

**KERN COUNTY PLANNING AND NATURAL RESOURCES DEPARTMENT**

**Board of Supervisors**

**STAFF REPORT**

**Date:** March 20, 2018

**FILE:** Kern County General Plan 2040  
**S.D.:** ALL

**TITLE:** Briefing Report on Kern County General Plan 2040 Workplan

**APPLICANT:** Kern County Planning and Natural Resources

**PROJECT SIZE:** 5 million acres

**LOCATION:** Countywide

**PROJECT ANALYSIS:** This matter is a briefing report on the progress of the comprehensive update of the Kern County Metropolitan Bakersfield General Plan and Kern County General Plan work plan. Kern County is the third largest County in California and the 20 largest County in the United States, consisting of 8,202 square miles divided by Valley, Mountain, and Desert regions. The County has 11 incorporated cities within its boundaries: Arvin, Bakersfield, California City, Delano, Maricopa, McFarland, Ridgecrest Shafter, Taft, Tehachapi, and Wasco; and 65 unincorporated communities (2010 US Census) with a combined population estimate of 882,176. The overall population is expected to increase to over 1.2 million by 2023 (California Department of Finance E-5 estimates.) The City of Bakersfield is now one of the “Big 11” cities in California with populations large enough to have meaningful influence in state policy making, ranked as number nine (9), with a population of 383,512.

Since 1990, Kern County has managed two (2) General Plans with the Metropolitan Bakersfield General Plan (updated 2002 for 409 square miles) and adopted separately but planned jointly with the City of Bakersfield and the Kern County General Plan (updated 2004) for the remaining unincorporated County areas. This comprehensive update will now incorporate the Metropolitan Bakersfield General Plan into one (1) Kern County General Plan 2040 with a Metropolitan Bakersfield area plan (same 409 square miles) coordinated with the City of Bakersfield.

The Kern County General Plan 2040 update is more than the legal underpinning for land use decisions; it is a vision about how a community will grow, reflecting community priorities and values while shaping the future. The General Plan is a document designed to guide the future actions of a community. It presents a vision for the future, with long-range goals and objectives for all activities that affect the local government. The General Plan 2040 is intended to review and update pertinent issues, goals, and objectives to provide for orderly and appropriate new development in Kern County for the next 20 years, while preserving a quality of life for its residents.

Furthermore, the update will result in an organization of these various elements (which are topics that California law requires be covered in a General Plan, along with optional topics unique to a region), as well as new elements in a consolidated, comprehensive document along with implementable programs, action items and user-friendly guides to allow for a workable document for Kern County departments, stakeholders, partnering agencies, and residents.

The Governor's Office of Planning and Research is the State Agency responsible for providing guidance on the General Plan law and preparation. The 2017 update to the General Plan guidelines provides a clear explanation of the process. It states:

*A local General Plan should start with a shared community vision that will help set priorities throughout the planning process, and inform decision makers about community values, creating a community vision may include the following:*

- *Expanding outreach to all members of the community including public agencies and local residents*
- *Looking back to identify past challenges and accomplishments*
- *Examining current data and emerging data trends*
- *Considering future issues, challenges and goals*

*With continued input and engagement from community members and decision makers, the processes of preparing, adopting, and implementing and maintain the general plan serves to:*

- *Provide a basis for local government decision-making, including decisions on development approvals and exactions.*
- *Provide residents with opportunities to participate in the planning and decision-making processes of their communities*
- *Inform residents, developers, decision makers and other cities and counties of the ground rules that guide development within a particular community.*

The geographical size and variety of regions are reflected in Kern County's diverse communities which, while having unique challenges, also share many needs and visions. Jobs for all levels of education, safe neighborhoods with quiet streets, sidewalks and bikeways, enhanced parks, health services and healthy food within reasonable distances along with reliable transportation options, support of businesses, educational programs, and the Department of Defense resources, as well as conservation of historical and open spaces. These shared goals are what make Kern County special.

