

Summary of Stakeholder Interviews

March 2021



Overview

Between June and July 2020, the Consultant Team for the Ventura General Plan Update (GPU) conducted 23 stakeholder interviews with community organizations, local employers, public sector agencies, and other interest groups in Ventura to share information about the project and gather feedback on existing conditions. Stakeholders were specifically asked to share their perspectives on Ventura’s unique attributes, important issues facing the community, and a desired vision for the future. The Consultant Team also posed topic- and organization-specific questions to stakeholders based on their unique areas of expertise.

The following groups were interviewed:

- Pierpont Bay Community Council
- Midtown Community Council
- Montalvo Community Council
- Westside Community Council
- East Ventura Community Council
- Downtown Ventura Partners
- College Area Community Council
- Ventura Port District
- Ventura Chamber of Commerce
- Ventura County Public Library
- Ventura Housing Authority
- Ventura County Area Agency on Aging
- Ventura College
- Gold Coast Transit
- Ventura Visitors and Convention Bureau
- Ventura Land Trust
- Diversity Collective of Ventura
- Women’s Economic Ventures
- Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy (CAUSE)
- CoLAB
- Patagonia
- Aera Energy
- Becker Group
- Johnson Development Associates
- Ventura Unified School District (VUSD)

This memo summarizes the key themes and topics of discussion from these meetings.

Qualities to Preserve

- Ventura boasts a humble, small-town character with high livability – not as “commercialized” as other coastal towns
- Cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity has increased in recent years and should be celebrated
- Locals are friendly and tolerant population, which creates a welcoming and family friendly atmosphere
- Ventura enjoys excellent weather with access to the ocean
- Ventura is proximate to world-class natural recreation, including the San Buenaventura State Beach and Los Padres National Forest
- The community shares a socially active, healthy, and outdoorsy culture
- Much of the city is bike-friendly
- Great historic architecture is found in the Downtown area
- Ventura comprises a mosaic of charming and distinct neighborhoods, with many including historic buildings and mix of architectural styles

- Ventura enjoys ideal proximity to Los Angeles – it has access to “Big City” amenities without having to live there
- Ventura College creates academic and workforce training opportunities for youth and adult learners
- Downtown is a unique regional asset with historic architecture, walkable streets, great community amenities, and a beautiful City Hall
- Several major employers are located in or near Ventura, including Patagonia (corporate headquarters), Aera Energy, and many County agencies
- There is strong support for the LGBTQIA+ community, including gay-straight alliance (GSA) groups in many schools and a City-supported Pride event
- The ongoing protection of nearby agricultural lands supports the local economy and retains community character
- There is an expansive and diverse portfolio of parks, open spaces, and recreational facilities
- A strong tourism sector supports the local economy

Issues to Address

Land Use and Development

- A lack of affordable housing creates gentrification risks, prevents the younger generation from settling in Ventura, and facilitates commuting for students and workers
- High costs of living are also causing some low-income families to overcrowd in single-family homes, while others opt to move out of the city altogether
- The number of homeless individuals has grown in recent years. Large segments of the population have expressed concern with this trend and want to see City action to ameliorate it
- There is a tension between growth and community character, as many residents feel that high-density housing threatens to undermine Ventura’s unique charm and quality of life
- Building higher-density housing may increase traffic congestion and reduce parking availability
- Short-term vacation rentals (STVRs) are an issue. They reduce the supply of housing available to residents and are overly-concentrated in the Pierpont area (~80%), which leads to excessive commercialization
- Some fear that the authority of the Historic Preservation Committee, as well as the general public, are eroding in the interest of streamlining development
- Higher-density housing, particularly those that are multi-story, creates issues by blocking existing views for nearby neighbors
- NIMBYism, City regulations (e.g., parking requirements), and a slow approval process (e.g., design review) have delayed projects and consequently hampered development
- The number of vacant sites is declining, which creates issues for growth
- Excessive focus on housing and redevelopment can undermine Ventura’s commercial base, leading it to become a “bedroom” community

Economic Development

- Revenues have been flat for the Ventura Harbor's commercial activities
- Retail is becoming increasingly unviable across the city, including the underperforming Pacific View Mall in Midtown. This may create fiscal issues given the City's heavy reliance on sales tax revenue
- Given a stagnant regional economy and lack of investment, certain industrial areas – such as those on the Westside – are at risk of being sold and redeveloped. There is a desire for these areas to be retained, since many industrial employees live in the Westside and need jobs related to their skillset
- A lack of amenities in East Ventura is resulting in lost sales tax revenue for the City, as many residents travel to Oxnard (Rivermark) for shopping and groceries

