



CITY OF IONE PLANNING COMMISSION STAFF REPORT



FOR THE MEETING OF: AUGUST 5, 2009

DATE: JULY 31, 2009

TO: HONORABLE PLANNING COMMISSION

FROM: CHRISTOPHER JORDAN, AICP, CITY PLANNER
DANIEL HAMILTON, AICP, GENERAL PLAN PROJECT MANAGER

SUBJECT: GENERAL PLAN UPDATE – REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATION
TO THE CITY COUNCIL

STAFF RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission:

1. Receive staff's presentation;
2. Open the public hearing and take public comment;
3. Close the public hearing; and
4. Adopt Resolution 09-4, a Resolution of the Planning Commission of the City of Ione Recommending that the City Council Certify the Environmental Impact Report and Adopt the 2009 General Plan (Attachment 1).

BACKGROUND:

In March 2008, the Council directed staff to conduct a comprehensive update to the City's General Plan. The General Plan is the City's overarching policy document, or blueprint, for creating a thriving, well-balanced, and sustainable community. All future development and actions of the City must be consistent with the General Plan. General Plans typically have a 20-30 year life span. The City's existing General Plan was first adopted in 1982 and portions were updated in 1989, 1991, 1992, 2003, and 2005. Given the number of changes that have happened in the community since 1982 the City needs to update the plan now in order to keep it current.

A lot has happened since the General Plan Update was initiated by the Council. The following list summarizes some of the key milestones and tasks completed to date:

- Establishing a General Plan Executive Committee made up of two Council members (Andrea Bonham and Lee Ard), two Planning Commissioners (Joe Wylie

and Mike McDermed), and two Parks Commissioners (Rosemary Johnson and Fraser West). The Executive Committee met twice a month between August 2008 and April 2009 to provide direction to staff on the process of the project and to ensure that the August 2009 deadline established by the Council is achieved (Note: The August deadline is also important as it is the deadline for certification of the City's new Housing Element under State law). Since January 2009, the Committee has been reviewing two administrative draft elements, or chapters, every two weeks. Their comments have been incorporated into the draft General Plan being presented this evening.

- Creating a project website (www.ionegeneralplan.com) for people to learn about the project and stay involved.
- Conducting three public workshops at Evalynn Bishop Hall at Howard Park. The workshops provided the public with an introduction to the General Plan process and were a forum for the public to express their ideas and concerns about the future of Ione.
- Conducting a public survey aimed at gathering resident input and views outside of the workshop setting. The surveys were mailed out as part of the September sewer bill and were available for pickup at a number of locations throughout town (Curves, Claypool's, etc). Over 230 responses were received.
- A series of Planning Commission meetings on December 9 and December 15, 2008, where the Planning Commission discussed the three base land use alternatives and a fourth alternative prepared by staff and based upon comments at the November 19 public workshop. The Commission ultimately recommended an alternative to the City Council as the draft preferred Land Use Plan.
- A City Council meeting on January 6, 2009 to discuss the draft preferred Land Use Plan. The Council received the Planning Commission recommendation and took public comment. At the conclusion of the meeting, the Council directed staff on a preferred Land Use Plan to use as the basis for the preparation of the balance of the General Plan and for the initiation of the draft General Plan Environmental Impact Report (EIR).
- A policy workshop with the City Council and Planning Commission on February 19, 2009 to discuss circulation issues and policies for the draft General Plan. The Council and Commission ultimately directed staff on a new series of level of service standards and other circulation policies. These standards were used to complete the initial transportation analysis of the draft Land Use Plan in late February.
- At a second circulation policy discussion on April 7, 2009, the Council directed staff to modify the draft circulation policy based upon the initial traffic model results.
- On April 21, 2009, the City rolled out the draft General Plan.

- On May 5, 2009, the City Council and Planning Commission conducted a joint study session of the Conservation and Open Space, Noise and Safety, Economic Development, Public Facilities, and Housing Elements of the draft General Plan.
- On May 19, 2009, the City Council and Planning Commission conducted a joint study session of the Land Use and Circulation Elements.
- On June 10, 2009, the City released the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for the draft General Plan. This initiated a 45-day public comment period as required under State law.
- On July 14, 2009, the City held a workshop to receive public comments on the DEIR. Only one comment was received at the meeting.
- On July 27, 2009, the 45-day public comment period for the DEIR closed. The City received a total of 7 letters (described in the Environmental Review section below).

The focus of this Planning Commission meeting is to review the draft General Plan in its entirety, with special attention to the changes directed by the Council and Commission in May and those changes recommended by staff, as well as the outcomes of the EIR analysis. Staff will present an overview of this information. The Planning Commission should take public comment and then provide staff with direction to modify the policies or programs in the draft as necessary, then adopt a resolution recommending that the City Council certify the EIR and adopt the Plan.

