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August 28, 2019

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James Campbell
Deputy Community Development Director
City of Newport Beach
100 Civic Center Drive
Newport Beach, CA 92660

Dear Jim;

It's been more than 20 years since the two of us were immersed and amazed at the length and breadth of the sheer undertaking of the 2000 General Plan. Looking back at that process, the experiences were many and varied. It is no less exciting and formidable this time around.

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I wanted to take this opportunity to express SPON's and our community's greatest and most urgent excitement in this current update of our General Plan. I know you and the staff also share our sense of crucial findings and key understandings.

The enclosed recommendations illustrate *where we are* - both as an important stakeholder and as a representative of our community and City. And, it is for this purpose that I present this cover letter attaching our **General Plan Recommendations**.

There were several watershed experiences from the previous General Plan update that I'm sure will be revisited. As a reminder, some of those key issues from our recommendations in the 2000 process are still unanswered in the communities. I know you might recall the 2000 Visioning process, where quite a resounding majority of those citizens that were polled, had a concerted interest in Mansionization, Design Guidelines and traffic.



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Mansionization was said to be taken care of in Design Guidelines. However, the Design Guidelines were, in turn, thought to treat height limits, housing bulk and setbacks in which there was also considerable interest. We ended up with neither Design Guidelines nor reasonable regulations curbing Mansionization.

And Sharon Wood and other development interests on the old 2000 GPAC group, often mortified the other seated members, with discussions including phases like, "GPAC should *generalize* their input and not think so *specifically* oryou don't want to end up with design guidelines and be like Laguna Beach do you.....?".

Having sat in many of the SPON-sponsored city-wide General Plan workshops from November 2017 through January 2019, I can tell you that the community has renewed and re-doubled its interest in aggressive development and Mansionization, is exhausted by endless discretionary actions of wealthy development interests wanting "taller and larger" and supports changes to the General Plan to accomplish this.

In regard to Design Guidelines we are excited to hear that even the Mayor, and kudos to Diane for her interest here, has her own interests in Design Guidelines. I don't think anyone would trade CdM or Newport for Laguna Beach, but in terms of weaving the care that can make a more reasonable and sustainable General Plan and better development, we do want that kind of specificity and design awareness in this General Plan update.

In regard to traffic, and being in the industry, I had already known this, but the laypersons on GPAC learned that the ADT (Average Daily Trips) was calculated in a "shoulder season" so, when the peak season traffic hits, of course it's unbelievably overbearing and the Levels of Service (LOS) of, for example, intersections, often have failing grades.



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This isn't a reason to change the way traffic is counted, but since Newport lives and dies with the summer traffic, we should perhaps let the GPAC know that, the City and the consultants are essentially saying "It doesn't matter", when of course, it does.

In any case please read SPON's recommendations and I look forward to interacting with you, staff and Council in the update of our General Plan.

Sincerely,

Don Krotee AIA
Board Member, SPON

cc: General Plan Update Steering Committee Members
Seimone Jurjis, Community Development Director
Ben Zdeba, Associate Planner
Mayor Dixon and City Council Members
Grace Leung, City Manager
Leilani Brown, City Clerk
Jenna Tourje, Consulting Director Kearns & West
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SPON General Plan Recommendations

SPON has actively engaged residents in Newport Beach to become more informed about the planning process, provide more effective advocating, and provide better solutions to concerns that our community sees facing our City.

After a bit of a false start in 2017 for a General Plan Update (GPU), SPON formed its own independent citizens General Plan Advisory Committee. Even without the GPU progressing at that time, our aim was to create a better informed populace and to generate independent ideas for improvement of this General Plan. This engagement occurred through a workshop series (nine presentations in all) from November 2017 through January 2019.

During a workshop the group focused on two questions and the following themes were noted:

What Needs Attention?	What is Working?
Quality of Life Needs to be Retained (view protection, less traffic, improved parking)	Quality of Life is Important (great parks and beaches)
Mobility (no mass transit, limited bus service, no complete streets*, limited pedestrian focus)	Good community amenities (shopping, restaurants, and neighborhoods, etc.)
Growth and Planning (too many variances, Mansionization, height issues, no sustainable planning/policies)	Most schools are good as well
Climate Crisis Needs Addressing (sea level rise, few sea walls, impacts to open facing beaches)	

This memo outlines the information learned that will be beneficial to the Steering Committee, staff, and the consultants preparing for and implementing the “Listen and Learn” tour for our upcoming General Plan Update. Here are our recommendations:

** “Complete Streets are streets for everyone. They are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities. Complete Streets make it easy to cross the street, walk to shops, and bicycle to work.”* Source: Smart Growth America



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Train Decision Makers to Interact with the Public

Trust in government is at an all-time low, and yet resident engagement is increasing. However, the connotation behind the word “public” remains negative. Residents’ main goal is to achieve a balanced policy solution to their concerns. This General Plan Update provides an opportunity unlike any other. There should be an emphasis on convening a public policy discussion on key issues. It appears that what decision makers perceive as frustration may be a lack of municipal tools deployed to resolve those community planning issues. Training opportunities in the making of a General Plan, for staff and decision makers, are a common part of other City’s tools, our planners have found. There is an array of exciting public policy learning that could help bridge any gap. Some are offered by the Public Policy Institute of Pepperdine.

