

# GPAC Meeting #21 Summary

March 21, 2023



## Introduction

On March 21, 2023, the City of Ventura convened the 21st meeting of the General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC). The purpose of the meeting was for the GPAC to discuss and recommend land use direction for the Downtown and Midtown Corridors Areas of Discussion (*the GPAC also planned to discuss Five Points/Pacific View Mall and Arundell/North Bank, but there was not enough time to discuss these areas*).

The meeting was open to the public and held in person in the Community Room at City Hall. The meeting was livestreamed on [YouTube](#). This document summarizes the key conclusions from the meeting.

## Meeting Participants

The following participants attended the meeting:

### General Plan Team

- Matt Raimi, Raimi + Associates
- Lilly Nie, Raimi + Associates
- Susan Harden, Circlepoint
- Neda Zayer, City of Ventura

### GPAC Members

- Doug Halter, GPAC Chair
- Bill McReynolds, GPAC Vice Chair
- Philip Bohan, GPAC
- Nicholas Bonge, GPAC
- Lorrie Brown, GPAC
- Stephanie Caldwell, GPAC
- David Comden, GPAC
- Kyler Carson, GPAC
- Joshua Damigo, GPAC
- Nicholas Deitch, GPAC
- Peter Freeman, GPAC
- Kacie Goff, GPAC
- Kelsey Jonker, GPAC
- Stephanie Karba, GPAC
- Louise Lampara, GPAC
- Scott McCarty, GPAC
- Daniel Reardon, GPAC
- Alejandra Tellez, GPAC

*Absent: Erin Kraus, Sabrena Rodriguez, Dana Worsnop*

# Meeting Format

Doug Halter welcomed GPAC members and the public to the 21st GPAC meeting. Susan Harden followed with an overview of the meeting agenda. Similar to the previous meeting, members of the community had the opportunity to provide public comment before the GPAC began their discussion. Following public comment, Matt Raimi presented the GPAC's updated schedule for developing land use recommendations, reviewed follow-up items from previous meetings, and provided a summary of areas where the GPAC has recommended downzoning and upzoning thus far.

The GPAC spent the rest of the meeting discussing a preferred land use direction for the Downtown and Midtown Corridors Areas of Discussion. A vote by "show of hands" was conducted for each sub-geography once the GPAC appeared to reach a consensus on a land use direction. Following the GPAC's discussion on these two Areas of Discussion, Matt presented more detailed distinctions between the light and heavy industrial designations and solicited preliminary feedback from the GPAC members. The meeting concluded with public comment. Note that live Spanish interpretation was provided at this meeting.

## GPAC Discussion: Land Use Direction for Areas of Discussion

The following section summarizes the GPAC's land use direction and other policy ideas for each Area of Discussion, organized by sub-geography. Land use direction with consensus from the majority of GPAC members is **bolded**.

### Downtown

#### Overall Vision/Thoughts

- The Downtown Specific Plan already meets the vision we have for the area.
- The City needs more housing, particularly for younger and middle-aged families. Downtown is one of the most desirable areas to build housing, but the City needs to be careful not to concentrate too much growth in Downtown to preserve its "small town, funky" character.
- 4-5 story building heights are okay for the Downtown, but it is important to recognize that the State Density Bonus and City's Inclusionary Housing Ordinance can increase the actual height that is built if the development includes affordable housing.
- Consider downzoning some areas of Downtown to help preserve its unique character, architecture, and historic nature. Be cognizant of how upzoning an area will impact parcels above.
- If there are any downzones in the Downtown core, consider upzoning the Thompson corridor since the Downtown Specific Plan intended to concentrate density along the corridors.
- Implement high-quality design guidelines to ensure new developments fit seamlessly into neighborhoods. Require a diversity of architectural styles and discourage the development of more flat roof buildings.

- Preserve the Main Street Moves program and continue to improve walkability along the corridor.
- If the City continues Main Street Moves, it should engage with business owners along Main Street to ensure it is still a viable program.
- Pursue capping the freeway to reconnect downtown to the beach. (Having a freeway cap could open up the possibility for new development on both sides of the California Street overpass).
- Implement strategies to reduce the need for parking in Downtown and support the conversion of parking structures into other uses.

