



## STAFF REPORT

**City Council**

**Meeting Date:**

**5/25/2021**

**Staff Report Number:**

**21-115-CC**

**Regular Business:**

**Receive an overview of the housing element update project and provide feedback on the goals and objectives, roles and responsibilities of the various reviewing and decision-making bodies, and the community engagement and outreach plan**

### Recommendation

Staff recommends that the City Council receive an overview of the housing element update project and provide feedback on the following:

- Goals and objectives (Table 1),
- Roles and responsibilities of the various reviewing and decision-making bodies (Table 2), and
- Community engagement and outreach plan (Tables 3 and 4.)

### Policy Issues

The components of the housing element update will consider a number of land use, environmental and housing policies.

### Background

Under California law, every jurisdiction in the State is required to update the housing element every eight years and have it certified by the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD.) The Housing Element is one of seven State-mandated components of the City's General Plan, and requires local governments to adequately plan to meet their existing and projected housing needs for all income levels. The City Council last adopted the housing element, which is included as Attachment A, in April 2014 and covers the planning period from 2015-2023. The next cycle's deadline for jurisdictions in the Bay Area, which is set by HCD, is January 2023, and covers the planning period for 2023-2031. This is also known as the sixth housing element cycle.

Recognizing the complexity, importance and time-intensive nature of the housing element process and its related work, the City Council unanimously supported the initiation of the housing element as one of its top five project priorities for fiscal year 2020-21 on August 18, 2020. The City Council has continued to express support for the housing element as a top priority, most recently during its discussion on goals and priorities April 20, 2021.

The housing element must be consistent with the City's general plan and updated for compliance with State law and include City policies, strategies, and actions to facilitate the construction of new housing and preservation of existing housing to meet the needs across all economic levels of the City. The City's anticipated regional housing need allocation (RHNA) for the next planning period is approximately 3,000 units, which is a 358 percent increase from the last housing element cycle. Menlo Park is not alone in seeing a large increase in its housing allocation. The RHNA is still considered a draft, although staff does

not believe the numbers will substantially change with the final adoption by the Association of Bay Area Governments anticipated in late 2021.

## Analysis

### Project components and timeline

On March 23, 2021, the City Council selected the M-Group to lead the City's housing element update project over the course of the next 18 months. The project is complex and will consist of the following main components:

- Implement a robust community outreach process that will be informed by the Community Engagement and Outreach Committee (CEOC);
- Update the housing element, including addressing affirmatively furthering fair housing (AFFH) and other State mandates, which will require the City to increase the housing supply and the mix of housing types, tenure and affordability level and take meaningful actions to combat discrimination and replace segregated living patterns with integrated and balanced living patterns;
- Amend the land use element, the zoning ordinance and/or rezone property to demonstrate compliance with the City's RHNA;
- Develop an environmental justice element to advance equity and address potential environmental health risks in the City;
- Update safety element to address climate adaptation for compliance with State law; and
- Prepare a fiscal impact analysis (FIA) and environmental impact report (EIR) to inform the public and decision-makers of potential fiscal and environmental impacts of the project.

Given the extent of the work and the mandated deadline, much of the work on the four different general plan elements will happen concurrently. The project will be fast-paced, but there will be multiple opportunities for public, Commission and City Council feedback and check-ins during the key milestones. Attachment A includes a graphic timeline that shows a general overview of the community workshops, activities and meetings during the process. Background and data collection, including stakeholder and focus group meetings, and broader community outreach and education will be happening in the coming weeks and months with the second half of the timeline more focused on the technical studies and refinement of the documents.

