

Agenda Item _____
June 17, 2009
File No. _____

AGENDA BILL

Subject: PAOT Ad Hoc Committee Project Impact Evaluation Criteria
Policy Recommendations

Initiated by: Mark Wardlaw, Community Development Director
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BACKGROUND:

The purpose of this agenda item is for the Town Council to consider adopting a series of Policy Recommendations for Project Impact Evaluation.

On April 15, 2009 the Town Council adopted the PAOT/Impact Assessment Policies, which included direction to “(s)hift from PAOT-based project evaluation to impact-based evaluation and mitigation” and to develop “Project Impact Evaluation Criteria ...that allow simple, but precise, summary evaluation of the impacts that are important to the community.” The Town Council directed the PAOT Ad Hoc Committee to complete additional work to develop more specific criteria for the Impact Assessment portion of the policy, including the “Project Impact Evaluation Criteria.”

As requested, the Ad Hoc Committee held three additional meetings between May and June 2009 to further refine and articulate the rationale, application, and method of an impact-based project evaluation approach. The policy recommendations presented here directly implement and reflect that previous policy direction.

ANALYSIS/DISCUSSION:

The adopted PAOT/Impact Assessment policy was developed based on direction from the Town Council in November 2008. The Town Council appointed an Ad Hoc Committee, consisting of Mayor Wendy Sugimura, Mayor Pro-Tem Neil McCarroll, and community members Tom Cage, Dan Dawson, Jim Smith, and Bill Taylor, who worked with staff to create and refine a series of policy recommendations.

The adopted policy recommendations include two major components:

1. A Buildout/PAOT model that provides a standardized methodology for calculating and tracking PAOT.
2. The concept of an “impact-based assessment” of the effects of new development and PAOT.

A numeric PAOT evaluation, by itself, does not necessarily correspond to those “Triple Bottom Line” (environmental, social, and economic) impacts that are most important to the community. Implicit in the policy is the idea that a project’s impact on those objectives is of equal or greater than importance than adhering to a particular population threshold number. The PIEC Policy recommendations are intended to articulate and implement this latter idea in greater detail.

PIEC Policy Recommendations

The Policy Recommendations include three major sections: Policy Intent and Guiding Principles; PIEC Framework Outline and PIEC Framework Application.

A. Policy Intent and Guiding Principles

In its deliberations on the PAOT/Impact Assessment policy, the Town Council set aside a number of points that had been included in the draft recommendations as Committee points of consensus. These policy points were discussed in detail by the Ad Hoc Committee in its follow-up meetings, and were reconfirmed as fundamental to the rationale, application and method of the Project Impact Evaluation Criteria framework recommended by the Committee. Therefore, they are incorporated as guiding principles in Section A of the Policy Recommendations.

The policy principles, with some explanatory notes, are as follows:

- a. The impact of one person at one time in one location is not always equal to one person at one time in a different location.*

Policy principle a. articulates the idea that “place matters,” or in other words, that the location of development is one of the most important factors in determining how much impact a unit of development will have, particularly in regard to environmental effects. For example, a residential unit built within walking distance of shopping, services, and employment, or with easy

access to transit, will require its occupants to drive less, with resultant decreases in traffic congestion, air pollution, and noise. A unit built in a distant location, where almost every daily need requires a car journey, will have greater impacts on traffic, air quality and noise.

- b. PAOT as a number by itself does not indicate whether a project is “good” or “bad,” nor does strict adherence to a specific population limit necessarily mean that the community’s desired objectives will have been met at buildout.*
- c. The status quo method of evaluating projects and planning documents is not sufficient to accomplish Community Vision, goals, and objectives. Existing outdated Municipal Code standards do not adequately reflect the 2007 General Plan and should be updated to be consistent with the General Plan, to support its implementation.*
- d. PAOT should not be used as a “growth cap,” and instead should be used alongside impact assessment as a tool to manage growth towards achieving the Community Vision.*
- e. The existing General Plan Policy L.1.A (setting the peak population at 52,000 PAOT) does not adequately encapsulate the above points, and may therefore require amendment.*

Policy principles b. through e. articulate the “outcomes” based emphasis in the PIEC framework, which ties its evaluation to the issues and criteria of greatest community importance. This, rather than a strictly numeric or quantitative assessment, will provide a more meaningful gauge of the merits of a project. Ultimately, achieving these objectives may mean a PAOT of more, or potentially even less, than 52,000 at buildout.

