

# GPAC Meeting #2 Summary

April 5, 2021



## Introduction

On March 16, 2021, the City of Ventura General Plan Update team convened the second meeting of the General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC). The primary meeting objectives were to:

- Provide an overview of Ventura’s demographic profile
- Review the project community engagement plan and provide input
- Discuss results of preliminary engagement
- Brainstorm key issues and opportunities

The meeting was open to the public and live-streamed to YouTube. This document summarizes the key content presented and themes discussed at the meeting.

## Meeting Participants

The following participants attended the meeting:

### General Plan Team

- Simran Malhotra, Raimi + Associates
- Aram Kamali, Raimi + Associates
- Susan Harden, Circlepoint
- Peter Gilli, City of Ventura
- Neda Zayer, City of Ventura

### GPAC Members

- Lorrie Brown, GPAC Chair
- Doug Halter, GPAC Vice Chair
- Philip Bohan, GPAC
- Nicholas Bonge, GPAC
- Stephanie Caldwell, GPAC
- Kyler Carlson, GPAC
- David Comden, GPAC

- Joshua Damigo, GPAC
- Nicholas Deitch, GPAC
- Peter Freeman, GPAC
- Kacie Goff, GPAC
- Kelsey Jonker, GPAC
- Stephanie Karba, GPAC
- Erin Kraus, GPAC
- Louise Lampara, GPAC
- Scott McCarty, GPAC
- Bill McReynolds, GPAC
- Daniel Reardon, GPAC
- Sabrena Rodriguez, GPAC
- Alejandra Tellez, GPAC
- Abagale Thomas, GPAC
- Dana Worsnop, GPAC

## Meeting Format

Lorrie Brown, GPAC Chair, initiated the session and welcomed all participants to the meeting. Susan Harden then initiated a round of introductions, prompting GPAC members to introduce themselves and share a preliminary thought regarding the community (see more below). Following introductions, Susan Harden and Simran Malhotra gave a joint presentation that covered preliminary data on existing city demographics and the approved community engagement plan for the project. After presenting this material and fielding questions from GPAC members, the General Plan Team broke participants into small groups to discuss key questions in greater detail, using two worksheets to record their thoughts. There were three GPAC breakout groups and two groups of public participants. Small group sessions lasted approximately 45 minutes, at which point participants were asked to debrief in the large group.

The meeting concluded with a public comment session. Each speaker was allotted two minutes.

## GPAC Feedback and Discussion

### Issues and Opportunities Facing Ventura

During introductions, each GPAC member was asked to express in a few words what he/she believed to be one of the greatest issues or opportunities facing Ventura. Below is a summary of themes identified:

#### Issues

- Tension between growth and community character
- Climate crisis, drought, and wildfires
- Lack of water supply
- Poor transportation and transit options
- Lack of affordable housing access, particularly for lowest-income residents
- Brain drain due to the cost of living
- Shrinking middle-aged population
- Traffic impacts

#### Opportunities

- Addressing adaptive reuse and community character
- Supporting local businesses and public safety
- Creating affordable housing (including workforce housing) and revitalizing the economy
- Promoting business development to create living wage jobs
- Preserving community character while also addressing urgent needs (e.g., climate, transportation, growth)
- Maintaining charm and character to make Ventura a great place for families and children
- Pursuing thoughtful, sustainable, and inclusive growth
- Promoting environmental sustainability

### Ventura Demographics

Following the presentation of the city's demographic profile, GPAC members, as part of a large group discussion, were asked to share a) whether any of the data surprised them, and/or b) other indicators that would be helpful to review. Below is a summary of GPAC members' takeaways:

#### Surprising Data

- A declining middle-aged population and families (aged 35-54) is a surprising and alarming trend. Ostensibly, this is due to the high cost of living in Ventura that pushes families out of the city.
- Income inequality is surprising and concerning. The data shows that Ventura has many low-income and high-income households, but not a lot of middle-income.

## Other Indicators/Questions to Consider

- Why have people left Ventura in recent decades?
- Where are people moving to? Is this a local or regional trend?
- In new housing developments, from which areas are these residents moving? Does new development cater to local Venturans or outsiders?
- What types of homes are available, especially in relation to Ventura's socioeconomic profile?
- How is COVID impacting the trends we see?
- What are the trends in household size?
- What is Ventura's employment mix and average pay by sector?
- What are the "other languages" that households with limited English speak? Anecdotally, we know that Arabic, Russian, and Korean are major languages in the school district (there has been a recent influx of Arabic-speaking immigrants)

## Small Group Discussions

Following the brief discussion on demographics and the short presentation on the community engagement plan, meeting participants were broken into small groups of 7-10 people to consider key questions related to engagement and issues and opportunities. Groups also used some of the breakout to time to further discuss the demographic presentation. Specifically, participants were given two worksheets that prompted them to consider the following:

- What surprised you about the preliminary input from engagement to-date?
- What do you feel was missing from the preliminary input?
- What other comments do you have regarding key Ventura issues and opportunities?
- What are some ways to reach and engage:
  - Hispanic/Latino Population
  - Lower Income Households
  - Renters
  - Families with Children
  - Youth
  - People with Disabilities
  - Others

In total, there were three GPAC groups and two for the general public. Key takeaways from these sessions are summarized below.

