



Rio Vista, CA R/UDAT Implementation Plan

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Background

In the last week of February 2014, the American Institute of Architects (AIA) sent a Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) to Rio Vista after the City was chosen by the AIA to receive assistance from the R/UDAT. A group of citizens had come together to request help from the AIA for four issues they identified as impacting the Community. These issues were identified as:

- Recommend a preferred alignment for Highway 12 incorporating a replacement bridge going over the Sacramento River
- Build a viable business community in the Rio Vista downtown
- Revitalize downtown Rio Vista commercial core and waterfront
- Connect the outlying areas and build a sense of a single community and a sense of place

The R/UDAT process catalyzed the community of Rio Vista, bringing together groups and individuals from all parts of the community. Volunteer groups, business organizations, City officials and average citizens all participated providing their direct feedback to the R/UDAT professionals trying to address the issues identified. This process culminated in the creation of the Rio Vista, CA R/UDAT Report. This report was presented at an open and public meeting to the over 400 citizens who participated in the process and was well received by citizens, business groups and public officials alike.

So now what? A plan has been created to address the issues that were originally raised in the application to the AIA. This plan identifies multiple ways the City of Rio Vista can meet these challenges and improve the quality of life for everyone living and working in the community. New City of Rio Vista policies were proposed, methods for improving the image of Rio Vista were identified and a variety of potential projects were suggested. Unfortunately, like all lofty visions for change, very little of the nuts-and-bolts actions needed to achieve this vision are included in the R/UDAT plan.

This document is a framework for implementation of the Rio Vista, CA R/UDAT Plan. Individual projects and concepts are broken into groups, needed participants are identified and required procedural steps are summarized. The goal of this document is to make implementation of the Rio Vista R/UDAT manageable and understandable for an average citizen who may not be accustomed to engaging with governmental agencies, who may not be aware of legal requirements for policy changes and who may be generally overwhelmed by the breadth and scope of the vision laid out for Rio Vista by the AIA R/UDAT team. Additionally, the document attempts to identify traps and pitfalls associated with any substantial policy implementation.

Introduction

The Rio Vista R/UDAT is essentially a long term plan for creating and managing the growth of Rio Vista. Many of the aspects of the R/UDAT plan are about creating a sense of place. Others are about guiding and shaping the development pattern of the built environment as properties redevelop. Still others are about maintaining the character and charm that make Rio Vista such a unique and loved community for the individuals who live and work there. Given this, it is important to keep in mind the long term nature of this effort. While some of the individual projects are things that can (and should) be done in a relatively short time frame, other aspects are on a ten or even twenty year time line. Businesses do not make investment decisions without significant planning, properties do not redevelop overnight and the vision laid out in the R/UDAT is not one that will be realized quickly (R/UDAT, pg. 3, 2014).

This implementation plan incorporates multiple theories and concepts from the leaders in the implementation field, as identified in most academic public administration circles. It also incorporates practical and applied experience from practitioners in the field of urban planning, economic development and public policy creation. However, it is important to keep in mind throughout the entire process of implementation that the vision laid out in the Rio Vista R/UDAT is just that - a vision. Creative ideas and solutions not identified in the plan may provide better pathways to achieve goals. Alternative methods to achieve the plan goals may become more feasible. Given this, flexibility and an organized ability to quickly focus resources on new projects as they arise is key to the success of the Plan.

Additionally, while some elements of the plan are flexible and can be achieved through a variety of ways, others are specifically required for the success of the R/UDAT vision for Rio Vista. Certain elements identified in the R/UDAT, like the proposed changes to land use regulations, lay the foundation for future pieces to be built upon. Given this, a project specific implementation plan and timeline are crucial elements to be developed early to guide efforts to achieve success. While certain elements will be relatively simple to implement, the complexity of the processes to implement other elements should not be underestimated. Knowledge of all of the steps necessary to achieve certain projects will not be found in one person, and may not be found in a group of consulting experts. Significant research, on-going collaboration efforts and the even the occasional misstep should be understood as the norm in the process of implementing this vision for Rio Vista.

For the most part, failure to implement one or two specific elements identified in the Plan will not stop the broader goals of the plan from happening. Any group or individual tasked with implementing this plan should feel free to incorporate their own experiences into the direction chosen to achieve any specific project. While some of the specific ideas will make solution to these problems come to fruition quickly, for the most part there are multiple ways to go about addressing the issues raised to the R/UDAT team. This is not stated to minimize the importance

of any one element, but more to provide confidence in the ability to overcome issues when problems occur, which they will.

