

# 1

## Introduction



# 1. Introduction

Santa Rosa is the urban core and economic center of the northern Bay Area. The city is in central Sonoma County, approximately 55 miles north of San Francisco, as shown in **Figure 1-1**. As the county seat of Sonoma County, Santa Rosa is the center of trade, government, commerce, and medical facilities. Santa Rosa grew outward from the original downtown area, which was oriented around the historic Northwestern Pacific Railroad line and Santa Rosa Creek. Historic resources and districts like the Railroad Square area offer a unique glimpse into Santa Rosa's early beginnings.

The city now encompasses 41.5 square miles within the city limits and 45.5 square miles within its Urban Growth Boundary. It is 167 feet above sea level and is the 28th largest city in the state. Proximity to the ocean, ample open space, neighboring wine country, the Russian River, and accessibility to urban and rural Northern California offer a unique way of life for the Santa Rosa community and support a diverse economy that weathers regional and larger cycles. Santa Rosa consistently ranks high among the nation's top places to live and work. It is also known as a top destination for cycling, mountain biking, running, hiking, and other types of recreation.

Most of the city is relatively level and is nestled within surrounding mountains and hills that provide a verdant and dramatic backdrop for the city. Taylor Mountain is to the south; Trione-Annadel State Park and the Mayacamas Mountain Range are to the east; and the hilly Fountaingrove neighborhoods are to the north. A series of creeks extend through Santa Rosa. The headwaters of Santa Rosa Creek, the city's

largest creek, are on the northern slopes of Hood Mountain at the northern end of Sonoma Valley. Santa Rosa Creek extends through the center of the city along the Prince Memorial Greenway and drains to the Laguna de Santa Rosa to the west, and eventually to the Russian River.

This chapter offers background information about the city, general plans in California, and the process of developing the Santa Rosa General Plan 2050.

## Context and Background

The City initiated the General Plan update process in early 2020. Since adoption of the previous General Plan in 2009, State planning laws have changed significantly, as have the city and community because of the typical impacts of growth and change over time as well as monumental events at the local, national, and global levels.

- **Legislation.** In the last several years, the State has enacted significant changes to general plan requirements under California law to address the need for more affordable and equitable housing opportunities for all residents, greater resiliency to natural and human-caused hazards, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reductions, environmental justice, and more. **Table 1-1** identifies some of the key changes in State law and how General Plan 2050 addresses them.
- **Wildfire.** In recent years, Santa Rosa and the wider region have experienced devastating wildfires. On October 8, 2017,

the Tubbs Fire quickly became the most destructive California wildfire at that time, burning portions of Napa, Sonoma, and Lake Counties. The Tubbs Fire resulted in 22 fatalities, 36,807 acres burned, and approximately \$1.2 billion in damages in Santa Rosa alone. Residential neighborhoods in the city, including Coffey Park, Fountaingrove, and Hidden Valley, suffered the most damage from the fire, which destroyed 3,043 Santa Rosa homes, about 5 percent of the city's housing stock. Concurrently, the Nuns Fire struck southeast of the city, resulting in 3 additional fatalities, 55,798 acres burned, and 1,355 structures destroyed. In 2019 and 2020, the city was threatened by wildfires again. North of Santa Rosa, the 2019 Kincade Fire burned 77,758 acres, prompting many Santa Rosa residents to evacuate in the largest evacuation in the history of Sonoma County. The 2020 Glass Fire, originating northeast of the city in the foothills of Napa County, destroyed 34 homes and 5 commercial structures in Santa Rosa.

The city and wider county suffered greatly through these wildfires and their aftermath, but also demonstrated powerful resilience in coming together for an unprecedented rebuild effort.

General Plan 2050 policies and actions work strategically to mitigate the risk of wildfire and enhance evacuation capacity in addition to addressing long-term resilience in the face of climate change and natural disasters.

- **Social Justice.** On October 22, 2013, 13-year-old Andy Lopez was shot by an on-duty Sonoma County Sheriff's Deputy and died at the scene. In the aftermath of the incident, significant civil unrest resulted in multiple protest marches and a Black Friday flash mob at the Santa Rosa Plaza. Protestors also convened at the Sonoma County courthouse for weeks to speak out against Mr. Lopez's shooting and other officer-involved fatalities.

On May 25, 2020, George Floyd, a Black man, was murdered by a White Minneapolis police officer, who pinned Mr. Floyd down by the neck with his knee for nearly 10 minutes. In response to Mr. Floyd's death, protests erupted across the nation. On May 31, 2020, numerous protesters were injured at a rally in Santa Rosa during a confrontation with police.

George Floyd's death and its aftermath pointed a spotlight on systemic racism and police brutality and awakened Santa Rosa residents to the reality of these issues in their own community. Further, these events added to a larger narrative on the need for meaningful action to address social and economic inequities that adversely impact communities of color and low-income households.







In consideration of these and other events and issues, the Santa Rosa City Council adopted Resolution RES-2021-203 in 2021 declaring racism a human rights and public health crisis in Santa Rosa. General Plan 2050 includes policies and actions to address environmental justice, equity, and community health with the aim of improving quality of life for all community members.