## Issues and Opportunities

### *What was surprising?*

- Population decrease among young families and middle-aged individuals
- The U-shaped income distribution curve (i.e., the middle-income group being smaller than the lower- and higher-income groups). This is indicative of high income inequality and a shrinking middle-class
- Aging population

- Modest support for expanding the trail system

#### *What was missing?*

- Although median income is lower than the County, cost of living is higher. What accounts for these differences?
- What is Ventura's job mix, especially in terms of compensation?
- It is important to consider how arts, culture, and other amenities contribute to quality of life
- How does Ventura compare with the state and nation as a whole?
- What are the longer-term trends of out-migration from Ventura?
- How big is the commuting workforce in Ventura?
- No data transportation
- Ventura needs to policies that can help improve public transportation infrastructure
- The City should make efforts to participate in regional transportation planning

#### *What other comments do you have?*

#### **Economics**

- Ventura needs a strategy to attract new businesses, including tech-based and other innovation-oriented firms
- How do we capitalize on the new telecommute economy?

#### **Demographics**

- How have changes over time in the length of homeownership affected the tax base?
- What will draw younger people to Ventura? Entertainment venues? High-tech jobs?

#### **Outreach**

- We are not effectively reaching the Hispanic/Latino population even though they represent nearly half of Ventura's population
- It is important to consider not just how to reach hard-to-reach populations, but also how to engage them. How can we make people interested and excited about the General Plan?

#### **Transportation**

- Public transportation must be more dependable. Even if the City's transit network expands and serves all parts of the city, people will not use it unless it is reliable
- A new express line, or even a tram, could be a worthwhile addition to the city

#### **Growth and Development**

- There is a lack of information and focus on the Eastside, even though it has comparatively greater ability to accommodate new growth and development to handle population increases.
- Consider using union labor for construction
- Ventura should develop policies that encourage development in mixed-use areas and on commercial corridors. There needs to be an emphasis on "controlled" growth that is in balance with other parts of the community – a "density plan" could help with this

## Community Character/Quality of Life

- Ventura residents want to be a small town but face big City problems (e.g., homeless, traffic, response to climate change). There is a need to reconcile and balance these tensions appropriately.

## Community Engagement Ideas

Below is a summary of suggested tools, institutions, and venues that could be leveraged to maximize engagement, organized by specific interest group:

### *Hispanic/Latino Population*

- Spanish-language radio stations and newspapers (RadioLazer, etc.)
- Community-based organizations (e.g., CAUSE, Women's Economic Ventures, Economic Development Collaborative, community councils, Catholic churches and faith leaders, etc.)
- Direct mail and fly
- Ventura Unified School District and Ventura College
- Ventura College swap meet for outreach or pop-up events
- Grocery stores, including both chains and mom-and-pop shops
- Social media
- Tabling at farmers' and flea markets
- Formation of a sub-committee to GPAC or focus group

### *Lower Income Households*

- Housing Authority and other community services
- Social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram) to get onto people's phones since many may not have computers
- Ventura County Human Services Agency
- Ensure that events are brief since people have limited time

### *Renters*

- Property management companies
- Nextdoor
- Laundromats
- Ventura Tenants' Union
- CAUSE
- Spectrum channel PSAs
- Social media
- Mailers/flyers

### *Households with Children*

- School districts
- Private schools and preschools
- PTA/PTOs
- Early childhood centers
- Sports leagues (e.g., AYSO)

### *Youth*

- Social media platforms (e.g., TikTok, Instagram, Reddit “redditVentura”)
- Ventura College
- Ventura Unified School District
- Sports leagues (e.g., AYSO)
- 1-hour interviews with high-school students (who may receive community service credit for providing input to GPAC)

### *People with Disabilities*

- HSA and VC Behavioral Health
- Tri-Counties
- Veterans Administration
- Senior living areas/nursing homes.

