

2 Key Planning Issues and Implications

The discussion in this chapter is based on the key issues identified in different chapters of this report, consolidated into the topics presented below. The issues will be addressed at varying stages in the General Plan Update—for example, several issues related to land use and circulation may be addressed during development of land use and policy alternatives, while issues related to noise standards or cultural resources may be addressed as detailed policy proposals are developed in the latter stages of the update process.

2.1 Land Use Planning and Development

Analysis of potential opportunity sites identified roughly 380 acres of vacant land in Half Moon Bay, as well as 690 acres of underutilized land. These lots are distributed throughout the city – most of the vacant land is concentrated in the paper subdivisions west of Highway 1, and much of the underutilized land is concentrated at the intersection of highways 1 and 92. A small number of vacant lots can be found downtown along Church and Main streets, with many more underutilized sites scattered throughout the downtown area.

However, not all of these sites are developable due to physical or regulatory constraints, or because of the presence of environmental resources or hazards. The General Plan Update offers an opportunity to review the location and nature of these constraints in order to formulate a land use strategy and any revisions to land use policies or designations to promote the development of desired uses where appropriate (such as in infill areas) while ensuring the preservation of important resources where they exist. It may be necessary to revise current policies in order to address potential impacts from future proposed development in areas where constraints exist (such as paper subdivisions where Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Areas [ESHAs] may be found) by considering appropriate allowable land uses in those areas, procedures for determining the extent of critical resources, and acceptable mitigation measures to allow development while promoting the conservation or restoration of sensitive resources.

PHYSICAL PLANNING ISSUES

Physical planning issues for land use and development include concerns related to substandard lot sizes and adequate infrastructure provision. Many of Half Moon Bay's subdivided lots are considered substandard or severely substandard, meaning that they do not meet requirements for minimum lot area or width; any development on these lots must meet specified design criteria before being permitted. Moreover, the dimensions of these lots may not easily accommodate

residential or other development consistent with the standards in the Zoning Ordinance. Further discussion on substandard lots may be found in Chapter 2-3 of this report.

Infrastructure provision is a major physical and financial constraint on development in Half Moon Bay. In one aspect, the constraint arises from provisions in the Local Coastal Program (LCP) defining priority and non-priority land uses and limiting water and sewer connections available to non-priority uses. Another aspect of this constraint relates to the city's paper subdivisions: though lots in these areas have been recorded and sold, no roads or water and sewer conveyances have been installed to serve them. Property owners are unlikely to undertake the development of individual lots and bear the cost of providing the necessary infrastructure. New water connections are also quite expensive, costing approximately 4 to 55 percent more than equivalent connections in neighboring Montara Sanitary and Water District. Further description of Half Moon Bay's infrastructure system can be found in Chapter 9 of this report.

PLANNED UNIT DEVELOPMENT (PUD) REGULATIONS

Some of the most significant regulatory limitations on development in Half Moon Bay are policies and regulations surrounding PUD development. The majority of the city's vacant land is zoned PUD. However, the LCP requires comprehensive area-wide specific plans for each PUD before development can take place. This—a requirement can be difficult to meet, given the fragmented ownerships, the lack of existing infrastructure, and the need to protect coastal resources and avoid hazards to the approval of the Coastal Commission that affect the remaining vacant PUD areas. Also, though zoning regulations for the Planned Development District allow for the full range of land uses provided for in the Land Use Plan (LUP) of the LCP by permit, there are no land uses that are allowed in this zone by right, other than existing uses, which may be non-conforming. The complex nature of the considerations affecting each site means that any potential developer would be making large investments of time and capital towards a planning process with an unpredictable outcome, cumbersome and expensive requirement, with an unpredictable outcome. ~~The large numbers of unique landowners in each PUD site mean that there is little that an individual property owner can do to develop a given lot. This results in uncertainty for potential developers, who lacking~~ guarantees that a specific plan will be approved at the end of the lengthy development process. Policies and regulations relevant to PUD development should be a focus of the General Plan Update, as constraints—such as potential ESHAs—may be present on these sites. Further discussion on PUDs can be found in Chapter 2-3 of this report.

GROWTH LIMIT

Residential development in Half Moon Bay is regulated by Measure D, a growth control ordinance that limits residential development to accommodate a maximum population growth of 1 percent annually (1.5 percent for dwelling units in the Downtown Area). The city's recent growth has been below this limit, and projections for the next 20 years indicate average growth below this level; however, it is possible that this limit could constrain growth in high demand years. The number of new dwelling units approved in a given year is limited to the number of dwelling unit allocations adopted by City Council resolution in that year. Measure D and population growth trends are described further in Chapter 2-3 of this report.

