

Suggestions for the 1/23 Planning Commission meeting
P. Lehman

These suggestions refer to the list provided to us for last meeting titled, "Policy Matrix Mapping Gateway Element Policies to General Plan Elements." The numbering corresponds to the numbering in that spreadsheet.

D-1m; 8j: The current language is: Provide adequate pedestrian-scaled street lighting to enhance public safety, encourage evening use of outdoor spaces, and enhance the visual quality of the public realm. Utilize "CPTED" (Crime Prevention through Environmental Design) guidance as applicable to ensure lighting achieves outlined goals of increasing pedestrian safety. Ensure all new lighting is compliant with "Dark Sky" policy guidance. Dark sly policy shall supersede CPTED policy.

This policy states that "Dark Sky" policy should supersede "Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED)" policy. I suggest it should be the other way around; CPTED policy should prevail, and the last sentence should read, "CPTED policy should supersede Dark Sky policy."

CM-5a; 7.b.11: The current language is: Emphasize Class IV bike lanes where greatest benefit, and not in conflict with other community values or amenities where warranted.

I recommend we strengthen this to say: Provide for Class IV bikes lanes whenever possible and not in conflict with other community values.

CM-5a; 7.b.5: The current language is: Class II bicycle facilities (i.e., standard bike lanes) may be converted to Class IV bicycle facilities (i.e., protected bike lanes), which may necessitate adjustments to the dimensions of other features.

I suggest we strengthen this to say: Class II bicycle facilities (i.e., standard bike lanes) should be converted to Class IV bicycle facilities (i.e., protected bike lanes) whenever possible, which may necessitate adjustments to the dimensions of other features.

From: Judith Mayer
To: Planning Commission; Staff
About: Changes to draft General Plan update
For: Planning Commission meeting, Feb. 13, 2024

I'm requesting that Director Loya circulate these to Planning Commissioners prior to our February 13 meeting, where we will continue to discuss the General Plan update. I sent a larger set of comments and questions to David Jan. 16, including editorial suggestions I'm not including here, and he returned some notes to me with suggestions to "pitch" recommended changes and pose substantive questions for the Commission to address.

Arcata Community Vision (Ch 1):

It will help to *add a clear explanation to the public about the purpose of the Vision statement at the start of the Plan-- a present-tense statement representing Arcatans' aspirations for our future – the values that have guided the plan's development, and are intended to guide its future implementation.*

Somewhere in the Introductory material it would also help to indicate how readers can get access to the numerous subsidiary plans that will guide implementation of this General Plan. (Some of the Implementation Measure lists at the ends of elements do this; some don't.)

Land Use Element (Ch 2):

Guiding principles: E. retail & business (p. 2-4) – Delete or change Guiding Principle E. My suggestion: *"Encourage businesses to locate and stay in the Commercial Activity Centers and Infill Opportunity Zones, while recognizing the City's priority to increase the City's housing opportunities."* (A rationale for locating housing in terms of housing's benefits to business ignores potential competition for space in C-M zones, where commercial land values could likely push up housing prices.)

Policy LU-1 Overall Development Pattern Objective (p. 2-8): Watch out for the definition of "amenity" (2nd ¶ of Objective): Clean air is a right, not an amenity. (Each section of the Plan appears to use the term "amenity" differently, so a clear glossary definition will help.)

LU-1e Streamlined review and standards in Infill Opportunity Zones (p. 2-9): *Language from the earlier GAP draft should be moved here to explain briefly the process of developing "applicable standards" that would allow streamlined project review in Infill Opportunity Zones.* Alternatively, point readers to where the Land Use Code will explain it. Since this is one of the MOST significant new policies in the Plan, such an inadequate 1-paragraph explanation potentially undermines the City's discretionary authority over properties where conflicts are most likely to arise. The simple Implementation measures listed at the end of the element aren't sufficient to make sense of this to the public.

