



# FOREWORD

## I. INTRODUCTION

For more than a century, Los Angeles County has been a place where people come to realize the California dream. From the cool breezes along the Pacific Ocean to the hot winds of the Mojave Desert, from the once-volatile banks of the Los Angeles River to the unstable foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains, Los Angeles County's varied settings have offered both migrants and natives a wide range of choices about where and how to live. Today, Los Angeles is one of the great metropolises of the world. Over 10 million people live in Los Angeles County, and while 9 million people reside in one of the 88 incorporated cities, another 1 million residents live in the unincorporated communities of the County, making it effectively the third largest city in the state behind Los Angeles and San Diego.

For almost all of those hundred-plus years, the California dream has been realized in Los Angeles County primarily through the creation of new human settlements out of raw land. Whether the dream consisted of a small cottage at the beach or a bungalow in the flats of southern Los Angeles County or a chicken farm in one of the inland valleys, the basis of dream has been the subdivision of land and the creation of thousands of single-family lots to accommodate the cottages and the bungalows and the farms.

Although the chicken farms are mostly gone, agriculture still exists in some northern parts of the county. Many of the bungalows and cottages remain, and often form the basis of thriving neighborhoods – some already outstanding, some on the rebound. And although a fair amount of open land remains, the majority of it is environmentally sensitive – it's steep land, or it's a wetland, or it's an important

wildlife habitat or watershed, or it's scenic or fire-prone, or it's worth preserving because it is the last remaining rural spaces in Los Angeles County.

So the California dream in Los Angeles County looks very different today. The County is a crowded and expensive place, and increasingly one whose fragility has become more obvious with the incidence of wildfires, water shortages, and aging infrastructure. And no longer does the California dream in Los Angeles County revolve around subdividing land. Instead, the 21st Century version revolves around preserving, strengthening, and recognizing that many of those great places are located inside the developed communities the County has already helped to shape.

### Los Angeles County's Great Places – An Historical Perspective

The Los Angeles County Regional Planning Commission plays a unique and important role in the history of American city planning. Regional planning originated in Los Angeles County in 1922 with the establishment of the Regional Planning Commission, the oldest planning body in the country. For more than 80 years, the Los Angeles County Regional Planning Commission and the general plans it has produced contained elegant ideas about city planning and helped to shape the unusual and flexible nature of Los Angeles today.

By 1930 Los Angeles had become a decentralized, yet orderly, metropolis – thanks in large part to the efforts of the Regional Planning Commission. Los Angeles County was built on the premise that orderly dispersion of homes and businesses contributes to the efficiency and aesthetics of the modern city. Prior to the adoption of formal comprehensive zoning and development regulations, the piecemeal regulation of tracts for residential development provided

for the proliferation of the suburban ideal. Dispersion of neighborhoods and places of commerce—but within a series of interconnected road and transit ways--was seen as an attractive alternative to the perceived disadvantages of urban life found in the crowded great cities of the East Coast and the Midwest. In fact, one of the Regional Planning Commission's first projects was undertaking plans for the region's first major highways. Routes were chosen based on the principle that city and county roadways should provide for the expansion of suburban development and efficient movement of goods, all with ease of access and proximity to downtown.

Contemporary land use planning in Los Angeles County began in the early 1970s, when the first General Plan was adopted and the Regional Planning Department was first designated as a separate county department. A completely revised County General Plan was adopted in 1980 and it has governed land use in unincorporated Los Angeles County for nearly 30 years.

So in many ways, the County, through its dispersed development model and the manner in which it directed growth, played a key role in shaping the growth pattern that characterizes Los Angeles today. Although many of the resulting communities later incorporated or annexed into existing cities, they were essentially birthed by the L.A. County regional planning effort. Today, dozens of these communities – ranging from Marina del Rey at the Pacific Ocean to the rural subdivisions in the High Desert, from the proud single-family neighborhoods of South Los Angeles to the communities planted in the natural setting of the Santa Monica Mountains – help make up the distinct character that is metropolitan Los Angeles.

### Planning Tomorrow's Great Places

For Los Angeles County, planning tomorrow's great places will be a much more complex process than was the case in the days of shaping new neighborhoods and communities from raw land. For this reason, the role of planning in shaping the future of Los Angeles County – and especially the role of the Los Angeles County General Plan – must evolve to meet these changing conditions and circumstances.