### Thompson from Sanjon to Plaza Park

GPAC members did not have a strong consensus on land use direction for this area. Roughly half of the GPAC supported maintaining the Downtown Specific Plan, while the other half wanted to see some form of change. However, there was a clear desire to maintain the area's funky, eclectic character. Ideas discussed include:

- Deferring to the survey results, which show clear direction to maintain the Downtown Specific Plan in this area.
- Upzoning along Front and Thompson, particularly where the Builders FirstSource and U-Haul are located. Given that there are already taller buildings and empty lots in this area, there are opportunities to create a more engaging and walkable community here.
- Encouraging the development of more craft industry and live/work uses in this area. Consider creating a new mixed-use designation that allows for this type of craft industrial or amending the Downtown Specific Plan and Eastside Workplace Overlay to allow for this type of use.
- Downzoning along Front to preserve older, funky buildings and prevent the development of generic high rises.
- Upzoning the area around Plaza Park to concentrate densities south of City Hall, rather than having "pockets" of higher density dispersed across Downtown.
- Implementing an adaptive reuse ordinance to support the funkiness of the area and preserve historic buildings.

### Beachfront Area from California St Mall to the Pier

- **Maintain the current zoning (Commercial Tourist Oriented).**
- Maintain existing parking given how heavily the parking structure is used, but encourage the development of additional uses to activate the area for both locals and tourists (i.e., commercial retail on the ground floor of the structure).
- Incorporate flexibility when planning for this area, anticipating potential future projects such as the capping of the freeway.

### Vons (Mission Plaza Shopping Center)

- **Change to Neighborhood Center, with the intention of preserving the grocery store and other valuable retail services in the shopping center.**
- Require ground floor commercial uses.



## Midtown Corridors

- **Maintain current land use designations (consistent with zoning in the Midtown Corridors Development Code) throughout the area except allow increased heights to Mixed Use 2 (4 Stories) on certain parcels east of Seaward. The potential parcels for increased heights include:**
  - Commercial parcels along Main
  - Key intersections
  - Deeper parcels on the south side of the corridors (note the south side was identified to prevent overshadowing of buildings).
- Support community gathering spaces such as the Singing Sun Coffee Shop and Santa Cruz Market area.
- Encourage less car-dependent developments.
- Ensure new developments are compatible with adjacent neighborhoods.
- Identify opportunities and strategies to manage parking, particularly around the Ventura Music Hall and other event venues.

## Midtown Corridors (Base)

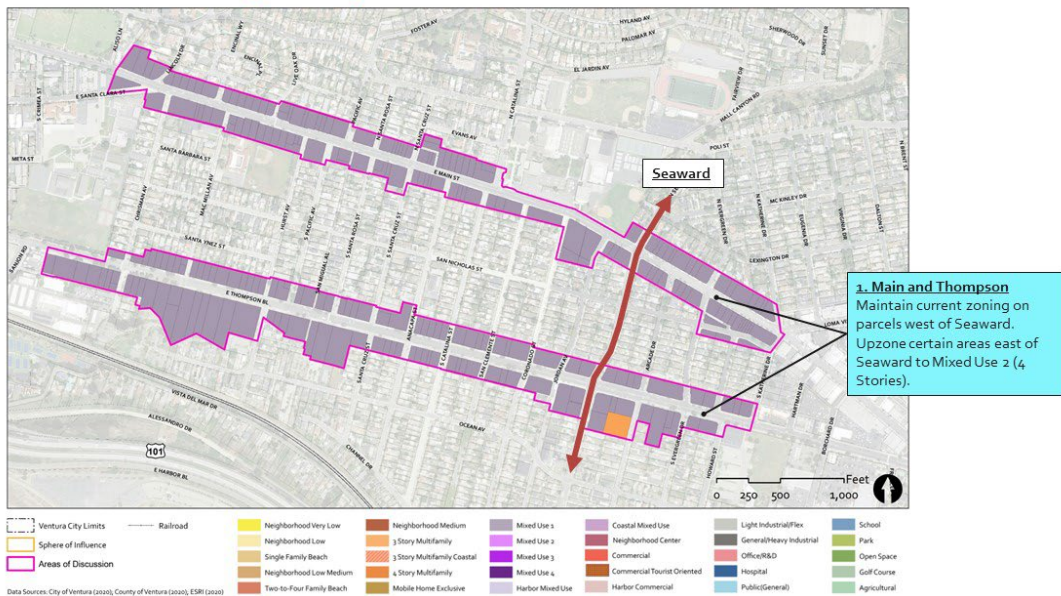


Figure 2: GPAC Land Use Direction for Midtown Corridors Area of Discussion

## GPAC Discussion: Industrial Designations

Below is a summary of feedback from GPAC members on the draft industrial designations.

- For better clarity, consider different nomenclature for the industrial designations (i.e., taking out 'flex' or changing to 'clean' and 'heavy' industrial)

- Add agricultural packing and equipment storage to the uses list and identify whether these types of uses fall under light or heavy industrial.

