



Date: August 9, 2022
To: Planning Commission Members
David Loya, Community Development Director (*via email*)
From: Oona Smith, Senior Regional Planner
RE: Items 6.2 and 6.3, August 9 Planning Commission Meeting

Thank you for the opportunity to review drafts of the City’s General Plan update and Gateway Area Plan. The Humboldt County Association of Governments (HCAOG), in its role as the Regional Transportation Planning Agency, strives to support and encourage the best outcomes from the nexus of transportation planning and land use planning. Our goals are to maintain a multi-modal transportation system that is safe, convenient, equitable, and sustainable, while serving the needs of all people and resources in Humboldt County.

Agenda Item 6.2 – Consider the Gateway Area Plan with Emphasis on the Design and Community Benefits Chapters

HCAOG recognizes that most, if not all, of the proposed policies in *Chapter 9: Design and Architectural Standards*, support HCAOG’s planning goals and objectives. HCAOG’s regional transportation objectives strongly support policies that help build and enhance walkable neighborhoods, which are built to a more natural human scale and can better serve a human pace. HCAOG’s policy objectives strongly support land uses that minimize, avoid, or reverse car-oriented development, which requires more land and tends to induce undesirable driving speeds on local roads. The draft GAP’s Design Standards Policies GA-9a thru GA-9s explicitly support these same objectives and are consistent with HCAOG’s planning goals (Regional Transportation Plan, “Variety in Rural Options of Mobility (VROOM) 2022-2042”).

Agenda Item 6.3 – Review and consider the information presented regarding the Land Use Element Update

The proposed modifications (underlined below) of draft Guiding Principles and Goals “G” and “I” are consistent with VROOM’s goals to enhance infill development, which helps create a safer and better multi-modal, sustainable transportation system.

G. Encourage infill development of vacant, brownfield, and underutilized land designated for development as a way of meeting housing and employment needs without major extensions of infrastructure and services. Encourage high-density residential infill development and low parking ratios in Infill Opportunity Zones throughout the City.

I. Encourage mixed use commercial/residential areas throughout the City through encouraging residential units on upper floors in commercial areas and other available strategies.

These General Plan goals will help support HCAOG in achieving “Safe & Sustainable Transportation Targets” adopted in *VROOM*. The draft update of Arcata’s Land Use Element is specifically consistent with the following targets:

Efficiency & Practicality in Locating New Housing

- *(iii) Starting by 2022, 80% of all new permitted housing units are in places with safe, comfortable, and convenient access to employment, shopping, and recreation by walking, biking, rolling, or transit.*
- *(iv) Starting by 2022, all new housing contributes to a countywide reduction in per capita VMT from cars.*
- *(v) By 2023/24, all jurisdictions have adopted GP/zoning incentives for building in “highly connected” areas and for other climate-friendly housing-development. (VROOM, Table Renew-3)*

In addition, the new draft Goal “J” is consistent with *VROOM*’s adopted Equity Policies and Actions.

J. Create a welcoming, safe and racially equitable community through the promotion of racial equity, diversity, and accessibility in all City neighborhoods and land use. Achieve this by encouraging housing development and business development in and around existing activity centers, and promoting access to transit and healthy food, among other strategies brought forward by Arcata’s BIPOC community.

Goal “J” is consistent with HCAOG’s *VROOM Policy Equity-5* (among others):

- *Take an anti-racist, equitable approach to transportation funding and project prioritization. Position funding investments and multi-modal-transportation advocacy efforts within the framework of equity and social justice.*
- *Follow the direction of BIPOC urbanist and mobility experts to operationalize the steps required to transform systems and to promote the actions most likely to create anti-racist walkable environments. Only support projects and initiatives that address structural racism and implement anti-racist efforts.*
- *HCAOG shall prioritize projects that have been planned and designed to bring economic benefits to communities that have had disproportionately low transportation investments and/or disproportionately high transportation harms.*



Date: August 19, 2022
To: Arcata City Council and Arcata Planning Commission
Cc: David Loya, Community Development Director
From: Oona Smith, Senior Regional Planner (via email, oona.smith@hcaog.net)
RE: ITEM III. REVIEW GATEWAY AREA PLANNING,
August 23 Special City Council Meeting–Joint Study Session
with the Planning Commission

Before commenting on Item III, I would like to thank the City Council for approving to add four more bikeshare stations and 20 additional bikes to the City’s bikeshare program. As these new stations were funded through a grant connected to the Sorrel Place project, we recognize that future high-density infill residential projects in the Gateway Area will afford similar grant opportunities to enhance active transportation in Arcata.

Thank you for the opportunity to share comments with the Council and Planning Commission to consider as you move forward with the draft Gateway Area Plan.

The Humboldt County Association of Governments (HCAOG), in its role as the Regional Transportation Planning Agency, strives to support and encourage the best outcomes from the nexus of transportation planning and land use planning. In adopting the 20-year regional transportation plan, *Variety and Rural Options of Mobility 2022-2042 (VROOM)*, HCAOG has committed to working more proactively to address transportation’s interconnected challenges of climate change, land use, safety, and equity. HCAOG is aware that our agency cannot possibly achieve the regional goal, adopted in *VROOM*, to “**have a carbon-neutral, multi-modal transportation system that is comprehensive, safe, sustainable, and equitable**” without the local cities and the unincorporated County pursuing land use/development policies that minimize, avoid, or reverse car-oriented development.