Participants

Of course individual people will be the single most important aspect of implementation of the R/UDAT plan. A variety of actions from both individuals and groups will be required to make the implementation of the R/UDAT Plan both possible and a success. For example volunteers will be needed to partake in individual projects; service organizations will be needed to help fundraise; politicians will be asked to adopt policy changes; City staff will be charged with enforcing the policies adopted; and property owners and developers will ultimately implement many of these policies through development and redevelopment of their private property. Getting organized cooperation from these different players, each with their own agendas and interests is the key to the successful implementation of the R/UDAT vision.

Gordon Chase identified seven major groups to consider in his article, "Implementing a Human Services Program; How Hard Will It Be?". The partial list below uses these categories but tailors the individuals identified in each, to the Rio Vista R/UDAT. Several other groups specific to the R/UDAT Plan have been added to the list as well.

Overhead Agencies-Governmental Agencies that act as a control system in any process. In the case of the Rio Vista R/UDAT, the individual departments that will be necessary to involve in the R/UDAT implementation should be categorized in this group. This includes the Community Development Department, Economic Development Department and Public Works Department of the City of Rio Vista as they regulate specific elements of the built environment, but also could include the City Managers Department who directs and manages these individuals and takes direction from the City Council. In trying to anticipate issues with this group, the number of interactions should be identified, as well as the potential problems that could result from each interaction.

Other Line Agencies-This is any other agency, outside of the City that is required to participate in implementation of any of the individual R/UDAT projects. CalTrans is an excellent example of a line agency that must be engaged to successfully implement the preferred Highway 12 route. It is important to not only identify these other agencies, but identify how their interaction will affect the implementation process, especially if they have the ability to prohibit an element of the plan. Generally, the fewer of these agencies that are involved the better, and the less any agency is involved the better, as their participation tends to complicate any process.

Elected Officials-This of course includes locally elected officials, who will be key decision makers and champions of the R/UDAT plan. However it also includes County and State representatives (such as Skip Thomson, Jim Frazier, John Garamendi and/or Barbara Boxer), who may be able to leverage funds available from County or State sources to aid a specific task or whose support may be needed to help influence one of the Line Agencies identified above. It is important to identify any important elected

officials early, reach out to them in inform them of the R/UDAT efforts and possibly generate some excitement for the plan on a broader scale. This process will also allow identification of those who may oppose elements of the plan, and for efforts to counter this opposition to begin. Timing of election cycles are an important aspect of this group as well.

Higher Levels of Government-It is important to identify any higher levels of government that will be involved in the implementation process and to clarify their role. Do they hold any authority, can they provide funding and how much interaction is needed are all important elements to consider. CalTrans is also an example of this group.

Private Sector Providers-In this context, this group includes individuals and industries that will be affected by the implementation of the R/UDAT. Certain property owners and specific business types will be directly impacted by some of the changes proposed in the plan. It is important to identify those who will benefit as well as those who may be negatively impacted. This will allow potential advocates and adversaries to be identified early, and allow campaigns to engage or rebuff their efforts to begin proactively.

Special Interest/Community Groups-This group includes professional, special-interest and social service organizations. Similar to the Private Sector Providers, these groups are likely to be important in the implementation process, either through their support or opposition to the individual projects. Early identification of advocates and adversaries is important here as well.

Media-Any local news organizations will have some influence over the perception of the individual R/UDAT projects and by extension, the Plan itself. The reputation of these organizations, the local readership and their general influence are all important factors to consider when engaging with them. Simply engaging with the press may engender some early support by easing their coverage of the issue. However, as the implementation process begins to create some opposition, it will be important to have identified talking points and supportive arguments to provide to those covering any issue of interest to the public. Given this, it is important to anticipate which projects will generate local interest early in the implementation process.

Developers-This includes local and out of town business interests, property owners and even the government agencies who own land in Rio Vista. Many of the recommendations of the R/UDAT involve making changes to the land use designations of private and public property. The owners of this property may have plans and projects in mind (some of which may involve significant investments) that are in opposition to the R/UDAT recommendations. Other recommendations involve marketing and supporting certain businesses or industries, which may come at the expense of others. Early identification of these groups allows identification of potential friends and foes, but also

identifies groups to target for future efforts. For example, if a piece of property is designated for a specific industry type, notify as many representatives of that industry as possible to get the word out.