- Pandemic.** In early 2020, just after the Santa Rosa Forward project (General Plan 2050) launched, the global COVID-19 pandemic hit California and Sonoma County. In March 2020, facing rising rates of infection and death, the State ordered nonessential businesses to close and issued a shelter-in-place order for residents that would be lifted and reinstated multiple times through the end of the year and into 2021. Businesses and employees without remote work options, like those in the restaurant industry, faced lost income, businesses closed, and many individuals lost their jobs.

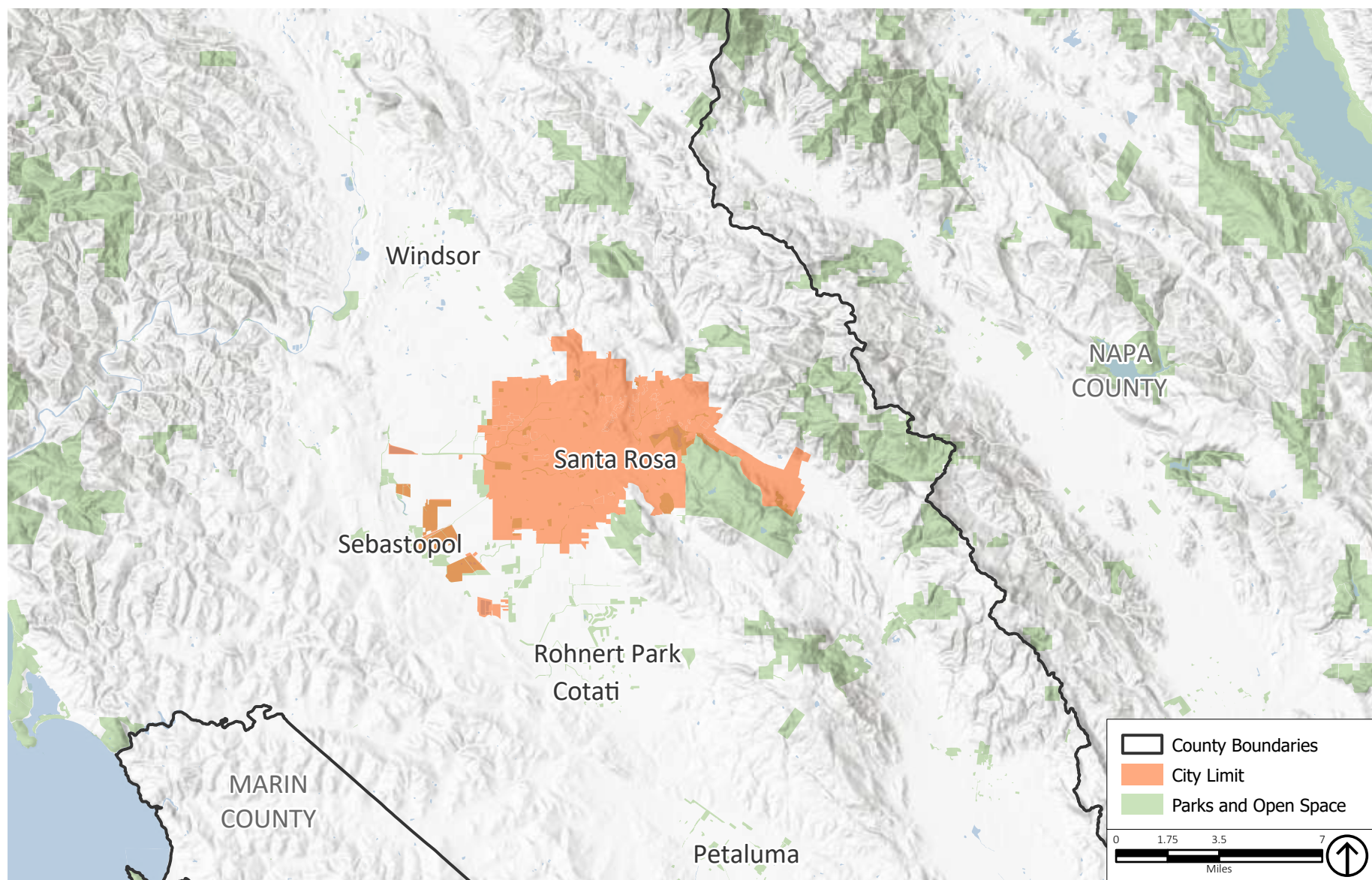
In August 2021, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the first COVID-19 vaccine. Santa Rosa gradually “re-opened,” and in-person work resumed, but the disease remains a concern, particularly for higher-risk individuals, and its impacts to the community are still widely felt.

By the end of 2023, more than 100,000 Californians and 500 Sonoma County residents died due to COVID-19. The death toll has not impacted all communities equally. A Sonoma County study revealed that a disproportionate share of those who died from COVID-19 were from the county’s Latino population. Similarly, studies at the national level found that the pandemic contributed to significantly greater declines in life expectancy in 2020 for Latino and Black populations compared to Whites.

In May 2023, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) declared the end of the federal COVID-19 Public Health Emergency. Now, Santa Rosa focuses on recovery and rebounding stronger. Many businesses have instituted permanent remote working opportunities, changing commute patterns and housing needs for the foreseeable future. Some businesses remain closed, but those that survived or opened in the wake of the pandemic offer more outdoor dining opportunities and activate the streets with sidewalk dining in parklets. Santa Rosa’s General Plan includes considerations for the impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the Santa Rosa community and plans to support the city’s economic and social recovery and revitalization.

