

General Plan 101

General Plan 101 presentation (updated March 2012) [[download PDF](#)] [[download PPT](#) (6 MB)]

The general plan is the principal long-range policy and planning document guiding the development, conservation, and enhancement of California cities and counties. It is a comprehensive collection of goals and policies related to a multitude of aspects of community life. State law requires every city and county to adopt a general plan to represent the jurisdiction's view of its future.

Why update the general plan?

Over time the needs and values of the community can change, and the general plan should reflect the community's vision for its future. To adjust to these dynamics and to comply with state law, general plans are reviewed and revised periodically. The City's current general plan was last adopted in May 1990, with amendments occurring at various points, including a major amendment in 2000. It should be noted that the current general plan is titled the "Los Alamitos 2010 General Plan," and that the 2010 date refers to the planning horizon when the plan was prepared in 1990 and substantially amended in 2000. The update taking place now will use a similar 15-25 year planning horizon, looking out into the year 2025 or even 2035.

Since late 2009 the City has been considering updating its general plan to strengthen its economic position, reaffirm its policy foundation and vision, and comprehensively evaluate several issues of citywide importance. These issues include the inclusion of Rossmoor into the City's sphere of influence, a plan for the City's commercial corridors and downtown, the recent adoption of the Medical Center Specific Plan, and the need to explore economic development opportunities in a built-out environment. As a separate but related effort, the City would also like to understand the potential long-term (20+ years from now) implications of base reuse on the citywide infrastructure system.

What goes in the general plan?

The general plan is both geographically and topically comprehensive. The general plan covers the territory within the boundaries of the City and areas outside of its boundaries that relate to its planning activities, i.e., the sphere of influence. The general plan addresses a wide variety of issues that characterize the City, and state law requires seven internally consistent elements (listed below in the order used by the current general plan).

MANDATORY ELEMENTS

Land Use

The land use element describes objectives, policies, and programs for areas within a jurisdiction's boundaries in both narrative and graphic terms and establishes development criteria and standards. The land use element can address issues such as the compatibility of different uses; impact of utility, flood control, and Joint Task Force Base operations; and community

character. Land use categories are used to depict the general distribution, location, and extent of public and private uses of land.

Conservation

The primary focus of the conservation element is natural resources. The element addresses the identification, conservation, development, and use of resources such as air, water, energy, and vegetation. The element may also contain policies regarding the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, which will be referenced in the environmental impact report (EIR) in compliance with state law.

Safety

The safety element must identify seismic, geologic, flood, and fire hazards, and establish policies to protect the community from personal and property loss. Issues related to crime and its impact on quality of life can also be addressed in this element.

Open Space

(titled Open Space and Recreation in the current general plan)

The open space element is intended to provide a plan for the long-term preservation of open space. It specifies plans and measures for preserving open space and providing recreational areas and facilities to improve public health, maintain a high quality of life, and meet other important community goals.

Circulation

(titled Circulation and Transportation in the current general plan)

The circulation element deals with the movement of people, goods, and infrastructure systems in and through the City. The element addresses issues such as existing and proposed roadways, truck routes, transit service, bicycle and pedestrian pathways/trails, and local public utilities and facilities. New state planning legislation (Assembly Bill 1358, 2008) requires that the circulation element plan for a balanced and multimodal transportation network, meaning the City's circulation system must consider not only the needs of cars and trucks, but also the needs of pedestrians, bicyclists, and the disabled.

Noise

The noise element identifies and analyzes projected noise conditions in the community and must include measures to abate or mitigate potentially unsafe noise levels, including mobile sources, like automobiles on a freeway, and stationary sources, such as industrial operations. The noise element also considers the implications of activity undertaken at the Joint Forces Training Base.

Housing

The housing element analyzes housing needs for all income groups and demonstrates how to meet existing and future housing needs. State law requires that this element be revised every five to eight years (depending upon the release of regional housing figures). The City's housing element was recently updated and adopted in December 2009 and will not be updated during this comprehensive update of the general plan.

ADDITIONAL ELEMENTS

State law provides local jurisdictions the flexibility to determine the structure of their general plans and address key issues not included in the seven mandatory elements. Many general plans include optional elements that establish policy direction for locally relevant issues. The City of Los Alamitos General Plan contains two additional elements: an economic development element that is an optional element, and a growth management element that is required in accordance with Measure M/M2 provisions.

Economic Development

The economic development element is a guide for the City of Los Alamitos to follow to expand, maintain, and enhance the local economy that provides jobs, attracts and retains a balance of business types, and provides sufficient revenue to local government.

Growth Management

On November 6, 1990, Orange County voters approved Measure M, a half-cent retail transaction and use tax to be used for transportation improvements over the next 20 years. A growth management plan was a requirement to participate in these improvements. The original Measure M expired in 2011, but Measure M2, approved by voters in 2006, established another 30 years of transportation projects. The growth management element establishes policies that identify traffic levels of service, commit the City to implement a development monitoring program, and commit the City to implement a development phasing program.

How do the elements work together?

All elements (mandatory and optional) have equal legal status so no element has legal supremacy over another. State law requires the elements of a general plan to be internally consistent, meaning the policies within the elements cannot conflict with one another. All goals, objectives, policies, and implementation measures must be consistent. For example, if a land use element identifies an increase in development potential, then the circulation element must also address this anticipated change.

Who will use the general plan?

The City Council and Planning Commission use the goals and policies of the general plan as a basis upon which to make both long-term and short-term decisions, determine long-term objectives, generate and evaluate budgets, plan capital improvements, and prioritize tasks.

The City staff throughout all of its departments will also reference the general plan when considering development applications, capital improvements, service programming, and departmental budgeting.

Individual residents, existing and prospective business owners, and the development community can also seek guidance for preserving and enhancing the community through the general plan.

Finally, other local and regional agencies will refer to the general plan when projecting future needs and services. The general plan is truly the City's collective guide to the future.

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