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## San Jose's updated general plan emphasizes 'smart growth,' healthier communities

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Jobs before housing. People before cars.

After 51 task force meetings, seven community workshops and 125 "outreach sessions" stretching over four years, San Jose's Planning Department will cross the finish line at Tuesday's City Council meeting with that message when it delivers a blueprint of what San Jose will look and feel like in the decades to come.

Called Envision San Jose 2040, the city's fourth general plan since the mid-1970s is the community's land-use constitution. The report lays out a long-term vision for the amount, type and phasing of development needed to meet the city's social, economic and environmental goals.

While it's true that many of the participants agreed the final product took too long to achieve, with few exceptions they seem satisfied with the outcome that emphasizes two major themes: moving San Jose away from its "bedroom community" and "Los Angeles of the north" legacy by increasing its employment and tax base; and designing the kinds of neighborhoods that create healthier populations less reliant on cars.

"Think about how you lived 30 years ago and how you live today and what has changed," Planning Director Joe Horwedel said. "Now, think about 30 years from now and how you'll live, how your kids will live and what you would like to work better."

For many, he said, it's not having to drive as much. Horwedel and other planners envision "urban villages" closer to where San Jose residents live that

offer a variety of ways to live, work, shop and play

all at one location.

The one-stop lifestyle isn't going to happen tomorrow, Horwedel said. But these and other key concepts are part of what the 2040 general plan is aiming for in the coming three decades.

With about a million residents, San Jose is the 10th-largest U.S. city -- and the third-largest in California. So the scope of its planning challenges is complicated.

The cash-strapped city, for example, has tried before to stop converting its valuable remaining industrial land -- where it could locate businesses that provide both jobs and taxes -- for housing. But powerful housing developers and lobbyists have pressured many City Council members to ignore that objective.

This plan, said City Councilman and task force member Pierluigi Oliverio, "is stating loud and clear that we have a budget crisis, and we need to manage land use differently."

The updated general plan, expected to be voted on by the council Tuesday night, does that by seeking to preserve land for jobs; develop only within existing municipal street, sewer and utility areas; and build taller, denser housing mixed with retail and office space -- all of which generates more taxes to pay for city services such as police protection and libraries.

"It will take political will to implement the plan and stay true to the principles that are in the plan," said



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Assistant Planning Director Laurel Prevetti, adding that she has "confidence in our elected officials."

Among the goals the plan suggests over the next three decades within the city's 180 squares miles are:

- Adding as many as 470,000 new jobs and 120,000 new housing units.
- Emphasizing growth in the downtown, North San Jose and "urban villages" along current and future transit lines such as BART, high-speed rail and dedicated bus lanes.
- Rethinking the design of major streets to encourage more biking and walking. Equally important to many is what won't be developed: Both mid-Coyote Valley and South Almaden Valley are off-limits to development through 2040. (South Coyote Valley remains protected as a greenbelt.) "In the past, San Jose had a tendency to grow by sprawling out onto the farm lands," said Michele Beasley of the Greenbelt Alliance. "That's why the general plan says we should basically accommodate growth through infill development" that promotes new housing, jobs and retail around transit corridors. Another big objective: reducing car miles traveled by 40 percent over the next three decades -- not only through the addition of at least 70 urban villages, but also by adding miles of trails and bike paths. "For over a half-century, San Jose's development patterns have built a city for cars, and our sprawl and auto-dependence reflects those choices," said City Councilman Sam Liccardo, who along with former Councilwoman Shirley Lewis co-chaired the 33-member task force of community leaders appointed by the council. "We've got a vision to transform this to a city designed for people rather than for cars, and we'll measure our success by the vibrancy and usage of our sidewalks, bike lanes and transit corridors." Developers and builders, however, aren't as thrilled with the plan's outcome, which will affect their ability to build as many large and lucrative housing tracts. Instead, the emphasis will be on more -- and taller -- apartments and condos, with some townhomes and single-family homes. Task force member Erik Schoennauer, a land-use consultant whose father was a city planning director, signed off on the plan, albeit reluctantly. Though he admires its progressive themes, he's concerned about

how private property owners and developers "can invest in the city." The plan, he said, "makes it more difficult to determine how to do that." Developer Michael Van Every, another member of the task force, was more blunt. "They have eliminated quite a few jobs by limiting housing," said the senior vice president at Republic Urban Properties. "You can't put artificial caps on housing and somehow decide that jobs are more important, when jobs and housing are synchronous." Both Horwedel and Prevetti acknowledge that the new plan does change a builder or developer's world. But that, they say, isn't necessarily a bad thing. Said Horwedel: "This plan was very much about San Jose being in control of our future rather than a developer in the past deciding what was in their best interest in flipping property to housing." **Contact Tracy Seipel at 408**

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## HIGHLIGHTS OF 2040 GENERAL PLAN

- Envisions as many as 470,000 new jobs and 120,000 new housing units in the next three decades.
- Encourages job growth in North San Jose, the Monterey Highway and Senter Road areas, Edenvale, North Coyote Valley and Evergreen.
- Supports San Jose's evolution into a regional job center. Job growth planned near Caltrain and future BART and high-

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speed-rail stations.

- Promotes creation of "urban villages" that attract young workers as well as older people who don't want to rely as much on cars.

- Rethinks design of major streets to encourage biking and walking.

Advocates a high-density mix of housing, office and retail development in downtown San Jose, North San Jose and new "urban villages" near transit corridors and commercial centers.

- Increases trail and bike paths, in addition to protecting urban reserves in mid-Coyote Valley and South Almaden Valley. (South Coyote Valley remains protected as a greenbelt.)

**Source: San Jose Planning Department**

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