

COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

GENERAL PLAN

INTRODUCTION

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## INTRODUCTION

### THE NATURE OF THE GENERAL PLAN

The purpose of the General Plan is to protect and further the public interest. The concept of public interest assumes that there are communities of interest having among them widely shared values, goals, and problems that transcend the special concerns of any particular community. The concept extends to protect special communities of interest from discriminatory actions. The concept of public interest also assumes that there are common means or resources. Thus, promoting the public interest involves using common resources responsibly to further common values and to attack shared problems. In a democracy, public interest cannot be separated from due process. Due process involves making public decisions in an accountable, fair and open manner. Fundamental to due process is the principle that those whose interests are affected by a public decision must have an effective voice in the making of that decision. Also fundamental is the right to adequate notice of possible or intended actions, the right of affected parties to present issues for public discussion, the right to be heard in an impartial and responsive forum, and the right of appeal to an independent body for impartial review.

It is in the public interest to satisfy the shared needs of the residents of Los Angeles County, to protect the interests of future generations, and to respond to the special needs of disadvantaged groups which, if left unmet, would endanger public trust. The shared needs of Los Angeles County residents include a healthful, safe, attractive and prosperous environment, the wise use of scarce resources, and effective public services at the lowest possible cost.

The General Plan is a public interest tool for initiating and responding to change. It is a unified statement of public policy for use in making decisions on critical public issues. The Plan provides a framework for coordinating short and medium range actions designed to meet needs and to prevent problems from becoming crises. It sets forth guidelines for how the County of Los Angeles should allocate its resources in meeting identified needs over the next few decades.

The General Plan serves as an advisory document to provide decision-makers with a policy framework to guide specific, incremental decisions so as to move toward achievement of the Plan's stated goals and objectives. At the time specific decisions are made -- whether on land use, the construction of a new highway or an urban renewal project, etc. -- the appropriate decision-making authority must interpret and weigh various Plan policies based on the best information available at that point in time. Thus, the General Plan neither promises nor guarantees the achievement of any goal or objective nor strict adherence to any single policy statement.

The Plan's goals, objectives and policies are the result of considerable public input and professional analysis. They represent a determination, based on existing data and expectations, as to what general course of action should be followed to achieve the kind of environment County citizens wish to be realized by the year 2000.

In addition, since the future is largely unknowable and public expectations may change, the General Plan cannot remain static throughout its lifetime. Appropriate adjustments to its goals, objectives and policies must be made to insure that the General Plan remains relevant to public needs. Thus, the physical, social and economic environment of Los Angeles County must be continuously monitored to identify the emergence of new problems and the solution of old ones.

## THE COMPONENTS OF THE GENERAL PLAN

The County of Los Angeles General Plan consists of two major components: (1) the countywide chapters and elements that set the countywide policy framework; and (2) the areawide and community plans\* that deal with local issues of unincorporated communities. Their various contents are as follows:

### COUNTYWIDE CHAPTERS AND ELEMENTS\*\*

- Introduction
- General Goals and Policies Chapter
- Conservation and Open Space Element
- Land Use Element
- Housing Element
- Transportation Element
- Water and Waste Management Element
- Economic Development Element
- Implementation Chapter
- Technical Supplement
- Safety Element
- Seismic Safety Element
- Noise Element
- Scenic Highway Element
- Plan of Bikeways
- Regional Recreation Areas Plan

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\*State law also provides for specific plans, which are sometimes confused with community plans. Community plans are general plans for specific localities within a larger jurisdiction. Specific plans implement general or community plans by providing very detailed designs for specific localities. They are much more detailed than community plans and, unlike community plans, they incorporate regulations and conditions.

\*\*It is proposed that future countywide elements on energy, public facilities and services, human resources, historical and cultural heritage, general recreation, and other subjects be added in the future as funds allow.

The countywide chapters and elements address issues which transcend local community interests, and are intended to identify and promote the broader public interests of the County by addressing issues that, individually or collectively, impact (in terms of costs and benefits) the lives, activities and well-being of all County residents. In this regard, the countywide chapters and elements have three major roles:

1. To provide an overall set of goals and policies to guide countywide activities so that governmental decisions at all levels move in the same direction.
2. To provide policy parameters to integrate more specific planning efforts in order to ensure a compatible and effective regional approach.
3. To provide effective planning for specific functions that can be best addressed at the countywide level.