There are a number of requirements that must be met in order for HCD to certify a housing element. One of the key components of the housing element update is the site inventory and analysis to demonstrate that the City can meet its RHNA. The City's land use strategy is anticipated to involve both a mix of rezoning of sites as well as program changes such as zoning ordinance amendments that may modify existing land use regulations and/or create new zoning districts. Site selection for rezoning will require the City to take a holistic view and determine where additional housing can be accommodated throughout the City. There are a number of potential strategies to consider, from looking at existing development in the pipeline, to conversion of commercial zoning to mixed-use, to intensification of sites near transit and other services, to further incentivizing accessory dwelling unit production. The selected combination of strategies, however, will require the City to rezone land throughout the City. This will not only be necessary to create a balance of housing across the City, but also to comply with affirmatively furthering fair housing, which is a new requirement of housing elements. The City is aware of several potential opportunity sites, including the United States Geological Survey (345 Middlefield Road), SRI Campus (333 Ravenswood Avenue), former Flood School site (321 Sheridan Drive), and a small portion of the Veteran's Affairs (795 Willow Road) site that will be explored, although the latter site would not be formally rezoned as a federally-owned property. During this summer, members of the public will have an opportunity to provide input on the land use

strategy options. Both the Planning Commission and Housing Commission will have an opportunity provide feedback prior to the City Council providing direction on the preferred land use approach to be studied in the EIR and FIA.

HCD plays a critical role in reviewing every local government’s housing element to determine whether it complies with state law and then submits findings back to each jurisdiction. HCD’s review is required before a local government can adopt its general plan. Staff is seeking HCD’s review of the draft before the release of the EIR and FIA. Therefore, the draft documents should be completed by late 2021 for review by the Housing Commission, Planning Commission and City Council. While this extra step compresses the timeline, it helps ensure the City is on the right path for certification.

**Project goals and objectives**

The housing element update process must be inclusive and reflect the values of the City. Staff and the consultant team, collectively referred to as the project team in this staff report, are proposing to approach the project with three overarching and interrelated goals as shown in Table 1. These goals will help achieve the objective of creating and adopting a housing element, environmental justice element, land use element, and safety element update that reflect the values of the community and create a place where all residents can enjoy a high quality of living.

Table 1: Draft project goals	
Project goal	Intent
Create a balanced community	Plan for the whole community in a sustainable, healthy and balanced way.
Focus on affordability	Focus on affordable housing given the difficulty of developing it as compared to market rate housing, and the demand for affordable housing options.
Forward social justice	Work with the community to help ensure participation and access to the process, and take intentional steps that improve equity for historically marginalized people and areas.

All of these goals are with a given expectation that the process will include full disclosure. This means that all relevant information, including the environmental and fiscal impacts, will be shared with the community and decision-makers to provide informed feedback and actions. At its meeting on May 25, the City Council may wish to comment on or include additional goals for the project.

**Roles and responsibilities**

The project requires the involvement and dedication of many people beyond the project team. Table 2 identifies the general roles and responsibilities of elected, appointed and advisory bodies while the community engagement plan section below discusses the importance of community participation during the process. The City Council, Planning Commission, Housing Commission, City Council ad hoc subcommittee, and the CEOC will each have a formal role in the process. The latter two bodies are were specifically formed by the City Council to support this project and will disband following its completion. To help prepare for the meeting of May 25 meeting with the full City Council, the project team met with the City Council subcommittee, comprised of Mayor Combs and City Councilmember Wolosin, to provide a high-level overview of the concepts covered in this report.

**Table 2: Housing element update roles and responsibilities**

Elected/appointed/advisory body	Role	Tasks and responsibilities
City Council	Final decision-making body	<p>To review and provide guidance on the overall project and key milestones, such as the selection of the preferred land use alternative, in order to successfully complete the project by December 2022.</p> <p>City Council meetings are typically conducted on the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month and items will be scheduled on an agenda as needed. Information items may be provided to keep the City Council informed of the status of the project.</p>
City Council Housing Element Update Subcommittee (ad hoc, Mayor Combs and City Councilmember Wolosin)	Advise on key topics areas:1) project objectives, 2) site selection, and 3) goals, policies and programs for the four different general plan elements, 4) liaising with other agencies/districts, and other topics as necessary where City Council feedback would be beneficial for maintaining the project schedule.	<p>To provide guidance to the project team on key topic areas as needed.</p> <p>Meetings will be scheduled as needed.</p>
Planning Commission	Recommending body to the City Council on the housing element, environmental justice element and safety element and related components.	<p>To review and provide feedback on key project components, including the land use alternatives, draft documents, potential zoning ordinance amendments, as well as conducting meetings on the scope of and draft EIR.</p> <p>Planning Commission meetings are conducted typically on the second and fourth Mondays of each month and items will be scheduled on an agenda as needed.</p>
Housing Commission	Recommending body to the City Council on the housing element.	<p>To review and provide feedback on the housing element, including the land use alternatives, policies and programs, and the draft housing element.</p> <p>Housing Commission meetings are conducted monthly on the first Wednesday of the month and items will be scheduled on an agenda as needed.</p>

Community Engagement and Outreach Commission (CEOC)

Assist the City in ensuring a broad and inclusive community outreach and engagement process, and help guide and provide feedback on the types and frequency of activities/events/meetings and the strategies and methods for communicating with the various stakeholders in the community.

