

# Chapter 1

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>I. WHAT IS THE GENERAL PLAN?</b> .....	<b>2</b>
General Plan Defining Qualities .....	2
General Plan Guiding Principles .....	2
History of the Los Angeles County General Plan .....	3
Public Participation .....	4
<b>II. GENERAL PLAN FORMAT</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>III. THE ROLE OF THE GENERAL PLAN</b> .....	<b>5</b>
Regional Agencies .....	5
Incorporated Cities .....	5
Unincorporated Communities .....	6
<b>IV. COMMUNITY PRIORITIES</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>V. IMPLEMENTING THE GENERAL PLAN</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>VI. LOS ANGELES COUNTY GENERAL PLAN: <i>PLANNING TOMORROW'S GREAT PLACES</i></b> .....	<b>8</b>
Sustainability .....	8



# INTRODUCTION

## I. WHAT IS THE GENERAL PLAN?

The Los Angeles County General Plan is the guide for growth and development in the unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County. California law requires each city and county to adopt a general plan “for the physical development of the county or city, and any land outside its boundaries which bears relation to its planning” (Government Code Section 65300). The General Plan is designed to guide the long-term physical development and conservation of the County’s land and environment through a framework of goals, policies, and implementation programs. The General Plan also provides a foundation for more detailed plans and implementation programs to be conducted, such as area or community plans, zoning ordinances, and specific plans.

Los Angeles County continues to grow at a tremendous pace. Careful planning and stewardship by County officials is needed to maintain the physical and natural amenities that make Los Angeles County a desirable place to live. Long-range planning also allows the County to responsibly manage future development, which is necessitated by continued population and economic growth. The General Plan is the County’s blueprint for guiding decision-making and meeting these diverse and contrasting needs.

### General Plan Defining Qualities

The Los Angeles County General Plan adheres to the following qualities as established by the State Office of Planning and Research guidelines:



View the General Plan Document online at: <http://planning.lacounty.gov/generalplan>

### General in Nature

The General Plan reflects goals that are general in nature and can apply to all areas of the unincorporated County. Simultaneously, the General Plan allows the policy needs of the diverse communities in the County to be addressed through community plans, area plans, specific plans, policy initiatives, and regulatory implementation mechanisms.

### Comprehensive in Scope

The General Plan addresses all aspects of physical development in the County, including land use development and growth, the provision of community services and affordable housing, and economic development activities that will sustain and promote the quality of life in the County.

### Consistency

The General Plan is a balanced and consistent document. Goals and policies within the General Plan have been developed to eliminate conflicts between one another (internal consistency) or with other agencies’ plans in the County.

### Short-term Policies Supporting Long-term Goals

The General Plan establishes a long-term blueprint for the County utilizing the most current information on the state of the County’s land use, economic, and social conditions. It is a forward-thinking document that uses shorter-term policies and implementation measures to strategically reach long-term goals.

### General Plan Guiding Principles

The Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning (DRP) has spent years gathering data and meeting with residents, business people, and County employees to assemble information to shape the General Plan. From this process, a progressive list of Guiding Principles was

“ The enormous increase in scale of the metropolitan region today requires an entirely new scale of image if the region is to hold together as an entity

–Edmund Bacon

developed to direct the creation of the General Plan. These Guiding Principles helped shape the General Plan’s goals, policies, and implementation programs.

#### The Guiding Principles for the General Plan are:

- **Dynamic:** The General Plan is designed to be a visually engaging and exciting document that examines the existing social, physical, and economic conditions in the County and provides a forward-looking plan for the future.
- **Flexible:** The General Plan is adaptable to the fast-changing social, physical and economic environments of the County. To ensure continued relevance, the General Plan goals and policies will be re-evaluated every five (5) years or sooner if needed. Between these milestone updates, the General Plan will be amended as necessary (a maximum of four times per year in accordance with State law) to conform to changing laws, requirements, and the diverse needs of our communities.
- **Accountable:** The General Plan’s goals and policies are clearly articulated and formatted in order to facilitate an accountable General Plan that can be easily measured and evaluated.
- **Inspirational:** The General Plan is presented in a way that is intended to inspire and raise the aspirations of all residents, the business community, and County agencies to make the County an even better place to live and work.

