

Plan Santa Barbara
**Community Input Summary Report:
Preliminary Findings**

September 10, 2007

ABOUT THESE PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

This document summarizes the results to date of an ongoing public outreach effort begun in the spring of 2007 by the City of Santa Barbara. This effort utilized a variety of outreach strategies, including community workshops, grassroots meetings, a website and comment forms, each of which provided opportunities for community feedback on the hopes and concerns related to the *Plan Santa Barbara* process. This report also identifies key issues and ideas expressed by residents through each of the outreach methods.

ORGANIZATION OF THE SUMMARY

This summary provides a brief overview of the history of the *Plan Santa Barbara* process, describes the different outreach strategies the City has implemented, and summarizes overarching themes that emerged across all forums.

The City is in the process of drafting a full report that will explain the outreach strategy in detail, outlining the structure and methodology of each approach and describing specific feedback and overall results.

OVERALL UNDERSTANDING & APPROACH

When distilling the significant amount of data provided, City staff took into consideration the nature of the source material. Without assigning any greater value to specific responses, there was an understanding that small affinity group meetings are quite different from large public workshops, which differ in turn from individual comment cards. The hope was that by providing a range of opportunities for public input, residents would be able to choose the format that was most comfortable for them (be it public workshops, small group meetings, or private comments). It was also assumed that some individuals would take advantage of all outreach methods—attending multiple workshops, participating in grassroots meetings, and submitting comment cards through the mail and via the website.

In analyzing the responses, the City did not attempt to produce specific quantitative results. Instead, the goal was to gain an understanding of the broad issues that respondents felt most strongly about, based on the frequency and range of opinion. The City considered all responses both in aggregate and within the context of each outreach approach, with the specific intent of informing the future policy options—the next step in the process.

OVERVIEW

In the spring of 2007, the City of Santa Barbara began the initial public outreach phase of its *Plan Santa Barbara* process to update the City growth management policy framework. Staff from the City Planning Division led this outreach effort in coordination with the *Plan Santa Barbara* Outreach Committee. The goal of the outreach effort was two fold: first, to inform the public about existing City land use and growth management policies; and second, to gather input and gauge public opinion about the issues that matter most to them.

BACKGROUND

The three primary reasons for undertaking the *Plan Santa Barbara* process were to:

- 1) Address the sunset of Charter Section 1508 regulating non-residential growth;
- 2) assess the City's capabilities to construct 40,005 housing units, as specified by the Housing Element; and
- 3) revisit the principle of *Living with Our Resources*, given today's focus on sustainability and global climate change. In 2005 the City Council initiated the *Plan Santa Barbara* process with an affirmation and update of the 1988 General Plan Update Goals, to include a strong environmental component (see attached).

In 2005, the City also published the *Conditions, Trends & Issues Report* (CTI) as a baseline of existing resources, public services and facilities that affect growth in Santa Barbara. This document also highlights trends, constraints, and potential policy conflicts

related to future growth and development. Issues discussed include air quality, creeks and storm drain system, land use and housing, noise, parks and recreation, sanitary sewer, solid and hazardous waste management, transportation and circulation, water supply, fire protection services, library services, police services, public buildings and facilities, and schools.

THE OUTREACH COMMITTEE AND PUBLIC OUTREACH PROCESS

In November 2005, the Council appointed a 13 member Outreach Committee, comprised of City Council, Planning Commission and community leaders, to help guide the public outreach process. The Outreach Committee has served several functions, including: a review body for the various outreach methods and tools; an important source to identify and prioritize key community groups, a sounding board for presentations, and an engaged and active group of *Plan Santa Barbara* ambassadors at the many local grassroots meetings. It should also be noted that many of the Council and Planning Commission members not formally appointed to the Outreach Committee assisted with the Grassroots meeting.

Between March and September of 2007, well over 900 community members from across the city attended meetings and workshops related to *Plan Santa Barbara*. In addition, the City received more than 550 individual comments cards sent by mail or submitted via the plan website. To reach a wide selection of community members, the City used a number of different outreach methods, described below:

PLAN SANTA BARBARA BROCHURE AND COMMENT CARDS

A four-page informational brochure was mailed to every household in Santa Barbara in the spring of 2007. The brochure contained an explanation of the *Plan Santa Barbara* process, information about upcoming community workshops, and a bilingual comment form that users could fill out and mail back to the City that included the following questions:

- “What do you love about Santa Barbara?”
- “What are your concerns about the future?”
- “What are your hopes for the future?”

COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS

The City hosted a series of four public workshops during the months of June and July 2007, each located in a different area of the City. At the workshops, participants learned about the *Plan Santa Barbara* process through an introductory video, a PowerPoint presentation, and then offered feedback through three activities:

1. In the large group, participants answered the question, “What do you love about Santa Barbara?”
2. Participants then met in smaller group breakout sessions to discuss hopes, concerns, and suggestions related to the following topics:
 - housing and neighborhoods;
 - transportation;
 - the environment;
 - the economy;

- community design;
- services and facilities.

