

Strategic Plan for the

SAN BENITO COUNTY

General Plan Update

Draft Work Program Report

March 2008



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Prepared by

DYETT & BHATIA
Urban and Regional Planners

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I Introduction

PURPOSE

What will San Benito County be like in 20 years? How should it change? What qualities should be preserved? How does its history and environment inform the evolving urban and rural structures? These questions and others have guided a community outreach and analysis process conducted by the County as part of a Strategic Plan for the General Plan Update. The Strategic Plan—conducted between January 2007 and February 2008—is the first step (or Phase One) in the San Benito County General Plan Update. Findings from the Strategic Plan process are distilled in four (4) reports:

- Stakeholder Interviews Report;
- Workshops Report;
- Community Survey Report; and
- Draft Work Program Report (this report)

This Draft Work Program Report presents the major issues emerging from community outreach that are likely to be the focus of the General Plan Update, providing the springboard for the Scope of Work for the Plan and the Environmental Impact Report. The list of issues and scope should be considered preliminary; it is likely that ongoing community participation during the update process, as well as technical analysis of opportunities and challenges, will unearth additional issues during Phase Two (the actual update of the Plan).

REPORT ORGANIZATION

The Draft Work Program Report includes the following chapters after this introduction:

Chapter 2: General Plan Update Focus, which summarizes the emerging themes from the Strategic Plan outreach process, as well as the major General Plan issues brought up by the community;

Chapter 3: Scope of Work, which defines the recommended overall phases of work required to complete the General Plan Update, as well as a detailed list of recommended tasks, optional tasks, and products. We have assumed the County will continue to utilize consultant assistance in this area to augment staff.

Chapter 4: Public Participation Program Options, which provides suggestions for tools to use in the next phase of public participation and outreach.

2 General Plan Update Focus

The guiding focus for the San Benito County General Plan Update will be the themes that emerged from community outreach. These themes encapsulate the desires and hopes of county residents, as well as the broad range of issues and challenges identified by community members and other stakeholders. These guiding themes help to focus investigation of opportunities and challenges, and serve as a yardstick for evaluating the suitability of land use and circulation alternatives.

This Chapter summarizes the emerging themes that are described in more detail in the Stakeholder Interviews, Community Workshops, and Community Survey reports. Although the updated General Plan will address a comprehensive range of subject matter in keeping with State law and good planning practice, resolution of these issues and pursuit of these planning goals are likely to be the principal focus of analysis and community and decision-maker dialogue.

EMERGING THEMES

Several overarching themes emerged through public outreach during the Strategic Plan process. These include:

- 1) **Balancing Growth and Agricultural Preservation.** A major theme from the outreach process is a shared desire to achieve balance between preserving the county's agricultural activities and landscape and developing new economic and housing opportunities.
- 2) **Protecting Natural Resources.** A high priority should be placed on the protection of important biological and water resources from development pressure, damage, and destruction.
- 2) **Maintaining a Place-based Identity.** The county needs a strong cultural/place-based identity that acknowledges their rural heritage and resources that are unique to San Benito.
- 3) **Increasing Economic Opportunity.** Outreach identified a desire for more job opportunities as well as guarantees against rising taxes and fees that increase the cost of living.
- 4) **Repairing and Expanding Infrastructure.** The General Plan Update should include provisions for adequate infrastructure improvements and maintenance, including transportation, water and sewer facilities.

MAJOR GENERAL PLAN ISSUES

While the updated General Plan will address the full spectrum of issues related to the physical environment in San Benito County, several key issues have been identified by the community that will require focused effort. The General Plan Work Program establishes a step-by-step process involving data analysis, alternatives development and consideration, and policy formulation to resolve these issues in a manner that balances the local diversity of needs and desires. The major issues, somewhat more specific than the emerging themes, are described below.

AMOUNT AND DISTRIBUTION OF GROWTH

A general sentiment among residents who participated in Strategic Plan outreach activities was that future population growth in San Benito County should be limited if possible, and the growth that is permitted should be located in existing population centers, within or adjacent to the two cities and in the existing unincorporated communities. Many participants spoke about the possibility of more compact, dense development including planned unit developments (PUDs) with clustered housing to allow for open space preservation.

A predominant issue that concerns virtually all stakeholders is the need for a sustainable growth and development strategy. San Benito County, with its location near Silicon Valley and its bucolic atmosphere, has faced tremendous growth pressures, emerging as a bedroom community for the nearby technology hub. Currently, both cities (San Juan Bautista and Hollister) and the County have growth management measures in place. Hollister has Measure U—that restricts the number of housing units this year at 244 and will expire in 2012—and the County and San Juan Bautista both have a one-percent dwelling unit growth cap. There is also a growth moratorium in Hollister as the City is working to upgrade its wastewater treatment plant. That upgrade is expected to be completed at the end of 2008. However, some stakeholders questioned whether the growth restrictions are the right approach, and they are looking for more flexible ways to control growth in the County.

PRESERVING AGRARIAN CULTURE

Virtually all stakeholders want agriculture to prosper and grow in the county. Participants favored compact, clustered residential and commercial development to relieve pressure on agricultural land. On one hand, the region is still home to those closely tied to farming, and numerous stakeholders expressed their desire to preserve the rural character of the county. On the other hand, San Benito County is increasingly a bedroom community, comprised of new residents who desire the rural atmosphere and rustic-small town “feel”, but

work in and associate with places like Silicon Valley; these new residents are often distanced from the long-time residents of the community. Thus, there seems to be a need for defining the cultural “niche” for San Benito County, and marketing it more effectively.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT “IN SYNCH” WITH COMMUNITY CHARACTER

Residents are generally interested in promoting job growth in the county. The development of agricultural-related industries is at the heart of economic development discussions as well as preservation discussions. Residents acknowledge the pressure on the county to collect tax revenue and to therefore allow more profitable land uses, as well as the importance of agricultural landowner rights. In response to this need, green businesses, sustainable agricultural practices, organic products, and bio-fuels need to be explored as attractive potential industries for the County. Residents desire to develop commercial uses that are supportive of agriculture, such as greenhouses.