Each of the countywide chapters and elements has been developed with one or more of the above roles in mind. Thus, their emphasis may be goal-oriented (i.e., General Goals and Policies Chapter), designed to integrate other planning efforts in the County (i.e., Transportation Element) or functional in nature (i.e., Noise Element).

#### AREAWIDE AND COMMUNITY PLANS\*

Unincorporated areawide and community plans are extensions, or refinements of countywide policy. Such local planning programs provide an accessible forum for community residents and interest groups to address issues unique to their area and to express local preferences and attitudes relative to future community growth and development.

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\*At the present time, the following have been adopted: Santa Clarita Valley Areawide General Plan, Hacienda Heights Community Plan, and East Los Angeles Community Plan. In preparation are the following: Antelope Valley Areawide General Plan, update

Although the content and scope of areawide and community plans are not mandated by State planning law, such plans typically focus on local land use issues including the distribution of specific land use types and intensities, local circulation patterns and the location of neighborhood and community services and facilities. By virtue of the explicit scale and detail that can be achieved through local planning efforts, areawide and community plans serve to refine and provide a local orientation for countywide land use policy.

#### RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE COUNTYWIDE CHAPTERS AND ELEMENTS AND THE AREAWIDE AND COMMUNITY PLANS

Although the major components of the General Plan have different roles, they are not mutually exclusive. As components of the overall General Plan, they serve to provide governmental decision makers with a perspective, and with guidelines appropriate to regional or local issues. Consequently, decisions made must reflect the direction set by both the countywide and local components of the General Plan, if they involve an unincorporated area with an adopted areawide or community plan. The countywide chapters and elements serve to guide decisions involving one or more regional concerns, whereas the areawide or community plans serve to guide local matters. An adopted community, areawide or specific plan may set forth precise standards and criteria

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(Cont'd)

of the Santa Clarita Valley Areawide General Plan, Rowland Heights Community Plan, Malibu/Santa Monica Mountains Areawide General Plan, West Hollywood Community Plan, and Los Angeles County Local Coastal Programs (ultimately to be known as the Coastal Element).

tailored to conditions within the community, provided that such standards and criteria are consistent with the general countywide provisions. In those instances where a decision may involve both local and regional concerns, it is the countywide component that sets the broad policy parameters within which local plans provide more specific direction.\* It is in this sense that the local plans are refinements of some of the more important regional issues that the countywide chapters and elements address.

#### ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS

Thus, the countywide chapters and elements fulfill a necessary role that transcends and supplements the local plans. In particular, the countywide chapters and elements constitute a collective policy statement addressing issues of countywide or regional importance that cannot be resolved at the local level. Moreover, they provide a coherent and consistent approach throughout the County with regard to the following factors:

Countywide Policy Framework. The General Goals and Policies Chapter provides basic policy parameters within which all countywide elements and areawide and community plans are formulated. These basic policies address critical needs affecting all, or a significant portion, of the County. They are specifically interpreted and elaborated on by "area development priorities" to provide additional guidance for areawide and community plan development.

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\*It should be noted that due to local characteristics or preferences, a local plan need not address a particular issue. In such a case, the countywide chapters and elements are to be relied upon exclusively.

Population Growth and Distribution. Also provided by the General Goals and Policies Chapter is a set of interrelated population, housing, employment, and land use (PHEL) projections. These projections quantify the anticipated impact of current countywide policy in terms of future growth and development, and provide a baseline for monitoring population, housing, employment and land use trends within the County's major planning areas.

It is the function of the areawide and community plans to determine specific implications of the PHEL projections and countywide policies within each of their planning boundaries.

Urban Form and General Development Pattern. Urban form and development policies seek to influence the character, timing and distribution of future growth and development insofar as they impact such countywide concerns as: the quality and cost of public services; regional air and water quality; the consumption of energy resources; the enjoyment of major open space areas and natural amenities; and the equitable distribution of public resources.

The countywide chapters and elements set forth a generalized urban form concept through both written and mapped policies. This concept provides an organizational framework for interrelating major activity sub-systems within the County. Such sub-systems include major commercial, employment and cultural centers; regional transportation networks and corridors; and major open space and recreation areas.

