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NEWPORT BEACH

PB&R Commission Staff Report

Item: VII-B
March 3, 2026

TO: Parks, Beaches & Recreation Commission

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TITLE: General Plan Update: Final GPUSC/GPAC Draft Harbor, Bay and Beaches Element, Natural Resources Element, and Recreation Element

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the Parks, Beaches and Recreation (PB&R) Commission review the Final GPUSC/GPAC Draft Harbor, Bay, and Beaches Element, Natural Resources Element, and Recreation Element, which have been revised to incorporate the Commission’s input from October 2025. The Commission may provide additional input and should conduct a vote to consider recommending the City Council adopt them as part of the comprehensive General Plan Update anticipated in May or June 2026.

BACKGROUND:

The General Plan is a State-mandated, long-term policy document that guides a community’s physical development and informs local decision-making on land use, housing, transportation, infrastructure, parks, and related issues over a 20- to 30-year horizon. Newport Beach’s General Plan was last comprehensively updated in 2006, prompting the City Council to initiate a full review in 2019; however, the effort temporarily shifted to address the unprecedented 6th Cycle Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) and complete the Housing and Circulation Elements.

As that work concluded, the City resumed the comprehensive update and, in the middle of 2022, the City Council established the three-member General Plan Update Steering Committee (GPUSC), chaired by Nancy Gardner, to guide the process and report to the City Council. In early 2023, the City Council also formed the General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC), a 24-member community-based body chaired by Jeremy Evans and Arlene Greer, which organized subcommittees to support efficient and focused review of each General Plan element. This included the *Harbor, Bay, and Beaches Subcommittee*, composed of GPAC Members Nicholas Acevedo, Virginia Anders-Ellmore, Dennis Baker, Jim Carlson, Lynn Hackman, Amber Snider, Debbie Stevens, and Paul Watkins, with GPAC Member Curtis Black serving as the Subcommittee’s Chair, as well as the

Recreation/Natural Resources Subcommittee, composed of GPAC Members Anders-Ellmore, Black, Susan DeSantis, Laird Hayes, Ruth Kobayashi, Katie Love, Jim Mosher, Snider, and Watkins, with GPAC Member Baker serving as the Subcommittee’s Chair. The General Plan Update effort has been broken into four primary phases, as described in Table 1 on the following page. Phase 3 (California Environmental Quality Act) is nearing completion with Phase 4 (Hearings) in progress. It is anticipated that the entire process will be completed by June 2026.

Table 1, General Plan Update Process			
Phase 1 (Background Analysis + Visioning)	Phase 2 (Policy Development + General Plan Amendment)	Phase 3 (California Environmental Quality Act)	Phase 4 (Hearings)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Engagement and Outreach Plan • Research and Data Analysis • Online Survey • GPAC + GPUSC Meetings • Pop-up Events • Paid Advertisements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of General Plan • Online Survey • GPAC+GPUSC Meetings • Community Workshops • Paid Advertisements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Virtual Open House • In-Person Open House • GPAC + GPUSC Meetings • Environmental Analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City Boards, Commissions, and Committees • City Council Adoption
Completed late 2024	Completed late 2025	Open houses completed late 2025; Environmental analysis in progress	In progress

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 were then reviewed by the Subcommittees, as well as the full GPAC and the GPUSC prior to being shared with the City’s boards, commissions, and

committees for further input, and then advertised for additional public input from the broader community late last year.

At a special joint meeting of the GPAC and the GPUSC on December 3, 2025, those Committees reviewed 56 comments received on various draft elements from six different City Boards, Commissions, and Committees, as well as 69 comments received from community members. Based on guidance received at that meeting, City staff returned to another special joint meeting on January 21, 2026, with a comprehensive set of revised draft elements. By a vote of 25 ayes to 1 nay, the GPAC and the GPUSC voted to move the draft forward as the Final GPUSC/GPAC Draft General Plan Update.

