

Dear Elena and Subcommittee members,

I wish I could attend this important subcommittee meeting but I cannot meet in any afternoons due to parental responsibilities.

Nevertheless, and because I suspect my voice on a few topics may be in the minority, I wish my voice to be heard clearly through this email.

I listened carefully to the City Council's feedback on this element.

I think it is wise and prudent to change the language of some of our policies/programs to avoid where appropriate the use of proscriptive language. The Comprehensive Plan is an aspirational document. The policies/programs should give clear intent as to desired direction. But implementation of policies/programs will always be governed by factors such as need/time/budget/public will/political strategies, etc., so why run the risk of throwing the baby out with the bathwater? We risk losing the aspirational impact of some excellent creative policies/programs if we insist on making the language proscriptive when some council members may vote against inclusion of those points. Any savvy citizen can build upon sensible, unrestricted, reasonable, inclusive, non-proscriptive policy/program language to bolster support for development of a concrete program... but not if the idea is absent from the Comp Plan. Some policies/programs need not be dogmatically demanded by the Comp Plan, especially if demanding them means they may not see the light of day. I am a writer. I understand the power of active verbs. But this is a public document, democratically developed, that must serve many purposes on many levels to many different constituencies. It is appropriate that the Comp Plan sometimes suggests rather than demands, ignites ideas rather than delineates them, remains open and inclusive rather than precise and restrictive, or worse, omitted. For the sake of keeping this document's light shining to its widest reach, I urge this subcommittee to selectively broaden, where appropriate, its proscriptive language.

I'm also concerned about the fate of the "ombudsman for neighborhoods" program, especially since Councilmember Scharff mentioned it as an example of one of the proscriptive programs that might cost too much. First, Hillary Gitelman, when questioned about how the CAC should consider costs, said basically that as long as we remain reasonable, we should not be concerned with the cost of our input, that our work should tap into and reflect the creative brainstorming of the citizenry, and that since we do not know the shifting costs of headcount and the workloads of city staff, we should propose our ideas and let budgeting and management figure out efficacy later down the line. Additionally, I've talked with two councilmembers about this specific program and both like it, one saying "it's one of my favorites!"

There is a real need out in the real world to provide our fellow Palo Altans access to the wealth of information and services the City provides. The City provides fast track, facilitating help to businesses trying to figure out permitting. I argue that the citizens, who pay for all of this, ought to receive similar assistance. Now, the way the final version of this program was written makes it sound like a proscriptive headcount addition -- easy prey for the hunters-- when in fact it should be more a shifting of responsive awareness by existing staff. So, in keeping with my earlier points about using non-proscriptive language where it makes sense, here is a rewritten version I hope you will consider:

Program C1.1.2 "Explore prioritizing a facilitating function that helps residents and others with questions about the City's website, services, and facilities."

This revised language allows the City to become more aware of the real need, to shift resources internally without new headcount, and to make the broad array of services more available to the public.

Will I and any others who may miss this meeting see the results of this subcommittee rewrite before it goes back to City Council?

Thank you.

Respectfully,

--Len Filppu