



STAFF REPORT

PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

April 11, 2023

TO: Honorable Chair and Commissioners

FROM: David Loya, Director of Community Development

PREPARER: David Loya, Director of Community Development

DATE: April 05, 2023

TITLE: **Consider a Recommendation to the City Council on the General Plan Updates**

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends the Planning Commission use its updated meeting framework to provide a recommendation on the General Plan Updates, including the Gateway Area Plan, and the Form-Based Code for the Gateway Area by July. Staff recommends the Commission use the framework to discuss amendments to the Circulation and Infrastructure Elements.

INTRODUCTION:

This meeting will focus on reviewing the Circulation and Infrastructure Elements, as well as the infrastructure financing, construction impacts, and K/L couplet identified by the Commission in their “Concerns and Solutions” list finalized on November 8, 2022. The Commission will use the March 27, 2023, amended Framework to make changes to the draft Elements.

BACKGROUND:

At the March 1, 2023, meeting, the City Council received an update on the Form-Based Code (Code) engagement, as well as the engagement process for the overall General Plan planning effort. At that meeting, they directed staff to stop the remaining planned Code engagements; to prepare a draft of the Code for public review as soon as possible; and to receive a Commission recommendation on the General Plan and Code amendments in July of 2023. The Council reaffirmed its direction at its April 5, 2023, meeting regarding the General Plan. To meet this timeline, the Commission adopted a framework for deliberations at its March 14, then modified it at their March 27, 2023, meetings (Attachment A). This Framework also includes the updated timeline and topics leading up to the July 11 meeting.

DISCUSSION:

Transparency and Communications – A concern was raised about the transparency of the Commission’s deliberations and the transmittal of information outside of the public meeting and/or agendas citing a Brown Act violation. Staff reviewed the communications policy that was developed to ensure greater transparency and access to information and found process improvements.

These procedures are defensible and structured such that no perception of a Brown Act violation can be upheld. These changes in process have been implemented. At the request of the Commission, staff can provide additional information on this topic, but this description is intended to provide the Commission and public notice of the changes. These measures are consistent with the Brown Act, have been reviewed by the City Attorney and City Manager, and will provide the same level of transparency as past practice, but ensure the Brown Act is complied with fully.

Emails from the public – Staff will no longer forward emails from the public to the Commissioners as they are received. Instead, emails will be uploaded weekly on Friday to <https://www.cityofarcata.org/940/Engagement-Information> under the “Public Comments” tab. This will provide access to the correspondence to the public and the Commission at the same time, as noted in the staff report, which will avoid any potential Brown Act violations.

Correspondence Received at the Meeting – On occasion, materials are distributed at the meeting by staff or the public. These materials are required to have ample copies to distribute them to the Commissioners, Staff, and the public. Materials handed out at the meeting will follow the minimum 10 copies requirement as published on the Agenda. Staff will compile these communications in a binder that is viewable at the Community Development Department.

Correspondence Outside of Meetings – the Framework includes a process that distributes to the Commission communications outside of the Agenda. These materials should be available to the public at the same time as they are to Commissioners. Staff will upload the materials to <https://www.cityofarcata.org/940/Engagement-Information> under the “Engagement Calendar” tab in the “Relevant Meeting Materials” column, placed in the lobby binder, and emailed to the Commissioners at the same time. Staff will send an eNotification when this step is complete to inform interested parties. This is the same way any outside correspondence on matters before the Commission will be managed.

General Plan Elements

Land Use Element - The Commission amended the Land Use Element to include the following policy. This change was not reflected in the revised Element. It will be updated.

LU-1q State mandated housing production. The City recognizes that the state’s housing goals have resulted in laws that increase density above City established base density, removed discretion in housing development, required streamlining in approval processes, established by-right development for certain housing types, and has reduced local control over many land use decisions related to housing production. The City shall monitor and comment on state actions to advocate for reasonable solutions to housing production that meet both state objectives and City need for housing development that produces high-density, infill housing in mixed-use or residential projects in appropriately zoned and designated areas.

Circulation Element – The Circulation Element was distributed to the Commission and the public by the Tuesday preceding this meeting (Attachment B). The Commission received a non-track changes version in its March 27 packet (<https://www.cityofarcata.org/1011/Circulation-Element>). The Circulation Element includes the policies aimed at achieving a balanced transportation system. Commissioners should use the framework to discuss potential changes to the Element.

