

Sonoma County General Plan 2020

I NTRODUCTION

Sonoma County Permits and Resource Management Department
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INTRODUCTION

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	IN-1
1. AUTHORITY AND PURPOSE	IN-1
1.1 AUTHORITY FOR THE GENERAL PLAN	IN-1
1.2 REQUIRED AND OPTIONAL ELEMENTS	IN-1
1.3 PURPOSE OF THE PLAN	IN-1
2. REGIONAL CONTEXT	IN-2
2.1 THE REGIONAL SETTING	IN-2
2.2 THE COUNTY SETTING	IN-2
2.3 INTERGOVERNMENTAL PLANNING COORDINATION	IN-2
3. ORGANIZATION AND OVERVIEW OF THE PLAN	IN-3
3.1 THE PLAN FORMAT	IN-3
3.2 THE PLAN ELEMENTS	IN-3
4. CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN PLAN PREPARATION AND FUTURE UPDATES . . .	IN-5
5. CONTENTS OF THE PLAN	IN-7
6. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	IN-12

INTRODUCTION

1. AUTHORITY AND PURPOSE

1.1 AUTHORITY FOR THE GENERAL PLAN

Statutory authority for a general plan is expressed in Title 7, Division 1 of the Government Code of the State of California. Article 5, Section 65300 et seq. requires the County to adopt a comprehensive general plan to guide its future physical development. The plan may recognize local conditions in a format that is appropriate for the local agency. Although the General Plan must address a number of different subjects and elements, the County may choose the degree of specificity and level of detail that is appropriate for its circumstances.

1.2 REQUIRED AND OPTIONAL ELEMENTS

The General Plan must contain a statement of development policies, including diagrams or maps and text, setting forth objectives, principles, standards, and plan proposals. Seven mandatory elements are Land Use, Circulation, Housing, Conservation, Open Space, Noise, and Safety.

A number of optional elements are allowed. This General Plan includes four optional elements: Agricultural Resources, Air Transportation, Water Resources, and Public Facilities and Services.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

Sonoma County General Plan 2020 (GP 2020) is a revision of the previous General Plan which was adopted in 1989, and supersedes and replaces that document. This plan carries forward the major goals and policy framework of the 1989 Plan, and retains the overall format. The primary purpose of the revised plan was to conduct a policy review which focused upon specific issues that were of paramount importance to the community.

The broad purpose of GP 2020 is to express policies which will guide decisions on future growth, development, and conservation of resources through 2020 in a manner consistent with the goals and quality of life desired by the county's residents. Under State law many actions on private land development, such as Specific Plans, Area Plans, zonings, subdivisions, public agency projects and other decisions must be consistent with the General Plan. The Goals, Objectives, and Policies set forth in the plan will be applied in a manner to insure their constitutionality.

2. REGIONAL CONTEXT

2.1 THE REGIONAL SETTING

Sonoma County, the most northerly of the nine counties in the San Francisco Bay Region, is located along the Pacific coastline about forty miles north of San Francisco and the Golden Gate Bridge. The County is just over 1500 square miles, making it the largest of the nine Bay Area counties.

Sonoma County is bordered by the Pacific Ocean on the west, Marin County and San Pablo Bay to the south, Solano, Napa and Lake Counties to the east, and Mendocino County to the north. Because of the geographic configuration and topography of the North Bay area, transportation linkages to adjacent counties are limited to a few routes. The U.S. Highway 101 Freeway is the major north/south route, connecting the County to San Francisco and Marin to the south and to Mendocino on the north.

2.2 THE COUNTY SETTING

Sonoma County's 1500 square miles include a diverse mosaic of landforms, environments, and human settlements. The broad, flat Santa Rosa Plain, which lies between the Sonoma Mountains on the east and low coastal hills on the west, contains the cities of Santa Rosa, Rohnert Park, and Cotati. The sparsely settled western margin of the county, along the Pacific coastline, includes the redwood and mixed conifer forests of the Mendocino Highlands in the north and rolling oak studded hills, dairylands, and coastal prairies in the south. The Mayacamas Range forms the eastern boundary of the county. Along with the Sonoma Mountain range, it encloses the Sonoma Valley or "Valley of the Moon," a scenic valley which extends from near Santa Rosa southeastward to the City of Sonoma and the marshlands of San Pablo Bay. In the north, the Mayacamas Range and Mendocino Highlands enclose the farming regions of Alexander and Dry Creek Valleys. In the far northeast, the remote interior of the Mayacamas Range contains the Geysers geothermal steam field.

