



Item No. **9b**
Meeting Date: **May 10, 2023**

AGENDA SUMMARY REPORT

To: Honorable Mayor and Council Members

From: Dusty Duley, Community Development Director

Agenda Title: City of Willits General Plan Land Use Element Update Presentation and Discussion

Type: Presentation Consent Regular Agenda Public Hearing Urgent Time: 50 min

Summary of Request: Receive a presentation from City staff and project consultants updating Council on the team’s progress regarding the Land Use Element Update project. Staff is seeking input and guidance from the Council on a variety of land use policy topics and prospective land use designation changes. Additional lands outside the City limits have also been identified to consider including in the City Sphere of Influence (SOI) for the purpose of supporting additional housing opportunities and other identified community needs.

During this meeting, consultants and staff intend to provide members of Council with an overview of the four general policy focus areas that are under review:

- Facilitating infill development and commercial vitality.
- Identifying residential and business opportunities available through land use changes within the City or through proposed Sphere of Influence expansion areas outside the City.
- Ensuring adequate public utilities, services, and infrastructure.
- Protecting and conserving natural resources and energy and avoiding hazards.

Specific policy questions from staff are found in the staff report along with a range of potential policy options for the Council’s consideration. Discussion at this meeting will be used to support the creation of a public draft Land Use Element update and supporting environmental review documents. Additional public meetings are planned prior to bringing a final draft Land Use Element update to Council for adoption.

Recommended Action: Receive presentation and provide feedback on the Land Use Element Update

Alternative(s): None.

Fiscal Impact: This project is grant funded and is scheduled to be completed prior to the end of 2023.

Personnel Impact: None.

2021 Adopted Goals: The request conforms with the recommendation listed under Community Development...*Complete an update to the City’s General Plan to be used to guide future development within the City including encouragement of housing opportunities and sustainable economic development.*

Reviewed by: City Manager City Attorney Assistant City Manager City Clerk
 Finance Director Human Resources Risk Manager

Council Action: Approved Denied Other: _____

Records: Agreement Resolution # _____ Ordinance # _____ Other _____



CITY COUNCIL AGENDA STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: May 10, 2023

AGENDA ITEM NO:

TO: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

PREPARED BY: Planwest Partners, Inc.

ITEM: ***LAND USE ELEMENT UPDATE DISCUSSION***

REQUEST: To receive the Staff Report, hear public opinion on the matter, and to provide feedback and direction to staff regarding policy focus areas of the Land Use Element Update and Sphere of Influence Amendment.

SUMMARY

Since fall 2022, City staff and a consultant team have been compiling background information and conducting advisory committee meetings and public outreach as part of an effort to update the City's General Plan Land Use Element. The Land Use Element has multiple objectives of accommodating desired growth, addressing community needs, identifying necessary amendments to reflect changes in state law and for the purpose of providing new housing opportunities, streamlining the development approval process, and accelerating housing development. This project will conclude with an application to the Mendocino Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) to amend the City's Sphere of Influence (SOI) and adoption of an updated Land Use Element.

To date, staff and the consultant team have: (1) held three meetings with the project Advisory Committee, created a project website, distributed a community input survey, and held an Open House to gather community input; (2) identified a proposed SOI that contains an array of land for which the City could potentially expand; (3) identified a series of opportunity areas within the City to facilitate new housing or business opportunities; and (4) prepared a series of policy concepts that, in addition to the land use change opportunities and sphere areas, are intended to protect natural resources, support future housing, business development and other community needs.

During this meeting, staff and consultants intend to provide members of Council with an overview of the four general policy focus areas that are under review:

- Facilitating infill development and commercial vitality.
- Identifying residential and business opportunities available through land use changes within the City or through proposed SOI expansion areas outside the City.
- Ensuring adequate public utilities, services, and infrastructure.
- Protecting and conserving natural resources and energy and avoiding hazards.

The objective of this presentation is to provide a project update, share feedback received from public outreach to date, answer questions, hear concerns, gauge support, and gather feedback

of all types from Council and the public regarding these land use policies, prospective zone changes and expanded SOI areas.

