



## STAFF REPORT

**DATE:** AUGUST 25, 2021

**TO:** PLANNING COMMISSION

**FROM:** DAVID M. REYES, DIRECTOR OF PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

**SUBJECT:** STUDY SESSION ON THE EAST COLORADO SPECIFIC PLAN UPDATE

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### RECOMMENDATION:

Receive the staff report and provide feedback on the draft East Colorado Specific Plan (ECSP). There is no action required at this time. Subsequent to this study session, staff anticipates returning to the Planning Commission in September with the proposed ECSP for review and recommendation to City Council.

### BACKGROUND:

In 2015, the City adopted a comprehensive update to the Land Use and Mobility Elements of the General Plan, which updated specific plan boundaries, the plan's vision, goals, policies, land uses, densities and intensities, and development caps within each of the eight specific plan areas. The update also included a list of tools to implement the General Plan. Specifically, it required the City to review and update seven existing specific plans, including the ECSP, and create a new specific plan for Lamanda Park.

In 2018, the City initiated a program, *Our Pasadena – Putting the Plan in Motion*, to review and update the City's eight specific plan areas. The program's primary objective is to establish neighborhood-specific design and land-use goals resulting in a refined set of permitted uses, residential densities, buildable area, and development standards and guidelines that will shape the built environment along the City's major commercial and mixed-use areas within the eight planning areas in accordance with the City's General Plan and Guiding Principles. The first specific plan to be presented to Planning Commission as part of the General Plan Implementation Program was the Lincoln Avenue Specific Plan, followed by the ECSP, which is the focus of this report.

## EAST COLORADO SPECIFIC PLAN UPDATE/DISCUSSION:

### Plan Context and Existing Land Use and Form

The ECSP area encompasses the 1.4-mile section of Colorado Boulevard between Wilson Avenue on the west and Roosevelt Avenue on the east (See Figure 1). The plan area also includes Green Street between Wilson and Holliston Avenue, and the north/south stretch of Allen Avenue between Colorado Boulevard and Corson Street, connecting the educational and commercial uses on Colorado Boulevard to the Metro L (Gold) Line and residential neighborhoods north of the I-210 freeway.

