



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Report to the Planning Commission

DATE ISSUED: January 2, 2024

REPORT NO. PC-25-003

HEARING DATE: January 9, 2024

SUBJECT: Mid-City Communities Plan Update Workshop

SUMMARY

This is a workshop for the Planning Commission to provide input on the Mid-City Communities Plan Update. No action is required on the part of the Planning Commission at this time. The Planning Commission has expressed a desire to have workshops during the community plan update process, where Commissioners can share their ideas and priorities for community plan updates early in the process. This workshop is meant to serve as an opportunity for discussion on the Mid-City Communities Plan Update and for the Commission to provide input on the draft documents prepared so far: *Public Engagement Summary*, *Mid-City Atlas: Existing Conditions Report*, *Existing Conditions Mobility Assessment*, and *Historic Context Statement*.

BACKGROUND

The Mid-City Communities Plan covers 8,052 acres and includes four communities: City Heights, Eastern Area, Kensington-Talmage and Normal Heights. The northern area of Mid-City is next to Interstate 8 and the College Area community; while the west adjoins Interstate 805, State Route 15, and the North Park and Greater Golden Hill communities. On the east side is the City of La Mesa; and the southern portion is bounded by State Route 94 and the communities of Southeastern and Encanto Neighborhoods. There are 24 neighborhoods within four community plan areas (Attachment 1). Mid-City is home to approximately 133,267 people and 54,453 homes in 2022, while its businesses employed over 20,000 people in 2019.

History of the Community Plan

The Mid-City Communities are some of the oldest and most diverse areas in the City of San Diego. Much of the westerly portion was originally developed in the 1910-1930 era along streetcar routes on University Avenue and Adams Avenue before the Second World War, while development east of 54th Street generally occurred in the post-World War II period. El Cajon Boulevard was once the main east-west highway for the region (Highway 80), with a concentration of economic activity, until Interstate 8 was built in the late 1950s.

One of the first community plans developed in the City of San Diego was the 1965 Mid-City Development Plan, which encouraged more growth in Mid-City and proposed commercial clustering and dense housing near parks. In 1984, the City Council adopted a comprehensive update of the community plan which envisioned a significant parkland expansion leading to the first-of-its-kind four-acre park over the proposed freeway for State Route 15.

In 1998, the City Council adopted a new update to the Mid-City Communities Plan which significantly reduced residential densities by over 10,000 homes along Adams Avenue, El Cajon Boulevard, and University Avenue. At that time, this reduction was due to concerns about inadequate community facilities and the overcrowding of schools. The community plan proposed future growth in urban villages, encouraging community investments and celebrating cultural diversity through placemaking. The implementation of the community plan also created additional development requirements with the Central Urbanized Planned District development regulations and zoning along the primary corridors.

Housing & Demographics

After the reduction of residential density from the 1998 community plan, the Mid-City population peaked in 2000 at 146,394 people. Since 2000, the total population of Mid-City has declined by 9 percent, while the City of San Diego saw a 13 percent increase in total population (Table 1). Compared to 2000, in 2022, there were 13,127 fewer people estimated to be living in Mid-City.

Table 1. City of San Diego and Mid-City Communities: Total Population Change 2000 to 2022

| | 2000 | 2022 | % Change |
|----------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| City of San Diego | 1,223,400 | 1,383,623 | 13% |
| Mid-City Communities | 146,394 | 133,267 | -9% |

Source: SANDAG Population & Housing Estimates Jan. 2023; SANDAG: Census 2000 Profile

In 2000, Mid-City had 52,033 total homes. Between 2000 and 2022, approximately 420 homes were added in the community, with a total of 52,453 homes which is a 0.8 percent increase over 22 years (Table 2). In 2022, the persons per household in the City of San Diego was 2.64 compared to 2.67 for Mid-City.

Table 2. City of San Diego and Mid-City Communities: Total Housing Change 2000 to 2022

| | 2000 | 2022 | % Change |
|----------------------|---------|---------|----------|
| City of San Diego | 469,689 | 558,702 | 19% |
| Mid-City Communities | 52,033 | 52,453 | 0.8% |

Source: SANDAG Population & Housing Estimates Jan. 2023; SANDAG: Census 2000 Profile

Affordable Housing

According to [San Diego Housing Commission data](#) from November 2024, there are currently 3,253 deed-restricted affordable homes in Mid-City or about 6 percent of the total homes in the community, with almost 60 percent of those affordable homes located within City Heights (Table 3). City Heights also has 28 affordable transitional beds.