The Transportation and Safety Committee was unable to hold their last meeting due to a noticing error. They have reviewed the Circulation Element at multiple meetings but have not yet made a formal recommendation. As previously discussed in our engagement plan, we provided opportunities for recommending bodies to provide input before the Commission reviewed the Elements. This is not always going to be possible.

Public Facilities and Infrastructure Element - The City's Public Facilities and Infrastructure Element guides Arcata's integrated waste management program; Educational and Public Facilities; Stormwater and Wastewater Collection and Treatment; and Water Supply and Delivery System. The Commission and the public received a track changes version of this Element by the Tuesday preceding this meeting (Attachment C and at <https://www.cityofarcata.org/1022/Public-Facilities-and-Infrastructure-Ele>). Commissioners should use the framework to discuss potential changes to the Element.

The Commission will review the Infrastructure Element again on April 25. Staff recommends the Commission prioritize the Circulation Element at this meeting.

Gateway Area Plan

The Commission compiled a list of topics on the Gateway Area Plan to address prior to making a recommendation. This list was developed with public input in September through November of 2022. The finalized “Gateway Concerns and Solutions” list included several references for work in the areas identified as concerns, as well as the follow-up actions the Commission requested to resolve the concerns (<https://www.cityofarcata.org/940/Engagement-Information> under the “Engagement Calendar” link for the November 8, 2022, meeting). This staff report addresses the topics that are addressed in the Concerns and Solutions document related to lack of multimodal infrastructure, infrastructure Impacts, and construction impacts.

L and K Street Couplet

The Commission compiled a list of topics on the Gateway Area Plan to address prior to making a recommendation. This list was developed with public input in September through November of 2022. The finalized “Gateway Concerns and Solutions” list included several references for work in the areas identified as concerns, as well as resources speaking to those concerns, and solutions. The Commission chose to focus on the L and K street couplet to address this concern. While this should be the focus of the discussion, the Gateway Mobility Chapter is also available for discussion (Attachment D).

The current Gateway Area Plan draft envisions a future L and K Street couplet. The couplet design would split out northbound traffic on K street from Samoa Boulevard to Alliance at around 14th street, with southbound traffic running on L Street (10/22 Draft Plan Figure 10-a). The couplet would retain a segregated Class I trail or separated Class IV bikeway, enhance the L Street linear park through easements along the west side of the trail and other improvements, and provide improved bike and pedestrian safety by nature of reducing vehicular points of conflict as well as through improvements to L and K Streets.

The couplet plan has generated a variety of opinions. The Transportation Safety Committee voted to “eliminate L St. from consideration as a one-way couplet (vehicular roadway)” and to plan for L Street to be a linear park with a focus on bikes, pedestrians and other non-motorized uses. Their deliberations acknowledged the safety improvements provided by the one-way design but did not want the quality of the L Street trail experience to be degraded. The Coalition for Responsible Transportation Priorities removed its support for the couplet, stating:

CRTP generally does not support new roads or new one-way couplets, but initially made an exception in this case because the proposed design of K and L Streets would be collectively much safer for bicyclists and pedestrians than the current configuration of K Street, the proposed couplet would not add substantial vehicular capacity, and the proposed design of L Street would maintain the Class I trail in the right-of-way. However, CRTP's preference would be to achieve an equivalent safety improvement on K Street without adding vehicular capacity to L Street, and when it became clear that this

might be possible, we withdrew our support for the original proposal. We are now officially neutral on the couplet proposal. We will only support a plan that includes a significant overhaul of K Street, preferably by reducing it to 1 lane as in the couplet proposal, but without adding vehicular capacity to other streets.

And a community group has initiated a petition to maintain and enhance the linear park along L Street and remove the couplet from the Plan. That group has cited the purposes of the Great Redwood Trail, the connection with the California Coastal Trail and Annie and Mary Trail networks, the impact on wetlands, and the degradation of current trail enjoyment, among other factors.

Since the Gateway Area Plan is a policy level document, there are many details that are not refined or fully planned. The City does not own or control the lands on the northern and southern terminus of the planned L Street expansion. The southern portion of L Street is in the Coastal Zone and may include pockets of low-quality wetlands. As such, the required coastal development permit has some uncertainty about the approval pathway. The rail corridor was recently transferred to the Great Redwood Trail Agency, which is still working to understand its charter and how that may reflect on the planned use. And the City does not have design or construction financing lined up for the project.