- **Informative:** The General Plan is an educational, data-driven document designed to inform and enlighten the community about existing conditions and future possibilities for change.
- **Progressive:** The General Plan is a future-oriented, forward-thinking document, incorporating the newest and best practices related to technology, innovative development practices, energy conservation, environmental stewardship, and economic sustainability.

#### History of the Los Angeles County General Plan

The first attempts at formalizing a development plan for the unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County began in 1970 with the creation of the Environmental Development Guide. Three years later in 1973, County officials adopted the first General Plan for Los Angeles County, and in 1980, the General Plan was revised and adopted by the County Board of Supervisors.

Since that time, the unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County have undergone a variety of physical, demographic, and economic changes that present planners and County officials with a unique set of challenges and opportunities. The General Plan sets goals and policies that are designed to address immediate issues and concerns while maintaining an awareness of the long-term implications and consequences of these proposed actions. The General Plan incorporates an analysis of the current conditions in the



Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, 2008



Public Participation

County and provides planning policies that will affect long-term planning decisions. Although the General Plan envisions goals and policies with a 20-year horizon, the Department of Regional Planning will update the General Plan on a continual basis to reflect the dynamic nature of the ongoing development in the unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County.

### Public Participation

Community participation was critical in the development of the General Plan. The Department of Regional Planning conducted an extensive series of community workshops and environmental impact report (EIR) scoping meetings throughout the County to engage residents in the process of shaping the General Plan. Residents and planners worked together to collaboratively develop ideas for the goals and policies of the General Plan. The result of these visioning workshops was a draft of the General Plan goals and policies called *Shaping the Future 2025*, which was released for public review in 2004.

Further input for the development of the General Plan continued through 2004 to 2006 with a series of workshops and inter-departmental presentations. In the summer of 2007, the Draft Preliminary General Plan was released for public review and staff again conducted public outreach meetings to garner input into the planning process. Throughout the entire development process, the Department of Regional Planning kept community stakeholders apprised of the

status of the General Plan through the Department's General Plan Update Program website, as well as through meetings and presentations, as requested.

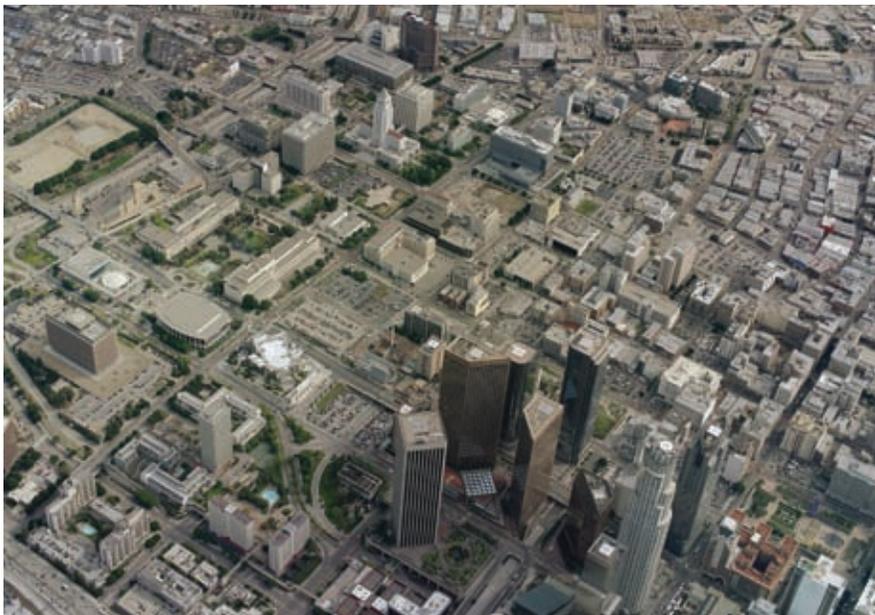
## II. GENERAL PLAN FORMAT

The California Government Code Section 65302 requires that all general plans contain and address seven elements: land use, transportation, housing, conservation, open space, noise, and safety. The Government Code also provides flexibility in the format and allows jurisdictions to combine elements or to cover new topics. The Los Angeles County General Plan contains all seven required elements, with the Conservation and Open Space elements being combined. The Housing Element is being updated as a separate document. The Los Angeles County General Plan also provides three additional Elements: Air Resources, Public Services and Facilities, and Economic Development. The General Plan is organized as follows:

- **Chapter 1:** Introduction
- **Chapter 2:** Background
- **Chapter 3:** Land Use Element
- **Chapter 4:** Mobility Element
- **Chapter 5:** Air Resources Element
- **Chapter 6:** Conservation and Open Space Element
- **Chapter 7:** Noise Element
- **Chapter 8:** Safety Element
- **Chapter 9:** Public Services and Facilities Element
- **Chapter 10:** Economic Development Element

The following five companion documents comprise the Los Angeles County General Plan:

- **General Plan:** Contains a background discussion that frames how the General Plan was created, and the goals, policies, and implementation programs for each of the Elements.
- **Appendix I:** Area and Community Plan Land Use Policy Maps.
- **Appendix II:** Land Use Plan Maps for Unincorporated Areas without a Local Plan.
- **Technical Appendix:** Contains information and studies that were generated in creating the General Plan.



Downtown Los Angeles - Source: Pictometry International Corp

- **Environmental Impact Report (EIR):** Meets the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The Regional Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors use the EIR to understand the potential environmental implications associated with implementation of the General Plan.

### III. THE ROLE OF THE GENERAL PLAN

The Department of Regional Planning provides long-range planning that guides land use decisions and development patterns in the unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County. The General Plan is the primary document that the Department utilizes in making land use and service development recommendations. In addition, the General Plan is a tool that facilitates inter-agency and inter-jurisdictional collaboration to meet agreed upon countywide land use and service-related goals. It provides valuable information to regional agencies, incorporated cities, and individual communities in unincorporated areas on the development patterns in the County for the next 20 years so that they can plan their service needs accordingly and effectively.

#### Regional Agencies

In Los Angeles County, special district agencies and regional agencies make many decisions related to the provision and maintenance of public services. For example, the County has numerous water districts, school districts, and sanitation

district providers. All regional agencies with jurisdictional activities in the County are responsible for coordinating with the County government on policies and programs that affect the region, as their policies often affect the County’s urban and rural form of development. As such, the General Plan is a vehicle for providing general policy guidance to all of the agencies, districts, and governments that operate within the County’s sphere of influence. Examples of the major regional agencies the County works with include the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro), the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), and the Metropolitan Water District (MWD).

#### Incorporated Cities

There are 88 cities in Los Angeles County, all of which have their own General Plans that govern their individual jurisdictions. While the Department of Regional Planning is responsible for the land use planning in unincorporated areas of the County, many other County agencies provide services to the unincorporated areas and many or all of the 88 incorporated cities. The General Plan primarily focuses on the unincorporated areas, which comprise nearly 65% of the 4,083 square miles of Los Angeles County. However, the General Plan does address regional issues that are countywide as appropriate, such as flood management or

SCAG’s Regional Comprehensive Plan (RCP) is a holistic, strategic plan for defining and addressing Southern California’s inter-related housing, traffic, water, air quality, and other regional challenges. In developing the RCP, SCAG relied on a set of Guiding Principles for sustaining a livable future that closely matched goals of the County’s General Plan, such as:

- Improve mobility for all residents;
- Foster livability in all communities;
- Enable prosperity for all people; and,
- Promote sustainability for future generations.



Port of Los Angeles and Long Beach

fire hazards. The responsibilities and focus of countywide issues versus those specific to the unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County are clearly identified throughout the General Plan.

### Unincorporated Communities

The General Plan Elements are structured to address issues that transcend local community interests and are of countywide importance. However, in California, more local-level planning is carried out through area and community plans. Community plans are a part of the General Plan but focus on a particular region or community within unincorporated Los Angeles County. A community plan is adopted by resolution as an amendment to the General Plan (in the manner set out in §65350, et seq). It refines the policies of the General Plan as they apply to a smaller geographic area and is implemented by ordinances and other discretionary actions, such as zoning. A community plan must be internally consistent with the General Plan of which it is a part, meaning all principles, goals, objectives, policies, and plan proposals set forth in an area or community plan must work within the overall context and framework of the General Plan. Each community plan need not address all of the issues required by the General Plan when the overall General Plan satisfies these requirements. However, a community plan may provide greater detail for policies affecting development in a defined area. The various types of community level planning are more fully addressed in the Land Use Element.

