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M E M O R A N D U M

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Re: Castro Valley General Plan - Public Workshop for Expanded Planning Area

Date: March 9, 2009

The January 2007 Draft General Plan will be revised to include El Portal Ridge, the Fairmont Campus, and Hillcrest Knolls. Two meetings have been conducted to gather community input regarding issues related to the three additional neighborhoods that will be included in the updated Castro Valley General Plan. On July 1, 2008, the consultants met with County staff and neighborhood representatives from the expanded planning area to review the planning process and receive comments on the community input process. A public workshop was conducted on February 17, 2009 for members of the community to review work on the General Plan update and to obtain feedback on potential issues and concerns and priorities especially within the three additional areas. The content of both meetings is summarized by the following topics: positive attributes; issues and concerns; priorities; and planning process comments.

ATTRIBUTES OF EXPANDED PLANNING AREA AND CASTRO VALLEY

At the community workshop, participants identified three categories of features that they like about Castro Valley: family-oriented neighborhoods; environment and recreation opportunities; and the small-town, local commercial areas.

Family-Oriented Neighborhoods

Community members at the February workshop identified a variety of attributes that contribute to making Castro Valley's family-oriented neighborhoods one of its best features. Residents from El Portal Ridge and Hillcrest Knolls said their neighborhoods are quiet and feel safe. In addition, these neighborhoods have been fairly stable with few home sales and fewer foreclosures. Therefore, there is a sense of community where neighbors know each other and offer to help each other out when necessary. The presence of children and good quality schools, especially for those in the Castro Valley Unified School District, contribute to the sense of community and were among reasons why people like living in Castro Valley.

Environment and Recreation Opportunities

The natural amenities that surround Castro Valley are also important factors that contribute to the high quality of life that residents enjoy. The natural landscape of hills and valleys help to define the community's special character and provide excellent recreational opportunities. In addition to having views of the San Francisco Bay and hillside open spaces, residents appreciate having good access to

the Lake Chabot Recreation Area and other parks and trails in the community. It was also noted that the area has reasonably clean air. The preservation of creeks and trees were mentioned as important tasks for the future of Castro Valley.

Small-Town, Local Commercial Areas

Many of the public workshop participants indicated that the small-town, almost rural feel of Castro Valley is another positive attribute. Locally-owned, “mom and pop” businesses, especially on Castro Valley Boulevard, are keys to the overall sense of community. Residents identified the Castro Valley Forum weekly newspaper and the Eden Medical Center as important community resources. Most residents enjoyed being able to shop locally while still having access to the whole Bay Area by car or transit. In the expanded planning area, Foothill Boulevard provides some locally-owned retail uses that some of the workshop participants visit but residents generally preferred shopping on Castro Valley Boulevard.

ISSUES AND CONCERNS

Many issues and concerns were brought up for discussion by the stakeholders and community members at the public workshops. A number of the issues that participants identified are beyond the scope of the County’s jurisdiction and the Castro Valley General Plan. The following summary includes mention of these concerns in order to acknowledge the full discussion.

Service Boundaries & School Sites

While many residents feel that Castro Valley has a good sense of community, several participants expressed the view that the area would feel more cohesive if utility service areas and school district boundaries could be changed to encompass the entire Castro Valley planning area. One workshop participant mentioned that the County should encourage the postal service to consolidate all of Castro Valley into a single zip code area. The idea that all students living in Castro Valley should be able to attend Castro Valley Unified School District (CVUSD) schools is important to many of the workshop attendees. (At present, the planning area is served by four different districts.)

Community members are also concerned about maintaining school sites for educational uses. The San Lorenzo Unified School District is leasing out the former Fairmont Terrace School and the Camelot School leases its site from the CVUSD. It was suggested that if the school district decides to sell the Camelot School site, the parcel should be used as a park if educational purposes cannot be maintained. Because the Castro Valley School District sold the site of the former A.B. Morris Junior High School for residential development, there is no middle school in the western part of Castro Valley.

Circulation & Access

Traffic Problem Areas- Improvements and Calming

A major issue concerning the stakeholders and workshop participants is traffic - problem spots, high volumes and/or high speeds on inappropriate routes. Many Castro Valley roads are used to avoid congestion on I-580 and I-238. Residents from Hillcrest Knolls and El Portal Ridge identified several streets in their part of the planning area where they believe traffic is generally too fast including:

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- Rolando Avenue
- 167th Avenue
- Somerset Avenue
- 164th Avenue/Miramar Avenue
- Crest Avenue

Traffic congestion on Castro Valley Blvd was identified as a problem for many residents through traffic on Crow Canyon Road continues to be an issue. The representative from Supervisor Miley's office mentioned that the plans to improve the Boulevard have been approved and construction should start soon. The plans include two lanes each way with extensive streetscape improvements. Improvements are also planned for Norbridge Avenue.

