

City Council Agenda Report

Meeting Date: July 18, 2023
From: Daniel S. Wall, P.E., Director of Public Works
Department: Public Works
Submitted by: Daniel S. Wall, P.E., Director of Public Works

Subject

Amendments to the Municipal Code and General Plan to allow Mixed Use

Recommendation

- A. Find that the proposed action is exempt from California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review because it is general policy and procedure-making activity that is unrelated to any specific project, which must undergo separate CEQA review, and that will not result in direct physical changes or reasonably foreseeable indirect physical changes in the environment, and therefore does not constitute a “project” as defined by CEQA Guidelines Section 15378. In compliance with CEQA Guidelines (California. Code Regulations., Title 14, Section 15000 et seq.), the City of Vernon prepared the Final Program Environmental Impact Report for the Westside Amendments to the General Plan and for the Westside Amendments to Title 17 of the Vernon Municipal Code.
- B. Adopt Resolution No. 2023-16 adopting Westside Amendments to the City of Vernon General Plan and certifying the Final Program Environmental Impact Report State Clearinghouse (SCH) No. 2022040458;
- C. Introduce and conduct first reading of Ordinance No. 1293 adding and amending various chapters in Title 17 – Zoning of the Vernon Municipal Code to allow Mixed Use Industrial Zoning along Santa Fe Avenue; and
- D. Direct staff to schedule second reading and adoption of Ordinance No. 1293 for the August 1, 2023 Regular City Council meeting.

Background

At its October 6, 2020 meeting, the Vernon City Council approved an agreement with The Arroyo Group (TAG) to prepare the Westside Mixed-Use Specific Plan and Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR). The intent was to allow and encourage a concentrated area within the Westside of Vernon (Westside) to transition into an active place of mixed uses (residential, live/work, production retail, and restaurant/entertainment) while strengthening the majority of the Westside as a highly competitive area of clean industrial production. During the past two and a half years, TAG performed baseline studies, drafted an update to the Housing Element, analyzed transportation enhancements, conducted one-on-one interviews with key stakeholders, identified and studied catalytic site development, conducted a PEIR Scoping meeting and held seven Stakeholder Committee Meetings. On November 11, 2022, the Stakeholder Committee expressed support for changing the City’s zoning code to allow for mixed-use development in select areas concentrated along Santa Fe Avenue and Pacific Boulevard; however, the Committee was not in support of adopting a Specific Plan.

Staff has utilized the feedback gathered from its community outreach to draft amendments to Title 17 of the Vernon Municipal Code (VMC) that are aligned with the City’s Housing Element Update and that incorporate mixed uses in select areas of the City. Resolution No. 2023-16 amends the introduction to the General Plan and the Land Use Element of the General Plan to provide consistency with the proposed changes to the City’s zoning code, while Ordinance No.

1293 makes those proposed changes to Title 17 (Zoning Code) of the VMC creating four zoning districts (shown on the attached Zoning Map), allowing for mixed-use development as well as providing design standards and guidelines for mixed-use development.

The majority of the properties in the districts being rezoned are small lots with older obsolete buildings. The lot size makes many of these properties unsuitable for modern industrial development. The proposed changes to the code will provide property owners with flexibility in redeveloping their property by providing new uses, shown in the following tables, that are in addition to the industrial uses currently allowed.

Residential and Office Uses				
	Zoning District			
Land Use	MU-CC	MU-S	MU-N	MU-PH
Primarily Residential Uses				
Single-Family Dwelling	By Right	Prohibited	Prohibited	Prohibited
Multi-Family Dwelling	By Right	By Right	By Right	Prohibited
Hotel	Encouraged	Encouraged	Prohibited	Prohibited
Live/Work	By Right	By Right	By Right	Prohibited
Residential Care Facilities	By Right	By Right	By Right	Prohibited
Trailer Park	Prohibited	Prohibited	Prohibited	Prohibited
Emergency Shelter	Prohibited	Prohibited	By Right	By Right
Primarily Office Uses				
Office Manufacturing	By Right	Encouraged	Encouraged	Encouraged
Media Production Studios	By Right	By Right	By Right	Encouraged
Offices	By Right	By Right	By Right	By Right

