

# Civic Center Specific Plan

## ISSUES AND OPTIONS WORKBOOK



*Prepared for the City of Santa Monica by ROMA Design Group*

# Civic Center Specific Plan

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## ISSUES AND OPTIONS WORKBOOK

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#### Preliminary Options:

- Open Space and Recreation
  - Housing
  - Civic/Cultural
- Circulation and Parking

# Civic Center Specific Plan

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## ISSUES AND OPTIONS WORKBOOK

**WORKSHOP 1: PROJECT OVERVIEW**

**APRIL 2, 2001**

**SANTA MONICA CIVIC CENTER SPECIFIC PLAN UPDATE  
WORKING GROUP/COMMUNITY WORKSHOP 1  
PROJECT OVERVIEW – APRIL 2, 2001**

**PRESENTATION**

Boris Dramov described the work program for the Civic Center Specific Plan, and discussed preliminary design principles and issues and options. Attached to these notes are:

- Work Schedule: Civic Center Specific Plan
- Preliminary Framework for Development of Principles and Definition of Issues and Options
- Opportunities and Linkages Map
- Existing Civic Center Specific Plan Goals and Objectives

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

1. Maintain and enhance the Civic Auditorium as a community resource.
2. The major emphasis of the plan should be the creation of a mixed-use village. The link to the beach is of questionable value.
3. The Civic Center should be civic in nature; it should provide strong linkages to the Beach, Main Street, and Downtown. It should provide open space, views, and places for picnics, entertainment. Future residents need to be tolerant of these activities.
4. Housing should include opportunities for both home ownership and rental.
5. The historic integrity of the Civic Center should be preserved. City Hall should be a “logo” for the Civic Center. A wide swath of open space should be created between City Hall and the Beach. As much open space and landscape as possible should be incorporated into the plan.
6. The main focus of the Civic Center should be public uses; it should be a “gem” for the citizens of Santa Monica. Is the land too valuable for housing?
7. Housing needs to be carefully considered relative to noise.
8. There needs to be a significant commitment to an Early Childhood Education Center, near places of employment (i.e., RAND, City Hall, Courthouse) and housing.

9. The purchase of the RAND land makes the Civic Center plan objectives of 1993 more achievable. The four key components of the Plan should be: (1) linkages to the Pier, Promenade and Civic Center; (2) cultural activities (both interior and exterior); (3) open space; and (4) housing, affordable to a diversity of residents.
10. A modern art gallery should be considered for the Civic Center.
11. It is important to come up with solutions that are realistic. Make sure that there is sufficient parking to satisfy needs of Civic Center and consider overflow demand in the downtown and adjacent areas.
12. Mini-parks are an effective way of providing usable open space.
13. The Civic Center should provide links to the Main Street area, and consider shared opportunities with the downtown area.
14. The feasibility of an exit ramp directly from the freeway to an underground parking garage should be explored.
15. What are the restrictions on the use of land purchased with the bond? Bob Moncrief responded: The City Council established a housing credit of 30% for the Civic Center site. If this is applied against the purchase price it is equivalent to \$15.9 million or 159 dwelling units at an estimated subsidy of \$100,000 per unit; if it is applied against the acreage, it is equivalent to 3.4 acres. Because the City utilized tax-exempt bonds, revenues from lease or sale to private uses are restricted to 10% of the bond or \$6.5 million.

## **WORKING GROUP COMMENTS**

1. Implementation should be a key goal. The 30% target for affordable housing should be a minimum.
2. The 1993 Specific Plan principles are still relevant. Linkages, both physical and emotional, should be a major emphasis; activities and housing should be considered part of the linkage system as much as open space and roads. There should be a reaffirmation of goals for affordable housing. The practicality of decking the freeway should be understood as early as possible.
3. Make sure the whole “family” is included in Civic Center activities. All age groups should be welcome in the area. Every inch of open space should be protected, as the City is deficient in open space.
4. The significance of open space, recreation and housing has expanded since the Specific Plan of 1993. We need to reclaim the surface for open space, parks and views; space should be used vertically (e.g., open space over roads). The reduction of commercial uses from the 1993 plan

provides opportunities for cultural uses and live-work. The Civic Center should be the “heart” of the community.

