



MEMORANDUM
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT RESOURCE AGENCY
PLANNING SERVICES DIVISION
County of Placer

TO: Honorable Board of Supervisors **DATE:** November 29, 2022
FROM: David W. Kwong, Community Development Resource Agency Director
BY: Christopher Schmidt, Interim Planning Director
SUBJECT: General Plan Update Workshop

ACTION REQUESTED

1. Conduct a workshop on a General Plan Update and direct staff to proceed with refining the General Plan Update work program through creation of a General Plan Update scope and work plan.

BACKGROUND

The Planning Services Division is providing the Board of Supervisors (Board) with a discussion about, and is requesting direction to initiate, a Placer County General Plan Update. The entire work program is projected to take approximately five years. Based upon the Board's direction, staff will return at a future date with a formal work plan for adoption, as well as a detailed accounting of estimated costs for implementing the work plan.

A General Plan is designed to serve as the jurisdiction's "blueprint" for future decisions concerning land use, infrastructure, public services, and resource conservation. Every city and county in California is required to prepare and maintain a comprehensive, long-range General Plan to guide its future. State *Government Code* Section 65300 requires that each jurisdiction prepare and adopt a comprehensive, long-term plan (General Plan) for the physical development of the county or city. *Government Code* Section 65302 provides that "the general plan shall consist of a statement of development policies and shall include a diagram or diagrams and text setting forth objectives, principles, standards, and plan proposals."

General Plans are divided into elements based on specific topics. Elements are an organizational method for policies. State law requires that General Plans include the following seven mandatory elements:

- **Land Use Element** designates the type, intensity, and general distribution of uses of land.
- **Circulation Element** identifies the general location and extent of existing and proposed major thoroughfares, transportation routes and other local public utilities and facilities.
- **Housing Element** assesses current and projected housing needs for all economic segments of the community.
- **Conservation Element** addresses the conservation, development, and use of natural resources.
- **Open Space Element** details plans and measures for the long-range preservation and conservation of open-space lands.

- **Noise Element** identifies and addresses issues related to noise.
- **Safety Element** establishes policies and programs to protect the community from risks associated with such things as seismic or geologic hazards, flooding, and wildfires.

In addition to these mandatory elements, a community may also include additional elements in its General Plan. Placer County's current General Plan contains a Recreation and Cultural Resources Element, an Agricultural and Forestry Resources Element, and placed Public Facilities and Services in a stand-alone chapter. There is not a limit to the types of policy discussions or elements that a community can adopt in a General Plan so long as the policies are internally consistent with State and Federal law and are actionable.

The policies of the General Plan are intended to underlie most land use decisions. Pursuant to state law, subdivisions, capital improvements, development agreements, and many other land use actions must be consistent with the General Plan. All specific plans, subdivisions, public works projects, and zoning decisions made by the County must be consistent with the General Plan.

Housing Element

The Housing Element, which was adopted on May 11, 2021, is unique within a General Plan because it must be updated on a separate eight-year schedule. The current Housing Element cycle covers May 2021 to May 2029.

Housing Elements must be prepared and submitted for certification by the California Department of Housing and Community Development. Housing Element updates are a routine function for Planning Services Division staff and are considered outside the General Plan Update scope.

1994 General Plan Update

Placer County's current General Plan was last comprehensively updated in 1994. The 1994 General Plan laid the groundwork for two specific plans, Placer Vineyards and Bickford Ranch, both of which are currently under development. The Placer Legacy Open Space and Agricultural Conservation Program was also a result of the 1994 General Plan.

One of the more significant changes has been the 2020 adoption of the Placer County Conservation Plan (PCCP). The purpose of the PCCP is to protect and enhance ecological diversity and function, including aquatic resource functions and values, in the greater portion of western Placer County while allowing appropriate and compatible growth in accordance with applicable laws. To this end, the Western Placer County Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Community Conservation Plan describes how to avoid, minimize, and mitigate effects on endangered and threatened species.

Planned and proposed new development would accommodate substantial housing and job growth in unincorporated western Placer County over the next 50 years. The growth scenario prepared for the PCCP shows an increase of about 68,000 residential units housing 178,000 people (just over 50 percent of the residential growth forecast for this area, including the growth projected for Roseville, Rocklin, and Auburn). The General Plan's land use diagram must be brought into alignment with the PCCP's designated preserve and future growth areas.

2013 General Plan Update

In 2013, a focused update of the General Plan was completed and adopted. The objective of this update was to keep the County's General Plan current by making adjustments to reflect changes in conditions and to incorporate state law and local policies and programs. The targeted update consisted of technical modifications to the Policy Document, including revisions to diagrams, goals, policies and programs. The chief purpose for the modifications to text was to insure the Policy Document is consistent with State law, and the status, responsible departments and content of implementation programs are accurate. Land use designations, the land use map or the Capital Improvement Program were not changed in 2013.

