

**COMMUNITY BASELINE ASSESSMENT
SUMMARY OF MAJOR ISSUES**

Robert G. Tefft
Chairman, General Plan Advisory Committee

1. Overall Balance and Appearance of Bias

During the recent CityVoice survey, six percent of callers spontaneously expressed the belief that the City of Morro Bay currently places the interests of tourists above that of residents. Regardless of whether this impression is accurate, the Community Baseline Assessment (CBA), in its current draft form, is likely to inflame such sentiment. With even the most cursory examination of the document, it is apparent that chapters dealing with economic issues and tourism are far more detailed than those covering community character and compatibility, preservation of the natural environment, and the overall "livability" of our community. In particular, Chapter 5: Economic Conditions and Market Trends contains a very dense presentation of data, tables, and analysis which is strikingly different from that found in other chapters.

The appearance of special concentration on economic conditions is especially troubling in view of the fact that economics are not a required element of either a general plan or a coastal land use plan. Even if the General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC) should elect to add an optional element dealing with economics, the CBA cannot place greater emphasis on this topic than on other subject matter. The General Plan Guidelines provided by the California Office of Planning and Research states explicitly (page 98) that

"All elements of the general plan have equal legal status. No one element takes precedence over any other."

To ensure that our process complies with State guidelines, to protect the legitimacy of our assessment, and to avoid any appearance that the GP/LCP planning process is biased toward any particular segment of the community, the GPAC should insist that the Community Baseline Assessment provide, throughout the document, the same level of detail as found in Chapter 5.

2. Assessment of Community Character

Community Character as a Priority of Morro Bay Citizens

The preservation of Morro Bay's friendly, small town character, valued relationship with nature and fishing village identity have consistently been the most expressed priorities of City residents. This public consensus dates back at least as far as the Destination2000 visioning process in 1994 and continued to be expressed in the 2005 Vision2020 report. In the recent CityVoice survey, 61% of respondents mentioned the preservation of community character as a major component of their vision for the future of the City. Of respondents who spoke to the issue of community character, 52% advocated maintaining Morro Bay's "unique", "quaint", "small town", or "hometown" character. An additional 32% of CityVoice calls that spoke to community character mentioned protecting the natural environment of habitat as a priority, while 11% spoke to maintaining the town's identity as a "fishing village" or "beach town".

A topic closely related to the preservation of community character is that of growth. In the CityVoice survey, 32% of callers expressed support for “slow” or “limited” growth, and an additional 2% advocated “sustainable” growth. No respondents indicated that the City should encourage population growth.

Community Baseline Assessment Treatment of Community Character

- The CBA does not contain a chapter devoted to the issue of community character. This topic, instead, is relegated to eleven pages at the end of Chapter 7. Oddly enough, thirteen pages of this same chapter are devoted to a detailed analysis of the tourism industry in Morro Bay.
- The discussion devoted within the CBA to the nine designated “community character areas” is largely descriptive. No effort is made to delineate the essential features and qualities which define the residential and commercial identity of each area or to identify trends that may threaten community character. The lack of a detailed assessment of community character stands in especially stark contrast to the CBA’s voluminous, detailed, and quantitative analyses of economic issues. In its current state, the CBA does not provide an adequate informational foundation for constructing General Plan policies that will fulfill the public mandate to protect Morro Bay’s small town feel.

Suggested Changes

- Considering the high degree of importance placed by Morro Bay residents on maintaining community character, the CBA should devote an entire, separate chapter to this topic. This chapter should be placed immediately after the introduction, in order to emphasize its importance and set the tone for the remainder of the document.
- With respect to each of the designated “community character areas”, the CBA should:
 - Define those qualities which contribute to the feel of a “small town” or “fishing village” environment, including consideration of:
 - Type, size, bulk, scale, style, density, and placement on lot of residential structures
 - Predominant streetscape (width, traffic, walkability, on-street parking, presence or absence of sidewalks)
 - Landscaping and natural vegetation
 - Presence of open space and its relationship to developed properties
 - Nature, size, ownership (local vs. chain), and amount of commercial development and relationship between commercial and residential areas
 - Impacts of tourism on the community character area
 - Identify social, regulatory, economic and other factors which act to support and preserve the “small town” or “fishing village” character of the area
 - Identify social, regulatory, economic and other trends which may threaten the “small town” or “fishing village” character of the area.

3. Natural Environment

The Natural Environment as a Priority of Morro Bay Citizens

The lifestyle of Morro Bay is intimately connected with the natural environment. The City’s residents engage in walking, hiking, biking, surfing, kayaking and many other activities that are dependent on the bay, ocean, and open spaces surrounding the City. In the recent CityVoice survey, protection of the natural environment and of habitat was the third most frequently mentioned priority.

Community Baseline Assessment Consideration of Natural Environment

- Within the current CBA, the topic of natural environment is dealt with primarily in chapter 4 (paleontology and mineral resources) and in chapter 9 (habitat). The CBA does not appear to contain any consideration of the City's natural landforms (e.g., hills, granite outcroppings) as visual or environmental assets.
- The discussions devoted by the CBA to the City's paleontology and natural habitats largely takes the form of a very general discussion of various geologic layers and habitat types, many of which do not even occur within the City. These sections read much like textbooks or Wikipedia entries. Significantly, the CBA presents essentially no direct observations or studies of actual, physical habitats in Morro Bay, nor any assessment of the state of the environment within the city. Further, no analysis is provided with regard to potential threats to the City's natural environment, such as pine pitch canker, eucalyptus longhorn borer, myoporum thrip, loss of eelgrass, increased nitrate levels and reduced oxygen levels in Morro Bay, or bay silt accumulation.