### *Other*

- Need to consider outreach for the homeless and LGBTQ communities

## Public Input

### Input from Small Group Discussions

During the large group debrief, members of the general public were also asked to share key takeaways from their discussions. Major themes are listed below:

#### **Community Character/Quality of Life**

- What is Ventura’s identity? Are we a small town or one of the bigger cities in California? Our vision for the future needs to address this question
- Three major priorities for Ventura’s future are affordable (family) housing, quality job opportunities, and climate change
- Light pollution is a major issue in the city
- To preserve community character, the City can consider developing incentives for adaptive reuse
- Urban forestry and tree canopies are a big priority. Currently, there are 12,000 empty tree wells in the city

#### **Transportation**

- There is an opportunity to amend the parking requirements in the Downtown Specific Plan
- How do we make public transportation more viable? An open-air trolley, which travels from the Westside to the Government Center, could be a great addition
- Infrastructure and mobility improvements need to accompany new housing. Development decisions need to be made holistically and with consideration for other impacts
- Mobility planning for disabled individuals needs to be incorporated into the General Plan process
- How do we accommodate parking demand as growth continues to happen?

## Other

- How do we leverage local academic institutions (Ventura College, Cal State Channel Islands) as partners in community development? Ventura can look to Eugene, Oregon as a model to replicate
- Spanish-language interpretation is a major priority and should happen at all meetings

## Public Comments

A small number of individuals spoke during public comment at the close of the meeting. Comments are summarized below:

- There are serious parking issues associated with certain new developments. We need to ensure that we are not weakening the authority of certain local agencies, such as Planning Commission and Design Review Committee. It would be instructive to brief the public on the authority and scope of the General Plan.
- Improving park safety and beach maintenance are important to a high quality of life.
- To promote sustainability, accommodating non-automotive travel throughout the city (from “East Ventura to the beach”) will be required.
- To effectively engage hard-to-reach communities, it is important to identify topics of high interest and demonstrate the General Plan’s relationship to them.
- Every neighborhood should have walkable access to nature, including hills and trails. The City needs to prioritize walkability and enable residents to “live simply”.
- Homeownership is inaccessible to lower-income households, which is a major issue.



# Appendix

This Appendix contains completed worksheets from each of the three GPAC groups.

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IDEAS!

TARGET GROUPS	Stats	WAYS TO REACH & ENGAGE? (Organizations, engagement tools, etc.)
<b>Hispanic/Latino</b>	36.0%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Using radio stations to do outreach (RadioLazer, etc.); CAUSE and other community-based organizations; direct mail targeted to higher latino communities; VUSD; Make sure they understand how valuable their voice is; Leverage County outlets and partners like WEV, EDC, community councils, and faith leaders, etc.; VC swap meet for outreach events. It's important to make sure that we aren't just asking how to reach them, but how to ENGAGE them and really empower them to use their voices.</li> </ul>
<b>Lower income households (80% of State AMI)</b>	43.9%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housing Authority and other community services; utilize social media to get onto people's phones since many may not have computers; VC Human Services Agency; these events need to be brief because people have limited time.</li> </ul>
<b>Renters</b>	45.9%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Property management companies; Nextdoor; Laundromats; Ventura Tenants' Union; CAUSE.</li> </ul>
<b>Households with children</b>	29.1%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School districts; private schools and preschools; PTA/PTOs; early childhood centers.</li> </ul>
<b>Youth (19 and under)</b>	21.6%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social media (tik tok, IG); Ventura College; School district.</li> </ul>
<b>People with disabilities</b>	12.3%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>HSA and VC Behavioral Health; Tri-Counties; Veterans Administration; Senior living areas/nursing homes.</li> </ul>

GROUP MEMBERS: (List here)

**GROUP 1**



# ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES

## WHAT SURPRISED YOU ABOUT THE PRELIMINARY INPUT?

- Families leaving Ventura; Shocking that some people didn't know that young families are leaving;
- Surprising that housing stock is low but also that people are leaving.

## WHAT DO YOU FEEL WAS MISSING FROM THE PRELIMINARY INPUT?

- What is our job mix (high wage vs low wage)?
- Arts, culture and other amenities and the value they add.

## WHAT OTHER COMMENTS DO YOU HAVE REGARDING KEY VENTURA ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES?

- Almost half of the City's population is latinx, but we are not reaching them. Also Arabic, Korean and Russian speakers.
- Shrinking middle class in Ventura.
- Need to explore why our income is low compared to county, but cost of living is high relatively.
- Strategy to attract new businesses (tech-based and innovation-oriented)
- How do we capitalize on the new telecommute economy?

GROUP MEMBERS: (List here)

**GROUP 1**



# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IDEAS!

