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General Plan as a macro EIR

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Published: Friday, May 20, 2011 at 3:00 a.m.

The General Plan and its place in the stream of things is often misinterpreted. The General Plan is neither a requirement for the detailed development of a specific parcel nor a fixed-in-place requirement to be used for development over its 20-year life span.

It's a guideline developed by the community, at a point in time and under a then-current set of circumstances. Its purpose is to point the way an active portion of the community thought future development should proceed. It is not limited to only land use, but includes other components of city development and management. It encompasses everything from bicycle lanes to water projects.

As an example of how flexible, not static, the General Plan is, it may be revised up to four times a year or 80 times during its predicted 20-year life span. This acknowledges that decisions made at that original point in time (the initial approval of a new General Plan) are not necessarily expected to hold firm over 20 years. The idea that anyone can wave the General Plan around and say, "this is set in stone for 20 years" is false. Usually, several land-use and other changes are made during these periodic revisions to meet changing circumstances.

If the General Plan was a specific, detailed document, then no deviation from that would be allowed. A recent Argus-Courier article noted the area of the proposed Lowe's center was 15 percent smaller than allowed in the General Plan. Will those fixated on the sacredness and inflexibility of the General Plan require the developer to increase his project size by a percentage? I doubt it.

As another example, due to financial problems SMART is proposing to not build the Corona Road rail station shown in the General Plan in the first phase of its construction work. Does this mean the city has to redo its plans for how many city buses will be needed to service passengers using city public transit to get to the single downtown station? Will the city have to rethink the size of any parking facilities proposed at the downtown station?

Estimates in the General Plan of typical EIR impacts for various aggregates of land use are general, but represent a ballpark figure that was acceptable in the overall scheme of development outlined in the plan. The General Plan EIR is in fact a macro EIR for any proposed use in an identifiable area.

If the Lowe's center development package shows a lesser traffic impact than the General Plan, there should be no more discussion of the acceptability from the traffic point of view. Professionally developed details on specific methods of handling traffic, (turning lanes and traffic signals), would still be a technical factor in the specific plan approval but not the General Plan approval.

In thinking about this column I recalled the comment made during the L.A. riots a

few years ago; "Can't we just get along?" Why are some people in this community so quick to protest and use the General Plan as a reason to sue over every development proposal?

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The General Plan represents a seven-year project costing about \$8 million to develop a plan acceptable to the whole community. Why is it constantly being challenged by the same small group of activists? Probably because they didn't get all the things they wanted from it. They talk about community but won't accept the community's acceptance of the General Plan document as our road map to the future. Who then do they represent? A selected group for whom there is no acceptable solution other than theirs.

Can't we just get along?

Let's follow this process for the Lowe's center and see if the objections are to basic concepts or nit-picking details designed to only harass any development in open areas.

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