SUBJECT:
GENERAL PLAN LAND USE THEMES

RECOMMENDED ACTION(S):

1) Provide direction on the selected Land Use Themes for the Five Focus Areas contained in the Land Use Themes Report for inclusion as the Benchmark Plan for detailed environmental analysis as part of the General Plan Update 2040.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The City Council approved a professional service contract with De Novo Planning Group in December of 2017 to prepare the General Plan 2040 Update. The first phase of the project included extensive public outreach, data collection, preparation of background studies and the formation of the General Plan Advisory Committee (“GPAC”). The second phase of the update process is currently underway and involves the identification of potential land use themes for five focus areas within the City as well as the development of policy options to support and implement the Community Vision. The identification of a land use theme for each focus area will be compiled together to create a “Benchmark Plan” that will become the basis of detailed environmental analysis to examine potential impacts and mitigation measures as well as alternatives that could be considered as part of the General Plan adoption process. The final phase of the Update process, which is expected to begin in Spring of this year, involves the preparation of an Environmental Impact Report (“EIR”) for the General Plan (including all necessary technical studies) and presentation of the General Plan Policy Document and EIR to Planning Commission and City Council for consideration and action.

BACKGROUND:

The City Council approved a professional service contract with De Novo Planning Group in December of 2017 to prepare the General Plan 2040 Update. The first phase of the project included extensive public outreach, data collection,
preparation of background studies and the formation of the General Plan Advisory Committee (“GPAC”). The second phase of the update process is currently underway and involves the identification of potential land use themes for five focus areas within the City and policy options to support and implement the Community Vision. The identification of a land use theme for each focus area will be compiled together to create a “Benchmark Plan” that will become the basis of detailed environmental analysis to examine potential impacts and mitigation measures as well as alternatives that could be considered as part of the General Plan adoption process.

DISCUSSION:

Land Use Themes Report

Recognizing that Lake Forest will grow over the planning horizon envisioned in the General Plan Update 2040, the City has the opportunity to think strategically about where and how the growth will take place. Taking a pro-active role in planning for how the City will grow and where it will grow allows the City to be in the “driver’s seat” instead of relying on external forces to drive decision-making. The Consultant Team has prepared a Land Use Themes Report to provide the City Council with a tool to consider how and where future growth can best be accommodated in Lake Forest.

The following eight principles serve as the foundation for the development of the land use themes for the general Plan Update 2040:

- Preserve, protect, and enhance the City’s existing residential neighborhoods
- Support local businesses and industries
- Strengthen the City’s image and identity
- Accommodate future growth in strategic locations near major roadways and transportation facilities
- Allow for the development of thriving mixed-use activity centers where new housing opportunities can be located near desirable goods, services, and jobs
- Expand the range of attainable housing choices to allow more people to live and work in Lake Forest
- Expand the local economy by planning for emerging industries and employment opportunities
- Create a fiscally-sustainable land use plan with balanced residential and nonresidential development.
The Land Use Themes Report (Attachments 1 and 2) focuses on evaluating five key Focus Areas in the city where community members recommended—through the Visioning Workshops, online Vision and Values Survey, General Plan Advisory Committee Meetings, and stakeholder interviews—that changes to land uses and/or development patterns should be studied. The Focus Areas include:

- El Toro Road
- Lake Forest Drive near the 5 Freeway
- Civic Center Area
- Foothill Ranch Towne Centre
- Light Industrial/Rail Corridor

The General Plan will continue to include policies to balance growth in a fiscally-sustainable way so that existing and future residents continue to enjoy the community services, amenities, and infrastructure that they value. In order to assist with consideration of possible change scenarios for each of the Focus Areas, four overarching citywide land use “Themes” have been developed and applied to each focus area. These include:

- Theme 1: Business as Usual
- Theme 2: Expanded Housing Choices
- Theme 3: Expanded Employment Choices
- Theme 4: Mixed Growth

