

# KERN REGIONAL BLUEPRINT PROGRAM TOWN HALL MEETING—PHASE 2

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## S U M M A R Y   R E P O R T

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### BAKERSFIELD CONVENTION CENTER POTATO ROOM February 6, 2008

#### I. INTRODUCTION

On Wednesday, February 6, 2008, Kern Council of Governments (COG) hosted a Town Hall Meeting for the Kern Regional Blueprint Program in the Potato Room at the Bakersfield Convention Center. The purpose of the meeting was: (a) to educate participants about the purpose of the Blueprint; (b) to provide results of Phase 1 outreach efforts regarding the visions, values, and top issues for the future; and (c) to present and facilitate discussion and collect input about draft principles and draft illustrative “scenarios” for future growth.

#### **Background**

Kern COG is an association of city and county governments primarily created to address regional transportation issues. Its member agencies include the County of Kern and the eleven incorporated cities within the Kern Region and ex-officio members representing Caltrans, Golden Empire Transit District and the Congestion Management Agency.

The Town Hall Meeting is one of a series throughout the Kern Region as part of the Kern Regional Blueprint Program, which is designed to engage policymakers and citizens to create a regional vision and growth principles for the integration of transportation, housing, land use, economic development and environmental protection that will inform local decision-making and guide growth over the next 50 years. **The Kern Regional Blueprint is not a City General Plan or a County Specific Plan; it is a 2050 visioning project designed to complement other planning processes.** Elected officials from the county and each city throughout the Kern region will determine how their jurisdictions will accommodate the regional vision through local decision-making and planning efforts. The Kern Regional Blueprint will also be included as part of the Central California Blueprint Program, which will integrate the outcomes of the Blueprint programs from the seven other Central California counties.

Phase 1 of the outreach process focused on introducing the Blueprint Program, developing a regional vision for the future of the region and its communities, and

understanding the participants' priority issues related to growth. Phase 2 of the process is focused on developing principles for future growth and a preferred illustrative scenario for development in each sub-region, all of which builds from the regional vision and priority issues developed in Phase 1.

### **Community Outreach**

To build community awareness of and involvement in the Blueprint Program, Kern COG initiated an extensive outreach program as part of these Town Hall Meetings, which will carry and expand into future phases of the process. With outreach and coordination support from Odyssey, a California-based nonprofit organization focused on transportation policy improvements, Kern COG implemented a number of outreach measures to advertise the meeting, including:

- Direct phone calls to a broad range of community-based organizations including business, social service, cultural, and other interests;
- Targeted mail and email of a project newsletter and meeting notice;
- Coordination with government agencies' outreach efforts and networks;
- Inserts in local and community-based newsletters and media publications;
- Media campaign.

These efforts will continue to build Kern COG's outreach database over time, leading to ever-expanding outreach measures in future phases of the process.

### **Town Hall Meeting Agenda and Format**

The Metro Bakersfield meeting was held from 6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m. in the Potato Room at the Bakersfield Convention Center, 1001 Truxtun Avenue in Bakersfield. Upon entering the meeting facility, participants signed-in and received a nametag and handout materials including an agenda, comment form, and evaluation form (handout materials may be found at [www.kerncog.org](http://www.kerncog.org)). Approximately 79 community members representing residents, businesses, local government agencies, and community-based organizations attended the meeting.

Participants then reviewed the "open house" portion of the meeting, which featured display materials of local area maps and data related to existing conditions and future growth projections, as well as other general information from Kern COG. Becky Napier of Kern COG served as the meeting facilitator and initiated the meeting with brief welcoming remarks and an agenda overview. She then recognized local officials in attendance: Stan Grady, Development Services Director, City of Bakersfield; Jim Eggert, Assistant Planning Director, City of Bakersfield; Vince Zaragoza, Principal Planner, City of Bakersfield; Scott Denney, Supervising Planner, County of Kern; Howard Silver, Vice Board Chair, Golden Empire Transit; and introduced Kern COG Assistant Director, Darrel Hildebrand.

Mr. Hildebrand delivered brief introductory remarks describing the relationship of the Blueprint to local planning activities followed by a slideshow presentation that provided an overview of the purpose of, need for, and process for developing the

Blueprint. The slideshow included results of the Phase 1 Town Hall Meetings in Metro Bakersfield including a list of participant's growth concerns for the future. The slideshow also introduced the draft principles for growth in the Kern region, which provide guidance and direction about how to manage future growth, as well as illustrative pictures to further describe each principle's meaning and intent.

Ms. Napier then reviewed the format of the small group discussions before convening participants to their small groups. After brief introductions among the participants, a facilitator at each small group table guided participants through a discussion of participants' reactions to the draft principles. As a discussion tool, the facilitators introduced a "card game," which is designed to allow participants to share their beliefs of how effective each principle would be in achieving the visions for future growth. The small group facilitators recorded participants' discussion points and the card game tallies during the small group discussion on flip chart pages, and participants also recorded comments on their own comment forms, all of which are summarized in the following pages of this report.