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Source: City of Santa Rosa, 2020; ESRI, 2022; PlaceWorks, 2023.

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- Climate Change.** Human activity increases the levels of carbon dioxide and other GHGs in the atmosphere. Many daily actions produce GHGs, such as using electricity and natural gas in our homes and businesses, driving a car, and throwing out the trash. Higher levels of atmospheric GHGs result in higher temperatures and other changes to the global climate system. These changes lead to more frequent and severe natural hazards in and around Santa Rosa. Scientists link many recent natural disasters in the region to climate change, including the 2017 Tubbs fire, the 2020-2023 statewide drought, and increased frequency and duration of extreme heat events. Many of the communities in Santa Rosa that already experience social and economic inequities are expected to suffer more than others from the effects of climate change.

To address the threat posed by climate change, Santa Rosa must take a multipronged approach to rapidly and significantly decrease the community's GHG emissions and to simultaneously make Santa Rosa more resilient to the harmful effects of climate change that have already happened and are expected to continue. The community will need to transition to low-carbon sources of energy for buildings and transportation; reduce total energy use; encourage local food production; improve economic security; reduce waste generation and water use; retrofit and rehabilitate vulnerable buildings and infrastructure; and improve emergency notification and evacuation practices, among many other actions, to decrease GHG emissions and achieve a more resilient future.

Numerous actions result in GHG emissions, and climate change affects almost everyone and everything in Santa Rosa. Though climate change is a significant problem and difficult to tackle, the benefits of addressing it are extensive—a more sustainable and resilient Santa Rosa, lower utility bills and other costs, less dependence on cars, improved air quality and other public health benefits, and a more equitable and just system. For these and many other reasons, addressing climate change is critical to Santa Rosa's future success and well-being. General Plan 2050 takes a cross-sector approach to addressing climate change through the goals, policies, and actions in all chapters; these measures support implementation of the city's Community-wide Greenhouse Gas Reduction Strategy (**Appendix A**).

- Summary.** The Santa Rosa community has endured great hardships but has shown incredible resilience and emerged stronger, ready to surpass previous norms; with this updated General Plan, Santa Rosa is not just bouncing back, the community is moving forward.

**Table 1-1 General Plan Updates Required by State Law**

<b>Law</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Related General Plan 2050 Chapter</b>
California Public Resources Code Section 21099	Changes the standard method of measuring transportation impacts from level of service to vehicle miles traveled, encourages transit-oriented development reduces greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.	Circulation, Open Space, Conservation, and Greenhouse Gas Reduction
California Government Code Sections 65351 and 65352	Requires consultation with Native American tribes as part of a General Plan update and for any subsequent project that could have the potential to impact Native American resources.	Urban Design, Cultural and Tribal Cultural Resources, Historic Preservation, and Art and Culture
California Public Resources Code Section 42488	Requires analysis of infrastructure deficiencies in any “disadvantaged unincorporated communities.”	Land Use and Economic Development
California Government Code Section 65302	Requires General Plans to include an element with environmental justice policies.	Health, Equity, Environmental Justice, and Parks
California Public Utilities Code Section 454.53	Requires “complete streets” be addressed in a general plan that considers the needs of all modes of travel.	Circulation, Open Space, Conservation, and Greenhouse Gas Reduction
California Government Code Section 65302	Requires a general plan to include a climate change vulnerability assessment and to address climate adaptation and resiliency.	Safety, Climate Resilience, Noise, and Public Services and Facilities
California Government Code Section 65302	Incentivizes a link between a city's local hazard mitigation plan and the general plan.	Safety, Climate Resilience, Noise, and Public Services and Facilities
California Government Code Section 65040.20	Requires all jurisdictions to develop policies and implementation actions based on the most recent Fire Hazard Planning Guide from the State.	Safety, Climate Resilience, Noise, and Public Services and Facilities
California Government Code Sections 65350-65352	Requires that general plans consider impacts on groundwater and plans for groundwater basins.	Circulation, Open Space, Conservation, and Greenhouse Gas Reduction
Government Code Section 65302	Requires general plans to identify areas subject to flooding using the latest flood hazard information, and to prohibit new housing in areas that are not adequately protected from flooding.	Safety, Climate Resilience, Noise, and Public Services and Facilities

Notes: GHG = greenhouse gas

Source: PlaceWorks, 2023.



## Tribal Acknowledgement

The City of Santa Rosa recognizes that we live in the ancestral area of the Coast Miwok, Pomo, and Wappo, who are the original stewards of this region. Santa Rosa specifically is on the ancestral lands of Coast Miwok and Southern Pomo Tribal groups. These two groups now make up the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, whose territory includes what is now Santa Rosa. We respectfully acknowledge the Indigenous peoples and Southern Pomo tribes: Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, Dry Creek Rancheria, Lytton Rancheria, Kashia Band of Pomo Indians of Stewarts Point Rancheria, and Cloverdale Rancheria. Six federally recognized tribes in Sonoma County have been stewarding and maintaining relationships on this land as knowledge keepers for millennia. The City is dedicated to promoting understanding and educating the public about historical and ongoing connections between land conservation and social inequities. This includes the histories of genocide, forced removal and displacement, and broken promises with Indigenous peoples and Tribes as a part of United States American history.