The unincorporated County territory that is regulated by the General Plan still covers a vast area – more than 2,600 square miles, an area larger than two states. The County is demographically diverse as well. Many unincorporated

areas in southern Los Angeles County are historically African-American; unincorporated East Los Angeles is mostly Latino; while the unincorporated neighborhoods in the San Gabriel Valley have large Asian populations. And the unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County are growing in population faster than the rest of the County, especially the Santa Clarita and Antelope Valleys. As the municipal government for these unincorporated communities, Los Angeles County is, in essence, the third-largest city in California and the 10th-largest in America, slightly bigger than San Jose or Detroit. These people are also not concentrated in one central location but are scattered in dozens of unincorporated areas throughout the County. Some, especially those in the Santa Monica Mountains and the Antelope Valley, are sparsely populated, while a string of small but well-established urban neighborhoods on the south and east sides of Los Angeles are well-positioned jewels situated in attractive locations along the Blue Line, the Green Line, and the Gold Line.

So the General Plan must address a wide range of issues in a sophisticated way – and do so with an overarching planning theme that addresses the following community-identified goals:

- A strong and diversified economy;
- Fiscal, environmental and social sustainability;
- Revitalization of urban areas and affordable housing;
- Adequate community services and facilities;
- Transportation alternatives and improved air quality;
- Protection from hazards; and,
- A wide variety of environmental and conservation objectives.

These are ambitious goals, and that is why this General Plan is organized around the concept of *sustainability*. Sustainability was originally conceived of as an environmental notion – the idea that we must meet current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Over time, this idea has been expanded to include other realms of human endeavor as well, including economic sustainability and the concept of sustainable social equity. Obviously, all of these concerns must be addressed in the General Plan. But in a rapidly maturing area such as Los Angeles County, the best way to think about sustainability is in the context of *creating and reinforcing great places*. In other words, creating a sustainable future is

best achieved by pursuing the principles of “smart growth” – preserving the County’s remaining natural and rural areas, protecting and even enhancing its well-established and diverse neighborhoods, landscapes, and its individual and collective range of great places.

To accomplish this, the new General Plan is wide-ranging—dealing not only with land use planning but also with sustainability as well as such topics as infrastructure, public health, environmental protection, energy conservation, and economic development. Obviously, a General Plan that must address all these topics – and do so on a landscape that already contains millions of people and buildings and thousands of miles of roads – must use a vast array policies and land use strategies.

So the County is in a unique position to shape development throughout the region and plan for tomorrow’s great places. The General Plan is the foundation policy document that will help the County achieve this goal – by dealing with a wide range of issues, using a wide range of policy tools, and applying them strategically in a wide range of places.

## II. PLANNING AND MAKING TOMORROW’S GREAT PLACES – A JOURNEY THROUGH LOS ANGELES COUNTY

A plan as ambitious as the Los Angeles County General Plan requires an organizing principle such as sustainability, but in a place with the largest and most diverse local government in the nation, there can be no one-size-fits-all approach to growth and development. The goals, policies, strategies, and implementation tools required to bring about tomorrow’s great places must be as varied and diverse as the place itself. Truly understanding the place - and the challenges facing the General Plan – requires a journey through Los Angeles County.

### Antelope Valley

The northern part of Los Angeles County, stretching from Santa Clarita all the way north to Tejon Ranch and the Antelope Valley is the fastest-growing part of the County and, in many ways, the one where the County’s approach to planning is most traditional. Large swaths of open land still exist and there is tremendous pressure for development,

especially for residential development. This area is one of the few left in Los Angeles County where it is still possible to build single-family homes in large numbers.

Yet the Antelope Valley is also dotted with a series of small communities that cherish their status as the last places in Los Angeles County where one can live the rural life, farm, or tend to their animals. The small hamlet of Acton is representative of many of the ideals and aspirations of the communities in the Antelope Valley, where urban and suburban-type development is unwanted, and where low-density, open space development is the norm. Acton, like many of the communities in the high desert, clings tightly to its identity and enforces rural standards, such as the Old West Country design standards for the town’s small commercial district, to ward off the sprawl of the booming cities of Lancaster and Palmdale.

