



AGENDA SUMMARY EUREKA CITY COUNCIL

TITLE: Waterfront Eureka Plan

DEPARTMENT: Development Services

PREPARED BY: Cristin Kenyon, Development Services Director

PRESENTED FOR: Action Information only Discussion

RECOMMENDATION

1. Hold a public hearing; and
2. Adopt a Resolution of the City Council adopting the Waterfront Eureka Plan and associated Addendum to the 2040 General Plan Environmental Impact Report.

FISCAL IMPACT

No Fiscal Impact Included in Budget Additional Appropriation

COUNCIL GOALS/STRATEGIC VISION

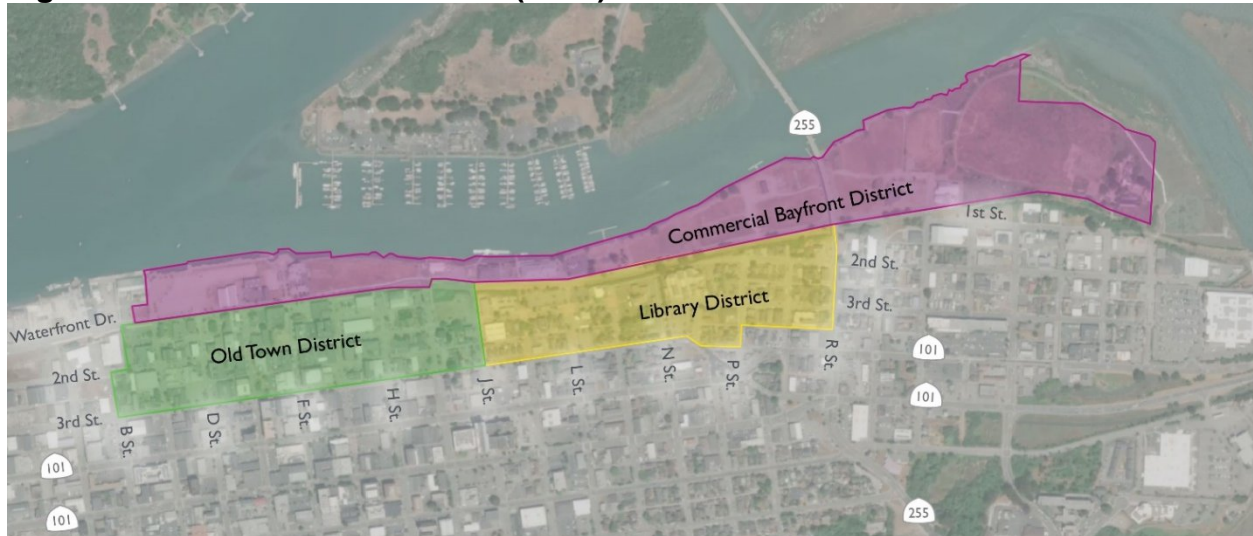
- 2040 General Plan Goal LU-2: A thriving, compact, and pedestrian oriented Core Area that serves as the heart of Eureka's civic, cultural, business and visitor activity and is appealing to new investment.
- 2040 General Plan Policy LU-2.11 Core Area Specific Plan: Initiate a specific plan for the Core Area to create a framework to focus community efforts and enhance the ability to attract funding for reinvestment.

DISCUSSION

The City of Eureka is proposing to adopt a specific plan, the Waterfront Eureka Plan (WEP; Attachment 2), for the systematic implementation of Eureka's 2040 General Plan in the City's Coastal Core Area (Figure 1). The WEP includes zoning regulations, development standards, design guidelines, vision statements, strategies, and implementing actions to provide a roadmap for development and redevelopment of the vacant and underutilized sites and buildings along and near Eureka's northern waterfront to facilitate new mixed-use development and accelerate housing production in alignment with the 2040 General Plan. Once the WEP is adopted, all subsequent subdivisions, development, public works projects, and zoning regulation amendments within the WEP Plan Area must be found consistent with the WEP.