General development policies identify and promote the various development processes necessary to accommodate anticipated growth and development within the County and its major subregions. Such development processes include urban expansion into suitable urban fringe areas, infill of bypassed parcels within existing urban communities, and revitalization of deteriorated older urban areas through rehabilitation and/or recycling.

Protection of Life and Property. The countywide chapters and elements of the Plan address certain hazards that threaten both life and property in so many areas of the County that it is cost-effective to develop reasonably uniform standards. This also recognizes that communities have not always internalized the cost of developing in hazardous areas and thus have permitted private development to impose burdens on the public at large. Standards and criteria are identified by the Land Use Element (with specific geographic locations depicted by the Special Management Areas Policy Map), the Water and Waste Management Element, the Noise Element, the Seismic Safety Element and the Safety Element. Their application is in addition to any standards and criteria that the areawide and community plans may provide to address purely local hazards.

Environmental Resource Protection. The Conservation and Open Space Element, the Scenic Highway Element, and Coastal Element (being developed) provide policies to protect environmental, cultural, and aesthetic resources which should be accessible to all residents for their use and enjoyment. Specifically identified are Special Management Areas, potential Scenic Highway Corridors and coastal areas that should be subject to countywide standards and criteria. Their application is in addition to any development policies provided by the areawide and community plans. Policies concerning air quality and energy are also addressed at the countywide level since they involve impacts that transcend the boundaries of any single community.

Major Open Space and Recreational Opportunities. The Conservation and Open Space Element, along with the adopted Regional Recreational Areas Plan and the Plan of Bikeways, identify general areas which have countywide significance because of their open space and/or recreational value. The areawide and community plans should provide the necessary analysis and site identification to ensure adequate opportunities for local parks, trails and scenic features, and may include specific measures to protect hillside areas.

Economic, Housing, and Social Opportunities. The distribution of jobs, housing and social opportunities is appropriately dealt with at the countywide level since only limited public funds are available, and equitable distribution requires a countywide strategy. As a result, the Economic Development Element, the Housing Element and the Human Resources Element (to be developed) provide the necessary policies and implementation guidelines. The role of the areawide and community plans is to provide specific site identification and implementation programs based on strong local citizen input.

Regional Transportation/Service System Needs. Both written and mapped policies are provided by the Transportation Element to ensure an adequate and well-balanced transportation system. In addition, the Water and Waste Management Element, together with the proposed Public Facilities and Services Element, deal with the provision of essential services (i.e. water, sewerage, solid waste disposal, electricity, natural gas and petroleum). These are addressed at the countywide level to ensure that necessary connections exist, adequate capacity is available, and the location of large-scale facilities is cost-effective. Within this context, it is the role of the areawide and community plans to identify the appropriate location and size of collector streets and service lines.

Land Use Policy. The land use classifications, depicted on the Land Use Policy Map in the Land Use Element (Chapter Three) of the General Plan, serve to identify general and dominant uses and intensities. It is the role of the local plans--where an adopted city, areawide or community plan exists--to identify more specific land uses, determine the actual boundaries between land use categories, and establish more specific residential density ranges within the general parameters established by the countywide goals and policies.

## PREPARATION OF THE PLAN

The Los Angeles County Regional Planning Commission is committed to public involvement in the planning process. Accordingly, the Commission directed that the General Plan be developed with the participation of individuals, citizens' groups and public agencies from all jurisdictional levels.

Citizen participation has primarily been through the involvement of the Countywide Citizens' Planning Council (CCPC), made up of citizens from a broad range of backgrounds and geographic locations. Throughout the development of the Plan, the CCPC participated in identifying critical needs, formulating major goals, reviewing proposed alternative plans, formulating recommended policies, and reviewing successive drafts of the General Plan.

The work of the CCPC was supplemented by the cooperation of public agencies. The Plan was developed with the assistance of the cities through: (1) area planning councils; (2) individual cities; and, (3) the Los Angeles County Division of the League of California Cities. County departments whose services would be affected by policies and programs of the General Plan advised the Department of Regional Planning through the General Plan Policy Review Board (GPPRB). Comments from the staff of the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), which cooperated throughout the preparation of the Plan, helped maintain a Southern California perspective. Many other federal, State and regional agencies were consulted as the Plan was formulated.