5. The 1993 goals and principles are still compelling. We need to find the best use for each part of the Civic Center. We need to define and understand an appropriate threshold for housing, and the legal obligations under the bond.
6. Streets democratize space; they open up the area making it accessible to all. Superblocks make space impenetrable. The Town Square from the 1993 plan provided a central meeting space for the community, a ceremonial space as well as an informal gathering place. The Civic Center should be part of the everyday life of the community.

## **PRELIMINARY FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPMENT OF PRINCIPLES AND DEFINITION OF ISSUES AND OPTIONS**

Santa Monica has undergone a dramatic transformation over the past ten to fifteen years. As a city, it is exemplary in demonstrating how infill development and the recycling of urban lands can result in a sustainable community for the 21st century. Ten years ago, the redesign of Third Street Promenade infused new energy and activity into the heart of the city and the forthcoming transit priority streets will enhance transit service and help to extend the success of the Promenade throughout Downtown. The improvements at Santa Monica Pier, the Beach and Palisades Park provide urban amenities that enhance the quality of life in the city. The transformation of the outmoded industrial rail corridor along Olympic Boulevard and the creative activities at Bergamot Station further demonstrate efforts to reclaim underutilized lands. The Civic Center area fits within the context of these trends in looking toward new activities that will add to the range of opportunities and quality of life for Santa Monica residents.

When the Civic Center Specific Plan was prepared and adopted in 1993, several basic principles were established. These principles may still have relevance today, even with the City's recent purchase of the 11.3 acres from the Rand Corporation and the relocation of Rand headquarters to a site closer to Pico and Main. It is important for the Working Group to consider, reconfirm and/or modify these principles as a basis for revisions and refinements to the Specific Plan.

### **Principles of 1993 Plan**

In the 1993 Specific Plan, the Civic Center was viewed as a large, isolated area that, together with the I-10 Freeway and Santa Monica Place, divides the city in a north-south direction, separating the Third Street Promenade and Downtown from the Ocean Park neighborhood and Main Street to the south. In addition, it provides little connection in the east-west direction between Ocean Avenue and Fourth Street and between inland districts and the Beach. As a result, one of the key principles of the plan was to create linkages through the Civic Center and make it an integral part of the city. Further, these linkages were intended to

create an interesting and continuous experience, break down the scale of the area, knit it back into the fabric of the city, and create an exciting and diverse experience. The plan identified specific linkages between:

- Downtown and the Civic Center
- City Hall, Palisades Park and the Santa Monica Pier
- The Ocean Park neighborhood to the Civic Center area and Downtown
- The Beach to the Civic Center area along a wide pedestrian promenade
- An east-west vehicular connection along a new Olympic Drive which would help to rebalance freeway access for the Downtown and Civic Center and meet the City grid

Although currently Main Street provides for a north-south connection through the Civic Center, the quality of the experience along this route limits its role as a true activity linkage between Downtown and the Main Street shopping area. The street appears as an over-capacity arterial relative to its limited vehicular function and provides a weak focus for the Civic Center, terminated on the north by the parking garage for Santa Monica Place and on the south by doglegging right in front of the Civic Auditorium. The plan called for a redefinition of the role and character of Main Street and made specific proposals for traffic calming features and integrating open space with vehicular functions to create a more appropriate focal point for the Civic Center. Specific proposals included:

- A circular open space with a ring road in front of the Civic Auditorium
- A Town Square providing a counterpoint and terminus to Main Street in front of City Hall
- A landscaped median in Main Street

The goal of the 1993 plan was to create a public framework comprised of landscaped open spaces, active and passive recreational areas, pedestrian promenades and bikeways as well as attractive vehicular streets that would give structure and orientation to the Civic Center area and link it more strongly to surrounding areas.

