

# Introduction



## What Is the Gilroy General Plan?

### A Statement of Community Values and a Shared Vision

The Gilroy General Plan is a statement of community values and priorities. It considers the issues and trends affecting the City today (Chapter 2); describes the type of community we want to be in the future (Chapter 3); and sets forth goals, policies and implementing actions across a wide range of issue areas to help us achieve our aims (Chapters 4 through 8). It also describes how the General Plan should be managed over time (Chapter 9), and identifies near-term priorities for putting the General Plan into action (Chapter 10). In total, the Gilroy General Plan articulates our vision of the future and how we intend to realize it.

### A Strategic, Pro-Active Planning Tool

The Gilroy General Plan is a strategic tool for guiding the City's physical development, and, in turn, its economic and social development. It is based on a comprehensive understanding of the issues we face today and the potential issues we may face in the future, as well as a clear sense of what we hope to accomplish. It has been developed with the extensive involvement of community members who have helped identify key issues; evaluated key challenges and opportunities; and developed goals, strategies and policies to guide the City's future growth and development.

The General Plan is based on the premise that growth and change are inevitable, and that while growth is certain to have some undesirable impacts, it can also provide important community benefits. The General Plan strives to be a positive, pro-active force to minimize or eliminate undesirable impacts, and to achieve desired community benefits in both the short and long term.



## **A Guide for Land Use and Development Decisions**

The General Plan helps guide the City's long-term development. It establishes the overall policy framework for development decision making and defines the desired location, character, and quality of future development, as well as the process by which development should proceed.

As the City faces tough development decisions, the General Plan will serve as a guide to help ensure that each decision is made in the best interest of the City's long-term future. If a project is proposed that does not conform to the General Plan, then the project must be either modified or denied, or the General Plan must be amended.

## **A Balanced Approach**

The goals, policies and implementing actions contained in the General Plan establish clear community priorities and development policies to ensure the protection of public health, safety and welfare and to further community goals while respecting the needs of individual property owners and businesses in the City.

The General Plan also recognizes that many factors beyond the City's control will have significant influence over future development activities. These include market forces as well as the land use and transportation decisions made by other cities, counties, and government agencies. The General Plan acknowledges and responds to these factors in its policies and implementing actions.

## **A Living Document and Action Plan**

The General Plan has been written and designed to provide a user-friendly resource for City staff and officials, property owners, developers, and area residents. Also, to ensure the Plan's usefulness and relevance over time, the Plan includes policies and programs regarding its ongoing management and coordination (Chapter 9).

To ensure a close link between the long-term perspective of the General Plan and short-term actions, the General Plan defines implementing actions across the full range of issue areas, and includes an action plan (Chapter 10) to identify implementation priorities in response to pressing issues and short-term planning needs.



## A State Law Requirement

All cities and counties in California are required to have a General Plan, and to keep it updated. The previous Gilroy General Plan was adopted in 1979. There have been numerous amendments since then, including complete updates to several sections of the General Plan (including the Housing Element in 1990 and the Circulation and Air Quality Element in 1992).

The 2002 update brings the General Plan into conformance with changes in State law and other legal requirements; reflects changes in the local population and economy since 1979; incorporates the most recent projections and assumptions regarding future growth; and responds to the issues, challenges and opportunities created by recent trends and developments.



## Structure of the Plan

The Gilroy General Plan is written and designed for use by all members of the Gilroy community: residents, businesses, property owners, developers, City staff, and elected and appointed officials.

Following is a brief overview of the General Plan's key structural components to help you understand how it is organized.

### **Community Setting** (*Chapter 2*)

This chapter summarizes existing conditions and key issues for the General Plan, based on the detailed information presented in the *General Plan Background Report* (bound under separate cover). It also provides a brief overview of the City's planning history, and a summary of the key assumptions and projections on which the General Plan is based.

### **Vision for Gilroy** (*Chapter 3*)

The vision describes the type of community we want Gilroy to be in the future. It is a reflection of our community's values, defining the outcomes we are trying to achieve through the planning process. It is the foundation for the General Plan's guiding principles, and for its issue-specific goals, policies and implementing actions. The vision for Gilroy is presented on pages 3-2 through 3-5.

### **Guiding Principles** (*Chapter 3*)

These are the key strategies that guide the General Plan towards achieving the community's vision. They represent the major themes—the “big ideas” on which the rest of the plan is based. They are presented on pages 3-6 and 3-7.

### **Areas of Special Concern** (*Chapter 3*)

The General Plan identifies four areas of special concern that have received focused attention in the update process: Neighborhood Districts; Campus Industrial Areas; Downtown; and Hecker Pass.



