

## DRAFT MEMORANDUM

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To: Sonoma County Land Use Audit Steering Committee  
From: Consultant Team  
Subject: Summary of Steering Committee Interviews; EPS #12003  
Date: October 22, 2002

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During the last week of September and the first week of October members of the Consultant Team conducted individual interviews with each of the Steering Committee members. These interviews were designed to give the Steering Committee members an opportunity to discuss aspects of the Land Use Audit in more depth and confidence than possible in the scheduled Steering Committee meetings. The results of the interviews will influence the drafting of the Phase II Land Use Audit Work Program, including the specific topics addressed, the depth of their treatment, data and analytical methods applied, and definition of products.

A set of general questions were circulated to the Steering Committee members prior to the interviews. In an effort to improve the accessibility and utility of the interview results, the responses from Steering Committee members have been grouped into a set of eleven "topics" relevant to the Land Use Audit. These topics were then used to organize this summary. Under each topic the range of comments received during the interviews, without attribution, have been listed. It is important that the range of opinion regarding each topic is accurately reflected. If you feel that something you may have said is not shown hereunder or is inaccurately stated please let us know and we will make the necessary additions or changes. You will also have the opportunity to discuss this summary at the upcoming Steering Committee meeting.

### 1. URBAN GROWTH PATTERNS

- UGBs are important but aren't enough; they make people "feel better" but aren't a true constraint to development
- Development within cities is too low density and isn't using land efficiently enough, this will create pressure to expand the growth boundaries sooner, rather than later. This pattern is also too auto-oriented



- Promote higher densities in cities; cities should require *minimum* densities. But be realistic about what the market wants
- Provide transit infrastructure to serve higher density development
- Mixed-use patterns are preferred; cities should emphasize opportunities to combine jobs and housing
- Town of Windsor and County Business Park encourages segregation of land uses and endanger effectiveness of UGBs
- UGBs should be defined by what you can't do outside
- Focus of study should be on what is happening at the edge of cities
- Need to discuss further the concept of "city-centered growth"; despite policy, cities are still not growing responsibly
- Lock in City boundaries to permanently preserve community separators
- Growth should be along transportation corridors - in that respect, incorporation of Windsor was appropriate
- Need to understand pattern of growth within the cities to understand implications/pressures on unincorporated areas
- Urban development historically has occurred (and continues) on the Valley floor, eating up prime farmland. Not much prime lands left except for what is in vineyards
- Farm Bureau has recently supported the UGBs
- City sphere-of-influence boundaries will be revisited by LAFCO - may result in pull-back of Petaluma's north boundary
- Rohnert Park expansion into community separator is not a unique problem
- Constrain Windsor from moving east into hills
- Need to promote jobs/housing balance, reduce need for long-range commuting. Don't push workforce housing needs to neighboring counties (like Marin has done to Sonoma)
- Concern about the Sonoma County Airport and how it affects growth patterns was expressed.

## 2. ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY AND TRENDS

- Concern over diminishing wildlife habitat, endangered salmon
- Loss of riparian corridors
- Vineyards have negative effects on water quality and can lead to erosion
- Bibliography should have more sources for environmental data
- Need to understand marshes, riparian corridors, and Russian River and what is required for protection

## 3. RURAL RESIDENTIAL GROWTH

- RR can be done well without endangering habitat; good to have people on the land
- Rural estates in RRD do not constitute sprawl



- RR has been dealt with effectively in the General Plan; County has only permitted RR that “infills”
- Small, fragmented parcels on urban fringe are not suited to agriculture, so conversion to residential is not a great concern
- Very concerned about potential for new development in RR and RRD, including vineyard estates

#### 4. AGRICULTURE/URBAN TRANSITION AND CONFLICTS

- Complaints of noise, odors, dust, pesticides, water use from neighbors cause problems for farmers despite right-to-farm ordinance
- Neighbors want to preserve “my utopia” and react negatively to any change, i.e. conversation of grazing or orchards to vineyard
- Agriculture uses on River Road and around Fulton particularly need to be protected
- Protect dairy belt (west Petaluma, Two Rock areas) from estate home development
- How much post-General Plan subdivision of Sebastopol apple orchards has occurred?
- Community separators should be maintained
- “Gray areas” are (unincorporated communities) such as Penngrove and Graton
- Concern over amount of development along Hwy 12 east of Santa Rosa
- Stop Fountain Grove-like development (master planned communities on the urban fringe)
- Hillsides, especially ridgetops, should not be developed, either for houses or vines
- Pre-project agreement established that Committee would not dwell on agriculture to agriculture conversions (i.e. apples to vines)
- Lot splits historically have been a way for farmers to make money when agriculture market is weak and to accommodate family growth/next generations
- Need to track number of Certificates of Compliance that exist for undeveloped parcels.

#### 5. AGRICULTURE / NATURAL RESOURCES CONFLICTS

- Natural areas in the northwest County are being converted to industrial-scale vineyards leading to loss of timberlands and oak woodlands
- CA Dept. of Forestry will not take lead on preventing timber/oak woodland conversion; local policies are needed
- County needs a vineyard ordinance “with teeth”
- Timberland conversion issues are “far afield” from where the Land Use Audit should be focusing
- Land Use Audit embodied pre-project understanding that study would not focus on shifts in agriculture or on shifts from resources to agriculture.