BACKGROUND

WILLITS GENERAL PLAN VISION 2020:

The Willits General Plan Vision 2020 is a planning document with text and diagrams that expresses the goals, objectives, and policies intended to guide the community toward achieving its vision over a long-term planning period (30 years). City decision makers rely on the General Plan as the basis for making decisions on matters such as land use, transportation, open space and conservation, the provision of public services, and environmental quality and safety. It is also a policy document that guides decisions related to protecting and enhancing what the community values most, such as protecting and enhancing the character of the community and open space. The City of Willits' General Plan was last comprehensively updated and adopted in 1992. Since then, the City's land use needs have changed to some degree due to demographic and economic conditions and updates are also required to comply with state guidelines and laws.

DISCUSSION OF THE LAND USE ELEMENT UPDATE

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

In the summer of 2022, the City initiated an update to the General Plan Land Use Element to comply with the requirements of California Government Code §65300, which mandates that each city adopt a comprehensive, long-range, internally consistent plan for future development. This project will update and amend the City's General Plan Land Use Element goals, policies, and implementation programs that articulate the vision for the City's long-term physical and economic development, while preserving open space areas and enhancing the quality of life for residents. The proposed updates are intended to:

- Satisfy state requirements for General Plans that have been approved since the General Plan was last updated;
- Provide additional land for housing, business and recreational opportunities inside and outside the existing City boundary;
- Streamline the permitting approval process, and accelerate new housing development;
- Address inconsistencies; and
- Ensure consistency and compliance with other City plans that have been adopted or revised in recent years, such as the 2019 Housing Element.

The Land Use Element will continue to establish the general distribution, location, and extent of the uses of land for housing, business, industry, open space, agriculture, natural resources, public buildings and grounds, and other categories of public and private uses of land within the City. Because the Land Use Element was last updated in 1992, the demographics and policies in the plan will be updated to reflect the current conditions and vision of the City. Although past growth in the City and surrounding area has been limited and future projections for Mendocino County indicate a population decline, various emerging local and regional factors indicate a need to provide for a range of housing types in Willits that can be readily developed. In addition, the Land Use Element may include changes to land use designations to support residential and commercial development, plan certain lands adjacent to the City for various types of development, including

residential, commercial, recreation, or open space, and update land use designations for areas where planned land uses may be in conflict with the character of existing communities. While focusing planning for residential land uses, the City seeks to ensure that projects that would result in the creation of employment opportunities are appropriately prioritized.

ZONING AMENDMENTS TO IMPLEMENT THE LAND USE ELEMENT:

The changes described above will trigger the need to make amendments to the Zoning Map and regulations to implement the Land Use Element and SOI Update as well as the possibility of creating a Mixed-Use Zone. The anticipated zoning amendments are intended to enable new development in a manner consistent with the Land Use Element.

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE UPDATE:

In addition, the Zoning Amendments will also pre-zone the SOI Update area as part of an application to amend the City's SOI to be submitted to the Mendocino LAFCo.

COMMUNITY AND AGENCY INPUT:

Since initiating the project, the Community Development Department established an Advisory Committee and held three meetings to provide guidance on this project that consists of two City Council members (Council Member Rodriguez and Council Member Strong); staff from Community Development, Public Works, and Police; representatives from the Sherwood Valley Band of Pomo Indians, Willits Unified School District, Little Lake Fire Protection District, Brooktrails Township CSD, the Chamber of Commerce, Adventist Health Howard Memorial Hospital; and representatives of businesses such as LEEF Organics, METAL fx, and a local building contractor. City staff is also coordinating closely with Mendocino County and the Mendocino LAFCo. A Notice of Preparation (NOP) was issued on March 10th to inform agencies and interested parties that a Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (Program EIR) will be prepared to evaluate the environmental effects associated with the proposed General Plan Land Use Element and SOI Updates. In addition, a project webpage is available at <https://willitslanduseupdate.com/>.

On March 29th, a Community Open House was held at the City community center with two sessions: 11:30 am to 2:00 pm and 5:30 pm to 8:00 pm. At the Open House, posters displayed the overall concepts and questions regarding the focus areas of this planning effort (a City of Willits Planning Area outside City limits and potential City growth areas; potential land use changes with the City; making more efficient use of land within the City and providing zoning flexibility; protecting important natural resources and conserving energy; and parks and recreational opportunities) and staff and consultants were available to answer questions and gather input. Members of the public were encouraged to write comments on post-it notes and place them on each poster. The comments have been compiled and are helping to guide policy and mapping recommendations.

