



“Jobs, Homes & Individual Rights ”

May 20, 2009

Mr. Jimmy Smith, Chairperson  
Board of Supervisors  
Humboldt County  
825 Fifth Street  
Eureka, California 95501

Subject: General Plan Update  
Public Participation

Dear Chairperson Smith and Members of the Board:

In reading through the April 10, 2009 State Housing and Community Development letter to Mr. Kirk Girard regarding the update of the Housing Element, it occurs to us it would be helpful if several private organizations and individuals were to assist in accomplishing certain programs set out in the 2003 Housing Element.

To expand on that concept, and in keeping with the State mandate that all elements of the General Plan be consistent, we propose your Board form a General Plan Task Force.

### **General Plan Task Force**

The policies in the County’s existing General Plan / Framework Plan, adopted on December 10, 1984, are the policies which govern the County’s current operations:

#### **Section 1343 The Public**

*“One of the first goals approved in the beginning of this program was:*

*To maximize the opportunity for individuals and groups to have meaningful participation in the planning process.*

*This goal was developed from the understanding that the public will be more able to support policies guiding the development of the County when an opportunity to participate in the development and review of the General Plan has been provided. Through this exposure, and the contributions it makes to the process and the product, the public will hopefully gain greater understanding of the plan. Participation not only in the review of this document, but also in proposing subsequent revisions to improve what is adopted, will help insure that this document will remain a current statement of public policy.”*

**Section: 5-1500 PLANNING AND COORDINATION**

**5. "The County should use combinations of the following techniques to involve the public in the planning process:**

***Planning Advisory Committees***

***Community Advisory Committees"***

**Housing Element Update**

With the urgency to adopt the new Housing Element portion of the General Plan, the Task Force could work on certain programs outlined in the 2003 Housing Element. Specifically it could address the following items outlined in the 2007 Annual Report to the State Housing and Community Development Department:

**1 2003 Housing Element Program, Item 1.1e:**

*"The Planning Division shall develop materials for the Department's website that clearly show the existing vacant and underdeveloped land inventory, including thematic maps, graphs, and tables documenting development potential and constraints on a parcel-specific level."*

COMMENT: The County's GIS has proven to be an invaluable tool. The FOL (Find Our Lots) team, working with Michael Richardson, has currently made significant progress on this item 1.1e. The team could continue to refine this inventory if the County wishes.

**2 2003 Housing Element Program, Item 1.1g:**

*"The Planning Division shall develop development timing procedures as part of the General Plan Update process that link updates of the Housing Element to infrastructure improvements and other development timing initiatives to ensure an adequate supply of housing to meet the County's future housing needs."*

COMMENT: Adequate infrastructure to meet the County's future housing needs is a crucial aspect of the planning process. The Task Force, which would include the Community Services Districts, could make meaningful progress on this item.

**3 2003 Housing Element Program, Item 1.2b:**

*"Inventory sites owned by the County that are presently not used or underutilized and research the potential for selling them to a non-profit housing developer or for-profit developer for the construction of new housing affordable to very low income persons."*

COMMENT: We support this program and encourage the County to make its surplus sites available to non-profit and for-profit developers. It is our understanding that government-owned land does not qualify to be listed on the Housing Element land inventory. If this is true, there would need to be a program outlined in the new Housing Element to transfer title of the site(s) involved, to the developer(s) following an open bidding competition. The Task Force could assist in this item.

**4 2003 Housing Element Program, Item 1.2d:**

*“The County shall assist in the development of housing for very low income households by reducing Planning Division fees by at least 50%, minimizing site improvement standards where consistent with public health, safety and welfare, and fast-tracking approval for up to six (6) housing projects per year that make at least 20% of the new units affordable to very low income households for 30 years or more.”*

COMMENT: The Task Force could analyze this program and make recommendations to the Planning Commissioners and Supervisors as to its viability.

**5 Page 9, Item B:**

Item 1 *“Include a program-by-program status report relative to implementation schedule from each program in the Housing Element; describe actions taken to implement each program.”*

COMMENT: We believe this item describes the function of the Annual Report itself. The Task Force could assist in statusing the various programs prior to finalizing the Annual Report and submitting it to the State HCD and OPR. We are not aware that the Annual Report due April 2009 was prepared and submitted as prescribed by State guidelines. It was to have gone through public hearing prior to being adopted by your Board.

**6 Page 10, Item 1.16:**

*“The County shall annually compete for CDBG funds as a means of developing local communities including improvements to and expansion of sewer and water lines and facilities for community planning areas and coastal communities.”*

COMMENT: In order to progress beyond the short-term project-by-project approach to planning housing, we agree with the County that it will be essential to make some long-term investments in infrastructure. Every opportunity and option for capturing financing of County-wide infrastructure should be explored.

HELP would like to see NOFAs (Notice of Funds Available) be publicized when they become known, so that the public has an opportunity to provide

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input to Planning staff, the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors regarding priorities. The Task Force could provide recommendations in this regard.

- 7 **Pages 9 through 16 of the Annual Report** identifies over 100 programs to be accomplished. Some of the programs are well defined and are quantitative objectives, while others are more of a general nature.

HELP recommends that there be some prioritization of these programs established so that progress can be measured and reported effectively. The Task Force could assist Planning Staff in the preparation of future Annual Reports, including the above-mentioned program-by-program statusing. We believe the benefits would be two-fold: 1) Bring better understanding to the public of County activities, and 2) Assist County staff by providing input from the private sector.

- 8 **Annual Report page 11, Item 3, Regulatory Constraints – 3.1:**  
*“The County shall devise mutually acceptable means to meld the efforts of citizens and government to address the problems common to us all.”*

- 9 **page 14, Item 6.3:**  
*“The County shall encourage the formation of citizen organizations to provide input on specific matters in a format consistent with the adopted policies and procedures.”*

COMMENT: The Task Force could assist in the preparation of the Annual Reports to HCD and the State OPR (Office of Planning and Research). This would be consistent with the State OPR (Office of Planning and Research) guideline to: *“Summarize the comments of other boards and commissions on the general plan implementation.”*

The General Plan Task Force being proposed would be a diverse group consisting of representatives from, as an example:

- Buckeye Conservancy
- Builders Exchange
- Chambers of Commerce
- Community Services Districts
- Cattlemen’s Association
- Civil Liberties Monitoring Project
- Farm Bureau
- Forestry Review Committee
- Green Wheels

- Humboldt Association of Realtors
- Harbor Commission

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- Healthy Humboldt
- Humboldt Economic & Land Plan
- Housing For All
- HumCPR (Humboldt Coalition for Property Rights)
- Labor Unions
- Northern California Association of Home Builders
- Williamson Act Committee

The Task Force would appoint a chairman and vice-chairman and could provide its own clerical support so that it would not detract from County Planning staff's current heavy workload. During past decades, the Housing Element was prepared solely by members of the public, without County staff support.

Many other jurisdictions in California take this approach to planning and have found it to be a most affective and collaborative process.

It seems to us the work done by such a group could provide the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors, a meaningful body of work which would assist in making the process evolve smoother as all of the elements of the General Plan come together. It would also help rebuild the public trust.

Please call any time if you have questions or if we can assist you in any way. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the County in any manner you feel would be productive.

Respectfully,

Kay Backer, representing  
Humboldt Economic & Land Plan

cc: Supervisor Clif Clendenen, District 2  
Supervisor Mark Lovelace, District 3  
Supervisor Bonnie Neely, District 4  
Supervisor Jill Duffy, District 5  
Bruce Emad, Planning Commissioner  
Ralph Faust, Planning Commissioner  
Mary Gearheart, Planning Commissioner  
Scott Kelly, Planning Commissioner  
Mel Krebs, Planning Commissioner  
Sef Murguia, Planning Commissioner  
Jeff Smith, Planning Commission Chair  
Loretta Nickolaus, CAO  
Kirk Girard, Community Development Services Director  
Michael Richardson, Senior Planner  
Kathy Hayes, Clerk of the Board  
Sharyn Lodes, Planning Commission Clerk  
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