



CITY OF

NEWPORT BEACH

City Council Staff Report

September 9, 2025
Agenda Item No. 19

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL

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TITLE: General Plan Update Steering Committee (GPUSC) Bi-Monthly Update to the City Council

ABSTRACT:

Since the previous update to the City Council in July 2025, the General Plan Update Steering Committee held one public meeting, the General Plan Advisory Committee held two public meetings, and various subcommittees collectively held five public meetings. In addition, five draft elements have been introduced across the Parks, Beaches & Recreation Commission, Harbor Commission, and Board of Library Trustees. This report provides an update to the City Council on the discussions and actions taken.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- a) 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
- b) Receive and file the report.

DISCUSSION:

The General Plan Update Steering Committee (GPUSC) is chaired by Nancy Gardner with Phillip Brown and Kimberly Carter as members. The primary purpose of the GPUSC is to guide the 24-member General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC) and to report to the City Council. The City's dedicated website for the General Plan Update is <https://www.newportbeachca.gov/gpupdate>. It provides information on the progress made and upcoming events, as well as opportunities for community input and engagement.

Attachment A to this report was prepared by GPUSC Chair Gardner and summarizes some of the notable recent progress made by both committees. Below is a list and recap of each meeting held since the July 2025 update to the City Council.

Recap of the July 2, 2025, GPAC Meeting

- As was reported previously, the Recreation and Natural Resources Subcommittee convened on May 15, 2025; however, only the Arts and Culture and Historical Resources Subcommittee and the Harbor, Bay, and Beaches Subcommittee had business on the GPAC meeting agenda for June 4, 2025. The efforts of the Recreation and Natural Resources Subcommittee were on the GPAC meeting agenda for July 2, 2025. A summary of the Subcommittee meetings and the GPAC's related actions follows.
 - The Recreation and Natural Resources Subcommittee met on May 15, 2025. GPAC Member Dennis Baker was appointed as Subcommittee chair. At the meeting, the Subcommittee reviewed the initial drafts of the Recreation Element and the Natural Resources Element. The Subcommittee provided feedback and agreed to allow City staff to make some small revisions and to share the Elements with the full GPAC for consideration. After some discussion at the GPAC meeting, the GPAC unanimously supported moving the initial draft Elements forward for review and concurrence by the GPUSC. As highlighted in Attachment A, the Subcommittee and the GPAC focused on appropriately distributing recreational resources of all types throughout Newport Beach and encouraging innovative strategies for accomplishing this. It also recommended de-emphasizing the specific need for electrification and instead broadening the policy guidance to include other alternative energy sources.
- Lastly, City staff provided an update on upcoming deliverables and the next steps.

Recap of the July 23, 2025, GPUSC Meeting

- The GPUSC reviewed the actions of the GPAC at its July 2, 2025, meeting, highlighting the initial drafts of the Recreation Element and the Natural Resources Element. After brief comments, the GPUSC unanimously voted to concur with the GPAC's work efforts and to move the drafts along to the responsible City boards, commissions and committees for additional review and input.
- With the GPAC's review and shaping of each individual General Plan Element, "softer" language has been suggested throughout using words like "reasonable" and phrases like "to the extent necessary." Given the frequency of such suggestions, the GPUSC unanimously decided to have the GPAC broadly discuss the use of language in the General Plan Update to see if there may be a better approach.
- Lastly, City staff provided an update on upcoming deliverables and the next steps.

Recap of the August 6, 2025, GPAC Meeting

- Between this meeting and the prior meeting in July, the Safety Subcommittee, Land Use Subcommittee, and Noise Subcommittee all convened. A summary of the Subcommittees' meetings and the GPAC's related actions follows.

