

I. INTRODUCTION



CA/KB

PURPOSE OF THE GENERAL PLAN

The General Plan is a blueprint for growth and development. California State law (Government Code Section 65300) requires each city and county to adopt a comprehensive, long-term General Plan for its own physical development and for any land outside its boundaries related to its planning activities. The General Plan is largely implemented through zoning and subdivision decisions. All subdivision,

capital improvements, development agreements, projects subject to the zoning code, specific plans, and other land use actions must be consistent with the adopted General Plan.

The General Plan is considered “comprehensive” since it addresses all of the components that characterize a city or county. These components include physical attributes such as how land is used and social aspects such as economic and housing conditions. The General Plan is considered

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“long-term” since it looks 15 to 20 years into the future.

All 34 cities in Orange County have general plans that address their individual jurisdictions. While the Orange County General Plan primarily focuses on the unincorporated area - territory that is not located within a city - the plan also addresses regional services and facilities provided by the County such as regional parks, roads, flood control facilities, etc.

The majority of the unincorporated area is located in the southern portion of the County, however there are large parcels of unincorporated property, developed and undeveloped, located throughout the County. In addition, there are numerous small, unincorporated “islands” of property spread throughout the central and northern County.

In the past ten years, the unincorporated territory has changed dramatically. Since 1993, three new cities (Laguna Woods, Rancho Santa Margarita, and Aliso Viejo) have incorporated within Orange County. These incorporations, together with the annexation of unincorporated territory to existing cities during this period, have reduced the unincorporated area in size by over 40 percent, from approximately 414 square miles to 321 square miles.

While city general plans focus on a single jurisdiction with a contiguous boundary, the County’s General Plan must address a diverse geographic area, from small

unincorporated islands surrounded by cities to large planned communities with populations exceeding many Orange County cities. In addition, with the probability of more incorporations and city annexations in the future, the County’s General Plan must be consistently reevaluated to ensure its policies and programs reflect the unincorporated area’s ever-changing territory and population.

FORMAT OF THE GENERAL PLAN

Government Code Section 65302 requires that general plans contain seven elements: land use, circulation, housing, conservation, open space, noise, and safety. This section also allows for the inclusion of other optional elements in the general plan. Section 65301 provides flexibility in the format of general plans and allows jurisdictions to combine elements.

The County of Orange General Plan consists of an introductory chapter, a demographics chapter, and nine elements: Land Use, Transportation, Public Services and Facilities, Resources, Recreation, Noise, Safety, Housing, and Growth Management.

Table I-1 demonstrates how the County’s General Plan Elements correspond to the seven state mandated elements.

“Without an architecture of our own, we have no soul of our own civilization.”

Frank Lloyd Wright

TABLE I-1.

| <u>County of Orange</u> <u>General Plan Elements</u> | <u>State Mandated</u> <u>Elements</u> |
|---|--|
| Land Use | Land Use |
| Transportation | Circulation |
| Public Services & Facilities | Optional |
| Resources | Open Space/ Conservation |
| Recreation | Open Space |
| Noise | Noise |
| Safety | Safety |
| Housing | Housing |
| Growth Management | Optional |

Chapter I provides a summary of the General Plan’s background and purpose.

Chapter II describes the County’s natural and urban settings and presents a demographic overview of the unincorporated area.

Chapters III through XI include the nine individual General Plan elements: Land Use, Transportation, Public Services and Facilities, Resources, Recreation, Noise, Safety, Housing and Growth Management.

INTERPRETATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GENERAL PLAN AND SPECIFIC PLANS

The Board of Supervisors (“Board”), as the legislative body of the County of Orange, has adopted the General Plan and supporting Specific Plans. As such, the Board retains

authority to interpret the General Plan and supporting Specific Plans and all of their constituent provisions, including their goals, objectives, policies and implementation measures, such as programs, regulations, standards and guidelines. The provisions of the General Plan and each Specific Plan are to be interpreted in a manner that harmonizes their goals, objectives, policies and implementation measures in light of the purposes of those plans.

It is recognized that in determining plan consistency, no action is likely to be entirely consistent with each and every goal and objective contained in the General Plan or a Specific Plan and that the Board may give greater weight to some goals and objectives over other goals and objectives in determining whether an action is in overall harmony with the General Plan and any applicable Specific Plan in light of the plan’s purpose.

In its decision-making, the Board shall also consider the environmental consequences associated with a proposed action in applying provisions of the General Plan or a Specific Plan and whether the action will protect resources in a manner it determines best advances that plan’s goals relating to environmental resources.

HISTORY OF THE ORANGE COUNTY GENERAL PLAN

The first land use plan for Orange County, the Master Plan of Land Use, was adopted in 1946. The Master Plan was later amended

“Orange County is a significant urban place and is becoming more so no matter how difficult or painful it may be for some to acknowledge that fact.”

*Richard Munsell;
Asst. Director
Advance Planning,
Dec. 4, 1979*

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and refined through the adoption of Area Plans for individual planning areas throughout the unincorporated area.

The first comprehensive update of the Orange County General Plan was completed in the early 1980s through the General Plan Modernization (GPM) effort. The objective of the GPM was to streamline the processing of land development projects that were consistent with the goals and policies adopted by the Board of Supervisors. The GPM process included an evaluation of existing and planned infrastructure capacities and a reduction in the number of land use categories from 35 to 15.

Through the GPM process, three components were created to serve as a framework for policy and land use decisions. Component I consisted of a long range-planning framework that identified three alternative growth scenarios for the County. Component II consisted of the General Plan elements. Component III called Community Profiles, was short range in nature and identified more precise land use and community characteristics.

A 1999 administrative update to the General Plan was prepared to create a more current and readable document. This update incorporated new County programs, socioeconomic data, and revised charts, graphics and maps. In addition, the update included a reformatted text that combined the nine separate elements into a single document. Sidebar notes, or factoids, were also added to the page margins to increase

reader interest. The sidebar notes highlight interesting facts or reflections on Orange County life; they are not, however, a part of the General Plan.

The 1999 General Plan update deleted both Components I and III. Since the adoption of Component I almost 20 years ago, much of the territory identified for growth potential in the three alternative scenarios is now, through annexation or incorporation, no longer under the County's jurisdiction. In addition, the County's ongoing strategic planning and visioning efforts continue to evaluate the County's long-term needs.

Development of new planned communities, feature plans, specific plans, area plans and other planning efforts over the last 20 years have yielded more precise planning and land use information than was available through Component III.

In 2001, County staff, in collaboration with State HCD, amended the County's Housing Element. The Purpose for this amendment was to obtain the State's certification of the County's Housing Element. The Board of Supervisors adopted the amended Housing Element on May 8, 2001. Following subsequent revisions, the Board adopted the final Housing Element on December 4th 2001. The State of California certified the County's Housing Element on January 2002.

On March 5, 2002, Orange County voters approved Measure W, which repealed the aviation reuse designation for the closed Marine Corps Air Station, El Toro and other

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provisions enacted by Measure A in 1994. Measure W also amended the Orange County General Plan to authorize El Toro to be used for non-aviation uses, including a

multi-purpose central park, open space, nature preserve, universities and schools, cultural facilities, and other interim and long-term uses.

John McGinnis, Orange County Planning Commissioner, pointing at the General Plan (circa 1960)