LU-1n Samoa Blvd and South G employment center as an industrial hub for Arcata (p. 2-10): The draft Plan's language is "... industrial uses shall be encouraged to relocate and expand within the Adaptation Zone boundary of this area as described in the City's Local Coastal Program." My suggestion: *"Samoa Blvd and South G Street employment and industries: The City shall support industrial land uses south of Samoa Blvd only to the extent that they are not threatened by sea level rise or seismic hazards, and that they do not increase vulnerability of people, property, or ecosystem to those hazards."* Commission discussions to

date of coastal policies have fallen far short of enthusiastically supporting increased development in hazard-prone areas, while the City wishes to avoid premature disinvestment in areas south of Samoa.

LU-1r Max & min residential density standards (p. 2-11): Clarify that the City will not consider low densities of existing development to be non-conforming. My suggestion: “ ... In addition, establish a minimum residential density standard *for new development* in each of these land use designations.”

LU-1y Form-based design standards (p. 2-12): The signal to develop form-based standards for an area should be its designation as an Infill Opportunity Zone, or the C-M designation, NOT simply a proposal for high density housing. This policy is also an appropriate place to state that “... *the City shall develop form-based design standards that are appropriate for each Infill Opportunity Zone.*” This will retain the efficiency of designating general design standards for all Infill zones and the for the entire C-M designation, while recognizing the unique characteristics, opportunities, and constraints of each area.

LU-1aa Incentivize mixed use as a community amenity (pp. 2-12 & 2-13): My suggestion: Change wording to simply “*Create incentives to mix compatible land uses.*” Avoid conflating the terms “amenity” and “community benefit.” Clearly define each in the Plan’s Glossary (not available yet). If we desire more detail here, clearly indicate that a Community Benefits incentive program would only apply where other conditions are met. While moving this policy entirely to the Design Element of the Plan (the list in D-8, as Staff suggests) might help, this policy should also clearly indicate that a single, uniform Community Benefits program is not intended to apply City-wide.

LU-ad State mandated housing production (p. 2-13): Suggested wording: “... *advocate for housing production to meet both state objectives and City discretion on how to fulfill Arcata’s housing needs.*” The original intention of this policy called on the City to advocate for reasonable solutions that meet state and City housing objectives, and provide the City with discretion on how to do so! (The Draft’s proposed wording is nearly the opposite of the original suggestion for including this policy.)

LU-2b Diversity and choice in residential environments (p. 2-15): The policy should specify that “... *inclusionary measures shall extend to all any multi-unit development of 15 housing units or more (as per the City Council’s recent discussion), regardless of zoning designation.*”

Table LU-2 Residential Land Use Classifications (p. 2-15): Questions & suggestions –

State law no longer really allows R-VL zoning to prohibit multi-family dwellings, especially since junior ADUs and zero setback lot lines could also be possible. (How *can the table notes clarify, in light of recent state law?*)

CA courts currently frown on city attempts to prohibit group residential uses in zones where they don’t violate any other rule. Also, zoning designations that refer to “family” units are problematic, since they imply the City has a right to define what a family unit is. (*Reword to avoid these problematic interpretations.*)

Don’t limit Planned Developments to only Medium-density Residential development. The **LU-2c** wording on p. 2-16 is good, but other policies imply that City staff intend to phase out use of Planned Development as a tool. That would be unfortunate, since the :PD designation can help implement strong design and performance standards for both residential and commercial development if the City chooses to use it to do so.)

Would the mobile home parks in a R-H zone, with 50 allowable units be allowed to add a density bonus up to 90 units/acre? (That would be only 484 sf total, including land between units, paths, roadways, and common facilities. That's hard to imagine as anything other than an emergency measure. (a) Do we wish to add a new zoning classification for this highest-density, emergency mobile housing? (b) Is it correct that no new or expanded mobile home park will be allowed in any C-M zone, or downtown? (c) Is it correct that no mobile home park (residential) would be allowed in any Industrial zone, including south of Samoa, though a short-term stay RV park might be?

