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Gualala Community Action Plan

Key Stakeholder Summary

28 April 2006

Introduction

This report summarizes key stakeholder interviews conducted for the Gualala Community Action Plan project on the morning of Friday, April 28, 2006, at the Coast Life Support District Training Center in Gualala. The “key stakeholder” group was a somewhat self-selected sample of community members identified by the client as having a particular interest or valuable insight into the project’s development and able to meet with the consultant during the available interview period, and the results of these interviews determined focus areas for subsequent phases of the Community Action Plan project.

Responses to a written questionnaire, which was emailed out to many of the stakeholders beforehand, have been tabulated and consolidated below. The question sheets contained a total of twenty-nine (29) questions, divided into three groups: General Information, Downtown Economic Opportunities, and Public Realm Improvements.

Results

General Information

Question #1. How did you learn about this action plan effort?

Two of the seven stakeholders who answered this question learned of the project through Action Network. Three stakeholders were property owners or merchants on Hwy 1. The remaining learned through GMAC, word-of-mouth, or the newspaper.

Question #2. What interest (organization etc) do you have in this effort?

The Chamber of Commerce, Gualala Arts, RCLC, Gualala Bluff Trail, and GMAC were represented. There were also two stakeholders who were property owners on Hwy 1.

Question #3. What is the most important outcome of this effort?

About half of the stakeholders saw beautification of the downtown as the most important outcome of the project. Safety of both pedestrians and vehicles was also important among the stakeholders. There is a desire to make Gualala a livable and walk able community with clear and safe access to parking, sidewalks and curbs. Project funding and community involvement were also mentioned as important outcomes.

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Question #4. What is the challenge to that outcome?

Almost all of the stakeholders stated that the main challenge to reaching the desired outcome is disagreement on what will be in the plan. Resistance to change, feuds, and politics were also cited as challenges. Funding, fair division of costs, permits and property lines, parking and options in the town plan were also noted.

Question #5. What needs to occur to overcome that challenge?

Compromise and agreement among property owners, the county and Cal Trans were noted. Extra strong public outreach, developing a common vision, a new tax to help disperse costs, follow-through, and a parking district were also mentioned.

Question #6. What has been the experience with decision makers in the recent past?

All of the stakeholders who answered this question shared a general disappointment with the way decisions have been made in the past. Poor communication and unwillingness to cooperate were cited as some of the reasons.

Question #7. What could (or currently does) set Downtown Gualala apart from other nearby towns?

Stakeholders stated the things that made downtown Gualala unique were its pro-growth mentality, unincorporated nature, remote location, high energy level, entrepreneurial spirit, vigorous commerce, scenic ocean views, and its location in relation to Sea Ranch.

Downtown Economic Opportunities

Question #1. How would you describe the downtown character?

Overall, the downtown character of Gualala is seen as an eclectic mix of many different building styles and uses, somewhat uncoordinated, unrelated development, but with a unique character that both tourists and locals enjoy. The downtown was also described as bustling, energetic, congested on the weekends, bucolic, clustered, disjointed, diverse, and friendly.

Question #2. What makes downtown a good place to do business?

While most agreed that the downtown is a good place to do business because it's the only place to shop in Gualala, other factors include good products and services, lower prices, good variety, convenience, the compact nature of downtown, supporting local merchants. Its central location, friendly atmosphere, and small-town feel were mentioned as features that help to make the downtown a good place for business.

Question #3. What types of uses should be in downtown in the future?

Amenities that would encourage tourism, like an effective bus system, traffic calming in the downtown, restroom facilities, and a more restaurants were mentioned as new uses that would help to revitalize the downtown. One individual brought up the idea of mixed use, business and residential, in downtown with a "town square feel." Another stakeholder expressed a need for more resident-serving uses that could be located on the ridge, for example: Trader Joe's, Home Depot, Costco, and Wal-Mart.

Question #4. Where should the new uses be located?

See answer above.

Question #5. What are the parking challenges downtown?

All stakeholders who answered this question agreed that there is a severe parking problem in the downtown; there isn't enough room for parking and the existing parking areas are confusing and disorganized. Bad circulation through the existing areas and limited space contribute to the dangerous nature of the existing parking areas in the downtown.

Question #6. What changes would you like to see in downtown?

Almost every answer to this question pertained to improving the pedestrian experience in the downtown. Most answers to this question related to creating a safe and pleasant an improved system of sidewalks and walkways through the downtown. Sidewalks, crosswalks, and better connections between destinations were specific elements mentioned by stakeholders. Possible improvements unrelated to the pedestrian experience in the downtown were: undergrounding of utilities, improved traffic flow, a gateway element prior to Sedalia, a corner parking lot at Hotel and Sundstrom, landscaping, off-street parking, regulated parking, and overlooks.

