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SB'S FORK IN THE ROAD

Guest Opinion by Paul Hernadi

For several years now, much of the city's general plan update process has consisted of receiving expensive consultant reports and debating whether their analyses and recommendations actually apply to our unique circumstances. Sometimes Santa Barbarans even wondered if Plan Santa Barbara was about to be renamed Plan Orange County or Plan Santa Monica.

Thursday's special meeting of City Council may treat our community to something different. Beginning at 9 a.m., the new mayor and the council's three new and three returning members will hear a staff report, as well as predictably critical comments by planning commissioners and the public. Then it will be up to the Council to indicate whether they want to steer city staff toward enhanced emphasis on three generally shared major goals: living within our resources, lessening our city's jobs/housing imbalance, and preserving Santa Barbara's much admired mountain views, cultural diversity, and established character.

Staff's 15-page agenda report includes statements by five planning commissioners, as well as letters from the Allied Neighborhoods Association and the Santa Barbara League of Women Voters. The statements and letters are both thoughtful and forceful. And so are the recommendations submitted on Friday by two committees of the Citizens Planning Association, of which half a dozen highlights are summarized below:

- The city should permit no more than three thousand new dwelling units and one million square feet of new nonresidential development between now and 2030.
- A dual density system should incentivize the production of modestly sized workforce housing in commercial and multifamily zones by allowing affordable units to be built about twice as densely as the 12 units per acre general limit to be reinstated for larger market-rate units.
- Plan Santa Barbara should focus its proposed Adaptive Management program on planning objectives that can be enforceably monitored on an annual basis. For example, if Plan Santa Barbara proposes 3,000 new residential units over 20 years and more or less than 150 building permits have been issued in a particular year, the number of building permits to be issued in the following year(s) should be reduced or increased to put the city back on track.
- Plan Santa Barbara should promote healthy living and the dissipation of traffic-generated air pollution by requiring generously landscaped building setbacks and other open spaces.
- Plan Santa Barbara should reflect our city's heritage, historic and architectural resources, and unique character, in part by including a separate general plan element devoted to historic preservation.

- City leaders should enhance community participation in the planning process by forming a citizens panel of neighborhood representatives.