The primary responsibilities of the group would be to:

- Serve as an ambassador of the project and encourage people to participate in the process;
- Help guide and provide feedback on the community engagement plan; and
- Serve as a community resource to provide information to and receive input from the community on matters related to community engagement and public outreach.

The primary responsibilities of each member would be to:

- Identify effective ways to inform and engage the various stakeholders about the project;
- Commit to constructive dialogue, mutual respect and collaboration; and
- Share local knowledge.

Meetings are anticipated to be monthly on Thursday evenings between May 2021 and November 2021, with check-in meetings as needed afterward.

*Community engagement and outreach plan*

Given the strong emphasis on creating an inclusive process, the City will be providing many opportunities for the community to get involved. The City would like to engage a broad range of stakeholders that will inform key aspects of the project. The CEOC will be play an integral role in the project’s outreach and engagement effort, making sure that the activities and meetings are appropriate, inclusive, accessible and informative. Receiving input and learning about what is important to the community is just as important as the City providing learning opportunities for what the project is about and why it is important, so the lines of communication are two-way. Change can be difficult, but no change is not an option for successful completion of this particular project. Upon City Council appointments to the CEOC, scheduled for May 25, the CEOC is anticipated to convene May 27 to review the draft community engagement and outreach strategy for the project.

A draft of the community engagement and outreach plan outline is included as Attachment B. The outline provides a high-level overview of the various outreach and engagement activities, including online tools, format, and exercises to broadcast and elicit ideas. Because not everyone learns the same way or has access to the same resources or time to dedicate to multiple meetings, the engagement plan offers a variety of opportunities to engage in the process. The purpose of the outreach is to include and involve as many community members as possible to ensure that all voices are heard and included in the decision-making process. For that reason, the engagement plan will likely evolve and respond to what has and hasn’t been effective and circumstances as the process moves forward. For example, currently meetings are to be conducted virtually, but they could evolve into a hybrid format when safe to do so or the proposed project gallery could be delayed or repurposed given in-person, indoor activities and facilities space may be limited in the near term due to COVID-19 restrictions or precautions. The project team is willing to adapt as needed, keeping in mind that preparation and advertisement of meetings will add some limitations to how much change can occur while trying to accomplish the bulk of site selection and policy work in the next 4-6 months. Table 3 summarizes the proposed types of activities and meetings that could occur as part of the outreach and engagement plan.

Table 3: Proposed Community engagement and outreach activities	
Activities and meetings	Description
Focus groups	Meetings designed to garner comments to develop an understanding of local issues and concerns. The targeted groups include housing organizations service providers, renters, homeowners, businesses, and housing developers.
Environmental justice and safety element outreach meetings	Informational and public input meetings to inform the public about the purpose of these elements and receive feedback on areas of concerns.
Individual (and/or group) interviews	Series of meetings to concentrate on smaller groups such as seniors, veterans, people with disabilities. These meetings can be conducted on the phone or in-person.
Partner with local non-profit community groups	Partner with local non-profit community groups to help with the outreach program.
General outreach meetings	General meetings to keep the community informed about the project, to answer questions, and to receive specific comments. These meetings are intended to be interactive. A video on the topic of environmental justice and the safety element is planned.
Pop-up events	Informal way to meet people, share information and garner input (e.g. farmer's markets.)
Project gallery	In-person display that allows people to access information other than on the computer.
Community survey	A method to seek information and feedback from the community on topics related to the project. Information gathered will be used to help inform policies and programs.
Housing introduction seminar	Seminar for community members who would like to understand the housing element components and process in more detail.
Key milestone meetings	Meetings during key milestones such as community vision, site selection, policies and draft documents.

