STAFF REPORT TO THE CITY COUNCIL

DATE: Regular Meeting of March 24, 2026

TO: Mayor and Members of the City Council

VIA: Dante Hall, City Manager

SUBMITTED BY: Timothy Rood AICP, Community Development Director

SUBJECT: 2025 General Plan Annual Progress Report

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

By minute order, approve the 2025 General Plan Annual Progress Report (APR) and direct staff to submit it to the relevant agencies.

BACKGROUND:

California state law requires each city and county to adopt a general plan to express the community's development goals and policies. State law also requires submittal of an annual report on progress in implementing the General Pan.

Since 2022, the Council has received annual progress reports on the City's General Plan. These reports have highlighted the fact that many of the General Plan elements are extremely out of date and require updating to clearly reflect the City's vision and current conditions and to comply with many new state laws. On March 25, 2025, the Council discussed the proposed General Plan update process and timeline.

A competitive Request for Proposals process in the summer of 2025 resulted in the selection of a team led by Raimi + Associates (R+A) to provide comprehensive consultant services (planning, environmental, transportation, economic and civil engineering) for the update of the General Plan Land Use, Circulation, Open Space & Conservation, Noise, and Economic Development elements and preparation of an Environmental Impact Report. The Council approved the consultant contract at its October 14, 2025 meeting.

ANALYSIS:

This memorandum serves as the City of Hercules 2025 General Plan Annual Progress Report.

Hercules had two significant General Plan accomplishments in 2025. The first was the adoption on May 13, 2025 of an updated Local Hazard Mitigation Plan attachment to the Safety Element and associated minor revisions to the text of the Safety Element for consistency. The second was a successful procurement process for a consultant team to prepare the City's first comprehensive General Plan update in over 25 years. Branded as the "Horizon 2050 Hercules General Plan," this effort will update the Land Use, Economic Development, Circulation, Open Space & Conservation, and Noise Elements of the General Plan.

Staff initiated a comprehensive update of the General Plan in 2025 for several compelling reasons:

Many Elements Outdated:
State guidelines call for the General Plan as a whole to be periodically updated; and many agencies update on a 10- or 15- year cycle. The Hercules Economic Development, Land Use, Open Space & Conservation, and Noise elements are over two decades old and do not reflect current land uses, available development sites, market conditions, regional plans, noise levels, or growth forecasts, nor the dissolution of redevelopment agencies statewide in 2011.

The Open Space & Conservation Element is required to be updated by at least two recent state laws and should be updated to reflect the 2024 Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan. The Circulation Element includes very ambitious projects dating back to the redevelopment era, such as reconfiguration of the I-80 ramps, that should be reviewed as to their current feasibility and need. The Hazardous Waste Management Plan also does not reflect current conditions, given that most of the City's hazardous waste sites have already been remediated. The Noise Element is based on noise data collected over 25 years ago. Extensive text amendments have been made to some elements over the years, including through the Waterfront Now! Initiative in 2008, but the elements themselves were never revised to incorporate these amendments.

Strategic Goals:
Updating the General Plan is needed to fulfill the Council's strategic goals of developing comprehensive Land Use and Economic Development Strategies. The General Plan update process provides a good opportunity to use existing funding to engage economic development professionals as part of the team, to assess current economic trends and conditions and recommend policies and programs to guide staff and policy makers following adoption.

Housing Capacity Needed:

Updating the Land Use element is necessary to provide additional housing capacity in the next cycle, which begins in 2032. With nearly all its vacant sites already entitled for predominantly market-rate development, at present Hercules has very limited capacity for additional affordable housing.

In addition, the Caltrans corporation yard site is called out for special mid-cycle action in the Housing Element: if Caltrans and the City have not determined, by 2028, that it is feasible to relocate the Caltrans corporation yard and allow the site to be developed as affordable housing, the Housing Element requires the City to make available alternative sites to replace the lost capacity – which would almost certainly involve rezoning and General Plan amendments as well as CEQA clearance.

It is highly likely that the City will not be able to accommodate its next RHNA allocation or replace the capacity of the Caltrans site unless additional sites, such as shopping centers or other commercial sites, are rezoned to allow housing. Depending on the affordable housing progress made in the current cycle and the number of units assigned in the upcoming cycle, it is possible that existing residential areas or approved development sites may also need to be rezoned to allow greater density if existing entitlements were to lapse.

The General Plan process provides an opportunity to integrate this mandatory replacement site identification and rezoning process into the City's larger land use vision and environmental document, as well as to engage the community in the process.

CEQA Documents Outdated:

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires government agencies to consider the environmental consequences of their actions before approving plans and policies or committing to a course of action on a project. The Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the General Plan was prepared in 1995. Subsequently, EIRs were prepared for the New Town Center (2009) and Bayfront (2010) projects. Since then, the CEQA documents for General Amendments or updates have generally been Initial Study/Negative Declarations that tiered off these older EIRs.

