

Economic Development Committee Stakeholder Meeting – April 9, 2009
2030 General Plan Update – Key Policy Questions

The General Plan Team asked the Committee to discuss and provide input on four key economic development policy questions/issues for the Chico 2030 General Plan Update. Each of the issues below represents an opportunity to develop new policies or changes to existing City policies.

1. Shovel Ready Sites. Given the projected demand for jobs and industry in the future and the fact that current policies and strategies have not yielded the desired result for shovel ready land, the City needs to consider new policies or programs to achieve this important objective.

a. Should the City commit resources to ensure “shovel ready sites” (ready to go land) for business development that leads to jobs, wealth and tax revenue to support public services? If so, how should the City proceed? Should resources include use of public funds? Prioritized infrastructure investments? Other?

- A statement in the Economic Development Strategy promotes development.
- The City shouldn't get too involved in physical investments to incite development.
- With the expansion(s) of the sewer plant, the City is already helping in this way.
- Streamlining discretionary permits would be the most helpful.
- The City should go as far as planning the infrastructure, but stop short of installing it.

b. If appropriately designated vacant land is not available to the market, should the City consider getting involved in land ownership/assembly and pre-development activity, specifically designated for industry development, that would make the land shovel ready?

- No, but City money could be used to help urge hesitant landowners to sell to interested developers.
- The City could selectively purchase properties (e.g., Austin's Furniture, CUSD Bus yard) to prevent uses that are contrary to the City's vision.
- Many larger vacant business properties aren't for sale and aren't served by infrastructure. Many of these owners wanted to rezone from industrial to commercial before selling to increase the value of their land.
- Let's put the City's money into the infrastructure instead of property, as an incentive before developers are looking to purchase land.
- Don't use the airport as an example because the City acquired that property at an extremely low cost.
- Generally don't get into the development business, but remain flexible enough to respond to unique opportunities that arise.

c. Given the City's desire to achieve a compact urban form, how can the City best intensify the use of existing zoned industrial areas?

- Allow mixed uses by right and have residential located close to job centers.
- Extend sewer as much as possible. Improved access will help these properties reach their potential by making these properties more attractive.

2. Project Review Process. Throughout the initial public outreach for the General Plan update, many folks identified concerns about the predictability of Chico's project review process.

a. Should the City of Chico streamline the project review process for key economic development projects? If so, for what type of projects and what should that improved process look like?

- The City needs to be able to show potential applicants what a "yes" project looks like in many different situations (by zone, type of project) to let the business owner know before they begin designing the site/building. The applicant would benefit from having a Planning staff or another department staff person who can be the ONE point of contact for the applicant. The return of the Development Review Committee is helping with this already.
- Adopt checklists to expedite review of projects and increase predictability. The checklist needs to address the scale of the building and parking issues more than the uses within the buildings. The checklist should be able to predict 80-90% of the site-specific issues, and the other ~10% would need a way to be addressed. Of course it will work on non-controversial sites; the controversial ones will be more troublesome.

3. Redevelopment/Reuse. The Council-selected Preferred Land Use Alternative relies on infill, redevelopment and reuse of existing land to partially address future growth needs. Redevelopment projects are more difficult than Greenfield projects because they often require land assembly and public financing to assist in project feasibility.

a. Given the City's limited redevelopment authority (no eminent domain), what strategies should be available to the business community to incentivize redevelopment and reuse in Chico?

- Allow more residential mixed uses.
- Utilize the historic building code as much as possible to allow more upper-floor residences.
- Provide more public transit and reduce parking standards.
- Infill development is more expensive, so we need to keep that in mind.
- Encourage infill, but not in competition with Greenfield development.

4. Connectivity. Having a connected local road network and access to major regional routes is important to sustaining and growing economic development opportunities.

a. Are there any "missing connections" in the City's circulation system that need to be addressed in the General Plan Update?

- From Diamond Match to Downtown.
- Look for grant opportunities to make City funds go further
- Correct safe routes to schools on foot and bike
- Improve bike/pedestrian connectivity through Annie's Glen-Lost Park