



STAFF REPORT

SUBJECT: Planning Grant Application

MEETING DATE: January 17, 2008

AGENDA ITEM: 11

STAFF CONTACT: Michael Powers

RECOMMENDATION:

Authorize submittal of joint grant application with the San Luis Obispo Council of Governments (SLOCOG) for State Blueprint Grant Funds for pilot study of Santa Maria Valley in conjunction with SLOCOG Community 2050 Program.

SUMMARY

This item was continued from last month to enable local representatives from the cities of Santa Maria and Guadalupe and the County of Santa Barbara to confirm their intent to participate in this project. Following a presentation to the SBCAG board by SLOCOG on its Community 2050 project at its meeting in September 2006, the board expressed interesting supporting a joint grant application to include northern Santa Barbara County in this regional planning effort. In October 2006, the Board authorized the chair to sign a letter of support for the grant application. The board also expressed interest in continued discussion of opportunities for development of a regional blueprint plan for Santa Barbara County. Unfortunately, our joint “Partnership Planning” grant with SLOCOG was not approved by the state. Another opportunity has arisen, however, as SLOCOG has invited SBCAG to participate their Blueprint Planning Program grant application, using the Santa Maria Valley as the test case. Staff recommends that the board authorize participation in this program that will be focused on improving the information for decision-making. Essentially this application is the same as before with the same scope of work.

DISCUSSION:

Background

The San Luis Obispo County Council of Governments is involved in a regional planning effort and made a presentation to the SBCAG board in September 2006. Based on the connections between southern SLO County and northern Santa Barbara County, staff requested SLOCOG staff to update your board on their progress in preparing their regional Vision Plan.

Member Agencies

Buellton ■ Carpinteria ■ Goleta ■ Guadalupe ■ Lompoc ■ Santa Barbara ■ Santa Maria ■ Solvang ■ Santa Barbara County

SLOCOG received a Blueprint Planning Grant from the state in fiscal year 2005-06 to undertake a vision planning process. This process, called Community 2050, centered on having the community envision the region's future. SLOCOG started with its municipalities' 20-year general plans, and then asked how people wanted the region to develop from there over the next couple of decades. Similar activities are underway around the entire state—regional growth blueprint planning efforts are underway in virtually every urban county (Attachment 1).

Following the presentation by SLOCOG, the Board discussed coordination opportunities between SLOCOG and SBCAG, the cities of Santa Maria and Guadalupe, and the County of Santa Barbara. The sense of the board was to pursue coordination opportunities with SLOCOG and take advantage of funding opportunities for improving the information to make decisions.

In October 2006, the Board authorized the chair to sign a letter of support for the grant application. The board also expressed interest in continued discussion of opportunities for development of a regional blueprint plan for Santa Barbara County. Unfortunately, our joint "Partnership Planning" grant with SLOCOG was not approved, probably because Regional Blueprints are funded through a separate program and the state funding available for Partnership Planning grants is very limited. However, another opportunity has arisen as SLOCOG has invited SBCAG to participate their Blueprint Planning Program, using the Santa Maria Valley as the test case.

The program will be similar to the prior grant request. As the representative from SLOCOG mentioned at the September 2006 board meeting, they are requesting SBCAG's support to involve SBCAG, the cities of Santa Maria and Guadalupe, the County of Santa Barbara in their regional planning effort. Staff discussed this option with SLOCOG and local agency staff representatives at a joint meeting in 2006. All parties agreed to participate in a joint application that would improve the data for decision making by each of the local agencies. All agencies believed the opportunity to obtain grant funds should be taken in order to develop GIS capability and address topical issues of local interest such as the potential to expand urban areas in an environment that strives to retain agricultural viability. The purpose of the grant would be to build up the base of information on which to make decisions. The following are examples of potential applications of the grant funds: Santa Maria can use the funds to generate information in its update of its Sphere of Influence; the County might examine agricultural – urban fringe development challenges and potential new town locations in the Santa Maria Valley area; Guadalupe may digitize their land use and zoning maps on a GIS platform. SBCAG can use all the information to refine its countywide growth forecast and allocation.

In 2006, the Board discussed the potential of this type of program to develop better information for decision making while being sufficiently controlled by local agencies that the program can mitigate the concerns about the intrusion of regional agencies in local land use planning. Staff believes these concerns can be addressed. Local agencies in SLOCOG had similar concerns and after two years are still actively engaged in the program. Since SBCAG is the only regional agency of significant size not fully participating in the Statewide Blueprint Planning Program your staff believes SBCAG may be put at a disadvantage with respect to existing and pending legislation that ties blueprints to housing bonds and other issues if we don't take advantage of this funding opportunity. This project will allow us to at least "dip our toe in the water." We clearly understand the concerns of our elected officials about the potential for state intrusion into local land use decision making but believe this project will improve the information base for decision making while maintaining local control.

SLOCOG would be the applicant and SBCAG would be the co-lead agency. The work would be developed under the leadership of a technical committee composed of staff from the Planning Departments of the cities of Santa Maria and Guadalupe, SBCAG, SLOCOG and the Planning Division within the County of Santa Barbara, Administrative Office. In addition, a policy committee composed of elected officials from those same agencies would provide policy direction to insure the program was responsive to local concerns. The grant request is for \$255,0000. Funding could be used collectively to secure consulting services to develop the information for all the agencies. The local 20% match requirement for the grant is available using in-kind services provided by the SBCAG and local agency staff participating in the project. The joint application will be reviewed by Caltrans and a decision will be made on successful applicants to this competitive grant in February 2008 with work starting in March or April 2008.