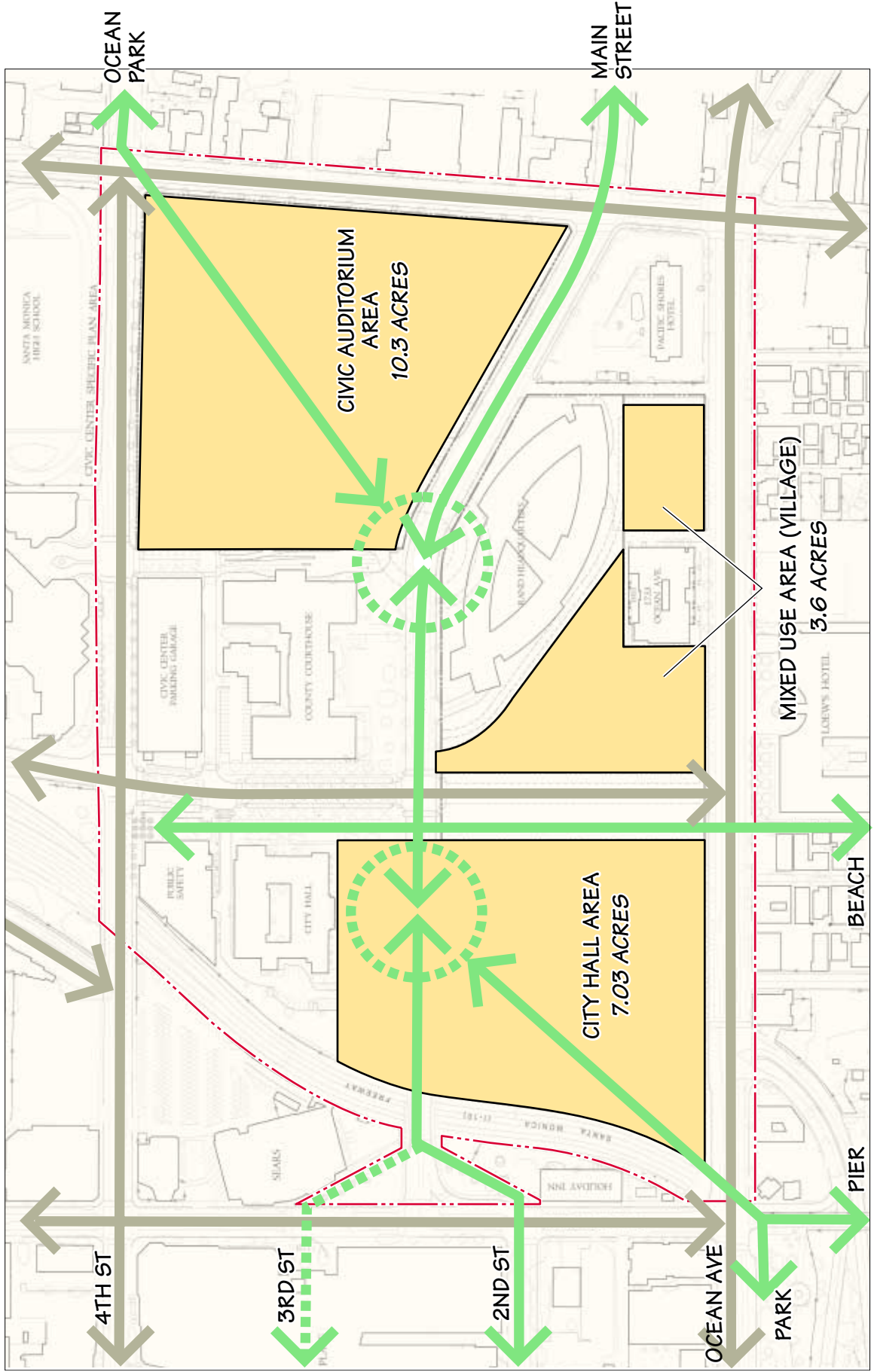
In considering the nature of the Civic Center, the community felt that it should be made more a part of everyday experience of the city, and not turned into a special purpose place only for governmental and institutional purposes. It should not have a monumental character nor gain identity primarily through visual or symbolic experience of space. In order to achieve a more diverse environment, given the composition of existing land uses, an emphasis was made on a greater mix and variety of activities, in particular, housing and recreation and open space, which would augment the governmental and institutional uses and create a more diverse and attractive environment. To achieve this diversity of uses and the desired linkages, surface parking lots would be eliminated and parking integrated as part of buildings or located in parking structures on Fourth Street. The desire was to intercept parking at the edges of the Civic Center and to create a more pedestrian-oriented environment internal to the site.