Following this small group discussion, participants heard a brief presentation from Kern COG Senior Planner, Robert Ball, regarding draft "scenarios" for future growth in the sub-region. Mr. Ball explained that each of the four scenarios represented varying levels of compact development, or the amount of development that is focused on existing urban areas. He also provided data regarding performance measures for each scenario, including the relative change in air quality, energy use, water consumption, and other measures.

Ms. Napier then asked participants to reconvene in their small groups to review the scenarios and data in more detail, which were provided as handouts and on large posters at each small group table. She asked that each participant indicate their preferred scenario and to share their ideas and reasons as part of the small group discussion. The small group facilitators guided these discussions and recorded comments on the flip chart pages, and participants also recorded comments on their own comment forms, all of which are summarized in the following pages of this report. Original copies of these documents are on file with Kern COG.

## **II. DISCUSSION: DRAFT PRINCIPLES**

Participants discussed the draft principles in terms of their beliefs of how effective each would be in achieving the visions and values for future growth. The small group facilitators asked participants to provide any overall comments about draft principles, and then proceeded to review each principle in turn.

Each participant received a set of five cards as part of the “card game.” The facilitator explained that the suited cards represent levels of effectiveness in achieving the visions for future growth. The suited cards were labeled as:

- ♠ **Spades** represent “No effect”
- ♥ **Hearts** represent “Small effect”
- ♦ **Diamonds** represent “Moderate effect”
- ♣ **Clubs** represent “Major effect”
- “X” represents “Delete this principle”

As the small group facilitator introduced a draft principle, each participant raised the card that represented his belief in the effectiveness of the principle. After tallying the results on the flip chart pages, the facilitator asked participants to comment on why they played their respective cards, which the facilitator recorded on the flip chart pages. The facilitator also encouraged participants to record their card play and associated comments on their comment form. Following is a summary of card game results and participants’ comments on each principle:

***Use compact, efficient development and/or mixed land uses***

Participants generally agreed this principle would alleviate transportation problems, create more walkable communities with less dependence on single occupancy vehicles, and improve the health of citizens. Participants

♣ Major effect	♦ Moderate effect	♥ Small effect	♠ No effect	X Delete
<b>51</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>

also agreed this principle lead to better use of land and open space. Participants stressed that compact development needed to be done tastefully with high quality development that had a sense of community and easy access to public transit. Participants also stressed that higher density development needed to be safe and appealing and not intended only for low income households. Participants listed as very important the need for compact development to be in proximity to parks and hubs for walking, biking, and public transit. Some participants identified the need for community recycling centers and zoning that allows mixed uses in one building i.e. retail, office, residential.

***Provide a variety of housing choices***





Most participants agreed it was desirable to have a variety of housing that is attractively designed, safe, and with a sense of community. Some participants identified a need to address issues

♣ Major effect	♦ Moderate effect	♥ Small effect	♠ No effect	X Delete
<b>41</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>

of segregation and encourage diversity. Other participants expressed the need to be careful not to plan housing types on top of each other i.e. high density housing next to one acre parcels that are not walkable. These participants felt the General Plan and Zoning Code should be adhered to unless there is a real community need to do something different. Several participants identified a need for choices such as duplexes and senior housing next to medical services. One participant expressed the opinion that people must lose their fear of other people to take advantage of this principle, and that income doesn't necessarily define "nice people".





***Provide adequate and equitable services***

Participants generally agreed education and good schools were critical to the community. Participants also felt that expansion of services needs to keep pace with growth. Others felt that proximity and access to services is the most important factor.

 Major effect	 Moderate effect	 Small effect	 No effect	<i>X Delete</i>
<b>41</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>





***Use and improve existing community assets and infrastructure***

Participants generally agreed the successes of downtown revitalization should be built on. Participants expressed a desire to provide incentives to provide infill development. Others thought historical resources should be preserved and blighted areas removed to provide for infill opportunities. Some participants thought the zoning laws should encourage infill.

 Major effect	 Moderate effect	 Small effect	 No effect	<i>X Delete</i>
<b>50</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>





***Provide a variety of transportation choices***

Participants generally agreed the attitudes of people toward public transportation need to change for this principle to be successful. Participants agreed that transportation choices need to be connected and identified the need to reserve corridors for future transit options, such as rail lines, now. Participants also identified the need for improve transportation options to outlying cities in Kern County. Some participants identified this as the most important principle that is highly needed now and will be needed more in the future.

 Major effect	 Moderate effect	 Small effect	 No effect	<i>X Delete</i>
<b>52</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>





**Enhance economic vitality**

Participants agreed that vocational education in high schools is necessary. Participants agreed that not everyone will go to college and that education needs to enhance vocational opportunities for the job market. Others identified a need for more diversity in jobs opportunities as well as a need for core jobs outside of government and the service industry. Participants agreed that an employed workforce at sustainable wages benefits everyone.

 Major effect	 Moderate effect	 Small effect	 No effect	X Delete
<b>38</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>

**Conserve energy and natural resources, and develop alternatives**





Participants agreed air quality was of vital importance. Some participants agreed this was the number one issue and that we should use alternative sources of energy that take advantage of our climate i.e. solar, wind, etc.