Table LU-3 Commercial Land Use Classifications (p. 2-17):

- (a) Gasoline sales would become non-conforming uses everywhere in Arcata. *What about electric car charging stations? (Would they be considered motor vehicle services?)*
- (b) Will "motor vehicles" be considered only those subject to state road licensing? (Many large new e-bikes are little different from road motorcycles, but quieter.)
- (c) In C-M zones, would new motor vehicle businesses be allowable adjacent to existing residences, with no special permits?
- (d) Will the LUC continue to impose special consideration or use permits for bars and pubs, assuming they also get state ABC ok?

LU-3b Northtown (p. 2-17): This policy specifies housing at up to 50 units per acre, but equivalent policy narratives don't specify maximum densities for other areas. *Does that mean the City will NOT allow state density bonus max to apply above 50 in Northtown?*

LU-3e: 8d Sidewalk dining (p. 2-18): This Gateway policy should be adjusted for already-built-up areas of the City. Change "Consider accessibility for the visually impaired in structures that may create sidewalk obstructions" to "... No structure or temporary furnishing shall be allowed to obstruct movement or eye-level visibility on a public walkway." (It's not only visually impaired people whose needs should be taken into account by sidewalk obstruction. Being prevented from walking beside a companion, or pushed over the curb by people passing sidewalk diners is both hazardous and annoying.)

LU-df Relationship of building height to open space (p. 2-18): The draft policy, transferred from the GAP, is a land use policy, and is appropriate to the Land Use Element. It reads: "Allow for buildings over four stories using Community Benefits Program but require greater percentages of Open Space to be retained at ratios set in the Form-Based Code to ensure residents of high-density housing retain an excellent quality of life and easy access to high-quality open space." This policy implies that a reasonable relationship between building height and open space would only be required in locations subject to Community Benefits Program and "the" Form-Based Code. Staff originally relocated this GAP policy to the Community Benefits list at the end of the Design element, and want to move it back there. This policy implies that it will only be applied in very limited circumstances, but also implies that there would be a single Form-Based Code for the whole City. *Clarify!*

LU-3g No maximum residential density (p. 2-18): *Suggested wording: "Regulate building bulk and massing through design and community benefit measures, including number of dwelling units feasible in the allowed building envelop, height, setbacks, unit sizes, or other performance standards."* There is nothing "natural" about any of those regulatory standards. The

presumption that those regulations collectively must or should maximize development is inappropriate on a City-wide basis.

LU-3h New non-residential uses (p. 2-18): The policy's highly subjective language works for an aspirational "values" statement, but will not readily translate into objective standards. It will throw a nearly impossible burden of proof that a proposed use is not complementary to neighbors into a NIMBY bin. My suggestion: Ideally, move this language into the Guiding Values section. OR: Shorten the policy to "*Commercial Mixed and Central Commercial land uses shall complement nearby residential uses, support an active and livable neighborhood, and respect neighborhood identity.*" Presumably, the LUC will define detail. Mentioning subjective neighborhood identity is already tricky, but the Draft's subjective language invites contentious, divisive wrangling. "... *thoughtfully blended together to create a cohesive neighborhood that feels complete...*" ?!?!? "*Allow flexibility in non-residential uses, with targeted limitations on uses that do not encourage street level human activity, livability, or neighborhood identity*". At the least, avoid using undesirable examples that the LUC will disallow in Commercial zones anyway.

LU-4b Little Lake (p. 2-20): The plan indicates that Little Lake shall be developed for industrial or business park uses consistent with the Long Range Property Management Plan. Add: "... *which will consider site capability limitations related to sea level rise, flooding, seismic hazards, and toxic remediation needs.*" (The LCP will also need to consider these.)

LU-4d Conversion and reuse of industrial sites (p. 2-20): This policy seems to refer to abandoned or underutilized industrial sites, but doesn't necessarily apply to sites that have been in continuous use. *It would help to clarify. (On what legal basis could the city require toxic site assessments on property in continuous industrial use, or new use under continuing ownership? On I-G sites, how would the City require continuing uses that have been outdoors in the past to be moved indoors if significant impacts don't significantly impact adjacent uses?)*

Policy LU-6 Ag & Natural Resource Lands (p. 2-21 ++). Suggested language regarding A-E Ag Exclusive designation: "... *Agricultural and aquacultural product processing facilities for products originating outside of Arcata, **or** which are essentially industrial, **or** require large-scale industrial buildings over 10,000 square feet, **or** any structure longer than 100 feet, **or** higher than 45 feet are not appropriate for the A-E zone.*" This will help retain the ag production and greenbelt views that the A-E zone is intended to protect while permitting reasonable construction of barns, greenhouses, and non-industrial processing. (The draft policy's use of "and" instead of "or" makes it near useless to prevent inappropriate industrial overdevelopment of Arcata's A-E lands and greenbelts.)

2.3 Implementation (p. 2-25 ++)

LU-7 Consider revising or removing Planned Development overlays. Suggested change: "*Consider revising Planned Development overlays.*" Eliminating :PD designations would be unfortunate, redesignating specific sites may make sense. They are among the few remaining tools that provide the City, including the Planning Commission, with any discretion to avoid over-building and to retain open spaces and human scales within large sites and existing developments subject to :PD overlays.

LU-9 Consider rezoning for mixed use & more housing in R-L zones in walking distance of Plaza & Cal Poly. (Bayview, Sunset). Add: "*Rezoning that would eliminate any Neighborhood Conservation Zone designation must include location-specific design standards that recognize and address that area's unique character.*"

Circulation and Mobility Element

Operational analysis section (p. 2-41): Delete the sentence: "... Furthermore, congestion is often desirable from a safety standpoint, as it results in slower traffic speeds." (There are far more effective ways to keep people safe. There's a tipping point where a policy deliberately encouraging congestion would reduce safety. The sentence also disrespects and devalues people's time.)

CM-2b Consider Non-motorized Campus Layouts (p. 2-57): "For areas that have incomplete block patterns and/or are currently lacking in vehicular roadways ..." This policy was lifted from the GAP, referring specifically to the master-plan the GAP would require for an area of the "Barrel District." For the City as a whole, a map showing candidate areas for this policy would help, including those in the Gateway Area. The map would be appropriate here, or in the Land Use Element.

CM-4b Vehicular Circulation 3. Improvements at intersections a. Minor improvements (p.2-60, on traffic signal policies): "The City shall consider developing traffic signals ... [followed by] **b. Minimize the installation of new traffic signals** ... "New traffic signals shall be provided **only ... to relieve a demonstrated safety problem at an intersection (based on documented collisions).** ..." This contradicts a "Vision Zero" approach, which directs planners NOT to wait until accidents have already occurred before taking precautions. (It would probably be ok to "default" to all-way stop signs or a roundabout before assuming that only traffic signals will solve a problem.)

CM-4c Slowing Traffic (p. 2-60): WHY is development of a slow streets program delayed until Year 5 in the Implementation Measures table CM-9 (p. 2-61, and p. 2-70). The Commission has already clearly recommended that the City reduce the "default" speed limit city-wide to 20 mph.

CM-5c Bike parking (p. 2-63): "... The required number of bicycle parking spaces shall be calculated as a proportion of the **number of users.**" Will the LUC specify what this means? # of residents in a complex? Square feet of commercial space? ???

CM-5e Pedestrian pathways and multi-use trails, 7 (p. 2-64): At least suggestion: "In general, **do not reduce retain the current** total linear feet of Class I trails within the City, even if current facilities must be realigned or relocated to other routes..." This language, lifted from the GAP, *should indicate that City-wide we should expect MORE Class I trails between 2024 and 2045. What are the limited circumstances in which the City would allow a developer to move a bike trail? Through what means would the City specify how a developer would need to "... demonstrate removal or relocation of Class I trail sections would improve active transportation access and connectivity"?*

CM-8b Subdivision improvements (p. 2-67): Since this exaction policy is triggered only by property subdivision, it would help to add general language and to the LUC indicating how developers are responsible for addressing demands on resources and services that their developments create. This could be in a CM-8a++ general aspirational policy or in a "guiding principles" statement for the Land Use, Public Facilities, and Safety elements. Such a statement could explicitly acknowledge that the City's decision to relax any Development Impact Fee, or the general assumption that developers shoulder burdens of impacts they create is a subsidy or incentive to those developments. (The Community Benefit program is an alternative approach to this idea.)

[I'm not sending comments here on the 2019 Housing Element or the pared-down GAP element.]

3.7 Parks & Recreation Element (p. 3-32++):

Add explanations, starting with the Guiding principles and goals, of how privately owned publicly accessible open space, recreation, outdoor gathering places, and recreational facilities are part of the City's Parks and Recreation / Open Space system. This is a major aspect of the GAP, but it's also significant for the rest of the City. This should also be added to policy **PR-3** (p. 3-43) on **Coordinated Open Space, Park and Recreational Facilities Planning and Use**, which refers to coordination with other non-City entities, and noted in **Implementation Measure PR-9** (p. 3-45).

PR-2d Community health in parkland planning (p. 3-41) and **PR-2e Trail improvements** (p. 3-42): We should explicitly note that the L Street Linear Park will be part of the Arcata Rail with Trail Corridor and the Great Redwood Trail, and list it. (The new version of the GAP addresses it, and this Element, the Circulation and Mobility Element, and the Open Space Element should, too.)

Open Space Element:

The Figures in this element should be clearly titled to indicate which relate to the existing already-designated or developed areas, and which show planned future features too. Adding a map of planned future features is important, along with references to implementing subsidiary plans. (Do not expect readers to seek all of that information in those other plans, even if they may change over the coming 20 years.)

OS-1d Linkages between open space areas, OS-1e Development of vacant / underutilized property with low resources value as a strategy to permanently protect high value open space, OS-1g on Public and private ownership and management of open space, and OS-1i Additional open space area identification and acquisition (pp. 4-6 and before all address roles of non-City entities in the City's open space "system.") Additional explanation in the Policy 1 and other portions of the Element should explain those roles, and indicate that social values should be considered as bases for future City land acquisition.

Resource Conservation & Management Element:

With the City's emphatic policies to streamline development permits of many kinds, I am concerned about development where analysis of environmental and conservation concerns are only triggered by discretionary permits. (An example of this is RC-2f, p. 4-21, on Conservation easement requirements for sites that include an EBA.) *Suggestion: Let's take a very careful look at the DEIR, now that it's out, to ensure that permit streamlining won't risk avoidable environmental impacts.*

Design Element:

Policy D-1a Building Characteristics (p. 5-4) *Rename this section "Building and Site Characteristics."* Also, text refers to the form-based code (from the GAP), implying that a single form-based code would apply at all locations where community benefits are linked to streamlined approval. *Let's discuss this. Should a single Community Benefits program apply across all areas where form-based code standards will apply? (All Infill Opportunity Zone?) Should an area-specific form-based code standards be developed recognizing the unique features of each area where they will apply?*

Policies should clearly identify where and how project approval streamlining will apply. It may be clearer in Staff's minds than it is in the actual text of the Plan.

A clear explanation of the link between area-specific design standards and Community Benefits appears only in policy **D-8**, tacked on as after-thoughts to the very end of the Element, transferred from the GAP. If Community Benefits programs are to be developed for other parts of the City, earlier policies and the Guiding Principles for the Element should also refer to them.

The list of material relocated to the Design element from the GAP includes an **Implementation Measure LU-1, Objective Design Standards**, scheduled for years 2-5. Does that mean expedited approval of projects in the GAP would be possible, but beyond the GAP would need to wait until design standards of Years 2-5?

D-1a, 12. 360-Degree Design:(p. 5-3). “Provide for buildings designed as a unified whole with architectural integrity on all sides of the structure. *Ensure that rear- and side-facing residents or other users do not face unmitigated views of unshielded parking, utilities, or other uses prohibited on streetsides of developments.*” (We shouldn’t just protect the view *toward* a building, but also those from the development. Lower-rent residents or users shouldn’t be condemned to face ugly uses while aesthetics for street-facing users benefit.)

