

**HUMBOLDT COUNTY
GENERAL PLAN UPDATE**

**Sketch Plan Alternatives:
Summary of
Planning Commission
and
Board of Supervisors
Recommendations**

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Prepared by

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Community Development Services**

Background

The Planning Division of the Community Development Services released the *Sketch Plan Alternatives Report* in early June 2004, in order to provide generalized depictions of proposed land use development scenarios for the General Plan Update process. The Report presented four sketch plan alternatives designed to illustrate different approaches to updating the General Plan for the unincorporated areas of Humboldt County and to compare the impacts of these alternatives to the existing Framework Plan. The report also included policy options that could be mixed and matched with the sketch plans to get the best fit for future development in the County. These sketch plans and policy options were developed based upon Board of Supervisor direction received at the conclusion of the Critical Choices phase, technical background studies and discussions with city and service district staff. To quote from the report's Executive Summary:

“While they represent various themes, they contain components that can be mixed, matched and reworked to develop the best fit for drafting the County's General Plan. Sketch plan components are expected to evolve based upon public input to provide sound policy choices and buildout scenarios reflective of community values.”

And from p.5 of the report – Public Review and Approval Process:

“The final sketch plan document will incorporate revisions based upon public input. Preferred components of each will be combined into a Proposed Project Sketch Plan (SP5). SP5 will provide the guidance for writing full draft General Plan.”

Public workshops and meetings with community groups were held during June, July and August to explain and receive public input on the sketch plan alternatives. The primary purpose of these workshops was to ensure that the sketch plans reflect a reasonable range of alternatives and to select a proposed project for CEQA analysis. During that time 24 meetings were held, including community workshops in Willow Creek, Petrolia, Garberville, Redway, Fieldbrook and Blue Lake, and presentations to numerous organizations, community service districts, all incorporated city councils (and available planning commission members and city staff), HSU administration, the Wiyot tribe and others.

The Sketch Plan Alternatives played a useful role in promoting a discussion of growth and development patterns. The broad public concerns regarding anti-sprawl, resource protection, affordable housing and infrastructure planning came to the forefront of the discussion. As noted in the Sketch Plan Alternatives report, the alternatives were expected to evolve based on public input, and it was expected that a new alternative would be developed to represent the proposed project alternative. Since there was little public support for Sketch Plans 2 and 4 which had significant expansions of water service areas, and because there was consensus opinion against sprawl, these plans were determined to not be reflective of community values and the public input received. Staff then developed recommendations for alternatives that reflected the range of opinion on development capacity and density, and the consensus opinion on promoting infilling, infrastructure planning, and development timing issues. To avoid confusion with the previous alternatives, the new proposed alternatives were renamed “A”, “B”, and “C”. Proposed Alternative B was effectively the Sketch Plan 5 that was described early on as being the final Plan that would incorporate the preferred components chosen by the public and the Board of Supervisors and that would be presented as the preferred alternative.

Based upon the comments received during these community meetings and the Board of Supervisors public workshop of August 25, staff prepared a staff report. This report summarized the public input into 10 findings, and reframed the alternatives to be reflective of the input received.

The Planning Commission held public hearings on September 2nd and 9th on the revised sketch plans A, B and C, introduced in the Board Report dated August 25, 2004. After deliberation, the Planning Commission renamed the findings “guiding principles”, made minor edits, and forwarded their recommendations to the Board of Supervisors on September 9, 2004. The Board then held a public hearing on September 13th to consider the Planning Commission’s recommendations and the comments of the public.

Following is the Board of Supervisor’s recommendations to staff regarding the findings (“guiding principles”), range of alternatives for the CEQA process, the proposed project alternatives, and proposed policy options and optional General Plan Elements.

