



Planning Commission Report

Planning Commission Meeting: February 13, 2013
Agenda Item: 6-A

To: Planning Commission
From: Francie Stefan, Strategic and Transportation Planning Manager
Subject: Initial Draft Bergamot Area Plan

Recommended Action

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission review the Initial Draft Bergamot Area Plan and provide comments and direction in defining the Plan for CEQA review.

Introduction

This hearing introduces the first complete draft of the Bergamot Area Plan, a community-based planning document that provides guidance on transitioning the former industrial lands into an arts-focused mixed-use pedestrian-oriented neighborhood. The Plan is both a visionary document describing the desired uses and activities of this new Santa Monica neighborhood called for in the Land Use and Circulation Element (LUCE), and a regulatory tool governing development by establishing a distinct set of standards and guidelines that will apply to projects – both private and public – wishing to develop, remodel, or adaptively reuse.

The importance of the Bergamot Area Plan for the community is clearly stated in the introduction:

As Santa Monica's Land Use and Circulation Element makes clear, almost all of the city's land area – 96%, to be exact – should be conserved and land use changes in the city should be directed to commercial and industrial land that comprises only 4% of the land area, including the land within the Bergamot Area Plan. So in order for Santa Monica to achieve the goals for sustainability and prosperity contained in the LUCE, areas such as the Bergamot Plan area cannot merely change. They must be transformed so they function in a completely different and much more sustainable way.

The Plan provides policies and strategies to both conserve and shape the cultural, economic, and urban design characteristics of this emerging area. Throughout the process, an emphasis has been put on valuing the innovative characteristics of the creative sector cluster that has colonized the former industrial district, providing them with new services, better public amenities and an infrastructure that aids in the creation of a new community space. At the same time, the Plan looks to the near future, when transit opens up new opportunities and will inevitably lead to new demands. The transit-oriented focus of the Plan envisions a mix of uses, including housing at all affordability levels, and new businesses that are open in both the daytime and evenings, and which serve all those who find themselves in the area, including residents outside the Plan boundaries within walking and biking distance of new activities, choices and services.

INNOVATIONS OF THE BERGAMOT AREA PLAN

- **PRESERVATION:** Two new “Conservation Districts” for areas of special or character-defining interest. These include the Bergamot Art Center and the Creative Sector Conservation Districts.
- **MULTI-MODAL TRANSPORTATION CHOICES:** New and innovative streets, pedestrian pathways and bicycle facilities that create public places that are comfortable for pedestrians, bikes and automobiles. Standards for building orientation toward each street type are provided to guide appropriate development.
- **FLEXIBLE STANDARDS:** A defined, alternative development standards process that allows flexibility to create more innovative architecture.
- **PARKING MANAGEMENT:** A proposed system that would include parking minimums and maximums, a phasing-in of requirements based on future higher transit use; requirements for sharing parking assets for more optimal utilization.
- **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & JOBS:** Strategies to retain, attract and incubate new creative businesses that foster job creation and growth.
- **ART AND CULTURE:** Approaches to elevating the presence and visibility of art and culture in the Bergamot Plan area.
- **HOUSING:** Housing choices to create a diverse neighborhood with ample affordable housing and encouraging pricing linked to area worker’s income levels.
- **FINANCING & PHASING STRATEGIES:** A spectrum of financing and funding options for funding the required improvements that will realize the transformation of the area over time.

Following the Planning Commission’s input, the Plan will be presented to the City Council for input, project description and direction to proceed with CEQA review. Following Council direction, additional outreach is planned, with the final Plan to be presented to both the Commission and Council in the summer.

Discussion

Vision for the Bergamot Area Plan

The Bergamot Plan area has been envisioned as a “complete neighborhood” that will guide an eventual transition from a former industrial zone to a well-designed, walkable urban place where people live, work in primarily creative industries and have access to an array of retail services and amenities by foot, bike, bus and train. The Bergamot Plan carefully conserves the character of the buildings that have survived from its industrial past and have been repurposed to attract the creative sector industries and offices that occupy the area today. It encourages innovation through both standards and guidelines, offering opportunities for out-of-the-box architectural concepts that meet

the Plan's goals and vision. And it recognizes the sensitivity of adjacent residential neighborhoods through identifying transition zones at the Plan boundaries.

The Plan also includes a blueprint for implementation that sets priorities for three project phases and identifies strategies for achieving the objectives of each phase. The plan maps out steps for both the City and for private developers, beginning with formation of organizations, like a Transportation Management Association (TMA) and projects and public improvements that are the first priority in terms of facilitating connection with the new Expo Light Rail station.

The Bergamot Area Plan outlines standards and regulations specific to the plan area, and is being developed in coordination with the Zoning Ordinance. Its standards will supersede and constitute the Zoning Ordinance for the plan area, although other Zoning Ordinance provisions not specified in the Plan will generally apply, such as permit processes, definitions, specific use standards and other Code sections. Projects will be reviewed for compliance with all development standards during the Planning approval process. Development Agreements approved once the Plan is adopted will need to be consistent with the Bergamot Area Plan.

