



September 10, 2019

Ventura County Board of Supervisors
800 S. Victoria Avenue, #L1740
Ventura, CA 93009-1740

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Re: General Plan Update – Work Session Summary (Agenda Item #32)

Honorable Members of the Board of Supervisors:

We appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on the 2040 General Plan.

Fiscal analysis

CoLAB strongly supports the completion of a fiscal analysis in order to evaluate costs and better prioritize actions that will be mandated by changes in the General Plan. However, we do not believe that completing “a fiscal analysis for proposed implementation programs scheduled for 2020-2025” (page 4, September 10, 2019 Board Letter) will be adequate to fully understand the economic impacts to the County from language in the General Plan Update.

There are over 90 new policies and programs in Exhibit 1. Within these 90+ policies and programs, there are over 110 applications of the word “shall”, including phrases “shall support”, “shall revise”, “shall encourage”, and “shall work to”. At the August 6 Board Hearing, Board members stated that the County would be obligated to carry out policies and programs that contained the word “shall.” This obligation will represent a potentially substantial cost and needs to be reflected in future budgets.

CoLAB strongly recommends that that proposed fiscal analysis be expanded to include policies, in addition to programs – particularly those policies that utilize the phrases “shall support”, “shall work to”, “shall revise”, and “shall ensure”.

In addition, the draft General Plan language contains programs that will be implemented later than 2025, or are “on-going.” Expenses and costs will not end in 2026. The fiscal analysis should include all policies and programs over the entire 20-year duration of the General Plan. Both the Board and the public must fully understand implementation costs prior to the adoption of the General Plan in order to set appropriate priorities, identify needed resources, and assess liabilities.

Clarification of terms

The terms “support”, “encourage”, “engage” are applied throughout the draft General Plan. However, these terms have not been fully discussed or defined in a public forum by the Board, County Counsel, or Planning Staff in

a manner that allows both Board members and the public to understand the obligations and liabilities associated with each term.

At the August 6 Board Hearing, Supervisor Bennett expressed concern over the use of the phrase “shall support”. He stated he “worried” whether that phrase would create potentially large, unintended financial obligations for the County. CoLAB has similar concerns related to several proposed policies in the proposed General Plan language. As an example, the phrase is used in Exhibit 1, item 47: “COS-1.X NEW POLICY: The County shall establish and support a countywide target...to plant 2 million trees.” In addition to the very necessary evaluation of impacts from this policy on water supply, increased fire hazard, and impact on native landscape and vegetation, this policy also needs to be evaluated for any potential, unintended legal and fiscal obligations (such as whether the County may inadvertently have created an obligation to subsidize tree mitigation planting). We urge the County not only to consider carefully, but also to clearly disclose, in a public forum, what any legal and fiscal obligation may be incurred by application of the phrase “shall support” in any and all proposed General Plan policies.

Correction to Exhibit 1:

Item 65: HAZ-1.X: Discourage Home-Building in Very High Fire Severity Zones. The policy as written in Exhibit 1 fails to capture the complete Board discussion on August 6, 2019. This policy was clarified by Supervisor Parks, in conversation with Resource Management Agency Director Kim Prillhart, to apply only to discretionary building. Please correct the language in HAZ-1.X to reflect the Board direction.

CoLAB looks forward to reviewing the preliminary Draft EIR, and fiscal and legal analyses in the near future. We hope that a thorough assessment and review of all the proposed policies and programs will enable both the County and the public to have a complete understanding of the true requirements and impacts of the modified language in the General Plan and encourage strong support of the final product.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Louise Lampara', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Louise Lampara
Senior Program Director