Question #7. What are the challenges to changing downtown?

Political issues, resistance from land owners, and opposing opinions were cited as challenges to changing the downtown. Additional challenges mentioned were: mistrust, money, and the unincorporated nature of Gualala means tax money goes to the county, not back to the community.

Question #8. How should these challenges be overcome?

Only a few stakeholders answered this question, but the few that did said that education, encouragement, peer pressure, money, and/or incorporation could help overcome the above challenges.

Question #9. Should downtown have a place for special events?

Most answers to this question pertained to the existing Community Center or Arts Center in Gualala. There was a general agreement that they both functioned well places for special events. Other possible ideas were: Bower Park with a shuttle for parking, picnic areas along the river for tourists, and expanding the existing Community Center.

Question #10. Do you have future plans for your property?

Gualala arts has plans for their site, RCLC wishes to complete bluff trail and connect it with other walking/public access improvements.

Question #11. What buildings or monuments have historic or cultural significance?

Almost all of the stakeholders agreed that Gualala Hotel was the most historic building in Gualala. The Catholic Church and cemetery, Carriage House, and the clock tower were also mentioned as historic structures.

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Public Realm Improvements

Question #1. What would you like to see change on hwy 1?

Generally, the answers to this question pertained to safety in the downtown corridor. Turn lanes, safer pedestrian realm, more and safer crosswalks, and traffic calming were specifically stated. There were conflicting opinions of parking along Hwy 1. One individual thought it should go away completely, while another said it should be maintained.

Question #2. What and where are the safety issues in the downtown?

Parking was recognized as the biggest safety issue in the downtown. The combination of undefined pedestrian walkways, disorganized and too little parking, and low visibility has created a dangerous situation in the downtown. Weekend traffic congestion only worsens existing conditions.

Question #3. What are the typical destinations that you would walk to?

The Post Office and Surf Super were the most popular answer to this question. Other destinations mentioned were: Dolphin, Sundstrom Mall, the pharmacy, the bank, Cypress Village, Seacliff Center, Forte Gualala, video store, and ocean overlooks.

Question #4. How could the walking experience be improved?

Sidewalks, with varying treatments, were the most popular answer to this question. Some specific terms used were: "Better Walkways" and "Urban Paths." More crosswalks, better parking, overlooks, landscaping near the sidewalks, signage to Bluff Trail, and streetlights were also mentioned.

Question #5. What are the typical destinations you would bike to?

Most stakeholders stated that biking in Gualala on Hwy 1 was extremely dangerous. Northern Gualala was cited as being especially dangerous due to the lack of shoulders and the 40 mph speed limit. While no destinations within Gualala were mentioned, one recreational biker stated that he likes to ride up and down the coast, but northern Gualala is a difficult area.

Question #6. Where could the biking experience be improved?

Although many restated the dangerous nature of biking in Hwy 1, bike lanes, a bike left turn lane at Ocean Drive, and wider shoulders were methods mentioned for improving the biking experience in Gualala.

Question #7. Should there be more marked crosswalks on Hwy 1, where?

Everyone that was interviewed agreed that there should be more marked crosswalks on Hwy 1. Locations mentioned were: near Cypress Village and the Seacliff Center, at Ocean Drive and Baker, between Cypress Center and Meza Grille, between Surf Motel and Chevron, and at Center Street and Hwy 1.

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Question #8. Is the 25 mph being obeyed? If not, where is the worst spot? How should it be remedied?

Most stakeholders agreed that the 25 mph speed limit was obeyed in the central part of town because of traffic and congestion but it is disobeyed in uptown Gualala. Additional law enforcement was mentioned as a deterrent for speeding.

Question #9. Where should school and municipal bus stops be located.

While some participants were unsure where school and municipal bus stops should be located, some individuals felt that Sundstrom Mall would be a good location. Other possible locations were at the Post Office, near Baker, and at the Community Center. A Gualala transit mall was also mentioned as a possibility.

Question #10. What important natural environments or features to preserve? (plants, habitats)

The river banks were mentioned as an important natural environment that should be preserved. Invasive plant species should be removed along the banks and the fish habitats should be repaired. The beach, ocean views, and ocean access were also noted as important elements to preserve.

Question #11. Where should public open space and parks be located?

While one individual felt that Gualala's central location, near many existing state parks, meant that Gualala does not need any more public ocean space or parks, most stakeholders felt that Gualala would benefit from additional parks and public open space. Some opportunities that were mentioned were a trail system along the river banks and bluffs, an overlook at Oceansong, a community center with trail access, open space in Gualala Redwoods, and/or open space at Mill Bend.