

INTRODUCTION

Adopted in entirety by Resolution 2002-56 on October 28, 2002

Guiding Principles

- *Preserve and enhance the character of Lafayette as a semi-rural community.*
- *Create and maintain a strong sense of community in Lafayette.*
- *Protect the natural and scenic quality of our surrounding hillsides and ridgelines, creek areas, trees and other vegetation.*
- *Encourage the involvement of citizen volunteers in land use and policy planning.*

Lafayette is a unique and fortunate community. Unique in its magnificent natural setting, and fortunate that through the tireless volunteer efforts of its citizens, it has preserved a semi-rural ambiance despite the severe pressures of urbanization.

In its early years, Lafayette grew from a settlement of pioneer ranchers occupying the Acalanes Rancho in the 1840's to a small village comprised of a grist mill, a school, a church, roadside stores and rooming houses centered along Golden Gate Way. By 1857, Lafayette had acquired its name, a post office and several hotels and eating establishments. A tunnel through the Oakland-Berkeley hills in 1904 accelerated Lafayette's transition from a settlement to a small residential village.

Rapid suburbanization took place in Contra Costa County after World War II. It wasn't until the 1960s that Lafayette began to grow substantially. By 1968 Lafayette had experienced such significant, and at times inappropriate, development that residents voted to incorporate in order to exercise more local control.

In 1974, Lafayette adopted its first General Plan. The principal goal of that Plan was to preserve and enhance the character of Lafayette as a low density, semi-rural residential community. Other goals of the Plan stressed the protection of Lafayette's natural beauty, and recognized the need to balance development with the preservation of the scenic quality of the surrounding hills.

Since its adoption in 1974, the Lafayette General Plan has been the guiding force behind all of Lafayette's land-use decisions. Despite the continued pressures of residential growth, Lafayette strives to protect its ridgelines and sensitive hillside areas through the application of residential design guidelines, control of hillside densities, and the careful review of the environmental and visual impacts of development.

The City's natural terrain - undeveloped hillsides, generous spans of open space, mature oaks, natural creeks and numerous tributaries, and spectacular scenic viewsheds - defines the City's physical setting. Complementing this foothill environment are the Lafayette Reservoir and the area's trail system, including the nation's first rail-to-trail project - the Lafayette-Moraga Trail.

In our residential neighborhoods, a small town look predominates, with many narrow winding roads and mature vegetation. The presence of older neighborhoods with smaller homes lends variety to the residential fabric of the City, while the City's superior schools enhance the quality of family life. The city's downtown is notable for its low-rise architecture, multi-family housing and local merchants. Together, these distinguishing features give Lafayette its structure, character, charm, and most importantly, its community identity.

This new Plan heralds the rebirth of the Downtown. It recognizes the value of preserving and enhancing the center of Lafayette as a place where residents can congregate to shop, take part in civic activities, and enjoy the ambiance of small town life. Downtown Lafayette continues to evolve as new retail, residential and commercial developments are introduced while preserving and enhancing existing historic landmarks and buildings and scenic vistas.

This General Plan celebrates the singular charm and value of Lafayette in an otherwise urbanized county. Careful implementation of its goals and policies will allow Lafayette to remain a semi-rural community, whose vibrant downtown and pastoral neighborhoods are set within a magnificent open space environment.

WHAT IS A GENERAL PLAN?

Every city and county in California is required by State law to have a General Plan. The General Plan establishes conservation and development goals, as well as the location and intensity of different land uses. Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances and specific plans must be in conformance with the General Plan.

The General Plan has the following functions:

- Identify the community's land use, circulation, and environmental goals and policies.
- Enable the City Council, the Planning Commission and other city commissions to establish long-range conservation and development policies.
- Provide a basis for judging whether or not specific private development proposals and public projects are in harmony with these goals and policies.
- Inform citizens, developers, decision-makers and other jurisdictions of the rules that guide development and conservation within the Lafayette Planning Area.

The General Plan is a statement of the community's vision of the future. It is a long-range and comprehensive plan that coordinates all major components of the community's physical development. Because the plan is long-range and comprehensive, it is general in nature. It establishes requirements for additional planning studies where greater specificity is needed. In addition, this Plan is internally consistent. The goals, policies and programs relate to one another within each chapter and to the whole document.

THE GENERAL PLAN PROCESS IN LAFAYETTE

This General Plan is an update of the Plan that was adopted in 1974. This current process began in 1992. An extensive public participation program took place to ensure that the revised Plan reflected the concerns and views of the community. Key milestones of the public participation process are summarized below:

- The General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC) was established by the City Council to facilitate public participation. It was comprised of members of city commissions, the general public and elected representatives
- A leaflet on the General Plan revision process including a summary of the plan alternatives was sent to all residents and business people in Lafayette. Town hall meetings were then held to discuss the pros and cons of the alternatives.
- City commissions reviewed the Draft General Plan and forwarded their comments to the GPAC.
- Planning Commission/City Council workshops were held on the Draft General Plan.
- The Planning Commission and the City Council held public hearings to certify the Environmental Impact Report and adopt the General Plan.

