

**CITY COUNCIL**

For City Clerk's Use:

**APPROVED**       **DENIED**

Reso No.: 2010-179      File No.: PHG 09-0020  
              2010-180                               PHG 10-0016  
              2010-181

Ord No.: \_\_\_\_\_

Agenda Item No.: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: December 15, 2010

TO:           Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council  
  
FROM:       Barbara Redlitz, Director of Community Development  
  
SUBJECT:   General Plan Update and Climate Action Plan  
              (Case No. PHG 09-0020, PHG 10-0016)

**RECOMMENDATION:**

It is requested that the City Council 1) Adopt Resolutions 2010-179, 2010-180, and 2010-181 approving three (3) consultant contracts and scopes of services involved in the preparation of General Plan technical studies, Climate Action Plan, and Environmental Impact Report (EIR) with the consulting firm PBS&J totaling \$899,302.00; 2) Gather additional input from the Downtown Business Association regarding the current downtown Valley Parkway / Second Avenue one-way couplet configuration for evaluation in the proposed General Plan Update; and, 3) Amend the city's General Plan Boundaries for evaluation in the proposed General Plan Update by adjusting territory in targeted outlying areas.

**FISCAL ANALYSIS:**

A total of \$854,710.00 remains available in the city's Capital Account for the General Plan Update for Fiscal Years 2010-2011, which is sufficient to complete the bulk of the proposed work effort. Expenses to date have been for one staff position that includes the salary of the staff Project Manager and minor, incidental expenses. Funds from this account are also earmarked for the consultant's General Plan and EIR assistance.

A total of \$170,000 was also received through the federal Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) Program for preparing the city's Climate Action Plan that allows \$15,455.00 for staff project management.

The three contracts totaling \$899,302.00 are proposed with the consulting firm PBS&J to conduct the following services:

- 1) A contract totaling \$199,628.00 would finance planning services technical studies including preparing the General Plan Housing, Noise Elements and Complete Streets analysis, which are required by state law. Consultant services would also be retained for a market and fiscal analysis to evaluate the proposed General Plan buildout assumptions. The analysis would address the General Plan's ability to assess environmental impacts and meet anticipated demand, which will guide infrastructure planning (streets and utilities) to ensure they are sized appropriately.
- 2) A fixed fee contract not to exceed \$152,690.00 would finance the city's Climate Action Plan (CAP) which would include a local Green House Gas (GHG) Emissions Inventory and contain policies appropriate for Escondido that promotes sustainability and reduces greenhouse gas emissions in concert with Assembly Bill 32. A separate contract is recommended for this project because the EECBG federal funding requires exclusive auditing.

- 3) A contract totaling \$546,984.00 (includes a \$65,000 contingency) would finance most of the preparation of the General Plan Program EIR that includes technical studies for air quality, noise and traffic, evaluation of the updated General Plan, the Interim Downtown Specific Plan (previously updated) and Climate Action Plan.

Funding for the contracts is available to complete the planning services and Climate Action Plan (Items 1 and 2 above). Opportunities are also being evaluated to utilize Housing Division funds to finance a larger portion of the Housing Element preparation, which would be subject to a future budget adjustment. Funding for the General Plan EIR contract (Item 3 above) would be sufficient to complete the first screen check edition by the end of the fiscal year (June 2011). Funds to finish the EIR (approximately \$100,000) would be requested during the 2011-2012 FY Budget Process.

**ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:**

Staff issued a Notice of Preparation (NOP) on July 26, 2010, informing agencies, organizations and individuals of the city's intent to prepare a Program Environmental Impact Report (EIR). The NOP allowed 30 days for the views of interested parties to be submitted regarding topics for the City to be evaluated in the EIR. The consultants will assist staff in the EIR's evaluation of up to five (5) General Plan alternatives. Included will be a "Preferred Alternative" and a "No Project Alternative" as required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). A "Program EIR" to assess the General Plan Update is considered the most appropriate document for analysis as it will be able to comprehensively examine the series of actions characterized by the build-out of the General Plan and provide the framework to streamline subsequent CEQA analyses for future development.

**GENERAL PLAN ANALYSIS:**

State Law requires General Plans to be updated periodically. The State's Office of Planning and Research (OPR) monitors the status of General Plans and begins to encourage cities to update their plans after 8 years. The updated General Plan will meet current legal requirements, establish a framework for implementing the community's Vision for 2050, and address the City Council's Action Plan requirements.

The Housing Element has a separate, specific, update schedule. The next required update has been extended to January 2013 so it can be coordinated with other Regional Planning efforts. The required Housing Element Update will be coordinated with the remainder of the General Plan Update to ensure they are ultimately consistent.

The Climate Action Plan will provide appropriate measures for reducing GHG emissions improving the health and safety of the community, consistent with General Plan goals and policies. The primary GHG contributors are auto and vehicle emissions which have a direct bearing on the manner in which residents travel between land uses. To the extent land uses can be arranged to minimize vehicle trips, and General Plan policies can be implemented that promote alternative transportation modes, positive air quality impacts can be attained.

**CONSULTANT SELECTION:**

Staff interviewed five consulting firms and has selected PBS&J to conduct the work. PBS&J has extensive knowledge and experience in preparing General Plans, EIRs and Climate Action Plans. The consultant understands the City Council's direction to place the General Plan on the November 2012 ballot and is committed to meeting the necessary deadlines to accomplish that objective.

**PREVIOUS ACTION:**

Input from the 15-member General Plan Issues Committee, as well as residents at community workshops and forums expressed desire to improve Escondido's jobs-housing balance, retain quality of life standards, enhance community aesthetics, and maintain the character of established single family neighborhoods, while allowing development to occur at existing residential densities. The City Council considered these recommendations on September 22, 2010, and directed staff to:

- 1) Evaluate the most desirable and feasible growth opportunities for accommodating anticipated population increases and creating and/or enhancing employment lands.
- 2) Refine/update several of the Quality of Life Standards;
- 3) Edit the General Plan text as necessary to update, address legal requirements, and reflect the General Plan Issues Committee's and residents' recommendations;
- 4) Develop at least three, Alternative Land Use Maps for Council and public review;
- 5) Evaluate the appropriateness of converting the Second Avenue / Valley Parkway one-way couplet back to accommodate two-way traffic;
- 6) Schedule Council General Plan Updates on a regular basis, and assemble the Issues Committee as directed by the Council to address specific issues as they develop; and
- 7) Continue to post information and solicit public input on a regular basis.

The General Plan update includes fifteen (15) Land Use Study Areas that are focused in the urban core and along transportation corridors where opportunity exists to enhance employment and residential mixed-use opportunities (see Exhibit 1). These employment land use study areas involve:

- 1) Amending approximately 450 acres of existing residentially designated properties to employment land uses (Business Park, Office, and Commercial). Note: Re-designating these residential properties to employment land will reduce approximately 1,400 dwelling units from the city's current General Plan built-out.
- 2) Establishing Specific Plans, Area Plans or other types of "Overlay Districts" on approximately 800 acres of existing employment lands with goals of attracting high-wage employers, intensifying land uses to raise employee densities, improving linkage to transit, upgrading infrastructure, enhancing aesthetics and walkability, etc., while ensuring compatibility with adjacent residential areas.
- 3) Incentivizing educational institutions, vocational schools, and job training facilities to locate along the East Valley Parkway corridor providing residents opportunities to enhance their personal or professional skills resulting in a higher trained, better educated local labor force.
- 4) Establishing mixed-use residential nodes that focus compact, attractive, high intensity urban development in close proximity to employment, transit, services, shopping, recreation, and entertainment in walkable, pedestrian-friendly environments designed to reduce vehicle trips. These mixed-use nodes would be:
  - a. Downtown (SG-1);
  - b. East Valley Parkway at Ash Street (SG-3);
  - c. S. Escondido Boulevard at Felicita Avenue (SG-5);
  - d. Centre City Parkway at Citracado Parkway (SG-6);
  - e. Ninth Avenue at Del Dios Highway (EL-9);
  - f. West side of Centre City Parkway between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Avenues (EL-4);
  - g. Westfield Shoppingtown (SG-7); and,
  - h. East of I-15, south of Hwy. 78 in concert with a regional sports facility (EL-3).

Staff will work with the EIR consultant to identify reasonable land use alternatives that include all 15 study areas in their analyses. Variations in the land use build-out scenarios will be in building intensities, the range of mixed use, and residential densities associated with each scenario ranging from 1,550 to 4,025 net additional residential units to the General Plan's current build-out projection of 63,100 units, which may be further refined to accommodate anticipated development in the proposed "Ball Park District."

**TRAFFIC CIRCULATION:**

The General Plan EIR will also assess Escondido's Circulation Element in relation to the proposed land use study areas described above. A "Complete Streets" analysis is required by new legislation that evaluates opportunities for incorporating and improving alternative transportation modes that reduce reliance on the automobile and can be used as a means for improving air quality as part of the AB 32 carbon emission mandates. The analysis will also include the extension of light rail from the existing West Valley Parkway transit station to Westfield Shoppingtown pursuant to NCTD's master plan. Policies will be included in the General Plan that monitor and coordinate high speed rail efforts, as well as refine policies to identify appropriate land uses around the high speed rail station proposed in Escondido.

**SECOND AVENUE & WEST VALLEY PARKWAY COUPLET:**

City Council directed staff to evaluate the appropriateness of returning the one-way Second Avenue / West Valley Parkway couplet back to two-way traffic (see Exhibit 2) as a means for providing a more pedestrian-friendly downtown and slowing traffic through downtown. At the Council's direction, staff conducted an internal analysis that identified anticipated intersection improvements, probable land acquisitions, necessary signal modifications, and estimated costs associated with the reconfiguration prior to expending consultant funds.

Staff met with representatives of the Downtown Business Association (DBA) to discuss the couplet reconfiguration on December 6, 2010. The DBA acknowledged staff's findings and concurred that additional input from the DBA Board of Directors is warranted. A tentative meeting is proposed in January 2011. Staff's discussion with the DBA regarding the Second Avenue / West Valley Parkway couplet included:

***On-Street Parking Elimination:***

The existing couplet primarily incorporates three travel lanes in each direction with parking on both sides. Facilitating four lanes (two in each direction) would require removing parking from one side of the street. Consideration was given to maintaining three lanes of traffic involving a single east and west bound traffic lane with a center turning lane in order to preserve current parking. However, traffic volumes cannot support this configuration without significantly degrading the level of service.

***Intersection Widening Implications***

At every intersection a left turn lane will need to be installed, which will eliminate parking on both sides of the street. Because the city's blocks are relatively short through downtown, street parking may have to be eliminated along the entire length of both sides of the street in order to accommodate adequate vehicle queuing in the left turn lanes. Double left turn lanes would be warranted in certain high-traffic volume areas (such as Escondido Boulevard, Broadway, etc.). In these situations additional right-of-way would need to be acquired in order to accommodate the intersection widening.

### ***Traffic Signal Modification***

The 14 existing traffic signals in the couplet address traffic approaching from three directions. Creating two-way traffic on Valley Parkway and Second Avenue will require significant modifications to the existing signals to accommodate currently non-existent opposing traffic, and potentially require additional signals on Grand Avenue to address increased traffic movements. The current signal arms are not engineered to accommodate the longer and heavier span needed to support new signals, requiring every traffic signal to be redesigned and replaced. Discussion included replacing traffic signals with stop signs to slow vehicles through downtown; however the traffic volumes are too high to support this approach.

### ***Surrounding Street Traffic***

The overall reduced number of lanes and increased left turn movements would result in significantly reduced traffic capacity and increased traffic congestion. A reason for installing the one-way couplet was to facilitate connection with eastern portions of the community along with shopping and services along East Valley Parkway. Reconfiguring the couplet would make travel to east Escondido less convenient and may redistribute traffic to outlying areas as motorists seek alternatives to avoid congestion.

### ***Anticipated Costs***

A detailed cost estimate of reconfiguring was not conducted. However redesigning and replacing 14 existing street signals are estimated to cost approximately \$4,500,000. Additional costs estimated to be between \$10-20 million would be associated with realigning the Valley Parkway/Second Avenue couplet “split” near I-15 as well as near Palomar Hospital, installing additional signals at intersections to accommodate increased traffic on Grand Avenue, acquiring additional right-of-way for turning movements, performing/modifying underground utility and drainage improvements, re-striping travel lanes, installing signage, repositioning loop detectors, etc.

### ***Construction Phasing/Timing***

The nature of reconfiguring the Second Avenue / Valley Parkway couplet to two-way travel does not lend itself to be a phased project that should be completed over a multi-year time frame. In order to minimize motorist confusion and accidents, minimize impacts to adjacent properties and downtown, the reconfiguration process would need to be constructed in a relatively short period of time. This would require a financial commitment from the city for significant funding that could impact the timing of other capital improvement projects in the community.

### ***Opportunities for Improving Pedestrian Orientation and Slowing Traffic***

“Traffic calming” opportunities are available for improving the couplet’s pedestrian orientation and slowing traffic without reconfiguring the existing design. One alternative is to modify the traffic signal timing to slow vehicles along the thoroughfares. This could be implemented fairly quickly at minimal expense and could be done on a trial basis. Another alternative is to “bulb” out the sidewalks at intersections in order to reduce the distance pedestrians must walk to cross the street (see photo). This feature has been incorporated along Grand Avenue to enhance the pedestrian experience.





A third alternative is to bulge out the sidewalks in mid-block areas and install landscaping to further enhance downtown's walkability and appeal (see photo). While this would reduce street parking (which would be eliminated if the couplet was reconfigured to two-way traffic) it would preserve some street parking, provide a more pedestrian-friendly walking experience and slow traffic along these streets by further separating pedestrians from vehicles. Staff will investigate these and other alternatives for discussion with the DBA prior to reporting back to City Council. Further analysis of

the couplet is included in the Planning Services Technical Studies contract at a cost of \$12,042.00.

### **AMENDING GENERAL PLAN BOUNDARIES:**

Updating a community's General Plan includes evaluating its boundaries to ensure their appropriateness. Escondido's General Plan boundaries have not changed for over 30 years; conditions and circumstances necessitate re-evaluating the current area to ensure they best meet the city's needs (see Exhibit 3). General Plan boundaries typically include unincorporated territory that bear relation to a community or include factors that, if developed, could impact the community. General Plan boundaries are also defined as a community's "blueprint for development" and should not overlap into an adjacent incorporated city's territory or sphere of influence (as described below), where jurisdictional authority would never apply.

General Plans include an assessment of the community's needs, which has fiscal implications when considering Quality of Life thresholds and associated impact fees. The city's ability to plan and finance facilities and infrastructure can be problematic and costly when attempting to address the needs of remote areas in the General Plan boundary containing non-conforming development. The financial obligation for planning and providing service to areas that will not likely annex (particularly police, fire, water and sewer) may not warrant their inclusion in the General Plan when considering where the city should prioritize its resources.

Escondido's General Plan in many locations extends beyond the city's sphere of influence, which is area that can be annexed to the city authorized by the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO). The city may desire expanding its sphere of influence in certain areas to match the General Plan boundary (which would be a separate action approved by LAFCO). However, staff recommends reducing the General Plan boundary in certain areas that are outside Escondido's sphere of influence where annexation is unlikely to occur because of the territory's remoteness, or its location within another jurisdiction.

### ***Del Dios Community; approximately 1,000 acres (Area 1)***

This area is outside Escondido's Sphere of Influence and well-distanced from the city with numerous properties containing non-conforming development. There are septic and drainage issues with properties adjacent to Lake Hodges as well as substandard deteriorating streets and utilities that require upgrading. Staff recommends deleting this area from the city's General Plan boundary because the likelihood of annexation is remote and would be a financial impact for the city. Deleting this area from the Escondido's General Plan eliminates the need for addressing Quality of Life thresholds, but still preserve the low intensity development of the County's General Plan.



**Areas within Other Jurisdictions or Spheres of Influence; approximately 250 acres (Areas 2)**

Areas in Escondido's General Plan boundary that are within San Diego's city limits and San Marcos's sphere of influence are recommended for removing from Escondido's General Plan. These areas have been, or will be, annexed into adjacent jurisdictions and are not appropriate for including in the General Plan because Escondido will never retain land use authority. Deleting these areas from Escondido's General Plan would still preserve the development intensity called for in each jurisdiction's respective General Plans.

**General Plan / Sphere of Influence Coterminous Alignment; approximately 80 acres (Area 3)**

Escondido's sphere of influence extends beyond the city's General Plan boundary northwest of the I-15 / Deer Springs Road interchange. Staff recommends expanding the General Plan boundary to be coterminous with the sphere of influence boundaries because the properties are eligible for annexing to the city and it would facilitate land use, facility, and infrastructure planning.

**CITY / COUNTY GENERAL PLAN UPDATE EFFORTS**

City staff met with the San Diego County Planning Department staff to discuss certain land use inconsistencies between Escondido and surrounding unincorporated properties (Citrus Avenue and I-15 corridor areas). The county recognized the inconsistencies and noted that Escondido's land use designations would apply upon annexation. The city's General Plan EIR "No Project" alternative will assess the County's land use designations in its analysis.

**CLIMATE ACTION PLAN:**

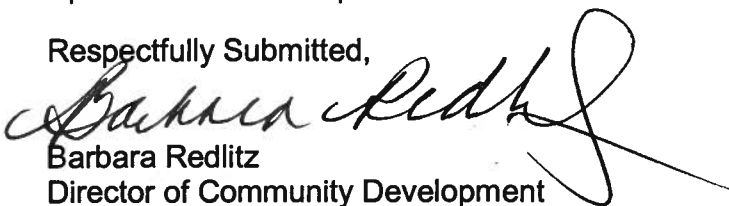
Assembly Bill 32 was passed by the state legislature in 2006 mandating that California cut its green house gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020, and 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050. An initial step involves each jurisdiction preparing a local Green House Gas Emissions Inventory that identifies and documents major sources of emissions affecting climate change within its boundaries. Results of that inventory will be the foundation for establishing a Climate Action Plan that will guide Escondido toward achieving its GHG reductions goals.

The City has partnered with ICLEI, Local Governments for Sustainability and The San Diego Foundation to prepare Escondido's Greenhouse Gas Emission Inventory at no cost to the City with funds provided by a federal grant. ICLEI and The San Diego Foundation have prepared such inventories for every jurisdiction in San Diego County which has saved considerable funds. PBS&J will refine information from the inventory to prepare the Climate Action Plan, which will contain policies appropriate for Escondido that promotes sustainability and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

**NEXT STEPS IN THE PROCESS:**

Staff has reviewed and refined the consultant's scopes of services for the preparation of the General Plan, Climate Action Plan, and EIR to ensure their appropriateness. Upon approval, the consultants will commence analysis and associated technical studies to prepare the documents. Environmental impacts and proposed mitigation measures will be considered concurrently to provide the City Council with as much information as possible in making a decision regarding the General Plan Update in time for the public's vote on the November 2012 election.

Respectfully Submitted,

  
Barbara Redlitz  
Director of Community Development

  
Jay Petrek  
Principal Planner

Exhibit 1

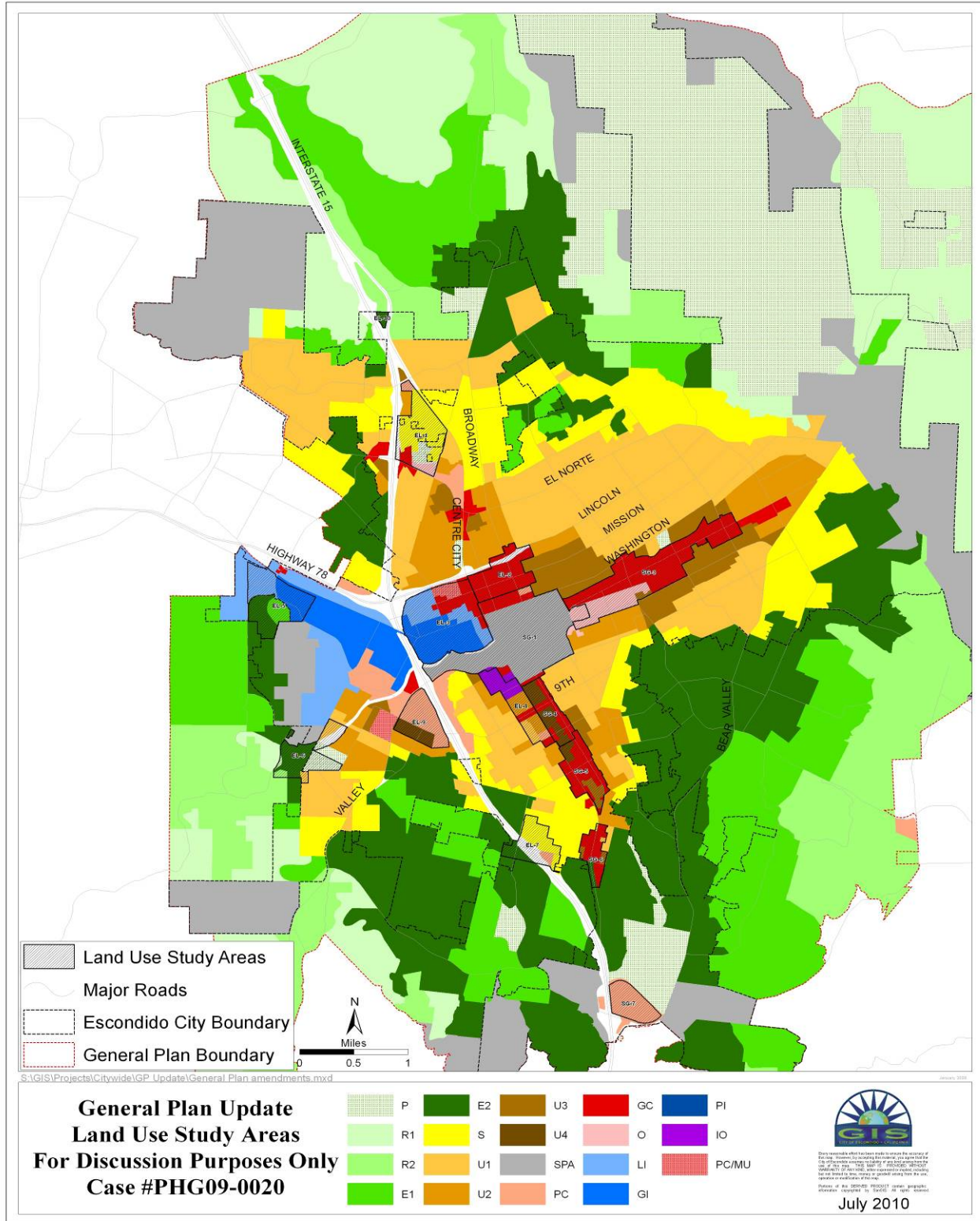




Exhibit 2

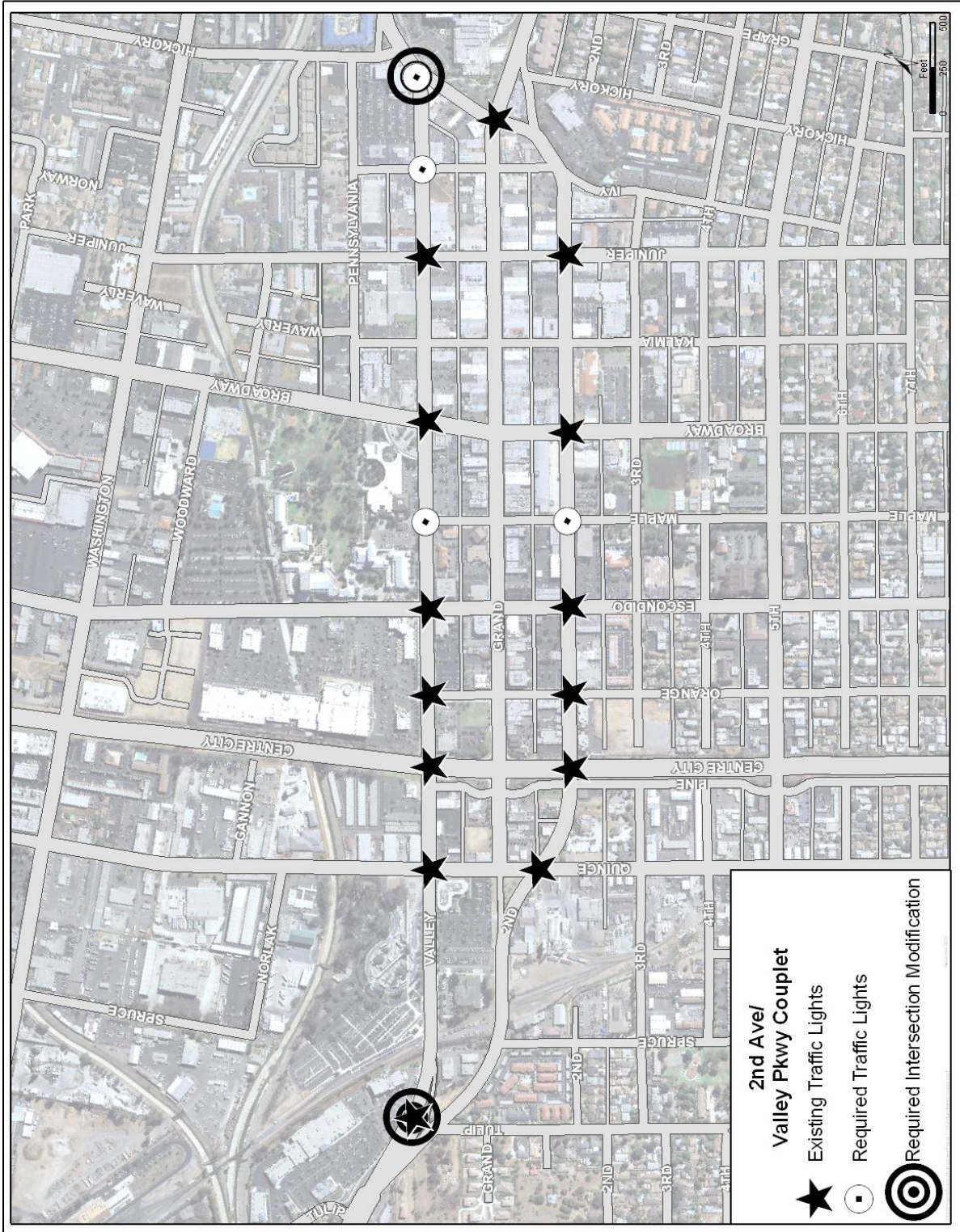


Exhibit 3