General job growth strategies include encouraging commercial zoning, infill development, exploiting the county’s “local niche,” using tax increment financing (TIF) and enterprise zones, as well as streamlining the government review of retail and commercial development. Residents also emphasize the need to support small businesses.

PRESERVING WATER QUALITY AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Overall, residents feel the General Plan should protect water quality and other environmental resources. Residents are concerned about riparian corridors and mineral resources. The latent flood plains carry large amounts of sediment when the rivers flow. The riparian corridors have not been well managed in part because extraction mining has created large holes throughout the landscape. Some stakeholders want the County to take more responsibility for pollution generated through economic development— for example, recycling, landfilling, and water contamination should be taken care of within San Benito County rather than sent somewhere else or left to impact communities downstream. Other specific environmental concerns include protecting wetlands and waterways, vernal pools, and other water bodies, and sensitive species, and preserving wildlife-movement corridors.

INFRASTRUCTURE UPGRADES AND MAINTENANCE

The lack of roads and transportation corridors across the county is a concern to many residents and stakeholders. There are a number of two-lane highways that are pushing their capacity limits, and routing issues with trucking that pose a hazard to commuters living in San Benito County and working in Silicon Valley. Others speak of the need for more connectivity to freeways (such as Interstate 5 in the southern part of the county) and increased public transit service. Residents generally agree that new development should pay for infrastructure instead of burdening the County or taxpayers overall.

Water, sewer, and drainage are also a concern for county residents. San Benito faces a water imbalance—development in the northern portions of the county affects the rest of the county as well. Residents want countywide planning to recognize that water resource issues differ across the county, and that there should be a distinction between rural and urban standards. In particular, residents would like the Plan to address concerns about the availability of water for agricultural uses due to increasing encroachment of homes around farmland.

POLICY FRAMEWORK WITH IMPLEMENTATION EMPHASIS

While the overall organization and policy structure of the existing General Plan is clear, the updated Plan can emphasize readability and implementation through:

More Maps and Visualization

The current General Plan includes few maps that illustrate targeted policy directives and programs. Increased use of maps and illustrations — such as for land use types and distribution, circulation system improvements, access to public facilities and services, locations of safety hazards, and population densities and growth trends — and less reliance on text can make the General Plan more accessible and useful as an everyday implementation tool.

Greater Detail for Implementation

Based on the infrequency of updates and amendments, implementation of specific General Plan policies has likely been limited or unconfirmed. Thus, the updated General Plan should place a greater emphasis on implementation and monitoring. Policies should provide direction on how to achieve the desired result, using statements that are specific, measureable, achievable, and realistic. It may be helpful to establish benchmarks in key areas to monitor progress, and to specify responsible parties where feasible and appropriate.

Increased Emphasis on Design

Design policies in the General Plan can help the community meet its objectives of maintaining a rural, small town character, integrating older and newer residents, improving access to services in conjunction with preservation of agricultural land, and effectively buffering incompatible uses such that traditional agricultural activity can continue without jeopardizing the success of necessary new residential and commercial development. Adequate design policies can lay a foundation for zoning and development review processes with clear articulation of the county's vision for the future.

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3 Scope of Work

SUMMARY OF MINIMUM REQUIRED UPDATES

While a complete legal analysis of the current General Plan will not be conducted at this time, this report provides a summary of minimum update recommendations.

The existing San Benito County General Plan contains the minimum State-required elements, as well as optional Seismic Safety and Scenic Highways elements. The Land Use Element was last updated in 1992, with amendments occurring through the year 2005. The Open Space and Conservation Element was last updated in 1995, with no further amendments. The Transportation Element was last updated in 1990 with amendment in 1992. The Noise Element was last updated in 1980, with amendment in 1984. The Safety, Seismic Safety, and Scenic Roads and Highways elements were last updated in 1980 with no further amendments.

The County intends the Plan to be reviewed annually and updated every three years (page 1 of the Land Use Element 1992 Update). Though Plan elements have been amended and updated individually, all required and optional elements of the San Benito County General Plan are due for complete updates in order to abide by the County's stated intentions. Furthermore, while State law requires that the Plan take a long-term perspective (Section 65300), the General Plan Guidelines also states that "a general plan based upon outdated information and projections is not a sound basis for day-to-day decision-making and may be legally inadequate. As such, it will be susceptible to successful legal challenge." (2003, p. 14) The information and projections within the General Plan are likely outdated, and, due to the discrepancies in time between updates of different General Plan elements, the Plan itself may not be internally consistent as required by law (Section 65300.5).

This scope of work thus recommends that all required elements be fully updated, and that seismic safety be folded within the Safety Element. In light of current State law and litigation around global climate change and greenhouse gas emissions, this work program also recommends the inclusion of a sustainability section, either as a distinct element or integrated within another pre-existing element. Certainly the County's involvement as a member of the California Climate Action Registry is a good start in this area and can be a resource in the General Plan Update. It is also recommended that an Economic Development Element and a Community Design Element be included in this General Plan Update.

