



**MINUTES
LA MESA PLANNING COMMISSION
SPECIAL MEETING**

Wednesday, February 10, 2021

Approved March 3, 2021

This meeting was conducted utilizing teleconferencing and electronic means consistent with State of California Executive Order N-29-20 dated March 17, 2020, regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.

The La Mesa Planning Commission held a meeting on February 10, 2021, in the La Mesa City Council Chambers located at 8130 Allison Avenue, La Mesa, California.

The Agenda for this meeting was posted on February 4, 2021, at 6:30 p.m., on the Bulletin Board next to the entrance to the City Council Chambers, 8130 Allison Avenue, La Mesa, California.

Planning Commission members present were Chairman Torpey, Commissioners Cooper, Hottel, Jones, Newland, and Podeswik. Commissioner Kelly was absent.

Staff members present were Community Development Director Kerry Kusiak and Senior Planner Allyson Kinnard.

Item 1. The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm.

Item 2. Chairman Torpey led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Item 3. Public Comment (non-agenda items) – None.

Note: In accordance with State Law, an item not scheduled on the Agenda may be brought forward by the general public for discussion; however, the Commission will not be able to take any action at this meeting. If appropriate, the item will be referred to staff or placed on a future agenda.

Item 7. Business

7a. Draft Housing Element Review and Comment

Prior to the Housing Element presentation, Commission Newland welcomed Lauren Cooper to the Planning Commission.

Mr. Kusiak then presented the report. He stated that cities are required to adopt a comprehensive General Plan. It is mandated by the State legislature that a Housing Element be included. The goal is for each resident to attain decent housing.

The City's fifth-cycle (2010-2020) Housing Element was exemplary and the update will maintain the existing, robust policy document as well as addressing new State law requirements. The City's Housing Element update is being prepared by Veronica Tam and Associates, who also prepared the previous Housing Element.

Holli Anderson of Veronica Tam and Associates provided an overview of the Draft Housing Element. The Housing Element is an assessment of the City's housing needs and how best to accommodate the needs of existing and future residents. It is unique in comparison to other elements in the Plan as it is subject to detailed statutory requirements rather than guidelines and must be updated every 8 years. It then must be reviewed by the State Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) for compliance.

The Draft Housing Element being reviewed at the meeting is the sixth-cycle (2021-2029) Housing Element. It includes a comprehensive update to demographic and housing data. All State requirements must be met. Mr. Kusiak added that a legally adequate General Plan allows the City to be eligible for housing and related funds, i.e. CalHRA, SB2/LEAP grants and regional transportation and infrastructure funds.

Some of the new State laws in the Housing Element Update include RHNA (Regional Housing Needs Assessment) accommodation, sites inventory and no net loss, as well as ADU laws and laws related to the homeless and those with special needs.

Mr. Kusiak said that comments from the Planning Commission and the public will be incorporated into the final Draft Housing Element to be submitted the HCD for a preliminary review. Revisions will then be made to address any HCD comments.

Once those tasks are completed, the Draft Housing Element will come back to the Planning Commission for recommendation. Lastly, it will go to the City Council for adoption and certification of the environmental document. Staff recommended authorizing the transmittal of the Draft Housing Element to the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD).

The Commissioners then discussed the Housing Element. Commissioner Hottel asked if there had been any community outreach demographically to address concerns residents may have. Ms. Tam stated that a Housing Element Workshop was held that was open to the public. Veronica Tam and Associates also reached out to other agencies and organizations that serve the low and moderate income residents as well as persons with special needs.

Ms. Tam added that a lot of the programs are specifically geared toward existing residents. She mentioned that even though La Mesa is a mature community, there are always opportunities for growth. She stated that ADUs present an excellent opportunity for affordable housing. Ms. Tam shared that affordable housing projects are extremely expensive to build. She felt that, in order to bring in more affordable housing projects, a jurisdiction needs to incentivize and remove constraints.

Chairman Torpey asked why the number of affordable housing units was much lower for El Cajon than La Mesa. Ms. Tam responded that access to public transportation and jobs are motivators for affordable housing projects. In the last cycle of the Housing Element, a lot of the numbers came from the unincorporated areas in communities. This round the methodology changed to focus on areas where there is transportation. Jobs were also a factor. She felt that these are the reasons La Mesa received a higher number.

Mr. Kusiak added that La Mesa is both job heavy and transportation heavy. He also added

that in the last cycle, El Cajon had a higher number than La Mesa. It was noted that, as far as transit is concerned, the emphasis was on rail transit in particular and La Mesa has 5 trolley stations.

Commissioner Jones commented that, regarding the higher numbers, no mention was made of the methodology used to come up with those numbers. Ms. Tam explained to Commissioner Jones how particular figures were calculated in relation to market growth. She stated that housing rates waiver in the amount of increase, so, generally, they looked at the conditions surrounding the increases when projecting the figures.

Commissioner Newland pointed out that La Mesa's population increased from approximately 50,000 in 1980 to just under 60,000 in 2021. He felt that La Mesa is properly zoned and in a good position to meet the 3,797 units in the next decade. He mentioned that the Grossmont Center property will provide an excellent opportunity for a large number of affordable housing units.

Ms. Tam then added that, based on comments from the meeting, they would be adjusting the Housing Element prior to sending it to the State. They will expand the analysis range to a longer timeframe so the market can be captured.

Commissioner Jones was concerned that the wording on Page 36 implies that a depression in property values equals a depression in the quality of life. Ms. Tam said they would rephrase the section so alleviate the implication that quality of life would be affected due to a decline in property values. Commissioner Hottel pointed out that, with this cycle of the Housing Element, La Mesa must show that there is a need for affordable housing in order to receive funding. Commissioner Newland felt that the older age of our housing stock offers a range in style and is actually an asset benefit.

Commissioner Jones asked about the calculation used when arriving at a potential site inventory figure (dwelling units per acre). Ms. Anderson explained that, when looking at the site, acreage and a relative density for a particular zoning was considered. The resulting figure is then rounded down.

Commissioner Jones then asked if La Mesa's site development standards were taken into consideration. Ms. Tam stated that the calculations they have used when working with staff, in particular with the assumptions that staff provided, is fairly conservative and closer to a realistic capacity. It, therefore, allows for various site potential based on zoning. She added that they used an average development density, not the maximum density allowable.

Commissioner Cooper felt the Draft Housing Element was impressive. She noted that the table on Page 87 (Summary of Projects) did not clearly reflect the 3,344 total for opportunity sites and pipeline projects. It was her recommendation that a new headline be inserted to read "Pipeline Projects" to help the report unfold and make it easier to follow.

Commissioner Hottel pointed out that the last Housing Element and General Plan received an American Planning award from San Diego. Ms. Tam added that it was also listed on the HCD website as a model Housing Element.

ACTION: Commissioner Newland made a motion to recommend transmittal of the Draft Housing Element to the California Department of Housing and Community Development. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Hottel. Motion carried with 6 in favor and 1 absence (Commissioner Kelly).

There being no further business before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 8:06 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Cheryl Davis
Administrative Coordinator