Engage Residents in Goal Setting

Newport’s goal should strive to become a “responsive government” that pays attention to the residents, businesses, and visitors (in that order). When the State’s General Plan Guideline says, “The GPG is a resource to help planners accomplish their respective community’s priorities and vision while meeting larger state goals ...”, SPON is sure that the emphasis is on “Community”. Engaging the residents in goal setting is essential to creating a shared outcome that aligns the community, business, and city’s interests—a view *everyone* can support. A good public process includes not only results in a cost effective, timely, and goal-oriented process but, also considers the culture and history of the City. The latter seems to be missing from the dialogue.

Respect and Uphold the General Plan

Residents, businesses, developers, decision makers, and staff all use the General Plan as tool for understanding what is in store for the community now and in the future. This “rule book” sets the stage for future development and change. Residents often find themselves at odds with projects because developers ask for modifications to the “rule book.” In other words, what the developer wants is not what is codified in the General Plan, and so they opt to change the plan—instead of changing the project. This changes the playing field for every project and makes the hard work that has gone into the General Plan, moot.



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Essentially, what was promised and expected in the General Plan, is not what is being delivered in the eyes of the residents. This is evidenced by the recent successful initiative to stop the Museum House. Setting the right tone and intent in the policy language, while simultaneously ensuring strong mandatory (shall and must) language will help immensely.

When too many modifications are proposed to the Plan or the Municipal Code it is indicative of two problems. First, adjustments are too easy and therefore when an applicant asks they can simply get the change. Second, ignoring the codes means the codes themselves hold no value and yet they are an implementing feature of the community's vision. Consequently, the vision is no longer upheld. This is no way to lead and govern.

Focus the General Plan on Areas of Change

One of the key concerns raised during the workshops was the actual implementation of the General Plan. The development of the new General Plan should focus on opportunity areas, leaving stable neighborhoods and commercial areas alone. In other words, the General Plan might focus only on anticipated areas of change instead of opening the entire plan. The City of Fullerton limited its General Plan to "[focus areas](#)," resulting in the residents support of the Plan being user friendly, with policies limited to focus areas, creating design guidelines for how the city will look and what standards must be followed. Additionally, the City should prioritize its action plan in shorter increments (3-5 years) and have an accountability component to ensure those goals are met in that timeframe.

Meet State Mandates for General Plans

We know the City is required, due to state mandates, to address many new topics that haven't been included in previous versions of the General Plan. We support a forward thinking, innovative, and sustainable policy document that includes addressing sustainability, environmental justice, climate change, sea level rise, and greenhouse gas reduction.



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Create an Accessible, Digital General Plan

The future is digital—this not only applies to digital data (covered shortly), but also applies to digital documents. The next General Plan should be accessible, easy to access online (and on a variety of devices), and easy to implement. The [Hayward General Plan](#) is a solid example of moving into the era of new technology.

Incorporate Data-Driven Technologies

We also believe data-driven technologies should be incorporated to promote accountability, transparency, and empowerment. The goal should be to make Newport Beach a “Smart City.”

Expand the Existing Open Data Portal

That said, some existing tools operated by the City include the Open Data Portal, but it is missing critical information, including:

- A short training video – This helps the user understand how to use the Open Data Portal.
- Time Stamp – When the last update of information occurred on a project (such as a Planning Commission hearing).
- Better Project Descriptions – Where is the project in the process (using the Planner’s Checklist below), what is a Capital Improvement Project, details on upcoming meetings, a history of decisions, etc.

Keep the Community Informed

We’ve also compiled a wish list of tools the community is interested in seeing:

- A Planner’s Checklist – This includes the specific steps needed to be taken in a process, what decisions need to be made, and a web-accessible updated list of where the project is in the checklist.
- Development Agreements Annual Report – This is a list of all the development agreements with a status update on their implementation and what changes have been made.



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- Variance Tool – This includes a list (by year) of the variances offered by the City for all projects requesting (and receiving) a variance.
- Better Baseline Information – Conditions in the General Plan are static and don't reflect real time data, nor do they provide the statistics residents desire (traffic, housing built, student count, parks, etc.). Community baseline data should be updated as it becomes available.
- Alignment Across Policies – a key goal should be to ensure this General Plan and the associated land-use diagrams, zoning code, and Local Coastal Plan implement the community's vision and safeguard that vision for the duration of the General Plan.

In the end, the residents wish to see a fair, transparent, empowering, and inclusive process for the General Plan Update and future decisions. Our aim is a more responsive government that aligns all the interests in the community, upholds the intent of the General Plan, and a Plan that focuses on opportunity areas only—places the City anticipates change.

SPON's website contains a wealth of information from its GPAC workshops, including notes, videos, and presentations from the expert guest speakers. This link will take you to SPON's dedicated webpage on this topic: SPONNB.org

Bruce Bartram

President, SPON



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