The policy principles suggest that strict adherence to a 52,000 PAOT limit alone may not be a sufficient basis to determine whether a project should be approved. However, as suggested in the adopted PAOT policy, the level of environmental impacts identified in the 2007 General Plan EIR for 52,000 PAOT provides a meaningful assessment threshold in a number of critical, measurable impact areas. These thresholds can in some cases be drawn from the General Plan EIR, others may need to be better quantified through further study. The PIEC Framework explicitly incorporates these specific thresholds and criteria.

B. PIEC Framework Outline

A significant part of the Ad Hoc Committee's discussion was on the development of a project evaluation tool, in the form of a summary table, or PIEC Framework.

The PIEC framework consists of a series of measurement criteria or questions, organized into nine topical categories:

- Traffic and Mobility
- Water Supply and Capacity
- Air Quality
- Green Technology and Energy
- Economic Stability
- Social Capacity
- Housing
- Recreation and Leisure Capacity
- Community Character and Aesthetics

These nine categories were identified by the Committee as responding to the key areas of community concern in a Triple Bottom Line assessment. The specific "measurements" under each category are intended to be reasonably broad, in order that they can apply to a range of different projects, but also to represent directly measurable aspects of a project and minimize subjectivity.

The measurements also seek to draw, in their "Basis of Analysis" on existing analyses and information that is prepared for a typical project review. The ultimate goal of the PIEC Framework is to provide a concise, simple summary that pulls together critical information from the overall project assessment into a single "snapshot" format, focused on the most important issues to the community.

Finally, the PIEC Framework table is intended to be updated as new information and analysis becomes available and can refine specific standards and thresholds. Forthcoming efforts such as completion of the Traffic Model Update, study and adoption of revised CEQA thresholds, and updates to the Air Quality Management Plan and Urban Water Management Plan are examples of studies that will feed into such updates. The PIEC Policy recommendations require that changes to the PIEC Framework be approved by the Town Council.

C. Framework Application

Section C of the policy recommendations addresses the implementation and applicability of the PIEC Framework. The Ad Hoc Committee has recommended that the PIEC evaluation be applied in a similar manner as the approved PAOT/Impact Assessment Policy (i.e. for all projects proposing legislative amendments or significant revisions to density or other standards, or that request discretionary density increases, and Tentative Tract Map and Use Permit applications).

The policy recommendations also suggest, given their size and importance to the community, that pending projects, including Snowcreek VIII Master Plan and Mammoth Crossing be required to complete a PIEC assessment. Staff has already completed the necessary assessments, which are included in sample/illustrative form in Attachment B. Please note that these assessments are intended to be illustrative only. Given the forthcoming hearings for these two major projects, it would not be appropriate to discuss the specific content of the evaluations at this Town Council meeting.

OPTIONS ANALYSIS:

1. Adopt by resolution the Project Impact Evaluation Criteria Policies.
2. Adopt by resolution the Project Impact Evaluation Criteria Policies, with changes.
3. Do not adopt the policies.

Option 1 would adopt the Project Impact Evaluation Criteria Policies as recommended by the PAOT Ad Hoc Committee. Staff will immediately incorporate these policies in the evaluation of permit applications and the formulation and evaluation of other planning documents.

Option 2 would adopt the Project Impact Evaluation Criteria Policies as recommended by the PAOT Ad Hoc Committee, with other changes as requested by the Town Council. Depending on the nature of Council changes, staff would proceed generally as described in Option 1.

Option 3 would reject the Project Impact Evaluation Criteria Policies and Council would provide staff with different direction.

VISION CONSIDERATIONS:

Establishing and adopting policies for effective project assessment against community “triple bottom line” objectives will assist in implementation of the 2007 General Plan policies that call for this approach, and which seek to implement the community vision.

STAFFING CONSIDERATIONS:

This work effort was directed by the Town Council to be substantially completed in Spring 2009. This effort is necessary to allow timely evaluation of and action on pending land use permit applications.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

None.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS:

None.

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS:

None.

RECOMMENDATION:

Therefore, it is recommended that the Town Council adopt by resolution the Project Impact Evaluation Criteria Policies.

Attachments

- A. Resolution to Accept the Project Impact Evaluation Criteria Policies
- B. Sample PIEC Assessments for Snowcreek Master Plan and Mammoth Crossing Projects.