Figure 1. Plan Area and Context

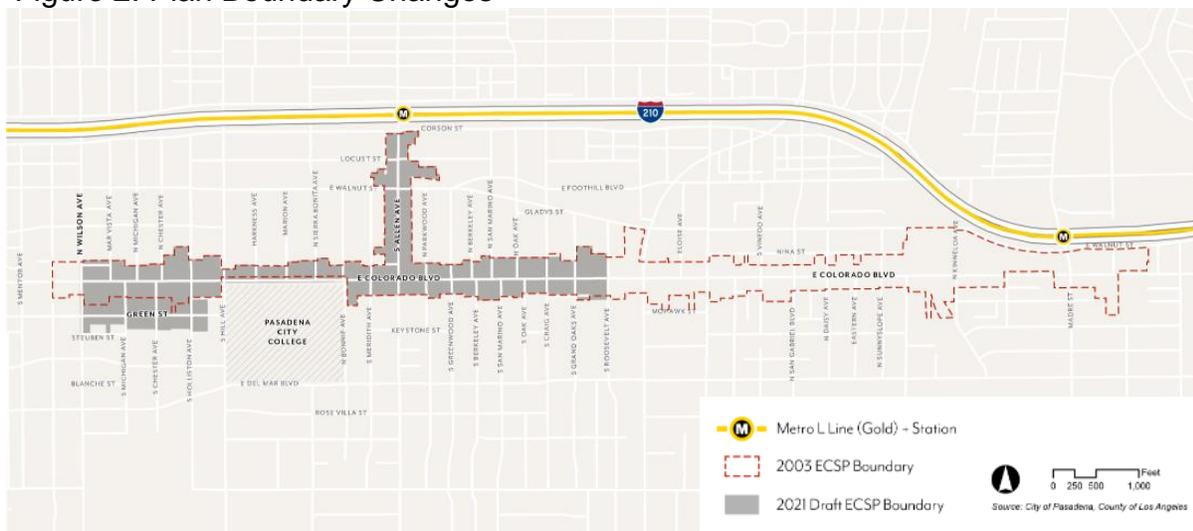


The ECSP area is a commercially focused area of the City that includes historic properties, churches, motels popular for Rose Parade viewing, and a few pockets of residential homes. Mid-century signage, car dealerships, auto service shops, and repurposed auto showrooms reflect the corridor’s historic Route 66 character. The area was formerly called East Pasadena, independent from the City of Pasadena, originating as a small village around the intersection of Chester Avenue and Colorado Boulevard. Since the establishment of the village the area has included commercial services, housing, and a variety of churches. The primary corridor along Colorado Boulevard was also part of the National Old Trails Route established by the Automobile Club of Southern California; it was later converted to be part of Route 66, the iconic motorway connecting Chicago to the Pacific Ocean. In the 1920’s, the boulevard connected Pasadena with the independent communities of East Pasadena and Lamanda Park, which were eventually annexed into the City of Pasadena. For several decades, Colorado Boulevard remained an auto-oriented corridor with an eclectic mix of commercial and auto service uses.

The original ECSP, adopted in 2003, included the portion of Colorado Boulevard from Catalina Avenue on the west to Sycamore Avenue on the east, approximately 3 miles in length, and Allen Avenue from Colorado Boulevard to the Allen Station. The 2003 ECSP focused on expanding the mix of uses along the corridor to create a “unified streetscape

and a series of distinctive places along the boulevard.” The original plan captured a much greater portion of Colorado Boulevard with a more robust set of historic resources and legacy Route 66 land uses. Since then, the character of Pasadena has evolved and the boundaries of this plan have adjusted accordingly (See Figure 2). The portion along Green Street was added as part of the 2015 General Plan update, while the block of Colorado Boulevard between Catalina Avenue and Wilson Avenue was removed to be included in the Central District Specific Plan. The Lamanda Park Specific Plan was established by the 2015 General Plan; the creation of this new specific plan resulted in removing the portion of Colorado Boulevard between Roosevelt and Kinneloa Avenue, with the portion east of Kinneloa Avenue being absorbed into the East Pasadena Specific Plan. The 2003 ECSP and draft boundaries for the plan area are shown on the map below.

Figure 2. Plan Boundary Changes



Portions of the ECSP area have evolved since 2003, such as the portion of Allen Avenue between Colorado Boulevard and the I-210 Freeway, which has become a primary connector to/from the Allen Station since its opening in July 2003. Other areas, such as the portion of Green Street between Wilson Avenue and Hill Avenue, have seen fewer changes and continue to provide the neighborhood with retail, small-scale offices, and services. Wrapping around the north end of the Pasadena City College (PCC) campus, the plan area contributes to multi-modal campus access from the Allen Station, and provides services for students and faculty. Allen Avenue, Green Street, and Colorado Boulevard all serve local needs for the variety of residential neighborhoods that border the plan area. The area continues to evolve beyond its auto-oriented history with more modern uses that include offices for professional services, studios for health and wellness, and an increasing number of restaurants throughout. The presence of religious uses has been maintained in the area with at least eight houses of worship located in the plan area. Today, much of the Colorado Boulevard corridor in the plan area serves as part of the annual Rose Parade route.

Additional information on community and historic context and existing land use and form is provided as Attachment A (Refer to Chapter 2 of the ECSP Study Session Draft).

### Planning Process and Community Engagement

The update to the ECSP is the result of an extensive three-year planning and public outreach process led by the Planning and Community Development Department. The outreach and planning efforts are supported by AECOM, a consultant team of urban planners, urban designers, outreach specialists, economists, architects, and landscape architects. The planning process also involved coordination with staff from various City departments, including Public Works, Transportation, Economic Development, and the Accessibility Coordinator, as well as feedback from the Design Commission.

