

# Summary of Community Council Meetings

March 2021



## Introduction

Between August and November 2020, Raimi + Associates (R+A) convened virtual meetings on the General Plan Update (GPU) process with each of Ventura’s seven Community Councils. The intent of these sessions was to **a)** inform and educate the general public on the project, and **b)** gather feedback on existing conditions. Specifically, participants were asked to share their perspectives on Ventura’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Participants were also encouraged to pose questions of their own. In total, it is estimated that more than 200 members of the public attended at least one of these meetings.

The following groups were consulted:

- Pierpont Bay Community Council (9/15)
- Midtown Community Council (10/8)
- Montalvo Community Council (11/10)
- Westside Community Council (9/2)
- East Ventura Community Council (8/20)
- Downtown Ventura Partners (8/26)\*
- College Area Community Council (9/23)

This memo summarizes the key themes and topics of discussion from these meetings. Because a presentation was only given to the Board of Downtown Ventura Partners, rather than to the neighborhood community as a whole, no public comments are recorded in this memo.

## Citywide Comments

### Unique and Special Characteristics

- Strong access to open space and natural recreation amenities.
- Small-town character with friendly, unpretentious people and a great city vibe.
- Charming neighborhoods with historic buildings and mix of architectural styles.
- Great amenities in central neighborhoods, including schools, parks, and plazas.
- Excellent views of (and access to) the beach.
- Diverse mix of housing types.
- Bike-friendly community.
- All the benefits of the Southern California lifestyle while still retaining a unique small character.
- Proximate to bigger urban destinations (Santa Barbara, Los Angeles).
- Beautiful historic architecture.

### Issues/Challenges

- Traffic congestion throughout the city, especially near the beach, on major thoroughfares, and at freeway onramps/offramps.
- Parking is limited near the beach.

- There is a shortage of affordable housing in the city.
- High cost of living will cause an exodus of the younger generation. Those who were born in the city will not be able to move back as young professionals.
- Concern that new housing development could diminish or erase Ventura's unique character.
- Homelessness has increased in recent years, creating quality of life issues.
- The City lacks a "lighting ordinance" that could properly regulate light use across the city.
- The City lacks a comprehensive urban forestry plan, which will be needed to combat climate change.
- Ventura's economic base is "shaky" and needs to be diversified and restructured. Currently, it is overly concentrated on the social and government services sector, while retail and industrial operations will continue to be steadily phased out.
- There is an excess of retail land, which will only grow over time.
- The design review process is inconsistent – multi-family housing is often subject to review whereas single-family housing is not.
- Concern that multi-story housing projects could eliminate existing views of the ocean and hillsides.
- There is a lack of utilities to support growth in the city.

## Opportunities

- Provide more public restrooms to serve the homeless population.
- Accelerate building electrification.
- Continue streamlining, incentivizing, and permitting ADUs to help alleviate housing pressures.
- Revitalize vacant commercial areas.
- Design and implement new programming for the State Park, which is currently underutilized.
- Devise strategies to expand private sector employment.
- Pursue redevelopment opportunities at:
  - Ventura Gateway Plaza
  - Gateway Village
  - Acapulco Center
  - Pacific View Mall
- Ensure that adequate transportation measures (e.g., parking, traffic calming) accompany new development.
- Address "spot zoning" in the General Plan to ensure that neighborhood uses are cohesive and compatible.
- Add more plazas and civic gathering spaces.
- Consider building a transit center, similar to what exists in Oxnard.
- Devise strategies to build community resilience to future pandemic.
- Explore implementation of the "shared street" concept on a more permanent basis.
- Prioritize community broadband infrastructure to bridge the "digital divide."

## Neighborhood Specific Comments

### Pierpont

- Sea level rise poses severe risks to coastal communities, like Pierpont and the Marina. Enhanced coastal management is required.
- Pierpont enjoys strong walkability.
- Great amenities exist on Seaward Street (bike path, restaurants, proximity to retail and schools).
- Seaward Street, which is a great commercial corridor, needs to be an emphasis for Ventura.
- Short-term vacation rentals (STVRs), traffic/parking near the beach, and homelessness/crime are major issues. STVRs in particular are seen as a quality of life issue as they reduce permanent housing stock and cause congestion.
- Neighborhood-serving amenities (Marina Park, Pierpont Elementary) are great assets in the heart of the community.
- Proximity to the beach, harbor, and marina is a major asset. However, constructing a bridge connecting the harbor from Pierpont would be a great addition.
- Improving bicycle and pedestrian safety on Pierpont Boulevard is a priority.

### Midtown

- Midtown enjoys strong walkability. However, potential new fences around the railroad tracks could obstruct walk access to the beach.
- Midtown has a charming and “fun funky” character.
- Midtown consists of beautiful and unique residential neighborhoods with a good mix of housing types.
- Not all commercial in this area (e.g., Pacific View Mall) is viable. Redevelopment of underperforming sites should be explored.
- The community needs more plazas and gathering places, like the Midtown Commons concept.
- More crosswalks and traffic calming measures are needed. It is neither easy nor safe for pedestrians to cross major corridors like Thompson, Main, and Loma Vista (between Day and Main Streets).

### Montalvo

- Montalvo suffers from poor walkability and limited bicycle/pedestrian infrastructure.
- The community wishes to retain its residential character at low to medium densities.
- Future development on Johnson Drive will need to be accompanied by traffic management improvements, especially at the 101 northbound interchange.
- Homelessness on Johnson Drive is becoming a major quality of life issue.
- The community suffers from significant light pollution from a new sign at the auto center. The City should be more responsive to the community’s concerns.
- Traffic is an issue, especially at rush hour at the Johnson/Bristol and Johnson/Northbank intersections.

- Montalvo has excess retail land that needs to be repurposed.

## Westside

- The Westside feels at risk of gentrification.
- The community feels that they are being overburdened with new multifamily housing projects. New multifamily is disproportionately being built in the Westside.
- Rents are currently high, which is problematic given the community's lower-income character.
- The Westside still grapples with environmental pollution and contaminated homes. An estimated 20 percent of homes may be infected with toxic mold. (Note that no source was given for this statement.)
- There is limited north-south circulation, as the community is essentially limited to Ventura Avenue. Expanded transit along Olive Avenue could help.
- Economic development strategies need to be inclusive and compatible with existing community character (e.g., leverage existing industrial base).
- The community needs more recreational options, such as a public pool.
- A pedestrian bridge over Highway 33 could improve access to the Ventura River.
- A trolley (or electric bus) along Ventura Avenue could help reduce greenhouse gas emissions and enhance mobility.
- Noise from the police gun range is a nuisance for the community
- The Westside is over-impacted by parking and traffic. New development needs to be accompanied by sufficient parking to minimize congestion.

## East Ventura

- East Ventura suffers from poor walkability and limited bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.
- Walkability on major corridors (e.g., Telegraph) is poor, and vehicle speeds are excessively high. This creates an uninviting pedestrian environment
- Wildfires still threaten foothill communities, and access for emergency vehicles is poor. Expanded evacuation routes and enhanced disaster preparedness are needed.
- East Ventura suffers from a lack of retail options, especially food retail. This leads to residents traveling to Oxnard for groceries, which results in lost revenue for the City.
- East Ventura residents feel under-represented in City decision-making.

## College Area

- The College Area is home to a friendly and unpretentious population.
- Residential neighborhoods are welcoming and have a diverse mix of housing types.