Since the last updates (2002 and 2004) new mandates for the General Plan have been imposed, as well as new challenges. Our progress on streamlining permitting and economic development in the areas of Oil and Gas permitting, renewable energy of solar and wind and industrial/commercial development has created successful new pathways that need to be reflected in the update. While the effects of the Sustainable Groundwater Management legislation (SMGMA), ongoing drought and wildfires, and new legislation on Housing, Environmental Justice, Climate Adaptation, and Senate Bill (SB) 375 (Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act of 2008) have provided an opportunity for a more collaborative outreach and work plan for the update.

And while workshops scattered around the County have been completed on previous updates, the scale and importance of this update, which will be a guidance and vision for planning over the next 20 years, lead Staff to a different format for the initial outreach and discussion on how to proceed.

From January to June 2017, Staff conducted a series of six (6) consecutive General Plan Update public Workshops utilizing the Planning Commission each month from 7:00 to 9:00 in the evening. These workshops replaced the regularly scheduled second hearing of the Planning Commission and the agenda did not include any development projects or other matters. This format provided for evening meetings with translation capability, televised and archived on KGOV in the Board chambers. Newsletters were circulated in advance focused on the topics of the workshops. Community residents, the public, agencies, and other interested stakeholders were invited to hear Staff presentations that included a synopsis on required

elements within the General Plan and other potential content discussions that should be considered for inclusion in the update.

The workshop format was intended to generate new ideas, educate and inform on new General Plan and related laws, and present an overview of our current land use conditions and challenges. Reformatting of the General Plan from paper to a primarily online version for better access and relevance is part of the update and the workshops provided feedback on how much the public understands about the function of the General Plan in community planning and permitting. Presentations ranged from input from the Director of the Kern County Public Health Services Department on the condition of our communities health to public joint presentations by the Audubon, the Defenders of Wildlife, rhw Sierra Business Council, the Nature Conservancy, and rgw Sequoia Riverland Trust recommending policies to improve connectivity for plants and animals, corridors, migratory pathways, land protection, conservation, and restoration.

Other stakeholders, such as the agricultural community (Farm Bureau and American Farmland Trust and rancher/cattleman), cities, water interests, Building Industry Association, Home Builders Association of Kern County, Greater Bakersfield Chamber of Commerce, WSPA, renewable energy companies, California Walks and Greenfield Walking Group, Wonderful Orchards, Edwards Air Force Base, Independent Oil Producers Agency, California Independent Oil Producers Association and others from our oil sector, KEDC and environmental justice groups of Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability, Center on Race, Poverty and the Environmental, and the Community Water Center participated in the workshops and ensured a robust and inclusive public comment discussion. These discussions included one on one conversations that focused on particular communities and needs for economic development as well as physical improvements.

Staff appreciates all the time and resources these business and community groups are providing to the update and the recommendation today for the work plan reflects many hours of discussions and dialogue outside the workshops. A report on the outreach workshops from January to June 2017, has been provided to your Board as an attachment to this report and was posted on line on March 8, 2018, for review. It can be found at the following link:

<https://kernplanning.com/general-plan-update/>

### **NEXT STEPS – WORK PLAN**

Staff has considered a variety of formats and approaches that reflects the complexity of our issues, the size of the County, as well as our funding sources. While the Department will continue to seek grants to match the General Plan Surcharge funding, staffing, and efficiency must also be part of the considerations. The work plan presented today reflects those considerations while providing a new inclusive process that can be completed for presentation to your Board of the General Plan 2040 document and Environmental Impact Report, after recommendation from the Planning Commission, by the end of 2019.

Based on the public input, discussions with stakeholders, review of the new laws and timeline, Staff is proposing six (6) Focused Issue working groups that will create a collaborative process of in-depth discussion on the identified topics. Policies for other issues will not be neglected; however, based on workshops and Kern County's recognized issues, the following focused issues will provide the vision and direction for the General Plan 2040. New elements for the General Plan 2040 include: Healthy Communities, Water, and Economic Development. The Military Readiness Element is already in the plan but requires policy expansion. Housing and Environmental Justice policies will be incorporated in all the elements. Climate Adaptation is required by law to be in the Safety Element and Air Quality will be addressed in the new Healthy Communities element. The mandatory elements of Land Use, Conservation, and Open Space will tie all the policies together into the land use vision for the next 20 years. Further

changes to land use designations will be recommended for economic development goals and zoning changes for process improvement in permitting.