Throughout the planning process, the Planning Department solicited input from residents, business and property owners, community leaders, and other stakeholder groups through a variety of outreach events, workshops, public meetings, and online engagement tools. Information on the engagement process, including public outreach methods and workshop meetings and materials is provided as Attachment B.

The following is a summary of the public outreach:

- Workshop 1 – listening and learning session to find out more about participants' experience living and/or working in, or visiting the plan area, and their ideas for how the plan could improve the area;
- Pop-Up Event – an interactive pop-up event at PCC to inform students about the update process and solicit feedback on how they would like to see the plan area develop in the future;
- Walking Tour – facilitated tour of specific areas of the plan to solicit input on participants' pedestrian experience in relation to use and the built environment;
- Workshop 2 – present emerging themes, draft vision, preliminary land use and urban form concepts that considered a number of factors, including community feedback; and
- Workshop 3 (virtual open house) – refined plan vision and concept, along with preliminary draft land use regulations and development and public realm standards.

Participants shared a wide range of input throughout the outreach process, including the following recurring themes:

- Maintain and support small businesses, services, and amenities within walking distance for residents and students;
- Accommodate student-oriented businesses like bookstores, cafes with WiFi, and restaurants near PCC and Caltech;
- Support housing affordability through larger unit sizes that allow students to share housing costs;

- Balance new housing opportunities with active commercial uses and services on the ground floor that are accessible from the street;
- Improve building facades and design, and incorporate open spaces in the design of new buildings to break up big, unbroken walls;
- Maintain context-sensitive building heights and densities while accommodating development that meets the community's housing needs;
- Create appropriately-scaled transitions between larger developments and surrounding residential areas;
- Support opportunities for placemaking, and accommodate mountain views at landmark destinations;
- Increase sidewalk widths and amenities, like outdoor dining, sidewalk furniture, shade structures, and bus shelters;
- Enhance shade and introduce more street trees along Colorado Boulevard;
- Tailor development standards to accommodate existing ficus trees along Green Street, which are valued by the community;
- Improve the pedestrian experience surrounding the Allen Station; and
- Support mobility enhancements in the public right-of-way that balance all modes of transportation, and encourage alternatives to driving to ease traffic congestion in the area.

Feedback received from these efforts helped to refine the preliminary draft vision, concepts, and standards that were presented last year and guided the drafting of preliminary goals for the plan area that are presented in this report.

## Draft ECSP

### *Plan Vision and Area Goals*

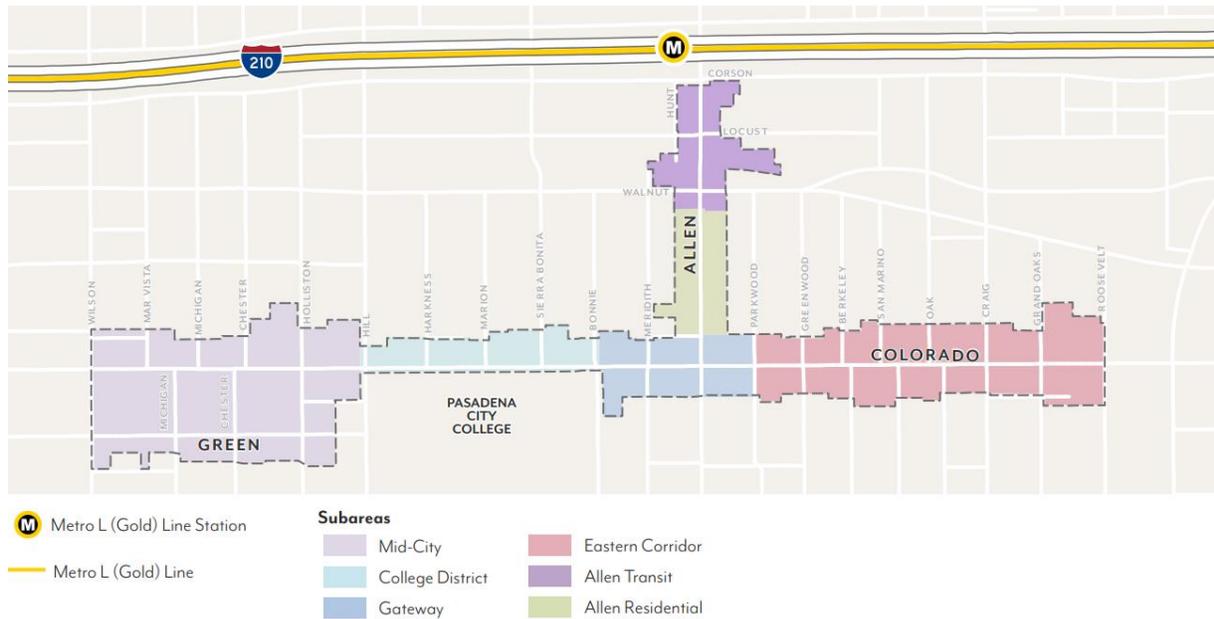
The ECSP area is envisioned as a community where people can live, work, learn, shop, and dine within a vibrant and well-connected district that is accessible to transit. The objective of the ECSP, as drafted, is to foster:

- High quality development that is compatible with the existing character and scale of surrounding neighborhoods;
- A mix of neighborhood commercial uses, public amenities, and housing options to serve families, students, and faculty; and
- A walkable community with enhanced sidewalks and landscaped areas to make transit and destinations comfortable and pleasant to access.

In addition, the ECSP will include plan goals and policies that provide further policy direction for implementing the plan's vision and achieving the desired outcomes based on community input and General Plan guidance. The goals and policies also provide guidance to decision makers, such as the Planning Commission, when reviewing development projects. The ECSP will include goals and policies that are applicable to the entire plan area and specific subareas.

The draft ECSP area is organized into six subareas: Mid-City, College District, Gateway, Eastern Corridor, Allen Residential, and Allen Transit (See Figure 3). The six subareas are distinguished by their existing conditions, their General Plan Land use designations, and the plan’s vision for the future. Each subarea will contain a set of goals and policies that help to guide implementation and shape future development.

Figure 3. ECSP Subareas



The draft subarea goals are as follows:

- Mid-City – a mixed-use neighborhood with a strong sense of place and supportive land uses that leverages its close proximity to PCC, Caltech, and South Lake;
- College District – a lively atmosphere with a mix of uses that serves adjacent residents, students, and employee needs;
- Gateway – a pedestrian-oriented mixed-use node with open space and a sense of place that connects the Allen Station and Colorado Boulevard;
- Eastern Corridor – an eclectic commercial corridor supported by a mix of uses and housing opportunities connected by an enhanced public realm;
- Allen Residential – a multi-family residential neighborhood lined with landscaping and canopy trees that reinforce the existing residential character; and
- Allen Transit – a transit-oriented district with a mix of housing, daily services and amenities for residents, employees, and transit riders.

Feedback on the draft vision and subarea goals will inform the preparation of the policies that will accompany each goal in the proposed ECSP presented next month.

## Draft Land Use, Development, and Public Realm Standards

The draft regulations and standards presented in this report seek to facilitate and encourage development and improvements to realize the vision for the plan area, factoring in community, stakeholder, and commission input received throughout the outreach process. The draft regulations and standards are provided in Attachment A. A comparison of the draft and current regulations and standards is provided in Attachment C. The current, 2003 ECSP, is provided in Attachment D.