## IV. COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

The goals and policies of the General Plan reflect the broadly expressed needs, concerns, and aspirations of County residents. Community participation and citizen feedback have been crucial components in the creation of the General Plan. Through public outreach activities, County residents identified the following ten (10) issues they felt were important topics to be addressed in the General Plan:

### Promote a Strong and Diversified Economy

- Provide a wide range of investment opportunities and job choices so that the County is less vulnerable to the harmful consequences of recessions.
- Provide an adequate supply of land suitable for industry and commerce to ensure a diversified and strong economy.
- Increase workforce training efforts to better prepare the job force for the careers of the future.

### Promote Fiscal, Environmental, Social and Logistical Sustainability

- Meet the needs of the current generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.
- Encourage practices that maximize user benefit, minimize waste and redundancy, and consistently promote the revitalization, restoration, and enhancement of the built, natural, and social environments.



Urban Infill Development and Affordable Housing

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- Promote the conservation of energy and other valuable natural resources as a basic principle in all planning activities.

**Promote Revitalization of Urban Areas**

- Direct development opportunities to areas most in need of economic investment.
- Emphasize code enforcement as a means to spur urban redevelopment in economically depressed urban areas.

**Provide Affordable Housing**

- Build and maintain a diversity of decent housing at an affordable price.

**Provide for Adequate Community Services and Facilities**

- Maintain roadways and regulate land uses.
- Provide community services and facilities like schools, parks, and libraries that play a significant role in the enrichment of the public consciousness.
- Develop a sense of place for the many neighborhoods within the County.
- Ensure proficient emergency service and infrastructure coverage, like sewer and wastewater systems, that are necessary for the health and safety of residents and visitors.
- Increase community services like daycare and job training centers.

**Promote Multimodal Transportation Alternatives and an Efficient Transportation System**

- Maintain and maximize the efficiency of the County highway and road network system by integrating and promoting alternative forms of transportation such as rail, bus, and biking.
- Improve the freight and highway system for the safe and efficient movement of goods.

**Improve Air Quality**

- Address the regional issue of air quality, which is important in maintaining a high quality of life for County residents.

**Conserve Water and Protect its Quality**

- Develop and promote strong conservation efforts and preserve land for the natural recharge of groundwater, which is essential to ensure an ongoing adequate supply of quality water to the County.

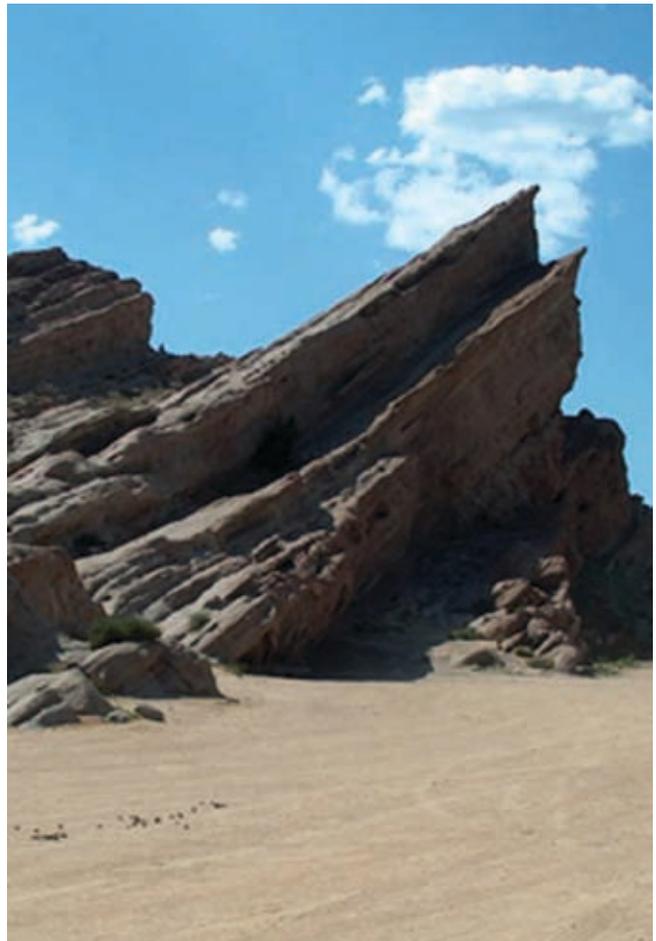
- Promote the development of a countywide recycled water system.