3. Members reconvened for a final large group discussion to present “big ideas” for Santa Barbara’s future.

GRASSROOTS MEETINGS

In an effort to actively seek out community input from those who might otherwise not attend a public workshop, Outreach Committee members, Council, Planning Commission and City staff attended more than 40 local grassroots meetings with groups representing a wide range of interests and affinities to discuss the *Plan Santa Barbara* process and issues. Participation at these meetings ranged from a handful to a few dozen attendees, and provided an opportunity for focused dialogue with staff and committee members. Almost 700 people participated in these meetings, and brochures and comment cards were distributed at each.

WEBSITE: [HTTP://WWW.YOUPANSB.ORG](http://www.youplansb.org)

The City launched the *Plan Santa Barbara* website in the spring of 2007 to provide up-to-date and in some cases “real time” information about the planning process, announce public workshops and other community events, and involve the public in the process. Once registered on the site, all community members receive periodic updates whenever new information is posted to the site, as well as the ability to provide online feedback and participate in occasional user polls. The website has a growing library of documents including a full copy of the *Conditions Trends & Issues Report* and videos of all the

workshops, as well as the July 18th, 2007 joint work session on Building Heights and Community Design. In addition, all four workshops and the 40 Grassroots meetings have been summarized and uploaded for public review.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Based on the public responses received from the workshops, grassroots meetings, and comment cards, a number of key themes emerged. This report does not provide a comprehensive list of every comment; readers are encouraged to access the transcription of all comments and summary descriptions of individual events online at <http://www.YouPlanSB.org>.

QUALITIES OF SANTA BARBARA

In both the public workshops and on the comment cards, participants were asked to describe what they love about Santa Barbara. Responses were very similar regardless of the format. The most common attributes included the following:

- Small town feel and community connectedness
- Diverse population
- Scenic beauty (beaches, oceans, mountains, creeks, etc.) and views
- Strikingly distinctive architecture, especially downtown
- Preservation of historic character and neighborhoods
- Vibrant and dynamic culture

These are qualities that public participants hope to see preserved into the future.

KEY ISSUES

Participants were also asked to describe their concerns about the city. Respondents raised a wide range of issues and concerns; however, a few overarching themes appeared across all formats. Many participants noted that these issues are interconnected on many levels and recognized the difficulty in reconciling often-contrary ideas.

HOUSING & NEIGHBORHOODS

Across the board, participants raised the issue of high housing prices as a cause for concern, pointing to it as a factor in class stratification, congestion, and other social, economic and environmental stresses. According to many, high land values are adversely affecting the nature of their neighborhoods—their children cannot afford to live in the city where they grew up; middle income earners are unable to purchase homes close to work; and freeway congestion has increased due to the large number of employees commuting to work from outside the city. Small business owners described the difficulty of affording space, as well as keeping a workforce located in the city. There is also a perception that many of the homes in the city are investment properties owned by absentee landlords.

Many participants struggled with the difficulty of creating more affordable housing opportunities while avoiding too much growth (see below). Some advocated a strict no-growth strategy, while others felt that the City needs to carefully examine its policies in order to find a balance between providing adequate housing for all income levels as well

as maintaining the attractive character of the city. Many participants focused their commentary on maintaining the character and cultural diversity of the city.

Another theme that emerged related to neighborhood character was the expressed concern that neighborhoods are losing their sense of community as residents become more isolated. Opinion as to why this was the case differed — some believed that it was a result of an increase in absentee owners, while others felt that the lack of neighborhood centers and an over reliance on the automobile were major factors.

COMMUNITY DESIGN

Participants are concerned by what many perceive as too much growth and change. This issue featured prominently across all formats (e.g., almost 50% of the comment cards received made a direct reference to growth). People are concerned about different aspects of growth—some are more worried about sprawl into agricultural areas, while others are concerned with overcrowding in the multi-family neighborhoods, on the east and west sides of downtown. Many feel that the nature of Santa Barbara is threatened by too much development; in particular, large projects (e.g., along Chapala) are seen as detrimental to the city’s character and quality of life. Building heights, residential unit sizes and densities, as well as parking and open space standards in the commercial districts were all discussed. Preservation of the city’s architectural heritage and aesthetic character was a frequently cited goal. On an economic perspective, many believe that recent development trends do nothing to alleviate the social imbalance described above since the units in question are often high end, luxury condominiums with large square footage.

Participants also discussed the impact that local colleges and UCSB have on the housing and rental market.