Sketch Plan Guiding Principles:

- 1) The proposed project must ensure efficient use of water and sewer services and focus development in those areas and discourage low density residential conversion of resource lands and open space.
- 2) The proposed project must provide sufficient developable residential land and policies to address the current scarcity of affordable housing and prevent scarcity under a range of population growth scenarios.
- 3) The proposed project must include actionable plans for infrastructure financing and construction.
- 4) The proposed project must support the County’s economic development strategy and work to retain and create living wage job opportunities.
- 5) A reasonable range of alternatives must include an environmentally superior alternative that would result in the least conversion of lands to development.
- 6) A reasonable range must also include an alternative that would result in a greater supply of land available for affordable housing and economic development.
- 7) The proposed project must contain long-term agriculture and timber land protections such as increased restrictions on resource land subdivisions and patent parcel development.
- 8) The proposed project must include unambiguous natural resource protections; especially for open space, water resources, water quality, scenic beauty and salmonids.
- 9) The proposed project must be practical and actionable.
- 10) Development of the proposed project and alternatives must involve stakeholders and be supported with accurate and relevant data.

CEQA Reasonable Range of Alternatives:

A reasonable range of alternatives was identified as including new sketch plans “A”, “C”, the “No Project” alternative, and the proposed project sketch plan “B”, as described below:

1. Add a lower residential capacity scenario (new sketch plan “A”).

Sketch Plan A would meet the County’s fair share Regional Housing Needs solely through infill development served by existing water and sewer lines. The Plan would include resource land protections and significant limitations on large lot residential development. This carefully controlled and urban focused growth plan would be the “environmentally superior” alternative as defined by CEQA. This plan has been suggested by the Healthy Humboldt Coalition. Sketch Plan A will be modified version of Sketch Plan 3.

2. Add a high residential capacity scenario (new sketch plan “C”).

Discussion: Sketch Plan C would accommodate the demand for approximately 18,000 new dwelling units at an average density of 3 units/acre. This average density would be attained through infilling existing water and sewer areas and extension of water and sewer services to lands adjacent to existing urbanized areas. Existing entitlements for large lot residential development would remain but would not be increased. Industrial and commercial lands would be made available in proportion to residential development. Sketch Plan C will be a modified and more carefully planned version of Sketch Plan 4.

3. A “no project” alternative required under CEQA (i.e. continuation of the existing Framework Plan).

The Identified Proposed Project:

1. Develop a new scalable residential capacity sketch plan (Sketch Plan “B”) with the following characteristics:

- a. Focused development within existing urbanized areas serviced by water and sewer.
- b. Specific urbanization expansion plans including precise land use maps, urban boundary adjustments and water, sewer, road and drainage system improvements.
- c. Land use designations that support high density urban development including use of alternative subdivision standards, density bonuses, second unit incentives, live-work commercial centers, etc.
- d. Reduction in existing large lot residential subdivision potential outside of community planning areas
- e. Increased resource land protection from residential and other conversion using a range of planning tools such as; clustered development incentives, minimum lot-sizes, patent parcel development standards, conservation easements and regulatory reform.
- f. An “exit strategy” plan for alternative land use on large resource production lands proven to be no longer economically viable.

Sketch Plan B will be a scalable proposed project with a range of specific urbanization plans designed to give the Planning Commission and Board flexibility during the adoption phase. Plan B will contain a series of specific urbanization expansion plans that allow for increasing residential, commercial and industrial development up to twice the amount necessary to meet projected fair share housing goals. The expansion plan alternatives will be evaluated for their timing and development potential, infrastructure needs, environmental impacts and cost. The expansion plans will be ultimately ranked using evaluation criteria such as number of units served, infrastructure cost per unit, readiness, transportation effects and resource land consumption. This analysis will be completed in cooperation with cities, service districts and the public and be included in the EIR and supporting technical reports.

Sketch Plan B will also include a number of options for resource land protections. These options will be developed and refined with stakeholders and included as a menu of choices evaluated in the EIR and available for inclusion in the final General Plan. (Sketch Plan B will follow the narrative of the original Sketch Plan 3, except where modified by the above.)