These uncertainties are acceptable given the stage of planning. The General Plan is a policy document that outlines the desired future condition of the City. While the means to achieve these goals are sometimes clear, often the Policy identifies aspirational goals. These goals provide the target for future budgets, planning documents, and revenue structures to support achieving the aspirational goals. A recent example of this type of goal setting policy is the Foster Avenue extension from Sunset to Alliance. The extension was envisioned and planned in the General Plan 2020, which was adopted in 2000. The road was finally built in fiscal year 2015/16 after acquiring the land through a series of purchases and dedications, acquiring funding, and having appropriate market conditions. If this long-range plan was not adopted, the City would not have pursued the project in the first place.

The question is, “does the City want to set the K/L couplet as a goal?” If so, the City can set its sights on meeting the challenges to implement the goal. Deciding whether to include the couplet is not straightforward. As with any endeavor or policy choice, there are pros and cons. But the question is not, “are there challenges” and if so, do not set the goal. Ultimately, the City Council must determine whether the benefits of developing the couplet outweigh the costs.

The primary reason for separating the north- and southbound traffic is for bike and pedestrian safety. Limiting travel to a single one-way lane reduces the potential points of conflict between motorized and non-motorized users. It provides additional space for well-separated and protected bikeways. It provides additional area for pedestrian refugia, as well as for wider sidewalks. The one-way design also provides the most on-street parking relative to other alternatives. The one-way design is by far the superior alternative for public safety.

The couplet plan retains and enhances the trail on L street. It does not change the current configuration of the east-west street crossings, such as at 8th and 9th. While it would increase the volume of traffic on L Street, which would run parallel to the trail, the safety impacts to the trail relative to other alternatives is negligible since any alternative would not change the east-west crossings. In short, this is still a trail through an urban core regardless of how the vehicular circulation is designed.

Notwithstanding the decision whether to include the expansion of L Street and the one-way couplet plan, the City will need to have alternatives for managing traffic flows and non-motorized safety improvements. The alternatives are valuable for evaluating whether to include the couplet in the

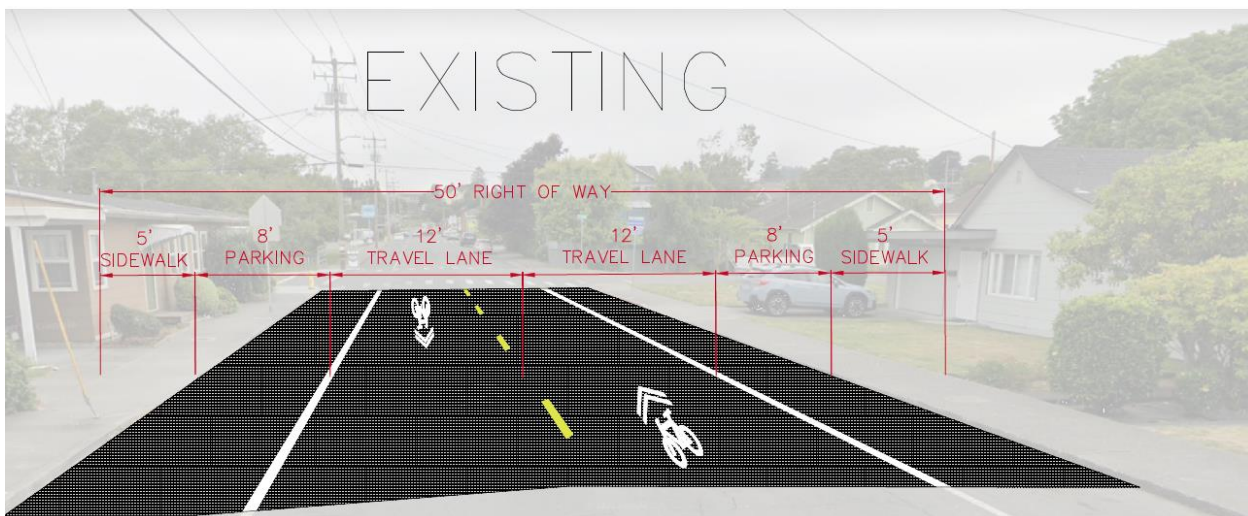
General Plan. But the alternatives may also be required during the near- and mid-term if travel demand dictates improvements before the L Street acquisition and planning work is complete.