Two background studies were of particular value in preparing the Plan. One was a public opinion survey designed to strengthen citizen participation. The survey was conducted among a randomly selected sample of 1,100 residents that represented a cross-section of Los Angeles County's population. It focused on attitudes

toward urban growth and development, transportation, housing, environmental protection, energy, and the costs of government services. The results helped identify issues of public concern and suggested policy directions for the Plan. The other study was a land capability and suitability analysis. It recommended development capacities of land areas throughout the County by focusing on environmental resources (including significant ecological areas), and identified threats posed to public health and safety by natural hazards. This survey provided valuable assistance in making land use allocations and shaping recommendations for environmental management.

A major step in the preparation of the Plan was the development of plan alternatives, which combined two possibilities for population growth and two possibilities for future urban development. The distribution of over 10,000 copies of the report on alternatives helped the staff, advisory groups and the public to assess the most critical needs facing the County and to decide what the future of the County should be. The alternatives were reviewed with the public at community meetings and through mail-back questionnaires. Advisory groups and public agencies also evaluated the alternatives. After carefully considering these reviews, the Regional Planning Commission established the policy direction for the General Plan. It was to: 1) promote a more concentrated urban pattern; 2) focus new development in suitable locations; and, 3) accept moderate population growth. Once this direction was established, the General Plan was prepared.

#### HOW TO USE THE COUNTY GENERAL PLAN

The General Plan is designed to assist the decision makers of Los Angeles County. Foremost among these are the elected officials of the County and the 81 cities in the County. The General Plan is an instrument for use by County government in managing public

affairs. It provides information on recent and projected trends, constitutes a statement of County policy on major public issues and is a basis for bringing about or responding to change. The Plan serves as a basis for capital budgeting decisions and for coordinating key activities of County agencies, such as the delivery of recreation, utility, transportation, and housing services. It is a basis for regulating land uses through subdivision and zoning ordinances. Plan policies will be used to make decisions on land use proposals. Thus, the Plan will influence decisions on private investment and the future development of the County's tax base.

As a statement of public need and policy, the Plan is designed to encourage the State and federal governments, as well as the private sector, to invest in existing urban areas. This will help implement the strategy for revitalizing older urban areas and inform private investors and developers as to where there is an opportunity or a need to develop new urban areas.

The Plan is also a basis for proposing and evaluating draft legislation. As a statement of County and city policies, the Plan will be used to communicate local policies to regional, State and federal governments.

By defining problems of countywide concern and identifying countywide policy, the Plan can help cities prepare and revise their plans. It will be a means for coordinating land use policies in unincorporated areas with land use policies in adjacent or affected municipalities, and for resolving planning and development issues among cities. The Plan can help in making decisions on annexations and incorporations.

The Plan is an instrument for meeting needs beyond the means and responsibilities of most individual cities, such as: preserving

regional open space; providing regional recreation services; conserving regional resources (i.e., energy, water and prime agricultural land); developing low and moderate income housing; and coordinating inter-city transportation, water and precise facilities.

#### RELATION TO OTHER PLANS, POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

In Los Angeles County, special districts make many decisions related to urban services and facilities and collectively appropriate large sums for capital improvements. The General Plan provides these districts with information on the development potential of areas in the County and advises them of County policy.

The regional agencies, among them the Southern California Rapid Transit District, the Metropolitan Water District, and the Southern California Association of Governments, are responsible for coordinating with city and county governments on policies and programs. The decisions of these agencies often affect the County's urban form and development.

State and federal agencies have taken an active part in environmental protection and resource conservation. Their involvement has had an increasing impact on the County's population growth, urban development, and housing and transportation policies. The General Plan is an instrument for making local policy known to higher levels of government and for establishing policy positions on issues of regional, state and national significance.

#### HOW TO INTERPRET THE GENERAL PLAN

The General Plan gives a general policy direction, not a detailed blueprint for action. Nevertheless, it should be used by government for guidance in making day to day decisions to ensure the effective use of public resources and to further the public interest.

Because of the general nature of the Plan, it will always be necessary to interpret its intent. To determine the intent, the written statements of policy contained in the various chapters and elements should be used. The maps in the Plan are graphic statements of policy, and are intended to be general, not precise, policy statements.