Copies of the draft General Plan were provided to City Council and Planning Commission at the April 21, 2009 joint meeting. A limited number of copies will be available to the public at the meeting. Copies are available for review at City Hall and the Ione Library, as well as on the project website at www.ionegeneralplan.com. Hard copies may be purchased from the City.

ANALYSIS:

Revisions to the Draft General Plan

Based upon the comments provided by the Council and Planning Commission at the May study sessions, as well as suggestions made by the general public, staff has prepared a series of revisions to the draft General Plan. These revisions are detailed out in the General Plan Errata (Attachment 2); significant changes are summarized below:

- The Future Growth Area has been added back to the Mule Town area north of Q Ranch/Mule Creek State Prison. It has also been added to the western half of the Silva property (west of Five Mile Drive).
- The Industrial Park, Old Stockton Road, and Q Ranch Policy Areas have been changed to Special Planning Area designations with corresponding Conceptual Land Plans, rather than detailed land plans with plotted General Plan land uses. The text for the corresponding policies has been updated to reflect this change.

- The maximum development potential for the Q Ranch Policy Area has been increased from 500 units to 850 units.
- The requirements for completion of backbone roadways and utilities as part of new development have been clarified (see Action CIR 1.1.2 and Policy PF 1.4).
- Policy CO-2.4 has been updated to allow for minor adjustments in creek alignments, on a case-by-case basis, provided the quality and integrity of the habitat is maintained.

Housing Element-Specific Changes

Specific to the draft Housing Element, the City received comments from the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) on the draft Housing Element in early June, 2009. Under State law, HCD must approve, or certify, the City's Housing Element. City staff has drafted revisions to the Housing Element in response to HCD's comments. These revisions, as well as the initial comments from HCD, are included in Attachment 3. The significant changes to the Housing Element are summarized below:

- A discussion of the current infrastructure constraints (sewer and water) was added to the Housing Needs Assessment (Appendix B). Two additional action items (new Action H-2.2.3 and Action H-2.2.4) have been added to identify how the City is continuing to work towards addressing these constraints.
- Action H-5.1.1 has been updated to identify that the City will update its definition of "family" in the Zoning Code consistent with State law.

Q Ranch Land Swap

At the May 19, 2009 joint meeting, the City Council and Planning Commission considered modifying the boundaries and conceptual land use plan for the Q Ranch Policy Area based on a possible land swap between the Q Ranch property owner and an adjacent owner. The proposed swap would trade lands west of Irish Hill Road for land on the east side and co-terminus with the rest of the Q Ranch property (Attachment 4). While the Council and Commission supported the concept, there was concern with the timing of the execution of the swap relative to the adoption of the General Plan. As such, staff recommended that the swap be considered in the General Plan EIR as a project alternative. This would give the property owner time to complete the swap and give the City the ability to make a final decision on the swap as part of the adoption of the General Plan. This adjustment would not modify the allowance for a maximum of 850 dwelling units within the Policy Area and, as such, would not create any additional impacts not otherwise addressed under the EIR's project.

The property owner has indicated that the land swap has been executed or will be just prior to the Planning Commission meeting. Staff has requested that the documentation be provided in time for the meeting. If the documentation is complete and adequately describes and executes the swap, staff will likely recommend that it be included in the final General Plan.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:

Overview of the EIR

On June 10, 2009, the City released the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for the draft General Plan. The intent of this document is to provide the City, the public, and other responsible agencies with information about the potential environmental effects of the proposed update to the General Plan. As described in the State Public Resources Code and State California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines, an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) is a public informational document that assesses potential environmental effects of the proposed project, as well as identifies mitigation measures and alternatives to the proposed General Plan that could reduce or avoid its adverse environmental impacts. The City is charged with the duty to consider and, where feasible, minimize environmental impacts of proposed development, and has an obligation to balance a variety of public objectives, including economic, environmental, and social factors.

CEQA requires the preparation of an environmental impact report prior to approving any project that may have a significant effect on the environment. For the purposes of CEQA, the term “project” refers to any action that has the potential for resulting in a direct physical change or a reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment. The General Plan Update is, therefore, a project and as such the EIR was prepared.

Under CEQA, a Draft EIR (DEIR) is prepared and circulated for public review and comment. While called a Draft, this document is actually a complete work effort. Comments received on the DEIR, responses to the comments, and other technical clarifications, are compiled into a Final EIR (FEIR).