TARGET GROUPS	Stats	WAYS TO REACH & ENGAGE? (Organizations, engagement tools, etc.)
Hispanic/Latino	36.0%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Neighborhood councils, social media, radio campaigns, visual items like flyers, churches, tabling at farmers market and flea market, sub-committee to GPAC or focus group</li> </ul>
Lower income households (80% of State AMI)	43.9%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪</li> </ul>
Renters	45.9%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Spectrum channel PSAs, social media, lofts and 1 bd apartments, mailer, flyers</li> </ul>
Households with children	29.1%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪</li> </ul>
Youth (19 and under)	21.6%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪</li> </ul>
People with disabilities	12.3%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪</li> </ul>
Asian communities		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪</li> </ul>
Chumash		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪</li> </ul>

# ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES

## WHAT SURPRISED YOU ABOUT THE PRELIMINARY INPUT?

- 59.5% quality of life decline; people always say things are getting worse
- Only 13.8% for improving public transit
- Amount of time it takes on the bus
- Distinction between transportation within the city and then between cities
- Revitalizing retail corridors

## WHAT DO YOU FEEL WAS MISSING FROM THE PRELIMINARY INPUT?

- Transportation and traffic information

## WHAT OTHER COMMENTS DO YOU HAVE REGARDING KEY VENTURA ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES?

- Nick Bonge – controlling growth and quality of natural environment – how much growth do we need?
- Finding good local candidates for jobs is difficult
- Build homes where people are close to work
- Spread density out and not concentrated
- Old General density Plan – neighborhood low is yellow and east end is yellow whereas west end is brown

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IDEAS!

TARGET GROUPS	Stats	WAYS TO REACH & ENGAGE? (Organizations, engagement tools, etc.)
Hispanic/Latino	36.0%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Catholic churches (including Knights of Columbus groups)</li> <li>▪ Spanish-language radio stations and newspapers</li> <li>▪ Maintain/increase emphasis on bilingual outreach</li> <li>▪ Grocery stores – both chain stores and mom-and-pop stores</li> </ul>
Lower income households (80% of State AMI)	43.9%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪</li> </ul>
Renters	45.9%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪</li> </ul>
Households with children	29.1%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Communicate through sports leagues, e.g. AYSO</li> </ul>
Youth (19 and under)	21.6%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Communicate through sports leagues</li> <li>▪ Consider HS students getting community service credit for 1-hour interviews giving their inputs to the GPAC</li> <li>▪ Social media: consider the redditVentura thread on the reddit site</li> </ul>
People with disabilities	12.3%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪</li> </ul>
Others		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't forget the homeless community</li> <li>• Don't forget the LGBTQ community</li> </ul>

Group members: Scott McCarty, Kelsey Jonker, Dana Worsnop, Doug Halter, Louise Lampara, Abagale Thomas, Bill McReynolds

GROUP MEMBERS: (List here)



# ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES

## WHAT SURPRISED YOU ABOUT THE PRELIMINARY INPUT?

- **The population decrease, particularly in the 35-54 year-old group (the highest wage-earning years)**
- **The aging population**
- **The U-shaped income distribution curve (i.e., the middle-income group being smaller than the lower- and higher-income groups)**

## WHAT DO YOU FEEL WAS MISSING FROM THE PRELIMINARY INPUT?

- **Would like to see longitudinal data (i.e., over time) regarding the “flight” of residents from Ventura**
- **What types of jobs are there in Ventura? What is the pay breakdown of these jobs?**
- **How big is the commuting workforce in Ventura?**
- **How have changes over time in the length of home ownership in Ventura affecting the tax base?**
- **With regard to the presented demographics, how does Ventura compare with the state and nation as a whole?**

## WHAT OTHER COMMENTS DO YOU HAVE REGARDING KEY VENTURA ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES?

- **What will draw younger people to Ventura? Entertainment venues? High-tech jobs?**
- **What Ventura has done well: the revitalization of downtown with the DTSP – perhaps a good model for other areas of the city.**
- **Concern: lack of information and focus on the Eastside vs. the concentration of effort on downtown and midtown areas. Eastside may have significant ability to accommodate housing development to handle population increases.**
- **Conflicting concerns: we want to be a small town, but we have big-town problems (e.g., homeless, traffic, response to climate change). Need to reconcile and balance these appropriately. To do this, perhaps concentrate on development of individual, “stand-alone” neighborhoods.**

**Group members: Scott McCarty, Kelsey Jonker, Dana Worsnop, Doug Halter, Louise Lampara, Abagale Thomas, Bill McReynolds**

GROUP MEMBERS: (List here)