A web-based survey was available on the project webpage in English and Spanish, which will also be used to provide essential guidance on policy and mapping recommendations. As identifying land use/zoning changes within the City that can create new housing or business opportunities is an objective of the project, the project webpage also contains a form where property owners can submit suggested changes to their property that could potentially be taken

up as part of this project if they are in the public interest (e.g., result in additional housing/economic development opportunities). The survey closed on May 1st and a summary will be provided as part of the presentation.

POLICY AREAS FOR COUNCIL CONSIDERATION

The purpose of this presentation is to provide an opportunity for the City Council to consider the general land use policy areas and mapping focus areas developed to date and provide input and guidance. These focus areas are intended to achieve the City's objective to update the General Plan Land Use Element to accommodate desired growth, address community needs, protect natural resources, and meet changes in State law – especially relating to housing – and to update the City's SOI for the purpose of providing new housing opportunities, streamlining the approval process, and accelerating housing development.

The following are Policy Focus Areas to be discussed:

1. Facilitate Infill Development and Commercial Vitality
2. Opportunities Available through Land Use Changes within the City or through proposed Sphere of Influence expansion areas outside the City
3. Ensuring Adequate Public Utilities, Services, and Infrastructure
4. Protect and Conserve Natural Resources and Energy, Avoid Hazards

For each focus area we hope to:

- Describe the Policy Focus Area.
- Ask Discussion Questions.
- Summarize potential policy topic areas to prompt input.
- Seek Council input and general guidance.

1. FACILITATE INFILL DEVELOPMENT AND COMMERCIAL VITALITY

The City seeks to expand the supply of land for residential development in order to accommodate future demand. The current General Plan identified land within the City and a potential annexation area and assumed that land within the City would accommodate projected growth levels between 1990 and 2020. Land use and land ownership constraints suggest that it may be beneficial to consider land use changes within the City to facilitate local growth and accommodate residential demand, as well as to plan for additional land outside the current City boundary.

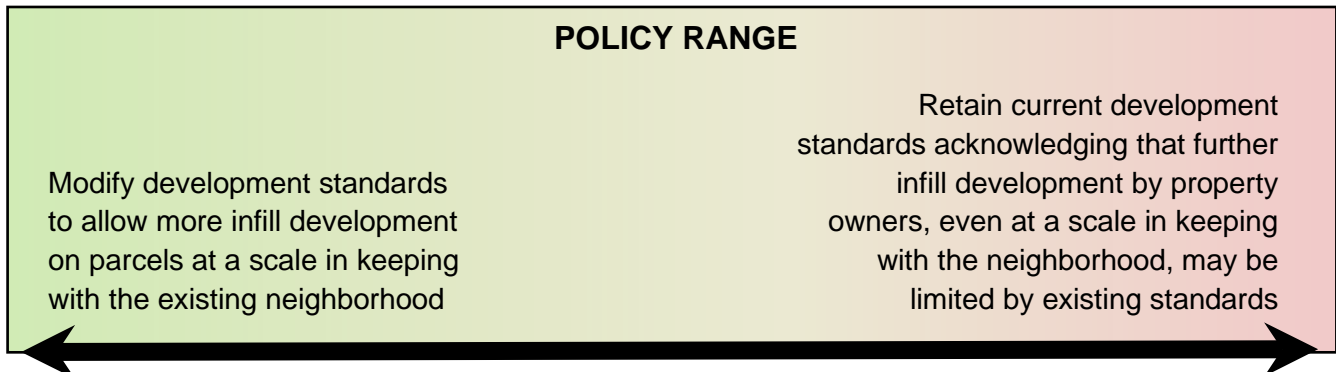
Modifying land use policy and regulations to allow more efficient use of existing developed areas for infill residential and commercial development could be beneficial because the need to extend or expand City infrastructure and services is minimized. Also, state laws require cities within urbanized areas to allow more diverse and less expensive housing types within single-family areas to address regional housing needs and to provide housing closer to jobs, services, and schools.

Related Current General Plan and Land Use Element Policy:

- 1.210 Facilitate local growth in accordance with Scenario 1, identified in Section 2.322 of the Technical Appendices (Volume 2). This scenario calls for an ultimate build-out population of approximately 7,500 residents.
- 1.230 Give priority consideration to infill development of vacant and underutilized land within the City limits.

