



**Contra
Costa
County**

To: Board of Supervisors

From: John Kopchik, Director, Conservation & Development Department

Date: December 8, 2020

Subject: Saranap Area General Plan Amendment, County File #GP19-0004

RECOMMENDATION(S):

1. OPEN the public hearing on the proposed Saranap Area General Plan Amendment (GPA), RECEIVE testimony, and CLOSE the public hearing.
2. DETERMINE that adoption of the proposed GPA is exempt from the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under CEQA Guidelines Section 15061(b)(3).
3. ADOPT Resolution No. 2020/318, amending the Land Use Element of the 2005-2020 Contra Costa County General Plan to include new text and graphics related to future development and infrastructure improvements in the unincorporated Saranap area (County File No. GP19-0004).
4. DIRECT the Department of Conservation and Development (DCD) to file a CEQA Notice of Exemption with the County Clerk.

FISCAL IMPACT:

No impact to the General Fund. This GPA was funded by a \$50,000 deposit received from the applicant for the Saranap Village project, with the remaining cost covered by the DCD Land Development Fund.

☒ APPROVE

☐ OTHER

☒ RECOMMENDATION OF CNTY

☐ RECOMMENDATION OF BOARD

ADMINISTRATOR

COMMITTEE

Action of Board On: **12/08/2020** ☒ APPROVED AS RECOMMENDED ☐ OTHER

Clerks Notes:

VOTE OF SUPERVISORS

AYE: John Gioia, District I Supervisor

Candace Andersen, District II
Supervisor

Diane Burgis, District III Supervisor

Karen Mitchoff, District IV
Supervisor

Federal D. Glover, District V
Supervisor

I hereby certify that this is a true and correct copy of an action taken and entered on the minutes of the Board of Supervisors on the date shown.

ATTESTED: December 8, 2020

David Twa, County Administrator and Clerk of the Board of Supervisors

By: June McHuen, Deputy

Contact: Daniel Barrios (925)
877-8199

cc:

BACKGROUND:

PROJECT SUMMARY

This is a hearing to consider a County-initiated GPA affecting the Land Use Element of the 2005-2020 Contra Costa County General Plan. The proposed Saranap Area GPA would add a new vision statement, new policies, a new implementation measure, and a new map, all relating to development and infrastructure improvements in the unincorporated community of Saranap.

BACKGROUND

As the nature and pace of urban development throughout Contra Costa County has continued to change through the years, the Saranap community has managed to maintain a small-town culture. The desire to maintain this culture was put to the test in 2013 with the proposed Saranap Village Mixed Used project. The initial project design consisted of 235 multi-family residential units, 30,000 square feet of street-level retail and restaurant space, and an off-street parking structure, all located within four buildings ranging up to approximately 78 feet in height at the tallest point. The type of scale of the Saranap Village proposal was substantially different from anything in the area and had the potential to significantly alter the community's character. As a result, Saranap residents took a vested interest and strongly voiced their sentiments over the proposal. The merits and impacts of the project were debated over a period of approximately four years, which caused a divide within the community. The opposing sides could broadly be characterized as those who felt Saranap Village would benefit the community by revitalizing a neglected stretch of Boulevard Way, and those concerned that the scale of the project was inconsistent with, and detrimental to, the community as a whole. A belief held by many was that approval of Saranap Village would set a precedent for redevelopment of Boulevard Way, and that development of a series of similar projects would forever negatively transform the community. Ultimately a scaled-down version of Saranap Village was approved by the Board of Supervisors in August of 2017. In the wake of the planning process for Saranap Village and in response to the resulting tension, Saranap community members expressed their desire for the County to engage in further discussions regarding future development in the area.

In response to the community's concerns, the County initiated a zoning/planning study of the Saranap area. The primary goals of the study were to: 1) define a vision for the future of Saranap; 2) determine appropriate levels of future development along Boulevard Way; and 3) provide assurances to residents regarding the design, scale, and impacts of future projects. In conjunction with Supervisor Andersen's office, DCD staff organized five outreach meetings that resulted in detailed discussions with residents and property owners about their expectations for the future of Saranap. A survey and online comment submittal process were also made available to residents and property owners throughout the outreach phase of the study and over 200 responses were received. Based on the community discussions and collected data, staff determined that adoption of a GPA

expanding the policy guidance for Saranap was the appropriate mechanism for achieving the community's land use goals.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Environs/Site Description: Saranap is an unincorporated community in Central Contra Costa County occupying approximately 1.1 square miles. The community is generally identified as that geographic area bounded by Highway 24 and Interstate 680 to the north, the Lafayette city limits to the west, and the Walnut Creek city limits to the east and south.

