



The City of San Diego

Staff Report

DATE ISSUED: July 11, 2024  
TO: City Council  
FROM: City Planning  
SUBJECT: Blueprint SD Initiative (General Plan Refresh), [Environmental Impact Report for Blueprint SD, University Community Plan Update and Hillcrest Focused Plan Amendment \(SCH. 2021070359\)](#)

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Council District(s): Citywide

OVERVIEW:

The General Plan Refresh provides a Citywide policy framework for future growth and development that addresses housing, climate, and equity goals. More specifically, the General Plan Refresh identifies a land use strategy and complementary policies to support greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction goals. It is a focused effort to refresh the Citywide land use strategy in the General Plan and to revise and add new policies, discussion, and figures to reflect the Climate Action Plan and SANDAG SAN DIEGO FORWARD: The Regional Plan (Regional Plan) which is prepared by the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG).

PROPOSED ACTIONS:

Approve the following resolutions for the Blueprint SD Initiative and Environmental Impact Report for Blueprint SD, University Community Plan Update, and Hillcrest Focused Plan Amendment:

- 1) RESOLUTION certifying the Program Environmental Impact Report for the Blueprint SD Initiative General Plan Amendment, the University Community Plan Update, and the Hillcrest Focus Plan Amendment to the Uptown Community Plan and adopting Findings, Statement of Overriding Considerations, and the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program for the amendment to City of San General Plan related to the Blueprint SD Initiative, University Community Plan Update, and Hillcrest Focused Plan Amendment.
- 2) RESOLUTION adopting the Blueprint SD Initiative General Plan Amendment).

DISCUSSION OF ITEM:

Why is a General Plan Refresh (Blueprint San Diego) needed?

To achieve greater consistency with the Climate Action Plan, the General Plan Refresh will encourage more homes and jobs in areas that provide the greatest likelihood of transit usage and improve opportunities to walk/roll, bike, and take transit for daily needs. The General Plan Refresh identifies additional opportunities for homes to be located to help address the City's housing crisis and provide existing and future generations with the opportunity to live in San Diego, near where they work. This General Plan Refresh, along with the City's certified Housing Element, which is part of the General Plan, will guide future community plan updates, amendments, and other planning efforts to make progress toward the City's housing, climate, and equity goals.

#### What was the process used to prepare draft General Plan Refresh?

The General Plan Refresh was developed through online engagement, question and answer sessions, in-person office hours at libraries across the City, community meetings and presentations, agency briefings and presentations and written/online comments submitted by the public, which began in 2021. The Discussion Draft of the Draft General Plan Refresh was released for feedback on March 17, 2023 for a period of 15 weeks between March 17 and June 30, 2023. The second draft of the General Plan Refresh was updated based on feedback received from the Discussion Draft. The second Draft General Plan Refresh was released for a six-week public comment period between March 14, 2024, and April 29, 2024. A summary of the comments received is attached.

#### What key policy concepts are introduced in the General Plan Refresh to better align with the City's climate, housing and equity goals?

Four key concepts called Sustainable Steps Forward have been developed to foster the development of village areas in a way that aligns with the City's climate, housing, and equity goals. These steps outline potential actions aimed at enhancing transit efficiency, expanding housing and mobility choices, and advancing climate goals. The General Plan Refresh uses these concepts to guide and inform new and revised policies.

The Sustainable Steps Forward are as follows:

1. *Provide convenient and affordable transportation options:* Increase the affordability and convenience of climate-friendly transportation options, such as walking/rolling, biking, and public transit.
2. *Get to and from work in a climate-friendly way:* Provide more options to get to work and reduce the need for additional car travel.
3. *Plan for more homes and jobs near transit:* Plan for more homes and jobs near transit to lower emissions.
4. *Create complete neighborhoods:* Provide options for services and amenities, such as shopping and grocery stores, closer to homes so that most daily needs can be met through a short walk, bike, or transit ride.