This draft, including the Harbor, Bay, and Beaches, Natural Resources, and Recreation Elements, represents the culmination of three years of diligent work by the GPAC, its subcommittees, the GPUSC, and engaged community members. Notably, the GPAC and the GPUSC combined for 57 meetings held in accordance with the Ralph M. Brown Act and 47 public meetings of the various Subcommittees.

DISCUSSION:

The Natural Resources and Recreation Elements have required components that cover the City's required policy areas related to conservation and open space. They are vital to maintaining the high level of open space areas and park amenities that the City prides itself on offering. On the other hand, the City's Harbor and Bay Element is important and unique to Newport Beach but not required. While not all goal and policy areas are pertinent to the purview of the PB&R Commission, they are being provided in their entirety for review. While not exhaustive, the following list presents highlighted updates to each of the Elements.

The refreshed and renamed Harbor, Bay, and Beaches Element includes updates that:

- ✓ incorporate direct goal and policy support related to "beaches," which has also been added by name;
- ✓ enhance goal and policy support for Upper Newport Bay;
- ✓ help to ensure multi-faceted and well-integrated public coastal access;
- ✓ minimize risk of displacement from coastal hazards; and
- ✓ place an emphasis on the economic strength and vitality of the beaches and harbor.

The refreshed Natural Resources Element includes updates that:

- ✓ integrate goals and policies that satisfy the requirements of Senate Bill 272 (2023) related to preparing a Sea Level Rise Plan by 2034 and Assembly Bill 1889 (2024) related to wildlife and habitat connectivity;
- ✓ encourage thoughtful clean energy infrastructure that is not wholly reliant on electricity;
- ✓ transition away from oil and gas resources, as deemed appropriate;

- ✓ raise awareness of clean energy incentives for existing buildings to reduce natural gas emissions; and
- ✓ encourage native/naturalized species habitats in parks and open space.

The refreshed Recreation Element includes updates that:

- ✓ integrate goals and policies that satisfy the requirements of Senate Bill 1425 (2022) related to open space access and co-benefits of open space (i.e., buffers from source pollutants and wildlife connectivity);
- ✓ encourage new and innovative parks where needed and connections to them that increase resident access;
- ✓ help ensure parks and recreational facilities that are adapted to meet a variety of needs for existing and future residents; and
- ✓ protect public beach access.

At the PB&R Commission's meeting on August 5, 2025, the Community Development Department presented and introduced the three initial draft elements to the Commission. The Commission requested the creation of an Ad Hoc Committee to effectively explore them and provide more informed feedback. Commissioners Daruty, Kirby, and Malouf were appointed to the Ad Hoc Committee at the meeting on September 2, 2025. The Ad Hoc Committee met twice to review and compile comments, which were presented and reviewed at the Commission's meeting on October 7, 2025, and subsequently forwarded to the GPAC and GPUSC for consideration.

The purpose of this item is to share those draft Elements, as revised by the GPAC and GPUSC to incorporate the Commission's feedback from October 2025 (Attachments A, B, and C). Attachment D is a table of the comments provided by the Commission along with a note on how each comment is addressed. City staff recommends the Commission review the updated drafts, provide any additional input, and conduct a vote to recommend the City Council adopt them as part of the comprehensive General Plan Update in May or June 2026.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:

The PB&R Commission's action of making a recommendation to the City Council is exempt from 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, Chapter 3, because it has no potential for resulting in physical change to the environment, directly or indirectly. An addendum to the Program Environmental Impact Report for the City of Newport Beach General Plan Housing Element Implementation Program is being prepared and will be provided for the City Council's action on the General Plan Update.

NOTICING:

The agenda item has been noticed according to the Brown Act (72 hours in advance of the meeting at which the PB&R Commission considers the item).

ATTACHMENTS:

- Attachment A – Final GPUSC/GPAC Draft Harbor, Bay, and Beaches Element
- Attachment B – Final GPUSC/GPAC Draft Natural Resources Element
- Attachment C – Final GPUSC/GPAC Draft Recreation Element
- Attachment D – Table of PB&R Commission Comments and Revisions