Outline of the Plan

Attachment A includes the full text of the Draft Bergamot Area Plan. Following a brief introduction, the next two chapters lay out a vision and provide background. Beginning with Chapter 4, the elements that together constitute a cohesive blueprint for the area's future are described in each chapter, with graphic illustrations, strategies and policies.

The following summarizes the purpose of each chapter:

1. Introduction: A summary and overview of the Plan document, its relationship to the LUCE and a summary of the community process.
2. Vision: A description of current conditions followed by an inspiration of the Bergamot Plan area twenty years in the future. The chapter concludes with Guiding Principles.
3. Setting the Stage: An overview of the area's history and background on the current assets and condition of the area in terms of land uses, urban form, mobility, parking and economics.
4. Core Components of the Plan
 - A. Urban Form, Open Space and Street Network: This section describes how the existing conditions in the Plan area can be transformed through street design that creates public gathering places and pedestrian orientation that pulls people onto the streets to enjoy the neighborhood. Street types are defined and assigned to each street in the district. The primary organizing concept of a Pedestrian Priority Corridor along Nebraska Avenue is explained. An additional concept outlined is orientation of buildings as a frame for their open space, with that open space oriented toward the public realm.

B. Land Use Districts: This section describes the four land use districts and two overlays in the Plan area including the Conservation – Creative Sector, and Conservation – Art Center districts. This chapter describes the permitted uses and their distribution throughout the area, and provides goals and policies to implement the core values of the community.

C. Circulation: This section defines the sustainable transportation approach to streets and parking management, and strategies for achieving circulation that works for pedestrians, automobiles, bicycles, delivery vehicles and others moving through the district.

D. Arts and Culture: This special section that discusses the value of creative enterprises in the district and proposes strategies to strengthen arts and culture in the future. The chapter reminds the reader that when projects are proposed in the Plan area, the City must ask the question: “How will this decision enhance Bergamot’s role as a creative district?”

E. Economic Sustainability: This section outlines a 5-component strategy for a locally sustainable and vibrant economy that also benefits local residents. It builds on the strengths of the existing creative sector businesses and harnesses the opportunities that transit and a mixed-use neighborhood will bring.

F. Utility Infrastructure: This section summarizes the utility assessments conducted. The chapter documents why most utilities are sufficient, with the exception of sewers, which will likely require some expansion as development occurs and the fiber optics network.

5. Land Use Regulations and Development Standards: This chapter outlines height limits, floor area ratios, open space requirements, and street based frontage standards. To address the desire for innovation and architectural creativity, certain standards are designed to be flexible. For consistency with the revised Zoning Ordinance, the Bergamot development standards anticipate utilizing the administrative provisions relating to elements such as definitions, measurements, and typical review process requirements. The chapter also includes requirements and guidelines for pedestrian improvements such as new streets, wide sidewalks, plazas, and seating areas, as well as standards for shared parking, ground-floor uses and design elements that “activate” the street, such as locating buildings adjacent to the sidewalk, transparent storefronts, easily identifiable pedestrian entries, and stoops.
6. Design Guidelines: The Design Guidelines are part of a regulatory structure designed to create some architectural flexibility to encourage innovation. They are intended to support design that creates visual interest and engagement, and which is human-scaled, and respectful of adjacent neighborhood residential uses.
7. Streetscape Standards and Guidelines: This chapter presents detailed standards and guidelines for new streets and renovations of existing streets, including

specific cross sections and differentiation between complete, flexible and shared streets.

8. Implementation and Monitoring: This chapter provides a phased approach to implementation and outlines funding strategies for different types of improvements to guide the next steps toward achieving the vision of the Bergamot Area Plan.

Note that there have been some minor corrections and expansions to the three chapters that were released in draft for the January 30, 2013 meeting. An errata sheet (Attachment B) is provided that lists differences.

Planning Commission Review

On [December 12, 2012](#) the Planning Commission began review of the draft Bergamot Area Plan components starting with core components of urban form and open space, land use and economic sustainability, parking, and implementation mechanisms.

The second discussion of Bergamot Area Plan components was scheduled for the [January 30, 2013](#) meeting, but was continued due to the length of discussion on other agenda items. The draft Bergamot Area Plan includes the chapters previously distributed for the January 30 meeting, with corrections as outlined in an errata sheet in Attachment B.

As stated in the Introduction, the Plan has innovative features to address urban form, streets and the encouragement of mode shift away from vehicles to walking, transit and biking. As this is the first release of a complete draft plan for public review and input, there are a number of issues that will undoubtedly be discussed and adjustments that may be made. The following questions, which incorporate the questions included in the staff report of January 30 are posed to initiate that discussion.

1. Land Use – Conservation Areas

The Plan establishes two “conservation” districts as a way to preserve character-defining fabric, and desired land uses within the Plan area. **The Conservation – Creative Sector District** seeks to preserve a collection of mostly 1950’s brick buildings between Stanford and Berkeley Streets, and Nebraska and Colorado Avenues. These buildings provide small business and incubator space, which is important for the health of the Bergamot Plan area. Development in this area is limited to a Tier 1 project, with a maximum height of 32’ and a FAR of 1.5. **The Conservation – Art Center District** is established to preserve this area as a cultural center and community gathering space. Development in this area is allowed to achieve a height of up to 86’ (Tier 3), but FAR is limited to 1.0 in all cases.