### **FOCUSED ISSUE WORKGROUPS**

The Focused Issue Workgroups are identified below and attached as part of this report:

- **Safety Element** – focus on wildfires, flooding, Climate Adaptation and soil stability
  - Grant from Cal OES to update Hazard Mitigation Plan
  - Collaboration with Kern OES, Fire Department, Public Works
  - Collaboration with public and Kern Fire Safe Councils
- **Economic Development Element** – focus on promotion of clusters, streamlining permitting process, transforming blight and raising the quality of communities
  - Inclusive of all stakeholders and community interests
  - Collaboration and support from CAO and KEDC
- **Healthy Communities Element** – focus on access to Health Care and Healthy Foods
  - Support from Kern County Departments: Aging and Adult Services, Public Health, Behavioral Health and Recovery Services, Human Services
  - Collaboration with Health Care providers and Institutions – Omni, Kern Medical, Adventist Health, Dignity Health, Kaiser Permanente, Clinical Sierra Vista, and others
  - Collaboration with community organizations – Greenfield Walking Group, Healthy Kern County, and others
  - Focus on mapping all health care facilities and pharmacies county wide to look at gaps and potential land use policies to streamline permitting for the inclusion of these facilities
- **Water Element** – focus on water supply, water quality and water supply insecurity
  - Collaboration with Groundwater Sustainability Authorities and adjudicated water basins county wide
  - Inclusive of all stakeholders and community interests
- **Military Readiness Element** – focus on policies and goals that implement the Joint Land Use Study for the R-2508 and on the ground installation issues
  - Grant from Office of Economic Opportunity – (OEA) Department of Defense
  - Update Joint Land Use Study for R-2508 restricted airspace

- **Priority Projects Workgroup** – focus on creating a list of top ten (10) projects in three (3) categories: Parks, Complete Streets and Safe Routes to Schools, and infrastructure solutions for flooding, water and sewer. Staff will then determine the top five (5) in each category for project level analysis in the Kern County General Plan 2040 EIR to be ready when State and Federal funding is available for grants.
  - Inclusive of all stakeholders and community interests
  - Collaboration with all county agencies
  - To be incorporated in the Implementation section of the General Plan document

**RESOURCES AND SCHEDULE**

The General Plan Surcharge was adopted by your Board in August 2004, on building permits to fund planning programs such as updating the Zoning Ordinance and this General Plan update. The six (6) workgroups represent the optimum amount of workload that can be accommodated for the schedule of completion by the end of 2019. Staff is refining a plan to ensure that all communities are included in the ongoing efforts, including discussions and that they have access to the information discussed. This plan will include a regional approach for Valley, Mountain, and Desert outreach, including online access and even potentially the use of webinars as discussion tools. Consultants will be used during the next phase which also includes preparation of background reports on all the regions and topic areas.

Staffing is covered by the General Plan Surcharge and fees and includes a team of a Division Chief, Supervising Planner, one (1) Staff planner lead, and five (5) planners for part-time inclusion. Additionally, five (5) interns are being hired to work full time on the General Plan Focus Issue workgroup implementation under the direction of the Workgroup assigned planner. The Focus Issue workgroups will begin May 2018, until October 2018, with a draft plan being formulated concurrently. The full draft General Plan 2040 as an online version and maps will begin public review at the beginning of 2019 and a full Environmental Impact Report will begin preparation. Periodic status updates to your Board will be provided as the workgroups begin their meetings and work.

Staff recommends the Board receive and file this briefing report and provide any comments or direction on the next phase of creating a vision for the next 20 years of raising quality communities in Kern County.

**CEQA ACTION:** Environmental Review: Environmental Impact Report

**DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION:** Provide Staff with direction and receive and file

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