This list is a general and partial listing of the parties necessary to achieve the vision of the R/UDAT, and it is based on current circumstances. As projects are implemented and circumstances change, this list will also change and evolve. What is important is awareness of the critical actors involved in the implementation of each project. Many of these individuals will likely be involved in several elements of the Plan. Maintaining knowledge of how to seek their support, mitigate their opposition and make the R/UDAT implementation valuable to them is the only way to make implementation of the Plan in its entirety possible.

Organization of Plan Efforts

The R/UDAT Plan is unique in both the scope of the recommendations and in the timeline for implementation. Given that ultimate achievement of this vision is likely to be a decade or more long process, creation of a formal organization with the sole purpose to implement the R/UDAT Plan is crucial. This organization will direct and manage the efforts of individuals tasked with project implementation and ensure efforts are not duplicated and schedules are fit within the overall implementation timeline. This organization would be coordinating both large and small projects, at the policy and the construction level. The R/UDAT identifies RioVision as the organization to do so and it appears RioVision is eagerly stepping into this role.

Coordinated efforts to implement the Plan will absolutely be necessary and organization is identified by the R/UDAT as one of the first steps in Plan implementation (R/UDAT, Pg. 65, 2014). Action is needed to both influence projects being considered and to organize and coordinate resources to implement individual projects. Without an organization to coordinate and direct efforts, progress on implementation of the R/UDAT will be disorganized and subjected to setbacks and wasted efforts. The Plan recommends following an operational structure similar to a Main Street Organization and points to the National Main Street Center Inc. as a resource.

The need to both organize resources to work on individual projects and coordinate efforts to influence policy decisions seems to dictate a defined structure be created in RioVision. One element of the structure could be project focused coordinating volunteer efforts, identifying potential projects and sites for their implementation. Another element of the organization could then be focused on broader aspects of Plan implementation such as working with elected officials, negotiating with developers and generally staying at a high level with regards to project implementation.

This stratified structure would allow individuals or small groups to focus on innovative ways to address problems at their level while also allowing an overarching group to ensure progress is being made on securing support for the plan itself. This is similar to Henry Mintzberg's concept of an Innovative Organization where most actions are decided upon individually (or in small groups) based on the needs of the moment, and overall management of the organization itself is essentially a coordination of the actions of these individuals or small groups. The primary benefit of this structure is that rather than trying to lay out a far reaching strategy for every situation, it allows for continuous responses to a complex unpredictable environment. Given the time frame and the number of actions needed to implement the plan, that is most likely the environment implementation of the Plan will occur in.

Beyond the external benefits of creating an organization to focus on R/UDAT implementation is the need to create rules and structure to direct the implementation effort. This is the only true way to create (internal and external) accountability to the individuals who are providing so much

of their efforts toward this goal. As an example, the very act of choosing a project to pursue will create “losers” whose projects or properties were not chosen. Creating bylaws governing decisions, taking minutes to record actions and generally having a decision making structure will lend credibility to efforts to achieve R/UDAT projects. Documenting a decision making process also facilitates learning by identifying the steps taken toward the success or failure of a project implementation effort. Finally, creating this structure will also allow the organizational momentum to remain, even as individuals come and go in RioVision.

Further, a formal organization is needed to bring the full weight of the community support to bear on implementation of the Plan. Any organization representing a significant number of community members will provide credibility, political weight and resources necessary for the implementation of many of the R/UDAT projects. RioVision should not think of itself as only an organization seeking help and support from others. Creating a formal organization, with the diversified structure mentioned above, would allow these same individuals (who are at key points in Plan implementation) to request support for their own initiatives. This allows RioVision leverage by offering (potential) quid pro quo support in exchange for actions supporting Plan elements.

Creating such an organization has additional benefits as well. The power and support of RioVision could be focused on a variety of elements in the community. It will allow partnerships with other organizations to be formed and nurtured as the implementation process continues. Having a number of individuals available to RioVision will also give flexibility in pursuing grants and other funding opportunities, which are frequently time sensitive. In addition to helping to raise funds, the structure of an organization will help shield those involved with project implementation efforts from personal liability and potential tax implications.