Suggested Changes

- Sections of the CBA dealing with paleontology and habitat should be revised to define and characterize specifically those paleontological assets and habitats that exist in Morro Bay. These sections should describe what plant and animal species actually *are* here in the City, not what *could be* or *might be* found. In addition, the health of each habitat should be assessed and any current trends or changes should be noted. Potential threats to the natural environment should be identified, together with assets available to counter such threats.
- Sections should be added to the CBA dealing with Morro Bay's natural landforms and with the bay itself, as features of the natural environment.

4. Validation of Statistics

Erroneous Conclusions Based On Improper Data Analysis

Review of the Draft CBA has revealed a number of instances in which erroneous conclusions have been drawn due to the inaccurate or inappropriate use of numerical data. The three types of error found were:

- Inaccurate conclusion due to inaccurate or non-comparable data
- Inaccurate conclusions due to inadequate analysis of data – Asserting that a "change" in data has meaning when, in fact, the variation is due to random fluctuation is a common example.
- Inaccurate conclusions drawn from an analysis that requires untenable assumptions

Examples of three such errors are shown in the table below:

CBA Page No.	Erroneous Conclusion	Source of Error
5-1	That the population of Morro Bay is growing at a rate of 0.8% per year, faster than the State as a whole	Population data from 2010 and from 2015 taken from two different, non-compatible sources
5-11	That, from 2006 to 2013, the number of jobs in Morro Bay declined by 2% per year	Failure to analyze "spread" of data. Statistical analysis reveals that the number of jobs in 2013 is statistically identical to 2006 and that there is no downward trend.
5-24 and 5-25	That the Morro Bay market area can support an additional 552,489 sq. ft. of retail space	Conclusion requires an untenable assumption - that Morro Bay can support and would accept at least two "big box" stores, such as Costco or Walmart

Suggested Changes

- Data quoted within the CBA should be taken only from primary sources or should be verified with primary sources.
- Any purported change in a value should be verified by determining the confidence interval for the data set, to ensure that the "change" is not merely due to chance and any purported trend should be verified by calculating the correlation coefficient.
- Before a conclusion is drawn from any analysis of data, the assumptions inherent in the analysis should be carefully examined to ensure that they are reasonable.

5. Economic Conditions

Community Baseline Assessment Consideration of Economic Issues

The Draft CBA presents extensive data and analysis of economic conditions relevant to the general business community and retail industry (Chapter 5) and to the tourism industry (pages 7-5 through 7-18). It does not, however, address some of the major economic issues of concern to the residents of the City.

Suggested Changes

- Add to Chapter 5 sections dealing with:
 - Housing affordability and availability
 - Homelessness
 - An assessment of what constitutes a "living wage" in Morro Bay and an analysis of wage growth vs. inflation
 - An assessment of the degree to which Morro Bay residents are provided with such employment-related benefits as medical, dental, and eye-care benefits, profit-sharing, and an employer-sponsored retirement plan.

6. Organization of the Community Baseline Assessment

The organization of the Draft CBA, in its current form, seems somewhat chaotic. Chapters dealing with community assets are interspersed, seemingly at random, with chapters on hazards and challenges. Discussions on shoreline issues are fragmented and interspersed with consideration of landside concerns. Overall, there seems to be no logical flow in the way

that topics are ordered. The apparent randomness with which topics are considered detracts significantly from the readability and ease of use of the CBA.

Suggested Changes

- Consider organizing chapters as follows

Chapter 1: Introduction

Section I: Community Assets

Chapter 2: Community Character and Cultural Resources

Chapter 3: Natural Resources

Paleontologic Resources

Mineral Resources

Geologic Resources

Biologic Resources and Landside Habitats

Bay Habitats

Chapter 4: Parks, Recreation, and Open Space

Chapter 5: Economic Conditions and Market Trends (*to include information on the tourism industry from present Chapter 7*)

Chapter 6: Transportation and Mobility

Chapter 7: Infrastructure and Public Services

Section II: Hazards and Challenges

Chapter 8: Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Chapter 9: Sea Level Rise (*now titled "Coastal Resources and Resilience"*)

Chapter 10: Shoreline Management and Protection

Chapter 11: Water and Water Quality

Chapter 12: Noise

Chapter 12: Other Natural and Environmental Hazards

Section III: References

Section IV: Appendices

7. Priority Findings

The Priority Findings listed at the end of each chapter of the Draft CBA are, in many cases, much too long and diffuse. Frequently, the Priority Finding includes an unnecessary recap of data or arguments previously discussed within the body of the chapter. The inclusion of this unnecessary verbiage tends, at times to obscure the actual intent of the finding and its relevance to the update of the GP/LCP.

Suggested Changes

- Priority Findings should be succinct and to the point – no more than two or three sentences.
- Following the statement of any Priority Finding, the CBA should indicate the GP/LCP chapters to which the finding is applicable and the specific implications of such finding for the GP/LCP update process.