So how does the General Plan ensure that places like Acton will remain a great place to live and work in the next 20 years? Through a variety of planning policies and land use strategies that are designed to meet a series of long-range outcomes. For example, the Significant Ecological Areas (SEA) overlay was created to protect the County’s remaining biological and natural resources and covers large swaths of biologically important open space land in the north county. The SEA designation provides a layer of regulatory review as a way to guide development away from these resources and to preserve these valuable lands. Programs and tools such as the SEAs will be invaluable in ensuring that communities like Acton, 20 years from now, will still fulfill the hopes and aspirations of its residents and businesses.

And while the General Plan provides numerous policies and strategies to preserve the desired way of life in the Antelope Valley, an equally important planning tool in achieving this goal will be the County’s efforts at community-based planning. The *Antelope Valley Area Plan* is an area-wide land use plan adopted in 1986 that supplements the General Plan and provides the Antelope Valley with more local level, detailed land use policy direction. More than 20 years later, a new area-wide plan is being written called *Town & Country*. Once completed, *Town & Country* will represent the new vision for the Antelope Valley. It will update the Valley’s land use policies to coincide with the General Plan and provide additional, community-based policies to ensure that the vision for Antelope Valley communities like Acton are realized.

## Santa Clarita Valley

State Highway 14 is the only major road available for travelers southwards from the Antelope Valley down to the Santa Clarita Valley. Historically, the Santa Clarita Valley had a lot in common with its neighbors to the north. But the City of Santa Clarita, planned by the County until its incorporation in 1987, is an example of a group of small villages that has become a major residential and commercial center of Los Angeles County.

The villages of the valley that incorporated into the City of Santa Clarita – Newhall, Saugus, Valencia, and Canyon Country -- wanted more local control of their land use decisions. But much of the remaining undeveloped property in the Santa Clarita Valley is located in unincorporated County territory, meaning the Department of Regional Planning still plays a major role in the Valley's development. For this reason, the County must increasingly partner with cities new and old to manage future growth. Perhaps the best example of this trend is the *One Valley, One Vision* joint effort between Los Angeles County and the City of Santa Clarita. "OVOV," as it is typically known, will create a single General Plan for the Santa Clarita Valley that would be incorporated into both the City and County General Plans. OVOV as it is typically known, goes far beyond typical planning efforts and represents a new direction for collaborative, long-range, visionary planning for the County. The *One Valley One Vision Plan* promotes a model Smart Growth land use form and pattern of development that limits and reduces carbon emissions and global warming, improves air quality by linking housing and employment, promotes mixed use and higher density development along transit and transportation corridors, and encourages planned, self-centered, full service village communities that promote walkability and minimize the personal use of automobiles while preserving environmentally sensitive lands.

The villages of the Santa Clarita Valley will further be shaped by General Plan strategies such as the Hillside Management Overlay, which address the development of land that is largely hilly and fire-prone. The Hillside Management Overlay is similar to the SEA in that it provides direction for development proposals that are located on or near steep slopes in order to preserve the county's remaining scenic ridgelines and hillsides. As development continues to creep into the County's remaining natural and hazard areas, plan-

ning tools such as the Hillside Management Overlay will reinforce the need for safe and responsible development that will preserve this valley of villages.

## Santa Monica Mountains

Like the Santa Clarita Valley, the Santa Monica Mountains area is a region of rare beauty and environmental sensitivity that the General Plan strives to protect. It is home to a bounty of rich and diverse biological resources including several significant plant communities, habitats, and a variety of wildlife species. As in the Santa Clarita Valley, the General Plan in the Santa Monica Mountains must acknowledge the emergence of new cities in the area and provide ways for the County to work with these cities to manage future growth. Since the last General Plan was adopted in 1980, four cities in the Santa Monica Mountains have been incorporated – Agoura Hills, Calabasas, Westlake Village, and Malibu. But, as in the Santa Clarita Valley, most of the remaining undeveloped property in the Santa Monica Mountains is located in unincorporated County territory, meaning the Los Angeles County General Plan and supplemental land use plans will control most of the new development in these areas.