- Extensive agriculture shares the land with ecological features and habitat
- Timber-to-agriculture conversion is an important issue but does not have to be addressed in this study
- Agriculture and natural resources are not incompatible; agriculture can be extension of natural resource lands and provide habitat
- Timber conversion permits have been less than 300 acres in the last 10 years
- Timber is not an agriculture crop
- Large habitat areas should not be developed wholesale for vineyards but it may be possible to fit small vineyards here and there
- Timber conversions seem to be slowing; natural resource issue not a priority for this study
- 67 percent of oak woodlands are in RRD; County policy is inadequate to protect trees and habitat
- RRD can be planned in an environmentally sensitive way
- Large corporate vineyards are not good stewards of the land

## 6. AGRICULTURAL VIABILITY

- Too many grape vines may be planted resulting in the commoditization of grapes/wine in Sonoma County. Smaller estate vineyards could be bankrupted and replaced with urban, rural residential, and campus office development
- Land use restrictions and environmental regulations drive up costs and threaten to make agriculture non-economic (e.g., oak ordinance, vernal pool protections, salamander listing, hill side vineyard ordinance/erosion control)
- High land values make it difficult for agriculture to compete with development. For example, new requirements for land disposal of dairy wastes but can't afford to acquire additional property needed to meet requirements
- Inheritance taxes are a problem for continuing agriculture
- Economics of dairy are difficult; added costs can't be passed through to consumer b/c of fixed sales price
- Need to develop marketing strategy to exploit niche ag markets
- Agriculture processing facilities, (e.g. dairy and wineries) support agriculture viability
- Economics of agriculture are highly uncertain; may see pressure to replace remaining apples with houses if grape prices decline
- Fear that "new urban" residents will use political power to constrain agriculture to the point that it becomes non-economic
- Human needs should not encroach on environmental needs
- No further encroachment of buildings and agriculture into natural areas
- Can't have idealized view of agriculture; have to support all agriculture uses that are profitable, not just types that offer bucolic views
- Agriculture is not open space; it is for-profit
- It's hard for calves to compete with grapes but the important thing is to keep land in agriculture



## 7. TOURISM

- Increased tourism changes community character, doesn't feel like "home" anymore
- Tourism does benefit agriculture, particularly wineries, by creating supplemental markets
- Balanced tourism is useful (within limits) in supporting agriculture
- Hotels and wineries have made roads impassable on weekends, especially Sears Pt. area

## 8. INFRASTRUCTURE PROVISION & CAPACITY

- Use of wastewater in agricultural production may free up more fresh water for urban development and lead to increased growth. Also it pollutes water sheds and may ruin reputation of County wines – "wine out of wastewater"
- Should not fear that infrastructure expansion (e.g. road widening ) will lead to haphazard, increased growth; planning tools are in place to manage growth
- Water storage and quality are issues, not water availability. Building more dams may be the answer to supply problems.
- Good idea to use treated wastewater on farms; some dairies would be out of business if water weren't available
- In the past the cities paid farmers to take treated waste water but cities are starting to sell it
- Water supplies may be limited given proposed reductions in flow from Lakes Mendocino and Sonoma. Use of reclaimed water could be solution
- Train service should not be established along Hwy 101 until County has established where and how much it plans to grow
- Restricting infrastructure as a way to keep people out does not work

## 9. ALTERNATIVE FUTURES (SCENARIOS)

- Scenarios used in the Land Use Audit should reflect a range of likely futures.
- Farm Bureau wants to be more pro-active rather than re-active to future land use issues
- Employment boom may create intense development pressures. Need to control jobs in the County
- Existing land use policies (e.g. urban growth boundaries) may not be continued leading to urban sprawl around existing cities.



## 10. LAND USE POLICIES/ REGULATIONS AFFECTING LAND USE

- County should have clearer land use designations, similar to Marin County. Current land use designations in Sonoma leave agriculture too vulnerable to urban development pressures
- Planning should be done at regional (County) level
- Tough environmental land use regulations are driving farmers out of the County -- e.g. proposed erosion control ordinance, ESA and listing of California Tiger Salamander.
- County development standards are outmoded. Some standards, such as for septic and grading, were put in place to limit development but have had the unintended consequence of encouraging more growth
- SCAOSD can help families stay in agriculture by buying development rights but issues have arisen with access to and operation of farmlands. Would like to see SCAOSD buy development rights without requiring a full conservation easement
- General Plan revision considered for riparian corridors threatens agriculture
- Tiger salamander listing will limit vineyard expansion
- 1989 General Plan has succeeded "beyond wildest expectations." Agriculture was saved, e.g. area north of Sebastopol where orchards were converted to vines not housing
- Farm Bureau proposal to create Agriculture Production Zones warrants consideration
- Conservation easements in Sonoma are driving up land prices
- PRMD processing adds burdens to all businesses; slow, uncooperative, inconsistent
- Erosion control ordinance is a great step forward; keep everything off steep slopes except for a few houses

## 11. GOALS FOR LAND USE AUDIT

- Build consensus around key planning issues
- Examine how well existing tools and polices have limited sprawl
- Clear up misperceptions about amount and location of sprawl
- Explore common ground between agriculture and environmental communities, for example both want less sprawl and to promote agriculture viability
- Collaborate on preparation of new proposals to achieve common goals
- Compile unbiased facts that can be used to educate newcomers on what it takes for the County to succeed economically
- Better communication; more talking and compromising
- Vision of how to integrate agriculture, transportation, land use, water, economy, environment
- Specific information on land use, rates of change, water usage
- Dialogue on what to do when agriculture becomes non-economic
- Develop trust, find areas of mutual support
- Explore future scenarios/options for Sonoma County



- Explore policy options that will get buy-in from the group to support city-centered growth and protect production agriculture
- Take study findings to Board of Supervisors with message that things are generally okay, but that certain areas need to be watched more closely
- Three or more maps showing baseline and expected land use patterns and land use patterns under different “what if” scenarios
- Seek common ground on land use patterns / outcomes before discussing what policies or tools are available; focus on common goals, rather than policy mechanisms
- Case studies of what other communities have experienced or done
- Be consistent with grant proposal submitted to Irvine Foundation