The primary goals of the traffic plan both improve bike and ped safety along and across the K Street current and future traffic volumes, as well as manage the motorized volumes to avoid leakage (short-cuts through other non-arterial and unplanned routing), unreasonable levels of traffic delay, and traffic safety. In addition, the goals include retaining and enhancing bike and ped infrastructure, including the L Street trail and proposed K street bike lane, and enhancing the streetscape, and supporting higher volume bus routes. Potential route alternatives were evaluated against these goals to assess feasibility. Alternatives that could not meet the primary goals were not considered further.

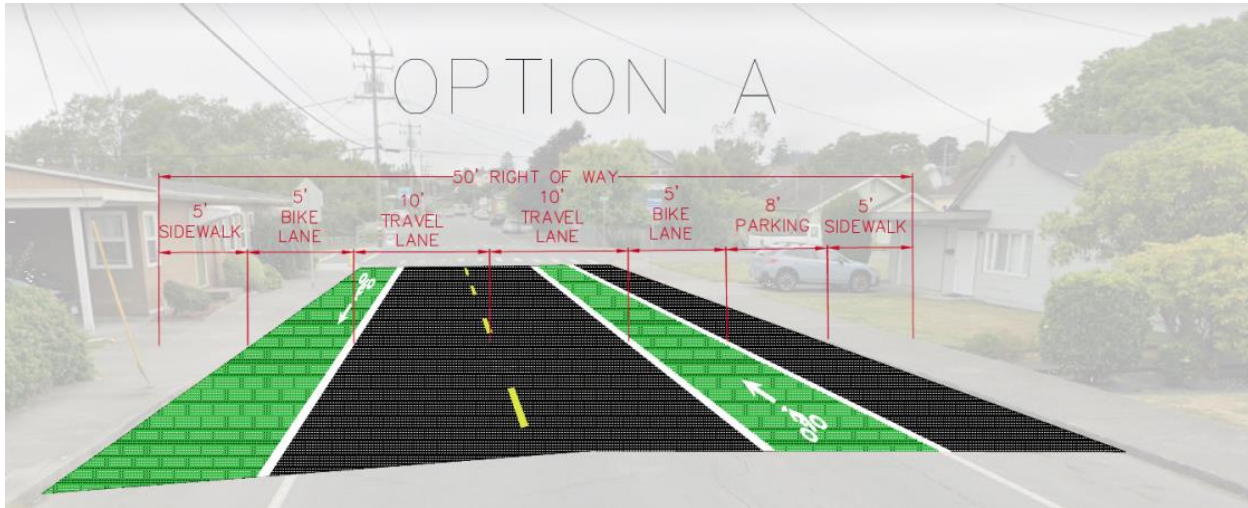
The alternatives considered and rejected included couplets with K and each north-south road between J and Q. Each of these has challenges meeting the primary goals and meeting financial feasibility. For example, M Street would cause little or no leakage if it could extend south to Samoa, but there are several existing businesses and historic buildings, including the Creamery property, that would have to be demolished to accomplish this goal. Diverting that traffic along 10th or 11th to N, O, or Q both extends the segment length of the new arterial and creates incentive for leakage. Each N, O, and Q have additional challenges, but Q is the most promising alternative since it has a largely intact roadbed. Q Street would cause the greatest opportunity for leakage and would incentivize the arterial traffic from Alliance to divert through J, I, or H for southbound 101 or south G and H destinations. These alternatives were removed from consideration for these reasons.

A K and J Street couplet is a feasible alternative, that largely meets the primary goals. The couplet could begin at 13th Street. However, placing the new arterial outside of the area planned for growth and development is less desirable. Relative to L Street, it would create more congestion crossing K to move from the arterial to the new activity center. J does have the benefit of being fully owned and controlled by the City, which makes it a viable alternative. However, the existing low-density residential uses along 13th and J Streets are less conducive to adding a new arterial.