The result of this multi-year process is a General Plan that reflects the concerns and values of the residents and business people of Lafayette. It is a plan that seeks a balance among the environmental, social and economic needs of the community.

CONTENTS OF THE LAFAYETTE GENERAL PLAN

The General Plan establishes goals, policies and programs to guide the community's conservation and development. It is organized into eight chapters covering all of the elements required by State law and the Contra Costa Transportation Authority (CCTA). Table 1 presents the relationship of the chapters to the State and CCTA-mandated elements.

TABLE 1 – RELATION OF GENERAL PLAN CHAPTERS TO STATE & CCTA-MANDATED ELEMENTS

Lafayette General Plan Chapter	Mandated Element/Body
Land Use Chapter	Land Use Element <state>
Circulation Chapter	Circulation Element <state>
Open Space & Conservation Chapter	Open Space Element <state> Conservation Element <state>
Parks, Trails & Recreation Chapter	<no state mandate>
Housing Chapter	Housing Element <state>
Safety Chapter	Safety Element <state>
Noise Chapter	Noise Element <state>
Growth Management Chapter	Growth Management Chapter <CCTA>

GENERAL PLAN CHAPTERS

Chapter I: Land Use. Addresses the mix of uses on public and private property, including growth management, annexation, urban design, the redevelopment plan, the City’s Sphere of Influence, and infrastructure to accommodate existing and future development. The Land Use Map and designations, with types and intensities of use, are part of this chapter, as is the growth management element required by the transportation bond “Measure C”. Urban design guidelines to ensure that new development is attractive and contributes to Lafayette’s unique sense of place are found here. Lastly, this chapter incorporates portions of previously adopted specific plans for the Downtown, as well as programs to preserve historic resources.

Chapter II: Circulation. Examines the roadway system and other means of access and circulation including transit, pedestrian walkways, bicycle routes and transportation for the mobility-impaired. Level of service standards and ways of managing transportation demand, taking into account the relationship between land use and transportation, are incorporated into this chapter.

Chapter III: Open Space and Conservation Chapter. Emphasizes the identification and protection of environmentally sensitive areas such as the hillside and ridgeline areas, and maintenance of ample open space. Includes the State-mandated open space and conservation elements.

Chapter IV: Parks, Trails and Recreation Chapter. Focuses on providing ample parks and recreational programs to meet the City’s needs. Provides for the continued implementation of the City’s trails system.

Chapter V: Housing. Addresses state-mandated policies and programs to increase the variety and types of housing in the City, including the use of infill sites, the preservation of existing neighborhoods, and the advancement of mixed uses in the downtown area. Contains a description of housing needs and programs to provide additional housing for special needs groups.

Chapter VI: Safety. Emphasizes protection of the community from injury, loss of life, and property damage resulting from natural disasters and hazardous conditions. Identifies the potential for exposure to hazardous materials (including transportation, storage, and disposal) and the effects of electromagnetic radiation.

Chapter VII: Noise. Addresses the impacts of noise on the community, including the identification of noise generating activities and noise-sensitive land uses (such as schools). Contains standards for determining excessive noise levels for different types of land use.

Chapter VIII: Growth Management. Compiles goals, policies and programs that relate to Growth Management from all the chapters of the Plan into one, consolidated location. It satisfies the requirements of the Contra Costa Transportation Authority (CCTA).

GENERAL PLAN MAPS

Found throughout the Plan, numerous maps depict the location and distribution of important physical attributes of the community. These maps help in the understanding of conditions, issues and policy decisions described in the text.

GOALS, POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

Goals, policies and programs are the essence of the Plan and each Chapter contains appropriate goals, policies and programs to implement the Plan’s overall vision for the community. Goals, policies and programs provide a structure for translating overall objectives to specific actions, and are defined below¹:

- Goal: A general, overall, and ultimate purpose, aim or end toward which the City will direct effort.
- Policy: A specific statement of principle or guiding action that implies a clear commitment. A general direction that the City elects to follow in order to meet its goals.
- Program: An action, activity, or strategy carried out in response to adopted policy to achieve a specific goal.

Policies and programs establish the “who”, “where”, and “what” of the goals. Policies are more specific statements that are used to determine whether land use decisions, a change in zoning or other actions are consistent with the General Plan. An example of a policy is: “Reduce flood risk by maintaining effective flood drainage systems and regulating construction.”