#### How Does Blueprint SD Affirmatively Further Fair Housing?

Affirmatively furthering fair housing involves taking meaningful actions that, taken together, address significant disparities in housing needs and in access to opportunity. Promoting fair housing is woven into and is a substantive part of land use planning and zoning, including the Regional Housing Needs Assessment process, preparation and adoption of General Plan Housing Element and the Housing Element

implementation. As a part of the General Plan, the Blueprint SD Initiative and the Housing Element must be internally consistent, meaning the climate goals outlined in Blueprint SD must be achieved within the context of Housing Element goals for affirmatively furthering fair housing. Climate goals are generally met by providing opportunities for new homes and jobs in areas with access to transit; however, furthering fair housing requires planning for homes in areas with high paying jobs, high performing schools, and fewer environmental impediments. These areas however do not always have access to quality transit. As the City implements the Blueprint SD Initiative, it will continue to ensure both goals are being met to meet the City Climate goals and affirmatively further fair housing.

The General Plan Land Use Element includes updated goals, strengthened and new policies, and new discussion to address fair housing, consistent with the Housing Element as follows:

- Balanced Communities Goal: ensure diverse and balanced neighborhoods and communities with housing available for households of all income levels and affirmatively further fair housing.
- Strengthened discussion in Balanced Communities to describe equitable development and fair housing, including discussion on a range of City led initiatives and programs in place to address fair housing across the city.
- New and strengthened policies:
  - Affirmatively further fair housing choice, promote equal housing opportunity, and promote the development of balanced and equitable communities that consider community-wide involvement, participation, and needs.
  - Apply land use designations at the parcel level to guide sustainable and equitable development within a community.
    - Include a variety of residential densities to increase the amount of housing types and sizes and provide opportunities for more affordable homes in all communities and affirmatively further fair housing.
  - Continue to promote job opportunities accessible to community members in low-income neighborhoods. Continue to promote job opportunities accessible to community members in low-income neighborhoods.
  - Prioritize Community Plan Updates in higher resource areas to promote affordable housing in those areas and affirmatively further fair housing.

#### What are the proposed policy changes to the General Plan?

The General Plan Refresh incorporates policies, discussion and figures are proposed as part of the General Plan Refresh to better align with the City's climate, housing and equity goals and complement the revised City of Villages Propensity Map now known as the Village Climate Goal Propensity Map. A summary of proposed changes for each element is included as an attachment.

#### How is the General Plan Refresh (Blueprint San Diego Initiative) consistent with the City of Villages Strategy?

The General Plan Refresh updates the Village Propensity Map with the Village Climate Goal Propensity Map and identifies village areas that can support sustainable growth. The Village Climate Goal Propensity Map reflects the 2050 Regional Transportation Network and recent land use patterns. The Village Climate Goal Propensity Map identifies areas with a higher likelihood for walking/rolling, biking, and transit usage compared to driving. Factors considered for determining greatest likelihood for walking/rolling, biking and transit usage include access to homes, jobs, mixed-use destinations, high-frequency transit services, competitive transit access to job centers, and connections between transit and destinations. This approach identifies areas with the greatest potential for new homes and jobs that align with the City's climate goals and contribute to increasing transit, bicycle and walk/rolling. The Village Climate Goal Propensity Map does not mandate specific land use decisions across the City. Instead, it serves as a guide for land use decisions

during future community plan updates. Future public input will continue to be critical as part of the community plan update process.

What is the relationship to the Draft Environmental Justice Element and the General Plan Refresh?

References to Environmental Justice have been removed in the Land Use Element. It will be replaced by the new Environmental Justice Element, which was adopted unanimously (7-0-0) by City Council on July 1, 2024. The amendments associated with the General Plan Refresh are consistent with the draft Environmental Justice Element.

How will Blueprint San Diego help improve the Community Plan Update process?

The General Plan Refresh introduces a strategic and streamlined approach to guide comprehensive Community Plan Updates. Utilizing the enhanced growth framework provided by the General Plan Refresh, community plan updates, specific plans and focused plan amendments will align with the Village Climate Goal Propensity Map to refine how growth is delivered at a community level. This approach provides an opportunity for the City to conduct additional community plan updates and enables specific discussions with community members who may not be able to stay engaged for the lengthy period of time required by previous community plan updates. The City values the important role community plans play toward addressing the unique needs of each community. Informed by community input, these changes ensure that as many people as possible are able to participate in the community plan update process.

It is anticipated that the environmental analysis for future community plan updates will tier off the PEIR and address any additional environmental considerations at a community level. Environmental analysis for future community plan updates will incorporate applicable mitigation and address potentially significant impacts to the environment. Through this approach, the City Planning Department anticipates that it can reduce the time it takes to complete Community Plan Updates from over 5 years to less than 3 years, while ensuring continued meaningful community engagement.