Process

Once the players have been identified and the organization has been created, the next step in the implementation process will be to identify priorities. Not all Plan elements may be able to be implemented for some time (Highway 12 realignment) or some may require others to be done first as stepping stones to the implementation of others. For example, a developer cannot be required to build a certain street design if the City standards have not been updated to include the desired street type. The choice of properties to target for redevelopment cannot truly be made without knowing the property owners goals for the property and the City's land use designation for it. Given this, the group needs to create a project list, organized around the themes identified in the R/UDAT Plan. This list should incorporate timelines (Quick Start; Seed; and Medium or Longer Term), the Downtown First Policy (R/UDAT, pg. 3, 2014), operational demands and the nature and availability of resources.

One element of projecting an accurate timeline is to plot out the steps necessary to actually accomplish the project. As simple as this step may sound, its importance should not be overlooked. Accurate planning of a process often requires intimate knowledge of many elements and this knowledge may not be possessed by one individual. Assumptions about specific and necessary steps in a process are often made, with little real knowledge or research. Uninformed assumptions regarding political or public support, availability of funding and even the legal requirements behind a process have been the demise of many a worthy project.

While this process mapping can be tedious and time consuming, it will allow potential roadblocks and constraints to be planned for. It can also allow for support to be garnered before big implementation steps are made public. Both of these are key to the success of projects with the potential for controversy. As is evidenced daily in national politics, it is much easier to say "No" or to 'go second' in responding to any policy proposal. As much support as is currently in the community for the R/UDAT Plan, there is also undoubtedly opposition. This opposition will become more prevalent as specific proposals are made and introduced. Finally this process planning can also help identify opportunities to develop partnerships for plan elements by bringing in other groups facing similar challenges or those with similar goals. Rio Vista Community Services and Rio Vista Care are excellent examples of such groups.

This process mapping will undoubtedly help with the project implementation process. However, action on implementation is equally or more important. While it is essential to consider a variety of options when looking at project implementation, it is also important to remember that it is impossible to look at all available options when trying to solve complex problems. Avoid "paralysis by analysis" and err on the side of action. The first projects chosen should be those that can be accomplished quickly, with few approvals needed from outside the organization.

Research

Researching processes and opportunities will be an essential element of any of the projects proposed. The assignments of individuals to research project elements should be decided based on the technical knowhow of the individual. Researching financial resources should include individuals familiar with grant writing and other public financing options, as well as private financing opportunities. Finding property owners interested in pursuing projects on their properties should be done by individuals familiar with real estate and the local business community. In situations where there are no ‘in-house’ experts, those tasked with researching a process should be the most qualified available. Other instances, like the creation of a historic district, may even benefit from the hiring of a consultant to outline (or possibly even complete) the process.

Another research element of the R/UDAT plan is the need to inventory properties. This will allow opportunity sites to be identified, and will help to sharpen project timelines. For example, even if a property is a perfect candidate for a specific project, an unwilling property owner or unsupportive zoning district will ensure that property is not a good candidate for a ‘quick start’ project. Therefore this inventory should also include helpful background information including existing land use designations, whether it serves a key role in the Plan, the property owners contact information, etc. Having an inventory of project sites, with a variety of potential projects assigned to each will allow a quick pivot from one to another as issues or roadblocks arise. This will keep both momentum and moral moving in a positive direction.

One final element of the research component is to compare R/UDAT land use elements to existing land use plans, adopted by the City of Rio Vista. If a land use element already exists in City plans, there is no need to focus effort on getting that particular element included in a package of policy changes. Instead, effort could be focused on how to get that element accomplished. For example, if the City’s Event Permit process is relatively affordable and easy to navigate, focus on marketing the easiness of holding events in the City to the type of groups desirable to Rio Vista. Conversely, if this process is expensive and/or onerous, focus effort on improving the process before inviting the local farming community to set up a farmer’s market downtown.

Must Haves

Making specific changes to the land use regulations in the City is the only way to ensure elements of the Plan can be required of property owners and developers to implement. Formal adoption by the City of Rio Vista, including the necessary environmental approvals will provide political and policy support for any Plan project, while also streamlining the process to implement that element or project. Additionally, formalizing these goals as City policy will bring credibility and formality in negotiating with any outside governmental or private organization. Line Agencies like Caltrans can be leveraged to respect established City policy; as can Other Higher Levels of Government and private industry, as land use regulation is specifically delegated to local government by state law.