Programs state actions to be taken to implement the policy. An example of a program to implement the above policy is: “Require runoff rate/volume analysis and duration flow analysis of projects where deemed necessary by City Staff.” The programs listed in this Plan are not exclusive; rather, they are a set of actions that the city should take to implement a goal and policy. There may be other mechanisms to implement the same goal and policy.

The Housing Chapter follows the requirements of State law, providing more detail on the implementation of programs. For every program contained in the Housing Element, a City department or other agency or entity is identified as responsible for its implementation. Funding sources and a schedule for completion are also provided, as required by State housing law.

GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE OF THE PLAN

The Plan establishes policies for all land within the Lafayette city limits and its Sphere of Influence.

MAIN THEMES OF THE PLAN

As stated earlier, the 1974 General Plan has served the city well, protecting Lafayette’s semi-rural atmosphere and preventing development in environmentally sensitive areas. The new General Plan echoes the same theme of preserving residential neighborhoods, scenic ridgelines and hillsides. Some of the main ideas underlying the Plan are summarized as follows:

- **Maintain Lafayette’s semi-rural character.** This Plan recognizes the charm and value of Lafayette as a quiet, semi-rural town in an otherwise largely urbanized county. The policies

¹ Refer to Glossary for definitions of terms used in this General Plan.

and programs of this Plan ensure that the city maintains its unique character, while encouraging revitalization of its commercial, cultural and civic core.

- **Maintain the character of existing residential neighborhoods.** In predominantly developed residential areas, the Land Use Map largely reflects existing conditions. Recognizing that the city is almost built out, the Plan emphasizes preserving the existing character of residential neighborhoods.
- **Protect environmentally sensitive areas.** Strong regulations are proposed to protect and enhance environmentally sensitive areas such as hillsides, ridgelines, creeks, and woodland areas.
- **Reinforce Downtown as the City's center for business, civic and cultural activities.** The plan supports the Downtown area as the hub for commerce, government, and social and cultural pastimes. Land use policies direct and organize activities to retain the downtown core's focus as a retail center and multi-family residential neighborhood. Office, visitor-serving and auto-dependent uses are located to the east and west of the core. Design policies guide public and private development to enhance the appearance of Downtown. This plan assures that Downtown remains a place where residents can congregate, shop, enjoy cultural activities, conduct their civic affairs and savor the beauty and ambiance of a small town.
- **Provide for housing opportunities.** The Plan calls for multi-family residences Downtown, and adoption of an inclusionary housing program and a density bonus program. Design policies are included to assure that new multi-family housing is planned and designed to provide quality residential neighborhoods.
- **Provide a network of trails and pedestrian paths.** The Plan seeks to provide pedestrian and bicycle links among parks, schools and cultural and commercial destinations in and around the city.
- **Balance future growth with infrastructure.** The Plan recommends that the amount of future residential and commercial growth be integrated with the availability of public services, such as water, sewer, police, fire, schools, parks and recreation. Growth management measures establish levels of service for public services and transportation that must be met if development is to be approved.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Three separately published documents provide background information for the General Plan. These documents are not a part of the adopted General Plan. The *Data Base Background Report (May 1992)* contains information and analysis for each of the topic areas covered by the *General Plan*. It is intended to be used as a reference document and to provide the factual basis for the policies contained in the General Plan. The draft *Environmental Impact Report* determines the type and extent of environmental impacts that would result from implementation of the General Plan. It is a "program-level" analysis, and identifies what future environmental analysis may be

required as specific projects are reviewed. The *Traffic Analysis Report (November 1998)* presents the traffic projections that correlate to the land uses contained in the General Plan.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE GENERAL PLAN

Although the General Plan covers a long-range period, it remains a flexible and dynamic document. This revision of the Plan is based on estimates of future growth and development, as projected in the late-1990's. As time passes, certain assumptions underlying the Plan may no longer be valid due to changing circumstances or new information. The City should monitor its General Plan to ensure that it remains in touch with its evolving community. The California Government Code (§ 65400[b]) requires each planning department to report annually to the City Council "on the status of the plan and progress in its implementation, including the progress in meeting its share of regional housing needs determinations." This report is also made to the State Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD).

It is recommended that every five years, the City review the entire General Plan to determine whether it still reflects community concerns and goals. This could coincide with the five-year review and update schedule of the *Housing Chapter* as required by State housing law.

AMENDING THE GENERAL PLAN

State law permits up to four amendments of mandatory elements of the General Plan per year (Government Code § 65358[b]). The City's procedure for filing a general plan amendment is available at the Community Development Department. To ensure consistency and compatibility with the Plan, general plan amendments initiated by the City or other public agencies must follow the same notification and hearing procedures that are required of amendments initiated by private organizations and individuals.