More specifically, the plan proposed the addition of community-oriented recreation and open space uses and new community and cultural uses in the Civic Auditorium area. The plan also proposed a mixed-use village south of the Olympic Drive extension between Main Street and Ocean Avenue with a significant residential component focused around a .7-acre open space.

## **Givens**

The givens in the planning process are those things not likely to change in any major way, or decisions that have been made that (although not yet realized) are no longer open to discussion. These include:

- City Hall
- Public Safety Building
- Olympic Drive extension from Fourth to Main
- Civic Center Parking Garage
- County Courthouse



**OPPORTUNITY AREAS**

- New Rand headquarters building
- Vicente Terrace
- The new office building at 1733 Ocean Avenue
- Pacific Shores Hotel

### **Geographic Opportunity Areas**

There are a number of opportunity areas that present themselves today and optional approaches that can be taken in each one of these, as discussed below:

- ***Civic Auditorium Area.*** The Civic Auditorium area, comprising approximately ten acres, remains a major opportunity for a range of new activities. However, a number of new options have presented themselves since the Specific Plan was completed, including the potential for more active recreational uses within this area, the reconsideration of the Civic Auditorium and its reuse for more community-oriented functions.
- ***Mixed Use Area.*** Even with the relocation of the Rand headquarters building and the development of 1733 Ocean Avenue, a significant amount of land (3.6 acres or over 30% of the land acquired from Rand) remains in what was the mixed-use area south of the Olympic Drive extension. This area could still accommodate a significant amount of residential development, ranging from 160-250 dwelling units.
- ***City Hall Area.*** The area from City Hall to Ocean Avenue and from the proposed Olympic Drive to the Santa Monica Freeway, comprising approximately 6.5 acres of land, was designated under the 1993 Specific Plan as the location of the future RAND headquarters. Under the Specific Plan, the opportunity for open space linkage to the Beach and the Pier were also recognized. Now that the City has purchased the Rand property, there are many opportunities to improve linkages to the Downtown and the Pier and Palisades Park and for a mix of new uses.

- **The Freeway Right-of-Way.** Although not contemplated at the time the Specific Plan was prepared, a great deal of discussion has taken place in recent years about the potential decking of the freeway in whole or in part. The possibility of air rights development over the freeway (comprising a total of approximately 2 acres) holds great promise to heal the scars left behind by single purpose transportation facilities. Consideration must be given to issues related to mechanical ventilation, light/air and structural spans, cost implications in developing implementable options for this area, and Caltrans regulatory issues.