Separate from the leverage formal creation and adoption of a specific roadway design for Highway 12 will create in negotiations with CalTrans, is the good will element. Securing the rights to the properties needed for the preferred alternative (or at a minimum beginning this process) would be huge incentive for CalTrans to consider the alternative supported by Rio Vista. Taking early steps for this process may be a way to get early agreement on the preferred alternative. Additionally, it would also gain political support at the state level for the preferred alternative by essentially allowing a “Good Government” argument and supporting a potentially streamlined process.

Another ‘must have’ is the creation of an organization capable of following through on the long term nature of the individual Plan elements. Organizing volunteers to undertake a community beautification project on a weekend is much different than sustaining political pressure over a period of years to ensure long-term plans and goals are completed. RioVision needs to become an organization that can do both. This speaks to the need to separate the organization into a project management element and a policy management element. Separating the duties assigned to individuals allows specialization to occur within the organization, focusing the skills available on the most appropriate elements.

The ability to sustain organizational momentum on numerous fronts is key to the success of R/UDAT Plan implementation. This need is a direct result of the incremental nature of the policy creation process combined with the difficult nature of modeling complex policy solutions. Small steps will be made and their effects will be hard to anticipate until the actions are taken. This requires the ability to monitor these steps, evaluate their effectiveness and formulate an appropriate response, both internally in the organization and externally in the policy and project implementation process. Having a structured organization that allows individuals to increase or decrease their efforts as they are able, will aid the process of implementation and monitoring.

General Plan

Many of the recommendations of the R/UDAT involve changing existing land use policy, creating new land use policy and revising transportation goals. Given that these are public policy changes, significant technical know-how is needed to make such changes. Since such changes will have far reaching impacts on the community, these are Plan elements that need to be undertaken by the City. Difficulties with making such changes involve resistance from entrenched interests and concerned citizens, hesitation by decision makers, hiring and funding experts to make revisions to existing regulations, and garnering public support for modifying these structures. While land-use changes are not a project RioVision can undertake itself, the difficulties around making these changes can be eased by their participation and support.

Further, these policy changes should be categorized as ‘Seed Projects’ as they need only be made once and definitely have the potential to catalyze other projects. Additionally, there is significant benefit to making these policy changes relatively early in the implementation process of the Plan. Land Use regulations can only help guide development if it is actually adopted policy. Therefore, having the land use elements of the Plan adopted as City policy will require these elements to be incorporated into any development project proposed in Rio Vista. Given the speed with which development is picking up across the State, some opportunities may be missed if Plan elements are not incorporated into policy in the near term.

Changes to the Rio Vista land use policies and regulations will require amendments to the General Plan and Zoning Code. These amendments require both technical expertise in crafting the language and structure, but also require analysis of the policy changes potential impacts to the environment under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Under CEQA, any “discretionary action” (essentially any planning decision) requires a full analysis and disclosure of the environmental impacts of those changes. Making changes as significant as those identified in the Plan will trigger significant environmental analysis to analyze and document the potential impacts these changes could have on the environment. Because the CEQA process can be time consuming and having the land use changes in place soon is essential (before any more development occurs in Rio Vista), significant efforts should be put toward implementing these changes in City policy.

A silver lining associated with the policy changes identified is that the City of Rio Vista is currently planning a General Plan update, an update to the City Standards (which may include street standards) and is currently involved in the creation of Priority Development Areas (PDAs). All of these provide opportunities to incorporate R/UDAT Plan elements into City standards and policies. Given that many of the changes to the Rio Vista land use policies identified in the R/UDAT Plan are conceptual and general in nature, several of these elements could be incorporated into the General Plan update already planned by the City. Including even a mention of the R/UDAT land use policies in the General Plan will lend weight to these in future negotiations with developers over Plan implementation. Additionally, the political will of the

elected officials appears to be present to direct the planning department to incorporate the R/UDAT vision.

While this General Plan update is not a comprehensive update, and therefore the scope will be limited, it will (almost certainly) require increasing the residential densities in some part of the City. Similarly, creation of a Priority Development Area (PDA) typically increases densities along planned transit routes. If these changes are focused in the “downtown triangle”, residential density numbers could be increased, matching the recommendations of the R/UDAT. This increased residential density could then justify revising the street standards in this area to incorporate more transit, bicycle and pedestrian amenities.