Saranap primarily consists of residential development, the vast majority being single-family homes. However, several multi-family developments of varying density can be found along Boulevard Way, Saranap Avenue, Flora Avenue, and Olympic Boulevard. Some neighborhood-scale commercial uses are located along Boulevard Way. Much of Saranap consists of narrow streets without sidewalks or streetlights, giving it a more rural feel than some other nearby communities.

Project Description: The proposed project includes the following changes to the Land Use Element of the County General Plan:

- A text amendment adding a formal vision statement for the Saranap area;
- A text amendment adding four new community-specific policies for the Saranap area as a whole and five new policies related to a newly designated subarea identified as the Boulevard Way Mixed-Use Corridor;
- A text amendment adding a new implementation measure; and,
- A new map identifying the Saranap area and the Boulevard Way Mixed-Use Corridor.

General Plan: Properties within the subject area are designated Commercial (CO), Multi-Family Residential – Low Density (ML), Multi-Family Residential – Medium Density (MM), Multi-Family Residential – High Density (MH), Single-Family Residential – Medium Density (SM), Single-Family Residential – High Density (SH), and Mixed Use (M-15).

Zoning: Properties within the subject area are zoned Retail Business (R-B), General Commercial (C), Multi-Family Residential (M-29), Two-Family Residential (D-1), Single-Family Residential (R-10), and Planned Unit District (P-1).

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The proposed GPA involves the County General Plan Land Use Element. GPAs qualify as projects under CEQA and are therefore subject to environmental review. Staff has determined that adoption of the proposed GPA will not result in significant impacts on the environment for the following reasons:

- The new vision statement and policies are intended to provide context and guidance

for future development to protect and enhance the unique character of the Saranap community. No new entitlements or additional development rights would be conferred upon any properties.

- None of the changes to the General Plan would affect existing or planned densities, alter existing development patterns, increase emissions, increase traffic, allow use or transport of hazardous materials, alter drainage patterns, increase noise, allow development in sensitive natural areas, or allow development to occur in areas where it is currently prohibited by the General Plan.
- Specific project types mentioned in the GPA, such as mixed-use projects and public roadway improvements, would be discretionary projects subject to their own CEQA review, allowing any project-specific environmental impacts to be studied at the time each project was undertaken.

Based on the foregoing, pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15061(b)(3), adoption of the proposed GPA is exempt from CEQA because it can be seen with certainty that it would not have a significant effect on the environment.

COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION HEARING

At the August 12, 2020, County Planning Commission hearing, staff presented this proposed GPA for the Commission's consideration. Public testimony was taken, and the Commission then adopted a recommendation that the Board adopt the proposed GPA.

STAFF ANALYSIS

The proposed GPA is the result of direct discussion and collaboration with the Saranap community. The text portion of the proposed GPA is contained in Attachment A. All new text would be inserted under the “Policies for the Saranap Area” subheading in Section 3.8 of the Land Use Element. The following explains each component of the GPA, as well as the GPA’s relationship to the Envision Contra Costa 2040 process.

Proposed Saranap Area Vision Statement

The proposed vision statement would precede the Saranap area policies. The vision statement provides context and a brief history of Saranap, and articulates the community’s values and goals.

Proposed New Policies 3-115 through 3-123

The proposed policies for Saranap are intended to provide guidance for future development and infrastructure improvements. These policies do not modify the existing General Plan land use designations.

3-115: Community members expressed concern that future mixed-use or multi-family development along Boulevard Way might encroach or “spill out” into Saranap’s

single-family neighborhoods. This policy ensures that the single-family residential portions of Saranap are maintained as such, except for the five properties fronting the east side of Palana Court designated as SH. These properties are oriented more toward the commercial portion of Boulevard Way than toward a single-family neighborhood and naturally could be included in a project along the Boulevard Way Mixed-Use Corridor.

3-116: Community members expressed a desire for improved connectivity. Evaluating pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, such as on-road bike lanes, trails, and signage, would help identify existing facilities and opportunities for expansion and improvement. Extending such infrastructure the full length of Boulevard Way would better connect Saranap to downtown Walnut Creek via Mt. Diablo Boulevard to the northeast and to the Tice Valley/Rossmoor area to the south. Improving access to these areas with bicycle facilities provides feasible opportunities for Saranap residents to travel to local amenities and destinations without using their car. Enhancing bicycle facilities and promoting their utilization would serve to create a safer and healthier environment for Saranap residents.