PARK STANDARDS

Half Moon Bay's current park standard is 8 acres per 1,000 people, which would require the development of an additional 69 acres of park land to serve the current population. This standard is not likely to be achieved and may not be appropriate given the recreational resource represented by the city's beaches. The standard also does not correlate with the City's Subdivision Regulations, which require dedication of park land at 4 acres per 1,000 residents, or the Quimby Act, which limits park land dedication to 3 acres per 1,000 residents or a higher amount matching existing parkland provision up to 5 acres per 1,000 residents. The General Plan Update is an opportunity to reassess the park standard and the roles played by both parks and beaches in providing for the city's recreational needs. It is also a chance to consider specific provisions for providing new park land as a part of future developments. Parks and recreation opportunities are discussed further in Chapter 8 of this report.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND RESOURCE PROTECTION

Biological and cultural resources are present in many parts of the Planning Area. In terms of biological resources, the presence of sensitive habitats, specifically ESHAs, affects project design, requires additional surveys and reviews, may require additional permitting from state agencies, and may require development of measures to avoid and/or minimize impacts to sensitive habitats and species. The LCP prohibits developments that would significantly impact sensitive habitat areas and limits the types of land uses allowed in such areas. Biological resources are discussed further in Chapter 5 of this report.

In accordance with the Coastal Act, the LCP requires mitigation measures to minimize impacts to archaeological resources. An archaeological report is required for projects located within any designated archaeological resource area or within 100 feet of any recorded archaeological site identified in the LUP. Cultural resources are discussed further in Chapter 7 of this report.

HAZARD MITIGATION

Review of pertinent materials has detailed the presence of potential hydrologic and geologic hazards within the Planning Area, as well as the potential for coastal hazards related to sea-level rise. Constraints associated with these hazards will influence future development efforts and may require measures to minimize impacts. Generally, areas of particular hazard including flood zones, tsunami inundation zones, and dam inundation areas are located along the coastline and the Planning Area's waterways, as well as areas with landslide and erosion potential. Geologic hazards are generally moderate to low within the Planning Area, though some areas of high landslide risk exist along the eastern edge of the city.

Some potential hazard types, such as flood and tsunami inundation zones, have been previously delineated and policies have been adopted that discourage or regulate development proximate to these areas. The LCP requires Geological Reports for areas in geologically hazardous areas as well as areas of coastal hazard, such as bluff edges, and where development may affect coastal and geologic stability, with mitigation measures implemented where necessary. The LCP also limits new development in areas where flooding due to tsunami or dam failure may occur, on bluff faces, and on bluff and cliff tops. Delineation of areas susceptible to sea-level rise is underway as

part of the General Plan Update process and is expected to be completed in the coming months. Hydrologic and geologic hazards are discussed further in Chapter 5 of this report.

2.2 Resource Protection

Analysis shows the presence of various natural and manmade resources—including biological, hydrological, aesthetic, agricultural, and cultural—in the Planning Area. These represent resources that are valued for their contributions to the area’s coastal and community character and their roles in local ecological and hydrological systems, and many are protected under state and federal laws.

SENSITIVE HABITATS

Biological resources in the Planning Area include habitats that may be considered ESHAs by the California Coastal Commission, or sensitive habitats by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW). These habitats—including sandy beaches, coastal dunes, sea cliffs, wetlands, riparian corridors, open water, coastal scrub, grasslands, eucalyptus groves—may support special status species, such as federal and state-listed species, species of special concern, and avian species protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

The presence of sensitive habitats and resources in the Planning Area provides opportunities for restoration, limited or improved public access for enjoyment of these areas by residents and tourists, and continued appreciation of popular areas such as beaches and coastal trails. Potential conflicts may arise between the conservation of these areas and other interests, such as providing coastal access and recreational opportunities along the coast, and developing vacant lots in that area. Thus, the General Plan Update process presents a crucial opportunity to define and delineate sensitive habitats (particularly ESHAs), establish a clear process for development proposed in potential ESHAs, incorporate protection and restoration measures for natural resources within both undeveloped and developed areas, continue to foster a sense of community ownership and responsibility related to sensitive habitats and protected species, and provide managed public access within areas possessing ecological importance. See Chapter 5 for more information on biological resources.