Indigenous and Tribal people are not just in our histories. We strive to empower Indigenous and Tribal voices to share their own history, so as to not perpetuate another form of being silenced. While recognizing the past, we honor the resiliency of Indigenous people and California Native American Tribes still in their ancestral territories in relationship with their land and culture.

## History and Setting

Before arrival of the Europeans, the Santa Rosa Plain was home to a rich history of Native American heritage. Archaeologists speculate that Native American habitation in the region began approximately 7,000 years ago. Remnants of Native American civilization have been discovered along Santa Rosa Creek and its tributaries, in the adjacent alluvial valleys and surrounding plains, in the hills, in the Trione-Annadel State Park area, in the Laguna de Santa Rosa, and in the Windsor area. The remains of entire settlements, including three former villages, have been found in northern Santa Rosa.

Santa Rosa, Spanish for “Saint Rose,” was founded in 1833 and named after Saint Rosa of Lima, Peru. The first non-native permanent settlers were the family of the widow Dona Maria Carrillo, mother-in-law of General Vallejo and aunt of the Mexican Governor Pio Pico. By the 1850s, a Wells Fargo post and general store were established in what is now downtown Santa Rosa. In 1867, the County recognized Santa Rosa as an incorporated city, and in 1868, the State officially confirmed the incorporation, making Santa Rosa officially the third incorporated city in Sonoma County.

The population of Santa Rosa remained relatively small until railroad services started in 1870 and linked the city to the greater Bay Area and the rest of the state. In 1947, construction of Highway 101 through Santa Rosa enhanced connectivity to much of the North Bay and North Coast, but the route through downtown bisected the city into east and west Santa Rosa. The road was eventually elevated, which accentuated this divide. Construction of

Highway 12 as a freeway a decade later created a similar divide between the north and south sides of the city. The layout of two highways together establishes the basic four defining quadrants of the city. While Highways 101 and 12 create divides that separate the city into distinct quadrants, they also bring valuable economic connectivity to the wider region.

Santa Rosa has grown and evolved into a diverse metropolitan community that serves as the commercial, economic, civic, cultural, and educational center of the northern Bay Area region. By 2000, the population was 147,532, making Santa Rosa the largest city in Sonoma County and the fifth most populous city in the Bay Area. By 2019, Santa Rosa had a population of 197,980 people. Today, the city has over 40 unique neighborhoods and commercial districts.

