

MEMO: Strategy to Implement the General Plan



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Honorable Mayor and City Council
City Hall, Pasadena

RE: Item #8 of Council Agenda for 2/29/16, Recommended
Strategy to Implement the General Plan

Please direct staff to **front-load** public input and decision-making in a public RFI / RFQ / RFP process and delay setting a strategy and budget until the Council and the public has weighed several good options on their merits and costs, and made a public decision.

The strategy, budget, and timeline recommend by staff does not provide a clear sense of what the *outcome* will be, and it assumes that public input can be minimally gathered towards the middle or *end* of the process.

I disagree that the public input gathered during the General Plan process will be sufficient or more than minimally relevant to the Specific Plans and Design Guidelines. The General Plan set the *broad, overarching* framework to establish guiding principles, land uses, densities, etc. Now, in implementing that overarching framework, we get down to the *fine details* of building heights, setbacks, etc. and the unique characteristics of unique neighborhoods. Are we to imagine that the public will not be interested in those fine details and that "focused" community outreach late in the process will yield a chorus of approval at the big reveal?

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I share the Council and Staff's desire to expedite the process. We do not have five or seven years to complete the process, or even three, as we are in the middle of a building boom. However, I think we have seen that public input is needed *early* in the process when critical key decisions lay the basis for years of work. There have been several instances in which key decisions were made behind closed doors and when the public got involved after "all the details have already been worked out," to our dismay. Those situations tend to explode into political controversy and result in *more* delay in the long run.

It's possible that the strategy and budget on the table tonight is a is the best strategy and budget, but how do we know what the results will be? The results will be determined in large part by the approach & techniques of the consultants who will complete the work. In addition, the cost of the work will also depend on the consultants who are selected. It appears that Council is being asked to approve the strategy and cost prior to the selection of the consulting firm, without having any clear idea of the approaches and techniques that will be used, or the results that can be expected.

It also seems to me that the proposed strategy of creating "zoning districts" and "consolidating" existing Design Guidelines to apply citywide:

- Indicates that the approach & techniques that will be utilized by the consultants have already been pre-determined in a non-public decision by staff. OR,
- Is an *arbitrary* strategy that may influence the results in unexpected ways to produce a less-than-satisfactory result.

It is true that the General Plan process yielded a public consensus that we will use a "Form-Based Code" approach & techniques to implement the Specific Plans. But my understanding is that "Form-Based Code" is a new-ish, still-experimental approach, and practitioners are still innovating as they go along, rather than following established conventions; therefore, different practitioners

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can yield different results with varying success. In addition, my understanding is that some established practitioners of Euclidian (outdated) code have borrowed some styles and techniques from form-based code to "dress up" their work, but ultimately those pretenders are still producing a fundamentally outdated Euclidian result. Which, exactly, of these types of practitioners are we going to end up with? According to the current strategy, the Council and the public will find out after staff has made the decision in private.

In addition, we have not had a public discussion of exactly *which areas* of the city may be appropriate candidates for a form-based code, and which areas may be less suitable for form-based code. Nor have we had a public discussion of *to what degree* should the code specify the form. Form-Based Code can be either general or specific. If it is general, it will establish building typologies and general form ("a 'courtyard' form 'here' and a 'tower' form 'there'"). If it is specific, then it may go far beyond building typology to specify a menu of characteristic building features that architects may choose from ("buildings in this district shall be of the 'x' style, which is characterized by "p", "d", or "q"-style windows, moldings and flourishes of "y" or "z" type." Etc, etc etc.). If the public decides they prefer a very specific form of codes in certain areas, then it will be necessary to make sure the consultant has the appropriate experience in getting those very specific details *right*.

Therefore, since we have not already made a decision about the desirable results or the exact approaches and techniques that will be used, we should establish the overall strategy after we have made a *public choice between several options*, so that we have a clear idea of the results that we can expect, based on the approaches and techniques that the chosen consultants will use.

I suggest, therefore, that the Council direct staff to establish the following procedure for implementing the General Plan:

1. Issue a **REQUEST FOR INFORMATION**. A public notice that we are seeking to implement the General Plan and a request to qualified professionals to suggest the criteria upon which a

"There are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say, we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns--the ones we don't know we don't know....and it is the latter category that tend to be the difficult ones.

D Rumsfeld

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decision should be made and the considerations that need to be taken.

Those criteria and considerations should then shape a

2. **REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS**. A public invitation for professionals to submit their qualifications, including examples of past work and the long-term results of their plans in practice. Notice that only a limited number of qualified applicants will be invited to submit actual proposals at the final stage.

3. **Public review and input**. Pasadena citizens should participate in making a choice, and Council should narrow down the applications to 3-5 firms that yield a variety of acceptable choices.

4. **REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS**. The 3-5 selected firms should be invited to submit actual proposals that specify the approaches and techniques, the anticipated results (particular to Pasadena), the costs, and *the strategy to implement the General Plan*.

5. **Public review and input**. Pasadena citizens should again participate in making a choice, and Council should vote to choose the firm that submits the best proposal.

6. Implementation of the Plan with public "spot checks" to keep citizens abreast of progress and ensure that unique neighborhood characteristics are being accurately respected.

Sincerely yours,

Jonathan Edwards