## Public Comments

Several individuals spoke during public comment at the beginning and end of the meeting. Comments are summarized below.

### Beginning of Meeting

- Keep in mind that limiting growth, preserving open space, and protecting farmland were top priorities identified by community members in past surveys, and that the majority of residents do not want denser housing.
- New housing developments that have been built in Downtown and the Midtown Corridors have greatly enhanced the neighborhood. Parcels this close to the beach should be accommodating housing, not parking lots and auto parts stores. Keep in mind that the tradeoff for not developing in the hillsides or farmland is infill, and increased density is appropriate for this urban part of town, which is walkable and well served by transit. The beachfront is the only area of the Downtown where increased density is less compelling, since housing is not currently permitted there.
- The State Density Bonus will already allow additional heights on developments with affordable housing. Do not increase heights in the Midtown.
- The City needs more housing, especially affordable housing. I support increased density in Downtown, Midtown, Five Points/Pacific View Mall, Montalvo, and Eastside to help address historic patterns of racial and economic segregation. However, the Vons should be maintained as a shopping center.
- It would be unsafe and irresponsible to overload Downtown with more developments, given how congested local roads already are and how challenging evacuation was during the Thompson Fire. An enormous amount of time was spent on the Downtown Specific Plan, and it seems to work best for us all. State laws require that when we downzone somewhere, we have to upzone somewhere else in the city. I am counting on GPAC to come up with creative strategies to allow for downzoning in the Downtown. Protect Downtown as a tourist mecca and maintain its safety, charm, and welcoming aesthetic. Do not block sunlight with overcrowded streets and preserve ocean views.
- The majority of respondents on the land use alternatives surveys support slow development, low building heights, and maintaining the Downtown Specific Plan. The Downtown Specific is a well-crafted visionary document that took into account each parcel and how it would affect the next and created view corridors for historic Mission and City Hall. Our Downtown is a critical revenue generator for the City. Tourists take photos of City Hall, the Mission, and the ocean and hills—not tall, generic buildings that block views. Growth will still occur under the Downtown Specific Plan.
- Commercial or Commercial Tourist Oriented is the appropriate land use designation for the beachfront area, not mixed use. With sea level rise, it is going to be difficult to build

developments here in the future. Keep in mind that taking away parking can be construed as taking away public access to the beach. The only viable alternative for the beachfront is to maintain its current uses.

- Maintain the Downtown Specific Plan to preserve the current character of the area.
- I am concerned about the accuracy of a statement made in a previous GPAC meeting that most of the air pollution on the Westside comes from the freeway. The City needs to bring third party entities like the Ventura County Air Pollution Control District into these discussions. The General Plan must be informed by facts and community experiences. The Westside has a pollution burden higher than 83% of other California communities, largely due to direct consequences from a large industrial and fossil fuel presence. The Avenue also hosts the largest oil field in the County and a gas compressor identified by NASA as a super emitter of methane. However, there are no air monitoring sensors along the Avenue to regularly measure toxic emissions from industrial and fossil fuel sites. Placing blame on the proximity of the highway silences lived experiences of community members. Community health needs to be prioritized over polluting interests.
- SR-33 is only a fraction of what impacts the health and safety of residents on the Westside. No gas compressor in California is this close to homes, schools, and businesses. No family in the City should be living near a polluting project.
- Ventura has a housing shortage that has contributed to the housing affordability crisis. Between 1980 and 2010, the City should have created 70,000-100,000 units every year. 97% of County land is protected farmland or open space, leaving little space for new development. Land prices are also skyrocketing, making it harder and more expensive to build housing. Create policies that support a diversity of housing types and allow for more housing near transit. Do not go back to a bygone era.
- Maintain the Downtown Specific Plan. Be careful about where we are designating parcels as mixed use. We want actual mixed use developments in the Downtown, not 100% residential projects. Density on the Westside can be a concern for emergency evacuation during natural disasters, so consider downzoning the western part of Downtown.

## End of Meeting

- The City should send the draft industrial definitions to businesses for feedback and coordinate with the County Air Pollution Control District to ensure there are no unintended consequences.
- Taller developments will cast shadows on adjacent residences and will likely not provide adequate parking. Developing empty lots along Main and Thompson as well as the Pacific View Mall will lead to sufficient housing units without the need to upzone the Midtown corridors.
- The closure of Main Street has turned Poli into a dangerous cross town highway. Do not ignore the survey results, which provide clear direction to maintain current zoning. Stay true to the "Little Cow Town by the Sea."
- Developing on shallow lots along Main and Thompson does not make sense. We need adequate parking for new developments. Most businesses along Main and Thompson have on-street parking, but adding more residential and mixed use developments will create issues.