

Commentary: Consider density's lasting effects when you vote

By **Rick Huffman**

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On June 14 the Costa Mesa City Council will vote to approve an update to the city's General Plan. The most significant changes involve the land-use element that controls zoning.

The update proposes to create overlay zones for properties up and down Harbor and Newport boulevards and the Bristol/Baker streets area that will allow high-density residential and residential/commercial mixed-use.

These changes ignore the residents' input at the many outreach events that were held beginning in 2013. The residents stated they want less density, more open space and the preservation of existing neighborhoods.

What we are getting is a vision imposed by the council majority of high-density apartment buildings that will increase the existing imbalance of renters versus homeowners in Costa Mesa.

This City Council majority could be gone next year, but it will leave behind long-lasting consequences that residents will regret.

This plan has been promoted by Mayor Tem Jim Righeimer as a way to get rid of the run-down motels that attract "pimps, prostitutes and druggies." Of course, many motel residents are families living on the margin and some old-fashioned policing may chase away the pimps.

But this rezoning isn't just about replacing problem motels. A closer look reveals that it involves the loss of large viable commercial areas to zoning for super-high density.

Buried within the 406 pages of the proposed General Plan update are color-coded maps with dotted lines around the areas to be rezoned. These maps are a sorry excuse for an adequate disclosure of the significant impacts of these zoning changes.

The small print next to the maps reveals that the overlays allow for 40 units per acre at four stories high. That type of density means big apartment buildings with multi-level parking structures.

Several projects with zoning changes like these are already approved and under construction, such as 125 Baker St., which is 57.7 dwelling units per acre, five stories high, with a six-level parking structure. Exceptions and variances seem to always get approved during the approval process, and this project was no different.

If you have noticed the three- and four-story projects already being built on the Westside at 20 units per acre, wait until you see buildings at 40 to 55 units per acre lining Harbor and Newport boulevards with big parking

garages.

The resulting traffic, pollution and loss of open space will have a significant impact on our quality of life for years to come.

Substantial changes to the General Plan should require voter approval. All residents are urged to attend the Town Hall sponsored by Costa Mesa First and Costa Mesans for Responsible Government at 6:30 p.m. June 9 at the Neighborhood Community Center.

Speakers will report on the proposed changes to the use of land, including the overlay zoning areas, and the resulting impacts on traffic and open space. There will also be information about the initiatives that are anticipated to be on the November ballot, and a question and answer period. I hope residents take this opportunity to learn more about the General Plan changes and what they can do to take control of their future.

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