The various land use Themes are intended to serve as a starting point for discussion of different scenarios for each Focus Area and to provide context for citywide discussion regarding potential land use changes throughout the City. Theme 1, Business as Usual, reflects the land use direction provided by the currently adopted General Plan for Lake Forest. In other words, Theme 1 illustrates where the City is headed should no changes be made to the Land Use Map. Theme 2 (Expanded Housing Choices), Theme 3 (Expanded Employment Choices), and Theme 4 (Mixed Growth) all explore how the City can strategically plan for its future by accommodating new residential and nonresidential development in key locations throughout the community (the Focus Areas) in different ways that reflect the community’s vision for the future of Lake Forest. While the emphasis of each Theme is different, all Themes accommodate both residential and nonresidential growth to varying degrees.

On March 7, 2019, the GPAC reviewed the Land Use Themes Report and recommended a land use Theme for each of the Focus Areas. In several instances, the GPAC recommend a new Theme for the City Council’s consideration. The GPAC land use Theme additions are contained in
Attachment 1 and a summary of the feedback received is contained in Attachment 3.

Benchmark Plan

In order to facilitate deliberation on the various land use Themes, staff suggests that the City Council review the information contained in the Land Use Themes Report and provide their feedback on which Theme, or other development pattern, for each Focus Area they believe best represents the community’s long-term vision. This feedback will be assembled and consolidated into a citywide map called the “Benchmark Plan” which will be a combination of the selected land use vision for each Focus Area. In other words, it is appropriate (and anticipated) that the Benchmark Plan will include components of each Theme or other development patterns as determined by the City Council; for example, “Theme 1” could be selected for the first Focus Area, but “Theme 4” selected for the second Focus Area, and so on.

Preparation of the Benchmark Plan does not reflect final policy direction or adoption of a new Land Use Map. Rather, the Benchmark Plan serves as a starting point for the project’s environmental analysis. The Benchmark Plan will be comprehensively analyzed in an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) which will evaluate and document all potential environmental impacts, identify ways to mitigate those impacts, and disclose any significant impacts associated with implementation of the Benchmark Plan that cannot be fully mitigated. The EIR includes preparation of detailed technical studies including a traffic impact analysis, Infrastructure Report, noise analysis, and air quality/greenhouse gas emissions analysis. Additionally, consultants will prepare a fiscal impact analysis of the Benchmark Plan alongside the Policy Document and EIR.

Future Public Hearing Process for the General Plan Update

Starting in late 2019, the Planning Commission and City Council will review the Proposed General Plan Policy Document and the Environmental Impact Report (based on the Benchmark Plan, as described above) at a series of public hearings, which will include time for public comment. These hearings will be noticed in accordance with all public hearing requirements, and ample time will be devoted to considering the project for adoption.

As part of the public hearing process, the City Council can make changes to the General Plan Policy Document, including the Benchmark Plan, prior to its adoption. Should the Council request significant changes to the Benchmark Plan, it is possible additional technical or environmental analysis will be necessary to ensure that all potential land use changes are adequately analyzed and considered.
The City of Lake Forest’s official Land Use Map will only be updated upon City Council adoption of the General Plan Policy Document and certification of the Environmental Impact Report. Until such time, the City’s current Land Use Map remains fully applicable.

**Recommended Review Process**

In order to facilitate deliberation on the various land use Themes, staff suggests the City Council review the information contained in the Land Use Themes Report and the GPAC recommendation and provide feedback on which Theme, or other development pattern, for each Focus Area best represents the community’s long-term vision. Staff also suggests the Council review the themes identified for the first focus area, provide direction to staff on that area and then continue with the review of the subsequent Focus Areas.

---

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

Sufficient funds are budgeted in the Fiscal Year 2018-19 Community Development Operating Budget for Phase 2 of the General Plan Update.

---

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Land Use Themes and Focus Area Summary Sheets (including GPAC Additions)
2. Land Use Themes Report
3. General Plan Advisory Committee Feedback on Land Use Themes Report

---

Initiated By: Gayle Ackerman, AICP, Director of Community Development  
Submitted By: Gayle Ackerman, AICP, Director of Community Development  
Approved By: Debra Rose, City Manager