The Plan Area encompasses approximately 130 acres and consists of three districts identified in the 2040 General Plan as comprising the Coastal Core Area: the Commercial Bayfront, Old Town, and the Library District (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Waterfront Eureka Plan (WEP) Plan Area



Specific Plans

A specific plan is not a component of the general plan; it is a separately adopted document that provides detailed guidance for the future development of a particular area, establishing a link between the goals and policies of the general plan and individual development proposals within the defined area. Public agencies use specific plans to set clear development expectations, while developers rely on them to determine where and what to build.

A specific plan must be prepared and adopted in accordance with California Government Code (CGC) §65450 et seq. Under CGC §65451, a specific plan must include a statement of its relationship to the general plan (included in WEP Chapter 1) and text and diagram(s) specifying all of the following in detail:

1. The distribution, location, and extent of the uses of land, including open space, within the area covered by the plan. (WEP Chapters 3 and 4 cover land use and zoning; WEP Chapter 7 covers parks and open space)
2. The proposed distribution, location, extent, and intensity of major components of public and private transportation, sewage, water, drainage, solid waste disposal, energy, and other essential facilities proposed to be located within the area covered by the plan and needed to support the land uses described in the plan. (WEP Chapter 6 covers transportation; WEP Chapter 8 covers other infrastructure; and WEP Chapter 9 covers infrastructure vulnerability and adaptation to climate change)

3. Standards and criteria by which development will proceed and standards for the conservation, development, and utilization of natural resources, where applicable. (WEP Chapter 4 includes development standards)
4. A program of implementation measures, including regulations, programs, public works projects, and financing measures necessary to carry out items 1-3 above. (WEP Chapter 4 includes regulations; WEP Chapters 5-9 include implementing actions including measures, programs, and projects; WEP Chapter 10 and Appendix D covers additional details of implementation and financing)

Finally, a specific plan must be consistent with the adopted general plan of the jurisdiction within which it is located (CGC §65454). Appendix C of the WEP outlines how the WEP is consistent with the City of Eureka's 2040 General Plan.

Under CGC §65453, a specific plan is prepared, adopted, and amended in the same manner as a general plan, except a specific plan may be adopted by resolution (like a general plan) or by ordinance (like a zoning ordinance) and may be amended as often as deemed necessary by the legislative body. The WEP is proposed to be adopted by resolution (Attachment 1).