2050 General Plan

Communities seldom stand still; they are continually growing, changing, and evolving. The County General Plan no longer reflects current conditions, nor does it directly address many of the issues now facing the County and the region.

New laws affecting General Plans have been passed, new social and environmental issues have emerged, and new and innovative planning strategies have been developed. Additionally, the County has grown and changed with significant development and population growth particularly in western Placer County. There have been frequent amendment requests due to development pressure, new growth has strained infrastructure, and housing affordability has become a significant issue. With these changing conditions, priorities have changed.

The General Plan Update under consideration would look ahead to the year 2050 and proposes adjustments based on current issues, emerging trends, and positioning Placer County to create balanced physical and economic growth for approximately the next 25 years. The update would also bring the General Plan into compliance with new laws and County initiatives related to climate change, multimodal transportation, affordable housing, and natural resource protection. Several key plans that would be incorporated into the General Plan policies include the PCCP, Placer County Sustainability Plan, and the Placer County Local Hazard Mitigation Plan.

Preparing, adopting, implementing, and maintaining a General Plan serves to:

- Identify the community's land use, circulation, environmental, economic, and social goals and policies as they relate to land use and development.
- Provide a basis for local decision making, including decisions on development approvals and exactions.
- Provide citizens with opportunities to participate in the planning and decision-making processes of their community.
- Inform citizens, developers, decision makers, and other cities and counties of the ground rules that guide development within the county.
- The General Plan bridges the gap between community values, visions and objectives, and physical decisions such as subdivisions and infrastructure projects.

The General Plan Update will coincide with the Placer County Transportation Planning Agency's update to the Regional Transportation Plan that will extend the Placer region's planning horizon

for transportation investments to 2050. The Regional Transportation Plan is a blueprint to guide investments for all forms of travel – motor vehicle, transit, bicycle and walking – and the movement of people and goods throughout the region. The Regional Transportation Plan will identify current and future transportation needs, investments needed to meet those needs, and what funds are expected to be available to make those investments a reality.

Scope of Update

Given constrained financial resources and the desire to complete a General Plan Update within a reasonable period, the County must begin the update with a scoping effort ahead of hiring a consultant team. This will allow the consultant team to begin with a clear mandate and direction, resulting in efficiencies.

The first step in preparing a General Plan Update for a county of this scale, with multiple distinct communities, and numerous anticipated focus topics, is to establish an achievable scope. What will be the focus of the update? Which policy guidance is most crucial to allow our communities to thrive? How do we best protect and cultivate what we hold dear?

Provided the significance of the General Plan, and its broad reach, there is tendency toward preparing an update that would solve everything. This is unrealistic and has partly led to some of the implementation challenges with the existing General Plan. To build broad acceptance of the next General Plan, and to complete the plan within a reasonable timeframe and on budget, the scope must be meaningful and manageable.

Healthy Community Plan

The 2050 General Plan is proposed to have a healthy community plan framework. Encouraged by the State of California, jurisdictions are beginning to integrate public health goals and objectives as part of the comprehensive planning process with the understanding that planning strategies and built environments can promote long-term community health. Decisions made regarding land use, urban design, and transportation have impacts local air quality, water quality and supply, traffic safety, and physical activity. Key issues, such as affordable housing, healthy communities, access to healthy foods, safe routes to school, conservation planning, groundwater, vehicle miles traveled, and climate change, would likely be addressed as cross-cutting issues throughout the Plan.

Community Plan Consolidation

Placer County has created policy documents for specific geographic areas. These community-based policy documents are known as community plans or area plans. Community plans provide more detailed land use designations and site-specific policy recommendations than is practical at the countywide level. Community plans typically address community issues such as: the local street network; development patterns; parks and recreation; distinctive environmental characteristics; location; and design guidelines.

The County currently has fifteen area plans, listed below with date of adoption, from oldest to newest:

- Alpine Meadows (1968)
- Weimar/Applegate/Clipper Gap (1980)
- Ophir (1983)
- Olympic Valley (formerly Squaw Valley) (1983)

Colfax (1990)
Dry Creek/West Placer (1990)
Auburn/Bowman (1994)
Horseshoe Bar/Penryn (1994)
Meadow Vista (1996)
Martis Valley (2003)
Foresthill (2008)
Granite Bay (2012)
Sheridan (2015)
Tahoe Basin Area Plan (2017)
Sunset Area Plan (2019)

Together, the General Plan and the community plans seek to guide future growth and development to achieve citywide and community level goals. All the adopted land use plans must be consistent with the goals and policies of the General Plan.

Today, over one-half of Placer County's community plans are in need of update with just six updated in the past two decades. Two updates, the Granite Bay Community Plan and the Sheridan Community Plan, were completed by County staff. The Granite Bay Community Plan update did not involve land use changes, however. The two most recent updates, the Tahoe Basin Area Plan and Sunset Area Plan relied on a combination of County staff and consultant work, and took over two years to complete, with large financial and staff resource commitments by the County.