This work scope does not encompass the Housing Element update. However, the Housing Element update must be addressed separately and scheduled to be completed by mid-2009. Staff will be reviewing this item with County decision-makers in the near future.

PHASES

The approach to the General Plan Update and the Environmental Impact Report work program envisions the project to be broken down into major phases, reflecting integrated public participation and analytical processes. These five phases—Background Studies/Opportunities and Challenges Assessment, Choices, Draft General Plan and EIR, Final General Plan and EIR—are outlined below, and build upon community visioning conducted for the Strategic Plan. This scope of work does not include preparation of a Zoning Ordinance or a fiscal analysis, although we understand the County would like to pursue the latter.

Throughout these phases, the General Plan update will need to address the major issues being faced by the County. Understanding what these are and how they are perceived will evolve as the program proceeds; it is essential to retain flexibility to address and respond to specific concerns within the State-mandated context of what a General Plan is and how it is intended to be used.

The General Plan should be laid out in an easy to read format, have a visual orientation, and be richly illustrated with drawings, sketches, graphs/charts, and photographs.

PHASE I: BACKGROUND STUDIES/OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES ASSESSMENT

Land Use and Vacant/Opportunity Site Survey

A complete land use data layer would be created from existing data sources where available, and third party sources. Windshield surveys in selected urban locations would be used to confirm the land use data, which would be given to the County as an ArcGIS data layer, and displayed on printed maps.

Existing Conditions, Opportunities and Challenges Assessment

A comprehensive assessment of all of the existing conditions, trends, and opportunities and challenges—physical, economic, and environmental—will be undertaken. This assessment will provide the springboard for the alternatives, basis for policies in the General Plan, and the setting for the General Plan EIR.

PHASE II: CHOICES

Alternative Plans Workbook

This workbook would draw from ideas that have emerged from the community forums and discussions with the County on land use concepts and classifications, and others, such as economic development initiatives and livability/sustainability concepts. Impacts of the alternatives will be discussed to enable informed decision-making.

Preferred Vision

In close cooperation with the community (including community-level meetings) and decision-makers, a Preferred Vision/Plan will be prepared. The Preferred Vision will encompass the land use and transportation framework, including issues related to location and intensity of development, to provide the basis for preparation of detailed proposals in the General Plan.

Framework Concepts and Key Goals

These will complement the physical development framework embodied in the Preferred Vision. Key goals for each element will be identified, providing the bridge between the Preferred Plan and detailed policy development.

PHASE III: DRAFT GENERAL PLAN AND EIR, AND PHASE IV, FINAL EIR

Draft General Plan

The Draft General Plan would include all of the State-mandated elements as well as Community Design and Economic Development elements. The emphasis would be on policies that all tie back to the vision/preferred plan, rather than presentation of lengthy background material. Policies would be written with the intent of establishing the basis for implementing ordinances and other actions. Following public review and hearings, the adopted General Plan will be prepared.

Environmental Impact Review

Impact assessment would be conducted parallel to General Plan preparation, so that mitigation can be built into the General Plan, resulting in a self-mitigating Plan. The impact assessment, documented in the Draft EIR, would be circulated for public review and then finalized with the responses to comments meeting all CEQA requirements.

Adopted General Plan

This will be laid out in an easy-to-read format, with rich use of photographs, charts, diagrams, and maps. It will be provided to the County in a format so as to be easily accessible on the web.

SCOPE OF WORK

This section outlines the proposed work program for the San Benito County General Plan Update. The program is organized into eight (8) tasks, from project initiation to publishing the final General Plan and the EIR.

The task-by-task descriptions that follow present the County's approach to data collection, alternatives analysis, policy formulation and preparation of the documents. Each task description includes a purpose statement at the beginning. Proposers should clearly state any changes they recommend to this work program.

The Scope of Work below incorporates one possible set of Board/Planning Commission meetings and community workshops. A more general description of public participation program options is provided in Chapter 4 of this report. Final design and integration of the public participation program within the work tasks will be determined during Task 1.

TASK I: RECONNAISSANCE AND ORGANIZATION

The objective of this first task will be to conduct a series of introductory and organizational tasks. An introductory meeting between the consultant team and County staff will occur. Background information needs will be determined, plan product formats, including computer-mapping formats, will be established, and the available land use information will be analyzed. Based on these introductory meetings and the evaluation of existing information, the proposed work program will be refined into a Final Work Program. The Work Program will be used to guide and track the General Plan and the EIR. In addition, the Work Program will clearly define overall project management and organization, staffing, technical studies, schedule and deliverables, and quality control measures to ensure cohesiveness and consistency of the final products.

Also included in this task is fine-tuning the Public Participation Program, although this component has to be flexible to respond to changing needs as the project progresses.

I-A. Conduct a kick-off meeting with County Staff

The consultants will meet with members of the County Planning

Department staff to review community issues, and the work program. At these meetings data sources will be identified, roles and responsibilities will be clarified, communication protocols will be established, and work program modifications will be discussed.

County staff will also provide the consultant team with an overview of existing plans and program, pipeline development, major opportunities, and issues. Existing information needed for the General Plan will be gathered. Additional information will be assembled, including facility plans, existing land use, and details on the status of proposed and approved development projects.

I-B. Conduct Initial Meeting with the General Plan Advisory Committee

By this time, the Board will have established the General Plan Advisory Committee, or similar decision-making body. Results of the community outreach (community survey, community workshop, and stakeholder meetings) conducted during the Strategic Plan phase of the General Plan Update process will be presented to the GPAC. GPAC's role for the General Plan Update, and overall meeting schedule with topics for each meeting will be reviewed.