**Figure 1-2** maps seven major areas referred to throughout the General Plan to orient the reader.



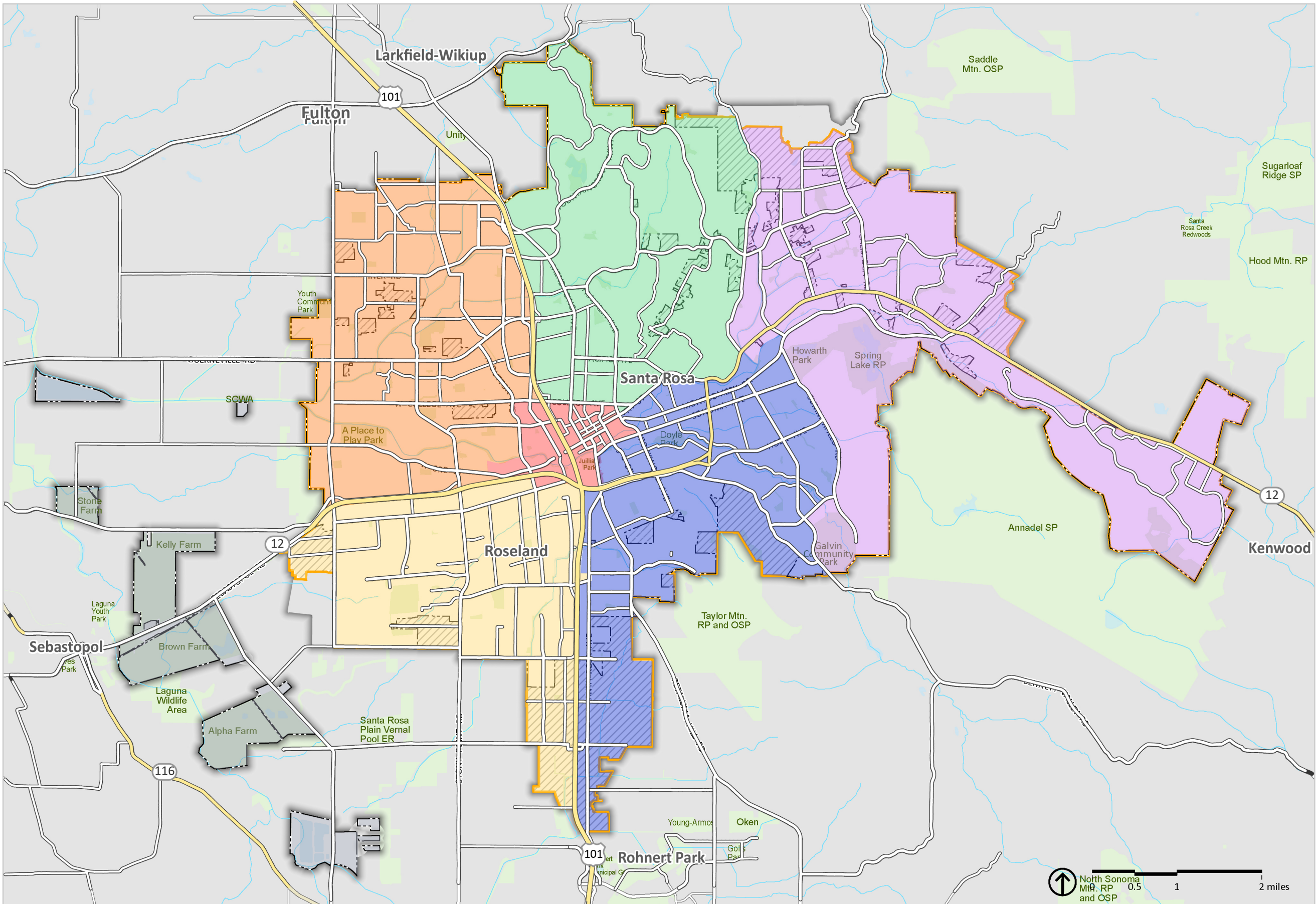


Figure 1-2  
Major Areas

- City Limits
- Urban Growth Boundary
- City Sphere of Influence
- Planning Area
- Creeks and Waterways
- Parks and Open Space
- Outside of Planning Area

### Santa Rosa Neighborhoods

- Downtown/Station Area
- Northwestern Santa Rosa
- Southwestern Santa Rosa
- Southeastern Santa Rosa
- Northeastern Santa Rosa
- Eastern Santa Rosa
- Western Lands

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# General Plan Development

## What Is a General Plan?

A general plan is a city's road map for the future. It describes a community's aspirations and identifies strategies for managing growth, preservation, and change. Sometimes referred to as the community's "constitution," the general plan is a comprehensive document that provides a policy framework to guide decision making related to land use, economic development, community design, historic preservation, art and culture, mobility, open space, conservation, GHG reduction, safety, adaptation to climate change, public service, community health, equity, environmental justice, parks, community services, housing, and more. California law requires every city and county to prepare and adopt a comprehensive and long-range general plan that addresses eight topics (or "elements"): land use, circulation (or mobility), open space, conservation, noise, safety, environmental justice, and housing. State law also allows optional elements to be added. Any optional element has the same policy weight as the required elements, and the elements can be presented in a variety of formats.

The general plan establishes the policy framework to be used by residents, businesses, developers, staff, council, and appointed boards and commissions. General plans typically include goals, policies, and implementing actions as well as maps and diagrams. These components together convey a long-term community vision and guide local decision making to achieve that vision. The general plan and its maps, diagrams, and development policies form the basis for

zoning and subdivision ordinances and for prioritizing public works projects. Under California law, any specific plan, area plan, community plan, zoning regulation, subdivision map, and private development or public works project has to be consistent with the general plan. Once a jurisdiction adopts, updates, or amends the general plan, it must amend the zoning, subdivision, and other land use regulation ordinances if needed to make them consistent with the general plan.

Santa Rosa's General Plan plays the foundational role in regulating land use in the city; it is the top-level planning document, providing direction for all zoning regulations, ordinances, guidelines, and area or specific plans. The goals and policies throughout the General Plan are interrelated and should be considered together when making decisions related to land use, mobility, growth, and development. City staff apply General Plan policies to give direction to development applicants and land use analysis for the City Council, Planning Commission, and other boards and commissions. In addition, the General Plan actions comprise a detailed implementation program to guide City department work programs and budgeting.

Future land use decisions and infrastructure improvements made by the City must be consistent with the General Plan.

## 2050 General Plan

The General Plan accommodates approximately 24,000 new housing units (which could house roughly 66,000 new residents) and 14,000 new jobs, as shown in **Table 1-2**. This additional capacity is based on the General Plan land use designations (development allowed by this plan) compared to existing land uses (what is already

built). The land use designations were set with consideration for future housing need (estimated to be approximately 24,000 units over the next three decades) and the economic growth that could be supported by the accommodated residential growth. In other words, while the General Plan does not project future housing, population, or jobs growth, it was designed to allow a level of growth that could reasonably occur over the next three decades.

Table 1-2 Buildout Capacity Accommodated in the General Plan			
Category	Existing (2019)	Projected Growth (2019-2050)	Buildout Estimates (2050)
Housing Units	75,850	24,090	99,940
Total Population	197,980	65,760	263,740
Jobs	77,590	14,090	91,680
Notes: Numbers are rounded from original sources. Source: Sonoma County Transportation Authority and W-Trans, 2023, <i>Santa Rosa General Plan 2050 Travel Demand Model</i> .			

## Plan Process

General Plan 2050 was developed in close collaboration with the community and with oversight and direction from the Planning Commission and City Council in a multiyear process called Santa Rosa Forward. The City formed two advisory bodies to help guide the planning process—a Community Advisory Committee (CAC) and Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). The CAC included representatives from a variety of organizations and perspectives, including neighborhood associations, transportation and advocacy groups, environmental organizations, and a diversity of community members. The primary

role of the CAC was to act as project liaisons and to encourage participation from a diverse breadth of community members. The TAC was made up of technical experts from City departments and partner agencies that provided feedback on the project to ensure the plan concepts could be achieved.

