

Judith Mayer summary comments: “Other Considerations” regarding General Plan Update, including Gateway Area Plan

For July 11, 2023 Planning Commission Meeting

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**“Vision” statement:** This is not included online in the list of General Plan elements, yet it is intended to guide the whole General Plan and all its elements. We should continue to review the new Vision statement, and amend it to more fully reflect Arcata’s aspirations in the Plan. The Vision statement and Introduction should also be included in the online General Plan Update sidebar, preceding the list of plan Elements.

Why? During the single meeting when we finally discussed it, the entire version of the Vision Statement which grew out of 20 years of our current General Plan was quickly and summarily discarded, in favor of a new statement developed by a committee operating separately from the Planning Commission’s process. During the portion of the meeting where we discussed the Vision statement, there was some confusion for at least 2 (maybe 3) Commission members as to which version we were actually discussing. As a result, few of the values listed in Arcata’s existing plan vision transferred across to the new statement. I believe that several of these should continue to be explicitly stated in the updated General Plan, and that *we should return to this discussion, including our sessions with the City Council.*

**Land Use – Gateway Area districts (including in GAP) – Avoid designating GAP district boundaries that straddle Coastal Zone boundaries:** Staff doesn’t seem concerned about this, but I believe that this could actually lead to the Coastal Commission making it difficult for the City to apply the GAP.

Even if standards are largely similar on redrawn GAP districts that do NOT straddle coastal zone boundaries, this will avoid Coastal Commission concerns blocking the entire GAP. Our upcoming Local Coastal Program, embodied in an upcoming additional General Plan element, should also take this into account.

**Public notice in Gateway Ministerial Permit requirements** (9.29.020 4.b and d, and Table 2-19): In addition to public notice of administrative decisions and hearings, the City should make public notice of ALL applications for Gateway Ministerial Permits at the time of permit submission (ideally), or when City Staff (Zoning Administrator) considers the application complete enough to review it.

Especially where only a Zoning Administrator’s decision will lead directly to issuing a permit, there is no other means for the public to even know of the application, and an appeal to the Planning Commission or City Council after a permit is already approved is a ponderous and potentially expensive for members of the public who do NOT find that the permit fulfills all “objective standards.”

Also, because some of the permits will require consultation and review by state, federal, and tribe agencies, as well as Fire District, etc, it is important for members of the public to know that they have access to those agencies’ responses and processes before any City administrative decision.

**Setback Standards for GAP** (9.29.040 – District Standards): The GAP district standards in the DRAFT set no setback requirements for “all other property lines” in all Gateway districts except Gateway Neighborhood (Min. 10 ft.). This would enable a block-long wall of building anywhere else in the Gateway area, especially if up to 300’ long structures are allowed. For any new Gateway building, which presumably would ALL be at least 2 stories, a “zero setback” should be allowed *ONLY if buildings on both sides of a back or side property line are designed to accommodate it*.

Otherwise, buildings could pose seismic, fire, or privacy problems to neighboring properties and their occupants, in addition to the shading issues addressed (still inadequately) in step-back requirements. This is especially true for the very large, bulky buildings the proposed standards would allow in all except the Neighborhood district.

**Reduce Maximum building length allowed for Ministerial permit in GAP** (9.29.040 -- District Standards): Draft GAP standards could allow Ministerial approval for buildings up to 300’ long, with some articulation. We should address this with the City Council.

This is longer than existing City blocks, and longer than all but a few existing buildings in Arcata. Even with visual breaks, buildings of this size will dominate all around them, and especially in private ownership, risk becoming “white elephants” over time. (City policy should encourage developers to build more moderately sized structures, even if they build several of them.)

**Bird Safe Buildings** (9.29.050) – Bird safe standards should apply for new buildings throughout Arcata, NOT JUST in the GAP. The threshold should not be based on the total % of glass or reflective surface in the building as a whole (draft indicates 35% in GAP), but on any side of a building, especially in upper stories. If a to is used, the threshold should be less than 35%, especially on upper stories.

**Greenways & Greenway Standards** (9.29.080), Fig. 2-56, and Table 2-31, as well as additional concerns list from staff – *The Planning Commission should address concerns about L-Street with the City Council*, including eliminating the L-K one way couplet as part of the plan, and any standard relating to the corridor itself and development facing it.

Because of the limited Greenway proposals beyond that, and because the City itself will be responsible for maintaining many of those Greenway areas, Greenway design should be addressed as part of other designs, but not necessarily assume the (minimum) footages indicated in Table 2-31 and Figure 2-57 for any designated “Greenway” in the GAP.

**Parking in the GAP** (9.29.080, Table 2-32): There may have been something in June’s discussions that I missed, but it appears that the minimum parking requirements are higher than other policies suggest, and that those minimums pose design challenges for the sample locations provided. Consider reducing those minimum parking requirements, even if we don’t eliminate them entirely. For parking location and design (F, p. 66 in packet): NO new mid-block parking or garage curb cuts should be allowed in the GAP, for safety reasons.

**Open Space** (for General Plan including GAP; for GAP at 9.29.090): Avoid the terms “passive open space” and “passive recreation” throughout the plan (and see E. Passive Open Space definition, Packet p. 73, draft p. 56; General Plan June 2022 update p. 4-1, etc). The connotation is to relegate uses of open space that do not require significant construction or expensive facilities to a second-class status, even if those places and uses DO require significant protection, management, and appropriate facilities.

**Barrel District Community Square (in future “Master Plan”)** – Consider a minimum size of a contiguous open space larger than ½ acre; Consider allowing it to be car-free (no car access on 2 sides, as proposed); consider City acquisition of this space as actual public space, rather than privately-owned public space.

**Clarify Table 2-35 (Publicly accessible Open Space Requirement)**, Packet p. 71; GAP draft p. 54.  
– Since no 8-story buildings will be allowed, Tier 4 designation makes no sense. (Staff and Commission may have addressed this while I was gone.)

**Open Space, General Plan, Biotic resources** (General Plan OS-2b, Draft P. 4-7): Address all aspects of ecosystem: “Development limitations and management for maintenance of biotic resources and diversity, including aquatic resources and sensitive habitats. Creeks, marshes, and wetlands are significant components of Arcata’s natural open space system. The City shall restore and maintain this system for the benefit of tribal members, residents, visitors, fish, and wildlife, plants, and all healthy ecosystem functions. ”

**General Plan Resource Conservation and Management Element:** . It appears that the Committees have had very significant input to this element already. Presentation to the Planning Commission of the significant 2022 Forest Management Plan (updating the 1994 plan) would help, as would a direct presentation in conjunction with the Local Coastal Program (GP Coastal Element) about work of the Wetlands and Streams Committee (It would help for the Planning Commission to know if those committees have outstanding issues to this Draft, so we don’t encounter surprises later, including on issues including the Marsh and its relation with the Wastewater Treatment Plant, streamside protection, etc.)