I-C. Finalize Public Participation Program and Schedule

Any adjustments in timing discussed in kickoff meetings will be incorporated into the schedule and scope of work, following which a final public participation program and schedule will be prepared.

I-D. Obtain and Compile GIS Database

Using the County's existing GIS data, digital orthophoto and other sources, and fieldwork, the Consultant will prepare a computerized base map for the display and analysis of Planning Area land data. All GIS information and database development will be coordinated to be compatible with ArcGIS.

I-E. Establish Project Website

Consultant will provide to County staff complete design of the project website for placing it on the County's website. Interim designs will be reviewed with staff before the site is finalized. The Work Program, Public Participation Program, upcoming participation opportunities, and other material will be placed on the project website.

<i>Meetings:</i>	<i>Kickoff meeting with County Planning Staff Kickoff meeting with the GPAC</i>
<i>Products:</i>	<i>Final Scope of Work and Schedule Final Public Participation Program Project Website Materials for Project Website</i>

TASK 2: EXISTING CONDITIONS, OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES ASSESSMENT

The objective of this task will be to obtain and compile background information, analyze long-term trends, and summarize the opportunities and constraints in San Benito County, and identify key factors that will affect planning decisions. For many topics, the background assessment will serve as the “setting” for the Environmental Impact Report.

This report will summarize existing conditions in the San Benito County Planning Area with regard to the entire range of subject matter affecting physical development, including land use and population distribution, employment centers, community character, transportation, parks and open space, historic resources, conservation of natural resources, and safety. Economic information will also be considered, as will regional trends that have an impact on the County.

This report will be visually rich and written to be easily understood by the public and decision-makers. A series of computer-based maps for various topics will also be prepared and included in the report.

For each topic, this report will present background data and information, analysis of the information for its pertinence to the General Plan Update, and policy implications of the analysis and resulting issues.

2-A. Conduct Land Use Survey/Vacant Parcel Survey

Building on information obtained from the County and Metrosan, focused windshield surveys in the urbanized areas will be conducted to verify land use data accuracy and to identify any underutilized parcels. A complete land use data layer will be prepared, which will serve as the basis for land use analysis and alternatives. Significant vacant and underutilized parcels will also be identified, based on a variety of considerations.

2-B. Prepare Opportunities and Challenges Report

A descriptive profile of the San Benito County existing conditions will be prepared. This will involve the compilation of baseline data for each General Plan element/section and evaluation of this data to identify their planning implications. The latter will contribute to the framework of critical issues and challenges impacting the County to be addressed by the updated General Plan. This data will be compiled, textually described, mapped, and analyzed. Maps, photographs, illustrations, tables, and charts will be extensively used to facilitate understanding of the data. The following topic areas will be addressed:

Population, Household and Labor Force Characteristics and Trends

Project Baseline County-Specific Population and Households

Employment and Economic Characteristics and Trends

Industry Sector and Employment Projections

Land Use

Growth Management

Transportation Systems & Circulation

Community Design

Parks and Open Space

Biological Resources

Historical and Archaeological Resources

Geologic/Seismic Hazards

Flood Hazards

Fire Hazards

Noise

2-C. Prepare Final Opportunities and Challenges Report

Following staff review of the draft, the Working Paper will be revised and then finalized for publication.

2-D. Present Opportunities and Challenges Assessment to Decision-Makers

The County envisions one (three to four hours) or two (perhaps two hour each) joint workshops with the Planning Commission/Board/General Plan Advisory Committee where results of the assessment will be presented. To enable the consultant team to present findings on key topics, a substantial time will be reserved at each meeting for decision-maker feedback on issues, choices, and strategies presented. Decision-maker feedback will be used to draw up Alternatives (Task 3), as well as incorporation in General Plan policy.

Meetings: Board/Planning Workshops on Opportunities and Challenges Assessment

Products: Opportunities and Challenges Report

TASK 3: SKETCH PLANS

The intent of this task is to identify three planning alternatives and conduct a thorough analysis of these to allow informed decision-making.

This task will be conducted in two parts: 1) Building on the identified issues,

and opportunities and constraints, Consultant will formulate and analyze three plans illustrating alternative land use and circulation patterns for the Planning Area; and 2) An evaluation of the alternative “sketch plans” will be conducted, so informed decisions can be made. This effort will include analysis of population and employment, and traffic impacts of each alternative.

3-A. Conduct Neighborhood Workshops on Defining Alternative Plans

Workshops will be held with the community to present results of the Opportunities and Challenges assessment, and brainstorm about specific issues and ideas to be included in the Alternative Plans.

3-B. Define Preliminary Alternative Plans

The land use/transportation alternatives will be defined. The alternatives will be sensitive to the issues, opportunities, and constraints identified in the Opportunities and Challenges task and the community workshops, and offer real choices. For instance, no plan alternative will show development at locations that have been conclusively identified as inappropriate due to environmental hazards, sensitive habitats, or other constraints.

The alternatives will be sufficiently developed to show the community and decision-makers clear choices among major land use options. Sketch Plan alternatives will incorporate urban design concepts and will explore land use arrangements, mixes, locations of centers and activities to reduce traffic impacts and promote quality of life.

- Sketch Plan alternatives will incorporate urban design and livability concepts and will address the challenge of adapting these concepts to San Benito County.
- Issues of amenities and walkability will be addressed.
- Existing community, specific, and other planning efforts will be integrated into the preparation of the sketch plans alternatives.
- At least one of the alternatives would encompass the DMB project.