Retail, Industrial, and Institutional Uses				
	Zoning District			
Land Use	MU-CC	MU-S	MU-N	MU-PH
Primarily Retail Uses				
Goods Sales	By Right	By Right	By Right	Accessory/ Conditional
Production Retail	Encouraged	Encouraged	Encouraged	By Right
Restaurant	Encouraged	Encouraged	Encouraged	By Right
Market	Encouraged	Encouraged	By Right	Prohibited
Art Galleries	Encouraged	Encouraged	Encouraged	Encouraged
Nightlife	Conditional	Conditional	Conditional	Prohibited
Personal Services	By Right	By Right	By Right	By Right
Big Box Retail	Conditional	Conditional	Conditional	Conditional
Drive-Through Retail	Conditional	Conditional	Conditional	Conditional
Adult or Sexually Oriented Businesses	Prohibited	Prohibited	Prohibited	Prohibited
Fitness and Recreation	By Right	By Right	By Right	By Right
Primarily Production/Industrial Uses				
Artisan Industrial	Encouraged	Encouraged	Encouraged	By Right
Light Industrial	By Right	By Right	By Right	By Right
Primarily Civic/Institutional Uses				
Community Facilities	By Right	By Right	By Right	By Right
Trade School	By Right	By Right	By Right	By Right
Religious Use	By Right	By Right	By Right	By Right

These changes will allow some form of residential use in each of the four districts. Other changes to Title 17 include creating design standards for new non-industrial and non-warehouse developments in the four mixed-use zones. These design standards include open space requirements, first floor minimum transparency requirements for projects fronting Santa Fe Avenue, and height limitations. These development standards are being suggested to preserve the heritage industrial appearance of many older buildings that exist within these districts. In addition, reuse and new use projects will be incentivized through the Zoning Code with reduced parking requirements, increased allowable densities and increased allowable heights, to preserve important architectural elements of these older buildings or that include encouraged uses.

While the proposed changes to Title 17 and the General Plan are not in and of themselves a project under CEQA (as they are only administrative actions), a PEIR was completed to provide the City Council with information on the potential impacts of projects that are thought to arise from the proposed zoning changes. In compliance with CEQA Guidelines, the City of Vernon has taken steps to maximize opportunities for the public to participate in the environmental process. A Notice of Preparation (NOP) was circulated on April 20, 2022 via mail to interested parties and surrounding cities and via the City's social media platforms, as well as being posted to the City's website and to www.ReimagineVernon.com, to solicit comments and inform the public of the proposed changes. The proposed changes were described, potential environmental effects

associated with implementation were identified, and agencies and the public were invited to review and comment on the NOP. The NOP review and comment period closed on May 20, 2022. At the time of preparation of this PEIR, the City received one written comment regarding the scope and content of the PEIR from the California Department of Transportation. The draft PEIR was made available for Public Review and comment from April 14, 2023, through May 14, 2023. A community meeting on the Draft EIR was held on Thursday, April 27, 2023. A notice of the availability of the draft PEIR was sent to interested parties and surrounding cities via mail and posted on the City's social media platforms, as well as being posted on the City's website and www.ReimagineVernon.com.

The only potentially significant unavoidable environmental impacts identified in the PEIR are those that may occur during any construction project such as noise, vibration, dust, etc. All other impacts are either less than significant or will be made less than significant through the implementation of mitigation measures described in the PEIR.

This nearly three-year-long effort has involved significant public participation through several avenues including the Stakeholder Advisory Committee composed of a diverse group of residents, business owners, property owners and other interested parties, including several members of the Vernon Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors. The Stakeholder Advisory Committee conducted multiple meetings during the development of the Westside project, a process that saw a conceptual vision evolve into a formal General Plan and Land Use Element, and identification of suitable areas in the City for mixed-use projects. The minutes from these meetings and all other related documents have been published on the Westside dedicated website, www.ReimagineVernon.com, as they have become available. The Westside website provides an option to subscribe to email updates on the project's process and sends invitations that announce participation opportunities. Links to this website are published on the City of Vernon website. In addition to more formal methods of communication at City Council and City Commission meetings, staff routinely shared information about the Westside project with businesses, property owners, and developers that were engaged through the course of regular business.

These proposed amendments to the Municipal Code and the General Plan were presented to the Vernon Housing Commission (VHC) at its special meeting held on July 12, 2023. The VHC recommended that the Council adopt the amendments allowing Mixed Use Industrial Zoning in the four districts.

Fiscal Impact

There is no fiscal impact associated with this report.

Attachments

1. Resolution No. 2023-16
2. Vernon General Plan with Amendments
3. Final PEIR – Vernon Westside Zone Change and GP Amendment
4. Ordinance No. 1293
5. Zoning Code Title 17 amendments and additions
6. Amended Zoning Map
7. Notice of Public Hearing – Proof of Publication