2.3 INTERGOVERNMENTAL PLANNING COORDINATION

Sonoma County has a particular interest in coordination of land use, infrastructure, and environmental protection with other local, state, federal, and tribal governmental jurisdictions within the County. GP 2020 is generally compatible with the plans of the nine cities, and with plans or policies established by other governmental agencies. Areas for future expansion of the cities were coordinated with the various cities and with the Local Agency Formation Commission, which is responsible for setting city boundaries and spheres of influence. Although GP 2020 does not regulate development within the cities, it is applicable to lands within their spheres of influence. In some instances, the policies of the plan establish larger "areas of interest" for cities, in order to provide for their review and comment on proposed County actions.

Sonoma County also acknowledges both the presence of federally recognized tribal governments within Sonoma County and the need for communication and coordination with federal and tribal governments, where development of tribal and non-tribal land is proposed and where tribes seek to acquire new trust land.

GP 2020 also considers the policies and concerns of adjacent counties and regional agencies, such as the Association of Bay Area Governments, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, the Northern Sonoma County Air Pollution Control District, the Bay Area Water Quality Control Board, the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board, the Sonoma County Water Agency, and others. The text of the various elements notes those situations where these agencies have particular responsibilities that affect the physical development of the County and approval of permits.

3. ORGANIZATION AND OVERVIEW OF THE PLAN

3.1 THE PLAN FORMAT

GP 2020 consists of 10 elements:

- Land Use Element
- Housing Element
- Agricultural Resources Element
- Open Space and Resource Conservation Element
- Water Resources Element
- Public Safety Element
- Circulation and Transit Element
- Air Transportation Element
- Public Facilities and Services Element
- Noise Element

3.2 THE PLAN ELEMENTS

Land Use

In addition to the nine general goals and policies, the Land Use Element describes where the different kinds of uses for land may be established in the unincorporated areas of Sonoma County. The Land Use Element includes a set of nine planning area land use maps which establish the use and density of properties throughout the unincorporated area. Sections of the element also express policies which are specific to each planning area.

Housing

Future housing production needed to accommodate projected growth is evaluated, along with policies and programs to:

- Encourage development of housing for very low, low, and moderate income households
- Meet the special shelter needs of specific population groups
- Maintain and improve the quality of housing
- Encourage production of diverse types of housing.

Agricultural Resources

Detailed guidelines and policies which apply to lands designated in one of the three agricultural land use categories are stated in this element. Policies address marketing of agricultural products, stabilization of agricultural use at the edge of urban areas, limitations on intrusion of residential uses, the location of agricultural services and visitor serving uses, provision of farmworker housing, the streamlining of permit procedures for agricultural uses, and recognition of the aquaculture and horse industries as agricultural endeavors.

Open Space and Resource Conservation

This element, in conjunction with the Water Resources and Agricultural Resources Elements, expresses the full range of goals, objectives, and policies for the preservation of open space, the protection of natural resources, and the provision of outdoor recreation opportunities. It designates various portions of the County in several open space classifications, such as Community Separators, Scenic Landscape Units, Scenic Corridors, Riparian Corridors, and Biotic Habitat Areas. Policies address natural resources such as soils, forests and timber, biotic resources, geothermal, mineral, and energy resources, and air quality. Policies are also established regarding parks, trails, and bikeways. Archaeological, cultural, and historical resources are also addressed.

Water Resources

This element was added for the first time in recognition of the importance of water to the environment, economic stability, agricultural protection, and the overall quality of life of the citizens of Sonoma County. Policies address subjects such as surface and groundwater, water conservation and re-use, public water systems, and water quality.

Public Safety

Special limitations and procedures for review of development projects located in areas subject to natural hazards are included in this element. Safety hazards addressed include seismic and other geologic hazards, flooding, and susceptibility to wildland fires. Hazardous materials are

also included in this element.

Circulation and Transit

The plans for the county's future highway and transit systems are expressed, with particular emphasis on the Highway 101 corridor. GP 2020 emphasizes an increased role for transit in serving commute trips and the importance of measures which will allocate existing highway capacity more efficiently during peak travel periods.

Air Transportation

This element expresses policies related to the public use airports in the county, including compatibility of land uses in adjacent areas. It focuses on the Sonoma County Airport and expresses policies related to the types and amounts of aviation activities to be accommodated and facilities needed to serve them.

Public Facilities and Services

The various public services that may affect the future development of land are emphasized, including water, sewer, parks, education, fire protection, and others. New to this element are policies related to youth, family, and senior services.

Noise

This element evaluates existing and projected future noise conditions related to highways, airports, and other sources and expresses policies and standards to assure noise compatibility in future land development.