The process to update the General Plan and envision the future of Santa Rosa was divided into phases. Preparation of the plan included the required environmental analysis, adoption, and any necessary changes to the City's Zoning Code and other City policy and regulatory plans and documents. Each of the five phases to create the plan involved similar, robust community engagement efforts to guide development of the product for that phase and included the following steps:

- **Draft Product.** The project team developed an initial product (e.g., Community Involvement Strategy, Existing Conditions Analysis), guided by research, input from the TAC, and/or prior community input.
- **Community Engagement.** The project team presented the draft product to the community to gather additional input. In each phase, the team used a range of parallel outreach strategies that were convenient to as many people as possible, such as pop-up events, informational videos, surveys, workshops, and open houses.



- **Joint Study Session with Planning Commission and City Council.** The team presented the draft product and community insights to the Planning Commission and City Council. The Commission and Council provided additional input and direction for next steps.
- **Revisions and Next Phase.** Based on direction from the Planning Commission and City Council, the project team revised to finalize the product and/or move on to the next phase of work.

Following are the eight stages of Santa Rosa Forward:

- **Phase 1: Project Initiation and Community Involvement Strategy.** In Phase 1, the City of Santa Rosa and consultants launched the Santa Rosa General Plan 2050 update by publishing a project work plan and a community involvement strategy (CIS). The City held four community and small group conversations and issued a public survey to get input on the CIS and help refine the planned approach for engaging the community.
- **Phase 2: Existing Conditions and Visioning.** Phase 2 involved the preparation and publication of a report detailing current conditions in the community. The team used this report to develop a briefing book with high-level takeaways that highlighted emerging opportunities and key topics. This work, combined with a climate change vulnerability assessment, led to the project visioning effort, which included two community surveys that together received 1,483 responses, and a series of 10 virtual workshops in summer 2021.
- **Phase 3: Alternatives.** Phase 3 focused on three land use and circulation “Alternatives” for Santa Rosa’s future development, prepared with consideration of the existing conditions report, equity issues, and the community’s Vision Statement (see **Figure 1-3**). The three alternatives provided options for community growth and change to address identified challenges and opportunities. Each alternative implemented the community vision and offered different approaches to distribute future housing and mobility. Engagement for the alternatives phase included nine pop-up events, meetings with 15 different community organizations, a series of five in-person workshops, and a virtual open house.
- **Phase 4: Preferred Alternative.** Phase 4 applied community feedback from the previous phase to draft a “Preferred” Alternative. Engagement activities in this phase included five informational pop-up events, two in-person open-house events, and a web-based survey with the same information and questions as the open-house events. Community input supported refinements to the final Preferred Alternative (shown on Figure 1-4), which is the foundation of the General Plan. The Preferred Alternative diagram details the major circulation network

changes (e.g., road diets and bike lane extensions) supported by the community and identifies 21 “Areas of Change” where the City will focus efforts to address housing, services, connectivity, and/or infrastructure needs to help make these complete neighborhoods.

- Phase 5: Draft 2050 General Plan.** In Phase 5, the project team prepared this General Plan 2050, including the introductory chapters and the goals, policies, and actions designed to achieve the community vision. Engagement for the Draft General Plan included five informational pop-up events; three open-house events, including two in-person and one virtual; and a web-based survey with the same information and questions as the open house events. Among community input received, was support for General Plan policies increasing active transportation opportunities, environmental justice, fire safety, and local economic development, while favoring policies that are focused more on eliminating barriers to such outcomes rather than regulating local activities. Those community comments informed the final revisions to this General Plan document.
- Phase 6: Environmental Analysis.** All general plans in California are subject to environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act and must analyze the environmental impacts that would result from implementation of the General Plan. [Additional details about the Environmental Analysis outreach process will be added following completion of this phase].

- Phase 7: Public Review and Adoption.** *[Additional details about the General Plan and Environmental Analysis Public Review and Adoption process will be added following completion of this phase].*
- Phase 8: Additional Amendments to City Documents.** The City’s zoning regulations and subdivision approvals must be consistent with the adopted General Plan. Therefore, this final phase includes the necessary amendments to ensure that the Santa Rosa Municipal Code and Zoning Code, the City’s Design Guidelines, Citywide Creek Master Plan, Active Transportation Plan, Specific Plans, and any other documents are consistent with the adopted General Plan.

## Housing Element Development

The Housing Element is one of the required elements of the General Plan. The State requires Housing Elements to be updated every eight years; therefore, the Housing Element was developed on a separate timeline with its own agency and public review and approval process. The City Council adopted the Housing Element on February 14, 2023, and the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) certified it on April 7, 2023. The adopted and certified Housing Element is included as Chapter 7 of General Plan 2050.

## Community Vision

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The community's vision for the future, developed in Phase 2 of the project, helped to frame the Preferred Alternative (Phase 4); inform new and updated General Plan goals, policies, and actions; and ensure that the General Plan fully addresses the needs and desires of the community. The vision consists of 13 complementary ideals, summarized as follows:

- **Santa Rosa** is a diverse, equitable, and sustainable community built on civic engagement that empowers everyone to provide and support equal and affordable opportunities to obtain good housing, education, and jobs; to enjoy vibrant cultural events and arts; and to live healthy lives in resilient neighborhoods that adapt to social and environmental change.

