



News on Planning San Mateo's Future

General Plan Update Schedule Amended, Facts Related to Measure P Negotiations

San Mateo, CA – The City is thrilled to see the high level of interest many in our community have for ongoing efforts that will help shape the future of San Mateo. We'd like to take this opportunity to announce the expansion of the City's General Plan 2040 Update process, and clarify the City's involvement with the initiative to extend Measure P (also known as voter-approved height and density limits.)

In September 2018, the City began the process of updating the General Plan, an overarching policy document that serves as a “blueprint” for the future of San Mateo. The plan covers a wide range of topics including land use, urban design, transportation, housing, safety, parks and conservation throughout the City. The General Plan is an extremely influential document and ensuring our community has a voice in its development is paramount to this process.

Initially, staff and the Council sought to complete this process within a 2- to 3-year timeframe in an effort to align with the sunsetting of Measure P. However, after feedback about the process feeling rushed and in the interest of expanding public engagement, the City Council unanimously decided to expand the project timeline. On April 1, 2019, the Council approved extending the contract with our General Plan consultant through 2023.

The extension allows us to substantially increase opportunities to educate and engage the community. This includes hosting more formal and informal public meetings, expanding outreach activities in the community and leveraging technology for online engagement.

To encourage continuation of informed participation, we would also like to provide facts related to the City's involvement with the initiative to extend Measure P and correct misunderstandings that have been reflected in public comments on this subject.

Facts Pertaining to Negotiations on Measure P Extension

In 2018, the group San Mateans for Responsive Government (SMRG) gathered enough signatures to place on a ballot a 10-year extension of Measure P through 2030. If Measure P were not extended, the rules it incorporates into the General Plan would remain as is until the Council conducts a public process to approve any changes. The key difference would be that Council would no longer need voter approval to make amendments. Among other things, the measure limits building heights and densities throughout the City.

Based on state law, the city attorney determined the citizens' initiative could be placed on San Mateo's next regular election in 2020. Around this time, the City received objections to SMRG's petition. Following a careful review, the city attorney found the citizens' initiative petition was legally defective and informed the Council of several options. These included: (1) placing the measure on the ballot as a citizens' initiative then seeking a judicial determination and court order to have the measure removed

from the ballot, or (2) choosing to place the measure on a ballot as a council proposition, which would resolve the legal defect.

In July and August, the Council met in open session to discuss the topic and in the interest of respecting the more than 7,000 residents who signed the petition, directed the city manager and city attorney to negotiate with SMRG representatives on a potential settlement. Council directed staff to seek an agreement that could involve changes to the measure, including shortening the length or term of the extension.

To be clear, the City cannot simply refuse to place SMRG's measure on the ballot or choose to do nothing, as the County's election official certified the residents' signatures.

While the City has determined the SMRG petition is legally deficient, SMRG has not agreed with this determination. It is possible that SMRG would agree to withdraw its ballot measure, if the council proposes an alternative ballot measure to extend Measure P. However, this is not certain. If SMRG does not withdraw its measure and the City wishes to keep the measure off the ballot due to its defect, the City will have to file a lawsuit to accomplish this.

The City understands there is significant community interest in this matter. That is why it is important for the conversation to be grounded in accurate information. The City's elected officials have directed staff to discuss a potential remedy with SMRG and as this relates to potential litigation, state law protects the City's interests by allowing the Council to receive legal advice in closed session. The Council will report out to the public once a decision is made and, if a settlement is negotiated with SMRG, the community will have an opportunity to comment on the proposal in an open public meeting.

The City's primary goal is to support informed participation in our community's decision making as we move forward on planning for San Mateo's future.

Those with questions about the legalities related to this issue are encouraged to contact the City Attorney at cityattorneysoffice@cityofsanmateo.org.

Community members interested in learning about or joining the General Plan update process are encouraged to visit strivesanmateo.org.

###