Table 3. Mid-City Communities: Deed-Restricted Affordable Homes - Existing

| Community Plan Area | Deed-Restricted Affordable Homes | Percent of Total |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|------------------|
| City Heights | 1,938 | 60% |
| Eastern Area | 708 | 22% |
| Kensington-Talmadge | 463 | 14% |
| Normal Heights | 144 | 4% |
| Total | 3,253 | 100% |

Source: San Diego Housing Commission, Nov. 2024

What are the Community Plan Update's Key Objectives?

The City is updating the Mid-City Communities Plan to identify opportunities for new homes, businesses and infrastructure to benefit everyone in Mid-City, as well as community members across the City. The community plan update process will assist in the implementation of the General Plan City of Villages strategy and Climate Action Plan by addressing the following key objectives, as well as others that arise through the update process:

- Increasing opportunities for additional residential and employment land uses within walking distance to transit stops;
 - Revitalize major activity centers as walkable destinations;
 - Identify appropriate locations to support a diversity of employment and mixed-use land uses;
 - Address Climate Action Plan strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions;
- Strengthening Mid-City's commercial corridors and employment areas;
- Improving walking, biking, and transit connections to homes, jobs, and amenities;
- Preserving open space canyon areas; and
- Addressing public facilities, parks and recreation, and infrastructure needs.

How will the Community Plan Update be consistent with Blueprint San Diego (General Plan)?

In July 2024, the City Council adopted an amendment to the City's General Plan known as Blueprint San Diego including the Village Climate Goal Propensity Map (Attachment 2) to identify areas with the greatest transit competitiveness and where opportunities for new homes can most effectively implement the General Plan's City of Villages Strategy. The Village Climate Goal Propensity Map serves as a guide for community plan update efforts, including the Mid-City Communities Plan Update, to align with Climate Action Plan mode share goals. This map indicates that the Mid-City should include increased opportunities for new homes and jobs within the community given the existing and planned transit which will help reduce vehicle miles traveled and support sustainable growth.

What is the status of the community plan update?

In Winter 2024, the City Planning Department began the plan update process by:

- Launching the project website, a promotional video in English and Spanish, an interactive Web Map and a Fact Sheet in English, Spanish and Vietnamese;
- Conducting an open application process to form the Joint Mid-City CPU Working Group and convening four Working Group meetings;
- Initiating comprehensive and inclusive public engagement activities with community partners, including the launch of the first online survey; and
- Conducting the existing conditions analyses.

Mid-City Communities Plan Update Working Group

As part of an inclusive engagement process, the City conducted an open application process to form the Working Group representing Mid-City communities of City Heights, Eastern Area, Kensington-Talmadge and Normal Heights. The primary role of the WG is to inform the Mid-City Plan Update process by convening approximately every three months. In order to satisfy this role, the group will:

- Be involved in the plan update from start to finish.
- Review project materials related to public engagement, research, and technical studies.
- Suggest ideas that could be included in the plan update.
- Provide feedback on proposals related to the plan update.

Four assigned seats are reserved for designees from the City Heights, Eastern Area, Kensington-Talmadge and Normal Heights planning groups. The rest of the twelve members were selected based on a combination of their community involvement, interests and objectives for representation across the Mid-City communities and demographics. The 16-member roster is designed to ensure that all members have an opportunity to participate in meeting discussions. The Working Group meetings are typically hybrid, allowing both in-person and virtual attendance for accessibility. During 2024, the Working Group members attended four meetings (in-person and virtually) to discuss the plan update approach, the history of Mid-City, existing conditions and public engagement summary:

- Apr. 24 - Working Group Orientation
- June 26 - First Meeting: *Mid-City Atlas: Existing Conditions Report (Part 1)*
- Sept. 11 - Second Meeting: *Mid-City Atlas (Part 2) and Overview of Key Engagement Efforts*
- Dec. 11 - Third Meeting: Existing Conditions Mobility Assessment and Historic Preservation

Draft Public Engagement Summary

The City released the Draft Public Engagement Summary (Attachment 3) in December 2024. The report summarizes what the community shared with the City Planning Department during the first year of the plan update process. A broad cross-section of community members participated in various activities such as:

- 2 online surveys;
- 2 interactive workshops and four mini-workshops;
- 6 community office hours;
- 11 community interviews;
- 16 pop-up stations;
- 18 community forums; and
- 27 youth engagement sessions.

More than 2,500 people provided over 8,300 public comments through 84 events and two online surveys, which will serve as valuable input to guide the formation of the framework and concepts for the community plan update. Table 4 highlights the results from the first survey and the early pop-up activities.