POLICY QUESTION:

“Should development regulations be modified to allow property owners to make more efficient use of land at a scale in keeping with the existing neighborhood?”

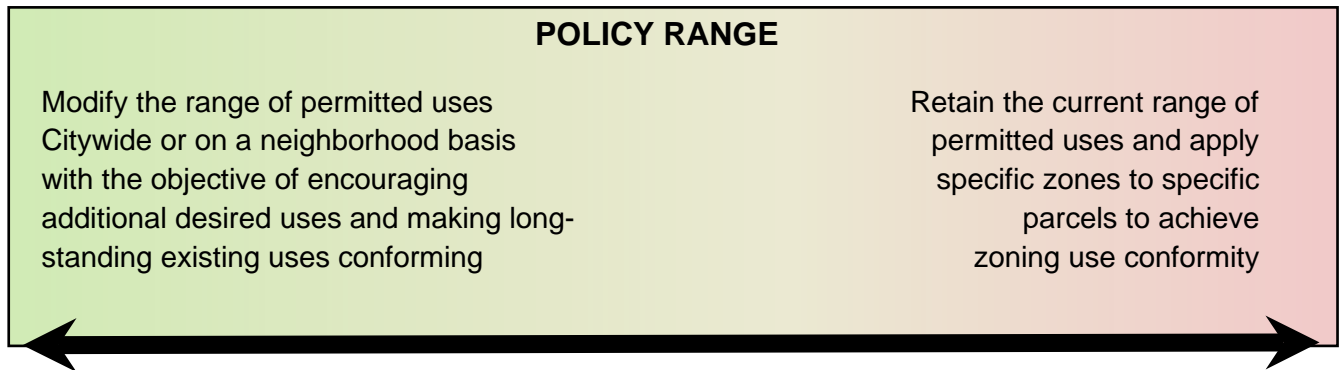


- Potential Policy Options:
 - Reduce minimum standards, such as:
 - Smaller minimum parcel sizes.
 - Reduce “yard” or required front, side, or rear setback requirements.
 - Increase maximum ground coverage limits.
 - Allow taller buildings.
 - Reduce minimum on-site parking requirements.

NOTE: Almost all of Willits is within a Census 2020 Urban Cluster, which qualifies parcels zoned for single-family units for ministerial approval, pursuant to SB 9, of a housing development with no more than two primary units in a single-family zone, the subdivision of a parcel in a single-family zone into two parcels, or both, plus one accessory dwelling unit for each primary unit. Given that the principally permitted uses for the Single-Family Residence (R1) Zone and Residential Estate (RE) Zone are identical, the provisions of SB 9 likely also apply to areas zoned RE. The only R-1 and RE areas that are not within an Urban Cluster are the areas south of Haehl Creek Court.

POLICY QUESTION:

“Should the range of principally permitted uses in certain residential and commercial zones be expanded - or new zones be created - in order to provide flexibility to property owners and encourage new business development and a broader range of housing types?”



- **Potential Policy Options:**

- Define more flexible zones in commercial districts, or zones on the fringe of commercial districts, to allow for a broader range of commercial and residential uses;
- Reduce or refine existing commercial zones to ensure that the range of uses such as the is achieving its intended purpose (e.g., Administrative Office (CO) Zone);
- Add a mixed-use zone that allows commercial and residential uses;
- Define tailored zones or combining zones for specific areas to achieve desired outcomes (commercial vitality on Main Street or South Main Street, or to address non-conforming commercial or residential uses); or,
- Provide greater flexibility for café, corner store, or other neighborhood shop front uses or cottage commercial uses in residential area with limited nuisance impacts.

2. OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE THROUGH LAND USE CHANGES WITHIN THE CITY OR THROUGH SPHERE OF INFLUENCE EXPANSION AREAS OUTSIDE THE CITY

Due to the available supply of vacant residential land and land constraints, including landowner preference, the City seeks to plan additional land to accommodate residential development over the next 30 years. City General Plan policy seeks a balance of jobs and housing and gives priority to land for employment over land for housing to ensure that objective is achieved. The City 2019 Housing Element concludes that “87 percent of Willits residents commute less than 30 minutes to work each way, indicating that the city’s residents depend highly on Willits and surrounding jurisdictions in the county for employment opportunities. The jobs-housing ratio was 1.0 (2,087 jobs/2,091 total housing units), indicating that there is a strong jobs-housing balance in Willits.”