The full Vision Statement, with all 13 ideals, is presented here and depicted graphically on **Figure 1-3**. As articulated in the Vision Diagram, *Santa Rosa is:*

- **Just:** Social and environmental justice are achieved for everyone—all abilities, ages, ethnicities, gender identities, immigration status, income levels, language speakers, races, religions, and sexual orientations and identities—EVERYONE.
- **Sustainable:** Natural resources are restored, protected, and expanded to provide accessible green space for everyone in all neighborhoods, mitigate drought, and minimize greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Inclusive:** Everyone is welcome and actively encouraged to join in neighborhood and citywide decision making, and barriers to participation are identified and eliminated.
- **Healthy:** All neighborhoods have low pollution levels and good air quality, are vibrant, connected, full-service communities, with the resources to be civically organized, and anchored by inclusive and accessible public outdoor spaces and buildings offering safe and welcoming places for everyone. Every person has the opportunity to attain their full health potential.
- **Resilient:** All facets of the community, including housing, infrastructure, and social services are sustainable and resilient to hazards and economic changes.
- **Prepared:** The health and safety of everyone is supported by neighborhood, City, and county-wide efforts to prepare for natural and human-caused hazards, and roadways are optimized to support efficient evacuations.
- **Sheltered:** A diverse mix of high-quality, safe, thoughtfully designed, efficiently planned, and well-served housing at all affordability levels is available throughout the community to accommodate everyone, including formerly homeless, immigrants, local workers, multigenerational households, seniors, students, and formerly incarcerated people.
- **Equitable:** Everyone has what they need to enjoy long, fulfilling, healthy lives, including affordable access to meet their

daily needs—including healthy food, recreation, education, childcare, employment opportunities, reliable internet, and physical and mental health services.

- **Successful:** Top employers gravitate; Black-, Latino/Latina-, and other minority-owned businesses are in all corners of the community; equitable investments are made in all neighborhoods; local shops, food and beverage establishments, food trucks, and entertainment spaces support a vibrant city; and meaningful work in a thriving economy is available for people of all ages and backgrounds.
- **Connected:** High-quality, reliable, and safe transit service, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and other forms of mobility connect all ages across the city and region at all times and support healthy lifestyles, clean air, equity, and resilience.
- **Safe:** Streets are safe; public safety services are provided by caring and thoughtful community members who are representative of and familiar with the neighborhoods, groups, and individuals they serve; and everyone, including immigrants and people of color, can safely access these services.
- **Educated:** Life-long education, enrichment, and supportive services and resources engage and empower young people, strengthen families (of any family structure), connect and activate seniors, and foster the success and well-being of everyone.
- **Cultural:** Art, cultural resources, and activities, historic assets, and live music thrive in every neighborhood, are accessible to everyone, and work to celebrate our diverse community, bring people from all areas of the city together, and support the local economy.



Figure 1-3: Santa Rosa 2050 General Plan Vision Diagram



## Preferred Alternative

The Preferred Alternative in **Figure 1-4** shows the foundational land use and circulation network priorities that guide the General Plan to implement the community's vision. The Preferred Alternative identifies 21 Areas of Change where the City will focus on housing, services, connectivity, and/or infrastructure needed to make these complete neighborhoods. Complementing the Areas of Change are major improvements to the transportation network, which focus on bridging east and west and enhancing multimodal connectivity and safety citywide. As appropriate, goals, policies, and actions prioritize the Areas of Change.

With this Preferred Alternative, the community is responding to a changing climate by creating an increasingly dense urban core with walkable, bikeable neighborhoods, where resources are conserved and neighborhoods are better protected against environmental hazards.

**Complete Neighborhoods** are areas with convenient, equitable access to goods and services needed to support daily life, such as grocery stores, recreation opportunities, community gathering places, active transportation infrastructure, and transit. The specific attributes of a complete neighborhood will vary, depending on the unique needs of the local community.

# Preferred Alternative Diagram

## LEGEND

- Urban Growth Boundary

Lakes/Creeks

Highways

Major Roads

SMART Transit Center

SMART Rail Line

Transit Hub

Transit Mall

Transit Park-and-Ride

Areas of Change
- Roadway Widening

Proposed Road Diets

New Major Roads

New Minor Roads

Improved Pedestrian/Bicycle Connections

New or Widened Auto Overpass including Pedestrian/Bicycle Enhancements

New Pedestrian/Bicycle Rail Crossing

High Frequency Bus Route (10-15 min. headways)

## General Plan Land Use

- Country Residential (0.05-0.2 units per acre)

Very Low Density Residential (0.2-2.0 units per acre)

Low Density/Open Space (2.0-8.0 units per acre)

Low Density Residential (2.0-8.0 units per acre)

Medium Low Density Residential (8.0-13.0 units per acre)

Medium Density Residential (8.0-18.0 units per acre)

Medium High Density Residential (13.0-30.0 units per acre)

Transit Village Medium (25.0-40.0 units per acre)

Mobile Homes (4.0-18.0 units per acre)
- Transit Village Mixed Use (0.05-0.2 units per acre)