3-C. Evaluate Alternative Plans

Impacts of the plans will be quantified. Relative merits and disadvantages of the alternatives will be assessed. Topics for evaluation will include:

- *Land Use, Population, and Employment.* Comparative impacts in terms of population, jobs/housing balance, and other factors of concern will be prepared for presentation in narrative and tabular form. The impacts of alternatives would also be compared against regional projections and the likely future condition assuming continuation of the existing General Plan.
- *Transportation.* Traffic forecasts will be developed for each alternative. Countywide transportation measures such as vehicle miles of travel, hours of delay, and numbers of trips generated will be calculated for each of the three alternatives and will be used to assist in comparing and contrasting the effects of the alternatives. Traffic volumes and operations at key locations will be documented and analyzed, and Consultant will identify the transportation infrastructure necessary to address the deficiencies identified through modeling. The results will be used to determine the effectiveness of potential circulation improvements and their possible inclusion in the final Preferred Alternative.

3-D. Prepare Final Alternative Plans Report

The alternatives, their organizing principles, as well as the evaluation, will be summarized in a working paper. Following staff review of an administrative draft, a Workbook for Public Review will be prepared.

Meetings: *Community Workshops on Ideas for Alternatives*
Products: *Alternative Plans Report*

TASK 4: PREFERRED PLAN SELECTION AND REFINEMENT

In this task, a Preferred Plan will be selected and refined in collaboration with the community and decision-makers. The selection of a Preferred Plan will create a framework within which new policy language can be developed and the General Plan updated. Much of the focus of choosing a Preferred Plan will revolve around the major issues identified such as economic sustainability, open space preservation, and achieving a self-sustaining mix of land uses. Additionally, framework concepts or key goals for the individual elements will provide a bridge to detailed policy-making.

4-A. Prepare Newsletter on Planning Alternatives

This newsletter will summarize the key alternatives being considered for the General Plan. Opportunities for public input will also be included. The County will be responsible for printing and mailing.

4-B. Conduct Community Workshops on Alternatives

The consultant team will lead a series of community workshops to discuss and compare the alternative plans. The format for the public workshop will be reviewed with County staff. While some of the material discussed will be common to all workshops, community-specific issues will be addressed in targeted discussions with area residents of the specific community where the workshop is held.

4-C. Conduct Decision Maker Workshop on Alternatives

Decision-makers will be briefed on the alternatives, their impacts, and community reaction to them, so decision-makers can weigh in or provide specific direction to the staff/consultants.

4-D. Prepare Preferred Alternative

Following the public input and direction by decision-makers and County staff, a preliminary preferred plan will be prepared. This will be reviewed with staff and refined in an interactive setting.

4-E. Present Preliminary Preferred Plan to Decision-makers and Refine in an Interactive Workshop

The Preliminary Preferred Plan will be presented to the Planning Commission/Board and refined in an interactive workshop setting using GIS-based analysis.

4-F. Prepare Policy and Framework Concepts

These concepts, in a memo format, will synthesize information gathered to date and assist the Planning Commission/Board in bridging the gap between Preferred Plan and detailed policy development. Key goals or guiding policies for each of the plan elements will be identified.

4-G. Review Framework Concepts, Key Goals, and results of Traffic Evaluation with the Decision-Makers

The concepts and key goals (from Task F above) will be reviewed with the Planning Commission/Board in joint workshop.

<i>Meetings:</i>	<i>Neighborhood workshops on Alternatives</i> <i>Decision-maker meeting on Alternatives</i> <i>Decision-maker meeting on Preferred Plan</i> <i>Decision-maker meeting on Framework Concepts and Key Goals</i>
<i>Products:</i>	<i>Newsletter: General Plan Alternatives</i> <i>Workshop Materials</i> <i>Preliminary Preferred Plan (display and report size in color)</i> <i>Preferred Plan Memo on Framework Concepts and Key Goals</i>

TASK 5: DRAFT GENERAL PLAN

Decision-maker approval of a Preferred Plan and key goals will establish a strong foundation to build detailed General Plan policies. Balancing attention between text policies, the land use plan, and the land use classifications is critical to a successful General Plan. The Consultant will strive for brevity and clarity that enables all interested persons to easily tell what commitments the County is making, what it hopes to accomplish, and whether a proposed project is consistent with the General Plan. The General Plan will include both “guiding policies” (or goals) and “implementing policies”, the latter forming the basis for implementing ordinances or amendments to existing ordinances. This task will be conducted in parallel with the Draft EIR exercise, so that any necessary mitigation can be folded into Plan policies to ensure that the Plan is “self-mitigating”.

The County’s current General Plan element structure is logical and responsive to the County’s needs. Thus, while the contents of the elements may change, the County anticipates having an overall outline similar to the current General Plan; the General Plan will meet State-mandated requirements for all elements (with the exception of Housing), rearranged to fit this outline. Housing Element changes adopted in 2009 will also be incorporated as necessary. The General Plan will be richly illustrated with drawings and photographs, and attractively designed using desktop publishing software.

5-A. Prepare Outline

Consultant will prepare an outline and format for the General Plan and review it with County staff. Topics that will be covered in each section will be identified, and a “mock-up” section will be prepared for staff approval.

5-B. Establish Plan Forecasts

Forecasts of land use, population, employment changes that will occur at General Plan buildout will be prepared.

