



CITY OF

NEWPORT BEACH

Harbor Commission Staff Report

August 13, 2025
Agenda Item No. 7.1

TO: HARBOR COMMISSION

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TITLE: General Plan Update: Introducing Refreshed Goals and Policies in the Harbor, Bay, and Beaches Element

ABSTRACT:

This report to the Harbor Commission outlines the City of Newport Beach's ongoing comprehensive update to its General Plan, last revised in 2006. Following delays due to the State-mandated 6th Cycle Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA), the City resumed its broader update process in 2022 with the formation of the General Plan Update Steering Committee (GPUSC) and the General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC), including various subcommittees to review each Plan element. The update process consists of four phases; Phase 1 (Background Analysis + Visioning) is complete, and Phase 2 (Policy Development + General Plan Amendment) is nearly finalized.

City staff, working closely with the GPAC, GPUSC, and consultant Dudek, developed draft goals and policies based on existing conditions reports and community input gathered through digital platforms and workshops. One key focus is the updated *Harbor, Bay, and Beaches Element*, which expands upon the current Harbor and Bay Element to include coastal beaches and related public access policies. While not required by State law, this Element reflects Newport Beach's unique coastal identity and falls under the Harbor Commission's jurisdiction. City staff now seek preliminary feedback from the Commission before the draft is released for wider public review. Final drafts will return for formal endorsement by the Harbor Commission in late 2025 or early 2026.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. Determine this action is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15060(c)(2) and 15060(c)(3) of the CEQA Guidelines because this action will not result in a physical change to the environment, directly or indirectly; and
2. Receive and file the draft Elements and provide any initial guidance or feedback on their goals and policies. The refined and finalized drafts would return to Harbor Commission for review and formal recommendation of approval to the City Council later this year or first quarter of 2026.

FUNDING REQUIREMENTS:

There is no fiscal impact related to this item.

BACKGROUND:

A General Plan is a long-term document that acts as a guide for future development and is used as the foundation for decision-making on the physical development of a community. It contains goals that set values and direction, policies that guide decision-making, and programs to carry out the actions needed to achieve the goals. The General Plan is required by State law and is used by local governments to make decisions about land use, housing, transportation, infrastructure, and parks, among other issues. While planning horizons vary, it typically sets direction for the next 20-30 years. The City of Newport Beach (City) General Plan was last comprehensively updated in 2006 – nearly 20 years ago.

In 2019, the City Council initiated its comprehensive review and update; however, due to the challenging and unprecedented 6th Cycle Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA), City staff was directed to pivot focus toward the Housing Element and Circulation Element. With the adoption and certification of the Housing Element in 2022, staff continued toward implementing the Housing Element but returned focus to the comprehensive update.

In early 2022, as the Housing Element was wrapping up, the City Council formed and seated the three-member General Plan Update Steering Committee (GPUSC), which is chaired by Nancy Gardner. The primary purpose of the GPUSC is to guide the larger General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC) and to report to the City Council. The GPAC was formed and seated in early 2023, is currently made up of 24 community members appointed by the City Council and chaired by Jeremy Evans and Arlene Greer. To help ensure efficient effective review and input for all the elements, the GPAC formed subcommittees to review each of them.

The effort is broken into four primary phases, as depicted in Figure 1 below. Phase 1 (Background Analysis + Visioning) was completed late 2024 and Phase 2 (Policy Development + General Plan Amendment) is in progress but nearly complete.



To get to the point of having initial drafts of the General Plan Elements available for review, City staff worked extensively with the GPAC Subcommittees, the GPAC, and the GPUSC. This started with the review of existing conditions and background analysis reports for each element. These documents are considered a “snapshot in time” to identify current condition in Newport Beach under each topical area as well as what needs to be addressed from a State requirement standpoint. Each subcommittee then worked on identifying a potential refresh for the individual elements and helped to create “ideas to support” them. These ideas were shared with the community through digital engagement on the City’s website for the effort (<https://www.newportbeachca.gov/gpupdate>), as well as at community workshops.

Based on the feedback received, City staff alongside consultant Dudek refined the ideas shared as actual goals and accompanying policy statements in furtherance of each. The draft goals and policies were then shared with internal City staff from various departments for review prior to finalizing them as initial draft elements.

These initial drafts are now being reviewed by the individual responsible Subcommittee, as well as the full GPAC and the GPUSC prior to being shared with the City’s boards, commissions, and committees for further input. After they are shared, City staff will begin to advertise the drafts for additional public input from the broader community. Ultimately, the drafts will be refined and shared back to the boards, commissions, and committees for consideration of support.

DISCUSSION:

The current Harbor and Bay Element is important and unique to Newport Beach but not required by State law. It serves to place emphasis on Newport Harbor as not only a community asset but a regional asset and sets forth a decision-making framework for its maintenance and enhancement.

Through its evaluation, the GPAC has decided to recommend rebranding this Element as the “Harbor, Bay, and Beaches Element.” This revised Element, as recommended, now expands to highlight the City’s beaches and includes goals and policies that address use and access for beach areas. It is important to note that, while the draft Harbor, Bay, and Beaches Element overlaps with other Elements like Natural Resources or Recreation, the Harbor Commission’s purview is centralized within the Harbor, Bay, and Beaches Element. This is the only Element being formally introduced to the Harbor Commission; however, any changes that affect the other overlapping Elements would be captured and made consistent.

The attachment is considered a first draft of the updated General Plan and is not fully formatted with graphics and exhibits. As referenced above, the Existing Conditions and Background Analysis Report prepared for each element serves as contextual information that will be provided alongside the goals and policies for reference.

The purpose of this item is to introduce the draft element. City staff would like to ensure the Harbor Commission is able to provide initial feedback prior to releasing it for broader public review and input. The Harbor Commission may wish to provide feedback verbally at this meeting or it may consider forming an ad hoc committee to provide a more formal comment.

City staff will bring back final refined drafts of the Elements for formal review and support from the Harbor Commission later this year or early 2026.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:

Staff recommends the Harbor Commission find this action is not subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15060(c)(2) (the activity will not result in a direct or reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment) and 15060(c)(3) (the activity is not a project as defined in Section 15378) of the CEQA Guidelines, California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Division 6, Chapter 3, because it has no potential for resulting in a physical change to the environment, directly or indirectly.

NOTICING:

This matter has been noticed in accordance with the Brown Act (72 hours in advance of the meeting at which the Harbor Commission considers the item).

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A – Draft Harbor, Bay, and Beaches Element
Attachment B – Background Conditions and Analysis Report