

Message from Bill Wolpert, GPAC Member

Thu 1/20/2022 12:00 PM

To: Garcia, David

Good morning, David-

I have reviewed the documents and have some concerns. From the draft Vision Statement to the Pillars to the Guiding Principles and their supporting concepts, they are all very nice. I feel like this is a big basket of Hallmark platitudes to make us feel like we are doing something. Or, all of the public feedback fills binders to show that our consultants have connected with the community. I believe they have. But the resulting mess of sentimental ideas or capital intensive projects is more than 20 years of work. *"Ensure all feel welcomed and culturally connected to the downtown"*. What does that even mean? How would you begin to implement that? *"Physically connect the East and West sides of Petaluma with new roadways, (etc.)"*. We have been trying to get a bridge from west to east for over 25 years. If this is to be a Planning Guide, where does pragmatism come in? The emphasis seems to be more on process and not the end result. (I felt this again in watching the Fairgrounds presentation this week.)

If the next step is for the GPAC to sort through all of the pages and refine, edit, and summarize it into a manageable plan, I am going to be very frustrated. I feel that Raime Associates should be taking a larger role in organizing and focusing the community input into realistic and manageable goals that we can discuss. Weed out the "feel good" and the implausible. Highlight some achievable priorities like dealing with the impacts of Climate Change and restoring the river as the face of Downtown. What I see now is just a hot mess, not a planning guide.

Also, I have noticed that within the Pillars we have developed, many of them are connected to our local schools. Yet, education is essentially not mentioned much less incorporated. I had been told that education would be well covered in the Existing Conditions Reports. I looked for education in 2 or 3 of the Existing Conditions Reports and finally found it mentioned at the end of the Parks and Recreation report. They list the schools and show them on a map. That's it for education. Here is why I think it deserves more attention:

1. We are concerned with income disparity and inequality. Better education results in higher wages.
2. We want people to have greater access to housing. Higher wages allows that access. Wages are directly tied to education.
3. We are concerned about traffic, yet so much is generated by parents, teachers, and students. All one has to do is notice the lack of traffic on a school holiday.
4. Commuter traffic from outside the City limits could be decreased if students were trained for tech and manufacturing jobs in town. (How much traffic is generated within our City limits?)
5. Some goals for Economic Development could be addressed by training local residents.

We have an excellent Junior College, one high school with a world-recognized fish hatchery and another with a first class auto tech and computer integrated design lab. This includes learning robotics, which is

the future of manufacturing and technology. Might the fish hatchery assist in the goals of stream restoration which builds environmental resilience? These are unique opportunities. Why aren't these resources integrated into our planning? On the flip side, I am sure the school district has needs that could be helped through planning, such as safer routes to school, transportation to school, more trees for school grounds, are just a few. I have been told that there has been an outreach to a group of students, but that misses the point. The schools are intrinsically tied to our goals, and while I am not suggesting that we dictate school curriculum, the relationship between the school district and the City should not be autonomous. I have mentioned this to one school board member and found agreement.

I know that the COVID pandemic has created significant restraints on our ability to communicate and discuss our planning efforts. And then you have the Brown Act. It is unfortunate. But my memory of the last GP update is of more small group discussion and action. The small groups were composed of knowledgeable people. The end result was a very good GP update. I see smart people on the GPAC, but I don't sense that their knowledge and input is being well used.

Thanks for your consideration and all you are doing in this effort,

-Bill Wolpert