5-C. Conduct Traffic Assessment of Preferred Plan

The transportation network identified to support the final Preferred Alternative will be represented in the Circulation Diagram in the General Plan. GIS mapping will be used for final presentation of traffic conditions. Mapping will include daily and peak hour traffic volumes on roadways and Level of Service forecasts for important intersections.

5-D. Prepare General Plan

Each element of the General Plan will include background information, goals and implementing policies, and monitoring and evaluation requirements. As discussed in the Project Approach, implementing policies will be consolidated into a stand-alone document – the General Plan Implementation Program. For each element, meetings with key figures from each department will be arranged as needed. A preliminary list of elements for the General Plan follows:

Land Use and Growth Management Element

Economic Development Element

Circulation Element

Open Space and Conservation Element

Urban Design and Preservation Element

Health and Safety Element

Noise Element

5-E. Implementation and Monitoring

The General Plan implementing policies will constitute the Implementation Program for the General Plan; if so desired, these can be assembled into an independent document/matrix, so implementation can be tracked or included programs easily prioritized. In addition, statutory requirements for annual General Plan reports will be included. Major capital improvements resulting from the General Plan—parks, streets, water/wastewater system improvements—can also be compiled into list, so that the County can prioritize timing and improvements.

5-F. Decision-Maker Meetings

Some policy issues must necessarily be considered and resolved during the preparation of the General Plan. Decision-makers (Board and/or Planning Commission) will convene as needed (likely 2 or 3 meetings) to provide the project team with planning policy direction.

5-G. Prepare Hearing Draft General Plan

An Administrative Draft will be presented for staff review and will be revised after a consolidated set of comments are provided by County staff.

Meetings: Decision-maker meetings

Products: General Plan Outline Administrative Draft General Plan Draft General Plan General Plan Implementation Program

TASK 6: DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

The objective of this task will be to prepare a Program Environmental Impact Report of the General Plan, pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). This task will be conducted in parallel with the Draft General Plan. Consultant will identify which Plan policies serve as mitigation, so the need for additional mitigation should be limited. Also, consultant will identify potentially significant impact issues early in the process so that appropriate mitigation policies can be developed and incorporated into the General Plan, resulting in a “self-mitigating” document.

6-A. Prepare Notice of Preparation

The Notice of Preparation (NOP) will indicate what subjects will be investigated in the General Plan EIR. Because the County has already determined an EIR will be prepared, there is no need to conduct an Initial Study.

6-B. Conduct a Scoping Meeting

Since an update of any portion of a General Plan is considered to be a project of statewide, regional, or local significance, a scoping meeting is required. In the scoping meeting, the Lead Agency meets with members of the public and/or agency representatives after a NOP has been distributed in order to learn about potential concerns, further define key environmental issues, identify feasible project alternatives, and discuss potential mitigation measures that may warrant analysis in the environmental document.

Consultant will conduct one scoping meeting and prepare hand-outs that describe the general environmental process. The focus of the scoping meeting will be to solicit the involvement of responsible agencies, the community at-large, and local business organizations. It is assumed that the scoping meeting will be conducted during the middle of the review period of the NOP. This Scoping Meeting could also be integrated with a meeting of the Planning Commission or the Board of Supervisors on General Plan policy issues (previous task).

6-C. Develop Thresholds/ Significance Criteria

Development of criteria against which impacts will be evaluated (and ultimately designed) lies as the crux of a Countywide Program EIR such as this. These thresholds will be developed and refined using those that have been adopted by the County, and applicable federal, State, and local standards. In some instances, new thresholds may be included—for example, the transportation thresholds may be more multimodal in nature, reflecting the community’s interest in sustainability.

Consultant will work closely with County staff to develop the thresholds for evaluation of environmental impacts. The County’s involvement in the determination and approval of thresholds is important when considering the level of significance for impacts associated with the proposed General Plan. The Program EIR will utilize the approved thresholds of significance to identify both the direct and indirect impacts of the proposed updated General Plan. It is intended that these thresholds of significance will be used to ensure that all future development projects do not generate adverse environmental impacts as defined by CEQA or San Benito County. The standardized levels of significance will also be included as a portion of the EIR.

6-D. Administrative Draft EIR

Existing conditions information compiled for the Opportunities and Challenges Assessment will serve as the setting for several EIR topics. Additional information will be compiled by contacting public service providers such as utility companies, school districts, emergency service providers, etc. The Program EIR will be prepared using the evaluation of existing conditions, the environmental setting of the County, and existing conditions for each environmental issue to be discussed.

To reduce or eliminate any significant adverse impacts identified during the analysis, the Program EIR would recommend appropriate mitigation measures. The intention here is to specify mitigation measures early in the planning process as alternatives are identified and evaluated, and as policies are formulated in response to key issues that have been identified. In this manner, the updated General Plan Elements can function as “self-mitigating” documents. However, we recognize that residual impacts may remain for which further mitigation and/or overriding considerations must be established.

The Draft EIR will include the following sections:

- Table of contents
- Summary of impacts and mitigation measures
- Project description (project objectives, project location, project characteristics, scope of project, and discretionary approvals)
- Environmental setting, thresholds of significance, regulatory framework, environmental impacts (short-term, long-term, direct, indirect, and cumulative), and mitigation measures for all issue areas
- Alternatives (including the No Project Scenario)
- Effects found not to be significant
- Unavoidable adverse impacts
- Long-term implications (including cumulative, growth-inducing, and significant irreversible environmental impacts)
- Organizations and persons consulted/EIR preparers
- References
- Technical appendices

The main purpose of the Draft Program EIR will be to thoroughly and accurately analyze the environmental impacts of the proposed updated General Plan for the County of San Benito County. The document will be free of jargon so that the information it contains is accessible to decision-makers and the public. The methodology and criteria used for determining the impacts of the project will be clearly and explicitly described in each section of the Program EIR, including any assumptions, models, or modeling techniques used in the analysis. The Summary section of the Program EIR will be in table format, and will briefly describe the impacts, level of significance of impacts, recommended mitigation measures, and level of significance after the recommended mitigation measures are incorporated.