So fragile and beautiful are the Santa Monica Mountains that the National Park Service and other state agencies have spent billions of dollars purchasing as much land as possible to create a National Recreation Area in close proximity to one of the largest urban areas in the country. The Santa Monica Mountains region also represents some of the most collaborative and effective community-based County planning efforts. The Santa Monica Mountains Coastal Zone Plan implements the provisions and policies of the California Coastal Act, while the Santa Monica Mountains North Area Plan is a unique cooperative planning effort between local cities, the National Park Service, and area and water districts to protect the mountains' scenic resources and to regulate incompatible development.

The General Plan recognizes the urgent need to reconcile the conflicting demands between the conservation of the diverse and spectacular resources in regions like the Santa Monica Mountains, protecting people from the myriad natural hazards in the County, and the continual urban and suburban expansion of the County's human settlements. Using the inspiration of the renowned writer and regional planner Ian McHarg, whose *Design with Nature* pioneered the idea that land use planning could be combined with

ecological planning, the Department of Regional Planning has created its own valuable planning tool to implement its Smart Growth strategies called the *Environmental Constraints and Development Suitability Map*. The County's land suitability model utilizes an integrated Geographic Information System (GIS) approach to take a quantitative, comprehensive, and multi-criteria approach in evaluating the suitability for future land use development in the County. The development suitability index utilizes a combination of environmental constraints, such as proximity to natural resource and natural hazard areas, as well as development criteria including proximity to public transit, public services, and infrastructure, to help planners, County officials, and residents make informed and efficient land use decisions. In short, the Suitability Map highlights the areas in the County most appropriate for new population, residential, and economic growth while simultaneously preserving the County's open spaces and natural resources.

### San Gabriel Valley

At the opposite end of Los Angeles County from the Santa Monica Mountains lies the San Gabriel Valley. Located east of downtown Los Angeles and stretching out to the Riverside and San Bernardino County borders, the San Gabriel Valley presents a unique set of planning challenge for Los Angeles County and its General Plan. First developed with small rural subdivisions in the '20s and '30s, and later with mass-produced housing after World War II, the San Gabriel Valley today is a mostly built-out area where 31 cities are intertwined with dozens of unincorporated communities and "county islands" – small neighborhoods which have never annexed to any city and therefore are still under county jurisdiction.

Yet the San Gabriel Valley today is one of Los Angeles County's most rapidly changing areas. It has undergone huge demographic change in the last 30 years and today is one of the most ethnically and racially diverse areas in Southern California. Once a bedroom suburb, it is now a job center and attracts commuters from as far away as the Inland Empire. Although the San Gabriel Valley is still mostly a low-rise, auto-oriented place, it is increasingly transit-rich, creating new opportunities to shape future development patterns. Metrolink and the El Monte Busway provide unusually good regional transit connections – and if the Gold Line Extension along the 210 Freeway is ever built, these connections will be even better. And the Valley's old

arterial grid system creates unusually good opportunities for bus service and bus rapid transit lines in a region where bus ridership is already surprisingly high.

The unincorporated community of East Pasadena/East San Gabriel in the San Gabriel Valley is the perfect canvas for the County's General Plan to create tomorrow's great places. East Pasadena is a stable community of single-family neighborhoods with multi-family dwellings along major boulevards such as the venerable Huntington Drive, which connects East Pasadena to its posh neighbors of San Marino, Pasadena and Arcadia. Rosemead Boulevard provides a major commercial route through the community and bisects the I-210 only a few short miles from the last Gold Line stop.

Over a period of 20 years, through the vision of the General Plan, East Pasadena can be the place where the County employs a strategic infill and mixed use development plan that will truly transform the community into one of the County's great places. Mixed-use development along Rosemead Boulevard could bring a variety of housing types to the area in proximity to public transit options. A focus on walkability as outlined in the General Plan can create a vibrant, livable streetscape in East Pasadena that will rival that of its neighbors. And as the Gold Line extends down the I-210, a new transit-oriented development district can be built at the 210/Rosemead Boulevard nexus, connecting East Pasadena to the major job centers of the region in Pasadena and downtown Los Angeles.

The County's efforts to plan East Pasadena, Charter Oaks and the numerous other unincorporated islands in the San Gabriel Valley must be a tapestry of efforts that fit both carefully and elegantly into a sub-regional effort in the San Gabriel Valley. For these reasons, the San Gabriel Valley will be an excellent place for the County to again focus on its community-based planning efforts in a region that already has a long history of excellent local plans in two well-established unincorporated communities – Rowland Heights and Hacienda Heights. In the future, the General Plan and other community-based plans have an invaluable opportunity to fully integrate the San Gabriel Valley unincorporated islands, both economically and in terms of urban design, into the cities that surround them, even if they are not annexed.