Relationship to the City's Local Coastal Program

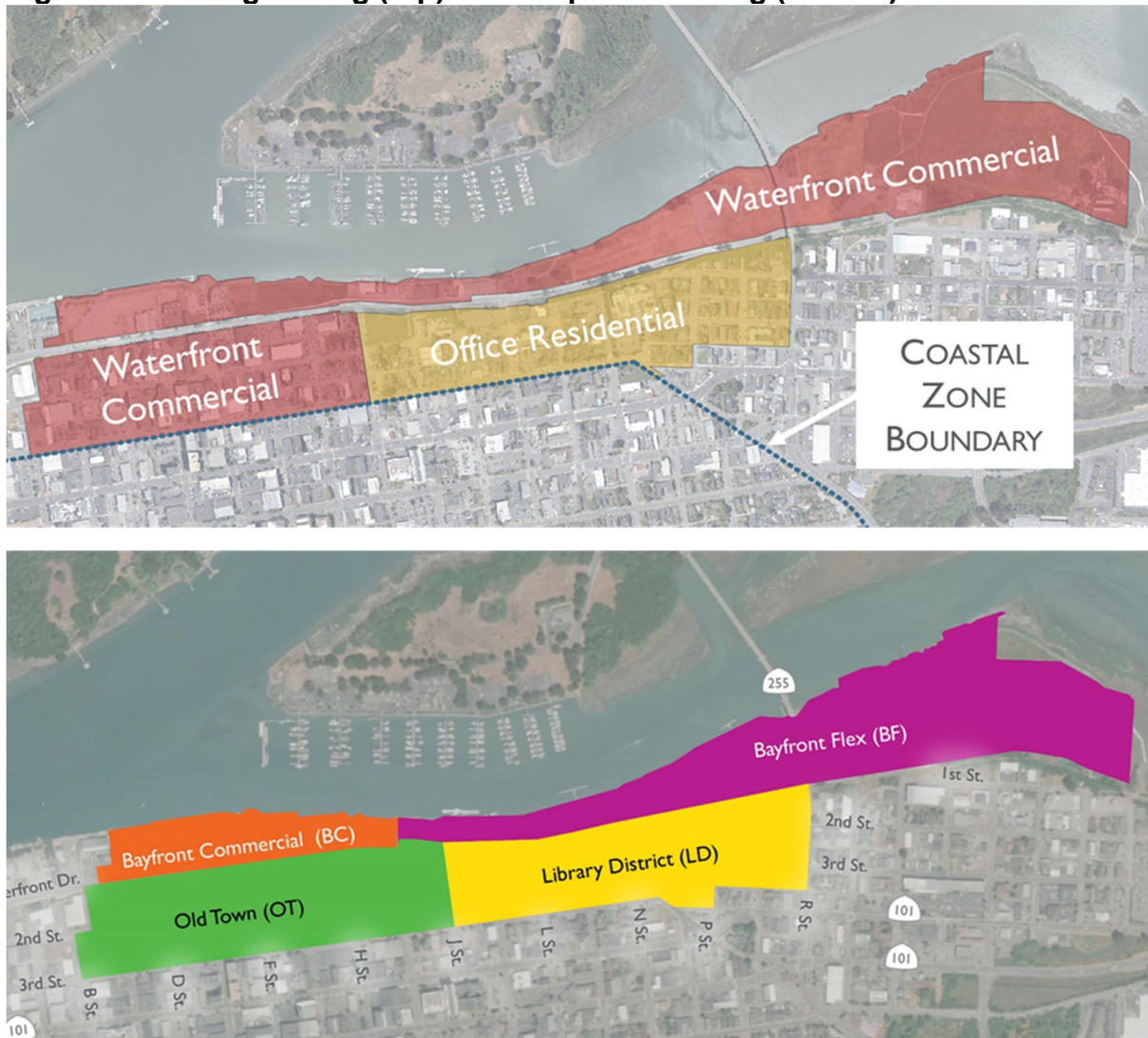
Since the Plan Area is within the Coastal Zone, the WEP's land use regulations and zoning standards (included in WEP Chapters 3 and 4) must be approved (certified) by the California Coastal Commission as part of the City's Local Coastal Program (LCP) before they can take effect. City staff recommends adopting the WEP now to meet grant deadlines, with the intention to integrate the WEP's land use and zoning provisions into the City's pending comprehensive LCP update, which will be adopted by Council and submitted to the Coastal Commission at a later date.

Since these provisions will not take effect until certified by the Coastal Commission as part of the LCP update, they do not need to be consistent with the currently certified LCP. However, the Coastal Commission will only certify the LCP update if consistent with, and adequate to carry out, the policies of the Coastal Act.

Current vs. Proposed Zoning for the Plan Area

Currently, Old Town and the Commercial Bayfront are zoned "Waterfront Commercial" (CW), and the Library District is zoned "Office Residential" (OR). Under the proposed WEP, each area would have its own tailored zoning: Old Town and the Library District would be assigned new Old Town (OT) and Library District (LD) zoning districts, respectively; and the Commercial Bayfront would be split into Bayfront Commercial (BC) and Bayfront Flex (BF) zoning districts.

Figure 2. Existing Zoning (top) and Proposed Zoning (bottom)



Attachment 7 outlines existing permitted uses. Both the current CW and OR zoning districts allow a mix of primarily residential and commercial uses. While the proposed WEP maintains this general mix, it modernizes and simplifies the use categories. For example, outdated and overly specific listings in the CW zoning district—such as “telegraph offices,” “messengers’ offices,” “real estate offices,” and “savings and loans offices”—would be consolidated under broader categories like “offices.”

Currently, the CW zoning district only permits coastal-dependent, coastal-related, and visitor-serving uses principally permitted, while allowing 73 other uses with a conditional use permit. In contrast, the proposed OT zoning district uses a “Pedestrian-Focused Frontage” (PFF) overlay to regulate ground-floor, street-facing tenant spaces differently from other spaces, recognizing their critical role in creating a vibrant, visitor-oriented pedestrian environment. For instance, new offices—which are currently allowed in any tenant space with a conditional use permit—would no longer be permitted in ground-floor, street-facing spaces on PFF-designated “Active Ground-Floor Dependent Use

Locations.” They would instead be principally permitted above or behind active ground-floor uses.

The proposed BC and BF zoning districts retain the current emphasis on coastal-dependent, coastal-related, and visitor-serving uses – considered “priority uses” under the Coastal Act. Certain uses would be prohibited unless they qualify as priority uses (see footnote 7, WEP Table 4-1), and others would only be allowed principally permitted if they meet that definition; otherwise, a conditional use permit would be required. The current CW zoning only allows residential uses above the ground floor of commercial buildings. Similarly, the proposed BC and BF zoning would permit new residential and office uses only above or behind a primary non-residential, non-office use (see footnote 3, WEP Table 4-1). Additionally, like the OT zoning district, the BC zoning district includes PFF designations to ensure new development features transparent ground-floor storefronts facing 1st Street, Madaket Plaza, Coast Guard Plaza, and the Eureka Boardwalk.

Development of the WEP

The concept for the WEP originated during the 2040 General Plan Update process (2013–2018), which led to General Plan Policy LU-2.11 calling for a specific plan for the City’s Core Area. The WEP is made possible by two State grants—an SB2 Planning Grant and a Local Early Action Planning (LEAP) Grant—both aimed at accelerating and streamlining housing production in the City. The SB2 Planning Grant also supported the 2022 Old Town & Downtown Parking Study conducted by TJKM Transportation Consultants.

Following a competitive selection process, the City selected Dudek as the WEP consultant, with work beginning in January 2022. A Public Review Draft of the WEP was released in May 2023. The Planning Commission and City Council reviewed the draft at public meetings held in July and August 2023. The City received significant input on the 2023 draft from community members and other interest holders, which was used to inform the current draft (see Attachment 6 for comments on the 2023 Draft WEP).

The land use descriptions and zoning regulations have evolved since the City Council reviewed the initial draft plan in 2023, in large part to address comments submitted by California Coastal Commission staff regarding the need to further prioritize visitor-serving uses that support coastal recreation as well as coastal-dependent and coastal-related uses (the cover letter from the Commission’s 2023 comments is provided in Attachment 6). Other changes were made based on an inventory and analysis of ground-floor uses in Old Town performed in spring 2024 on behalf of the City by four Cal Poly Humboldt students for their Planning and Policy Senior Capstone Class. The students’ final report is titled “Challenges and Opportunities to Support a Vibrant Downtown” and can be found on the City’s website, on the Planning Library page.¹ An

¹ <https://www.eurekaca.gov/DocumentCenter/View/5447/Challenges-and-Opportunities-to-Support-a-Vibrant-Downtown---Final-Cal-Poly-Capstone-Report>

excerpt of the report's findings, including the inventory of ground-floor uses, is included as Attachment 8.

In March 2025, the City presented the updated vision, land use, and zoning sections of the 2025 Draft WEP to the Planning Commission for initial feedback. The full 2025 Draft WEP was published online in late March 2025 on the City's website. Written comments received on the 2025 Draft WEP as of this agenda summary's publication are included in Attachment 5.

Key Differences between the 2023 Draft and the Updated 2025 Draft WEP

Several important updates and refinements distinguish the 2025 Draft WEP from the 2023 Draft:

- 1. Reorganized Structure:** The 2023 Draft WEP presented all background information in Chapter 2 ("Background Report") and combined all goals and policies into a single chapter (Chapter 5, "Land Use, Housing, and Mobility"). In contrast, the 2025 Draft WEP introduces dedicated chapters for key topics: housing (Chapter 5), mobility and access (Chapter 6), culture and community (Chapter 7), economy and infrastructure (Chapter 8), and coastal hazards and climate change (Chapter 9). Each chapter integrates relevant background information with a vision, strategies, and implementing actions. Vision statements and strategies now replace the 2023 Draft's goals and policies. The background report has been eliminated, and the introduction and community engagement sections have been condensed, allowing the plan to reach its core content more quickly.
- 2. Eliminated Redundancies:** The 2023 Draft WEP included overlapping content—for example, guiding principles in Chapter 1 were similar to the goals in Chapter 5, and "preferred futures" for each Plan Area district included in Chapter 4 were similar to the "Core Area descriptions" in Chapter 5. The 2025 Draft WEP consolidates these by combining guiding principles and goals into unified vision statements (in Chapters 5–9), and merging preferred futures and Core Area descriptions into a single set of district-based preferred futures (in Chapter 3).
- 3. Refined Content and New Information:** The 2025 Draft WEP incorporates updated background data, strategies, and actions in response to public feedback and new City initiatives. For example, it now includes expanded content on homelessness, vandalism, and crime—topics highlighted in public comments. It also aligns with recently adopted City policies, such as the Complete and Green Streets Policy (January 2023) and the Eureka Bike Plan (September 2024), both of which are discussed in the new Mobility and Access Chapter (Chapter 6). Chapter 9 includes updated sea level rise vulnerability and adaptation strategies, reflecting the City's 2023 Sea Level Rise Vulnerability and Capital Improvement Program Adaptation Plan and initial work on a Citywide Coastal Resilience Plan. Additionally, Planning staff collaborated with other City departments and divisions responsible for WEP implementation to refine implementing actions and ensure their feasibility and effectiveness.

- 4. Revised Development Standards:** In addition to the zoning district modifications made in response to Coastal Commission staff comments and the Cal Poly Capstone project discussed above, the revised draft also removes certain provisions—such as those for temporary uses—that will instead be addressed through the forthcoming LCP update for application throughout the Coastal Zone. The revised draft only includes standards unique to the Plan Area.
- 5. Expanded Design Guidelines:** The 2025 Draft WEP includes more robust and detailed design guidelines than those in the 2023 version.

Both the 2023 and 2025 Draft WEPs are available for reference on the City’s website: <https://www.eurekaca.gov/978/Waterfront-Eureka-Plan-WEP>.

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

Adoption of the WEP is subject to CEQA, and an Addendum to the 2040 General Plan Environmental Impact Report (EIR) has been prepared (See Attachment 3).

In 2018, the City of Eureka, acting as lead agency in compliance with CEQA, prepared the Program EIR for the 2040 General Plan Update (State Clearinghouse #2016102025), including a notice of preparation, a draft EIR with technical appendices, a response to comments, final corrections and additions, and the project findings and statement of overriding considerations. The City Council certified the General Plan EIR and adopted the General Plan on October 15, 2018.

The General Plan EIR evaluated the potential environmental impacts associated with full buildout of the General Plan through the year 2040, including an anticipated 1,886 new housing units and 1.6 million square feet of new non-residential uses. The EIR is available on the City’s website: <https://www.eurekaca.gov/806/2040-General-Plan-Update-Preparation>.

The WEP is intended to implement the 2040 General Plan in the Coastal Core Area consistent with the General Plan’s growth projections. Pursuant to CEQA §21166 and CEQA Guidelines §15162, when an EIR has been certified for a project, no subsequent EIR shall be prepared unless the lead agency determines there are substantial changes to the project or its circumstances, or new information of substantial importance has emerged—and these changes or new information would result in new significant environmental effects or substantially more severe impacts than previously disclosed.

