

# General Plan Factsheet



Each city and county must adopt a General Plan "for the physical development of the county or city..." Govt. Code § 65300. Courts have called the General Plan the "constitution for future development."

A General Plan is the long term outline of what, where and how the jurisdiction envisions the community will grow. For example, what is the needed capacity for roads, sewers, water lines,

park acreage, etc. The General Plan expresses the community's land use, circulation, environmental, economic and social goals, policies, objectives and actions. The plans must comply with Planning and Zoning Law and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

General Plans serve as the basis upon which decision-makers approve developments.

## Contents of a General Plan

By law a General Plan must at a minimum contain the following sections, or elements:

1. Land Use
2. Open Space
3. Conservation
4. Housing
5. Circulation
6. Noise
7. Safety

Optional elements can include climate action plans, energy and air quality elements, among other topics.

## General Plan Amendments & Updates

Developers frequently request General Plan amendments to increase density for their development in exchange for providing amenities the city wants but can't afford. These General Plan amendments and changes can lead to a piecemeal approach and inconsistencies within the General Plan (e.g. a lack of correlation between planned land use and transportation facilities).



As a general rule, General Plans may need updating after 10 years. Only the Housing Element is required to be updated and certified by the State Department of Housing and Community Development. The process for updating a General Plan usually involves community visioning workshops and even possibly setting up a General Plan Technical Advisory Committee (GTAC). General Plans are also subject to the California Environmental Quality Act.

## City's Undergoing a General Plan Update

Of Orange County's 34 cities and the County, the following cities\* are undergoing a General Plan Update:

- Fullerton
- Garden Grove
- Laguna Hills
- Orange
- Placentia
- Santa Ana

\*partial list



General Plans decide where housing, parks, commercial and industrial areas go.

## Legislation Impacting General Plans

In 2006, the California Legislature and Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed into law AB 32 -- the California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006. AB 32 sets targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 down to 1990 levels. This will reduce emissions approximately 25-30% below "business as usual" projections.

Full implementation of AB 32 is required by 2012 but in the meantime, jurisdictions cannot simply avoid looking at how projects proposed or allowed for in their General Plan will add to greenhouse gas emissions. In other words, in order to meet the mandate for 2020, every project must have a baseline study of its existing contribution to emissions and a projected level of emissions.

## Attorney General's Office & General Plans

State Attorney General Jerry Brown has been watching jurisdictions that are updating their General Plans to be sure they address climate change.

According to the Office of Planning and Research:

"Lead agencies should make a good-faith effort, based on available information, to calculate, model, or estimate the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> and other GHG emissions from a project, including the emissions associated with vehicular traffic, energy consumption, water usage and construction activities."

In short, jurisdictions can't ignore greenhouse gas emissions in their General Plan updates or Environmental Impact Reports.



Climate Change, CEQA & General Plans  
Green Vision Workshop  
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