WATER RESOURCES

Several surface waters and groundwater basins in the Planning Area have previously been identified for their potential beneficial uses. However, hydrologic resources can be significantly influenced and impaired by existing, new, and re-development. New impervious surfaces from development projects increase stormwater flows, reduce groundwater recharge, increase pollutant discharge, increase erosion, and can result in hydro-modification that may further proliferate degradation. Out-of-date studies or lack of detailed studies lead to an information gap in understanding current conditions and potential constraints. The General Plan Update provides an opportunity to develop policies, standards, and design criteria to minimize potential impacts to hydrologic resources. See Chapter 5 for more information on hydrological resources.

Through thoughtful development, restoration opportunities, detailed study, and advanced planning, these resources and others within the Planning Area can provide continued and new opportunities for public enjoyment, municipal use, and biological/hydrologic integrity. Future planning and new development should implement applicable requirements to address discharge, drainage, and flooding issues; connect and improve stormwater infrastructure; and provide on-site infiltration.

AESTHETICS

The visual environment is an important component of the quality of life in the Planning Area, and is also an important factor in its visitor-based economy. Critical visual resources such as the Pacific Ocean, hillsides and ridgelines, agricultural fields, bluffs and shoreline, open spaces, historic properties, and pedestrian-scale urban design help to define the area's unique character.

Challenges related to visual resource preservation in the Planning Area are often a result of construction, land conversion, and traffic associated with local development and regional tourism. Addressing these will involve striking a balance between allowing development while preserving the integrity of the aesthetic qualities that make the region popular. Issues identified in the Aesthetics chapter include the design and placement of new residential development, development of Half Moon Bay's western subdivisions, the change in landscape caused by future conversion of agricultural land, traffic congestion, the type and appearance of future development downtown, alterations to views outside of the City's jurisdiction, and light pollution from future development.

Opportunities exist to maximize the visual experience for the community and its visitors. The General Plan Update should be attentive toward articulating a clear vision and prioritization for visual resource protection. Policies must anticipate future issues and establish clear, strong, defensible direction for decision makers and the community. See Chapter 7 for more information on visual resources.

CULTURAL

The Planning Area is considered to have high cultural resources sensitivity due to the presence of dozens of important archaeological and historical resources, such as prehistoric shell middens and lithic scatters, historic debris scatters, historic structural remnants, and historic architecture. The locations of these sites can be used to help guide land use classifications and potential overlays, and provide guidelines for further review of development projects in order to avoid significant negative impacts to both known and currently unknown cultural resources. See Chapter 6 for more discussion on cultural resources.

2.3 Circulation

Circulation plays a major role in the quality of life and development in the Planning Area, though the existing circulation system poses a number of challenges for the community. Circulation issues are discussed in Chapter 4 of this report.

CONNECTIVITY AND STREET SYSTEMS

Development has occurred in Half Moon Bay on a project-by-project basis over the years and has resulted in few functional parallel alternative routes to Highway 1 and SR 92; some parallel facilities exist along certain segments of Highway 1, generally south of Main Street, though there are none along SR 92. As a result, most trips by automobile or truck into, out of, within, or through Half Moon Bay must use Highway 1, SR 92, or both. This funneling of almost all vehicular traffic onto these two roads results in congestion on both facilities and many of the streets that cross them.

Due to the limited connectivity between many of the city's neighborhoods, residents often must follow circuitous routes that require them to drive or walk to Highway 1 or Highway 92 before they can access adjacent neighborhoods or one of the city's paved trails. Pedestrians and bicyclists often do not have separate facilities and must use portions of the roadways or their shoulders. Crossing of major facilities like Highway 1 and SR 92 can be challenging because of the small number of signalized intersections that provide pedestrians and bicyclists a break in the traffic. Creating a more comprehensive bicycle and pedestrian network within the city would improve the safety and convenience of traveling between neighborhoods and to major destinations.

While several proposals for alternative or parallel (to Highway 1) routes have been offered over the years, implementation has been constrained due to a variety of challenges. Acknowledging that the previously proposed connections may no longer be feasible, new attempts to develop parallel routes will need to consider a greater variety of strategies to provide incremental improvement in north-south mobility by multiple modes. These strategies may include new alignments for Foothill Boulevard, combinations of smaller alignments, and alignments that address the needs of different types of trips by allowing for pedestrian or bicycle travel. While opportunities are presented by undeveloped sites, the City will need to consider constraints such as landslide risks, areas of potential environmental sensitivity including wetlands and riparian habitat, existing and planned development, and project cost.