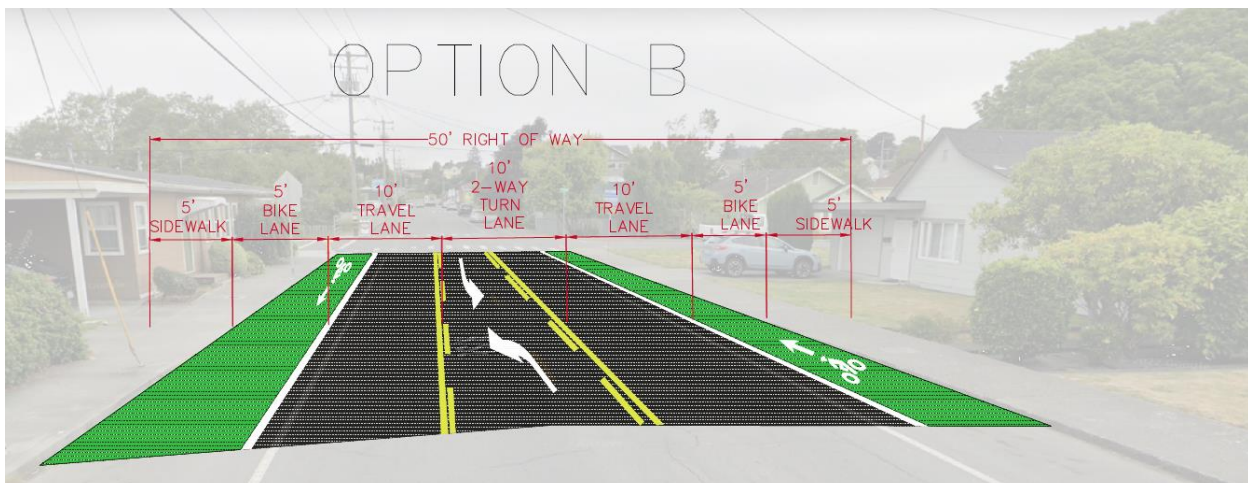
If traffic volumes dictate, improvements to manage levels of service on K Street before L is an option, or if the couplet concept is removed from the plan, K Street could be reconfigured in one of a few ways (see below). The right-of-way on K is 50'. This could accommodate north- and southbound travel lanes as currently configured. Eliminating parking on one side of the street would provide for a separated Class II bike lane in each direction. This would be a minor improvement over the existing Class III bike route, which is a shared facility with north- and southbound travel lanes. This would not improve cross-traffic bike and ped safety.

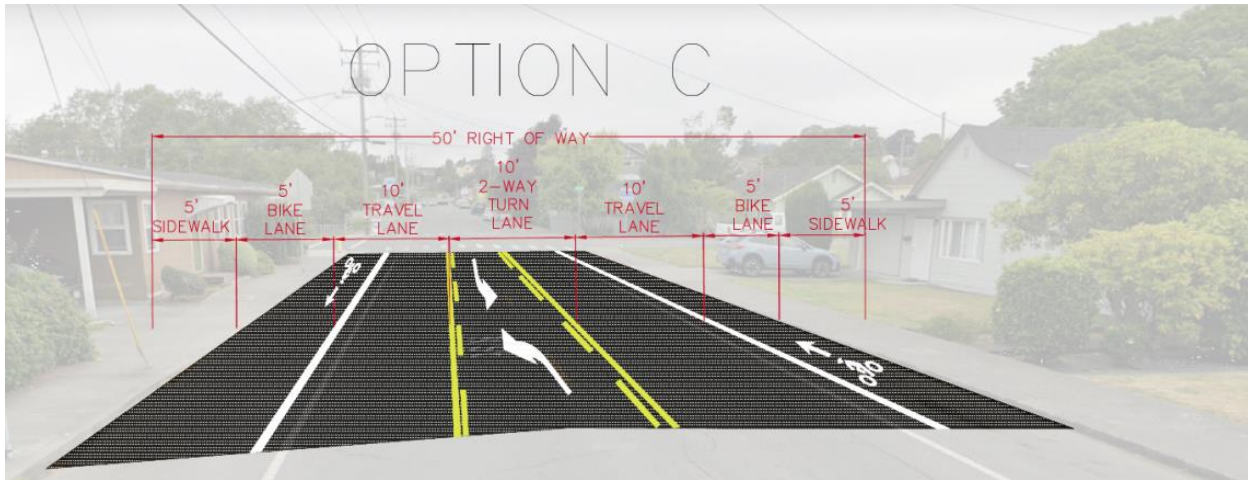


As level of service degrades with growth, a turning lane could be added to K Street. This would require eliminating either the bike lanes or the remaining on-street parking. There could be minor improvements to cross-traffic bike and ped movements, however, this plan would significantly degrade bike and ped safety, increasing the number of points of conflict with motor vehicles by two additional lanes and reducing the visibility and areas for mid-crossing refugia. This alternative is feasible and may be a necessary mid-term solution, but it does not accomplish the primary goals. Instead, this alternative focuses primarily on addressing level of service for vehicles when it is impacted to the point of creating leakage and multi-modal safety issues.