Throughout the outreach process, the community expressed a wide range of opinions on specific details of the ECSP update. Last year, staff presented a preliminary draft of the ECSP, which included draft land use regulations and development and public realm standards, for community input. In general, feedback received was supportive of the plan vision, subarea concepts, and preliminary standards proposed for the ECSP area. Participants particularly expressed support for the enhanced sidewalk widths with landscaped parkways and the paseo and publicly accessible open space requirements that would increase the tree canopy and provide a more comfortable pedestrian experience while advancing climate change-related goals. Participants also expressed support for the reduced parking requirements that would encourage existing structures to be adaptively reused by allowing changes of use to occur within smaller and older buildings without requiring additional parking, thereby encouraging the preservation of existing neighborhood character and incentivizing reuse of such structures for smaller businesses. Mixed opinions were expressed by participants on the height of buildings and massing, transitions to adjacent uses and whether auto-oriented uses should be phased out over time, such as drive-throughs. Participants also expressed mixed opinions on the ficus trees planted along Green Street, but shared overall support to ensure that new development contributed to an enhanced tree canopy.

A summary of the draft regulations and standards that implement the plan vision is discussed below.

### *Land Use, Intensity, and Density*

In general, the distribution of land uses is similar to the current plan, with a few land use changes proposed in the draft ECSP consistent with the General Plan, including:

- Introduction of new housing opportunities within the Eastern Corridor subarea at residential densities lower than the General Plan to complement existing uses and lower scale character;
- Continue to focus new housing opportunities within Mid-City, College District, Gateway, and the Allen Transit subareas at residential densities greater than the current plan but consistent with the density ranges established by the General Plan;
- Maintain existing commercial uses and character by no longer permitting housing south of Green Street between Wilson and east of Chester Avenue and the parcels fronting south of Walnut Street;

- Prohibit new drive-through establishments throughout the entire plan area but allow expansions with the requirement to obtain a Minor Conditional Use Permit and continue to allow expansion of existing drive-throughs with potential conditions (i.e., addressing queueing and drive-through lane placement, reduction in parking in exchange for outdoor dining and additional landscaping, and lighting and noise mitigation measures where located adjacent to residential uses); and
- Support restaurants with walk-up windows across the plan area by changing the permit requirement from Conditional Use Permit to Minor Conditional Use Permit to encourage pedestrian-accessible restaurant options.

For a complete list of allowed uses and permit requirements refer to Chapter 4 of the ECSP Study Session Draft. Definitions of land uses are found in Pasadena Municipal Code (PMC) 17.80.020. Additional standards for specific land uses may apply; refer to the PMC Section noted in the table.

### *Development Standards*

#### *Building Height Limits*

The draft ECSP supports mixed-use development, including new housing opportunities throughout most of the plan area. In order to encourage new development, the following building height limits are proposed:

- Mid-City – 63 feet compared to current 60 feet height limit (5 stories);
- Allen Transit – 63 feet compared to current 45 feet with up to 60 feet with height averaging (5 stories);
- Gateway – 51 feet compared to current 45 feet height limit (4 stories);
- College District – 48 feet compared to current 45 feet height limit (4 stories); and
- Eastern Corridor – 39 feet compared to current 45 feet height limit (3 from 4 stories) and 51 feet east of Grand Oaks Avenue (4 stories).

Most of the changes are modest and are recommended in order to reflect modern building practices of taller floor to ceiling heights. The proposed changes also reflect community input and general preference to limit building heights. Although the preliminary plan included additional standards related to height, such as upper story stepbacks, many community members expressed that the heights proposed for the Gateway and the College District subareas, which were previously set at 63' and 51' respectively, were too tall. Based on this feedback and a variety of other factors, the height limits for these two subareas were reduced to those presented in this report. For additional standards related to building height, including ground floor height and upper floor stepbacks, refer to Chapter 6 of the ECSP Study Session Draft.