CONGESTION

The lack of alternative routes and transportation modes in the Planning Area contributes to the congestion problem by funneling traffic onto the highways and necessitating the use of motor vehicles for both short crosstown trips and regional travel. Congestion is one of the Planning Area's primary concerns, and affects connectivity between neighborhoods and local and regional destinations, safety, aesthetics, noise, and where or whether development is considered appropriate. On weekdays, congestion can be attributed to high commute traffic volumes, inadequate turn lanes, and lack of signal control at some key intersections. The highest volume of traffic occurs on weekends and during special events, when the roadway network—built to meet the average weekday needs of the city's residents—is overwhelmed. This congestion not only results in delay for residents and visitors, but also reduces access to the transportation system for residents. Vehicular traffic also has a significant impact on the views along scenic corridors and is the predominant source of noise in the Planning Area.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Public transit in the Planning Area is limited, and the scheduling and headways make it difficult for riders to use public transportation as a primary mode of travel. Stops can also be isolated, located on high-traffic routes, and lacking in amenities such as benches, shelters, and trash cans. Transit may not be meeting the demands of the city's aging population, recreational visitors, or those requiring regional connections. Improving transit service and amenities is one potential method of addressing connectivity and congestion issues. Increasing transit headways on the weekend or providing additional service during major events, increasing frequency of weekday transit service with regional connections, and improving the comfort and visibility of transit stops could reduce automobile usage at peak traffic times and improve service for those who rely on public transit.

COASTAL ACCESS

Challenges to coastal access include a lack of clear wayfinding signage indicating access points to the coastline from Highway 1, lack of non-motorized connections across Highway 1, and lack of beach parking, and are closely related to general issues of congestion and connectivity. During high demand periods such as weekends, the lack of wayfinding signage causes additional congestion as cars search for access points and parking. There is an opportunity to improve wayfinding to direct vehicles to designated parking areas. Wayfinding can also direct pedestrians to designated access points, helping to prevent environmental damage and erosion from use of informal paths.

The lack of signalized intersections along Highway 1 make accessing recreational areas along the coast difficult for pedestrians and cyclists east of Highway 1 as well as cars driving northbound on Highway 1, which have to cross oncoming traffic. During peak periods, beachside parking facilities are often filled to capacity, resulting in spillover parking on residential streets. However, the lack of direct and safe bicycle access and crossings makes it difficult to access the shoreline via non-auto modes. The General Plan Update is an opportunity to upgrade pedestrian and bicycle connections and crossings to the coastline in order to increase connectivity for these modes and reduce the demand for parking on the coast.

PARKING

Peak demand periods for parking in Half Moon Bay include special events and weekends. During these times, it can be a challenge for visitors to find parking in popular destinations such as downtown Main Street and at the beaches. Some negative impacts are associated with peak parking periods, including the spill-over of visitor parking onto nearby residential streets, which can cause aesthetic and safety impacts, and affect quality of life for residents in those neighborhoods.

Findings from a 2011 parking survey found that while parking demand may increase on Main Street during peak hours, the remainder of the downtown area's parking supply is undertutilized. The City found that while parking on Main Street may approach capacity during peak demand periods, there is generally ample parking remaining on downtown side streets, and on Johnston and Purissima streets, which parallel Main Street. This suggests that while parking is not

necessarily lacking in Half Moon Bay, there are opportunities to improve connections between major points of interest and areas of parking supply, both in terms of directing drivers to available spaces and in terms of guiding visitors safely and comfortably their destinations once they have left their vehicles. Other approaches to parking programming that could improve the parking experience for residents, employees, and visitors would require assessing the needs (in terms parking duration or amenities) of different users in different parts of the city.

2.4 Hazard Mitigation

In an area where both hydrologic and geologic hazards are present, hazard avoidance and mitigation measures are essential to the long-term protection of lives and property. Hydrologic hazards include flood zones, coastal hazards (i.e., sea level rise, tsunami, wave runup) and localized flooding. Geologic hazards include areas subject to landslides and coastal erosion, as well as groundshaking from nearby faults. Liquefaction and soil erosion hazards exist in the Planning Area; risks of these range from moderate to low, with the exception of very high liquefaction risk in riparian corridors. Areas of particular hazard have been previously delineated and standards have been adopted that generally discourage development proximate to these areas. Further examination of coastal hazards, including coastal erosion and sea level rise, will be conducted as part of the General Plan Update. The update process provides an opportunity to make clear delineation of potential hazards and understand of existing resources in order to develop policies, standards, and design criteria that will help guide development and minimize the potential for exposure, upset, and damage. Hazards are discussed in Chapter 5 of this report.