This item was continued from last month to enable local representatives from the cities of Santa Maria and Guadalupe and the County of Santa Barbara to confirm their intent to participate in this project. SBCAG Staff has contacted local planning staff representatives on this project and apprised them of the need to discuss this opportunity with their SBCAG elected representatives.

Staff recommends that the chair be authorized to sign the attached letter of support for the Blueprint Planning Grant application submitted by SLOCOG.

COMMITTEE REVIEW: None

Attachments:

California Regional Blueprint Planning Program

Letter Supporting SLOCOG application for State Blueprint Planning Grant

CALIFORNIA Regional Blueprint Planning Program

The State of California Business, Transportation and Housing Agency has launched the California Regional Blueprint Planning Program to support efforts of the Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and Councils of Government (COGs) to conduct comprehensive scenario planning that results in consensus by regional leaders, local governments and stakeholders on a preferred growth scenario – or “blueprint” – to achieve the goals shown below for a twenty-year planning horizon (through 2025). The new program makes \$5 million in grant funds available to the MPOs for regional blueprint planning in fiscal year 2005/2006 and potentially another \$5 million in 2006/2007.

Seven Regional Blueprint Planning grants are being awarded in the first year as follows:

1. San Joaquin Valley (SJV) includes the eight Valley MPOs
2. Butte County Association of Governments (BCAG)
3. Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG)
4. Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG)
5. Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) / Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG)
6. San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG)
7. San Luis Obispo Council of Governments (SLOCOG)

The grant program is intended to better inform regional and local decision-making, through proactive engagement of all segments of the population as well as critical stakeholders in the community, business interests, academia, builders, environmental advocates, and to foster consensus on a vision and preferred land use pattern. It is anticipated that the regional blueprint planning grants will build capacity for regional collaboration and integrated planning that will in turn enable regions to plan to accommodate all their future growth, thereby reducing need for sprawl.

The grants for regional collaborative decision-making will lead to adoption of “blueprint” plans that will:

1. Foster a more efficient land use pattern that (a) supports improved mobility and reduced dependency on single-occupant vehicle trips, (b) accommodates an adequate supply of housing for all incomes, (c) reduces impacts on valuable habitat, productive farmland, and air quality, (d) increases resource use efficiency, and (e) results in safe and vibrant neighborhoods.
2. Provide consumers more housing and transportation choices.
3. Improve California’s economic competitiveness and quality of life.
4. Reduce costs and time needed to deliver transportation projects through informed early public and resource agency involvement.
5. Secure local government and community support, including that of under-represented groups, to achieve the resulting comprehensive vision through including innovative computer models and public involvement activities.
6. Establish a process for public and stakeholder engagement that can be replicated to build awareness of and support for critical infrastructure and housing needs.

The regional blueprint efforts will include development of regional performance measures that can measure progress toward the region's own vision for future land use and transportation. Each region will also select several statewide performance measures to measure progress toward statewide transportation system and housing goals.

California has the opportunity to build on several existing scenario planning efforts including San Diego's Regional Comprehensive Plan, the nationally recognized planning processes known as Blueprint in the Sacramento region and the Riverside County Integrated Project in Southern California, and the Merced County Partnership in Integrated Planning of the Central Valley agricultural region.

While each project reflects the vision and character of their respective regions, each has valuable lessons learned on aspects of scenario planning such as use of growth scenario models, interactive public participation tools, engaging resource protection agencies in the transportation planning process, use of non-traditional performance measures that indicate changes in land use patterns, and gaining public and local government support for regional efforts.

WEBSITE:

More information on the California Regional Blueprint Planning Program and the statewide regional blueprint-planning workshop held August 2, 2005, are found on the California Department of Transportation, Division of Transportation Planning web page at:

<http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/tpp/>



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January 17, 2008

Mr. Steve Devencenzi
Planning Director
San Luis Obispo Council of Governments
Suite 202
1150 Osos Street
San Luis Obispo, CA. 93401

Dear Mr. Devencenzi:

This letter confirms SBCAG's enthusiastic support for the joint Regional Blueprint Planning Grant submitted by SLOCOG. We are hopeful that the State will approve this proposal that will lead to a collaborative planning program between our two MPO's and the cities of Santa Maria and Guadalupe and the County of Santa Barbara. We appreciate SLOCOG's initiative in extending your planning efforts across the Santa Maria River into Santa Barbara County.

SBCAG recognizes the various ways our counties are interconnected:

- The Santa Maria Urbanized area includes the Nipomo Mesa of Southern San Luis Obispo County
- Many residents who live in Santa Maria work in SLO County, and vice versa
- Highways 101 and 1 connect the two counties
- The UP rail line connects the counties and is on the Pacific Surfliner Rail Corridor
- The Santa Maria River is the boundary line between the two counties
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SBCAG believes this effort will build upon these historic connections and lead to improved collaborative planning between our two regions.

SBCAG is anticipating that this program will be successful based on the history of our collaborative efforts summarized below:

- Joint transportation project development, e.g. Santa Maria River Bridge
- Joint SBCAG-SLOCOG policy board meeting
- Joint participation on LOSSAN and CRCC Rail Corridor Agencies

SBCAG believes this application satisfies the specific objectives of the State Blueprint Planning Grant Program. Through collaboration between neighboring counties, the program will address resource use efficiency, reduce impacts on valuable habitat and productive farmland, enable an adequate supply of housing, and support improved mobility.

SBCAG also believes this effort will enable SBCAG to explore how the various aspects of Regional Blueprint Planning might be applied to other parts of the County and might serve as a key first step toward more collaborative and comprehensive regional planning efforts.



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SBCAG looks forward to working with SLOCOG and all the other agencies in our joint project. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact our Executive Director, Jim Kemp.

Sincerely,

Jonny Wallis
SBCAG Chair