

Kearny Mesa's future likely to include more housing, dense transit-oriented development

San Diego is launching an effort to transform Kearny Mesa, a key regional hub for jobs, into a more balanced community by adding housing and bolstering the Convoy District

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August 15, 2017

San Diego is launching an effort to transform [Kearny Mesa](#), a key regional hub for jobs, into a more balanced community by adding housing along transportation corridors and making the Convoy culinary district a regional attraction.

A quarter century after the community's growth blueprint was last updated, city officials and business leaders are exploring how to combat Kearny Mesa's visual blight, add much-needed parks and decrease reliance on cars.



City officials say the new blueprint will address San Diego's severe shortage of affordable housing and help the city meet the goals of its ambitious climate action plan by allowing more people to live near Kearny Mesa's thriving industrial areas.

One idea is for Kearny Mesa to have many more mixed-use projects, where housing is built above ground floor businesses or when projects combine commercial and residential areas in different ways.

Kearny Mesa has only 9,000 residents, but that is sharply up since 2000 when less than 3,500 people lived there.

The future of Kearny Mesa is crucial because of its central location between three freeways — Interstates 15 and 805 and state Route 52 — and its relatively large size at 4,400 acres, which provides enormous potential for residential and industrial growth, city officials say.

Regional leaders also plan to have the city's fourth trolley line, the purple line, travel through Kearny Mesa on its route from San Ysidro to Carmel Valley.

So the new blueprint will include proposed areas for dense, transit-oriented development along Clairemont Mesa Boulevard for when that trolley line gets built sometime between 2035 and 2050.

Community backlash prompted the city to scrap plans for high-rise housing on a new trolley line under construction farther west on Morena Boulevard, but Kearny Mesa could be ideal for such

projects because it has fewer residents and no views of Mission Bay for the tall buildings to block.

A protected bicycling lane along Kearny Villa Road is also being proposed as the city continues progress on efforts to create a regional cycling network so more people can commute without creating pollution and worsening traffic congestion.

Members of the public are encouraged to participate in the process by completing an online survey at kearnymesaconnected.com by Aug. 31, or by attending one of several upcoming public meetings.

Meetings are scheduled from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturday at the Serra Mesa-Kearny Mesa Library at 9005 Aero Drive, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Aug. 22 at 8840 Complex Drive, from 4:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Aug. 23 at Centrum Park and from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. Aug. 23 at 9192 Topaz Way.

In addition, the Kearny Mesa community plan update subcommittee will hold a public meeting from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Aug. 24 at 9192 Topaz Way.

The process, which will include an extensive analysis of potential impacts on traffic and other environmental issues, is scheduled to be completed in 2019.

It's among six community plan updates the city is in the process of completing. Another nine community plan updates have been completed since Mayor Kevin Faulconer took office in winter 2014.

Updated community plans accelerate development by determining the zoning and maximum densities for properties in the city, which allows developers to move forward with projects knowing what the city plans to allow.

Kearny Mesa has relatively few residents because only 41 of its acres are zoned residential and only 60 acres are zoned for mixed use. The existing community plan was adopted in 1992, before San Diego adopted the "City of Villages" development strategy.

City officials say the revised blueprint is likely to sharply increase the number of acres where housing is allowed, especially the number of mixed use acres.

The plan is also likely to allow more commercial and industrial development, but Kearny Mesa is already among the city's job hubs along with downtown, Mission Valley and the University Town Centre area.

A city analysis shows that more than 93,000 people commute to Kearny Mesa for work each day, while only 2,700 live there and work elsewhere, and only 700 both live and work in Kearny Mesa.

“If there ever was a need in a community to increase residential land uses, this is the one,” Planning Commission member Bill Hofman said during a discussion of Kearny Mesa’s new development blueprint earlier this month.

Commissioners also said the updated blueprint is a chance to spruce up the community, where outdated architecture and strip commercial centers with parking lots along street dominate the landscape.

“One of the things I think of in the Kearny Mesa area is visual blight,” Commissioner Douglas Austin said.

The community has been praised for its Convoy District, where a variety of Asian restaurants attract people from around the region. The new community plan would seek to strengthen this area by adding housing and making it more pedestrian-friendly.

“I see no reason why they can’t be the next Little Italy,” said Commissioner Susan Peerson.

Commissioner Vicki Granowitz agreed, but stressed that such a revamp needs to be handled carefully so the area doesn’t lose its cachet and appeal.

“When we start to make places ‘cool,’ the ‘cool’ things leave,” she said. “I don’t know how you fix that.”

The Convoy District reflects the community’s ethnic demographics. According to the city, half the population is white, 19 percent is Asian, 19 percent is Hispanic and 7 percent is black.

Another goal of the community plan update is adding more parks. Kearny Mesa has 21 less acres of parkland than called for under city policies, so officials said they are searching for spots where new parks would make sense.

Two key parts of Kearny Mesa aren’t included in the update: Marine Corps Air Station Miramar and Montgomery-Gibbs Executive Airport. The city is creating new master plans for Montgomery-Gibbs and Brown Field as part of a separate process.