



STAFF REPORT – PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

TO: Honorable Chair and Commissioners

FROM: David Loya, Director of Community Development

PREPARER: David Loya, Director of Community Development

DATE: March 11, 2025

TITLE: **Provide Direction on the Community Benefits Program**

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends the Commission provide input and recommendations on the community benefits program required as part of the infill streamlining program adopted in General Plan 2045.

INTRODUCTION:

The Planning Commission worked on the community benefits program associated with the Gateway Area Plan in late 2022 and through 2023. The Council ultimately moved the community benefit program out of the Gateway Area Plan and into the General Plan so it could be applied in other areas where zoning specifically authorized the program. The Council decided to adopt the program by resolution instead of imbedding it in zoning ordinance so it could more readily respond to community need. The Commission will review the history of the community benefits program and make a recommendation to Council on how to structure the program.

BACKGROUND:

The Commission is tasked with recommending a program to Council based on previous community conversations. The Commission specifically addressed this program on the following dates: 8/4/22, 11/15/22, 4/22/23, 6/27/23, 10/14/2023, and 12/12/23. Commissioners and the public may wish to review those meetings at <https://arcataca.iqm2.com/Citizens/default.aspx>. The product of these conversations (Attachment A) was incomplete. The Commission will review the program components and make a recommendation based on current considerations and review.

The community benefits program is intended to continue to provide amenities typically provided through discretionary review conditions of approval. They were intended to have nexus and proportionality consistent with case law, while also applying to ministerial approvals, which do not generally allow for “conditions”.

Community benefits are required in the Gateway Area Plan (Chapter 2). But they will be implemented through the combination of the Gateway Code, the Gateway Plan, and a resolution identifying the specific community benefits.

The Commission’s current work will be to continue the community benefits conversation and make a recommendation to Council.

DISCUSSION:

To improve the effectiveness of the Commission's discussion, members may wish to formalize a process for discussion. Previously, the Commission used polling to work through this type of decision-making process. There are several polling techniques that the Commission can use. Staff will help facilitate when each is best used, but the Commission should consider the options to ensure they concur with the process. Among the polling options, staff recommends at a minimum, the Commission use simple straw polling, negative polling, and gradients of agreement.

Straw polling is familiar to the Commission. This is a show of hands for or against when the question is called. Straw polling can be used in combination with negative polling to quickly resolve matters in an equitable and efficient way. Negative polling is essentially asking whether there are any in opposition to a proposal.

Negative polling and straw polling result in binary (for or against) decisions. Often, decision makers feel that they land along a continuum. That is, they do not feel completely for or against, or they have mild objections but would not necessarily vote for or against.

Gradients of agreement is a polling technique that allows non-binary consensus building. The range of polling responses in a gradients of agreement are: 1) I fully support this and will vote for it; 2) I have some reservations, but I will vote for it; 3) I am neither for nor against it, and will go with the consensus; 4) I have concerns about passing it, but will not block it; and 5) I have serious concerns and will vote against it. Polls are conducted by each participant holding up their hand with the number of fingers showing that corresponds to their position along the gradient. The objective of these polling techniques is to build consensus on a recommendation, recognizing that consensus may not be resounding agreement.

Staff recommends the Commissioners each come with a prioritized list of benefits and a gradients of agreement assignment to each. The Chair can start by asking if there are any benefits Commissioners believe should be removed. The Chair will then use negative polling on each proposed for removal to assess whether to move on to more nuanced gradients of agreement.

If there are benefits Commissioners feel should be added, the Commission should be prepared to make a brief pitch, followed by succinct discussion, then polling. This process would be similar to the Meeting Framework (Attachment B) adopted by the Commission during the General Plan recommendation review.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS:

This proposal retains the policy intent to achieve off-site investment in the community to offset the impacts of higher-density projects that do not require discretionary review. The Commission may want to consider the economic impact on projects by requiring community benefits.

COMMITTEE/COMMISSION REVIEW:

This item had extensive Committee and Commission review and recommendation.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW (CEQA):

This action will be covered under the General Plan EIR.

ATTACHMENTS:

A. Community Benefits Table

B. Meeting Framework