3-117: Community members have lamented the lack of parks in Saranap. Establishing a neighborhood park or other community space would help create a safer and healthier environment for Saranap residents. Amenities such as playground equipment, lawn areas, a dog park, exercise equipment, etc. would contribute to a place that encourages Saranap residents to meet their neighbors and build community, as well as provide opportunities for exercise and engagement in outdoor activities.

3-118: While the Open Space Element of the General Plan (Chapter 9) contains policies for the protection of scenic vistas, this policy emphasizes the community's desire to preserve the Saranap area's views of Mt. Diablo without depriving property owners of their rights to develop in accordance with existing land use regulations.

3-119 through 3-122: These four policies guide development in the Boulevard Way Mixed-Use Corridor, a roughly triangular area bounded by Boulevard Way, Saranap Avenue, and Highway 24 (see Attachment B). The newly established Mixed-Use Corridor would extend from the site of Saranap Village east approximately 1,000 feet to the border with the City of Walnut Creek. The Corridor would not be redesignated on the Land Use Element Map for mixed uses as part of this GPA. The name describes the existing condition (a mix of commercial, office, and residential uses) and indicates the intention for future development to be primarily mixed-use.

Policies 3-119 through 3-122 establish parameters for future development with the intention of revitalizing the Mixed-Use Corridor without compromising community values. Staff notes that policies 3-120 and 3-121 contemplate development at an intensity which exceeds current General Plan and zoning standards for the area. The purpose of these policies is to limit the scale and impact of future proposals for GPAs and rezonings, not to grant additional development rights under the current land use and zoning designations. By establishing a shared understanding and expectation of the scale of future development, the community hopes to avoid repeating the division and tension that

resulted from the Saranap Village planning process.

3-123: The right-of-way improvements specified by this policy mimic those approved with Saranap Village and would result in a consistent and cohesive streetscape through the Mixed-Use Corridor, terminating at the border with Walnut Creek. Implementation of these improvements would serve multiple purposes. They would increase safety by slowing traffic through lane reductions and traffic-calming devices, and by adding bike lanes for cyclist safety. They would also beautify the area with art, landscaping, and streetscaping, and increase walkability with wider sidewalks. Overall, this would result in a far more pleasant experience for pedestrians and cyclists and provide additional consumer interaction for local businesses along the Corridor.

Proposed Implementation Measure 3-ap

This proposed implementation measure calls for adoption of an ordinance or other appropriate instrument to guide development in a manner consistent with the vision expressed by the Saranap community. This instrument would include added specificity and direction to assist in effectively implementing the new Saranap area policies.

Proposed New Figure 3-4

Attachment B is a proposed new map, Figure 3-4, which delineates Saranap and the Boulevard Way Mixed-Use Corridor. The purpose of this map is to illustrate the areas where the general Saranap policies and policies specific to the Boulevard Way Mixed-Use Corridor are applicable.

Relationship to Envision Contra Costa 2040

This planning process for the Saranap area began prior to the County commencing work on *Envision Contra Costa 2040*, the program to update the General Plan, Zoning Code, and Climate Action Plan. Adoption of the proposed GPA is not intended as a substitute for Envision 2040 work related to Saranap. An Envision 2040 community meeting for Saranap was held on July 11, 2019. Input from that meeting and any future community meetings will be integrated with the policies included in this GPA to form the policy guidance section of the Saranap/Parkmead Community Profile in the updated County General Plan.

CONCLUSION

Turmoil surrounding the Saranap Village project provided the impetus for the proposed Saranap Area General Plan Amendment. The proposed vision statement and policies were drafted with substantial community involvement and reflect Saranap residents' values and desires. Adoption of the proposed policies will provide the community with reassurance regarding the scale and nature of future development, while also allowing for development and infrastructure improvements beneficial to the area. For these reasons,

the CPC recommended that the Board of Supervisors adopt the proposed Saranap Area General Plan Amendment.

CONSEQUENCE OF NEGATIVE ACTION:

Should the Board vote against adoption of the proposed GPA, the General Plan policies specific to the Saranap area would remain unchanged.

ATTACHMENTS

Resolution 2020/318

Attachment A - Draft General Plan Amendment Text

Attachment B - Draft General Plan Figure 3-4

Attachment C - Saranap Area General Plan and Zoning Maps and Aerial Photograph

Attachment D - Correspondence from Saranap Community Interest Group

Attachment E- PowerPoint Presentation