These areas are critical to achieving the General Plan's vision and goals. The focused discussions in Chapter 3 help clarify the Plan's intent for these areas, providing a more detailed level of policy direction. These directives are further supported by the policies and implementing actions in subsequent chapters.

### Goals, Policies, and Implementing Actions (Chapters 4 to 8)

The General Plan contains five issue chapters: Community Design and Development; Housing; Transportation and Circulation; Public Facilities and Services; and Community Resources and Potential Hazards. The specific issues addressed in each chapter are listed in the Table of Contents.

Each issue chapter presents goals, policies, and implementing actions:

- A **Goal** is a general statement of values or aspirations held by the community in relation to each issue area. It is the end towards which the City will direct its efforts.
- A **Policy** is a more precise expression regarding the community's position on a particular issue, or how a particular goal will be interpreted or implemented. Policies may include guidelines, standards, objectives, maps, diagrams, or a combination of these components:
  - **A guideline** is a policy statement that provides a set of detailed instructions regarding how some aspect of land use regulation will be conducted.
  - **A standard** is a policy statement with a specific, quantified measure of performance.
  - **An objective** is a policy statement where very specific results, dates or products are included.
  - **A map or diagram** is a graphic expression of policy. Maps illustrate the geographic application of policies.
- An **Implementing Action** puts the goals and policies into practice. These might include ongoing programs sponsored by the City (e.g., general road maintenance); discrete, time-specific actions (e.g., widen the sidewalks in a particular area); or further planning actions (e.g., develop a specific plan or enact an issue-specific ordinance).



### **Plan Management and Coordination** (*Chapter 9*)

The General Plan includes goals, policies and implementing actions regarding its ongoing management, including procedures for making amendments to the General Plan. It also encourages ongoing community participation in the City's planning and development processes, and addresses coordination issues between the City and other planning and regulatory agencies, including coordination between the Gilroy General Plan and the *South County Joint Area Plan*.

### **Implementation Priorities** (*Chapter 10*)

To provide direction for the General Plan's implementation, the final chapter establishes implementation priorities, identifying implementing actions from previous chapters that should be prioritized for implementation in the next one to five years.



## Issues Addressed in the Plan (The Plan's Elements)

Under California law, cities are required to address seven issue areas or “elements” in their general plans: land use, transportation, housing, safety, open space, conservation, and noise. The State allows considerable flexibility in how these elements are organized, and encourages the inclusion of additional “elements” to ensure that plans are truly comprehensive and effective in addressing local issues.

The Gilroy General Plan incorporates the State-mandated elements, but organizes them into five major policy areas: Community Design and Development; Housing; Transportation and Circulation; Public Facilities and Services; and Community Resources and Potential Hazards. The General Plan also includes a number of “optional elements” to address key issue areas. Like the State-mandated

**Table 1-1. State-Mandated Elements and Optional Elements in the Gilroy General Plan**

	Gilroy General Plan Chapters				
	Chapter 4 <i>Comm. Design &amp; Development</i>	Chapter 5 <i>Housing</i>	Chapter 6 <i>Transportation &amp; Circulation</i>	Chapter 7 <i>Public Facilities &amp; Services</i>	Chapter 8 <i>Resources &amp; Hazards</i>
<b>State-Mandated Elements</b>					
Land Use	X				
Circulation			X		
Housing		X			
Open Space					X
Conservation <i>includes energy and forestry/wildlife</i>					X
Safety <i>includes seismic</i>				X	X
Noise					X
<b>"Optional" Elements (alphabetically)</b>					
Agriculture	X				X
Air Quality					X
Cultural Facilities				X	
Economic Development	X				
Growth Management	X				
Historic Preservation	X				
Parks and Recreation				X	
Scenic Highways	X				
Schools				X	
Water Supply and Quality				X	X



elements, these optional elements are not necessarily presented as stand-alone chapters in the General Plan. Instead, they are incorporated into the structure of the five major policy areas. **Table 1-1** lists both the State-mandated and optional elements, indicating where they are covered in the General Plan document.

In addition to the elements listed in Table 1-1, the Gilroy General Plan incorporates the policies of the *South County Joint Area Plan* (SCJAP), adopted by the City of Gilroy in 1989 in conjunction with the City of Morgan Hill and Santa Clara County. The SCJAP is “a mutual statement of policies for community development and environmental management... to achieve harmony and cooperation among the three South County jurisdictions, and consistency between their adopted policies” (SCJAP, Policy 0.01). The SCJAP is included in the Gilroy General Plan document as Appendix B, and coordination between the General Plan and SCJAP is discussed in Chapter 9.