None of these conditions have been met, so instead of preparing a subsequent EIR, City staff has prepared an Addendum to the certified General Plan EIR. The Addendum, included as Attachment 3, verifies the WEP would not result in any new or substantially more severe significant environmental effects beyond what was identified in the General Plan EIR.

Planning Commission Public Hearing

The Planning Commission held a public hearing on April 23, 2025, and unanimously voted (5-0) to adopt a resolution recommending the City Council adopt the WEP and associated CEQA Addendum (Attachment 4). Three community members spoke during public comment:

- The first commenter expressed concerns about the difficulty of complying with rigid development standards, including PFF standards, when renovating an historic structure on the south side of 3rd Street just outside the Plan Area. The commenter cautioned the Planning Commission against creating regulatory barriers to historic preservation and adaptive reuse. In response, City staff clarified that the proposed PFF standards, together with the existing nonconforming use provisions of the zoning code, are designed to allow historic buildings to be remodeled, as long as the modifications do not increase nonconformity, for instance, with storefront transparency requirements. Additionally, the WEP includes several implementing actions focused on catalyzing and supporting adaptive reuse (Actions 4.3a-f).
- The second commenter voiced support for the overall direction of the WEP but expressed concern the plan may overemphasize tourism at the expense of local needs, acknowledging this emphasis stems from Coastal Act requirements. The commenter also called for a cap on vacation rentals; expressed support for balconies on residential buildings to better engage pedestrians at the street level; and recommended the City require new buildings to include internal solid waste/recycling storage accessible to trucks via alleys, rather than placing dumpsters in the alleys, to allow for alleys to become more of an asset for Eureka. City staff agrees with these recommendations, but believes they are broader issues that should be addressed through the upcoming comprehensive LCP update and the next Inland Zoning Code cleanup amendment, rather than through the WEP.
- The third commenter raised concerns about public noticing, which City staff clarified was conducted in accordance with State law and City policy (the noticing procedures for the Planning Commission hearing matched those described below for the City Council hearing). The commenter also recommended modifying the WEP to allow full-unit vacation rentals as a principally-permitted use (i.e., without a conditional use permit) in the Commercial Bayfront, and to allow offices as a principally-permitted use above or behind the ground-floor, street/trail-facing tenant space. City staff agrees with these suggestions, but recommends adopting the WEP as currently drafted now to meet grant deadlines and minimize additional costs. These changes can instead be incorporated when the WEP zoning standards are brought back to the Planning Commission and City Council as part of the comprehensive LCP update. If the City Council wishes to propose a substantial modification now, the proposed change must first be referred to the Planning Commission for a recommendation before Council action can be taken.

Public Hearing Notice

Public notification of the public hearing before the City Council consisted of notification by mail of property owners within a 300-foot radius of the Plan Area boundary on Monday, April 14, 2025 (248 notices mailed), and publication in the Times Standard on Tuesday, April 15, 2025. In addition, the notice was posted on the City's website and bulletin boards, and emailed to individuals who signed-up to stay informed of the WEP process, on April 10, 2025. Notices were also posted around the Plan Area on Friday, April 25, 2025.

Planning Commission Public Hearing

"I move the City Council adopt a resolution to adopt the Waterfront Eureka Plan and associated Addendum to the 2040 General Plan Environmental Impact Report."

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: City Council Resolution

Attachment 2: 2025 Draft WEP and link to WEP Appendices

Attachment 3: CEQA Addendum

Attachment 4: Planning Commission Resolution

Attachment 5: Public and Agency Comments on the 2025 Draft WEP

Attachment 6: Public and Agency Comments on the 2023 Draft WEP

Attachment 7: Existing Zoning in Plan Area

Attachment 8: Excerpt from Cal Poly Capstone Project Report