Other road improvements that were suggested included:

- Installing a traffic light (or other traffic mitigation) near the Neighborhood Church (Cathedral Crossroads) complex on John Drive;
- Moving the U.S. Post Office on Santa Maria Avenue or mitigating its traffic impacts; and,
- Completing construction of the I-580 interchange providing both on- and off-ramps at Redwood Road.

Bus Service

Community members indicate that while public transit services are generally good in Castro Valley, some areas, including Lake Chabot Road, are not adequately served. Workshop participants would like to see increased bus service to: major shopping areas including downtown Castro Valley, PW Market, and Bayfair; the library; and BART.

Sidewalks & Pedestrian Safety

The workshop participants had mixed opinions about sidewalks in the expanded planning area. In general, residents felt that each street should have a consistent solution to providing a safe location for pedestrians. The solution may not be a sidewalk, since many streets are too narrow to accommodate one. The expressed desire is for consistency, in order to limit streets that have small sections of sidewalks interspersed along the right-of-way.

One public workshop participant indicated that the County's Pedestrian Master Plan was considered inadequate for the expanded planning area because it does not include specific pedestrian safety projects that are needed in the area, such as a pedestrian crossing at the intersection of 167th and Somerset avenues.

Parks, Open Space, and Creeks

The draft Castro Valley General Plan identified a significant lack of public parks to service the western Castro Valley neighborhoods. This was confirmed by the workshop participants and stakeholders. Certain locations were identified as possible sites for park land:

- Hillcrest Knolls Park has recently been expanded.
- HARD has evaluated the Camelot School site as a potential neighborhood park.
- Some community members would like to see the GSA communications parcel and the hill-sides of the Fairmont Campus preserved as open space.
- The draft CVGP identified the EBMUD-owned site on Sydney Way as a potential site. However, Measure Q, which would have funded the acquisition of the site was not approved by the voters. A representative from EBMUD indicated that further discussion of this specific site was inappropriate at the public workshop.

One community member recommended that the County work to conserve and rehabilitate the creeks in the Castro Valley area, since the creeks are critical to so many environmental systems. This would include restoring the creeks that have been

Development Standards

Many stakeholders and workshop participants are concerned about the design of new infill development within the neighborhoods and commercial districts of Castro Valley. This is particularly true for the hillside neighborhoods such as those in the expanded planning area. In recent years, residents have seen variances to the existing building standards approved that have resulted in inappropriate development types, such as tall building walls on slopes, inappropriately scaled buildings for the neighborhood, and lack of landscaping. Some of the examples of development that participants didn't like included:

- Single-family home at Lake Chabot and Dominic Court
- Three-unit subdivision on Almond Road;
- Apartments on Wilbeam near BART;
- Single-family homes at the top of John Drive

The hodgepodge of development types is prevalent on Castro Valley Boulevard where residential uses are mixed in with commercial uses. Community members said that the combination of an inappropriate mix of uses, strip malls, and overbuilding is hurting the visual character of Castro Valley. There was also some concern about proposals for residential development and commercial use in the Fairmont campus area.

Workshop participants recommended a variety of development regulations for consideration as part of the County's efforts to create new standards for residential and commercial development. A view ordinance of some sort was suggested to help preserve views of the Bay, hillsides, and creeks. Many residents also requested consistency in the requirement to underground utility lines. Landscaping standards for Foothill Boulevard were recommended to provide more trees and landscaping. One workshop participant requested that the new development standards require native landscaping. Residents of the areas above I-580 also expressed the desire for Caltrans to build new sound walls.

Code Enforcement

Code enforcement and property maintenance is an issue identified by the community members. The areas along Foothill Boulevard are part of a Redevelopment Project Area and have been identified as

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blight. The blighted conditions are evident in the garbage in yards, graffiti, and cars parked on yards. The area near Rolando and Somerset avenues was mentioned as an area that is particularly run-down.

Social Issues

Community members mentioned that they are concerned about the recent increase in crime (bank robberies), gang activities (graffiti), and homeless persons in Castro Valley.