What is the relationship to the Community Plan Updates that are in progress?

The University Community Plan update and the Hillcrest Focused Plan Amendment as well as community plan updates for Clairemont, College Area, and Mid-City Communities are and would be consistent with the framework identified in the General Plan Refresh including the Village Climate Goal Propensity Map. The General Plan Refresh PEIR also includes environmental analysis for the University Community Plan Update and the Hillcrest Focused Plan Amendment. Future community plan updates, including ones currently underway, are anticipated to tier from the General Plan Refresh PEIR for their environmental analyses. The Village Climate Goal Propensity Map will serve as a guide for identifying opportunities for future homes and jobs as part of future community plan updates, specific plans and plan amendments, with the potential for higher densities and intensities being assigned to areas with a higher village propensity consistent with helping to meet the Climate Action Plan goals. The opportunities for future homes and jobs are anticipated less in areas with a lower village propensity.

What does the Environmental Impact Report cover that is included for certification?

Along with this item, staff recommends that the City Council certify the Program Environmental Impact Report for the Blueprint SD Initiative, University Community Plan Update and Hillcrest Focused Plan Amendment and adopt the Findings, Statement of Overriding Considerations, and the Mitigation, Monitoring and Reporting Program. The University Community Plan Update within the University Community Planning boundary proposes land uses that enhance housing opportunities, walkable streets, mixed-use buildings, and a diverse array of retail, employment, and entertainment options. The proposed

update generally aligns with adopted community plan land uses while seeking to increase allowable density and intensity to provide new homes and jobs, and is consistent with the framework set forth in Blueprint SD. The Hillcrest Focused Plan Amendment within the Uptown Community Planning boundary proposes amendments to land uses that enhance housing opportunities, further enriching the vibrancy of the Hillcrest neighborhood, which includes lively, walkable streets, mixed-use buildings, and a diverse array of retail, office, and entertainment options, and is consistent with the framework set forth in Blueprint SD. Certification of the Environmental Impact Report would also cover the University Community Plan Update and Hillcrest Focused Plan Amendment, which are anticipated to be heard separately by the City Council on July 30, 2024. This Environmental Impact Report is also anticipated to help streamline the environmental review of future community plan updates, allowing for the more efficient update of the City's community plans, allowing for more meaningful community engagement to shape the future of each of the City's communities.

#### What changes have been made to Blueprint SD after the Land Use and Housing Committee?

On June 13, 2024, the Land Use & Housing Committee heard the Blueprint SD Initiative. Following the Committee meeting, additional references were added within the Mobility Element to include references to the North County Transit District regarding coordination with other transit and regional agencies. Minor text amendments were also made to the Urban Design Element for clarification purposes.

The following policies were added to the Land Use and Community Planning Element to strengthen consistency with Climate Action Plan Goals:

- Policy LU-A.2: Determine the appropriate mix of land uses and densities/intensities to achieve the citywide climate goals for land use and mobility established by the Climate Action Plan during the community plan update process.
- Policy LU-H.2: Explore acquisition of land to affirmatively further fair housing to meet the city's housing goals.

#### CONCLUSION

The Blueprint SD Initiative provides a comprehensive amendment to the General Plan to better align the City of Villages Strategy to reflect the updated goals, policies and plans for housing, mobility and transit, environmental protection, climate change adaptation and sustainable growth. The Blueprint SD Initiative amends the General Plan to reflect an updated Citywide Village Climate Goal Propensity Map and policy framework to promote reductions in per capita greenhouse gas emissions and vehicle miles traveled as part of community plan updates and amendments. The comprehensive amendment to the General Plan identifies complementary land use, transportation and related policies to support future development consistent the revised Village Climate Goal Propensity Map. The General Plan amendments are consistent and align with the climate goals outlined in the Climate Action Plan and Climate Resilient SD Plan.

#### City of San Diego Strategic Plan:

The General Plan Refresh (Blueprint SD Initiative) aligns with all Strategic Plan Priority Areas:

- Create Homes for All of Us by focusing opportunities for housing within mixed-use and residential areas;
- Project & Enrich Every Neighborhood through Identifying opportunities for public spaces and pocket parks, trails, and joint use facilities and providing guidance for the future identification and preservation of historical resources and districts that embody architectural and cultural history;

- Advance Mobility & Infrastructure by promoting opportunities for mobility infrastructure that improve walking, rolling, biking and transit connections;
- Champion Sustainability by promoting opportunities for urban greening and street trees to address stormwater runoff and climate change and protect canyons, open space and sensitive habitat; and
- Foster Regional Prosperity by promoting employment uses as economic drivers connected to regional transit.