Table 4 below provides a draft timeline of the key upcoming community engagement and outreach activities, pending feedback from the CEOC. The process will be intense, but it's needed in order to prepare the EIR and FIA and meet our December 2022 adoption date. The proposed activities and meetings are expected to help create a project that reflects the community's values. The City Council may wish to provide feedback on the types and frequency of activities and meetings before the project team meets with the CEOC to review the engagement and outreach plan.

Table 4: Upcoming community engagement and outreach schedule	
Date	Activities and meetings
May 27, 2021 (tentative)	CEOC meeting #1
June 2021	Housing introduction seminar
June 2021	Individual/group interviews
June 2021	Focus groups
Summer 2021	Initial outreach on environmental justice and safety elements
June/July 2021	CEOC meeting #2
Mid-summer 2021	Survey
Late summer 2021	Housing Commission - Preliminary land use strategies
Late summer 2021	Community visioning
Fall 2022	Land use alternatives review

The process for the next six months will be intensive and include gathering data and input, synthesizing information and preparing draft documents. To help meet timelines, the project team will need to stay focused. The City Council meeting of May 25 is an opportunity for the City Council to provide feedback to the project team on the following:

- Goals and objectives (Table 1),
- Roles and responsibilities of the various reviewing and decision-making bodies (Table 2), and
- Community engagement and outreach plan (Tables 3 and 4.)

As part of this feedback, the project team is seeking confirmation that the City Council is committed to this work plan. This will help advance the project team's efforts.

**Impact on City Resources**

On November 10, 2020, the City Council authorized up to \$1.69 million for the preparation of the housing element, including consultant services and partial funding for two full-time equivalents for the fiscal year 2020-21. On March 23, 2021, the City Council authorized the city manager to negotiate a scope of work and fee and execute an agreement with the M-Group for a fee, not to exceed \$982,000.

**Environmental Review**

This action is not a project within the meaning of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines §§ 15378 and 15061(b)(3) as it will not result in any direct or indirect physical change in the

environment. As part of the housing element update process, an EIR will be prepared.

### **Public Notice**

Public notification was achieved by posting the agenda, with the agenda items being listed, at least 72 hours prior to the meeting. The City also sent a citywide mailer about the City's housing element update project in early May.

### **Attachments**

- A. Hyperlink – Housing element (2015-2023): [menlopark.org/DocumentCenter/View/4329/Adopted-Housing-Element-2015-2023?bidId=](https://menlopark.org/DocumentCenter/View/4329/Adopted-Housing-Element-2015-2023?bidId=)
- B. Community outreach and meetings schedule – Process graphic
- C. Draft community outreach and engagement outline

Report prepared by:

Deanna Chow, Assistant Community Development Director

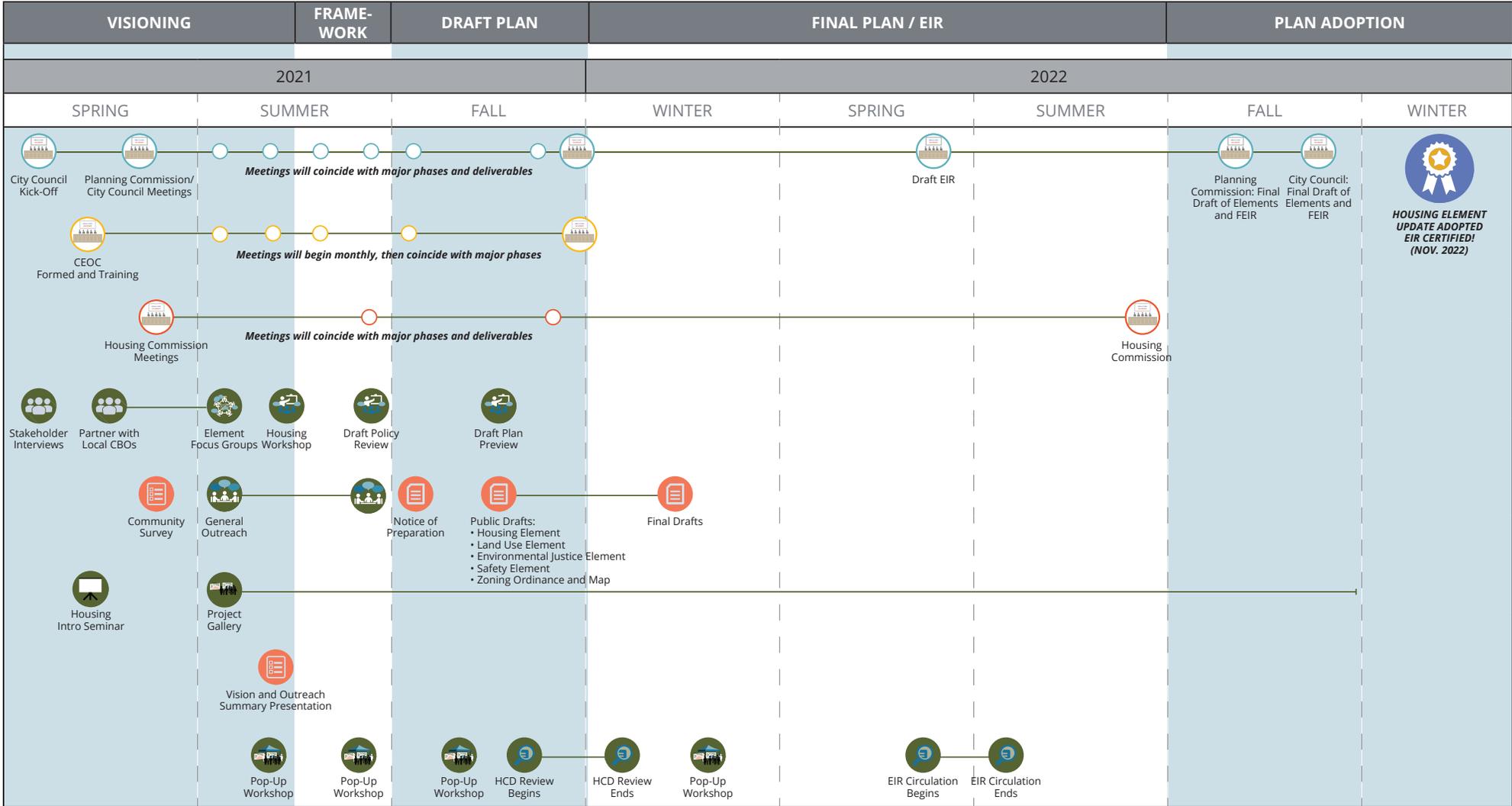
Report reviewed by:

Justin Murphy, Deputy City Manager

CITY OF MENLO PARK HOUSING ELEMENT UPDATE  
**COMMUNITY OUTREACH & MEETINGS SCHEDULE**



PROCESS GRAPHIC VERSION: MAY 2021





## **Menlo Park Housing, Safety and Environmental Justice Elements Community Outreach and Engagement Outline**

The following provides a high-level overview of the project community outreach and engagement activities. The purpose of the outreach is to include and involve as many community members as possible to ensure that all voices are heard and included in the decision-making process.

### **Individual (and/or group) Interviews**

*Purpose:* The purpose of these interviews is to actively include various groups and individuals into the engagement process. The individual interviews will allow for traditional phone or in-person interviews with community members.

This series of meetings will concentrate on smaller groups such as seniors, veterans and people with disabilities. These meetings will also include talking to people who may not have access to technology and would rather talk on the phone or in-person rather than join a video meeting.

*Result:* These smaller interview meetings will result in key insights shared by key stakeholders.

### **Housing Introduction Seminar**

*Purpose:* This meeting will provide information to the community about housing element topics. This meeting is intended to be a general informational meeting.

M-Group will provide a Housing Introduction Seminar online for community members who want to understand housing issues in Menlo Park. This seminar would also outline the major themes of the housing element update including:

- History of racial segregation in planning and housing
- Housing Element Requirements
- Housing Element Schedule
- Community Involvement: Ways to provide comments and suggestions
- Existing Conditions
- Racial and Ethnic Equity

*Result:* The housing introduction seminar will provide a foundation level of information so that interested community members have the necessary knowledge to participate fully in the planning process.