The Gilroy General Plan also incorporates many of the recommendations from the South County Agricultural Study, adopted by Council on September 23, 1996 and presented in the document titled *Strategies to Balance Planned Growth and Agricultural Viability in the Areas South and East of Gilroy*.



## How the General Plan Was Developed

The Gilroy General Plan update effort began in Fall of 1997. It involved community residents, City commission members, staff, and elected officials in a series of meetings and workshops to identify key issues; review current plan policies; review data on current conditions and trends; develop a vision and goal statements; and define key policy and program directives. Additionally, following release of the June 1999 Draft General Plan, the City's Planning Commission and Council reviewed and revised the draft goals, policies, and implementing actions, including revisions to the Draft Land Use Plan Map. Those changes, as adopted, have been incorporated in the General Plan.

### General Plan Update Committee

In September 1997, the City Council convened a General Plan Update Committee (GPUC) to ensure broad community representation in the update process and to provide the community with a direct voice in the Plan's development. The 40+ member GPUC included over 30 citizens, reflecting Gilroy's diverse population, as well as representatives from the Planning Commission, Parks and Recreation Commission, Arts and Culture Commission, Library Commission, and Gilroy Unified School District. There were also two advisory members from the City Council. A complete list of GPUC members is provided at the beginning of this document.

The GPUC selected a consultant team in February 1998 to facilitate its work and develop the General Plan as well as the background documentation and environmental analysis. The consultant guided the GPUC through a sequence of large and small group discussions to:

- **Develop a Vision** to define the group's shared values and establish the desired "end point" towards which the updated Plan would be directed.
- **Review Current Policies** to familiarize GPUC members with the policies in the current General Plan and provide a preliminary evaluation of issues to address.



The General Plan Update Committee, representing more than 40 Gilroy citizens and commission representatives, played a critical role in development of the Draft General Plan.



- **Identify and Prioritize Key Issues** based on an area-by-area review of the City and small group discussions, providing the basis for organizing into issue-specific subcommittees.
- **Develop Goals** at the subcommittee level to provide an overall policy framework.
- **Resolve Key Issues**, providing policy direction from the subcommittees for development of draft policies and programs.
- **Review Draft Policies and Implementing Actions**, leading to approval of a Draft General Plan for further public review, culminating in public hearings before the City's Planning Commission and City Council.

### Additional Outreach

In addition to the extensive involvement of GPUC members in the Plan's development, a number of outreach activities helped keep the Gilroy community informed about the GPUC's work and provided opportunities for public input and feedback. These included:

- **Regular Mailings** of GPUC agendas and materials to city officials, other agencies, and interested citizens.
- **Newsletter Articles** in the City's quarterly newsletter, *The Inside Scoop*.
- **Local Media Coverage** in the *Gilroy Dispatch*, including several front-page articles on the General Plan Update. In addition, all GPUC and Subcommittee meetings were announced in the *Dispatch* and on Channel 17.
- **Community Workshops (4)** in conjunction with the Parks and Recreation Master Plan process.
- **Targeted Outreach Workshops (2)** with youth and seniors in conjunction with the Parks and Recreation Master Plan process.
- **Staff and GPUC Member Presentations** to various community and civic groups, including the Chamber of Commerce, Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Visitor's Bureau, Neighborhood Accountability Board, Leadership Gilroy, South County Joint Area Planning Advisory Committee, Economic Development Corporation, and American Association of University Women.



## Public Review of the Draft Plan

The Draft Gilroy General Plan was distributed widely by the City and members of the GPUC to promote public review and awareness. In addition to the traditional methods of making the Plan available at City offices and the library (and to agencies or individuals that request a copy), the Draft Gilroy General Plan was:

- **Presented at a Special Community Event**, with GPUC members presenting their Draft Plan to the City Council, Planning Commission, School Board, and other members of the Gilroy community.
- **Highlighted on Channel 17** to provide an overview of the Draft Plan and its contents to as wide an audience as possible, and encourage public participation in the review process.
- **Distributed Throughout the Community** at places such as coffee shops, churches and school offices so that copies of the Draft Plan were easily available.

The June 1999 Draft Plan was then reviewed in a series of public hearings before the Planning Commission and City Council, culminating in April 2001 with direction for the preparation of a Revised Draft General Plan and Revised Draft EIR, which were released for public review in September 2001. Subsequent refinements to the revised draft were identified in public hearings before the City Council in early 2002, and incorporated into the General Plan, as adopted on June 13, 2002.



