory elements, a city may adopt any other elements that relate to its physical development. Once adopted, these optional elements become an integral part of the general plan with the same force and effect as the mandatory elements. Accordingly, zoning, subdivisions, public works, specific plans, and other actions that must be consistent with the general plan must be consistent with any optional elements.

The general plan should be reviewed regularly, regardless of its horizon, and revised as new information becomes available and as community needs and values change. In Woodland's situation for instance, the recent adoption of the Urban Limit Line ballot measure by itself may trigger the need to revise the general plan. Additionally, recent state legislation on flood issues may pose significant issues that need to be made part of the City's long range planning efforts. A general plan based upon outdated information and projections is not a sound basis for day-to-day decision making and may be legally inadequate. As such, it will be susceptible to successful legal challenge.

The last comprehensive update to the Woodland was completed November 5, 1996 and confirmed by citywide referendum in 1997. A minor update/revision was adopted on December 17, 2002.

The Specific Plan

A specific plan is a tool for the systematic implementation of the general plan. It effectively establishes a link between implementing policies of the general plan and the individual development proposals in a defined area. A specific plan may be as general as setting forth broad policy concepts, or as detailed as providing direction to every facet of development from the type, location and intensity of uses to the design and capacity of infrastructure; from the resources used to finance public improvements to the design guidelines of a subdivision.

A thorough specific plan can enable city staff, the Planning Commission, and the City Council to effectively implement selected long term general plan objectives in a short time frame. The enabling statutes are flexible, allowing public agencies to create standards for the development of a wide range of projects or solutions to any type of land use issues. The plan may present the land use and

design regulations which guide the development of a city center or incorporate land use and zoning regulations, infrastructure plans, and development approval processes for the development of residential, office, commercial and open space uses. The plan may be organized into a concise set of development policies and include land use regulations, a capital improvement program, or financing program within a single document.

Future development proposals may benefit from the foundation created by the specific plan. For example, a Program Environmental Impact Report (EIR) adopted to fulfill the plan's California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) obligation should streamline the processing of subsequent discretionary projects by eliminating the need for additional environmental documentation. The specific plan represents a good tool for developing a community "sense of place."

California Government Code mandates that a specific plan be structured as follows:

(a) A specific plan shall include a text and a diagram or diagrams which specify all of the following in detail:

(1) The distribution, location, and extent of the uses of land, including open space, within the area covered by the plan.

(2) The proposed distribution, location, and extent and intensity of major components of public and private transportation, sewage, water, drainage, solid waste disposal, energy, and other essential facilities proposed to be located within the area covered by the plan and needed to support the land uses described in the plan.

(3) Standards and criteria by which development will proceed, and standards for the conservation, development, and utilization of natural resources, where applicable.

(4) A program of implementation measures including regulations, programs, public works projects, and financing measures necessary to carry out paragraphs (1), (2), and (3).

(b) The specific plan shall include a statement of the relationship of the specific plan to the general plan.

The Downtown Specific Plan was adopted on March 18, 2003.

Discussion

The Woodland General Plan had its last major update more than 11 years ago and the last minor revision over 5 years ago. Also in June 2006, there was a voter approved measure that established an Urban Limit Line around the City as well as adopting several other provisions relating to future land use.

Since the last major revision, significant new commercial and residential development has taken place and major new City facilities have been constructed, i.e. the new Community and Senior Center and the new Fire Station #1. There has been voter support of two tax measures and the failure of one. There are also significant questions on the feasibility of some of the policies in the current general plan. The City is also in the midst of its second update to the Housing Element since the last comprehensive update to the general plan.

Based on the above, it is clearly time to prepare for a comprehensive update to the Woodland General Plan along with an economic feasibility analysis that should provide an economic reality test to the feasibility of the suggested plan's goals, objectives, and policies. However, staff believes that the more immediate need is to update the Downtown Specific Plan. This belief is based on the major projects currently projected for the downtown area that, when approved and completed, will likely generate additional development proposals. The City needs to be in a position to efficiently and effectively respond to these development proposals with the foundation for environmental impacts, fiscal analysis and the strategic vision for the downtown area in place. This foundation can be completed through an updated Downtown Specific Plan.

In focusing on the Downtown Area and updating the Specific Plan, staff recommends that the City start to clearly articulate a *vision* for the downtown. In most communities, downtown areas no longer function as the retail hub for the everyday needs of the residents of the city and the surrounding area. However, downtown areas can continue to play a critical role in a community by providing an identity and “sense of place”. For downtown Woodland to efficiently grow and thrive, the City will need to clearly guide its future growth and development.

A possible focus for downtown would be to enhance its role as the government, dining, entertainment, cultural, and retail/specialty retail center of the community. To move the area towards a vibrant district that has activity beyond the 8 am to 6 pm period, it is *extremely critical* to introduce a large residential component to the area. This will also supply additional needed customers to the dining, entertainment and cultural uses in the area. Another focus of development in the downtown area could be to preserve, where appropriate, some of the wonderful historic architectural resources that the City has while blending in newer development with newer architectural styles. This will allow the City to build on the best of what we now have while continuing to perfect and adjust our downtown to today's and the future needs of the community.

Members of the City Council have expressed interest in enhancing the Downtown Area in the immediate future. Staff believes these steps need to be taken carefully with the understanding it will help move the City towards attaining the desired *VISION* for the area. Some potential actions that could be implemented include:

1. The Redevelopment Agency may consider allocating some of its Redevelopment Bond and annual Tax Increment money to stimulate development and projects that are consistent with the projected downtown vision. Possible uses of the Bond proceeds include:
 - a. Increased infrastructure capacity.
 - b. Prepare one or more sites for development.
 - c. Assist possible development in the vicinity of College, Bush, and First Streets.

- d. Downtown lighting, streetscape improvements, landscaping, and other beautification.
 - e. Downtown Façade Program.
 - f. Downtown parking facilities.
 - g. Developer assistance to critical Downtown projects.
 - h. The Downtown Court project.
 - i. Promotion of events and programs to assist the Downtown Area.
2. The Redevelopment Agency/City may consider funding a Downtown Coordinator position (likely part time at first) that would facilitate and support promotional activities such as the Holiday themed event in the Plaza and act as a liaison to downtown businesses.
 3. The City should actively engage Downtown Area stakeholders in the Downtown Specific Plan Update process and other development activities as described above.

Fiscal Impact

The update of the General Plan is a listed project in the City's Capital Improvement Program (CIP). It is currently listed for \$100,000 in fiscal year 2007/08 and \$400,000 in fiscal year 2008/09.

The update of the Downtown Specific Plan is a listed project in the City's Capital Improvement Program (CIP). It is currently listed for \$50,000 in fiscal year 2007/08 and \$200,000 in fiscal year 2008/09.

In 2007 the Redevelopment Agency sold approximately \$1,700,000 taxable and \$4,410,000 net non-taxable bonds.

The Redevelopment Agency has annual Tax Increment revenue of approximately \$1,300,000.

Public Contact

Posting of the City Council agenda.

Alternative Courses of Action

1. Approve the update of the Downtown Specific Plan in advance of the update to the General Plan as described herein and provide direction regarding specific activities that will support the establishment of a vision and priorities for the Downtown Area.
2. Approve the update of the General Plan in advance of the Downtown Specific Plan and provide direction regarding specific activities that will support the establishment of a vision and priorities for the downtown area.

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Recommendation for Action

Staff recommends that the City Council and Redevelopment Agency Board approve Alternative No. 1.

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