The establishment of a PDA creates grant opportunities specifically intended to improve alternative modes of transit. Therefore establishment of a PDA in the downtown triangle could be utilized to leverage grants available to improve transit, bicycle and pedestrian services and amenities. These grant funds could then be used to build some of the bicycle and pedestrian improvements recommended in the Plan. These improved amenities combined with an increase in the allowable density on certain downtown parcels, may even spur re-development of these parcels. Regardless, it will lay the framework for the future re-development of the properties in compliance with the Plan goals.

The City’s General Plan update is an excellent opportunity to incorporate R/UDAT elements within the General Plan, and to include these changes within the scope of the environmental review to be conducted. Even strategic mentions of the R/UDAT Plan elements in the City of Rio Vista General Plan would add legitimacy to the R/UDAT Plan. General concepts, such as the Downtown First policy could then be referenced in any discussions with developers or property owners considering re-development of a property. Just the knowledge that implementing a Plan element would garner community support for a project would be of benefit to a potential developer.

Getting these changes incorporated into the General Plan will require recommendations by the Planning Commission, and final action by the City Council. This is where the strength of RioVision could be brought to bear on the process. Pressure could be put on elected officials to incorporate the R/UDAT Plan elements into the General Plan, even with the limited opportunities available under the Housing Element update and PDA creation. RioVision could promise support or opposition for projects that do (or do not) implement Plan elements. Achieving this inclusion would not only require implementation of Plan elements by any development project that does come forward (on the properties included in these revisions) but it would provide instant credibility to RioVision, take a big step toward Plan implementation and would provide a huge success story for all participants in the R/UDAT process to celebrate.

Zoning

Similar to the General Plan, the zoning code directs land use and development within the City limits. The zoning code differs in the specificity of the land use regulations. While the General Plan may identify general land use types and conceptual policies, the zoning codes provides specifics governing how these land uses will be built and operate. Typical zoning regulations include height limits, setback requirements, sign standards, parking standards and many other specific criteria for development. The approval processes for specific types of uses are also identified in the zoning code, with some uses being conditionally permitted and others being “principally” permitted.

Given the specificity of these regulations, making significant changes to them may be the most difficult element of the Plan from a policy perspective. The R/UDAT Plan recommends going from a Euclidian based code to a Form-Based (or similar) zoning code type. While form based codes are very much in favor in current planning philosophy, making an abrupt transition from one type of regulatory system to another is not to be undertaken lightly. Ignoring the staff time and technical difficulty behind such a transition, just the number of non-conforming properties such changes could make should give people pause for consideration. Having a property deemed non-conforming creates a number of issues for re-financing, securing insurance and buying and selling property and this should be considered with any proposed zoning code changes.

An alternative to making a wholesale transition to a new code type may be revising the existing code regulations, moving them in the direction recommended by the R/UDAT. In western democracies, changes in governmental regulations are typically chronological and incremental, and this is very much intentional. Incremental changes both make the most of available knowledge and simplify the process for making the changes. In this case, existing zoning regulations could be modified to be more flexible. The recommended shift from a Euclidian code to one that is Form-Based is not an incremental step and the unintended consequences resulting from such a significant change cannot be known.

Rather than requiring a build-to line, setbacks in the downtown triangle could be reduced in the residential districts and possibly eliminated in the commercial and industrial districts. Similar reductions could be made for parking requirements, lot sizes, and proscriptive use criteria. Generally, existing zoning regulations could be made more flexible and even targeted to streamline the process for industries and activities the City is trying to encourage to come to Rio Vista. Focusing these on the downtown areas first would allow the changes to be measured, reducing the potential for problems and the staff time needed to achieve them.

Other zoning code recommendations made by the R/UDAT plan are seen as important and supportive to the goals of place making and connecting the outlying areas identified as goals of the plan. These include the reduction in allowances for Planned Development zoning to deviate from the standards, increasing the allowable building height in the downtown and the creation of

a Design Review process to ensure interesting and compatible architecture is built. Additionally, revising the sign code to reduce clutter and encourage interesting and unique signs could benefit Rio Vista as more commercial activity occurs within the City limits. A Historic district zoning overlay is also seen as a beneficial way to preserve the existing historical fabric of the community, and to potentially create more grant and funding opportunities for the property owners.

Unfortunately, there is not currently a City plan to undertake a zoning code update. A zoning code revision is a very technical process and is fraught with potential unintended consequences, which gets back to the benefit of making zoning changes incrementally. Additionally, these changes will also need review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and several of the changes will create potentially significant impacts.

However, there are also opportunities to simplify the zoning code revision process. These include the use of CEQA Section 15183 which allows zoning changes which are consistent with existing General Plan policy and the creation of a Design Review process and/or Historic zoning overlay as a mitigation measure for the increased allowances proposed under the recommended zoning code changes. Ultimately, the ability to make zoning code revisions will be somewhat limited based on the time and funds available to undertake such a broad and technical policy revision. Given this difficulty, RioVision staff should be vigilant in looking for opportunities to achieve these changes, both through existing City processes and also by seeking funding to help the City achieve them.

This difficulty may provide another opportunity for RioVision to put its political weight behind efforts to make zoning changes. Requests could be made of the Council to revisit existing code interpretations with the goal to make these interpretations more favorable to R/UDAT Plan goals. Bureaucrats make policy through their use of discretion in interpreting and applying regulations on a daily basis. These interpretations and applications then begin to shape the community identity and often interpret the “Public Interest”. Council regularly directing staff and members of boards and commissions to consider R/UDAT goals could begin to shape City policy as it is applied to individual circumstances. To further these efforts, RioVision could request that the City Council try to find additional funding during the budget process to make some of the identified changes.

Influence

The breadth of the goals and projects identified in the R/UDAT has the potential to involve jurisdictions and politicians at every level of government. This involvement creates a need to lobby influential politicians and decision makers at all levels for support of the plan elements. While the community and City officials currently vow their support for the plan, implementation of a specific project has yet to really occur. Additionally, most of the citizens and politicians currently indicating their support were instrumental in bringing the American Institute of Architects (AIA) R/UDAT team into the community. Finally, the bureaucracy of the City government, often called the fourth branch of government for reasons discussed above, has yet to become formally involved in the implementation process.

Additionally, every type of project identified in the R/UDAT, whether policy, construction or funding, will benefit certain properties or individuals. Given this, each of these benefiting individuals will be working from her or his own agenda and many will utilize their political influence to try to affect the implementation process to their benefit. This creates a need for coordinated efforts from RioVision to support the projects that will provide the most benefits to the community.

Also, while the individuals and the community at large appear to generally favor the R/UDAT Plan, it is impossible to know how this sentiment will translate into the future. Given the long term and ongoing nature of the plan, political preference of both citizens and elected officials will change and could even swing against the R/UDAT itself or specific elements of it. The likelihood of this only increases as projects are implemented, due to the scope of proposed land use changes, the likely use of public financing (and debt to fund these projects) and the “losers” in the scenario mentioned above. Generally, political preferences can and do change over time, and political opposition is often a direct result of policy implementation and changes.

Organization of neighborhood and citizen groups is also necessary to monitor development proposals. These groups could meet with politicians and developers early and offer support for their projects, if they meet the goals and design criteria of the R/UDAT. This type of coordinated effort will also be absolutely necessary to support the broader elements of the Plan, such as the bridge design and location as well as the Highway 12 realignment through Rio Vista. The long term nature of these elements and the frequency of changes in government require sustained support to ensure the desires of the community are kept at the forefront of these issues.

Economic Development

Many plan elements are aimed at generating economic activity in Rio Vista. Economic development is identified as a way to address several of the problems originally identified as the primary goals of the R/UDAT. The goals of creating a viable downtown business community as well as revitalizing the downtown are not only proposed to be addressed through land use changes, but also with branding and marketing efforts. These elements should be seen as equally important to the proposed changes in City land use policy given that business investment builds a majority of the infrastructure in a typical California City. In order to generate the economic investment needed to build new city streets and redevelop downtown properties, business opportunities need to be present to motivate developers to make such investments in the community.

The Plan seeks to improve business investment primarily by driving interest in Rio Vista. Branding and marketing Rio Vista in combination with efforts to bring more people into the community are identified as methods to generate interest in Rio Vista. An “asset based” approach to economic development is recommended by the Plan. Recommendations are made to develop ways to emphasize why Rio Vista is such a great place by focusing on the unique aspects of the community’s history and benefits of its central location (R/UDAT, pg. 64, 2014). A combination of information (pitch-packet and website) and organization (RioVision and City of Rio Vista Economic Development Department) is recommended as first steps toward marketing the community to generate business interest.

It is also important to not only think about ways to bring investors to Rio Vista, but also to know what their questions and interests will be once they get here. Serious effort should be made to understand what existing industries are having success in Rio Vista and also what business types have the potential to grow in Rio Vista. If these industries are seen as desirable to the Community, additional zoning code and other regulatory changes can be made to streamline the permitting and approval process for these business types. These changes can then be touted to industry leaders to help attract outside interest as well as to grow opportunities for local businesses.

The R/UDAT recommends a Trade Market Analysis (R/UDAT, pg. 66, 2014) be done to help inform this process, but smaller changes can also be made. The process for holding a special-event could be streamlined, minor improvements could be made to appropriate City owned properties to accommodate their use for special events and rallies (American with Disabilities Act improvements, providing public safety presence, public restrooms, access, etc.) and public access to the Sacramento River could be improved. Relatively minor improvements in all of these areas could be done to accommodate the use of Rio Vista for special events, with relatively little expense. Further, the centralized location and surrounding rural character make the community desirable for holding regional scale events (bicycle races, marathons, car shows and motorcycle rallies) and marketing efforts should emphasize this.

After these processes have been researched and efforts begun on areas needing improvement, ‘community advocates’ for Rio Vista will need to be identified. These individuals need to have a combination of enthusiasm for the community, as well as significant knowledge of the industry of groups they are targeting. These advocates, if properly vetted and given some authority, could also be utilized to reduce pressure on City staff. These individuals could be used to advertise the benefits of Rio Vista to local, regional and national interests. Further, they could provide support to City staff in the Economic Development Department helping to prepare information for presentations at tradeshow and to business and industry groups.

There are already several industry groups developing in Rio Vista (retirement communities, agriculture and wind power), each of which bring significant outside investment when they develop. While these industries have contributed to some of the problems being addressed by the R/UDAT, the land use regulations identified above can mitigate some of these issues and marketing efforts can create more local investment. The Plan recommends utilizing the Progressive Urban Management Associates (PUMA) 2014 Global Trends Impacting American Cities report as a support reference and starting point for charting the course to Rio Vista’s economic future (R/UDAT, pg. 66, 2014). The proposed economic restructuring is combined with city scape design elements and promotion of the community to direct economic development toward the twenty-first century economy. Other actions such as improving the use of technology and ensuring diverse interests are considered are also key to sustaining long term economic activity in Rio Vista.

Conclusion

Just as the scope of the R/UDAT Plan itself can be overwhelming, so can contemplating all of the changes that are identified in it. It is important to recognize however, significant changes in Rio Vista are likely to occur in the coming years regardless of Plan implementation. The central location of the City, the number of approved residential units and the cyclic nature of economic activity all but guarantee it. The Plan proposes proactive action to capture the most benefit for the community from these changes rather than allowing them to benefit only a few. By making efforts to improve urban design, target economic development and creating an organization that can shepherd this change over the coming years, the rewards of living in Rio Vista can be preserved and even enhanced.

Given this however, it is important that those tasked with implementing the Plan grow comfortable with change while keeping their focus on achieving positive results from it. Focus must be made on both making the changes suggested, but also ensuring they are bringing the desired benefits. To achieve affective implementation of the Plan, the means and the ends must not be seen as one effort dependent on each other. Essentially, implementation of the plan should not be seen as separate from the creation of policy; they are one and the same.

To achieve this, consistent support and advocacy is needed from RioVision. Elected officials and City staff will change, citizen interest and participation will wane and developers and their projects will come and go. This creates a need for consistent long term strategy as to how these aspects will be addressed and how solutions to the issues that arise will be created. Additionally, there will be opposition to these changes and alternative agendas pursued by those involved. There will be missteps and unintended consequences. The ability for RioVision to be flexible and forgiving is also necessary. RioVision must be a dynamic organization that can innovate and solve problems for the benefit of the community as a whole.

Finally, it is important to celebrate successes as they are achieved. RioVision has already been hugely successful in bringing benefit to Rio Vista. Members from differing factions in the community have come together to work on community wide issues. A blueprint based on the input from the whole spectrum of Rio Vista has been drawn with the creation of the R/UDAT Plan. Celebrating this success and the success to come will not only help to build support for RioVision, it will also help to build credibility. The list of RioVision accomplishments will become the resume of the organization as each Plan element is implemented. Celebrating every addition to this list will bring more interest from community members, and also drive interest from outside of the community. Essentially, by celebrating the accomplishments of Rio Vista (and RioVision) in achieving the R/UDAT goals, more interest in Rio Vista and the dynamic and proactive citizenry that live there will be created. No better way to create a sense of place, than celebrating the success of the community can be imagined.

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