Current General Plan and Land Use Element Policy:

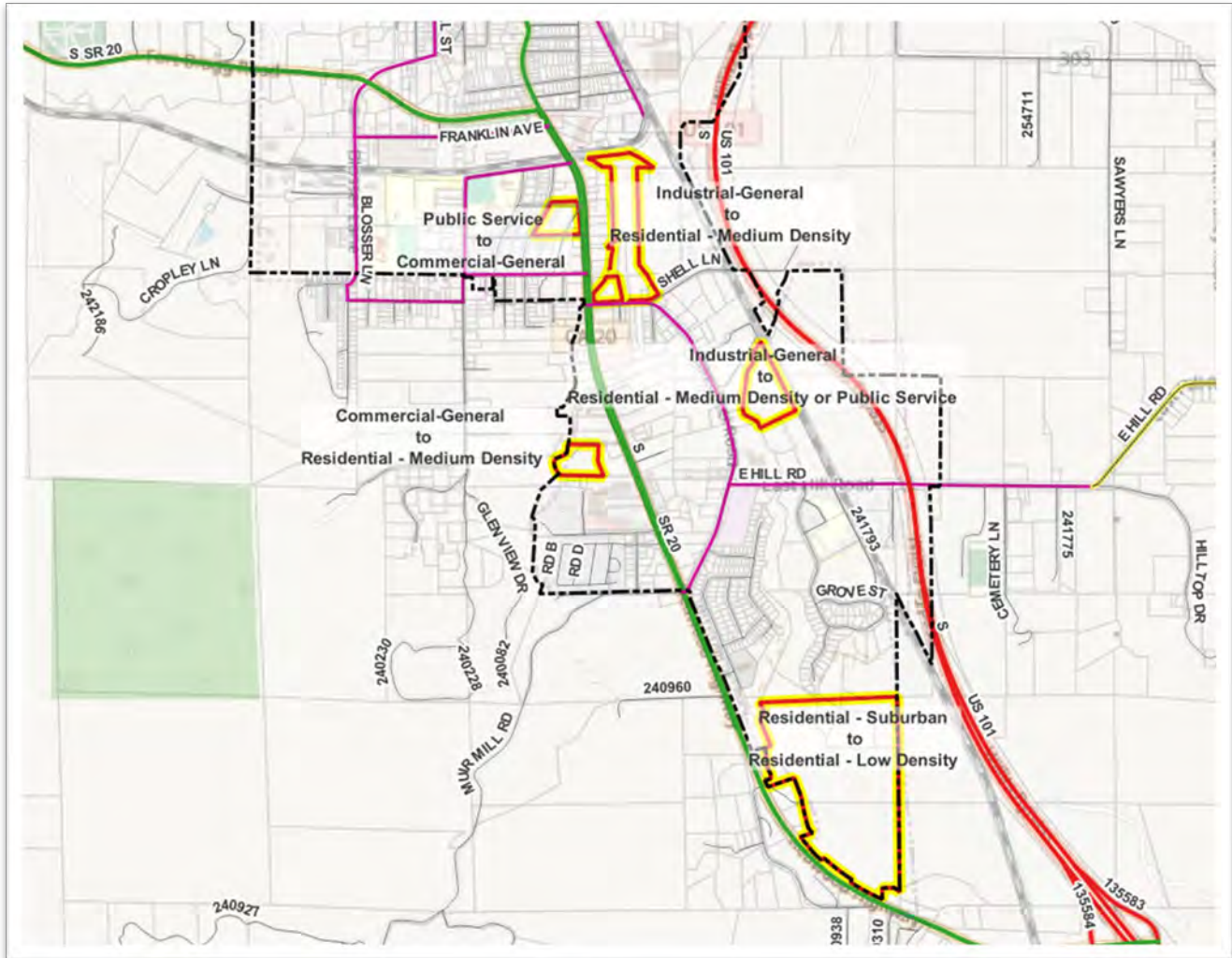
- 1.230 Give priority consideration to infill development of vacant and underutilized land within the City limits.
- 1.240 Consider annexations which are consistent with the extension of public services and facilities and other City policies and plans. Possible future annexation sites are shown on Exhibit 3-2 of the Technical Appendices (Volume 2).
- 1.260 In reviewing proposals for changes in land use, priority shall be given to projects which would result in the creation of employment opportunities.
- 1.270 Until such time as the community reaches a balance of jobs and housing, commercial and industrial development shall be regarded as a higher priority objective than residential development.