### **Partner with Local Nonprofit Community Groups**

*Purpose:* The purpose these partnerships is to work closely with local nonprofits to ensure strong community involvement with the planning process.

As part of the overall outreach approach, we will partner with local nonprofit community groups and seek to involve them in the outreach program.

*Result:* Effective partnerships with community groups will insure a successful community engagement effort and more community acceptance of the planning effort.



## Focus Groups

*Purpose:* The purpose of these focus groups is to gain insight from a wide variety of perspectives. We will ask about challenges, recommendations, and other concerns they would like to share. This information will be used to describe issues and concerns to address in the Housing Element.

These meetings will be designed to garner comments to develop an understanding of local issues and concerns in various topic areas. The targeted groups will include Housing Organizations, Service Providers, Renters, Homeowners, Businesses, and Housing Developers.

*Result:* These meetings will help identify pressing issues and community concerns.

## General Outreach Community Meetings

*Purpose:* The purpose of these meetings is to obtain public comments and feedback on any portion of the Housing, Environmental Justice, and Safety Element update.

These outreach meetings will be designed to be interactive meetings to answer questions and garner specific comments from residents. These meetings are intended for any resident to provide comments on any aspect of the Housing Element, Safety Element, Environmental Justice Element and Land Use Strategy. Quick poll questions will be asked during the meetings in order to keep participants engaged and interested. Attendees of these meetings will be given the link to the online survey and given the opportunity to provide dots on maps of where new housing should be planned for. The General Outreach meetings will be ongoing through the plan framework phase.

*Result:* These community meetings will result in a shared basis of information and an opportunity for interested people to have their voices heard and questions answered.

## Project Gallery

*Purpose:* The project gallery is intended to provide a low-tech forum where people can get information about the project without the need to rely on the internet or technology to obtain information.

M-Group will work with City staff to prepare a gallery in a large conference room in the Library or other publicly accessible space (that is handicap accessible) or large room for the project. This would allow people to come and understand the project without internet access. This Gallery will have maps, a project website kiosk, a survey kiosk, comment box, posters, and project schedule. In addition, educational videos from the housing symposium can be provided. People would be able to come as go as is convenient for them during the hours of operation.

*Result:* The project gallery will result in wider community outreach and engagement by providing real-world display that is more accessible than computer based methods. Written comments left by participants will be collected and shared with the public and decision makers.



### **Environmental Justice and Safety Elements Outreach Meetings**

*Purpose:* The purpose of these meetings is to get feedback from people on specific Environmental Justice/Safety Element topics. Meeting with people from disadvantaged communities.

M-Group will hold informational meetings and public input meetings to inform the public of the nature of these elements and feedback on areas of concern from the community. We plan to have an integrated approach where safety and environmental justice will be discussed in conjunction with each other and the Housing Element. These meetings will include climate change, sea level rise, fire safety, local hazards, and creating more equity in land use and planning within the community. An introduction video will be provided to accompany the meetings.

*Result:* Information gained from these meetings will be utilized to identify and refine issues for inclusion in the Environmental and Safety Elements.

### **Preliminary Land Use Strategies Descriptions with Housing Commission**

*Purpose:* The purpose of the meeting is to introduce land use strategies to the Housing Commission and the public.

M-Group will provide an overview of site selection and specific strategies to implement the RHNA allocation. We will outline different types of site selection options. The purpose of this meeting is to inform the public and Housing Commission what site selection options can be utilized.

*Result:* Provide defined housing strategies for the Housing Commission and General Public to consider as part of the site selection process.

### **Community Survey**

*Purpose:* The purpose of the community survey is to get feedback from a wide cross section of the community on a variety of issues and concerns.

M-Group will develop a survey in coordination with City staff to gain information about the community, housing needs, housing related concerns, and issues that may not be readily evident. This survey will be provided in English and Spanish (with other languages upon request). Results of the survey will be available on the website. A gift card drawing will be provided to encourage people to fill out the survey.

The survey will include questions that cover Housing Policy, Environmental Justice, Safety, racial equity, special housing needs, and other housing issues. The survey will be provided in both Spanish and English.

*Result:* The community survey will provide detailed information on a city-wide scale that can help identify issues of concern and define policy choices for many of the housing, safety, and environmental issues under consideration.

### **Pop-up Meetings**

*Purpose:* The purpose of these pop-up events is to reach out to individuals as they go about their daily lives into the engagement process. This will allow us to interact with people directly as they visit the booth during the farmers' market.



These pop-ups will be designed to be an informal way to meet people where they are and garner comments in a relaxed setting from residents at events such as the farmers' markets. These meetings are intended for people to provide comments or concerns on any aspect of the Housing Element, Safety Element, Environmental Justice Element and Land Use Strategy. Attendees of these meetings will be given the link to the online survey and given the opportunity to provide dots on maps of where housing should go. This information will help inform the selection of housing opportunity sites. M-Group staff will be available to answer questions from people who visit the pop-up tent.

*Result:* These pop-ups will result in a wider selection of viewpoints to be heard as the participants are not self-selecting for participation.

### **Housing Workshop (Housing Placement and Strategies)**

*Purpose:* The purpose of this meeting to receive direct community input on where housing should go.

M-Group will develop and lead a housing meeting that will explain the parameters and policy requirements, including equity and Fair Housing principals, around planning for new housing. This will allow people to provide input on where new housing should be planned for within the city. This meeting will give people the opportunity to indicate preferences for housing units on the various sites with the strategies outlined at the Housing Commission meeting. We will summarize the comments at the end of the public workshop.

*Result:* This meeting will provide for interested people to learn more about the opportunities and constraints facing the city. This meeting will also allow for questions and answers to make sure people are having their questions answered in real time. Participants will also be encouraged to participate in showing preferences for new housing locations. These results will also be shared at future public meetings.

### **Vision and Outreach Summary Presentation**

*Purpose:* The purpose of this meeting is to present our findings and draft vision based on the feedback provided by the community.

At the end of the visioning phase, we will provide a vision summary presentation to the public. This will be a summary of the community outreach feedback. At this meeting, we will solicit additional comments and refinement suggestions for the vision.

*Result:* This activity will provide a common understanding of the vision and goals for the housing, safety and environmental justice elements.

### **Draft Policy Review Community Meeting**

*Purpose:* The purpose of this meeting is to present our findings and draft policies based on the feedback provided by the community.

At the end of the plan framework phase, we will present draft policies to the public for review. At this meeting, we will solicit additional comments and refinement suggestions for the policy framework.

*Result:* This meeting will allow the project team to make refinements to goals and policies in response to feedback from community members.



### **Draft Plan Review Community Meeting**

*Purpose:* The purpose of this meeting is to present our draft plan based on the feedback provided by the community.

At the end of the draft plan phase, we will present the draft plans (Housing, Safety and Environmental Justice Elements) to the public for review. At this meeting, we will solicit additional comments and refinement suggestions for the draft policy documents.

*Result:* This meeting will allow the project team to make refinements to goals, policies and programs in response to feedback from community members.

### **Draft Environmental Justice and Safety Elements to Planning Commission**

*Purpose:* The purpose of this meeting is to present our draft documents to the Planning Commission for review and recommendation to the City Council.

M-Group will present the preliminary draft Environmental Justice Element, Safety Element to the Planning Commission for review and comment.

*Result:* This meeting will allow the project team to make refinements to goals, policies and programs in response to Planning Commission feedback.

### **Draft Housing Element, Land Use Element, and Municipal Code Update to Planning Commission**

*Purpose:* The purpose of this meeting is to present our draft documents to the Planning Commission for review and recommendation to the City Council.

M-Group will present the preliminary draft *Housing Element, Land Use Element, and Municipal Code Update* to the Planning Commission for review and comment.

*Result:* This meeting will allow the project team to make refinements to goals, policies and programs in response to the Planning Commission feedback.

### **Draft Environmental Justice, Safety Element, Housing Element, Land Use Element, and Municipal Code Update to City Council**

*Purpose:* The purpose of this meeting is to get feedback from the City Council.

M-Group will present the preliminary draft *Housing Element, Land Use Element, and Municipal Code Update* to the Planning Commission for review and comment.

*Result:* This meeting will allow the project team to make refinements to goals, policies and programs in response to City Council feedback.