Policy Options:

Based on the responses to the policy options worksheets, include policy development on the following issues (all other required policy topics will be addressed as well):

Forest Resource Policy Options

- Additional policies to ensure adjacent uses are compatible with industrial timber operations
- A policy statement to support for long term continued timber production
- A policy statement to protect beneficial uses of sensitive watersheds and critical water supply areas
- A policy to address urban interface / timber issues in urban fringe areas.

Agricultural Resource Policy Options

- A policy that the County take a proactive approach to conservation of working resource lands landscapes.
- A policy to ensure lot line adjustments and other development are consistent with the General Plan densities notwithstanding underlying land units.
- A policy to allow flexibility for additional development at original homesite areas (similar to RCC standards) for large ranches.

Open Space Policy Options

- A policy that supports establishment of greenbelts and agricultural buffers to insure separation of existing communities.
- A policy directing the County to take a proactive approach to conservation of open space.

- A policy that establishes an open space classification system to serve as a framework for land use planning and environmental resource management programs.
- A policy concerning public land acquisition of open space and resource lands.

Water & Biological Resource Policy Options

- A policy to provide erosion control measures consistent with TMDL target reductions
- A policy to provide a riparian canopy retention standard in TMDL temperature impaired areas
- A policy to limit impacts of water withdrawals in impaired watersheds
- A policy to establish uniform stormwater management standards
- Update the County's water export policies
- A policy to promote conservation easements for sensitive resource areas

Cultural & Scenic Resource Policy Options

- A policy to protect "heritage landscapes"
- A policy set to provide inland scenic resource protection
- A policy to protect tribal cultural resources

Hazard Policy Options

- A policy to provide hillside development standards
- A policy which requires increased levels of geological review for certain discretionary projects.
- A policy to direct floodway and flood fringe combining zone be added to lands in the floodplain.
- A policy to direct improved flood hazard rating to secure reduced flood insurance rates.

Mineral Resources

- A mineral resource extraction overlay to protect regionally important extraction sites from incompatible adjacent uses

Building Communities

- A policy that establishes sewer service areas and water service areas.
- A policy to require infill development prior to expanding into resource areas.

- A policy that promotes mixed uses (either by monetary incentives or non-monetary incentives)
- A policy that promotes “re-use” of brownfield sites.
- A policy that supports design standards that protect neighborhood and community characteristics.
- A policy to broaden opportunities for second units.
- A policy to ensure that the size and scale of new multi-family development is compatible with community character.
- A policy that provides broader allowance of residential uses within commercial districts.
- A policy to require coordination with the service providers to ensure that adequate funding mechanisms are available for infrastructure.
- A policy to allow mixed uses and ensure a variety of housing sizes.
- A policy for development timing and staging of urbanization plans.

Moving Goods and People

- A policy to support transportation improvements to truck routes countywide.
- A policy to ensure that planned improvements to the County’s road system support improved access to port facilities.
- A policy to support the Port’s efforts to attract new shippers through its facilities.
- A policy and implementation program to update the County trails plan.
- A policy that supports multi-modal transportation systems for urban areas.
- A policy to support rail development as a complement to port development strategy.

Governance

- Make general plan amendment process more responsive and strategic. Re-focus from multi-year community planning efforts to implementation of existing plans and more rapid small-scale town plan updates.
- Amend criteria for accepting individual plans amendments to primarily consider the public interest
- Establish criteria and performance standards to provide a simplified and faster project review process.

D. With respect to Optional General Plan Elements:

In addition to the mandatory General Plan Elements, include the following optional elements:

- Capital Improvements/Public Facilities (including Telecommunications)
- Economic/Fiscal Development
- Energy
- Water

Summary

The primary task for this phase was to identify a proposed project and insure a reasonable range of alternatives was included for analysis. To that end, this report summarizes the public comments received (the Board Report dated August 25, 2004 contains a full summary of comments received during this process) and documents the recommendations of the Board and Planning Commission regarding the range of alternatives, policy options and optional elements, and selection of a generally defined proposed project. Staff will continue to meet and work with the public, organizations, cities, service districts and agencies in order to develop project detail and draft the Plan.