Each of these plans may involve additional stop signs, lighted crossings, and potentially traffic signals at some point in the future. Currently, the K Street does not even meet the traffic engineering warrants to install additional stop signs. These improvements would help address the degradation in bike and ped safety that the K street plan would create. But this plan is far inferior to the safety improvements a couplet would afford.





For these reasons, staff and our consultants are recommending the K and L Street couplet. The Commission should provide a recommendation on the inclusion of the K/L couplet in the Gateway Area Plan.

Infrastructure Financing

The Commission requested a general discussion on infrastructure financing in the Concerns and Solutions list. Some public comments were concerned with the ability of the City to provide adequate infrastructure as the City grows. This discussion provides background on how major infrastructure projects are financed.

Infrastructure Financing Background

The future development envisioned in the City’s General Plan will require new and updated infrastructure. The City’s water, wastewater, road, trail, and other public utilities infrastructure is in varying stages of service life. Older infrastructure may need to be replaced to meet both current and future needs. The current project at the wastewater treatment plant and the ongoing sewer mainline replacements and lining projects are examples of replacing aging infrastructure. Some of the infrastructure may be undersized to meet higher density. The Cal Poly Craftsman’s Mall project will require upsizing several components of the sewer main. The long-range planning envisions new roads and trails. These will need to be financed, designed, and built to support the planned growth.

Infrastructure is financed in several ways. Large-scale projects that benefit the City as a whole, such as the wastewater improvements project of the current Tank 1C project, are generally financed and built by the City. Funding for these projects comes from a variety of sources including replacements reserves in the underlying enterprise fund, grants, bond issuances, or loans.

The City is currently working on several large-scale projects with a diversity of funding sources (Attachment G). Notably, the City secured a \$60M State Water Resources Board grant in 2023 for the Phase I Wastewater Improvement Project. The City secured an Infill Infrastructure Grant and an Affordable Housing Sustainable Communities with a combined total of approximately \$6.2M between 2015 and 2020 in partnership with affordable housing providers. These funds were used for a wide variety of infrastructure improvements and additions, including the Janes Creek Bridge at 30th Street, vehicle charging stations, the Tank 1C project, the 8th and 9th Street Project, several sidewalk improvements, an electric bus, new trails and bus stops, a new flashing pedestrian crossing at Samoa and I Streets, expanded bike share, as well as several park improvements.

Very large improvements, such as the Foster Avenue extension or the wastewater treatment plant project are infrequent and require special financing. While not comprehensive, the sources listed in

Table 1 provide a sense for the sources that have been used to develop larger projects. Each funding source has limitations and requirements.

Table 1. Infrastructure financing sources. There are several state, federal, and local means for financing infrastructure improvements. Many of these sources have been used to finance City infrastructure.

Source	Financing Type
USDA Rural Development	Loans and Grants
California Infrastructure and Economic Bank (IBank)	Bonds, Loans, Grants
Department of Housing and Community Development	Grants
State Water Resources Control Board	Grants
Enhanced Infrastructure Financing Districts	Bond/Property Tax
Fees (impact, enterprise, mitigation)	Direct Revenue
Assessments	Direct Revenue
State Transportation Infrastructure Program	Grants, Loans
Tax Measures	Direct Revenue

By contrast, smaller projects that are directly related to the infrastructure impacts of a single project are generally borne by the project budget and are installed by the project developer instead of the City. For instance, when a project is built in an area that needs new or replaced sidewalks, the project would be required to pay for the new sidewalks. These project-borne infrastructure improvements may extend beyond the immediate and near project boundaries. For example, if the project requires the upsizing of a sewer main, the project will generally pay for those improvements from the project site to the point at which the existing sewer main was sufficiently sized.

Where project-based infrastructure impacts are incremental and additive, such as the impact of adding new housing units on the wastewater treatment plant, the City assesses capital connection fees from the enterprise funds from which the service is rendered. When a project connects to sewer and water, it pays into the enterprise funds for each utility. A portion of that capital connection fee is used to pay for the replacement cost and a portion is used to pay for the sunken cost of the infrastructure. The City’s recent water/wastewater rate study provides a detailed description of rates structure, including capital connection fees.