Item III. A. Background and Context

The objectives of the Gateway Area Plan (from “Gateway Area At-A-Glance” in the meeting packet) include Mobility and Alternative Transportation; Economy and Jobs; Sustainability and Climate Adaptation; Racial Equity and Social Justice, and Equitable Housing. These objectives align with and will support *VROOM*’s strategic framework, which sets out to address:

- **CLIMATE CHANGE:** *Achieving a substantial mode shift to more walking, biking and transit trips is a pillar for climate action in Humboldt County.*
- **HOUSING & VIBRANT NEIGHBORHOODS:** *Strategies to reduce vehicle miles travelled (VMT) are a key component of a sustainable transportation system. One of the most powerful ways to shift how people move around is to focus on where they live in relation to everyday destinations. In concert with the complete streets policies that encourage walking, biking, and transit, HCAOG supports effective land use policies to create places with a mix of uses and pleasant, vibrant streetscapes.*

- **SAFETY & HEALTH:** HCAOG adopts “Vision Zero” an initiative to reduce roadway fatalities to zero, with a focus on the crisis of pedestrians and bicyclists hit by cars.
- **EQUITY:** Transportation equity means all people benefit equally from transportation investments and that no group is disproportionately impacted negatively by the transportation system.

Item III. B. Gateway Area Districts/Building Heights

Encouraging high-density residential infill development is consistent with *VROOM*’s goal to help create a safer and better multi-modal, sustainable transportation system. If you were looking at where housing in the region has the greatest potential to create robust multi-modal options and active transportation, you would find that the Gateway Area is one of the most walkable and bikeable locations in Humboldt County. Looking at results from the Walk Score methodology (walkscore.com), which assigns a walkability score of 0 (car-dependent) to 100 (car-free), you will find that **out of all the housing units permitted or constructed in Humboldt County from 2018 to 2021, the Sorrel Place units on 7th Street have the highest Walk Score at 95.** Certain locations within the Gateway Area Plan, such as the carwash parcel, have a Walk Score of 97; in the O Street area scores range in the 70s; currently the “Barrel District” scores 57. Reviewing scores across Humboldt County, this metric can serve as a fairly good proxy for how conveniently trips can be accomplished by foot.

The walkability in the Gateway Area would be further enhanced by the proposed street and trail network, mixed-use development pattern, and pedestrian-oriented characteristics built into the form-based code. Additional planning to incorporate frequent transit service and on-demand mobility (e.g., car- and bike-share) will further residents’ (and visitors’) opportunities to enjoy car-free days and avoid single-occupancy driving.

HCAOG supports the Gateway Area Plan’s measured high-density infill strategies as an effective and practical means to encourage affordable housing and vibrant neighborhoods.

Item III. C. Transportation Circulation: L Street Couplet

HCAOG staff sees the promise in the Gateway Area Plan’s conceptual design of the circulation plan. Of particular benefit is that:

- The total length of trails in the Gateway Area would nearly triple. Transportation research shows that having bikeways separated from car traffic results in more people riding, and it makes the difference for people who are “Interested but Concerned” to switch from driving to bicycling.¹
- L Street would be one lane/one-way car traffic and K Street would be one-way (K-L Street couplet). Under existing conditions, L Street is a stinted 2-way street, and K Street could be considered a “stroad.” Coined by Strong Towns, a stroad is “what happens when a street (a place where people interact with businesses and residences, and where wealth is produced) gets combined with a road (a high-speed route between productive

¹ “Our logic is that if we make bike networks safe and comfortable for the ‘interested but concerned,’ or majority of the population, then more people will use it, and more people will become physically active.” Alta Planning + Design, <https://blog.altaplanning.com/understanding-the-four-types-of-cyclists-112e1d2e9a1b>

places).”² As Strong Towns demonstrates, stroads are expensive to build, are ultimately financially unproductive, and they are dangerous. By calming K Street traffic and eventually gaining projects that will bring more foot-traffic, K Street could feel more like L Street, and L Street could feel more like the new K Street, both being more walk- and bike-friendly.

Having the cities and the County locate new housing in areas with high accessibility is critical to achieving the regional targets adopted in *VROOM*. HCAOG staff recognizes that the draft Gateway Area Plan will support *VROOM*’s Safe & Sustainable Transportation Targets, specifically:

- To reduce vehicle-miles travelled by 25% by 2030.
- Starting by 2022, 80% of all new permitted housing units are in places with safe, comfortable, and convenient access to employment, shopping, and recreation by walking, biking, rolling, or transit.
- Starting by 2022, all new housing contributes to a countywide reduction in per capita VMT from cars.
- By 2023/24, all jurisdictions have adopted GP/zoning incentives for building in “highly connected” areas and for other climate-friendly housing-development. (*VROOM*, Table Renew-3).

HCAOG appreciates the extensive and thorough work that Community Development and other department staff have put into drafting and publicizing the draft Gateway Area Plan and explaining form based code and infill development. Moving forward, we encourage the Commission and Council to maintain the staff’s momentum by continuing the planned public outreach and approving and implementing the plan as close to schedule as possible.

² <https://www.strongtowns.org/journal/2018/3/1/whats-a-stroad-and-why-does-it-matter>