

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

General Plan Legislation

The adoption of a General Plan by cities and counties became a legal requirement in 1955. At that time, a General Plan consisted of Land Use and Circulation Elements. In 1971, the Legislature created one of the most important features of State planning law by requiring that local zoning and subdivision approvals be consistent with the General Plan. Government Code Section 65302 (a) defines the Land Use Element as follows:

A Land Use Element which designates the proposed general distribution and general location and extent of uses of the land for housing, business, industry, open space, including agriculture, natural resources, recreation,, and enjoyment of scenic beauty, education, public buildings and grounds, solid and liquid waste disposal facilities, and other categories of public and private uses of land. The Land Use Element shall include a statement of the standards of population density and building intensity recommended for the various districts and other territory covered by the plan. The Land Use Element shall also identify areas covered by the plan which are subject to flooding and shall be reviewed annually with respect to such areas.

Purpose and Function

The purpose of the Land Use Element is to establish a pattern of compatible land uses to reflect existing conditions and to guide future development. By law, the element must set clear standards for density of population and intensity of development for each proposed land use category. The Land Use Element, which has the broadest scope of the seven required elements, provides a composite discussion of the issues which are addressed in the other elements through text, diagrams and land use map.

Relationship to Other General Plan Elements

Section 65300.5 of the Government Code requires that the General Plan be consistent throughout (i.e., "internally consistent"). The assumptions and projections used in the Housing Element, for instance, must be consistent with those used in the Land Use Element and the Open Space Element. Local policies must not conflict with Statewide policies pertaining to housing, open space and environmental quality.