D-1m Lighting(p. 5-5) . *It’s crucial to apply “Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design” standards judiciously. Suggested language to accommodate both dark skies and personal safety: “... Where Arcata’s Dark Sky standards appear to conflict with ‘Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design’ standards, site-specific analysis shall determine appropriate lighting.”* (Arcata’s existing Dark Sky standards require lighting that limits side-effects on birds, wildlife, and night sky, and avoid unnecessary off-site spillover. CPTED standards tend to over-prescribe bright lights. They tend toward floodlighting, overly-bright, higher-pole, unshielded, and more reflective lighting than Arcata’s existing “Dark Sky” policies allow.)

D-2b Streetscape design diagram (p. 5-6) shows no landscaping anywhere on the frontage / setback area, only in the landscape / amenity zone adjacent to the street. Revising the diagram to show possible landscaping adjacent to the part of the building behind the people will show that it’s a possibility. The current diagram can be misinterpreted to prohibit or strongly discourage building-front landscaping. (Concrete-to-concrete building frontages in areas without exorbitant land prices don’t necessarily make for more walkable streetscapes or neighborhoods, and may actually eliminate the privacy features important to building users, which even a few feet of building-front greenery can provide.) It would also help if this diagram indicates where bikes could actually ride (as in a “complete street” diagram), rather than just a bike parked in the “amenity zone.”

D-3d Bay and ocean views (p. 5-9): Suggested language: “Any impairment or partial obstruction of these ocean views from new development shall be the minimum necessary for otherwise allowable development.” *How much view-blockage would result in the need to modify design, or prohibit the development? Beyond blocking existing electricity-related solar access, the City should adopt some standard or protocol, especially if project approval might be “streamlined.”*

D-8 sub-policies (all transferred from the GAP): Several of these actually relate to land use, rather than building and site design. Since some could eventually apply in large areas beyond the GAP, *introduce* them in more appropriate elements (e.g., Land Use), not just at the conclusion to the Design Element.

D-8c Value of Benefits (p. 5-16): Suggested language: *“Ensure that the additional intensity allowed is appropriately calibrated to the value to the community of the ~~community~~ benefits provided. High-~~community-value cost~~ benefits should allow for a greater increase in ~~allowed~~ intensity than low-~~community-value cost~~ benefits.”* (Do not refer to high-cost or low-cost benefits! The “points” a benefit provides should depend on the benefit’s relative value to the community, not their cost to the developer.)

D-8j Incentivize active & alternative transportation: Change an item in the list: *“~~free~~ electric charging”* . (Free electric charging would be a regressive subsidy to private car use.)

Historic Preservation Element:

HP-1c Historic Landmarks (:HL) Combining Zone (p. 5-23): This should be moved to “Implementation,” since no historic landmarks Commission exists at this time. (Suggested Implementation Measure: *“Establish a Historic Landmarks Commission as an extension of the existing Historic Landmarks Committee’s responsibilities.”* Year 5? What would be the advantage of a Commission?

HP-4 Neighborhood Conservation Areas (p. 5-26): Another policy indicates that the City should consider rezoning several areas within walking distance of the Cal Poly campus for higher density and more housing, which includes at least one Neighborhood Conservation Area. *Add to the policy: “Any rezoning of a Neighborhood Conservation Area must include a neighborhood-specific design standards that recognize and protect key aspects of the neighborhood’s historic character.”*

Safety Element:

PS-5b Review of development for fire safety (p. 6-13): *Add the italicized sentence:* “The Arcata Fire Protection District (~~District~~) reviews new development for compliance with fire safety standards. The City shall continue to incorporate review by the District to ensure that buildings and sites adhere to relevant fire and building codes, including sprinklers, vertical clearance, and turn-around space for fire fighting vehicles. *Streamlined project approval shall be contingent on Fire District review.*”