Economic Development & Services

As mentioned above, not many of the public workshop participants shop along Foothill Boulevard regularly. Some participants said they would be more likely to shop locally if the area had better neighborhood commercial uses such as a small grocery store or dry cleaners. Others said that Castro Valley needs more youth activities and places teens can go after school and in evenings, such as live music or karaoke venues and cafes.

One workshop participant mentioned that the schedule for recycling collection is not frequent enough. One of the local service providers only provides collection services every other week, while the other provider comes every week.

PRIORITIES

The next portion of the public workshop was a discussion of the most important priorities for Castro Valley over the next twenty years. The draft General Plan identified the top ten priorities as established as part of the earlier planning process. Participants were asked to rank the priorities and submit them. The tally is listed below the summary of the discussion.

Downtown

The discussion about Downtown Castro Valley centered around two main topics - making the area more accessible by alternative modes of transportation and making the area an identifiable district with small town character. The suggestions to improve Downtown focused on: less traffic by diverting traffic around Downtown and providing more transit options and creating a more pedestrian-friendly urban design. One suggestion included closing Castro Valley Boulevard to car traffic like K Street in Sacramento. Another suggestion was to provide shuttle to Downtown.

A goal that became clear is that community members would like Downtown to be a vital area with new businesses and still maintain the small-town, rural character of the area. Downtown should be maintained and improved without becoming like Hayward.

Environmental Conservation & Open Space Preservation

Conservation of natural resources including open space was discussed as an important priority. Planting more trees and preserving critical habitat and open space (creeks, riparian habitat, Fairmont Ridge, Lake Chabot, and regional parks) are critical components to achieving this. One workshop participant disagreed with the prevailing opinion about the location of open space suggesting that the hillsides should be developed and parks be maintained in the valleys. Water conservation was also mentioned as an important issue for Castro Valley to deal with over the next 20 years.

Development Standards

Green building standards were recommended to be considered as part of the new development standards being drafted by the County. These standards would promote more transit, native landscaping, and reducing water use.

Other Priorities

Other priorities included rationalizing the service boundaries, building a new middle school to serve western Castro Valley, and meeting the need for more senior housing and assisted living facilities.

Top 10 Priorities for Castro Valley

Workshop participants were asked whether they agreed with how participants ranked priorities for Castro Valley at previous workshops. As shown in the column on the right, the residents who attended this meeting concurred with the top three priorities selected at workshops in 2006 and 2007.

#	Priority	Votes
1	Castro Valley Streetscape Improvements.	7
2	Highly Visible Hillside or Canyon Sites Preserved as Open Space.	13
3	Enforcement of Zoning and Design Review Regulations, as well as property maintenance requirements.	8
4	Billboards Eliminated through Buyouts.	2
5	Neighborhood Commercial Center Sites at Heyer/Center and Lake Chabot Road/Seven Hills Renovated and/or Redeveloped with Mixed Use.	3
6	Commercial Façade Improvement Program.	
7	Revised Subdivision Standards – Lot Size, Private Streets, Landscaping, etc.	4
8	Residential Design Standards and/or Guidelines.	4
9	Commercial Design Review Standards and/or Guidelines.	3
10	New Neighborhood Park in the western area of Castro Valley, and/or in other areas.	4

Other Priorities

The following is a list of other priorities quoted from the handouts that workshop participants returned to the consultant:

- Preserve, protect, and restore natural and culverted creek areas and riparian habitat with a long term vision to restore the creeks and their riparian and aquatic ecosystems
- Noise from 580 freeway
- Reduce noise of 580 freeway
- Green building standards
- Water use and conservation standards

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- Remove eye sores: relocate pole/electrical and telephone lines underground
- Regular traffic/pedestrian studies in hillside neighborhoods circulation
- “Pedestrianized” Castro Valley
- Maintain full length easy access to Castro Valley Blvd and Redwood Road
- Put El Portal Ridge in Castro Valley school district
- Neighborhood schools
- New middle school in western Castro Valley
- Youth entertainment
- Preserve family-owned businesses, maintain, and revamp them
- Include foothill commercial area (with priority number 5)
- Include commercial and residential (with priority number 3)

PLANNING PROCESS

The planning process was discussed at the two meetings to ensure that input from the residents and stakeholders in the expanded planning area is incorporated into the Castro Valley General Plan. It was recommended that the previous General Plans (1961 and 1985) which included El Portal Ridge be reviewed for the existing plans and proposals for the area. The comments on the draft Eden Plan also include ideas for the area.

The next steps include revising the Draft General Plan and preparing the Final EIR. The current Draft Plan and the Draft EIR are available online, and at the Castro Valley Library and the County Planning Department.