A number of respondents came out strongly against any growth, others felt that it would be unwise to place limits on growth; however, most felt the need for a level of growth that is, as one respondent phrased it, “controlled and sensible.” There is a desire for the City to manage growth in order to achieve a healthy balance. Many residents also hope that the City considers ecological factors on both a local and global scale when looking at growth issues. Respondents also stressed the importance of promoting a healthy community and considering public health epidemics such as obesity, diabetes and lung cancer during the planning process.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Residents raised a host of issues related to the environment, including the health of our creeks, beaches and ocean, water supply, air quality, open space, vegetation and wildlife, energy use, waste management, pesticides and other toxics, noise, agriculture, and how the City addresses climate change. Overall, residents reaffirmed the concept of “Living within Our Resources,” and want to see the City continue to take an active role in conserving our resources by exploring alternative energy sources and reducing waste. According to many, the City needs to encourage and increase efforts in sustainability. In addition, the discussion of parks and recreation often centered around the importance of green space in the context of public health as well as the overall health of the environment. People believe that Santa Barbarans are informed and engaged in

environmental issues, and that the City should serve as a national leader in the area of sustainability.

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation issues are integrally connected to the concerns related above and cover a range of categories, such as congestion, public transit, parking, accessibility, and bicycle and pedestrian safety. Many people are disturbed by the amount of traffic that currently exists, and worry about future increases. Participants in all of the grassroots meetings believed that a good and balanced transportation network is critical. Residents discussed the difficulty in providing efficient, reliable and frequent public transportation options to all areas of the city. A number of respondents want the City to explore the concept of integrating multi-modal transit to connect different forms of transportation within the local area, in the immediate vicinity, and throughout the region. Concern about growth also raised the issue of congestion and parking downtown. Creating safe zones for bicycle and pedestrian traffic was another key concern; a significant number of respondents advocated for more secure bike paths and lanes throughout the city.

THE ECONOMY

Economic issues were largely related to the steep rise in housing prices and commercial rents, which people fear have a deleterious effect on the local economy, especially small businesses, as employers struggle to afford expensive leases and recruit and retain a workforce due to the high cost of living. Concern was also expressed by the growing number of chain stores. A significant number hope that the City can come up with ways

to encourage small businesses and limit the influx of non-local business. The lack of affordable “workforce” housing was a topic that also came up many times, with people expressing the fear that Santa Barbara’s economic vitality and diversity is compromised by the fact that workers can’t afford to live here. The overall perception of a loss of a middle class and continued economic stratification is a major concern that relates to many topics previously addressed, such as housing, transportation and the environment.

A number of comments raised the concern that the City relies too heavily on tourism; others saw the tourist business as a clear way to keep local businesses alive.

PUBLIC FACILITIES & SERVICES

Public services and facilities discussions covered a wide range of issues, from drinking water to social services. The issues that received the most attention were public safety (specifically the problem with gang violence); recreation facilities (and the need to provide greater recreational opportunities for youth); social services for the aged and homeless; and water issues. Regarding public safety, a majority expressed the need for greater police presence and an increased police force with adequate pay. Some suggested establishing community policing and neighborhood watch programs. The discussion of gangs often led to a discussion of creating more recreational opportunities for youth, such as converting the Amory into a recreation center and developing programs and building community centers for young people to go for safe activities. Participants were divided on the issue of the homeless—some felt that the problem needs to be addressed through increased police enforcement, while others feel that greater social services are essential for addressing the issue. Social services in general are suffering due to the high cost of

rent, as well as the inability to attract and retain social workers in the immediate area. A number of comments noted the lack of affordable housing for health care workers. The water issues that were expressed included increasing capacity of the sewage treatment plant and improving the quality of drinking water.

HOPES FOR SANTA BARBARA'S FUTURE

In the workshops, grassroots meetings and comment cards, participants acknowledged the serious challenges that Santa Barbara faces in the coming years. However, a majority expressed hope that the City can meet these challenges to create a framework that balances growth with preservation, establishes sensible and environmentally sensitive policies, and provides the structure and services to meet the needs of all who live and work here. Regardless of their disagreements and fears of what might be lost, virtually everyone expressed a sincere love for the city and expressed hope that it will continue to be an attractive and exciting place to live.

**Plan Santa Barbara
City Council Goals
March 15, 2005**

1. Live within resources by balancing development with available resources and promoting sustainable, pedestrian scale, transit-oriented development.
2. Ensure affordable housing opportunities for all economic levels in the community, while protecting the character of established neighborhoods.
3. Provide safe and convenient transportation through improved transit, circulation and parking.
4. Ensure a strong, economy that provides the revenue base necessary for essential services and community enhancements.
5. Advance regional thinking, collaboration and solutions.
6. Maintain the unique character and desirability of Santa Barbara as a place to live, work and visit.
7. Provide adequate services and facilities.
8. Encourage public involvement and participation at all levels of city planning and other government activities.
9. Develop explicit environmentally sustainable policies.