

The information below is from the March 19, 2024, City Council meeting. The complete agenda item, exhibits, and meeting minutes can be found online at the link below <https://nationalcityca.new.swagit.com/videos/300332> (Item 11.2).

BACKGROUND

The City's General Plan serves as the guiding document for achieving the community's vision for the future. Since the last update in 2011, new State legislation and other regional and local changes have taken effect. As result, in March 2020, National City initiated the FGPU to support housing-related goals, comply with changes in State legislation, update per City planning studies, and coordinate growth through a holistic process. To follow the adoption of the Housing Element on August 3, 2021, the Land Use Element, Transportation Element, Safety Element, Zoning Map, and Climate Action Plan have been updated. The Downtown Specific Plan, Westside Specific Plan, and Municipal Code have been updated for consistency, as well. Additionally, new Objective Design Standards Floor Area Ratio Bonus Regulations have been created to comply with State legislation and streamline the housing approval process. One environmental document, a Supplemental Program Environmental Impact Report (SPEIR), was prepared to analyze these actions.

The goals, policies, and actions in the General Plan will guide development in National City through the horizon year 2050. These documents will supersede the current Land Use Element, Transportation Element, and Safety Element of the City of National City General Plan, which were last updated in 2011, and portions of the current Municipal Code.

One environmental document, a Supplemental Program Environmental Impact Report (SPEIR), was prepared to analyze the Focused General Plan Update (FGPU) and related documents. The SPEIR includes the adoption of the Housing Element, the Land Use Element, Transportation Element, Safety Element, Zoning Map, and Climate Action Plan have been updated. The Downtown Specific Plan, Westside Specific Plan, and Municipal Code have been updated for consistency, as well. Additionally, new Objective Design Standards Floor Area Ratio Bonus Regulations have been created to comply with State legislation and streamline the housing approval process.

Outreach Summary

The FGPU is the product of approximately two (2) years of analysis and outreach. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and consistent with official public health guidance, outreach activities were shifted from in-person events to virtual platforms. To address potential barriers to participation and maximize reach, a variety of media and activities were used to share information and gather input. These activities were outlined in the project's Community Engagement Plan and on the project's website (www.nationalcityca.gov/fgpu).

Mailers announcing the project and opportunities to get involved were sent to all registered addresses in National City in the summer of 2020 and spring of 2021 in both English and Spanish. Since the project kickoff in March 2020, the project team has conducted a total of seven webinars to gather public input. Of these webinars, six were conducted in English with live Spanish interpretation and one was conducted primarily in Spanish. The combined total attendance over the course 7 of these webinars has been 159 participants (an average of approximately 22 participants per session). An interactive survey was prepared and circulated to the public using the MetroQuest platform; a total of 201 responses were collected. These activities were supplemented with telephone office hours staffed by English- and Spanish-speaking staff. Meetings with stakeholders, including community organizations and developers, were also conducted.

Events and notices were marketed via the City's email listserv, FGPU stakeholder list, and the City's social media sites to share the dates and times of outreach events and opportunities to get involved. Additionally, an interactive map link was made available on the project's website from November 14, 2021, to June 30, 2022, to collect input through an on-going basis on the proposed land use changes, as well.

FOCUSED GENERAL PLAN UPDATE

To address changes in State legislation, a changing regional context, a forecasted future growth, and implement the City's 2021 Housing Element, National City conducted a FGPU. The FGPU includes updates to policies and supporting updates to codes, ordinances, and development standards. Specifically, the FGPU includes policy updates to the following Elements and the Climate Action Plan (CAP), last updated in 2011, which are addressed in detail later in this section:

- Land Use Element
- Transportation Element
- Safety Element
- Housing Element*
- CAP

*The Housing Element was adopted by the City Council on August 3, 2021, covering the planning period from April 2021 to April 2029 (6th Cycle). On November 10, 2021, the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) provided a letter certifying the Housing Element.

The FGPU considers separate recent planning documents, including the 24th Street Transit Oriented Development Overlay (TODO) study, Downtown Specific Plan, Westside Specific Plan, Harbor District Specific Plan, and INTRACConnect. Recommendations from these predecessor planning studies have been carried forward to all components of the FGPU. In addition, the General Plan will be expanded to include the annexation of approximately 50- acres of the unincorporated community of Lincoln Acres into the City of National City, which was completed in 2020.

A resolution authorizing approval of the FGPU (Land Use Element, Transportation Element, Safety Element, and CAP) is included in Exhibit "A."

Land Use Element Update

The Land Use Element designates the general distribution, location, and extent of uses of land for housing, businesses, industry, open space, etc. This element identifies and designates where future development and redevelopment should be directed and it is intended to balance growth and change with preserving and improving well-established residential neighborhoods and commercial and industrial cores, and overall quality of life. Community character is also integrated in this element to ensure that the physical forms, patterns, and aesthetic features of future development and redevelopment advance the City's desire for a higher quality of life and a more sustainable future.

The Land Use Element update includes revisions to policies to incentivize housing development in an integrated way with circulation network improvements. Based on the existing conditions analysis, community feedback, recent planning studies, and housing-related needs, a series of goals and policies were updated to guide land use and zoning changes across National City to accomplish this goal. These land use policy updates intend to:

- Foster an integrated development pattern.
- Improve development opportunities in areas served by transit and facilitate the creation of 10-minute neighborhoods based on National City's prior INTRACConnect (2020) study.
- Support the City's CAP and other sustainability goals.
- Prioritize increasing housing in areas that have access to transit and resources.

- Stimulate the production of additional housing units to meet housing-related needs.

Transportation Element Update

The Transportation Element guides the City's decision-making related to the movement of people and goods. This Element considers the evolving need for mobility through the development of an integrated multimodal circulation network that accommodates both local and regional trips, and supports public transit, walking, bicycling, vehicular traffic and parking. It also identifies the general location and extent of existing and proposed major roadways, transportation routes, terminals, air and water ports, and pedestrian and bikeway facilities.

The Transportation Element update builds on the focused studies and plans that were completed since it was last updated in 2011, including integrating findings from the SMART Foundation Plan (2014), Downtown Specific Plan (2017), INTRACONnect (2020), Homefront to Waterfront Connectivity Study (2020), and Bicycle Master Plan (2010). Traffic modeling was completed to inform the development of the update to the Transportation Element to ensure that the proposed network adequately accommodates anticipated growth in the region and includes the annexation of approximately 50 acres of the unincorporated community of Lincoln Acres.

Goals and policies within the Transportation Element were revised to provide more effective language. The following policies were removed from this Element to streamline and consolidate interrelated policies and provide the City with flexibility for multimodal improvements:

- Policy C-1.4: Require new development and redevelopment to apply universal design standards.
- Policy C-9.6: Keep abreast of bicycle facility innovations in other cities and regions, and seek to incorporate these into the bicycle network.

The Transportation Element update adds additional community corridors/districts to the circulation network to better connect multimodal resources into a complete network so that residents and visitors can access key destinations (such as schools, commercial centers, public facilities, homes, and the waterfront) through the city safely and easily by any mode. In addition, the Transportation Element Update incorporates TODO Network recommendations, including:

- Road diets on 24th Street, 30th Street, and Hoover Avenue
- Closure of 19th Street under Interstate 5 (I-5)
- Conversion of one-way to two-way traffic on 18th Street under I-5
- Signal at National City Boulevard and 22nd Street

The Transportation Element Update expands upon the existing community corridors typology and identifies two new typologies specific to pedestrians: walkable retail corridors and pedestrian safety corridors. Both typologies are focused on pedestrian improvements to improve the pedestrian experience and pedestrian safety. Walkable retail corridors are located along existing and planned commercial corridors. Pedestrian safety corridors are located along existing and planned residential corridors. Additionally, roads and sub-communities in National City that have a prevalence of speeding issues were identified. To address this, a new typology has been defined, the Traffic Calming District or Traffic Calming Corridor, and recommendations are provided for locations for additional traffic-calming investments by the City. Proposed improvements from the Transportation Element would be implemented via the Capital Improvement Plan through the horizon year (2050).

Safety Element Update

The Safety Element addresses the potential short- and long-term risks of fires, floods, earthquakes, landslides, climate change, hazards, emergency services and disaster response, and other locally relevant safety issues. This Element establishes goals and policies that work to protect the community from risks of injury, loss of life and property, and environmental damage associated with natural and human-caused hazards such as wildfires, geologic and seismic

hazards, flooding, hazardous materials, military installations, and brownfields. It includes mapping of known seismic and geologic hazards, along with areas subject to flooding and fire risk. This element also includes methods to reduce criminal behavior through environmental design and response objectives related to police and fire operations and emergency services.

The Safety Element update reflects changes in State legislation, including:

- SB 379: Requires Safety Element updates to include climate adaptation and resilience strategies
- SB 1000: Requires the identification of environmental justice communities
- SB 1035: Requires that the Safety Element be revised no less than every eight years.

The 2018 General Plan Guidelines from the State Office of Planning and Research mandate that the Safety Element complement the San Diego County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan, last updated in 2018, and include a comprehensive hazard mitigation and emergency response strategy. Information in the Safety Element Update has been updated to be consistent with information about the city, provided in the 2018 San Diego County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan. In addition, the proposed policies address methods to minimize risks and ways to minimize economic disruption and recovery following an incident.

The Safety Element update includes the addition of a set of feasible implementation measures for climate change adaptation and resilience, including a vulnerability assessment and measures to address vulnerabilities that are increasingly impacting California communities.

Climate Action Plan

CAP addresses the major sources of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in National City and sets forth a detailed and long-term strategy that the City and community can implement to achieve GHG emissions reduction targets. The CAP would also be utilized for tiering and streamlining of future development in National City pursuant to CEQA Guidelines 15152 and 15183.5.

The FGPU includes a comprehensive update to the 2011 CAP by updating the 2009 GHG emissions inventory to 2018 as its baseline year and forecasting emissions for 2030 and 2050, consistent with Executive Order B-30-15 and SB 32. The CAP update would account for new policies stemming from the General Plan update that are expected to expand the City's housing capacity and implement mobility improvements in select corridors. Updates to the Land Use and Transportation Elements are expected to yield revised projected vehicle miles traveled estimates, which will result in updated GHG emissions projections and reductions from transportation sources included in the adopted 2011 CAP. The 2022 CAP update accounts for existing plans, programs, and activities that the City has already completed or implemented to reduce emissions and revises, removes, or expands upon 55 emission-reducing strategies from the 2011 CAP to improve GHG reductions in the residential, commercial/industrial, transportation, solid waste, and water and wastewater sectors.

SPECIFIC PLAN AMENDMENTS

The Downtown Specific Plan and Westside Specific amendments include updated policies, development standards (allowed uses, densities, FARs, heights, etc.), design guidelines, and parking requirements to encourage housing production. The updated policies aim to streamline housing production for all income categories and align with updates to the Zoning Code and General Plan. Amendments to these specific plans center on specific conformance with recently adopted plans and those being concurrently revised through the updates to the General Plan, as well as State legislation, and do not serve to create new plans.

Downtown Specific Plan Amendment

No Focus Areas fall within the boundaries of the Downtown Specific Plan boundary. The amendments to the Downtown Specific Plan as part of the FGPU include updates to sections

referencing the General Plan’s goals and policies, additions of references to the objective design standards, parking requirements, clarifications to regulations where residential uses are involved, and providing clarification that in cases where the procedures of the Specific Plan and Municipal Code conflict, the Municipal Code shall prevail.

A resolution authorizing approval of the amendments to the Downtown Specific Plan is included in Exhibit “B.”

Westside Specific Plan Amendment

The Westside Specific Plan would allow transitional and supportive housing as a permitted use in the MCR-1 and MCR-2 zones and group homes as a permitted use in the RS-4, MCR-1, and MCR-2 zones in the Westside Specific Plan, in accordance with State law. Additionally, portions of the 16th Street Focus Area, which is within the boundaries of the Westside Specific Plan boundary, fall within the proposed Mixed-Use Overlay, as described above. This overlay allows for multi-family residential development in areas zoned for commercial and institutional uses and near transit. This overlay is optional and does not propose a change in the underlying zoning to these parcels.

An ordinance recommending approval of the amendments to the Westside Specific Plan is included in Exhibit “C.”

MUNICIPAL CODE UPDATE

As part of the 6th Cycle 2021–2029 Housing Element implementation, National City’s Municipal Code Title 18 must be updated to comply with Housing Element policies and recent State housing legislation, and address minor language and conformance discrepancies throughout. The Municipal Code update also includes the incorporation of Objective Design Standards and the Floor Area Ratio Bonus Regulations. All updates aim to ease local impacts of the statewide housing crisis by facilitating easier housing development, encouraging deed-restricted affordable housing construction, or allowing for a variety of housing types.

An ordinance recommending approval of the updates to the Municipal Code is included in Exhibit “D.”

Legislative Compliance

In the past five years, the State of California has passed a significant number of bills related to housing that require municipalities to allow specified types of housing in certain zones and to process housing development applications meeting specified criteria using certain streamlined processes, subject to definitive timelines. Like many other municipalities throughout the State, National City’s Municipal Code was not in compliance with this legislation. The Housing Element update thus identified a program to update the City’s Municipal Code to be in compliance with all State housing legislation. As part of the FGPU, the Municipal Code would be updated to comply with legislation such as SB 35, SB 330, AB 101, AB 2162, AB 1397, AB 68, etc.

In addition to ensuring legislative compliance, the Municipal Code update implemented feedback from stakeholders gathered during engagement efforts for the Housing Element update. This feedback included adding language and requirements from the State Density Bonus program directly into the Municipal Code to encourage the use of the program. National City staff had identified smaller amendments to the Municipal Code that would correct language discrepancies, facilitate easier use, and address conformance issues. These amendments were also incorporated into the Municipal Code update.

Objective Design Standards

To incentivize the production of housing in National City, Object Design Standards were incorporated into the Municipal Code to provide architectural and design requirements aimed at streamlining the approval process for qualifying multi-unit residential developments based on

zoning, General Plan land use designations, and percentages of residential use designated square footages. These architectural and design requirements support high-quality development, including site design, building design, façade and articulation, building equipment and service areas, fence and walls, pedestrian access, outdoor/common spaces, landscaping, parking, bicycle parking, and lighting. The Objective Design Standards only apply to multi-family projects located on a site that is zoned for residential use or residential mixed-use development or on a site that has a General Plan designation allowing residential use or a mix of residential and nonresidential uses. These standards will serve as the minimum requirements and will be mandatory for any eligible project for which a streamlined approval process is requested under State law provisions that reference objective design standards.

Floor Area Ratio Bonus Regulations

To incentivize the construction of new context-sensitive development that would assist the City in meeting first and foremost the residents' needs for new affordable housing opportunities, as well as the State's RHNA allocation, Floor Area Ratio Bonus Regulations were incorporated into the Municipal Code. The Floor Area Ratio Bonus Regulations, also known as the House National City Opt-In Density Bonus Program, intend to help create new, transit-supportive development by strategically placing new development in areas near job centers and schools with the greatest access to mobility choices to reduce reliance on automobiles. Additionally, this program is intended to create new commercial and retail spaces along the commercial corridors.

The Floor Area Ratio Bonus Regulations emulate AB 2372 by ensuring that properties are afforded the opportunity to achieve higher densities than currently allowed under zoning. This is intended to produce additional housing units and other community benefits, such as new deed-restricted affordable housing, context sensitive design to address pollution issues, enhanced rules for relocation, first right to return, and tenant displacement.

These regulations will use a method of calculation known as Floor Area Ratio (FAR) to calculate the number of residential units for a residential or mixed-use project in exchange for a certain percentage of the new units as deed-restricted affordable housing targeted to National City residents. These new regulations would remove the residential unit cap set forth by the traditional dwelling units per acre (du/ac) calculation to bring greater flexibility when planning a new development project in close proximity to transit. For purposes of this program, two FAR tiers (Tier 1 and Tier 2) would apply and would supersede the du/ac maximums allowed by the base zones. Tiers 1 and 2 include FARs of 2.5 and 4.0. The following base zones are included as part of this program: MCR-1, MCR-2, MXC-1, MXC-2, MXD-1, MXD-2, RM-1, RM-2, RM-3, and MXT. The mixed-use overlays would also be included.

BICYCLE MASTER PLAN UPDATE

The Bicycle Master Plan Update will include the incorporation of changes from the General Plan elements, as described above, and other recently completed planning documents, such as the Harbor Drive Corridor Study, the INTRACConnect Plan, and the TODO Study. This update revises the citywide bicycle network to guide the City in planning for a more connected, safe, and accessible network. Design guidelines will be updated to align with current best practices and City plans. The plan will recommend programs related to furthering bicycling education, bicycling encouragement, enforcement, and evaluation. The plan also will include estimated network costs and resources to fund construction.

A resolution authorizing approval of the updates to the Bicycle Master Plan is included in Exhibit "E."

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION

Final Program Environmental Impact Report (Final SPEIR)

The City of National City, as lead agency, has prepared a Draft and Final Supplemental Program

Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) to provide information to the public, agencies and policy makers about the potential environmental effects that could occur with implementation of the Focused General Plan Update (FGPU). The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires a process through which agencies and the public can evaluate the potential environmental effects of implementing the FGPU (the “project”), understand the potential scale of any environmental impacts to the degree feasible, and develop measures to reduce these impacts.

Impacts identified in the Final SPEIR (which incorporates the Draft PEIR) will be mitigated through application of federal, State, and local laws and regulations; through the application of General Plan policies and programs; and through application of the mitigation framework during project level environmental review and that reflects the implementation of General Plan goals, policies, and actions.

In accordance with California Code Regulations Title 14 §15126.6 of the CEQA Guidelines, the EIR describes two (2) reasonable alternatives to the project, which could feasibly attain most of the basic objectives of the project and might avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the project. As documented in FSPEIR Section 3.4 (Alternatives Analysis) of the FSPEIR, three alternatives to the proposed FGPU were evaluated in accordance with California Code Regulations Title 14 §15126.6 of the CEQA Guidelines.

Alternate Project Location (Environmentally Superior) Alternative

To fully evaluate the environmental effects of projects, CEQA mandates that alternatives to the project be analyzed. The Environmentally Superior Alternative (ESA) includes the same components as the Project. The sole difference pertains to the exclusion of the 24th Street Transit Station Focus Area. This alternative replaces the 24th Street Transit Station Focus Area with the 27th Street Focus Area, a set of three (3) parcels located between A Avenue, E 26th Street, E 27th Street, and D Avenue.

Table 2: Environmentally Superior Alternative Focus Area Proposed Rezoning

Focus Area	Acres	Current Zoning	Adopted du/ac	Proposed Zoning	du/ac
18th Street	2.2	Small Lot Residential (RS-2)	9	Mixed Use Transition (MXT)	24
		Very High Density Multi-Unit Residential (RM-3)	75	Open Space (OS)	0
4th Street	16.6	Small Lot Residential (RS-2)	9	Medium Density Multi-Unit Residential (RM-1)	23
D Avenue	17.4	Small Lot Residential (RS-2)	9	Medium Density Multi-Unit Residential (RM-1)	23
Hospital Area	38.6	Small Lot Residential (RS-2)	9	Minor Mixed-Use Corridor (MXC-1)	48
		Medium-Low Density Multi-Unit Residential (RS-3)	15		
		Institutional (I)	0		
16th Street	12.3	Multi-Use Commercial-Residential (MCR-1)	24	Mixed-Use Overlay	24
		Limited Commercial (CL)	0		
		Service Commercial (CS)	0		
27th Street	3.2	Service Commercial (CS)	0	High Density Multi-Unit Residential (RM-2)	48

The current adopted use in the 27th Street Focus Area is Service Commercial (CS), which does not allow residential uses. The current maximum height in the area is three (3) stories or 50 feet. Under this alternative, these parcels are proposed to be rezoned to High Density Multi-Unit Residential (RM-2), to allow the production of higher-density residential development with a maximum density of 48 du/ac and a maximum height of six (6) stories or 65 feet. This alternative would relocate density from the 24th Street Transit Station, which would remain zoned as Limited Commercial (CL).

The 27th Street Focus Area was selected as a replacement for the 24th Street Transit Station Focus Area to reduce potential air quality and noise impacts on residential uses near the Interstate 5 (I-5) corridor. Additionally, this site is surrounded by medium- and high-density residential uses and is located near a school, major transportation corridors, 24th Street Transit Station, and is in a Transit Priority Area. This Focus Area is located approximately 2,400 feet (0.4 miles) from the I-5 corridor, as compared to the 24th Street Transit Station Focus Area, which is approximately less than 200 feet from the edge of the parcel to the nearest off-ramp. The SPEIR determined this rezoning alternative to be the Environmentally Superior Alternative because it would result in fewer impacts and would still meet the FGPU's objectives.

Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Report – Located on the City website (<https://fc.nationalcityca.gov/ui/core/index.html?mode=public&shareto=#expl-tabl./SHARED/!2cAmdTIY983DHlv78OB34/D28QfINrxPmNKjel>)

SUMMARY

The FGPU will guide development and conservation in National City through 2050. The goals, policies, and actions that will be reflected in the Land Use Element, Transportation Element, Safety Element, rezoning of parcels, the Municipal Code, the specific plan amendments, the CAP, and the Bicycle Master Plan will allow National City to address changes in State legislation, accommodate forecasted future growth in a changing regional context, and implement the City's 2021 Housing Element. These updates, along with future rezoning of parcels in focus areas, will support National City's housing-related goals, foster economic development, encourage mixed-use and infill development, promote alternate modes of transportation, and achieve GHG emissions reduction targets.