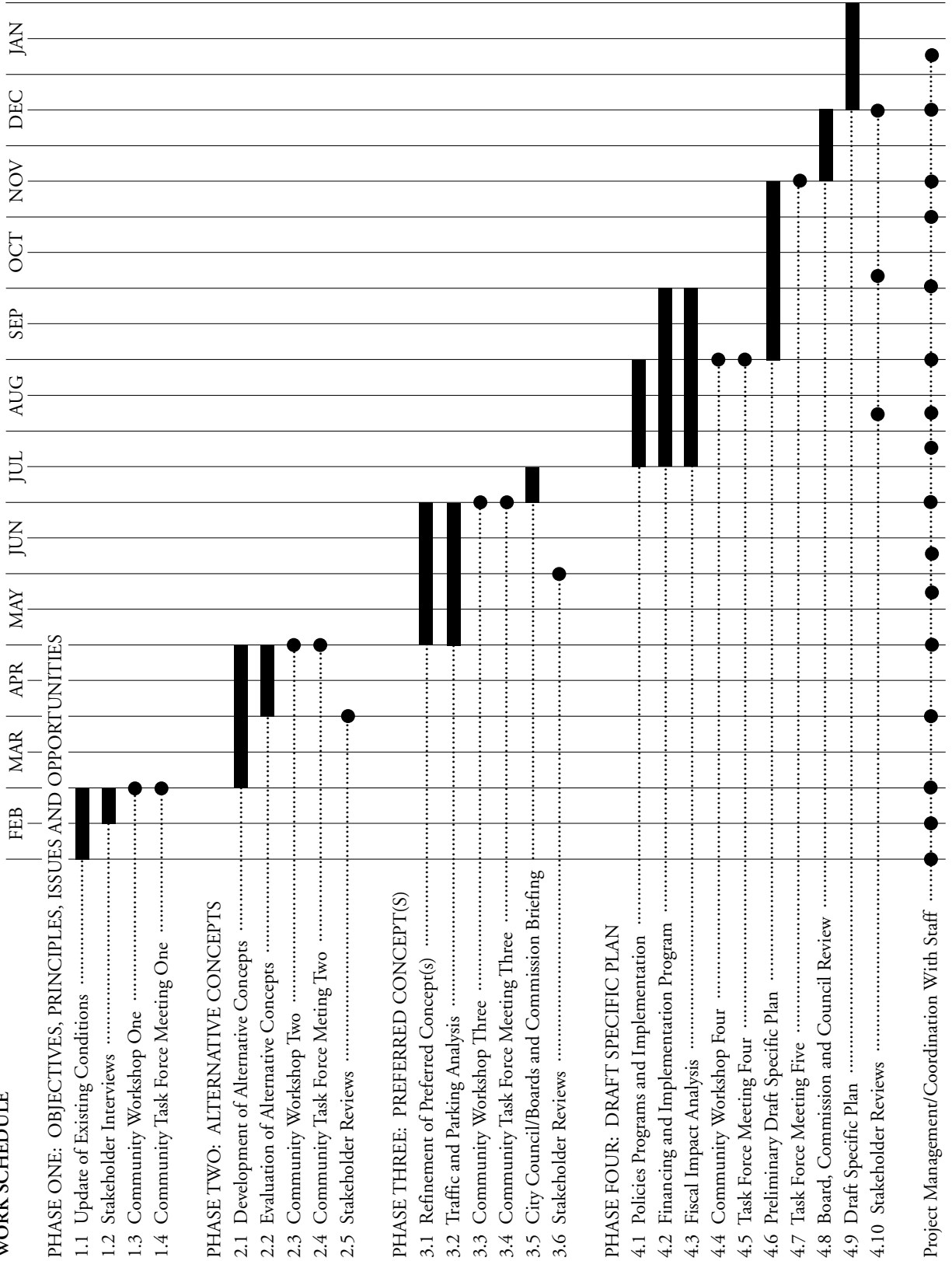
## Potential Issues

There are a number of broad issues which need to be addressed in developing the Specific Plan for the Civic Center area, and these include:

- **Recreation.** What role should the area play in serving community open space and recreational needs? How can we ensure that recreational opportunities are expanded that serve the broad community, and not just a single user group? Should there be more of an emphasis on active sports or less programmed and passive activities? How integrated should open space be with the housing, and how closely tied should it be to Santa Monica High School?
- **Housing.** One of the working assumptions is that a portion of the newly acquired land would be used for low and moderate income housing. Where should the housing be located? How should it be organized to create a sense of neighborhood? What is the type, mix and total number of units to be provided? Should market rate housing be added as a way of creating a "cross-subsidy" for more affordable housing?
- **Community and Cultural Uses.** What role should the Civic Auditorium play in the future of this area and within the community as a whole? Should special purpose facilities be built for new cultural uses? How can we design greater flexibility to accommodate an increased number and wider range of events within the area? What considerations should be given in locating the early childhood education and development center called for in the Civic Center area?

- **Parking.** Should the parking be for Civic Center only or should it serve other parts of the city? Where should parking be located and in what kinds of facilities? Should limitations on what is a reasonable amount of parking relative to circulation and parking be a basis for what the uses should be?
- **Transportation.** The transportation issues need to address pedestrian, bicycle, and transit as well as automobile functions. How can all of these be appropriately accommodated within the Civic Center area in a complementary manner to existing and potential new land uses? Due to the large and insular nature of the Civic Center area, traffic must divert around it, creating a significant burden on other parts of the city. Therefore, should the Civic Center play a more significant role in creating an improved circulation system and a more balanced distribution of traffic?
- **Implementation.** New uses such as affordable housing and open space will require subsidy beyond what has been spent on land. How will housing subsidies, infrastructure improvements and park development and maintenance be paid for?