The proposed General Plan update provides the opportunity to prepare a new EIR that reflects current laws and guidelines and provides the City with an additional increment of growth capacity for the next housing cycle.

General Plan Update Process and Timeline

The Land Use, Economic Development, Circulation, Open Space & Conservation, and Noise elements will be comprehensively updated. Other elements will be selectively updated if needed for consistency. The optional Hazardous Waste Management Plan adopted in 1990 will be reviewed for current need and relevance and either repealed or updated as needed.

A broad and inclusive public engagement process will be a key component of the General Plan update. Engagement activities may include in-person and virtual workshops, focus groups, stakeholder interviews, online surveys, and pop-ups at other events.

General Plan Advisory Committee

An ad-hoc General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC) will provide guidance by reviewing the existing plan and policies, helping identify targeted updates, and reviewing draft goals and policies. GPAC meetings will guide the development of the guiding principles, analysis of issues, and evaluation of proposed goals, policies, future development scenarios, and infrastructure improvements. Consultants will work closely with the GPAC throughout the process, using their input as a sounding board for key concepts to ensure alignment with community priorities.

The GPAC members will provide added eyes and ears in the community to provide insight and act as ambassadors to encourage broad engagement in the General Plan update process. The members will also provide unique expertise and invaluable local knowledge. The role of the Committee will include reviewing milestone documents, providing guidance on policy direction, and providing recommendations to City staff and the consultants at critical junctures. Meetings will be publicized and open to the public. The Committee will act in an advisory capacity and not have decision-making responsibilities and will serve to build support for the updated General Plan.

On October 14, 2025, the Council approved a resolution creating an ad-hoc GPAC with the following composition:

- One (1) Planning Commissioner, to be selected by the Commission
- One (1) Finance Commissioner, to be selected by the Commission
- One (1) Community & Library Services Commissioner, to be selected by the Commission
- One (1) representative of the Hercules Historical Society, to be selected by the Society's board
- Five (5) to seven (7) at-large community representatives, to be appointed by the City Council. The Council may wish to consider appointing representatives reflecting the City's diverse population, such as seniors, youth, parents, business owners, and representatives of non-profit organizations and other community groups.

The general flow of GPAC meetings will be approximately every two months over a roughly two-year period, and related to the phases of work, as listed below:

- Meeting #1: Introduction to the project and the role of the GPAC
- Meeting #2: Issues, opportunities, community priorities
- Meeting #3: Focus areas and development vision
- Meeting #4 and #5: Land use options

- Meeting #6: Preferred land use options
- Meeting #7: Land use designation changes and development standards
- Meetings #8 and #9: Policy development
- Meeting #10: Responses to comments on the Public Review Draft Elements and Draft EIR

GPAC meetings are anticipated to include the following topics:

Focus Areas and Vision: Building on the Part 1 deliverables, the Consultant Team will work closely with City staff and the GPAC (meeting #3) to draft a vision for future development and to identify "focus areas" – sites or areas that are likely to develop or redevelop by 2050.

Land Use Options: For each focus area, the Consultant Team will work with City staff to explore land use development options that are consistent with the vision but vary in the mix of use, density, and/or intensity. The land use options will be refined and confirmed in consultation with the GPAC (meetings #4 and #5), Planning Commission (meeting #2), and City Council (meeting #2).

Preferred Land Use Option: Based on the community feedback, and in consultation with City staff and the Consultant Team, R+A will prepare a recommended land use option for each focus area. The team will refine the recommendation with the GPAC (meeting #6) and Planning Commission (meeting #3) before inviting the City Council (meeting #3) to select the "preferred" land use options.

Land Use Standards and Map: Based on anticipated land use change, and building on the existing Municipal Code, R+A will draft updates to the General Plan land use designations and their associated development standards and refine them in consultation with City staff and the GPAC (meeting #7). R+A will then prepare an updated land use map based on the preferred land use options and designations. Along with the policy direction confirmed in Part 3, the land use map will be the starting point for the EIR (Task 7).

Engagement Round 3: Using community-friendly summaries of changes in policy direction, community feedback on the policy frameworks will be invited through GPAC meeting #8, Survey #3, Pop-ups #3, Workshop #3, and focused stakeholder meetings. Based on a review of community feedback with City staff, recommendations for policy direction will then be presented to the GPAC (meeting #9) and Planning Commission (meeting #4) before requesting that the City Council confirm the policy direction for each of the General Plan elements being updated (meeting #4).

Engagement Round 4: Using community-friendly summaries of changes made since the community last reviewed land use options and draft policies, community feedback on the Public Draft Elements and Draft EIR will be invited through Online Survey #4, Workshop

#4, and focused stakeholder meetings. Based on a review of community feedback with City staff, recommendations for refinements to the elements will then be presented to the GPAC *(*meeting #10) before proceeding with adoption hearings for the updated elements.

Following adoption of the updated General Plan, anticipated for early in 2028, the GPAC will be dissolved.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact to this item.

ATTACHMENTS:

NONE