#### *Sidewalk, Building Setback, and Street Trees*

The draft ECSP includes public realm standards and guidelines to implement the General Plan vision for the plan area and achieve objectives of the Pasadena Street Design Guide and Pasadena Master Street Tree Plan. The draft ECSP introduces the concept of minimum sidewalk widths to the plan area, consistent with the Pasadena Street Design Guide. Existing sidewalk widths along Colorado Boulevard range between 12 to 15 feet, the range along Allen Avenue is between 10 to 15 feet, and Green Street between 8 and 11 feet. To support pedestrian mobility and amenities within the sidewalk that is appropriate and relative to adjacent uses, the draft ECSP establishes the following minimum sidewalk widths:

- Allen Avenue – 16 feet (between Walnut Avenue and Corson Street) and 15 feet (between Walnut Avenue and Colorado Boulevard);
- Colorado Boulevard – 15 feet;
- Green Street – 12 feet; and
- Wilson Avenue, Michigan Avenue, Chester Avenue, and Holliston Avenue – 12 feet (between Colorado Boulevard and Green Street).

To expand the public realm and enhance the walkability of the plan area by allowing space for more greening, open space, and outdoor amenities, the draft ECSP establishes the following building setback requirements:

- Eastern Corridor – range of 3 to 8 feet;
- Mid-City (Green Street) – range of 5 to 8 feet;
- Mid-City (Wilson and Holliston Avenue) – range of 5 to 10 feet; and
- Mid-City (Michigan and Chester Avenue) – minimum of 10 feet.

This is an increase from the current building setback requirement of 5 feet throughout most of the plan area. It also reflects community feedback for additional space for landscaping and outdoor amenities that contribute to a pleasant and comfortable pedestrian experience. For standards related to sidewalks refer to Chapter 5 and for setbacks refer to Chapter 6 of the ECSP Study Session Draft.

During the ECSP update process, opportunities were identified to better align street tree selection with the plan's goals related to shade, climate resilience, stormwater capture, placemaking, and supporting a vibrant public realm. To address these opportunities, the draft ECSP includes guidance and recommendations for tree selection, which is intended to guide discussions between the City and community when updating the Master Street Tree Plan within the ECSP area. While the tree selection in the draft plan reflects recommendations to achieve the plan's goals, the ECSP also takes into account the feedback received from the community regarding tree species selection, particularly regarding the preservation of existing ficus trees along Green Street. While a number of development standards have been introduced with the intent of protecting the existing ficus tree canopy, such as building setbacks and stepbacks in height, the draft plan also includes a recommendation on an alternative tree species, the Fern Pine. This alternative recommendation is intended to address the need for a variety in tree species

to ensure that the tree canopy on Green Street can remain healthy and sustainable in the long-term. For more information refer to Appendix A2 of the ECSP Study Session Draft.

Another notable change relating to street trees in the draft ECSP is the introduction of an allée concept in the Mid-City subarea along Michigan Avenue, between Green Street and Colorado Boulevard. An allée is formed by lining each side of the street with a double row of trees, oftentimes a flowering tree to create a sense of place. Incorporation of an allée along this street is intended to create a strong pedestrian and visual connection between Green Street and Colorado Boulevard by establishing a canopy of trees on both the public right of way and private property. This is achieved by increasing the setback requirement for properties on Michigan Avenue to 10 feet, along with a minimum 6 foot Amenity Zone within the sidewalk area, to provide adequate space for street tree planting. For more information on this concept refer to Chapter 6 of the ECSP Study Session Draft.

### *Open Space and Paseos*

The draft ECSP would increase open space requirements for both residential and nonresidential projects throughout the plan area. For residential uses, the plan would update the combined private and common open space requirement from 150 square feet per unit to a per bedroom requirement ranging from 200 to 275 square feet per bedroom. For example, a 24-unit building with an even mix of studios, one, two, and three bedroom units, this requirement would increase the required open space from a total of 3,600 square feet to 5,700 square feet, or about 238 square feet per unit. The updated requirement better aligns the amount of open space with the number of people living in a building with the objective of improving quality of life and open space access for multi-family residents. Higher open space requirements would also create building modulation opportunities through the need for balconies, upper floor terraces, patios, and courtyards. More recently, since the onset of the COVID pandemic, community members have expressed the desire for more outdoor private and common open spaces within multi-family development for added flexibility and wellness during stay-at-home restrictions. The draft ECSP also includes new common open space design requirements related to indoor/outdoor space, location, hardscape, landscaping, and trees, which would encourage the design of successful, usable open spaces within developments.

