



STAFF REPORT

PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

May 23, 2023

TO: Honorable Chair and Commissioners

FROM: David Loya, Director of Community Development

PREPARER: David Loya, Director of Community Development

DATE: May 16, 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 Design Element, the new Health Element, and topics included in the Gateway Area Plan Concerns and Solutions list. As time allows, the Commission should return to the Land Use Element “Bike Rack” items, beginning with the Land Use designation map.

INTRODUCTION:

This meeting will focus on reviewing the Design and Health Elements, as well as the impacts on the Creamery District, Creamery Building, and businesses in the Gateway Area. These topics were included in the “Concerns and Solutions” list finalized by the PC on November 8, 2022. The Commission will use the April 27, 2023, amended Framework (Attachment A) to make changes to the draft Elements. As time allows, the Commission will return to policy recommendations held over from previous meetings, beginning with the Land Use designations map and other Land Use Element policies.

DISCUSSION:

Transparency and Communications

Emails from the public –Emails received as part of the public record are available at: <https://www.cityofarcata.org/940/Engagement-Information> under the “Public Comments” tab.

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 – Commission communications distributed outside of the Agenda are available at <https://www.cityofarcata.org/940/Engagement-Information> under the

“Engagement Calendar” tab in the “Relevant Meeting Materials” column, and placed in the lobby binder at the time they are emailed to the Commissioners.

Bike Rack - The Planning Commission’s Discussion Guide and compiled “Bike Rack” includes items submitted by Planning Commissioners discussion. Planning Commissioners determine whether to include topics requested by the public in the Discussion Guide. The public are encouraged to provide policy recommendations for the Commission’s consideration.

General Plan Elements

Design Element - The City's Historic Preservation Element (Attachment B) describes general design concepts the City would like to see from future development and other aesthetic topics. The Commission and the public received a track changes version of this Element by the Friday preceding this meeting (Attachment B and at <https://www.cityofarcata.org/974/General-Plan-Updates>). The changes were generally focused on elevating the narrative to the policy level, recognizing that the detail is in the zoning codes, as well as eliminating reference to “community character” based on previous recommendations from the Commission. Commissioners should use the framework to discuss potential changes to the Element.

Health Element – The Health Element (Attachment C) describes the City’s approach to health and equity. The Element includes policies that are intended to be part of the Health Element itself, as well as a group of policies that are intended to be moved into other Elements of the General Plan. The Health Element is currently under concurrent review by the City’s racial equity contractor, as well as a racial equity advisory group comprised of professionals from a broad range of sectors working on diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. The group includes members from equity arcata as well as representatives from Cal Poly, College of the Redwoods, the County, UIHS, HCAoG, and others. This ad hoc group of stakeholders will provide recommendations to the Commission and Council.

Land Use Element – The Commission asked to address the Land Use Designations amendments map as the first Bike Rack item. The Land Use Designations map was produced in April 2022 (Attachment D). The Commission has made recommendations on redesignation of the two Agricultural Residential properties on 17th Street and Alliance (Attachment D, Exhibit 4) and on the St. Louis Infill Opportunity Zone redesignation (Attachment D, Exhibit 3). These changes and any other recommendations of the Commission will be updated after the Commission completes its review of the proposed Land Use Designation changes.

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). The topics for this staff report include impacts to the Creamery District, the Creamery Building, and Existing Businesses.

Staff held a workshop at The Playhouse on May 16, 2023, to cover these topics with affected residents and businesses. Staff summarized their takeaways from the meeting and provided photo documentation of the comments made by attendees (Attachment E).

Creamery District

The Creamery District is both a Combining Zone in the City's zoning ordinance and a cultural district. The zoning was developed in collaboration with several businesses in the district to provide more opportunities and flexibility in land uses. This rezone occurred in 2015. The Gateway Area Plan increases the flexibility in uses and replaces the land use purpose of the zoning. The Gateway Area Plan Form-Based Code will replace the zoning effect of the Creamery District.

The rezone will not, however, affect the cultural district. The Creamery District and the Creamery Building are important cultural features in the City. The City will continue to recognize the district on maps and signage, as well as in other ways that promote the businesses, events, and activities in the region.

Creamery Building

The Creamery Building is an historic site. The main building is recognizable from many vantage points in the City. The main building does not have proposed changes, and the new zoning in the Gateway will not affect the building.

The City does propose to include demolition of the buildings on the west side of the property and the concrete tower in the environmental review. These buildings were included in the ordinance designating the building historic, but reuse of these buildings is not possible, and renovation and maintenance of the concrete tower are likely financially infeasible. These areas could be redeveloped in the future.

The Commission asked that design standards in the Form-Based Code address potential aesthetic impacts to the Creamery Building. While the Code is still under development, design standards will address impacts to the building itself.

Business Impacts

The Gateway Plan does not require any business to cease operation or relocate. Every business currently operating in the Gateway will be allowed to continue to operate indefinitely. Every business may be transferred to new owners and continue operating under the Plan. There is no threat to any business directly from the City related to the Plan.

Most business uses will be allowed in the Plan Area. For these businesses, they may continue to grow and expand their use with approval from the City. Approval may include nothing more than building permits and business licenses. Some may require design review (see Land Use Code Sec. 9.42.070). Business expansion on priority sites may require a minor use permit for expansion. This allows the City to confirm the business use justifies a project that does not implement the Plan. If a business chooses to expand and include the streamlining provisions of the Plan, they would be principally permitted.

Some business uses will be prohibited in the Gateway Plan Area. Among them, the City has previously discussed auto sales and rentals, ministorage, gas stations, major utility infrastructure (e.g., PG&E and Amerigas), heavy industrial uses, and auto repair shops, to name a few. The existing businesses that operate these uses would receive existing non-conforming status. These businesses would be allowed to continue operating, transfer to a new owner and operate, and in some cases expand operations. The Code will give guidance on which businesses would be allowed to expand, and which would not, but in general, uses that are compatible with the urban infill goals of the Plan may expand on site. For example, auto repair shops would be allowed to expand on their existing sites. New auto repair would not be able to newly establish in the Plan Area. Sawmills would not be able to expand. Auto shops are consistent with and necessary for urban infill and growth. Sawmills are not compatible with urban infill.

Staff will provide the Commission an update from the May 16 Creamery District meeting on each of the topic areas at the May 23 Planning Commission meeting.

ATTACHMENTS:

- A. PC Meeting Framework v4.1 (PDF)
- B. Design Element (2045)_05.12 (PDF)
- C. Health Element 5.12.23 (PDF)
- D. Land Use Designation Updates (PDF)
- E. 2023.05.16 Creamery Dist Mtg (PDF)