In some instances, there are cost sharing structures established, such as an assessment district, an impact fee, or an in-lieu fee. These are usually established if the improvements extend beyond the immediate or near project boundary or if the infrastructure will be developed over time. One example of this financing mechanism is the City’s park in-lieu fee codified in the Land Use Code Section 9.86.030. The in-lieu fee program only applies to subdivisions, but recognizing that development of any kind has an impact on park facilities, the City also has a fee for new construction assessed on all new development not covered by the park in-lieu fee, which is assessed at 1% of the project value for residential and 0.25% for non-residential. The revenue generated by these programs is used by the City to develop new parks and recreational facilities.

The financing mechanism for public infrastructure is dependent on the size of the infrastructure improvement, the proportion of the City the improvement serves, the specificity of the improvements needed and how they relate to the developments and existing users that require them, and the timing of the installation of the improvements. Because there are so many variables, it is impossible to provide a universal statement of how infrastructure is financed. But by exploring the range of alternatives for financing infrastructure, and the impact of various financing sources on current and future users, the community can better understand how we meet the challenges of

building the infrastructure we need to both replace existing aging infrastructure for current uses, as well as developing new infrastructure for new uses.

Infrastructure Planning and Development

It is important to understand the relationship between the physical projects implemented on the ground and the planning process a municipality must use prior to the build out of those projects. Specifically, understanding the relationship between the General Plan, the City's highest order policy document relative to growth, development, and resource conservation, and any given infrastructure project, informs the scale and scope of planning necessary and appropriate at each level of planning,

The General Plan establishes a goal to which projects aspire. It is the first part in the planning process relative growth and development, including significant infrastructure improvements. Once the goal is established, the City can then develop planning documents consistent with that goal. It can seek funding and financing consistent with that goal. And it can implement projects consistent with that goal.

Once the goals are established by the General Plan, the City develops plans and programs consistent with the General Plan to finance and develop the infrastructure. The Capital Improvement Program (Improvement Program) is the City's infrastructure project plan. Each year, the Planning Commission must assess updates to the Improvement Program and determine if the projects proposed are consistent with the goals in the General Plan. Once determined consistent, they are added to the Improvement Program list and staff initiate engineering and seek financing.

Where the planning process provides enough clarity of needed projects, a master planning document can be developed. The City's former Community Development Agency's Implementation Plan is an example of this type of planning work. The Gateway Area Plan Draft includes an implementation measure to develop an Enhanced Infrastructure Financing District (Financing District), which would involve such master planning. But the Financing District should be based on the final adopted plan. It would be improper to develop the plan before having policy authorization to do so.

Infrastructure Financing Options

The City will continue to seek a range of sources for financing and funding major infrastructure projects. The City will use its Capital Improvement Planning process to identify new and replacement infrastructure needs, the timelines for these projects, and the costs and sources. New development will continue to pay its fair share of existing and new infrastructure through capital connection fees, service fees, and any new development impact fees established by the City. The City will also continue to seek and procure grants from a variety of sources. In addition, the City will consider establishing an Enhanced Infrastructure Financing District, which could be used to issue bond debt to pay for large projects or to match funds for grant sources.

Construction Impacts

The Commission was interested in what impacts should be expected with development of larger buildings. The Building Official and City Engineer will be on hand to discuss construction impacts, ADA and accessibility requirements, mass timber and other new construction techniques in development, questions about energy code requirements, or other matters that are of interest to the Commission related to construction and related impacts.

Other Items

The Commission may use the policy pitch tool to structure their proposals for change to policy (Attachment E). These should be hard coded strikeout and underlined text (do not use track changes). This will help facilitate the transmittal of information.

Pursuant to the March 27 Framework, the Bike Rack is included (Attachment F), The Commission should return to the Bike Rack only after completing the Elements to be addressed in the current meeting. Staff will continue to update the bike rack. As requested, the table below show progress.

Table 2. Policy Review Progress.

Total Policies Reviewed	Total Complete	Bike Rack
Vision	All	None
Land Use 37	14	19

ATTACHMENTS:

- A. Framework (PDF)
- B. Circulation Element (2045) (DOCX)
- C. Public Facilities Infrast. (PDF)
- D. Gateway_AreaPlan_v11c_Mobility (PDF)
- E. Policy Pitch Tool (DOCX)
- F. Bike Rack 03.27.23(PDF)
- G. Capital Improvement Program List (DOCX)