General Plan Environmental Impact Report

Prior to adoption of GP 2020, the Board certified the GP 2020 Final Environmental Impact Report that identified the impacts of GP 2020 and the policies that contribute to mitigation of these impacts. For informational purposes, each GP 2020 policy that was cited in the FEIR as a mitigating policy is identified with an asterisk (*) after the policy. In addition, a table is included at the end of GP 2020, entitled "Mitigating Policies of GP 2020". This table identifies the applicable Policies and their relevant impact sections.

4. CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN PLAN PREPARATION AND FUTURE UPDATES

The County encourages a high degree of public awareness of planning and development issues and participation by interested citizens in the preparation and consideration of plan policies. Preparation of GP 2020 was assisted by a citizen's advisory committee, appointed by the Board

of Supervisors, responsible for reviewing and making recommendations on all issues and related policies that were included in the update. In effect, the committee directly participated in the drafting of the goals, objectives, and policies to be submitted for consideration by the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors. During all phases of policy development, local residents, businesses, property owners, and interest groups were encouraged to express their views about planning issues and policies proposed for incorporation into GP 2020. Members of the Citizens' Advisory Committee are identified in Section 6, Acknowledgments.

5. CONTENTS OF THE PLAN

LAND USE ELEMENT

1. INTRODUCTION	LU-1
2. COUNTYWIDE LAND USE POLICY FRAMEWORK	LU-3
3. LAND USE POLICIES FOR THE PLANNING AREAS	LU-51
4. LAND USE IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAMS	LU-88

HOUSING ELEMENT

AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES ELEMENT

1. INTRODUCTION	AR-1
2. GOALS AND POLICIES RELATED TO AGRICULTURE	AR-1
3. AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAMS	AR-20

OPEN SPACE AND RESOURCE CONSERVATION ELEMENT

1. INTRODUCTION	OS-1
2. SCENIC RESOURCES	OS-3
3. BIOTIC RESOURCES	OS-20
4. SOIL RESOURCES	OS-32
5. TIMBER RESOURCES	OS-34
6. MINERAL RESOURCES	OS-36
7. ENERGY RESOURCES	OS-38
8. AIR RESOURCES	OS-42
9. OUTDOOR RECREATION	OS-44
10. ARCHAEOLOGICAL, CULTURAL, AND HISTORICAL RESOURCES	OS-51

11. OPEN SPACE AND RESOURCE CONSERVATION IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAMS OS-54

WATER RESOURCES ELEMENT

- 1. INTRODUCTION WR-1
- 2. WATER RESOURCES BACKGROUND WR-2
- 3. WATER RESOURCE GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND POLICIES WR-9
- 4. WATER RESOURCE IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAMS WR-27

PUBLIC SAFETY ELEMENT

- 1. INTRODUCTION PS-1
- 2. PROTECTION FROM GEOLOGIC HAZARDS PS-2
- 3. PROTECTION FROM FLOOD HAZARDS PS-6
- 4. PROTECTION FROM FIRE HAZARDS PS-11
- 5. PROTECTION FROM HAZARDOUS MATERIALS PS-15
- 6. PUBLIC SAFETY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAMS PS-18

CIRCULATION AND TRANSIT ELEMENT

- 1. INTRODUCTION CT-1
- 2. CIRCULATION AND TRANSIT SYSTEM GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES CT-2
- 3. CIRCULATION AND TRANSIT POLICIES FOR THE PLANNING AREAS CT-24
- 4. CIRCULATION AND TRANSIT IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAMS CT-33

AIR TRANSPORTATION ELEMENT

- 1. INTRODUCTION AT-1
- 2. BACKGROUND AT-3
- 3. AIR TRANSPORTATION DEMAND AND THE COUNTY AIRPORT SYSTEM AT-7

4. COMPATIBILITY WITH THE COMMUNITY AT-11

5. AIR TRANSPORTATION POLICIES OF THE COUNTY OF SONOMA AT-12

6. AIR TRANSPORTATION IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAMS AT-22

PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES ELEMENT

1. INTRODUCTION PF-1

2. WATER AND SEWER SERVICES PF-1

3. OTHER PUBLIC SERVICES PF-7

4. PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAMS PF-17

NOISE ELEMENT

1. INTRODUCTION NO-1

2. EXISTING AND FUTURE NOISE ENVIRONMENT NO-3

3. NOISE ISSUES, POLICIES AND STANDARDS NO-11

4. NOISE ELEMENT IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAMS NO-17

GLOSSARY GL-1

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