

Shape Our Fremont

Where Fremont residents can learn about shaping proposed housing developments...

Sticking to the General Plan?

The City uses "conforming to the General Plan" as the reasoning behind many of its decisions. But is the City really following the General Plan as a whole, or does it pick and choose parts that help justify its position? A General Plan is a roadmap for future growth and development - a framework for policies. The General Plan of December 2011 is comprised of twelve Elements or chapters. Here are ways in which we feel the City is veering off the path that each Element promotes.

1. Sustainability Element

This important Element "summarizes the City's vision for a more environmentally sustainable future" and "serves as a kind of executive summary of the 'sustainable urbanism' embodied in the rest of the document."

Adding dense housing all over Fremont increases traffic. It adds commuters, adds parents who must drive their children to distant schools because of overcrowding. Every minute spent sitting in congested traffic adds to our environmental footprint.

2. Land Use and Open Space Elements

The General Plan maps out Land Use Designations for each of the areas in Fremont. The most dense designation is the Urban Residential in a Transit-Oriented Development Overlay District (TOD). However, if a parcel had been designated as a Planned District prior to December 31, 2012, this designation does not apply. The proposed Walnut Residences apartment project is being processed by the City as an Urban TOD development even though it is currently zoned as a medium density Planned District P-2004-267.

Preserving Open Space by restricting developments to "infill" sites is a good goal. But what is an "infill" site? Several large parcels with old non-tract houses on them have been declared "infill" sites even though the houses are not vacant nor run down.

3. Circulation (Mobility) Element

Traffic is bad all over town. A new housing development won't be denied for traffic reasons unless the traffic generated from that one project will worsen it substantially. The cumulative effect of all recent and proposed new housing is not evaluated.

Traffic Impact fees are collected but they are not used until after the foreseen problems arise.

4. Community Character Element

"Community Character is about design, aesthetics and place-making." This Element has been the most neglected Element in reviewing development applications. Here are just two examples:

The Historic Preservation and Cultural Resources Goal promotes "Conservation and enhancement of Fremont's historic sites, buildings, structures, objects, and landscapes into the 21st Century and beyond." Ten old homes including Pop Gould and Millie Logan Gould's home on Peralta Blvd. are proposed to be demolished because an evaluator from outside Fremont couldn't discover historic references to the past owners.

This Element includes a Place-Type Design Manual which "... to guide and evaluate urban development in terms of form, scale and function in the built environment." A Landscape Place Type is to have primarily low rise buildings, wide setbacks and abundant trees and landscaping. The Mission-Stevenson and Granite Ridge projects are on streets with a Landscape Place Type. They were both approved despite one having three-story buildings lining the street only five feet from the sidewalk and the other having a four-story apartment house right on Paseo Padre near Quarry Lakes.

5. 2015-2023 Housing Element

The Housing Element assigns housing quotas for different levels of affordability. For 2015-2023, the Very Low and Low Income quota is 2,640, the Moderate Income is quota 978, and the Above-Moderate Income quota is 1,837.

Already as of April 2016, the Above-Moderate Income 8-year quota has more than been filled. We are marching ahead on the Very Low and Low Income housing. Extremely little Moderate Income housing has been approved or is even proposed.

6. Economic Development Element

The City has a "retail pruning" policy for underutilized commercial centers and allowed The Connolly Center in Irvington to be redesignated as Residential. As a result, eleven viable businesses will be pruned.

7. Conservation Element

This Element "presents measures to preserve and enhance Fremont's natural resources". Mature old-growth trees have been allowed to be cut down and merely replaced with new trees that are more conveniently positioned on the developments.

8. Parks and Recreation Element

The City sold about a third of the 19.8 acres of Palm Avenue Park land to SummerHill Homes for a single-family development.

9. Public Facilities Element

The City is moving ahead with a new Civic Center, but has postponed the needed parking structure indefinitely.

10. Safety and Noise Elements

The General Plan's Acceptable Exterior Noise Level Standards set the maximum instantaneous noise level in bedrooms at night at 50 decibels. The Peralta Crossings development was approved despite the train horn noise at the crossings being four times greater than the builder could mitigate.

11. Community Plans Element

Guidelines for the Town Centers of Niles, Irvington, Mission San Jose, and Centerville are under this Element. The architecture in Niles Gateway starkly contrasts to the rest of the Town Center.

12. Implementation Element

Amending the General Plan is part of this Element. Developers can request a General Plan Land Use Amendment (GPA) to change the type and density of a parcel. Six out of the most recent twenty-eight approved housing developments have involved a GPA and not one amendment was rejected.

Read the General Plan yourself at <http://www.fremont.gov/398/General-Plan>