Specific topic areas/sections to be addressed/included in the EIR will include:

Project Description/Population, Housing, and Employment

Land Use

Agricultural, Mineral, and Soils Resources

Visual Quality

Traffic and Circulation

Air Quality

Biological Resources

Hydrology and Water Quality

Seismic and Geologic Hazards

Noise

Energy Use and Climate Change

Cultural Resources

Public Facilities and Services

Hazardous Materials and Toxics

Long-Term Implications

Alternatives

6-E. Public Review Draft EIR

County staff will provide the Consultant team with one consolidated set of comments on the Draft EIR, following which, the Draft EIR for public distribution and review will be prepared. Consultant will also prepare the Notice of Completion. It is anticipated that the County will handle distribution of the document to the appropriate members of the public and public agencies.

Meetings: Scoping Meeting Consultation with agencies as appropriate

Products: Notice of Preparation

Memorandum on Thresholds/ Significance Criteria

Administrative Draft EIR

Draft EIR for Public Review

TASK 7: PUBLIC REVIEW / FINAL EIR

The objective of this task will be to take the Draft General Plan and EIR through public meetings and hearings and assist in the adoption process.

7-A. Prepare Newsletter on Draft General Plan Update

This newsletter will summarize the salient features of the new plan/ programs. It will identify the time and place of public workshops, and hearings on the Draft EIR, as required by CEQA, and the availability of the documents.

7-B. Conduct Community Open House

Consultant can present salient features of the General Plan to the community in an “open house” format – after the presentation, attendees would be invited to ask questions and offer comments.

7-C. Prepare Administrative Final EIR

This task will result in the preparation of a Final EIR, which will contain a list of commenters, comment letters, and responses to comments on the Draft EIR. Any changes to the Draft EIR text will be marked with strikeout/underline formatting to show revisions in response to comments until the Final EIR is adopted with the certified language.

7-D. Prepare Final EIR

The objective of this task is to prepare a Final EIR that incorporates County comments on the Administrative Draft Final EIR.

7-E. Prepare Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program

The objective of this task is to ensure compliance with Public Resources Code Section 21081.6, as mandated by Assembly Bill 3180 (Cortese 1988), which requires a Lead Agency to adopt a mitigation monitoring program (MMP) at the time an EIR is certified. The Consultant team will prepare a draft MMP concurrently with the preparation of the Final EIR. To the extent possible, the updated General Plan will be self-mitigating. The MMP will include measures required beyond policies proposed in the updated General Plan.

The MMP will be in table format, and will specify mitigation measures, standards of success, parties responsible for implementation and monitoring, funding sources, timing, and provisions for remedial measures (if the success standards are not achieved). The MMP will be designed to fit into the County’s existing entitlement and project review process. A Draft MMP will be provided to the County with the Final EIR. After review and comment on the Draft MMP, the consultant team will revise the MMP, according to the comments provided, and will submit the Final MMP, which will comprise a portion of the Final Program EIR. Additionally, the MMP will be integrated into the General Plan implementation program, as appropriate.

7-F. (Optional task) Findings of Fact and Overriding Considerations

With additional funds, Consultant may prepare the findings and the

Statement of Overriding Considerations to enable adoption of the Plan. Consultant would prepare drafts for these documents, and following review by County staff, would finalize them.

7-G. Adoption Hearings

Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors must consider adoption of the new General Plan, and certification of the Final EIR in public hearings, following the public review period. Consultant will closely coordinate with County staff prior to the hearings to ensure that presentations respond to specific questions and issues likely to be encountered during the hearings. The first of these hearings maybe a joint meeting with the GPAC (which would also conclude the GPAC involvement in the process).

- Meetings: Community Workshop/Open House Hearings*
- Products: Newsletter on General Plan Update
Administrative Draft Final EIR
Final EIR
Draft Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program
Final Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program
(Optional) Findings and Statement of Overriding Considerations*

TASK 8: ADOPTED GENERAL PLAN

In this task, the adopted General Plan will be prepared.

8-A. Prepare Adopted General Plan

Following adoption, consultant will prepare a final version of the General Plan in a high-quality, easy-to-read format. It also will be put in a form suitable for posting on the County’s Website. The final product will also include large scale, colored display maps.

8-B. Provide GIS and all Files to the County

GIS files compiled at various stages of the process (such as existing land use, General Plan Land Use, environmental resources files) will be compiled and provided to the County.

- Products: Final General Plan (in Web-ready and publication formats)
GIS files*

4 Public Participation Program Options

PURPOSE

Because of the wide-ranging impacts of the County General Plan Update, it is particularly important to facilitate a broad range of public participation. As we envision it, San Benito County's public participation program should fulfill five broad purposes:

1. Educate the public about the purposes of the General Plan, the physical, economic, and social implications, the process, and how they can be involved.
2. Inform the public about the current state of the County, its issues, and critical trends that may affect its future.
3. Expand the public's awareness of planning strategies and policies that have been used in other counties throughout the State and proven to effectively address critical issues and achieve community visions comparable to those facing San Benito County with broad support by local residents and decision-makers.
4. Provide opportunities for the vigorous discussion of and effective input regarding issues, visions, planning principles, growth and development opportunities and challenges.
5. Achieve public ownership of the emerging visions.