Fiscal Considerations:

There are no expenditures being authorized with this action.

Charter Section 225 Disclosure of Business Interests:

N/A. There is no contract associated with this action.

Environmental Impact:

[A Citywide Draft Program Environmental Impact Report \(PEIR\) has been prepared \(SCH No. 2021070359\)](#) to evaluate the environmental impacts of areas where significant land use changes and implementation of the General Plan policies. The analysis identifies potential feasible mitigation measures to reduce environmental impacts across the City in a manner that best achieves the City's climate goals outlined in the Climate Action Plan. The University Community Plan Update and Hillcrest Focused Plan Amendment are also analyzed within this PEIR, which will be considered separately from the adoption of Blueprint SD Initiative. The public comment period for the Draft PEIR closed on April 29, 2024, and a Final EIR has been prepared, including responses to comments received during the public comment period.

Climate Action Plan Implementation:

The [Climate Action Plan](#) sets a goal to achieve net zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2035. To support this goal, the Climate Action Plan identifies various strategies to reduce GHG emissions. The largest contributing source of GHG emissions is the on-road transportation network – meaning cars traveling in the city. These emissions generate over half (55 percent) of total Citywide emissions. The Climate Action Plan includes various actions to reduce transportation-related emissions, including locating new development in areas near transit, with a focus on providing walking/rolling and biking infrastructure and additional transit investments to serve these areas.

Blueprint SD Initiative amends the General Plan to reflect an updated Citywide Village Climate Goal Propensity Map and policy framework, promoting reductions in per capita greenhouse gas emissions and vehicle miles traveled. This initiative aligns with the Climate Action Plan (CAP) and Climate Resilient SD Plan, ensuring sustainable development through transit-oriented principles and mixed-use neighborhoods. By integrating complementary land use and transportation policies, Blueprint SD fosters resilient communities while advancing environmental objectives, ultimately enhancing quality of life for residents in alignment with the city's climate goals.

Equal Opportunity Contracting Information (if applicable):

N/A

Previous Council and/or Committee Actions:

The Land Use & Housing Committee heard the item on June 13, 2024, and voted unanimously (4-0-0) to recommend approval. The motion was made by Vice Chair LaCava and seconded by Vice Chair Whitburn.

Planning Commission Action:

Planning Commission heard the item on May 30, 2024 and voted unanimously (4-0-0) to recommend approval. Per Reso-5292, the motion was made by Commissioner Boomhower and seconded by Commissioner Marlborough.

Key Stakeholders and Community Outreach Efforts:

The draft General Plan Refresh was developed through online engagement, question and answer sessions, in-person office hours at libraries across the City, community meetings and presentations, agency briefings and presentations, and written/online comments submitted by the public. A dedicated webpage was launched as the home page for ongoing engagement and information. Staff additionally obtained input from the SR-15 Transportation, Equity, and Affordable Housing Task Force, Community Planners Committee, and community planning groups and community organizations. Staff also obtained input from other public agencies, including the San Diego Association of Governments, San Diego Metropolitan Transit System (MTS), and San Diego Unified School District and incorporated feedback from the Planning Commission workshops held on September 22, 2022, and June 29, 2023.

Mobility Board Recommendation:

On May 1, 2024, the Mobility Board voted (7-0-0) to recommend the approval of the Draft Blueprint SD Initiative General Plan Amendment.

Community Planners Committee Recommendation:

On May 28, 2024, the Community Planners Committee voted (17-6-3) to provide recommendations to the Blueprint SD Initiative. The stated purpose of the proposed recommendations is to make City Council aware of Blueprint SD deficiencies and to encourage the City to address the issues raised by the Community Planners Committee on the Draft Blueprint SD Initiative General Plan Amendment. A summary of the Community Planners Committee's recommendations and City Planning Department staff's responses to those recommendations are both attached.

Park & Recreation Board Recommendation:

N/A

Historical Resources Board Recommendation:

N/A

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