

March 12, 2014

To: Policy Advisory Committee – Sub-Committee to discuss RTP Policy Proposals
From: Barbara Steck, Deputy Director and Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) Project Manager
Re: Feasibility of Community Based Organizations Policy Proposals

During our Sustainable Communities Strategy development with the RTP Roundtable, we were presented with three proposals from the Coalition of Community Based Organizations. The proposals included (Full text is attached to this memo):

1. Proposed Sustainable Planning and Infrastructure Program
2. Needs Assessment Proposal
3. Natural and Working Lands Conservation Policy

On November 21, 2013 the COG Policy Board directed PAC to initiate a discussion group to:

- (1) continue discussion on policy issues suggested by City of Fresno (Bruce Rudd) and responded to by County of Fresno (Bernard Jimenez)
- (2) Evaluate the feasibility of the policy recommendations submitted by the CBOs
- (3) Engage the community in the discussion (specifically mentioned were LAFCo staff, School Districts, Service Providers, Coalition of CBOs)

PAC is to come back to the Policy Board in 120 days (April) with an outline of what early steps would look like, including a timeline and an update on progress

At its first meeting on February 14, 2014, the PAC Subcommittee directed staff to respond to the feasibility of each of the three proposals. Following is a summary of what has transpired in each case:

City of Clovis
City of Coalinga
City of Firebaugh
City of Fowler
City of Fresno
City of Huron
City of Kerman
City of Kingsburg
City of Mendota
City of Orange Cove
City of Parlier
City of Reedley
City of San Joaquin
City of Sanger
City of Selma
County of Fresno

1. Proposed Sustainable Planning and Infrastructure Program

The stated purpose of this program is to support the implementation of the Fresno Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) by enhancing the ability of existing neighborhoods to serve as walkable, bikeable, transit-oriented or transit-ready areas for people of all incomes via funding the development of necessary plans, projects and programs.

Staff has had several conversations with the project proponents on this topic. (The text of an email sent to them on 10/21/13 on the topic is included below.) We believe that some type of program is indeed feasible but that it will take time and effort and needs to include our member agencies who are the decision makers on funding issues. Specific program parameters will be determined by the project development committee at a later date.

Email sent 10/21/13:

Thank you for submitting the Sustainable Planning and Infrastructure Program proposal in August and for meeting with us to discuss the program details thereafter. Upon further research into similar programs across the state, staff has determined that while the implementation of the proposed program may be very valuable and attainable in the future for the Fresno County region, the initial developmental stages of the program will require extensive coordination between the member agencies, project sponsors and COG Policy Board, which, given the constricted RTP/SCS timelines that we are faced with at this point and because the RTP funding scenarios have already been vetted and approved, we do not have ample amount of time to create a new program with guidelines and criteria. The Proposed Sustainable Planning and Infrastructure Program will not be part of the 2014 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) or the 2015 Federal

Transportation Improvement Program (FTIP) at this point, however, COG staff will continue to work with member agencies and other stakeholders to develop a similar type of program that would be applicable to the Fresno County region and that can be implemented in the near future.

Related to this new program issue is a second request from the PAC Subcommittee to develop a list of potential funding sources. That list will be presented to the sub-committee at its March 14th meeting.

2. Needs Assessment Proposal

The stated purpose of this proposal: In a step towards region wide sustainability and improved public health, we request that Fresno COG partner with member jurisdictions, government agencies (e.g. Fresno County Public Health), non-profit organizations, and interested stakeholders to evaluate existing needs in Fresno's disadvantaged communities. This can be done through a needs assessment database of existing built environment conditions and current health status in low income communities. Low income communities have considerably higher negative health outcomes and typically have significant unmet needs related to their built environment, often lacking paved roads, sidewalks, adequate transit, access to basic services, safe drinking water, affordable housing, wastewater services, and access to health care services.

Staff believes that a modified version of this proposal is feasible. A county-wide needs assessment would be helpful to the development of the program requested in proposal #1 above. The information would also be valuable for other COG functions. As a good faith measure, Fresno COG has already programmed \$50,000 in the 2014-15 Overall Work Program to conduct a needs assessment. We must be cautious, however, because COG cannot spend its "PL Funds" on non-transportation planning related activities. In addition, staff believes that a scope change would require other agencies to provide information from their databases, access to which could be provided in the report on the transportation related data. The request for COG to "develop an action plan" would not be part of the Needs Assessment but could be addressed at a later date once the needs assessment data is analyzed and the member agencies are agreeable.

3. Natural and Working Lands Conservation Policy

According to the proponent, there are two parts to this proposal. The first part would be a binding policy applying to projects on the RTP transportation project list. The second part asks that the COG work with local land use jurisdictions on policies to reduce land conversion. The purpose of both is to protect farmland, ranchland, and natural lands in the County while incentivizing the efficient use of land and helping transportation projects through the CEQA process.

COG staff responded to the original proposal requesting revisions that would provide more detail. On March 11th we received the revisions, which are shown below. At first look, this revised proposal seems more appropriate for a regional agency without land use authority. Fresno COG staff will work with staff and member agencies to determine the feasibility of the data implications and on how best to proceed with the proposal.

Model SCS Farmland and Habitat Conservation Policy Proposals for the Sustainable Communities Strategy (SB 375)

- Map and quantify agricultural and other open lands with natural resource values, including but not limited to farmland, grazing land, riparian corridors, aquifer recharge areas, rare and important vegetation, critical wildlife habitat and corridors, vernal pools and other wetlands, and carbon sequestration capacity. Incorporate these resource maps and quantified resource data into transportation planning and large-scale development proposals as a baseline for decision making.
- Determine projected conversion of identified and mapped resources by urban and rural development (acres in each category) as reflected in existing land use plans and policies.

- Establish goals and quantify benefits for avoiding conversion of these resources (acres in each category) based on increasing development efficiencies (measured by people, jobs and economic outcomes per acre), and identify policies for mitigating conversion that cannot be avoided.
- Quantify the GHG reduction that would be achieved by meeting the SCS goals for reducing land conversion (over and above those associated with reduction in vehicle miles traveled) as well as the co-benefits of achieving those goals, including but not limited to water and energy conservation, public service cost containment, and increases in agricultural output and ecosystem services.
- Assess and develop the ability of current local government policies to meet the SCS land conservation goals and, if necessary, propose policy changes and funding incentives necessary to achieve them.
- Establish a system of benchmarks that local governments can use to track their progress in meeting the SCS goals for avoiding and mitigating the conversion of open lands.

DRAFT