- *Does the Planning Commission support the creation of these Conservation Districts as a way to preserve character, affordability, and creative capital?*
- *Would the Commission support the establishment of some variation from the Zoning Code’s non-conforming uses and structures provisions to liberalize the*

opportunity to rebuild after destruction or to add to a non-conforming building or use without need to bring the existing building up to Zoning Code standards? Building Code standards would not be affected.

2. Circulation – Mode Split

To implement the LUCE goals for no net new pm peak trips, and to support community goals for sustainability and health, the plan creates additional opportunities for walking, biking, transit, shared and managed parking, and TDM. The circulation policy promotes a “park once” system that gets people that do arrive by car out of their vehicles quickly, and preferably parking on one of the district’s edges.

- *Should additional strategies be incorporated to better balance the needs of different modes and provide genuine opportunities and incentives to reduce VMT and congestion and support local health and regional air quality goals?*

3. Strategies to Promote Arts and Culture

While the community clearly prioritized arts and culture in this area during previous outreach, helping arts and creative industries to flourish requires a delicate balance of support and autonomy.

- *Do the Plan’s strategies and policies seem to strike the right balance? Are there additional ideas, strategies and policies for promoting arts and culture that might be considered?*

4. Standards – Maximum Floor Area Ratios (FAR)

The draft standards presented in the Bergamot Area Plan revise the FARs that were adopted in the LUCE, based on community and Council-endorsed urban design principles. The Urban Form concept provides for lesser intensities at the borders of the Bergamot Plan area.

- *Does the Planning Commission support the reduced FARs for the four districts as proposed?*

5. Standards – Land Use Regulations

Each of the four land use districts represented in the Plan contain a specific set of permitted, limited, conditional, and prohibited uses. The same is true for the two specified Overlay areas.

- *Are there any uses missing from the chart that should be permitted? Any that should not be allowed in particular districts?*
- *Are there any additional limitations that should be required of new uses in certain districts?*

6. Standards – Street Based Frontage Standards

The development standards address building form through an approach that recognizes the relationship between buildings, the street, and open space. Many of the standards included in the Bergamot Area Plan use this context as a way to shape building form. The Plan's street-type approach changes requirements based on the type of street on which the project is located. In this way, the orientation is appropriate for the context in which the building is or will be following street improvements based on the Plan.

- *Does the proposed street-based approach to the design and orientation of buildings help to achieve Plan goals for a more active and engaging built environment?*
- *Are there additional standards that should be considered that were not included in the draft Development Standards and Regulations chapter?*

7. Standards – Open Space

Open space is an important component to site design both in terms of inviting communal activity into the district and in shaping the built environment. However, the City does not own land in the Bergamot Plan area other than the public right of ways and the City-owned portion of the Bergamot Art Center, and there are limitations on the city's ability to convert private to publically owned open space.

- *For projects that are not subject to Development Agreements, do the Plan's design standards adequately ensure that private development projects will have open space that is open, visible and will be used?*
- *Should these projects contribute fees that could be used to acquire larger areas for publically-accessible, City-controlled open space?*

8. Design Standards & Guidelines – Flexibility

For projects seeking opportunities to do innovative building types or creative architecture, a separate Track II process is defined. Design Guidelines are prepared to aid in evaluation of projects seeking exceptions or modifications.

- *Does the Planning Commission support this structure and pursuing flexible zoning standards in this area?*
- *Are the standards selected as "flexible" the right standards? Are the standards selected as "mandatory" the right standards?*
- *Do the proposed guidelines sufficiently address the major components of new development needed to achieve the Plan's Vision?*

9. Streetscape Standards and Guidelines

The proposed Bergamot Street Network describes five distinct street types that create the foundation for a highly walkable district that also serves bikes and cars.

- *Is the level of detail sufficient to provide clarity to private developers and public agencies in the construction of the new roads, pathways, and bicycle facilities?*

10. Implementation and Monitoring

Since discussing implementation at the December 2012 Commission meeting, staff has continued to refine the implementation strategies which will require a combination of community benefits, development standards, fees, grants, capital funds and assessment districts. Implementation must be nimble enough to adjust to changing opportunities and market conditions. The monitoring included in the Bergamot Plan will help to focus implementation and enable adjustments to stay on track.

- *Should additional implementation strategies be explored? Are there any which should be prioritized?*
- *Do the monitoring tools sufficiently cover key issues? Are there other measurements or data sources that should be included?*

Prepared by: Peter D. James, Senior Planner
Elizabeth Bar-El, AICP, Senior Planner

Attachments

- A. Draft Bergamot Area Plan
- B. Errata sheet: Changes from January 30, 2013 versions of Chapters for Land Uses, Development Standards and Design Guidelines