Table 4. What word(s) would you use to describe your ideal future vision for Mid-City?

| Rank | Major Themes - Future Vision | Comments | Percent |
|-------------|---|-----------------|----------------|
| 1 | Clean, Safe & Thriving Neighborhoods | 275 | 17% |
| 2 | Vibrant, Walkable, Mixed-Use Places & Corridors | 257 | 16% |
| 3 | Better Infrastructure - Mobility & Public Facilities | 256 | 16% |
| 4 | More Green Spaces, Trees, Parks & Recreation | 133 | 8% |
| 5 | Build Affordable Homes for All People | 129 | 8% |
| 6 | Accessible, Diverse, Equitable & Inclusive Community | 121 | 8% |
| 7 | Beautiful, Charming, Dynamic & Innovative Neighborhoods | 116 | 7% |
| 8 | Community-Oriented, Friendly & Neighborly | 104 | 7% |
| 9 | Preserve Neighborhood Character | 79 | 5% |
| 10 | Peaceful, Quiet & Serene | 45 | 3% |
| 11 | Crowded, Destroyed & Declining Community | 36 | 2% |
| 12 | More Parking | 27 | 2% |
| | Total | 1,578 | 100% |

The following is a high-level summary of community feedback organized around the plan update themes:

- History and Place:
 - Celebrate Mid-City's cultural diversity and heritage by encouraging new cultural districts and gateway signs
 - Continue to emphasize local culture through murals, events and signage to honor community history
 - Balance historic preservation with housing development, ensuring that historic neighborhoods retain their character while contributing to housing needs
- Sustainability, Equity and Climate Resilience:
 - Identify blue and green infrastructure strategies for climate resilience
 - Support equitable community engagement and civic education
 - Promote clean energy and sustainable transportation
- Land Use and Development:
 - Build more affordable homes and diverse housing types
 - Address homelessness and expand supportive services
 - Prioritize mixed-use development, high-density housing and neighborhood-serving businesses along major corridors while ensuring thoughtful design and mobility considerations
 - Ensure opportunities for new homes is shared across all Mid-City communities
 - Revitalize declining areas to strengthen the neighborhood economy and support local businesses
 - Redevelop areas with a focus on minimizing displacement while prioritizing the relocation of displaced residents
- Urban Design:
 - Create clean, safe and thriving neighborhoods that are beautiful, authentic and artistic
 - Improve well-being and safety through physical improvements such as fixing sidewalks and adding streetlights, which contribute to a stronger and more connected environment
 - Develop community & youth gathering spaces, pedestrian-only plazas, and cultural programming tailored to neighborhood identities
 - Enhance walkability with local markets, grocery stores, restaurants and gyms within walking distance
- Mobility:
 - Improve mobility options and make streets safer for all users
 - Provide greater investments in sidewalks, bikeways, transit and traffic calming measures
 - Address the gap in connectivity for the Mid-City area by improving transit connectivity within and outside of Mid-City
 - Consider neighborhood lots, parking permits, parking structure and metered parking options
- Parks, Public Facilities and Open Space:
 - Address the need for parks and amenities, infrastructure maintenance, and safety issues
 - Develop a connected network of small/medium parks

- Encourage more community gardens, dog parks, and gathering spaces, especially in highly populated areas.
- Preserve canyons and develop urban trails and pathways with culturally significant features like signage and sculptures to enhance connectivity between neighborhoods

For more detailed information please see the *Draft Public Engagement Summary and Attachments*.

Draft Mid-City Atlas: Existing Conditions Report

The City released the *Draft Mid-City Atlas: Existing Conditions Report* in June 2024 (Attachment 4). The Mid-City Atlas provides a snapshot of existing conditions, challenges and opportunities and focuses on mappable resources, trends and critical concerns that will frame choices for the long-term physical development of the Mid-City communities. The Atlas includes maps, photos, charts and tables about the history and place, sustainability, equity and climate resilience, land use and development, mobility, and parks, public facilities and open space. The Atlas will help inform and facilitate:

- Community input on planning issues, priorities and vision for the future;
- Development of alternatives and concepts related to land use, mobility, urban design, public facility, parks and recreation; and
- Formulation of policies and implementation actions for the updated Community Plan.

Accompanying the draft report is an Interactive Web Map and Appendices that contain supporting data broken down by community planning area related to existing park and recreation facilities, demographic, historical San Diego Unified School District enrollment, recent and upcoming Capital Improvements Program projects, and a list of previous plans and studies. The City Planning Department received more than 72 suggestions (as of December 11, 2024) to improve the existing conditions report. The final draft is anticipated to be released in early 2025.

Draft Existing Conditions Mobility Assessment

The City released the *Draft Existing Conditions Mobility Assessment* in November 2024 (Attachment 5). The draft assessment highlights the current state of mobility in Mid-City, covering infrastructure, demand, safety, and performance across all transportation modes - pedestrian, bicycle, public transit, and vehicular. The draft assessment will help inform the development of mobility policies and recommendations in the Mid-City Communities Plan Update.

Draft Historic Context Statement

The City released the *Draft Historic Context Statement* (Attachment 6) in December 2024 which identifies the historic development themes and property types that shaped the built environment of the Mid-City communities. The Historic Context Statement is used to identify locations in the Mid-City communities that may contain significant historical resources and inform the development of the policies and recommendations in the Historic Preservation Element of the Mid-City Communities Plan Update.

How will awarded grant funds be used to support the Community Plan Update?

The City was awarded a Smart Growth Incentive Program grant from SANDAG to help launch the Mid-City Communities Plan Update and support the exploration of smart growth concepts. The funds will be utilized to inform the initial phases of the community plan update and ensure the community's role as a smart growth area, and identify opportunities for:

- Homes of a variety of incomes and household types;
- Safer streets and mobility options for all;

- Enhancement of existing parks and network of public trails;
- Expansion of tree canopy, better landscaping, and other types of shade; and
- Creation of new and improved social hearts and commercial hubs that contribute to community prosperity.

The City was also awarded the Regional Early Action Program 2.0 Housing Acceleration Grant from SANDAG and the Sustainable Communities Grant from Caltrans to help complete the Mid-City Communities Plan Update.

Where should opportunities for change be focused in Mid-City?

An important part of the update is identifying areas of transition and obtaining input on certain areas in the community (focus areas) to explore opportunities for new homes, businesses and infrastructure to improve the lives of people that live, work, and visit Mid City. Through public engagement and technical analyses, the plan update will identify land use recommendations consistent with a smart growth strategy that minimizes displacement of current residents and businesses. The transit corridors along El Cajon Boulevard, University Avenue, and Adams Avenue are located within Sustainable Development and Transit Priority Areas (Attachment 7). The corridors offer the potential to better integrate transit and land use while helping to improve community well-being, and will be explored as part of this iterative planning process.

Where are additional public spaces opportunities for the community?

Existing parks and recreational facilities in Mid-City, along with progress toward achieving parks goals, based on 2022 SANDAG population estimates, are shown in Table 5. A range of new opportunities for improved and new public spaces will be studied as part of the Chollas Creek Watershed Regional Park Master Plan (Chollas Creek Master Plan) and the community plan update process. The Chollas Creek Master Plan is expected to study and identify additional outdoor recreation opportunities in the Mid-City communities while preserving the natural qualities and habitats within the watershed. The community plan update will study and identify additional parks and recreational opportunities such as freeway lid parks, promenades, paseos, plazas, community parks, pocket parks, open space trails, recreation centers, aquatic complexes, skate parks, dog parks, and joint-use parks. Potential new park and recreational opportunities will be identified in the draft community plan.

Table 5. Mid-City Existing Parks and Recreation Facilities

| Summary | |
|---|---------|
| Total Population (2022) | 133,267 |
| Recreation Value Points Goal, 100 points per thousand | 13,327 |
| Current Recreation Value Points | 7,020 |
| Recreation Center Requirement – 17,000 SF per 25,000 people | 90,622 |
| Current Recreation Center square footage | 49,672 |
| Aquatic Complex Requirement – 1 complex per 50,000 people | 2.6 |
| Current number of Aquatic Complexes | 2 |

** This table has been updated since the release of the Draft Mid-City Atlas: Existing Conditions Report*

What are the next steps for the Mid-City Communities Plan Update?

The community plan update process is now entering phase two (Attachment 8) with a focus on historic context statement and focused reconnaissance survey, market study, and exploration of land use, urban design, public space and mobility concepts and park and recreation opportunities. The next

Working Group meeting is tentatively scheduled for March 2025 to discuss the engagement summary, historic context statement and survey. Finally, the concepts and alternatives based on existing conditions analyses and community feedback will be available for public discussion in spring/summer 2025. Staff will also return to the Planning Commission to present and discuss phase two documents at a future workshop.

CONCLUSION

The City Planning Department is presenting this first workshop for the Mid-City Communities Plan Update to seek early input from the Planning Commission. Staff will continue to conduct public engagement to obtain community input through the Working Group, Community Planning Groups, and community members to develop the community plan. Staff welcomes and values ongoing feedback from the public. All community plan update documents are available on the project website: www.planmidcity.org.

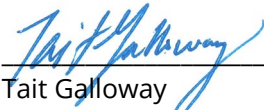
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Attachments:

1. Mid-City Planning Area and Neighborhoods
2. Village Climate Goal Propensity Map
3. Draft Public Engagement Summary link
4. Draft Mid-City Atlas: Existing Conditions Report link
5. Draft Existing Conditions Mobility Assessment link
6. Draft Historic Context Statement link
7. Sustainable Development, Smart Growth and Transit Priority Areas
8. Community Plan Update Phases