



# San Carlos Focused General Plan Update

## Virtual Workshop #2 January 20, 2021

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## Introduction

In the spring of 2020, the City of San Carlos began efforts to draft a Focused General Plan Update. In California, all municipalities must develop a General Plan to establish how a city will grow and change over the next two decades. General Plans are required to address land use, circulation/mobility, open space, conservation, noise, environmental justice, air quality, safety, and housing.

The San Carlos Focused General Plan Update will address the Housing Element and the Environmental Safety Element, both of which are required by state law to be reviewed and updated, as appropriate, by January 2023. As needed for consistency, other elements (chapters) of the San Carlos General Plan may need to be updated as well, specifically, the Land Use Element. Woven throughout the Focused General Plan Update is a comprehensive community engagement program that is used to inform the plan update process and gather input from the community. This was the second workshop held to engage the community in this project. The website, [www.SanCarlos2040.org](http://www.SanCarlos2040.org), contains more information about the project and its upcoming activities.

## Workshop Purpose and Format

On Wednesday, January 20, 2021, the City of San Carlos and its consultants, MIG, hosted its second public workshop to inform the community about the 2040 San Carlos project and collect focused input related to the Housing Element. Following guidance from public health agencies regarding public gatherings during the COVID-19 pandemic, the workshop was held virtually using online video conferencing. City staff conducted robust community outreach to publicize the event. This included social media posts on Facebook, NextDoor, Instagram, and Twitter. In addition, the workshop was promoted through the City's E-notify blasts. Finally, announcements about the project and workshop were made at public meetings including City Council, Planning Commission, Transportation and Circulation Commission, Economic Development Advisory Commission, and the Youth Advisory Council. Seventy-five (75) people participated in the workshop.

MIG planner Joan Chaplick served as the moderator and facilitated the meeting. Lisa Porras, San Carlos Planning Manager and Project Manager, introduced the new City of San Carlos mayor, Laura Parmer-Lohan. Lisa provided remarks to set the context and introduced the City's project team members including Al Savay, Community and Economic Development Director, and Aaron Aknin, Strategic Advisor, Principal, Good City Company. Lisa also introduced Lisa Brownfield and Genevieve Sharrow from MIG who provided a presentation on the overall planning process, specifically the Housing Element. The workshop was highly interactive and included live polls and a discussion documented in real-time using a digital whiteboard tool known as Mural. Participants could submit comments and questions throughout the meeting using the "Chat" feature. The Project Team answered questions throughout the meeting.

## Agenda Topics and Engagement Activities included:

- **Brief recap of the Housing Element:** Participants received a brief review of the housing element's purpose and requirements. This was intended to ensure that all participants were starting with the same information. This section also included a brief recap of the first survey's results and what the City learned from the first workshop. Participants were also asked to respond to four demographic questions; these same questions will be asked consistently throughout the process.
- **Housing density and what it can look like:** Participants were provided a series of examples of different housing types and related densities from other communities. This was followed by an online polling activity that asked participants to "Guess the Density" for several different projects that have been approved or are already developed in San Carlos.
- **Factors, priorities, and criteria to guide the development of new housing:** Participants were provided information about factors, priorities, and criteria that may guide new housing development. Participants were asked to respond to polling questions related to criteria and priorities. They were also asked to submit additional comments in the chat.
- **Focus on areas/locations for new housing:** Participants were provided a description of the areas zoned for residential uses and participants were asked to share their priorities and ideas for where housing should be located. Participants generated an extensive list of potential locations.
- **Public comment:** Participants were provided the opportunity to make public comment; participants were each given up to two minutes to speak.

## Results from the Engagement Activities

The workshop opened with three polling questions intended to collect basic information about the participants. As noted above, the City will continue to ask these questions throughout the process. For polling questions, a number "n" is provided for the number of respondents for the question. Not all participants responded to each question. This number is the basis of percentages shown unless otherwise described.

### *Question 1.1. How long have you lived in San Carlos? n: 53*

- 79.2% 10+ years
- 11.3% 5-9 years
- 5.7% 1-4 Years
- 3.8% less than 1 year

### *Question 1.2. What is your housing situation? n:54*

- 85.2% I own my home
- 7.4% I rent my home
- 5.6% I live with family/friends, do not own or pay rent
- 1.9% Do not currently have a permanent home

**Question 1.3. What is your age? n:55**

- 0% Under 18 years old
- 9.1% 18 - 29 years old
- 23.6% 30 - 49 years old
- 41.8% 50 - 64 years old
- 25.5% 65+ years old

**Polling Session 2 - "Guess the Density" Activity**

Participants were asked to "Guess the Density" for recently approved or recently constructed residential projects in San Carlos. The audience was presented with an image of a development and were polled on what they thought was the building's density. The examples and polling results for the different projects are as follows:

**"Guess the Density" Activity - 1501 San Carlos Ave.**



The development is a four-story building with six condominium units and one commercial unit with covered parking on a 0.16-acre. The most popular answer was 41 du/ac (44%) The actual density is 37 du/ac.

*"Guess the Density" Activity - 1501 Cherry (Cherry/Chestnut)*



The development has a total of 34 units on a 0.53-acre lot. The most popular answer 52 du/ac (50%). The actual density is 64 du/ac.

*"Guess the Density" Activity - Wheeler Plaza - 657 Walnut*



The development has 109 condominiums with below grade parking and a commercial space on 2.9 acres. The most popular answer (37%) matched the actual density, which is 37 du/ac.

*"Guess the Density" Activity - 817 Walnut*



The development has a total of 24 apartment units on four stories with at grade covered parking on a .242-acre lot. The most popular answer (40%) was 25 du/ac. The actual density is 97 du/ac.

*"Guess the Density" Activity - 1257 Magnolia*



The development is a four-story apartment building consisting of nine units with at grade covered parking on a 0.21-acre lot. The most popular answer (34%) was 24 du/ac. The actual density is 42 du/ac.

### Polling Session 3 - Community Preferences - Criteria and Priorities

In the third session, participants were asked to identify their top three criteria and priorities for determining where to locate housing. Participants were asked to respond to a polling question and then respond to additional questions using the chat. For each polling question, participants could select up to three choices. Comments from the chat are summarized following the polling responses.

#### *Question 3.1. What are your top 3 criteria and priorities for new housing? n: 158*

- 17.7% Walkable/bikeable to shops and services
- 17.1% Located near public transit
- 17.1% Be well designed
- 16.5% Provides options for different household types (seniors, young adults, etc.)
- 12.7% Have least possible impact on traffic
- 8.2% Spread evenly around the city
- 5.7% Located near community services and parks
- 5.1% Other

#### *Question 3.2. What are your top 3 areas for locating higher density housing? (N:156)*

- 16.0% C. South Laurel
- 16.0% F. ECR north of Holly
- 14.1% D. Western PDA
- 12.2% H. ECR south of Arroyo
- 11.5% E. Mixed-Use Neighborhood
- 10.9% G. ECR (Holly to Arroyo)
- 9.6% A. In the Downtown Core
- 9.6% B. Surrounding Downtown

## Summary of Comments Received through the Chat

Participants were encouraged to share their comments and ask questions using the chat feature. These responses are organized by topic and as a response to a specific question asked by the presenter or facilitator. This made for a very dynamic meeting and yielded valuable input for the project team.

#### **Question: When you hear the word “Density,” what do you think of?**

For many participants, the term “density” may have negative, positive, or neutral associations. The list below presents the responses received. Duplicate terms and phrases have been deleted, full responses can be found in the chat download and whiteboard. The comments were generally sorted to improve readability.

Negative terms describing density:

- Packed
- Crowded
- Cramped
- Height
- Thickness
- Too many units
- Too many people
- NIMBY
- Knee-jerk demonized
- Noise
- Loss of sunlight
- Loss of Outdoor Space
- Poor Quality Housing
- Size
- Height
- Blocky
- Ugly Exteriors
- Changing Character
- Most looks like boxes with windows cut in the side!
- Negative impact to the quaint feel
- More competition for my landlord
- Industry city
- Loss of Neighborhood
- Blocking people's views
- Loss of Privacy
- Greedy Developers
- Unfairness
- Overburdened Infrastructure
- Nobody wants tall buildings near them
- Disregard to established neighborhoods.
- Not family-friendly
- Consequence of growth
- Congestion
- Traffic
- Most seem to be for studio apartments
- Unattractive
- Impacts the price of existing homes
- Impacts supply and demand of housing

Neutral or positive terms describing density:

- Affordable
- Partnerships on how to fund the high cost of construction
- Solution to affordable housing
- Affordable two and three bedroom housing units
- Reaching climate goals
- Climate Resilient
- Environment
- Open Space
- Reaching housing goals
- Fitting more things into a smaller space
- Number of units per square feet of land
- Concentration
- Zoning
- Density
- Fairness to next generation
- High rise
- Efficient
- Multi-family housing
- Multiple units in one property
- Apartment
- Moderate heights
- Efficient use of infrastructure
- Irrelevant to appearance of the building
- Compactness
- Volume
- Reasonable sized units
- Dynamic neighborhood
- Less space wasted
- More housing choices
- Resourceful
- New Urbanism
- Something other than single-family homes
- Well-maintained
- Undoing racial segregation
- Opportunity for local businesses
- Housing for our essential workers
- Creates community
- Neighbors
- Occupants
- More welcoming community
- Forward looking
- Growth
- Inevitable
- Opportunity
- Inclusive
- Necessary
- A measure how much in a confined area
- Diversity
- Senior
- Partner with non-profit
- Walkability
- Parking
- Close Proximity

- Transit Friendly
- TOD: Transit Orientated Design
- Walk to train
- Less traffic per household
- Energetic
- Workforce
- Urban
- Younger population
- Missing Middle

**Question: What other factors should be considered as the City develops housing policy and determines where housing should be located?**

This section presents comments in the chat referred to the factors from the third polling session and other considerations.

#### Near public transit

- High density should be concentrated around transit and commercial centers
- Bring back SCOOT
- Public transit needs to spread out and be more efficient
- Concerns to minimize traffic

#### Impact on traffic

- Impact on egress
- Noise
- Increase congestion and traffic - Manage construction schedule to avoid excessive detours
- Exits from 101 were backed up during non-COVID-19 times
- Exits off freeway and roads into city can handle high volumes
- Holly freeway exit is 2-lane most of the time

#### Parking

- Ample off-street parking
- Optimize space for people, not for cars
- Incentivize homeowners to park cars in public lots

#### Variety of housing options

- Inclusive and equitable
- Diverse

#### Residents

- Families
- Offered to all age groups
- Seniors

- Local essential workers
- Creative Housing Opportunities
- Preserve older apartments and turn into affordable
- Convert unused office buildings to housing
- Rental and condos
- Connect high density housing in hills to downtown via ariel gondola
- Add higher rise units in the hills, and bring residents down in buses on bus-only lanes, aerial transport like gondolas from our hills to downtown
- Prioritize smaller development to promote diverse ownership
- Foster community within development
- New development should subsidize ADUs
- Apply zoning to allow for multi-units on existing properties
- Upgrade old properties
- High percentage of high quality BMR (below market rate) units
- Modernizing San Carlos for the needs of the next generation and our climate future

#### Housing Affordability

- Variety of options
- Provides affordable housing in balance with number of local low income jobs

- Quality housing for local essential workers
- More opportunities for ownership
- Encourage family-sized units
- Include work/live spaces
- Both rental and for sale

#### Service needs

- How will essential services be expanded?
- Impacts on existing communities, parks, and schools

#### Utilities

- Ensure utilities and roads can handle the additional capacity
- Additional public facilities for residents

#### Town events

- Additional town resources to handle larger town events
- Welcome events to build connections among groups and housing units

#### Schools

- School district losing students each year
- Able to accommodate additional students
- Schools for East of El Camino

#### Parks

- Preserve and support green/open space
- Protection of endangered species
- Preservation of heritage trees
- Maximizing natural space, using natural grass in our parks, providing access to nature
- Preserve creeks with appropriate setback—could be part of open space, with trails, etc.
- Includes usable common spaces indoor and out
- Drought resistant landscaping to protect from fire

#### Concerns

- Overcrowding in downtown area

- Impacts on surrounding properties
- Avoid luxury units

#### Decision making

- Ensure that the structures and processes in the all the commissions are aligned with addressing concerns.
- Enforce Airbnb restrictions
- Ensure feasibility of the construction
- Relocation out of Bay Area trend

#### Density

- Minimum density
- Larger lots for high density

#### Types of Uses

- Infill not destruction of open space
- Consider mitigation to large office development
- Mixed use

#### Design

- Optimize for usable common space instead of unnecessary setbacks
- Access to solar
- Shade impact from taller buildings
- electric & non-gas infrastructure in buildings
- Telecommuting trend/Needing home office space
- Design and density fit with existing housing density and design
- Feasibility and impacts on utilities
- Soundproofing units
- Construction quality and space per unit
- Preservation of the distinct "look"
- Includes usable common spaces - inside and out
- Earthquake proof

#### Preservation

- Preservation of our historical buildings and landmarks.
- Don't destroy the neighborhood feel of San Carlos
- Easier to add ADU as a rental on existing single family dwelling lots

- Incentivize ADUs for rentals and not STVR

#### NIMBY

- Address NIMBY characteristics
- Mitigate large office development
- Negative impact on established neighborhoods and current homeowners.
- Consideration of existing residents - people moved to San Carlos because of its friendly, low density family

oriented neighborhoods. We can't throw all of this away just to meet state housing needs.

- Are the goals realistic?

#### Climate Change

- Impact on climate - zero emission
- Climate friendly fuel sources
- Don't build in climate risk zones; wildfire areas, sea level rise, flood zones

#### **Question: What are your ideas for locating housing?**

Participants were asked to share their idea for possible locations to consider for housing in San Carlos.

- More development and housing throughout San Carlos
  - Increase density along all major transit corridors
- Commercial/offices areas
  - Airport – Run transit to the area
  - Above Arguello
  - Above Walgreens, Trader Joes, CVS
  - Novartis
  - OSH Property
  - PG&E Area
  - PAMF
- Old Black Mountain Property
- Taylor Way
- Delta Star
- Melendy Drive
- Heather
- San Carlos Avenue
  - More multifamily near existing development
  - Change zoning
  - From ECR to Alameda
- Alameda
  - Reduce density of 808 Alameda proposed development
- El Camino Real (ECR)
  - High density housing
  - Consider the historic buildings in the area
  - Converting light industrial properties to light industrial/residential
  - Prioritize for redevelopment
  - For less impact on single family neighborhoods
- Holly/ECR
  - Upgrade shopping centers to mixed use housing/commercial
- South ECR on the East side
- South Laurel
  - Expand downtown with housing above retail
  - High rises
- Around 280 - Crestview ramp
- Industrial Road
  - Rezone for housing
  - Add density MFM
  - Replace unused warehouses East of Industrial
  - Develop true diversity and inclusion units should be spread interspersed among SFH(single family housing) neighborhoods

- Allow for higher density without affecting existing neighborhoods and close to train
- Rezoning east of freeway for multi-unit, probably rental because of Airport noise
- Industrial office spaces east of Caltrain for high density housing
- Around Holly and Brittan in between Old County Road and Industrial Road
  - Plan mixed-use, live-work, night-life, etc.
  - Rezone high density multi-housing. Solves traffic issue with SFR (single family residential) there
- Enable large complexes that incorporate pleasant open areas and walkability
- East San Carlos
  - Consider Bay level rise
  - Needs to provide essential services (Schools, Fire Dept., etc.)
  - Live/Work development
  - Walkable to jobs and train
- East of US 101
  - Move the cement plant on Bransten east of 101
  - Move much of the light industrial space to East of 101
  - High rise

Sites that some participants did not want to be considered as locations for housing included:

- Alameda above Brittan Acres
- Laurel should feel like a small town downtown
- Surrounding downtown
- Protect Crestview Open Space

## Public Comment

Six people made public comment. The following identifies the main topic of each speaker's concerns.

- Preserve the historic and natural character of the community.
- Consider design guidelines to add to the character and remove density limits.
- Consider bonuses for the low-density projects.
- Concerned with developer circumventing the review process.
- Create affordable (for all income levels) multifamily housing using fourplexes and changing single family home zoning.

## Next Steps

The City and MIG will share workshop results with the public and incorporate input into the development of the San Carlos Housing Element. Participants were encouraged to share their responses to the survey on the website. The next workshop is scheduled for early spring.