- The Safety Subcommittee met on June 25, 2025. GPAC Member Amber Snider was appointed as the Subcommittee chair. The Subcommittee reviewed the initial draft of the Safety Element. The Subcommittee provided feedback and agreed to allow City staff to make some small revisions and to share the Element with the full GPAC for consideration. After some discussion at the GPAC meeting, the GPAC unanimously supported moving the initial draft Element forward for review and concurrence by the GPUSC. As noted in Attachment A, the Subcommittee and the GPAC placed emphasis on the adequacy of City's evacuation routes and methods, and how to ensure the community is aware of them.
- The Land Use Subcommittee convened for the first time in 2025 on July 24 and confirmed GPAC Member Susan DeSantis would continue to serve as the Subcommittee chair. The purpose of the meeting was to begin reviewing the initial draft of the Land Use Element. The Subcommittee flagged several topics for broader discussion at a subsequent Subcommittee meeting. Chair DeSantis reported this update and progress to the GPAC at its August meeting. Although the meetings occurred after the August GPAC meeting, it is relevant to share that the Land Use Subcommittee met again on August 11 and August 27. The Subcommittee wrapped up review of the initial draft and, across its three meetings, provided productive and direct feedback on several topic areas that need to be revised. Notably, the Subcommittee supported sharing a revised draft with the full GPAC at its upcoming September meeting.
- The Noise Subcommittee convened for the first time in 2025 on July 28 and confirmed GPAC Member Jim Mosher would serve as the Subcommittee chair. The purpose of the meeting was to allow the City's consultant Dudek to provide an update on the work being done to establish a baseline and future projection for noise, as well as what to expect as next steps moving forward. Chair Mosher reported this update and progress to the GPAC at its August meeting.
- As recommended by the GPUSC, the GPAC discussed language use in the General Plan Update to determine whether there may be a better unified approach to providing softer goal and policy language that upholds the intent of a general plan document as a visionary, decision-making framework. After discussion, the GPAC took a straw poll and opted to have the City Attorney's Office assist with a prefacing statement. As reported in Attachment A, this statement would encourage and respect adherence to the policies but would allow flexibility to adapt with unforeseen changes that may occur in the future.
- Lastly, City staff provided an update on upcoming deliverables and the next steps.

City Board, Commission, and Committee Meetings

- At the Parks, Beaches & Recreation Commission (PB&R) meeting on August 5, 2025, City staff was joined by consultant Dudek and Recreation/Natural Resources Subcommittee Chair Baker to introduce the draft Recreation Element, Natural Resources Element, and Harbor, Bay, and Beaches Element. PB&R opted to bring forward the formation of an ad hoc committee at its September meeting, but supported the three draft elements moving forward for public review concurrent with PB&R's review.
- At the Harbor Commission meeting on August 13, 2025, City staff was joined by Harbor, Bay, and Beaches Subcommittee Chair Curtis Black to introduce the draft Harbor, Bay, and Beaches Element. The Harbor Commission noted that an ad hoc committee had already been formed in 2024 to help monitor and provide input on the General Plan Update. Although preliminary feedback was provided at this meeting, it was noted that the formal feedback would be forthcoming. The Harbor Commission supported the draft element moving forward for public review concurrent with the Commission's review.
- At the Board of Library Trustees meeting on August 18, 2025, City staff was joined by Dudek and Arts & Culture/Historical Resources Subcommittee member Paul Watkins to introduce the draft Arts & Culture Element and Historical Resources Element. The Board indicated that formal input would be provided by its October 2025 meeting and supported the drafts moving forward for public review concurrent with the Board's review.
- Prior to the September 9 City Council meeting, the progress on the General Plan update and its topic areas relevant to the Water Quality/Coastal Tidelands Committee will have been shared at its meeting on September 4.
- The draft Arts & Culture Element will be introduced to the City Arts Commission at its meeting on September 11. The draft Land Use Element and Safety Element are expected to be introduced to the Planning Commission at its meeting on October 9.

Outreach Updates

- The Outreach Subcommittee, led by Subcommittee Chair Annie Clougherty, met on August 14 to discuss public advertisement of the various draft elements and how to best post them for comments. The primary outcome of this meeting was direction that it is important to make sure the language advertising the public drafts is relatable such that the community better understands what each element covers and why it matters. It was also emphasized that draft elements should be posted in a way that is easy to navigate and provide comments in a meaningful way.

- Since last reported in July 2025, the project website has seen an increase in 562 unique visitors for a total of 11,677 unique visitors since efforts began in March 2024. As the next phase of the process begins, the General Plan Update will continue to be advertised on the City's website and social media, as well as in Stu News, the Daily Pilot, and the City Manager's newsletter, The Week in Review.
- With many of the draft elements becoming available for public review starting in early September, City staff is coordinating with the Outreach Subcommittee and the consultant to facilitate a community open house for the General Plan Update. An in-person open house is tentatively planned for the evening of October 21, with a virtual open house planned for the evening of October 22.

Upcoming GPAC and GPUSC Meetings

- The GPAC Noise Subcommittee will reconvene on September 15 with the full GPAC expected to reconvene on September 16. The GPAC's agenda will primarily focus on reviewing the draft Land Use Element.
- The GPUSC will convene in late September to review the GPAC's efforts from September 16 for guidance and concurrence.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact related to this item.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:

Staff recommends the City Council 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, Chapter 3, because it has no potential for resulting in physical change to the environment, directly or indirectly.

NOTICING:

The agenda item has been noticed according to the Brown Act (72 hours in advance of the meeting at which the City Council considers the item).

ATTACHMENT:

Attachment A – GPUSC Chair Gardner's Memo to the City Council