At best, the County is able to complete two community plan updates per decade. The Board will be asked to consider whether the county should continue to have and maintain fifteen community plans. Options for community plans include:

- ✓ **Exclude:** One, some or all remain as stand-alone documents.
- ✓ **Eliminate:** Merge into the General Plan.
- ✓ **Include:** Incorporate into the General Plan as an "Area Plan" or "Community Area Plan".
- ✓ **Add:** Add new Area Plans or Community Area Plans for one or more areas of the county.
- ✓ **New:** Prepare a new stand-alone community plan (or specific plan) for one or more areas of the county.

Some community plan areas have seen significant growth with updates long overdue. In others, there has been little growth or change since adoption reducing the need for a community plan. These areas are prime candidates for elimination. On the other hand, the new Tahoe Basin and Sunset Area Plans have unique development regulations and implementing zoning, making incorporation into the General Plan Update more complex.

One benefit of incorporating older existing area plans as General Plan community area plans would be assurance that community-specific policies would be refreshed with each General Plan Update rather than every twenty-plus years or longer.

Public Outreach

As part of the process, engaging community members and decision makers will be critical in order to produce a General Plan that is forward thinking, informed, and fiscally viable. A wide-ranging, effective community outreach program is required. There is an expectation in the community and of the Board to involve the interested public throughout the update process. While staff is expected to take an active role in community outreach, a consultant would provide a broad range of services including but not limited to workshop materials and exercises, newsletters, e-blasts, on-line townhall forums, and public opinion surveys.

County Working Group

A team of County staff overseen by the Planning Services Division is expected to take an active role in the update process. County staff from multiple departments will be the “face of the project” and have a complete understanding of and familiarity with every aspect of the Plan. Some of the more technical tasks in the work program, such as the existing conditions analysis, Environmental Impact Report (EIR), and web-based general plan, will be primarily the responsibility of the consultant. The working group would provide focused and technical direction for the project on key issues. County staff will have significant responsibilities for visioning and guiding principles, alternatives analysis, policy development, advising on plan development, help prepare for public meetings, and ultimately implementation.

The County working group would help define the General Plan Update objectives, refine the scope of work, prepare a request for proposals, and recommend a consultant team with the necessary technical, outreach and planning expertise for the project. Specifically, the working group would be tasked with:

1. Providing guidance to staff regarding the scope of work and preparation of a Request for Proposals for a General Plan Update consultant(s);
2. Reviewing responses to the Request for Proposals;
3. Making a recommendation to the Board regarding the selection of a consultant to assist with the General Plan Update; and
4. Making reports to the Board as needed regarding the progress of the General Plan Update.

Timeline

Building upon any work previously accomplished, and with the dedication of substantial staff resources from several departments, and relying upon existing Boards and Municipal Advisory Councils, staff anticipates completing the General Plan Update in approximately five years. The EIR process would likely constitute one and a half years of that time.

The short-term work plan includes seven tasks:

1. **Overview.** Audit the existing General Plan’s policies and implementation programs.
2. **Early Outreach Preparation.** Develop methods and outlines for outreach.
3. **Major Issues.** Identify preliminary issues to explore through community outreach.

4. **Public Outreach.** Market the planning effort to increase awareness/participation; reach out to community members and stakeholders for input on focus topics.
5. **Scope/Financing.** Provide the Board with options for the planning scope and budget.
6. **Recruitment.** Recruit a consultant to implement the Board-approved scope.
7. **Commencement.** Begin the update and complete a draft document within five years.

Cost

County General Plans are considerable undertakings because of the scope and scale of issues involved. Consultant services are needed to support the preparation of the 2050 General Plan Update and will require significant County resources, staff time, and funding. Staff will return to the Board with a cost estimate once the Update work program is refined.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff requests the Board provide direction on whether to proceed with a General Plan Update; and if so, direct staff to proceed with refining the General Plan Update work program through creation of a General Plan Update scope and work plan. Staff actions included within that request will consist of the following:

1. Refining the scope of work and preparing a Request for Proposals for a General Plan Update consultant;
2. Reviewing responses to the Request for Proposals;
3. Making a recommendation to the Board regarding the selection of a consultant to assist with the General Plan Update; and
4. Making reports to the Board as needed regarding the progress of the General Plan Update.

Based upon the Board's direction, staff will return at a future date with a formal work plan for consideration, as well as a detailed accounting of estimated costs for completing the General Plan Update.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

This action does not constitute a "Project" under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA guidelines section 15378(b)(5) because it is an administrative action that does not result in any direct or physical change in the environment.

FISCAL IMPACT

The Actions Requested with this item have no fiscal impact. County General Plans are considerable undertakings because of the scope and scale of issues involved. Consultant services are needed to support the preparation of the 2050 General Plan Update and will require significant County resources, staff time, and funding. Staff will return to the Board with a cost estimate once the General Plan Update work program is refined.

ATTACHMENTS

None