**SANTA MONICA CIVIC CENTER SPECIFIC PLAN  
WORK SCHEDULE**



**CIVIC CENTER PLAN  
WORKING GROUP GUIDELINES**

**ADOPTED BY SANTA MONICA CITY COUNCIL  
JANUARY 23, 2001**

1. The plan shall include all properties within the boundaries of Pico Boulevard, Ocean Avenue, Fourth Street, and the Santa Monica Freeway.
2. The plan shall maintain the permitted development intensities for the City Hall, Public Safety Facility, new RAND Headquarters, City Hall Public Parking Structure, and Pacific Shore Hotel sites.
3. The plan shall identify a location for the development of an early childhood education and development center in the Civic Center.
4. In accordance with the Federal Tax Code, the amount of sale or lease revenue to be received from private uses on the 11.3 acres of former RAND property is generally limited to an amount not exceed ten percent of the total bond proceeds used to purchase said property.
5. The plan shall include low- and moderate-income housing development on the 11.3 acres of former RAND property at a level commensurate with no less than 30 percent of the total bond proceeds used to purchase said property.
6. The plan shall include goals and policies related to land use and urban design, circulation, open space, public services and utilities, conservation and sustainability, and implementation.
7. The Working Group shall complete its work by November 30, 2001, culminating with a recommended draft specific plan.

## **EXISTING CIVIC CENTER SPECIFIC PLAN GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

### **LAND USE GOALS**

- Establish a pattern and mix of public and private uses that integrates this large site into the remainder of the City and creates a vibrant civic gathering place; and to
- Create a cohesive public framework of streets, parks and other open spaces necessary to: support land uses; organize private and public buildings; enhance views and activity linkages; and create an attractive pedestrian environment.

### **OPEN SPACE OBJECTIVES**

1. Create a continuous public open space system which connects Palisades Park and the Santa Monica Pier to the Ocean Park neighborhood and the Main Street district with downtown and the Third Street Promenade.
2. Structure and organize the open spaces of the Civic Center to give special significance to key civic landmarks such as City Hall and the Civic Auditorium.
3. Create an open space system that supports on-site uses; contributes to an attractive pedestrian environment; and enhances open space and recreational opportunities citywide.
4. Encourage the integration of art in public places throughout the Civic Center area.

## **PUBLIC USES OBJECTIVES**

1. Allow for the improvement and expansion of existing City and County functions within the Civic Center.
2. Enhance cultural, recreational and other community-related uses in order to broaden the role and significance of the area within the city.
3. Replace existing surface parking with public parking structures centrally located and designed in a manner which complements land uses and open space areas, and which does not compromise the pedestrian environment or the desired visual character of the area.

## **CIRCULATION OBJECTIVES**

1. Improve accessibility for all modes of travel to and through the site.
2. Design the circulation system to not only meet functional requirements, but also structure and organize activities, reinforce the character of open space areas and other land uses, and create an attractive pedestrian-oriented street environment.
3. Place priority on nonauto modes of transportation, including transit, pedestrian and bicycle.
4. Encourage a mix, configuration and density of uses which reduces the need for commuting and encourages pedestrian movement.
5. Encourage land uses with different peaking characteristics to ensure a more efficient utilization of transportation and parking facilities.
6. Protect the character and livability of adjacent neighborhoods by discouraging project-oriented auto trips and parking from utilizing neighborhood streets.
7. Maintain vehicular access to the Main Street commercial area.

## **PUBLIC SERVICES POLICIES**

Provide a safe environment for existing and future residents, employees, and visitors to the Civic Center:

- Require that new development conform with all applicable City and State regulations concerning fire and police safety;
- Ensure adequate street widths and turning radii for emergency fire vehicles;
- Require that new development be designed to provide adequate safety features, including secure building entrances and garages, while also ensuring pedestrian-friendly design.

## **UTILITIES OBJECTIVES**

- The Civic Center shall have adequate water, sewer and storm drain services.
- The Civic Center shall serve as a model for environmental conservation and energy efficiency.

## **CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES**

1. Limit disturbances or disruption to the ecological balance and natural resources in the city.
2. Promote and strengthen water conservation and energy efficiency.
3. Eliminate nonessential sources of air pollution.