The full DEIR for the draft General Plan is a document of considerable length. Environmental issue areas studied under the DEIR include:

- Land Use (Section 4.1)
- Agricultural Resources (Section 4.2)
- Population, Housing, and Employment (Section 4.3)
- Traffic and Circulation (Section 4.4)
- Air Quality (Section 4.5)
- Noise (Section 4.6)
- Hazardous Materials/Risk of Upset (Section 4.7)
- Biological Resources (Section 4.8)
- Cultural and Paleontological Resources (Section 4.9)
- Hydrology and Water Quality (Section 4.10)
- Geology and Soils (Section 4.11)
- Visual Resources (Section 4.12)
- Public Services and Utilities (Section 4.13)
- Cumulative Impacts (Section 5.0)
- Growth Inducement (Section 7.0)

Copies of the full DEIR are available at City Hall and on the project website at www.ionegeneralplan.com. In lieu of providing a full copy as part of this report,

Attachment 1 is just the Table of Contents, Introduction, Executive Summary, and Project Description.

Of particular interest to the Planning Commission will be the following sections in Attachment 5:

- **Summary of Environmental Impacts** – Beginning on page 2.0-7, the DEIR contains a summary of impacts for the proposed General Plan Land Use Map, General Plan policies, and proposed mitigation measures that would avoid or minimize potential impacts.
- **Project Description** – Section 3 of the General Plan EIR describes the project being analyzed in the EIR. The City has taken the opportunity, as part of the General Plan EIR, to analyze a number of related projects that, in the near term, implement the General Plan. The “projects” included in the EIR are:
 - The General Plan policy document and related land use and circulation maps;
 - A Sphere of Influence Amendment and Annexations (see page 3.0-29 for a description of what has been included);
 - An amendment to the City’s Zoning Code (Title 17 of the Municipal Code) for consistency with the General Plan Land Use Map and Land Use Categories; and
 - The West Ione Roadway Improvement Strategy (WIRIS) (note, this is a programmatic review only as part of the General Plan Circulation Element and not at a level for construction).

Comments on the DEIR

The City received a total of seven comments on the DEIR. The comments are from the following individuals and agencies and are provided in Appendix 6.

- CAL FIRE
- California Department of Fish and Game
- Caltrans
- Amador Water Agency
- Foothill Conservancy
- California Public Utilities Commission
- David Plank, Ione Resident

Draft responses to these comments are included in Appendix 6.

Based upon the comments received, staff is recommending that two new policies/actions be added to the draft General Plan. These are included in the Errata (Attachment 2) and are:

- **Action CO 1.1.4** – Which requires feasible mitigation of impacts to ensure that a public or private project not contribute to the decline or viability of a special-status species (e.g., Ione Manzanita). Such mitigation measures could include providing similar replacement habitat or paying in-lieu fees toward a mitigation bank. Mitigation shall emphasize a multi-species approach to the maximum extent

feasible and could be accomplished through Habitat Conservation Plan (a plan that identifies specific conservation measures that will be implemented in exchange for a federal permit to allow the taking of a threatened or endangered species).

- **Policy NS 2.7** – Which requires roadway construction projects or projects requiring new or expanded roadways to assess impacts to existing railroad crossings and provide improvements as necessary to ensure such crossings remain safe for vehicles, pedestrians, and bicycles.

SUMMARY:

Staff has incorporated all the changes to the General Plan policy document directed to date by the Planning Commission and City Council. Further, staff has identified a number of additional modifications that clarify the intent of the overall plan. The DEIR was routed for a 45-day comment period. All comments have been addressed in the draft FEIR and additional policies to address these comments are proposed. Staff recommends that the Planning Commission forward the General Plan and EIR to the City Council for final review and adoption.

RECOMMENDED MOTION:

If the Planning Commission agrees with staff's recommendation, the following motion is recommended:

I move that the Planning Commission adopt Resolution 09-4, a Resolution of the Planning Commission of the City of Ione, Recommending that the City Council Certify the Environmental Impact Report for and Adopt the 2009 General Plan for the City of Ione.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Resolution 09-4
2. General Plan Errata
3. Housing Element Edits
4. Q Ranch Policy Area Alternative Boundaries and Conceptual Land Use Plan
5. General Plan Draft Environmental Impact Report (excerpts)
6. Preliminary Draft Final EIR (Comments on the DEIR and Draft Responses to Comments)

Attachment 1
Resolution 09-4

Attachment 2
General Plan Errata

Attachment 3
Housing Element Edits

Attachment 4
Q Ranch Policy Area Alternative Boundaries and Conceptual Land Use Plan

Attachment 5
General Plan Draft Environmental Impact Report (excerpts)

Attachment 6
Preliminary Draft Final EIR
(Comments on the DEIR and Draft Responses to Comments)