**Protect the Natural Environment, Natural Resources, and Conserve Open Space**

- Maintain and protect natural resources, such as clean air and water, wildlife habitat areas, mineral resource areas, agricultural land, national forest land, parks and open space areas, and recreational areas.
- Preserve open space areas that provide valuable recreational, scenic and biological resources for County residents.
- Acquire open space and limit development in rural areas.

**Protect Against Natural and Manmade Hazards**

- Create programs to provide current and improved hazard-related information, and strengthen development review procedures and standards.



Vasquez Rocks, Open Space



Metro Rail Gold Line

## V. IMPLEMENTING THE GENERAL PLAN

The General Plan is primarily designed to assist decision-makers and the general public with land use planning and infrastructure/service management. It also provides guidance for policy and program development throughout the County, which is planned for and implemented by a variety of departments, agencies, commissions, and community groups. The General Plan also puts forth several strategies and action items for the implementation of its goals and policies.

While the General Plan was written by the Department of Regional Planning, the implementation of the Plan is the responsibility of the entire County, its many departments, and its agencies. In Los Angeles County, the General Plan is especially useful to the Board of Supervisors and the Regional Planning Commission, both of whom are charged with implementing this adopted policy document.

While writing the General Plan's Implementation Actions, County staff consulted with various County agencies to produce implementation measures that maximize collaboration

and facilitate short-term, strategic actions to help realize the long-range intent of the General Plan. The implementation actions are listed after their relevant set of goals and policies in the last section of each Element. A comprehensive list and timeline of all General Plan implementation action can be found in Appendix I.

## VI. LOS ANGELES COUNTY GENERAL PLAN: PLANNING TOMORROW'S GREAT PLACES

The updated Los Angeles County General Plan arrives at an opportune time. The landscape for how planning and development activities take place in the County is undergoing profound changes. Extreme environmental conditions, such as water shortages and wildfires, require that County officials develop and build in ways that differ from past practices, promote environmental sustainability, and maximize public safety. The high cost of housing and development, and the absence of available land have also affected planning practices in the County, as mixed use development, infill development and transit corridor planning replace sprawling growth patterns.

### Sustainability

The primary theme of the County General Plan, and the ultimate goal of all of its policy actions, is to achieve sustainability. Sustainability is a simple concept that involves the utilization of planning practices that ensure people's needs



Downtown Los Angeles

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Renewable Energy and Conservation

in the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their economic, social, and environmental needs. The County is committed to utilizing and promoting land use policies that achieve sustainability, and to implementing practices that promote healthy, livable, and sustainable communities.

The General Plan addresses sustainability on a regional level by increasing its attention to environmental protection and by making long-range changes to the regulations that govern planning and development activities. For example, the Department of Regional Planning is working closely with staff from the Department of Public Works to implement operational practices to the County Code that require low-impact development standards that manage stormwater runoff, and building code changes that use green-building techniques to conserve water and energy.

Furthermore, the General Plan also promotes sustainability at the community and neighborhood level. The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) for Neighborhood Development Rating System was created by the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) to develop a national set of standards for neighborhood development and design that is based on smart growth principles, environmental sustainability, and the building of healthy and livable communities. These standards were created to accomplish a set of goals that are similar to those in the County's General Plan: revitalize urban areas, reduce land consumption,

reduce automobile dependence, promote pedestrian safety and accessibility, improve air quality, decrease stormwater runoff, and build more livable, sustainable communities for people of all income levels. Adhering to these standards, the Los Angeles County General Plan provides policies to achieve all of these goals and meet the sustainability benchmarks as outlined by the LEED Neighborhood Development Rating System.

The County recognizes that achieving countywide sustainability will involve shifts in policy that will be initiated and implemented over many years. The Los Angeles County General Plan will also be just one instrument in the County's endeavors to achieve sustainability. But as the guiding policy document for land use in the County, the Los Angeles County General Plan: *Planning Tomorrow's Great Places* will lead the way for the sustainable planning and development actions of the future.



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