## East Los Angeles

East Los Angeles, located between downtown Los Angeles and the San Gabriel Valley, is one of the oldest, largest, and most important unincorporated communities in Los Angeles County. East Los Angeles has traditionally been – and remains today – the center of Latino life in Los Angeles. It’s an unusually vibrant neighborhood, filled with street life and hidden pockets of prosperity. Yet East Los Angeles will inevitably serve as a focus point for implementation of the Los Angeles County General Plan and will require the use of a wide variety of tools designed to implement transit-oriented development and “smart growth” policies.

The Gold Line Extension from Downtown Los Angeles will open in 2009, creating new development pressures and opportunities in an area that is an extremely attractive location within the region. Tools such as the transit-oriented development ordinance and density bonuses will come into play, and they will have to be combined with efforts in such wide-ranging areas of policy as economic development and pedestrian oriented planning. In many ways, East Los Angeles will be the most important test of the General Plan and its application to urban areas, because implementation of the Plan must retain the special qualities of East Los Angeles while, at the same time, effectively taking advantage of the new development opportunities that are emerging.

An ambitious new planning endeavor in East Los Angeles is to create a Specific Plan for the new transit oriented districts that will come from the extended Gold Line. The East Los Angeles TOD Specific Plan aims to utilize form-based codes to regulate development in these new districts. As such, East Los Angeles represents a community with the opportunity to implement the best pedestrian-oriented policies and strategies of the General Plan. Pedestrian-oriented planning, with its focus on creating and planning for walkable, livable and active communities, achieves a major goal of the General Plan, which is to create great places that are sustainable and improve public health. Improved public health has long been a goal of land-use planning – and creating more opportunities for walking and physical activity can help younger people establish lifetime patterns of fitness that can help prevent – and later, manage – chronic disease such as asthma and diabetes. Good land use planning can also reduce air pollution emissions of all kinds – including

greenhouse gas emissions – in ways that will protect both the environment generally and the health of Los Angeles County’s population specifically.

Embracing smart growth principles in East Los Angeles can create walkable, convenient, attractive, and climate-friendly neighborhoods – enhancing public health while still providing housing, shopping, parks, and other amenities in a manner conducive to modern tastes. A new focus on pedestrian planning calls for the establishment of standards for sidewalks, reducing the challenges for pedestrians in urban, suburban and rural communities. By closing gaps in the existing system through design standards the County is ensuring a comfortable and safe walking environment. For example, limitations on curb cuts reduce pedestrian-vehicle conflicts. Building orientation and setbacks define the space reserved for pedestrians, and transit shelters, street trees, and awnings protect pedestrians from the sometimes harsh climate.

## South Los Angeles County

In many ways, South Los Angeles will be the most important laboratory for the implementation of the planning tools contained in the General Plan. But using the plan to strengthen these areas may be more challenging because, at least in the short run, demand for new real estate development may be lighter than in East Los Angeles, the San Gabriel Valley, or the northern county Santa Clarita and Antelope Valley regions..

South Los Angeles contains many historically African-American unincorporated communities, such as Willowbrook, West Athens, and Florence-Firestone, which have had a close attachment to nearby incorporated areas, such as the City of Inglewood and the Watts community, which is located in the City of Los Angeles. In recent years, these communities have undergone many important changes. First, an influx of immigrants from Latin America has altered the ethnic and racial makeup of almost all these communities, making them more multi-ethnic. Second, the Blue Line and the Green Line light-rail lines, which now transect these communities, have created important and exciting new planning opportunities in South Los Angeles.

The Blue Line traverses South Los Angeles on a north-south route, with stops in the heart of Willowbrook and Florence-Firestone, while the Green Line travels east-west

along the Century Freeway (Interstate 105), with stops in Willowbrook, Westmont-West Athens, and Lennox. These communities too will need better local level planning to guide future transitions, and many of the urban planning tools currently in place will have to be revised and improved to be effective. For example, the County has put transit-oriented development ordinances in place for both the Blue Line and Green Line communities, complete with provisions permitting mixed-use developments, but so far these ordinances have not been heavily used by developers. This lack of interest is partly a function of the private real estate market, but it also shows that the County must be vigilant in revisiting and upgrading the actual implementation tools, so that the General Plan's vision and the potential of these communities can be realized over time.