Mobility and Circulation

- Poor transit service contributes to high rates of driving, which in turn causes significant congestion on local streets and Highway 101
- Parking near the beach, especially during weekends, is severely lacking

Climate Change and Safety

- Sea-level rise and wildfire pose severe risks to Ventura. Coastal communities in Pierpont and the Marina are at risk of flooding and inundation, while many homes in the Westside and East Ventura are in high fire risk zones
- Many at-risk areas have inadequate evacuation routes, such as the Westside and foothill neighborhoods in East Ventura

Community Engagement

- There is a lack of resources and social outlets for marginalized communities, such as the transgender population

Quality of Life

- Certain employment centers have experienced security issues, such as break-ins, that threaten workforce safety
- Certain neighborhoods, such as Pierpont, Montalvo, and East Ventura, lack important commercial and recreational amenities. East Ventura specifically has experienced a decline in commercial activity with the emptying of strip malls and has consistently lobbied for a full-service grocery store
- Ventura's elderly population struggle with a high cost of living and poor transportation options to access needed amenities

Opportunities for the Future

Land Use and Development

- Ensure that existing views are not blocked as the city continues to densify
- Provide a diversity of housing options— ranging from ADUs and tiny houses to tall multifamily complexes – across the city to improve affordability. Opportunities for workforce housing – including teacher housing – should be explored. Higher-density housing would be most appropriate in and around Downtown
- To preserve the existing character of established single-family neighborhoods, focus new infill development in certain areas such as major corridors, underutilized commercial/retail spaces, and the Downtown area
- Create incentives to support the production of low-income and very low-income housing. An example would be to strengthen the existing Inclusionary Housing Ordinance to cover both renter- and owner-occupied housing units
- Create complete neighborhoods that locate housing near essential commercial and recreational amenities (e.g., parks/trails/open space, plazas, grocery stores, etc.) and add commercial uses in areas without access to essential services (such as East Ventura)
- Promote high-quality design standards to ensure that Ventura retains its character – avoid “cookie cutter” structures
- As the city grows, provide supportive infrastructure (e.g., street improvements, parking, etc.) for new infill development to reduce congestion and maintain a high quality of life
- Consider redeveloping underutilized hotels as homeless supportive housing. To advance implementation, the City could place an Affordable Housing Overlay on all hotels in the city
- Designate commercial corridors as “areas of change” and residential neighborhoods as “areas of stability.” Specific corridors include Seaward, Main, Thompson, and Telegraph
- Consider annexing Saticoy and developing a community center there for the East Ventura community

Economic Development

- Create partnerships with Ventura College public service programs to stimulate growth in the “health and human services” sector
- Pursue opportunities to modernize and improve the Marinas, including land uses that support commercial fisheries, as well as better parking and transportation management
- Retain commercial and industrial uses in certain areas to ensure that Ventura does not just become a “bedroom community”

Mobility and Circulation

- Improve bicycle safety across the city and expand the bicycle network
- Transit infrastructure needs to be expanded and improved in many parts of the city. A tram or trolley along Ventura Avenue could be an option for the Westside, while a water taxi system

could be explored in the Harbor area. A central transit center, such as that which exists in Oxnard, is also desirable

- Prioritize walkability, especially for elderly population who face transportation issues and can suffer from social isolation
- To improve beach access, the City could consider a multi-modal freeway cap and expansions of the local trail network
- Consider permanently closing off central Downtown to vehicles. A pedestrian-oriented space would be very positive for the community
- In East Ventura, extend the existing multi-use path to cross the Santa Clara River

Climate Change and Safety

- As climate change impacts continue to compound (Ventura County is one of the fastest warming regions), the City will need strengthen adaptation and resilience, including new evacuation plans
- Expand evacuation routes to protect the community in cases of natural disasters. These are especially needed northbound out of the Westside, Foothill, and East Ventura neighborhoods
- Ensure adequate water supply in hillside communities to ensure readiness in the event of wildfires

Community Engagement

- Elevate the voices of marginalized populations and encourage their participation in civic engagement efforts
- Harness technology and social media platforms to better engage with younger generations and hard-to-reach populations
- Beautify existing communities, such as through enhanced gateways, art, and signage

Quality of Life

- Continue to expand outdoor recreation options and stimulate eco-tourism by providing public access to adjacent sites
- Preserve existing agricultural lands and open spaces along the hillsides
- Complete construction of the Ventura Community Park/Aquatic Center
- Continue to expand “mobile library” operations for underserved populations and neighborhoods
- Pursue strategies to bridge the “digital divide”