POLICY QUESTION:

“What types of City or property owner initiated changes within the City boundary should be considered in order to facilitate future residential, commercial, or other kinds of development?”

The map displayed in Figure 1 shows a series of potential land use change opportunities areas within the City that will be discussed in greater detail during the staff presentation.

Figure 1. Location Map of potential land use change opportunities.

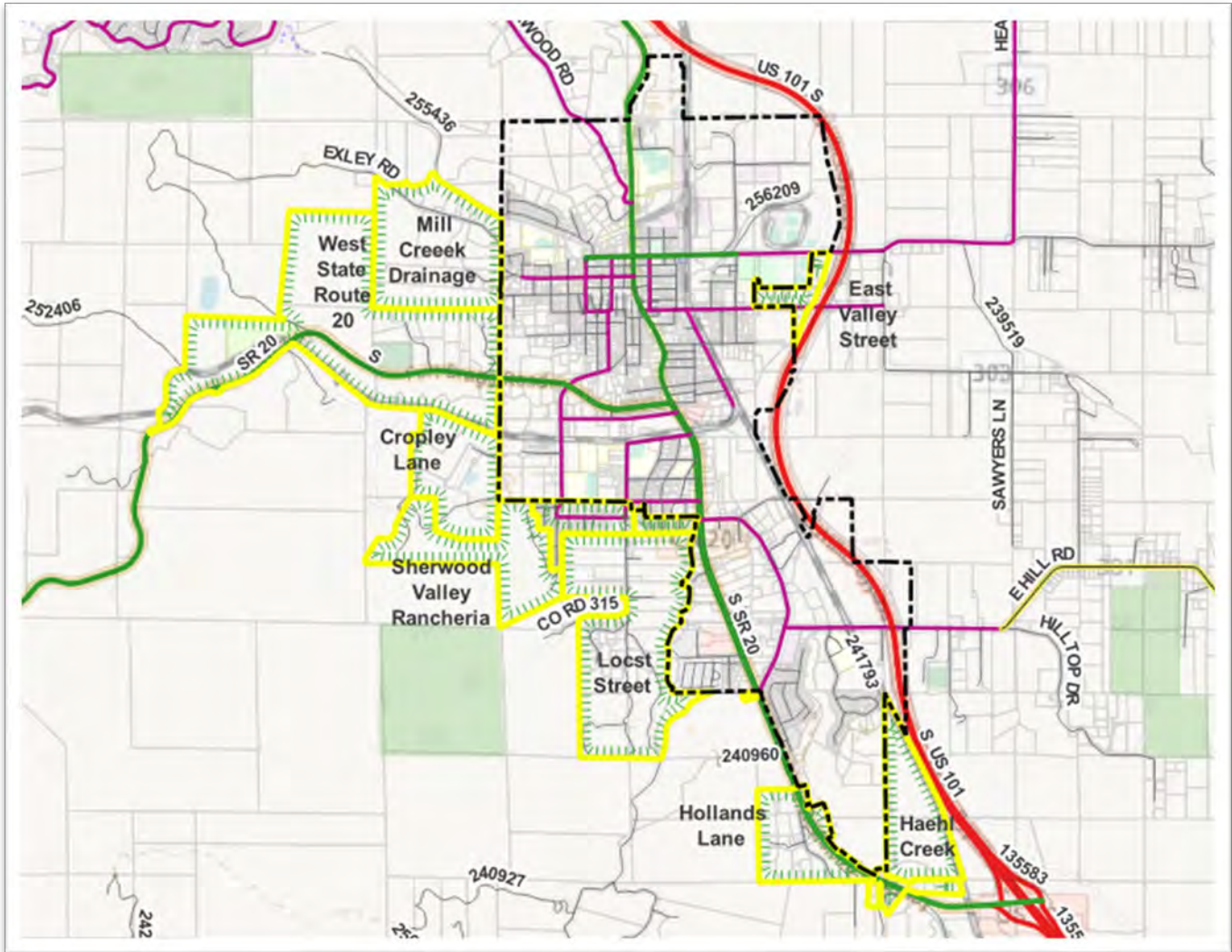


POLICY QUESTION:

“What types of City or property owner initiated changes within the City boundary should

The map displayed in Figure 2 shows a series of areas outside the City that could be considered for expanding the City’s SOI for future annexations for residential, commercial, and industrial development that will be discussed in greater detail during the staff presentation.