Florence-Firestone is representative of a lot of South Los Angeles communities in that it has a colorful history of prosperity followed by decline and neglect. Like most of the communities in South L.A., Florence-Firestone has far more to it than the crime-ridden representatives typically portrayed in popular culture. It has stable middle-class African American neighborhoods, new Latino marketplaces, and great opportunity for investment that will help all ethnicities.

As the County begins to focus on strengthening existing communities such as Florence-Firestone, economic development becomes more important – and it becomes essential to link land use changes with economic development. The economies of the communities in Los Angeles County vary widely, and this is especially true in the existing communities of South Los Angeles and East Los Angeles, many of which have struggled with prosperity for so long and cannot count merely on additional real estate development to bring lasting economic success.

In devising this General Plan, the County has worked with the Los Angeles County Community Development Commission (CDC), the Los Angeles Economic Development Corporation (LAEDC), and other public and private stakeholders to develop economic development goals and meld land use strategies to obtain them, including the following:

- Balance the needs of the entertainment industry and the local communities where its activities reside;

- Promote planning processes and development regulations that enhance the competitive edge of the County businesses;
- Update aging infrastructure to support the functioning of world-class Ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles, along with LAX;
- Pursue strategies that attract the green sector and other target industries; and,
- Protect jobs-rich, economically viable industrial lands from incompatible development.

The General Plan's Economic Development Element calls for the provision of the physical and land use needs to accommodate the County's economies of the future in a sustainable manner, particularly by promoting a strong and diversified economy. The revitalization and redevelopment of existing communities like Florence-Firestone and Willowbrook cannot be done through zoning alone, but land use policies can be coupled with economic development efforts to promote prosperity. And it is especially important for such prosperity to be sustainable in nature.

That's why the General Plan places so much emphasis on green technology as a primary vehicle for economic growth. Similarly, green industries that can support the local employment base while conducting profitable and environmentally sustainable business practices are the future of the County's economy. Communities such as Florence-Firestone, which have traditionally been a center of such businesses as scrap metal, can emerge as leaders in the world of green jobs and green businesses.

### III. PLANNING GREEN COMMUNITIES

Through our journey of the County, it is easy to see that the unincorporated communities are full of wonderful and diverse neighborhoods and each have their own set of planning challenges and opportunities. Importantly, none of the County's great places can be truly great in the future without being environmentally sustainable in all ways. That means that places must be constructed and maintained with sustainable materials. It means they have to reduce, rather than increase, our carbon footprint. And it means they have to be able to withstand, minimize, or, preferably, avoid, the fires, floods, earthquakes, and other natural disasters to which Southern California is so prone.

The new Los Angeles County General Plan addresses all of these aspects of making great places sustainable – and does so in a comprehensive way that addresses all aspects of County operations. Not only does the County manage the day-to-day operations of vital services for its residents, such as healthcare, public protection, and waste management, but it is also the largest employer in the 5-county region with over 100,000 employees. The County, then, has the opportunity to serve as a role model for other governments and employers in the region who are considering adopting sustainable business and land use practices.

An illustration of this leadership role can be seen in the joint effort between the Department of Regional Planning and the Department of Public Works to create, adopt, and implement the County’s Green Building Program. This program includes plans to implement development concepts such as Low Impact Development (LID), regulations that promote the use of natural lighting and improved indoor air quality, and requirements for drought-tolerant landscaping - concepts that are not only better for the environment, but also promote public health and employee productivity. The “green” ordinances being drafted by the County, which will play a large part in implementing many of the sustainable goals and policies that shape the General Plan, will make the County more energy and water-efficient, and ultimately will reduce its carbon footprint.

Sustainable communities must also be safe, and the County’s communities, especially on the suburban fringe and in rural areas, are especially vulnerable to natural hazards. So the General Plan must provide the foundation to make them more sustainable over time in the face of a hazard-prone environment and especially what biologists call a “fire-driven ecology”. In this regard, the new General Plan builds on existing policies and practices that are already strong. In the disastrous fires of recent years, many recent Los Angeles County subdivisions have received considerable publicity and attention for their ability to withstand and repel fires. However, maintaining that reputation relies on minimizing impacts on existing infrastructure.