## **How the General Plan Relates to Other Planning Documents and Activities**

There are a number of other planning documents adopted by the City and planning activities that are undertaken on a regular basis. These represent techniques that the City can use to help implement the General Plan. The most important techniques and their relationship to the General Plan are discussed below.

### **Zoning Ordinance and Map**

The Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map are parcel-specific regulations pertaining to how land may be used, and the specific conditions of use that the City will impose, consistent with the overall policy framework of the General Plan and Land Use Map. The Zoning Ordinance and Map are therefore important tools for implementing the goals and policies of the General Plan, with the General Plan serving as a guide for determining appropriate revisions to the Zoning Ordinance and Map documents.

### **Subdivision Ordinance**

Government Code Section 66410 et seq. requires that local jurisdictions regulate and control subdivision activity through adoption and use of a Subdivision Ordinance. The City may not approve a proposed subdivision map unless the subdivision, including its design and proposed land uses, is consistent with the General Plan. A proposed subdivision must be consistent with the goals, policies, and implementing actions included in the General Plan. This requirement applies to subdivisions for which parcel maps (minor subdivisions) are filed, as well as tentative and final maps.

### **Capital Improvement Programs**

Government Code 65401 requires the City Council to obtain from City officials and staff, and from special districts operating within the City limits, lists of all public works projects recommended for study, design, or construction during each ensuing year. To facilitate its longer-term capital planning, the City of Gilroy compiles its list of public works projects for the ensuing five years. The list of public works projects is then organized into a coordinated program, called the



Capital Improvement Program (CIP). The City must ensure that the CIP and its component projects are consistent with the General Plan.

### **Environmental Impact Review**

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (California Administrative Code Section 14100 et seq.) establishes the relationship between environmental review as prescribed by CEQA and the General Plan. Section 15080 requires that the environmental review process be “combined with the existing planning, review, and project approval process” used by the City. Section 15125(b) requires environmental review to discuss any inconsistencies between a proposed project and the General Plan. Projects should be found to have a “significant adverse effect on the environment” if they conflict with “adopted environmental plans and goals of the community...” (including the General Plan). Future public and private projects, even if they are consistent with the General Plan, are still subject to environmental review requirements under CEQA.

### **Building Codes and Standards**

State Housing Law (Health and Safety Code Sections 17910 et seq.) requires the City to adopt regulations imposing substantially the same standards as those contained in the various uniform industry codes (e.g., the Uniform Building Code). State law also imposes special standards, which may be more stringent than the uniform industry codes, designed to protect against certain types of hazards (fire, noise, earthquakes, unstable soils) and to achieve certain resource management goals (such as energy conservation). The City of Gilroy may adopt regulations and standards that vary from those mandated by State law, if justified by local conditions. If such variance is appropriate, the General Plan can serve as the vehicle for documenting local conditions and specifying the necessary regulatory response.



## **Companion Documents: General Plan Background Report and EIR**

To promote its ease of use and readability, the General Plan's technical documentation and environmental analysis have been compiled separately.

### **General Plan Background Report**

In the process of preparing the General Plan, large volumes of technical data were collected, analyzed, and summarized. To support the work of the GPUC, much of this information was presented in a series of "working papers," documenting existing conditions, trends, and key issues. Working papers were prepared for Growth Management; Public Utilities and Services; Transportation and Circulation; Environment and Safety; Housing; and Open Space, Agriculture, Historic Preservation, and Scenic Highways. Additional information was compiled on the City's existing land use inventory; projected population growth; housing; and demographics.

The General Plan Background Report is a compilation of this technical information and is considered a part of the General Plan. It also provides documentation on the participation process leading to the Gilroy General Plan.

### **Environmental Impact Report**

State law requires preparation of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) if "any aspect of the general plan element or amendment, either individually or cumulatively, leads to a significant effect on the environment, regardless of whether or not its total effect is adverse or beneficial. . . ." (Title 14, California Administrative Code, Section 15080).

The Gilroy General Plan is accompanied by an EIR, under separate cover, analyzing and documenting the updated General Plan's potential environmental impacts and, where applicable, associated mitigation measures (i.e., actions that can be taken to reduce or eliminate adverse impacts). It also addresses other State-mandated EIR components for a General Plan, including a 'Mitigation Monitoring Program' that identifies specific mitigation measures, including revisions to General Plan policies and programs that have been incorporated as part of the General Plan, as adopted on June 13, 2002.