 Major effect	 Moderate effect	 Small effect	 No effect	X Delete
<b>53</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>

Participants agreed water resources need to be conserved and that the competition for water will only keep increasing with population growth. Some participants expressed the need to utilize native plants in landscaping and gray water for irrigation. Some participants expressed the need for conservation education programs and the need to remove barriers to conservation.

**Conserve undeveloped land and spaces**





Participants agreed that agricultural lands need to be preserved and that we should not depend on other countries for our food supply.

 Major effect	 Moderate effect	 Small effect	 No effect	X Delete
<b>45</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>

Participants agreed that as the population grows, preservation of “open space” will become more valuable. Some participants identified a need to establish an urban boundary to help regulate growth outward from Bakersfield. Some participants identified a need to protect habitat corridors.

**Increase civic and public engagement**

Participants agreed that all levels of government should collaborate. Some participants agreed community involvement is important but it is leadership that gets things done and government officials need to lead or get out of the way. Participants

 Major effect	 Moderate effect	 Small effect	 No effect	X Delete
<b>41</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>

agreed public engagement should be inclusive of everyone to avoid conflicts in the future. Some participants suggested partnering with social service agency

sites and programs and tribal governments to increase participation. Most participants agreed that getting people involved was difficult.

***Missing principles***

Participants identified the following missing principles:

- Develop cultural centers and senior centers
- Increased recreation for youth
- Sustainability
- Mental health services
- Conservation programs
- Greenbelts and open space should be a separate principle

**III. DISCUSSION: DRAFT SCENARIOS**

Following Mr. Ball's presentation of the draft scenarios and associated performance measures for the sub-region, participants indicated their preferences for the draft scenario of compact development and associated performance measures that best reflect the visions for growth and appropriate level of implementation of the draft principles. The four scenario options included:

- **No change**, or maintaining development patterns as projected in today's local land use planning policies
- **Some change**, or some increase in compact development
- **Moderate change**, or a moderate increase in compact development
- **Major change**, or a major increase in compact development

After tallying participant's preferences for scenarios, the small group facilitator asked participants to comment on their choices, which the facilitator recorded on the flip chart pages. The facilitator also encouraged participants to record their scenario choice and associated comments on their comment form. Following is a summary of participants' scenario choices (with tallies noted next to the scenario names) and comments:

***Major Change (31)***

Participants who selected this scenario thought major change would be good if properly managed with open space and greenbelts incorporated through the denser urban core. Some expressed that all impacts are minimized with this scenario and it is the only rational choice with population growth. Others stated that because our resources are finite, we need to act decisively now to provide for future generations. One participant discussed the depletion of fossil fuel worldwide and the probability that alternative energy sources will not provide current levels of energy; therefore, major change to protect the integrity of our communities.

***Moderate Change (17)***

Participants selected this scenario because they felt the major change scenario was not the most desirable. Some thought the major change scenario would not maintain a desired quality of life in the more compactly built areas and feared those areas might become the blighted areas of our future cities. Participants indentified the need to establish principles and ensure the future development conforms to the principles.

***Some Change (0)***

Participants didn't think this scenario was "good enough".

***No Change (0)***

Participants did not support this scenario.

***Additional Comments***

Participants provided additional comments during the small group discussions and via comment cards.

- Top Phase 1 outcomes (gang violence) were completely forgotten or ignored.
- There was less concern with the issues than there was with the process.
- Staff tried to sell the idea that this would affect future development. Actually politics and power will trump any process such as this. As with Will Rogers, the City Council never saw a promoter they didn't like. Someone will build a pretend canal out South Union or half-build a hotel, or in a place where kids grow up with baseball and football. Fill a sport arena with highly hyped ice hockey and give the arena an odd sounding name of a foreign bank no one ever heard of or close neighborhood pools in favor of the wealthy.
- Infrastructure for safety for blind and visually impaired is spotty, confused and at times dangerous. Competing disability concerns dilute effectiveness of any change. Center for the Blind & Visually Impaired (CBVI) is committed to working cross discipline to arrive at solutions that are economically viable and serve the greatest good.
- The Phase 1 Report did not include Tribal Governments' input. KCOG has been meeting with Kern County area Tribes during July – December 2007. We look forward in Phase II efforts and the improved inclusion of the Kern Regional Blueprint Project.
- The vision of this County will be largely based on our economical growth. Hopefully the people will determine that based on a combined effort of thought and hard work.
- It's time for major changes. We do have some leaders and organizations to support these changes. We need to find the funds. Make these changes now, before we turn into another Orange County or LA County.
- The Kern River Plan Element needs to be an integral part of the Bakersfield Metro area vision.

- The 61% Hispanic population is a very diverse group. Diverse in immigration status, educational level, language use, even shopping patterns. Be careful not to bunch us all together.
- Compact growth creates more traffic.
- Transit is a good idea for others but it's not for me.