The draft ECSP introduces public and commercial open space requirements not presented in the preliminary draft plan to ensure that new development creates a sense of place for the area. Nonresidential projects over 80,000 square feet would be required to provide 2 to 5% of the building floor area as public open space, depending on project size. These requirements are meant to create a series of community gathering places within the plan area. The draft ECSP also introduces the concept of paseos within the Mid-City subarea to create mid-block pedestrian connections between buildings and enhance connections between Colorado Boulevard and Green Street. Mixed opinions

on requiring allées and paseos within Mid-City have been expressed by the community. For more information refer to Chapter 6 of the ECSP Study Session Draft.

### Parking

Parking requirements for commercial uses were refined in the draft ECSP. Parking requirements are set at 3 per 1,000 square feet in the plan area. Requirements also includes exemptions for commercial spaces under 5,000 square feet, uses within designated historic structures and buildings built before 1970, and outdoor dining. New parking would also not be required for changes of uses in the College District. For residential uses, the draft ECSP seeks to reduce the cost of housing by unbundling parking from the unit itself; any unused parking could then be leased to other tenants. Standards relating to driveways, parking lots and parking structures are also included in the plan. For more information refer to Chapter 6 of the ECSP Study Session Draft.

### Implementation of the ECSP

The updated ECSP will be primarily implemented through the adoption of the plan's new land use, public realm, and development regulations, which align private sector investment with the plan's vision, goals, and policies. In addition, ECSP improvements and programs funded through the City and outside sources, can further implement the plan, particularly where redevelopment is less likely to occur. The draft ECSP will include targeted actions intended to help guide and prioritize the implementation of the plan. It will also provide an overview of existing services, plans, and programs, all of which can be leveraged to help implement the plan. A summary of funding sources will also be included to guide the City in understanding and selecting available funding sources to implement the improvements and programs identified in the updated ECSP. Feedback on the draft ECSP will help prioritize programs identified for this plan area.

### Environmental Analysis

An addendum to the General Plan Final Environmental Impact Report (GP EIR) is being prepared to evaluate the environmental effects associated with the ECSP update and to determine whether these impacts are consistent with the evaluation presented in the GP EIR in compliance with CEQA (Public Resources Code Sections 21000 et seq.) and the State CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulations Section 15000 et seq.). The ECSP Update Addendum will be presented to the Planning Commission along with the proposed ECSP.

**CONCLUSION:**

The Planning Department anticipates presenting the proposed ECSP, and associated amendments to the Zoning Code and Plan Map, and the addendum to the General Plan EIR to the Planning Commission for its review and recommendation to City Council in September of this year. This report focuses on the background, public outreach, land use, development standards, and public realm standards in the ECSP update for the Planning Commission and members of the public to use as reference for the study session.

Respectfully submitted,

  
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Attachments:

- Attachment A – 2021 ECSP: Draft Chapters 2, 4, 5, and 6 and Appendix A2
- Attachment B – ECSP Update Public Outreach Process
- Attachment C – 2003 ECSP
- Attachment D – 2003/2021 ECSP Land Use and Development Standards Comparison Table

**ATTACHMENT A**  
**2021 ECSP: DRAFT CHAPTERS 2, 4, 5, AND 6 AND APPENDIX A2**

**Can be viewed at:**

<https://www.ourpasadena.org/ECSP-PC-SS-082521>

**ATTACHMENT B  
ECSP UPDATE PUBLIC OUTREACH PROCESS**

**Can be viewed at:**

<https://www.ourpasadena.org/ECSP-PC-SS-082521>

**ATTACHMENT C  
2003 ECSP**

**Can be viewed at:**

<https://www.ourpasadena.org/ECSP-PC-SS-082521>

**ATTACHMENT D**  
**2003/2021 ECSP LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS COMPARISON TABLE**

**Can be viewed at:**

<https://www.ourpasadena.org/ECSP-PC-SS-082521>