Sustainable communities must also be able to house all of its residents regardless of their income level, race, or ethnicity. However, the recent housing bubble has been anything but sustainable. It is almost impossible to provide adequate housing for low- and moderate-income individuals and families, especially for seniors, persons with disabilities,

single parent households, the homeless, and farmworkers has become increasingly difficult if not impossible. The Housing Element of the General Plan has the stated goal of planning for a wide range of housing types in sufficient supply to meet the needs of current and future residents. The following specific land use policies communicate how the County is proposing to create a sustainable housing supply and meet the growing housing needs of existing and future residents:

- Encourage mixed use residential and commercial developments along major transportation and commercial corridors.
- Support the development of affordable housing near employment opportunities and or within a reasonable distance of public transportation.
- Promote mixed income neighborhoods and a diversity of housing types throughout the unincorporated County to increase housing choices for all economic segments of the population
- Incorporate advances in energy-saving technologies into housing design, construction, operation, and maintenance.

Innovative mapping techniques are also important tools in creating a sustainable county. Los Angeles County has a long history of using environmental data as development guidance tools, and this is continuing on an unprecedented basis in the General Plan. In fact, the Department of Regional Planning’s early planners undertook an in-depth analysis of the County’s to determine land that was most suitable for development using aerial photography and other technology coming on line at that time. Some 75 years ago, the Regional Planning Commission also conducted an inventory and mapping of more than 450 square miles, identifying each land use that made up the urban fabric.

Today’s Regional Planning Department continues this tradition with modern-day mapping technology in a fashion analogous to that used by the original planners for Los Angeles aided by greater data precision in inventorying resources. Maps and diagrams in “Planning Tomorrow’s Great Places” reflect the same principles that ecologists employ in studying natural and human activity, building on existing environmental policies and spatially depicting the diverse geography of the County. Specific environmental policies are combined with site and regional characteristics in order to direct development away from environmentally

sensitive areas, those least suitable to human habitation or most costly to develop, such as seismic zones, hillsides and fire prone areas. The tradeoffs between Social needs such as public safety and affordable housing and environmental resources at the regional level are made clear. In this way – and many others – the General Plan’s many powerful tools are brought to bear to create not only great green places, but great sustainable places as well.

## IV. CONCLUSION

There is perhaps no local jurisdiction in the country that has such a long and storied history of planning – especially regional planning – as Los Angeles County does. Los Angeles is often viewed by outsiders as unplanned and sprawling. But as the history of the Regional Planning Commission suggests, the opposite is actually true. Los Angeles may be auto-oriented and decentralized, but it was planned that way, with residential neighborhoods built in close proximity to industrial and job centers and to small retail downtowns as well.

If Los Angeles County’s past planning efforts helped create its decentralized development pattern – appropriate for the 20th Century - then the County’s future planning efforts must reinforce and strengthen that pattern in a way that will work in the 21st Century. To truly plan and to make tomorrow’s great places actually happen, existing communities must be the focal point of future efforts. In some communities in the South and East County, this will require increasing permissible densities to take advantage of emerging transit opportunities; and it will also require combining land use planning and economic development efforts to stimulate needed improvements in these neighborhoods. In the northern part of the County, natural assets must be protected and, in so doing, the interconnected system of human settlements and natural areas must be strengthened together, and in places like the Santa Monica Mountains and the Antelope Valley, this will require the increased use of strong environmental policies in the General Plan. Economic, environmental, and human health concerns must be central to the effort to plan tomorrow’s great places. The County must be able to recognize and deal with the great diversity of places under its jurisdiction – and their relationship to great places already located in adjacent cities.

All these things the new General Plan does. But it is important to remember that the plan is not an end in itself. Ultimately, the purpose of a plan is to guide to creation of places. And so the ultimate measure of the Los Angeles County General Plan’s success will not be the policies and actions contained within it; but, rather, the quality of the great places – urban, suburban, rural, natural – that emerge throughout the County over the next 20 years.



**Bill Fulton**

*Publisher*

California Planning & Development Report

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK