

HISTORY

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In 1964, the City's first General Plan was adopted. This General Plan reflected the buildout potential under the existing zoning; in excess of 100 million square feet of nonresidential development and a potential residential population of between 140,000 and 170,000. Following adoption of the General Plan, community concern began to grow regarding the effects which that amount of buildout may have on the community and the ability of the City to provide resources to support that amount of development.

In 1971 the City of Santa Barbara Goals report was completed and called for:

1. An ultimate population and number of dwelling units that must not exceed the level provided for by the General Plan;
2. Comprehensive studies to determine the effect of this population density on people from the standpoint of all environmental, social, economic and cultural factors; and
3. Reduction of maximum density to ensure the community a physically, mentally and morally healthful environment, based on the studies.

IMPACTS OF GROWTH 1975 – 1990

As a result of this report, the Impacts of Growth Study was completed in 1975. The IGS concluded that significant effects on the quality of life would occur if population increased to the then theoretical buildout (140,000 - 170,000) because the City would not have the resources to maintain the population at theoretical buildout. The IGS indicated that housing market intervention (residential downzoning) should be coupled with labor force intervention (commercial downzoning) in order to have successful growth management. In addition, the IGS stated that the City needed to pursue, "...positive programs to satisfy the demand for low and moderate income housing beyond the bare minimum required by law..."

Residential Downzoning Adopted By Council

In April 1975, the City Council determined that 85,000 people would be an optimum population level for the City. This was the number that could be sustained by existing resources, such as water supply and traffic & air basin capacities. Amendments to both the General Plan and the Zoning Ordinance were adopted which would be consistent with the 85,000 population goal. Based on a household size of 2.58, the General Plan was amended to reflect a holding capacity of approximately 33,000 dwelling units in residential zones. However, the companion rezoning as enacted actually allowed a potential buildout in the residential zones of approximately 35,000 units. In 1977, "Land Use Zones Analysis," an analysis of the effects of the downzoning was completed. It confirmed that buildout at 90% saturation allowed up to 35,000 dwelling units.

The 1975 downzoning was the initial step towards a concept which was later referred to as "living within resources." The concept of "living within resources" calls for a population and buildout level consistent with the City's water supply, traffic and parking capacity, sewage treatment capacity, air quality, etc., which maintains the high "quality of life" that Santa Barbarans presently enjoy.

The rezoning included Planning Commission recommendations for densities in multiple family zones of 12 units/acre, with special provisions for up to 25 units/acre for senior housing, low-income families, small families and single persons. The rezoning was based on the expectation that all residential uses in commercial zones would convert to nonresidential uses.

The Impacts of Growth Study also recommended initiating a commercial downzoning which did not occur at that time.

Advisory Ballot Measure Regarding 85,000 Population Goal

In July 1975, the environmental document (Negative Declaration) for the residential downzoning was challenged. In response to the challenge, an Environmental Impact Report was prepared. In March 1977, Proposition A, a two part advisory measure was put on the ballot to give Council the opinion of the voters regarding the downzoning.

Proposition A-1 asked if the voters supported the General Plan and Zoning Ordinance policies made by the Council which would limit the population of the City to approximately 85,000 people when the City is completely developed. 11,738 voted Yes; 7,110 voted No.

Proposition A-2 asked, "Should any changes in the City's General Plan and Zoning Ordinance which would permit the City's population to exceed 85,000 persons be approved by the voters?" 10,953 voted Yes; 7,331 voted No. Based on the outcome of Proposition A, the Council certified the Environmental Impact Report and upheld the 1975 downzoning.

Variable Density Ordinance

Later, it was realized that the downzoning had created a bias in the Zoning Ordinance that made it more profitable to build large units than small ones and that the City was "losing" smaller, more affordable units. In addition, commercial development increased while residential development did not. In order to reverse this trend, in 1977 the City adopted an amendment to the Zoning Ordinance, which is referred to as the Variable Density Ordinance. This Ordinance allows densities based on the number of bedrooms/acre in multifamily zones; the highest density can be achieved with studios, the lowest with three or more bedroom units. The Variable Density Ordinance only applied to the R-3 and R-4 zones. In commercial and industrial zones, properties were allowed residential densities equivalent to those of the R-2 zone (generally one dwelling unit/3,500 square feet of lot area).

An analysis of the Variable Density Ordinance was performed regarding the effect it would have on the total population and the number of housing units in the residential zones. There was a wide range of populations that could occur under the Variable Density Ordinance. The potential population of the residential zones in the "low" scenario was in the mid-70,000's. The potential population of the residential zones in the "medium" scenario was in the 85,000 range. "High" was the scenario where there was the greatest amount of change from existing land use patterns; i.e., population and number of housing units were maximized. The potential population of the residential zones in this scenario rose to the mid-90,000's. After an analysis was completed showing that the population could increase beyond 85,000 if the persons per household figure increased over time, the City Council adopted the Variable Density Ordinance because of the great need for smaller, more affordable dwelling units.

Housing And Commercial Assessment Study

By 1980, commercial development was outpacing residential development. The transition of existing residential uses to nonresidential uses was an increasing trend in the commercial zones surrounding downtown. At the request of the Environmental Review Committee, the City Council initiated the 1980 Housing and Commercial Assessment to identify housing in commercial areas surrounding downtown (“Transitional Areas”). The Housing and Commercial Assessment study identified 4497 dwelling units located in commercial zones. The Housing and Commercial Assessment recommended that certain areas of existing residential development be rezoned to residential in order to preserve up to 2,000 units and create opportunities for up to 800 more. Only three of the recommended rezones were completed, for a net gain of about 450 dwelling units.

Residential Density Report

At the direction of the City Council, in 1980, the Residential Density Report was prepared. The report reviewed the history of the 85,000 population goal, as well as constraints and opportunities for increased density. The report recommended that the City provide special means of achieving affordable housing and recommended various means of increasing density within the City. The Residential Density Report recalculated the residential buildout allowed by zoning to include the additional Variable Density units and estimated that 36,748 dwelling units would be allowed by the existing Zoning.

Density Reserve

In 1981, the results of the 1980 Census were released. Based on this information, the new theoretical maximum number of potential dwelling units increased from 33,000, as indicated in the General Plan, to 38,288. This increase was due to the fact that the persons per household figure in the Census had decreased from 2.58 to 2.22. ($85,000 \div 2.58 = 32,946$, $85,000 \div 2.22 = 38,288$). Based on the smaller household size, 38,288 units could be built before reaching the 85,000 population goal.

Since 38,288 units was the theoretical maximum allowed under the 85,000 goal, and 36,748 units were allowed by the Zoning Ordinance, the difference became the Density Reserve, from which all bonus density units (as required by State law) were allocated. The Density Reserve, and its use as the source of bonus density units, was formalized in the 1982 Housing Element.

1982 Housing Element

The City's Housing Element adopted in 1982, examined population and housing characteristics of the City setting goals and policies by which the City would attempt to provide housing for all income groups. The need for housing, especially affordable housing, was growing, and the need to balance jobs and housing became a major concern. The recommendations from both the Housing and Commercial Assessment and the Residential Density Report became formalized as goals and policies of the Housing Element:

Goal #2:

Balance new housing demand from a diversity of social and economic groups with available and affordable housing opportunities.

Policy 2-1.0:

Developments generating new employment from outside the South Coast Area shall be in balance with available housing resources at prices affordable to the projected new employees who will be moving into the area.

Goal #3:

Preserve the City's existing housing stock while minimizing displacement, maintaining housing affordability and preventing future blight or deterioration. Protect existing neighborhoods by preserving their residentially oriented conveniences and services.

Policy 3-1.0:

The City shall protect and preserve residential housing stock including areas undergoing transition as a result of commercial expansion.

Implementation Strategy 3.1-1:

Implement the recommendations of the Housing and Commercial Assessment Study, 1980.

An Environmental Impact Report (EIR) was prepared for the 1982 Housing Element. The EIR contained a discussion of the effects of policies of the Housing Element on the 85,000 population goal. The EIR stated:

“The number of persons currently or potentially residing in nonresidential areas was unknown and not included in [the Impacts of Growth] study. Thus two variables influence whether the existing General Plan and Zoning actually do limit the population to any specific number. First, the component of 2,580 existing residential units and all possible future dwelling in the nonresidential areas was not included, therefore the 85,000 limit could be breached if these areas remain residential while the rest of the City's residentially zoned areas built out...Second, because the number of persons per dwelling unit varies, setting the allowable number of dwelling units by zoning does not automatically control the number of occupants...” (pg. 32)

The EIR concluded that the following impacts would occur:

- a. The population accommodated in the City would exceed the established 85,000 limit by 2,068...This increase in population is attributable to the retention of residential uses in the Housing and Commercial Assessment (HCA) study which would have been converted to commercial as provided for by existing policy...
- b. the preservation of 2,568 existing dwellings in the HCA study area would retain 5,752 residents, who would have been dislocated on continuation of previous policy...
- c. ...[The policies of the 1982 Housing Element result in] a 77% population reduction from the “No Project” alternative...the impacts of not implementing the Housing Element are more severe than those associated with implementing it.” (pg. 179)

**Measure K -
Charter Section
1507**

At about the same time that the Housing Element was being adopted, the Council established a Charter Committee to incorporate the 85,000 population goal into the City Charter. It was determined that a population goal was too specific and legally could not be incorporated into the Charter. The result of the Charter Committee's discussions was

a ballot measure, Measure K, which proposed a Charter Amendment mandating that the City “live within resources,” although those exact words were not used. Measure K declared that:

“...land development shall not exceed its public services and physical and natural resources...All land use policies shall provide for a level and balance of residential and commercial development which will effectively utilize, but will not exhaust, the City's resources in the foreseeable future...”

Measure K was approved by 60% of the voters and incorporated into the City Charter as Charter Section 1507.

Master Water Plan

The Master Water Plan, released in 1985, reanalyzed the City's existing and projected water supplies, and assessed current and projected water demands. It identified four land use scenarios ranging from no growth to full buildout of the commercial and residential zones and identified a potential supply/demand imbalance associated with impacts of new development in the four scenarios. The Master Water Plan determined that the existing and projected water supplies would be sufficient to support approximately 3 million square feet of new nonresidential development and full buildout of residential potential under existing zoning of approximately 40,000 units.

1985 Housing Element Addendum

Policies in the 1985 Housing Element Addendum paralleled those of the 1982 Housing Element, with emphasis on preserving units within the commercial zones and creating additional residential opportunities.

General Plan Update

In 1982, the technical studies that became the background material for the General Plan Update (GPU) were initiated. The General Plan Update Public Participation Process, which included extensive public participation forums, began in 1988 and culminated in 1990 with the adoption of amendments to the General Plan and Zoning Ordinance which:

- Reduced commercial development potential;
- Recognized residential needs as the highest priority;
- Limited development based on master water plan scenario b-1, which assumed 40,005 dwelling units;
- Established mixed use development as a high priority implementation strategy to provide additional dwelling units;
- Determined that the transitional areas must be studied and plans prepared to preserve existing dwelling units; and
- Established high density residential in the downtown area as a high priority implementation strategy to provide additional dwelling units.

The General Plan Update concluded with a decision to limit commercial development and to balance jobs and housing opportunities within the next increment of growth. These growth decisions were the same as the conclusions that were reached over a decade earlier in Impacts of Growth, but had never been fully implemented.

**Measure E,
Charter Section
1508**

The City Council placed the nonresidential growth limitation before the voters as ballot Measure E in 1989. 55% of the voters approved Measure E, which was incorporated into the City Charter as Charter Section 1508.

In addition to the nonresidential growth limitations, an interim restriction on the demolition and conversion of existing residential units in commercial zones was included in the Charter Amendment. The purpose of this restriction was to preserve existing units in commercial zones until long term policies could be adopted for residential preservation and replacement.

The City is proceeding with the implementation of the General Plan Update and Charter Section 1508. The General Plan Update implementation involves enacting the commercial growth limitations as well as completing a variety of strategies aimed at preserving existing residential uses in commercial zones, encouraging the full buildout of residential opportunities in residential zones and supporting, where appropriate, new residential opportunities in commercial zones.

1990 Census

The 1990 Census indicated that the population in Santa Barbara was 85,571, and over 36,000 dwelling units existed in the City. The State Department of Finance population estimate for the City of Santa Barbara was 87,379 on January 1, 1992.

In the 1970's, the planning challenges focused on establishing a residential buildout potential which would be consistent with the resources of the community and which would maintain a high quality of life. This was accomplished, in part, by limiting the buildout in residential zones. Focus in the 1980's was on managing the commercial growth to keep buildout within the community's resources.

THE CHALLENGE OF THE 1990s

The 1995 HEU identified the community's challenge as providing the residential opportunities to meet the new housing demands from that limited commercial buildout potential and to address the housing needs of existing residents. The 1990's also included implementation of the strategies adopted by Council that accompanied the limited growth decisions of Measure E / Charter Section 1508 and the GPU. These implementation strategies represented a balanced approach to long range planning and were grouped into four areas: nonresidential strategies, residential strategies, transportation programs and community diversity. Implementation of the GPU Work Program as well as the 1995 Housing Element encompassed nearly all of the long range planning that's been done over the past 12 years.

**1995 General Plan
Amendment
Housing Element
Update & Land
Use Element Text
Amendment**

The primary focus of the 1995 Housing Element was to remove regulatory barriers and to stimulate the development and construction of housing. Special emphasis was given to multi-family housing in and around the downtown employment center and incentives for mixed use development. These housing element goals were further supported and substantiated in the 1998 update of the City's Circulation Element.

Concurrent with the adoption of the 1995 Housing Element, the City Council also amended the Land Use Element to update and clarify the residential buildout estimate for the City. The Principles and Goals Section of the Land Use Element was amended to

include a specific discussion on Residential Buildout Potential. The amendment acknowledged that the theoretical maximum residential buildout for the City includes residential units in commercial zones and variable density units. It also clarified that the buildout estimate was based on parcels located in the City in 1985. Residential buildout of the unincorporated areas was not included in calculating the 40,000 unit maximum.

During public review and discussion of the Draft 1992 Housing Element, concern was raised about whether additional residential development will be allowed once the units allowed by existing zoning have been developed. It was decided to include an implementation strategy in the Housing Element requiring the City to begin public discussions of further residential development in the City when the number of units reaches 39,000. This 39,000 unit threshold includes all units that may be added to or developed in the City as a result of annexations.

As of January 2003, the State Department of Finance (DOF) estimates the total number of dwelling units in the City to be 37,236. As of March 2003, a total of 727 units were in various stages of the development review process. If all the pending units are approved and built, the total number of units in the City would reach 37,963, still far below the 39,000 trigger for review and discussion.

Further, the likelihood of exceeding 39,000 over the next six-year planning period is highly improbable given recent historical trends. Building permits for a total of 746 units were issued by the City from 1992 – 2000 or an annual average of 83 units per year. If one uses this average as a rough indicator as to the number units to expect from 2003 – 2007, approximately 415 new units could be built. When this estimate is added to the DOF estimate of 37,236 units, City could reach 37,651 units by 2007.

**Economic
Development Plan
/ Repeal of the
Housing
Mitigation
Ordinance (1995)**

In response to the significant economic decline experienced in the early 1990's, the City, County and many other agencies developed economic development plans and programs. The South Coast experienced the most significant job loss in modern history due primarily to the downsizing of the military and related industries. The City of Santa Barbara developed an Economic Development Plan and Implementation Program (EDPIP) aimed at trying to recapture the high quality, high paying jobs that had been lost. An important outcome of this effort was the voter approved charter amendment to the City's growth restrictions creating a new Economic Development category within the Measure E growth management program.

Another important outcome of the EDPIP was the repeal of the City's Housing Mitigation Ordinance (HMO). Although interim requirements had been in place since 1988, the City formally established the HMO in 1992. The HMO required payment of a jobs/housing linkage fee and prohibited the demolition or conversion of residential units in commercial zones unless the units were replaced on site or a fee paid into the City's Affordable Housing Programs. In 1995, it was determined that the HMO requirements were detrimental to economic development and the City's attempts to recapture the jobs lost during the economic decline. Further, housing prices were stagnant and rental vacancy rates were uncharacteristically high.

Circulation Element Update & Implementation (1998)

The need to update the Circulation Element was identified during the General Plan Update process leading up to Measure E. The policy direction for the update was to create an element that placed an emphasis on alternative modes of transportation. The Circulation Element Update was guided by a Consensus Group Report that was prepared by representatives from neighborhood and business groups, special needs groups as well as transportation planners and advocates. The Consensus Group developed the Circulation Element's Comprehensive Goal and Vision Statement:

“While sustaining or increasing economic vitality and quality of life, Santa Barbara should be a city in which alternative forms of transportation and mobility are so available and so attractive that use of an automobile is a choice, not a necessity. To meet this challenge, the City is rethinking its transportation goals and land use policies, and focusing its resources on developing balanced mobility solutions. “

Circulation Element Update Consensus Group, Page ii-I of the Circulation Element

In 1998, the Council adopted a new Circulation Element consistent with this goal and vision statement. An important chapter of the element is devoted to land use planning and strategies that support the City's mobility goals. The chapter includes strategies for compact development and incentives for mixed use. Implementation of the Circulation Element has been ongoing since 1998. Highlights include development of Urban Design Guidelines, the Neighborhood Traffic Management Program, and a re-prioritizing of funding for transportation projects, to name just a few.

Other Neighborhood Planning Strategies of the 1990's

In addition to the major efforts described above, the City has been very active in supporting and responding to other planning issues and neighborhood needs. The following is a list of some of the major ongoing or completed planning activities in support of neighborhoods.

- Transitional Area Rezoning Study
- Downtown / Waterfront Visioning Process
- Hotel and Related Commerce HRC / OC Rezone
- Eastside Study Group
- Westside Community Group
- Mixed Use Zoning Amendments (setbacks, parking)
- Las Positas Valley / Northside Pre-Annexation Study
- Substandard Housing Task Force
- Circulation Element Update Implementation Programs
- Urban Design Guidelines
- Neighborhood Traffic Management Program
- Eastside / Westside Electric Shuttle
- Missing Pedestrian Links Program
- Bicycle Master Plan
- School / Student Pedestrian Safety Improvements
- Historic Resources Survey and Preservation Program
- Housing in the M-1 Industrial Area
- Public Works Capital Improvement Programs

- Milpas Corridor Improvements and Undergrounding of Utilities
- Milpas / 101 Roundabout
- San Andres / Micheltorena Street Improvements
- Street Lighting
- Lower Mission Creek Flood Control Project
- Neighborhood Park Expansions and Improvements
- Kid's World
- Ortega Park
- Yanonali Park
- Parque de Los Ninos
- Chase Palm Park
- Douglas Family Preserve
- Bohnett Park
- Joint Use of School Facilities / Fields

Regional Planning Strategies of the 1990's

In addition to the long range planning and neighborhood programs listed above, the City of Santa Barbara was very active in trying to address regional planning issues as well. Some of the major projects and studies in this area included:

- South Coast Transit Plan and Priority Funding
- Transportation Funding Priorities
- Economic Development Plan
- Draft General Plan Annexation Policy Update
- Goleta Annexation Study
- City / County Joint Affordable Housing Task Group
- Cacique Street Homeless Shelter
- St. Vincent's / Mercy Housing Annexation
- Joint City / School District Task Group on Siting Downtown Schools
- Joint City / County Task Group on Parks and Recreation
- Joint City / County Task Group on Water Quality
- Joint Cities / County Affordable Housing Task Group
- Joint City / County Staff Training and Development Programs

2003 HOUSING ELEMENT UPDATE CONCLUSION

The challenge for the 2001 – 2007 planning period will be to continue the City's strong Affordable Housing Program in the midst of a difficult fiscal environment. This will include actively advocating for local control over Redevelopment Agency tax increment funding and aggressively pursuing new funding offered through the State Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) as a result of Proposition 46. With respect to planning strategies for the 2001 – 2007 planning period, it will be important to finish the studies and projects that have been initiated or identified by Council and the community as the Five Year Work Program for the 2003 Housing Element.