PROGRAM COMPONENTS

BOARDS, COUNCILS, AND COMMISSIONS

Staff and Consultant would meet with members of the Planning Commission and the Board as well as any other commissions or committees deemed appropriate on a periodic basis to check in and update them on the planning process.

GENERAL PLAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE (GPAC)

A General Plan Advisory Committee could potentially be formed for the project. The primary responsibilities of the GPAC will be to: a) consolidate the initial public feedback into a concrete vision, and b) carry this vision forward into Phase 2. The GPAC will be responsible for shepherding the planning process; providing leadership; reviewing County staff and consultant research and technical analyses; and providing input for and confirming key issues, visions, land use planning policies, and updates to zoning regulations. It is recommended that the GPAC focus on input, review, and “buy-in” to fundamental visions and policy directions. Detailed deliberations on precise policy and program wording should be discouraged.

The GPAC committee members would additionally serve as communication advisors to expand the role of public participation. Advice would be sought regarding potential methods to effectively communicate and solicit general public input for the planning program. GPAC members would be requested to serve as conduits to their respective constituencies, informing them about the planning process and how the public can participate, distributing information about the planning program and workshop flyers, and encouraging participation in the involvement programs.

PROJECT LOGO/“BRANDING” AND WEBSITE

Logo/Branding

An identifiable and representative logo/image of the project will be created to generate interest and involvement in the process. A logo can impart a unified look to outreach materials, meeting and workshop graphics, and publications, enabling more effective sustained communication with the community.

Web Site

The consultant would design a project website on the County’s homepage, and prepare information about the purposes of the planning process and project progress; workshops; access to meeting materials, reports, and graphics on-line; and responses to surveys and other information gathering forums. Throughout the planning process, materials and information (including text and maps) can be prepared in a web-compatible format, so they can be posted on the website. The site can also act as a record of the process, providing meeting dates, agendas and meeting notes in a central, accessible location. Project memorandum and milestone documents can be uploaded to the project website to be accessed by interested citizens.

NEWSLETTERS

Newsletters could be developed at key points in the process and distributed throughout the county, as has been done in Phase 1 with the introductory newsletter/survey. A newsletter is an excellent vehicle for informing the public about the update process, describing how they as citizens can participate and presenting schedules, information about community workshops, key issues, and emerging themes. Response (feedback) forms that can be mailed back to the County may also be incorporated. The newsletters will emphasize graphics, photos, and illustrations in order to be eye-catching and make the planning concepts easily understood. This project could develop a stand-alone newsletter or incorporate project information into the newsletter published by the County, depending on lead times and staff preference.

PRESS AND MEDIA RELEASES

Press and media releases could be prepared and distributed to local media at key milestones in the planning process in consultation with County staff and in advance of the neighborhood and Countywide workshops and other public forums. Editors and writers for local newspapers can be encouraged to publish articles about the planning process, key issues, options, and recommended policies and programs. Similarly, local cable television outlets can be encouraged to participate by broadcasting live or by taping the public workshops and other outreach events.

COMMUNITY AND NEIGHBORHOOD WORKSHOPS

In addition to gathering input on countywide issues/visions, the workshops would be designed to solicit input on issues specific to each neighborhood as well, including opportunity sites. The consultant team would prepare materials and conduct the workshops (while consultant team members would have primary responsibility, County staff would be available to assist). The workshops would be designed as events for the entire community, designed to facilitate the participation of a wide array of residents, business people, and other key stakeholders using participation techniques that engage interest, maximize opportunities for input, and send a message that the input has been heard and considered in the planning process.

Specific methods can be selected in collaboration with County staff in response to the specific objectives of the planning process and consideration of available budget and supporting County resources. Workshop methods may include:

- Large-scale base maps or aerials for recording of community issues, visions, and preferred options.

- Visual preference surveys presenting images of community places, characteristics, and issues and possible land use development, conservation, and other pertinent strategies, which are rated according to their importance and/or acceptability.
- Written essays, note cards, and other comments that articulate visions, issues, and reactions to planning options.
- “Break-out” sessions addressing issues and visions.
- Panels of consultants and other experts addressing key issues and potential policies.
- Large scale “wall graphics” and flip charts on which public comments are graphically recorded.
- “Delegate” score cards on which the votes of individual participants, appointed delegates, and/or small groups for planning options are tabulated.

KEY GROUP OUTREACH/NEIGHBORHOOD BRIEFINGS

Sometimes it is effective to reach out to groups where they meet, broadening outreach to those who do not otherwise come to public workshops. Briefings can be made to interest groups and organizations in locations where these groups (such as PTA, Chambers of Commerce, church groups, etc.) meet. These meetings would be conducted both by County staff and by the consultants. Students may also be able to assist staff and the consultants in areas such as this, if so desired.

COMMUNITY EDUCATIONAL FORUMS

Community visioning and assessment of issues can be accompanied by forums designed to educate and inspire the community to think big about the future. Educational topics might include sustainability issues (environment, social, economic), community design, public health and walkable neighborhoods, transportation, etc. These would address questions such as: How can we reduce our global environmental impact? How can we plan our community and neighborhoods to improve public health, specifically the health of our children and aging population? What type of example can we set for other communities in California and the world? How can we build on our assets and what residents cherish about San Benito County? Educational forums are opportunities for guest speakers to provide advice on tackling the county’s planning challenges.