Figure 2. Location Map of possible Sphere of Influence boundary amendments located outside City limits.



- Be adjacent to City infrastructure and facilities with adequate capacity or that can be feasibility expanded to provide an adequate level of service.
- Annexations should:
 - Be initiated based on the supply of land for residential, commercial, industrial, and public facility uses within the City;
 - Contribute to the City's fiscal stability;
 - Result in the efficient use of City services and utilities;
 - Connect to or extend the City's mobility network; and,
 - Protect agricultural land and open space areas.

4. NATURAL RESOURCES

Many of the potential land use change areas and SOI expansion areas are in close proximity to important natural resources such as streams, oak woodlands and wetlands. The current General Plan has general programs to protect natural resources, such as assuring that adverse impacts are identified and mitigated prior to project approval and no net loss of wetlands in the review of proposed development projects. The City seeks to streamline future development and establishing objective buffers will assure resource protections and disclose potential environmental constraints to property owners. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife recommends that the City incorporate specific protective measures and implementing programs that would avoid or minimize potential impacts to natural resources including riparian areas and streams, wetlands, sensitive natural communities, rare and endangered plant species; protect native trees and natural communities including oaks and oak woodlands; and encourage invasive species removal and landscaping with locally native plant species. It may be important to develop more definitive General Plan policies and programs that demonstrate that future ministerial projects within the City and annexations will not result in significant environmental impacts.

Current General Plan and Land Use Element Policy:

- 3.210 Conserve, to the greatest feasible extent, the City's existing natural resources, with particular emphasis on air and water quality, open space, tree preservation and riparian habitat maintenance and enhancement.
- 3.220 Ensure that all adverse environmental impacts of proposed development projects are identified and acceptably mitigated prior to approval.
- 3.230 Ensure that environmental mitigation measures included as conditions of project approval are effectively implemented and maintained over the long term.
- 3.250 Maximize open space preservation on lands outside of the City limits which are not identified for possible future annexation on Exhibit 3-2 (Volume 2).
- 3.320 All applications for development within 250 feet of Willits, Broaddus or Baechtel Creeks shall be required to include site-specific field observation by a qualified botanist and a wildlife biologist as part of the application package. This requirement may be waived in the event that the City's Environmental Review Officer determines that the proposed project will have no impact on the riparian corridor

or that the site in question has been previously disturbed to the extent that the proposed project would be of minimal environmental concern.

- 4.731 Site-specific environmental review of all residential, commercial and industrial development proposals shall be required; extra scrutiny shall be given to projects along riparian corridors and in areas containing Valley Oak Woodland or other habitats or species of significance.
- 4.733 The City shall pass, by December 1993, an ordinance calling for the preservation of Valley Oaks and other trees of significance.
- 4.135 Revegetation of sites using native species may be required as a condition of approval for development projects.
- 4.736 The City shall conform to the California Department of Fish and Game policy of no net loss of wetlands in the review of proposed development projects.
- 4.834 Preserve trees and other significant visual features through enforcement of existing ordinances and enactment of new ordinances where appropriate.

POLICY QUESTION:

“What programs are needed to ensure that annexations and new development proposals are streamlined and that important natural resources are protected and energy is conserved?”

POLICY RANGE:

Include more detailed programs to demonstrate that natural resources protected through ministerial and discretionary project review

Defer all annexation area entitlements until annexation is initiated by property owners

- Potential Policy Options:
 - In order to protect natural creeks and streams, prohibit development within a buffer area on either side of the stream.
 - Establish a combining zone for stream and riparian areas to be applied to parcels adjacent to streams that specifies protective criteria.
 - Identify wetlands through project review.
 - Require onsite protection or through relocation and replacement of wetlands coupled with appropriate mitigations, as appropriate, to ensure no net loss of wetlands.
 - Integrate important tree protections from the urban forest management plan into Land Use Element and Zoning Regulations.
 - Establish an oak tree and oak woodland retention and protection program for new development that emphasizes the avoidance or minimization of oak tree and oak woodlands removal.

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