

# General Plan

## City workshop looks at growth, economy

By [Robert Speer](#)

There were some surprises Tuesday evening (March 11) at the first public “key issues workshop” held as part of the city’s general plan update.

In a section on growth opportunities, for example, many people thought growth should go not only in the Bell-Muir area, which is a mix of orchards, ranchettes and houses in northwest Chico, but also in the area north of it, the so-called Study Area No. 1 from Bell Road out to Mud Creek, much of which is orchard land.

Both areas are outside the Greenline, so they can’t be developed without redrawing the line. Even fervent Greenline supporters such as county Supervisor Jane Dolan believe Bell-Muir eventually will be developed, but they’re adamantly opposed to developing the area north of it. Some observers have noted, however, that extending the Greenline to Mud Creek would give it a much stronger natural northern boundary and that the area is contiguous to a large section zoned for development.

Another surprise was how many people supported building more housing downtown—apartments and townhouses, presumably.

More than 100 people showed up at the Lakeside Pavilion for the workshop, the first of four being held so the team putting together the update can learn more about what Chico residents want to see in key areas.

This week’s subjects were land use and economic development. April 8 will cover the environment and sustainability; May 13, circulation/mobility and public services; and June 10, community character and neighborhoods. All are from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at the Lakeside Pavilion in California Park. Refreshments are provided.

The plan team—a crew from the consulting group PMC working with city planning staffers—first provided an overview of the process so far, which has including taking a community survey and holding two “envisioning sessions.” It has since published two reports, an “Existing Conditions Report” and an “Imagine Chico 2030 Vision Book” that is a compilation of how Chicoans would like their community to look in 2030. Both documents are available at [www.chicogeneralplan.com](http://www.chicogeneralplan.com).

For this meeting, the team sought to answer questions in five areas:

- Where should growth go (and not go)?
- What is meant when we speak of “compact form”? Does the term apply to the city as a whole, to neighborhoods or to individual projects?

- Where should shopping and neighborhood centers go?
- How can we best expand the number and quality of jobs?
- How can we make Chico more attractive to businesses?

**For the survey, participants meandered** among five stations, each dealing with one of the five areas. There they wrote down ideas or, in a couple of cases, stuck little colored dots on maps (to show where shopping should go, or growth).

Afterwards, a quick survey of the results was provided. As mentioned, northwest Chico was popular for growth, while people wanted to see farm lands, the foothills and the area overlooking Bidwell Park protected.

When it came to defining “compact urban form,” city of Chico Senior Planner Brendan Vieg explained that most people applied it on the macro level, to the city as a whole, but supported by compact neighborhoods and projects such as downtown apartments.

The shopping survey basically resulted in people choosing places where shopping already exists, but there was a definite preference for mixed use (housing with commercial).

With jobs, the preference is to attract high-tech and particularly “green”-tech jobs, as well as research jobs. Another was to foster homegrown entrepreneurs.

Finally, there was a laundry list of recommendations for attracting and keeping businesses, ranging from limiting big-box stores and retaining students in Chico to streamlining the city’s permitting process. One person’s advice was to make and keep Chico attractive, and businesses would follow.

Was the event useful? “Yes,” said Mark Sorensen, the chairman of the Chico Chamber of Commerce. “It will depend on what [the planners] do with it.”

For those interested particularly in downtown, the first of two Downtown Vision public workshops will be held March 25, beginning at 6 p.m. in the Arroyo Room, upstairs next to Collier Hardware.