Retail and Business Services

Office

Business Park

Light Industrial

General Industrial

Public/Industrial

Parks and Recreation

Open Space

Agriculture

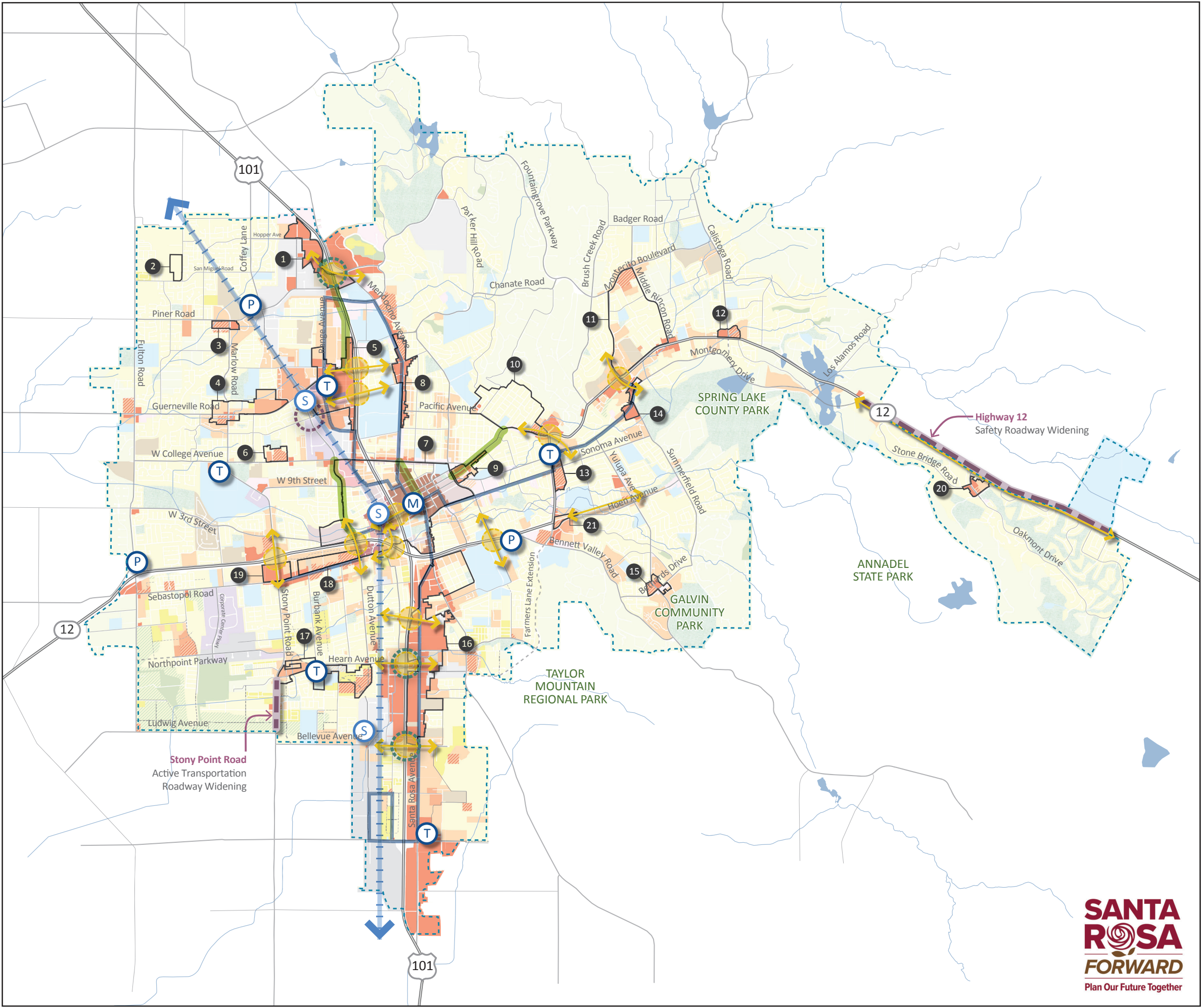
Parcel Lines

Creeks

## Areas of Change

Areas of Change are areas where the City will focus efforts on addressing housing, services, connectivity, and/or infrastructure needs to make these complete neighborhoods.

Areas of Change	
1	Fountain Grove/Mendocino Interchange
2	Francisco Avenue
3	Rosewood Village
4	Marlow Center and Lance Drive Annexation
5	Coddington
6	West College Neighborhood Center
7	Downtown Station Area
8	Mendocino Corridor
9	4th Street Corridor
10	Flamingo Center
11	Montecito
12	St. Francis Shopping Center
13	Montgomery Village
14	Howarth Commercial
15	Bennett Valley
16	Santa Rosa Marketplace/South Park
17	Hearn Corridor
18	Roseland
19	Stony Point Circle
20	Oakmont
21	Southeast Greenway



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# Santa Rosa General Plan 2050

## Planning Area

The Planning Area for the General Plan defines where the City has an interest in land use and includes land in the incorporated city, sphere of influence (SOI), and urban growth boundary (UGB). Under State law, a general plan must address all areas in the jurisdiction's Planning Area. **Figure 1-5** shows the boundaries of the Santa Rosa Planning Area, which covers about 49 square miles.

The Santa Rosa city limits encompass nearly 43 square miles, 67 percent of which is developed or is developable. An additional 13 percent of the city is made up of local, regional, and state parkland and open space, including creeks and waterways. The remaining 20 percent of the city is undevelopable because it is unusable due to topography such as steep terrain, right-of-way (roads and railroads), or similar.

The SOI is the unincorporated area adjacent to the city that receives services from the City or may in the future. As shown on **Figure 1-5**, the Sonoma County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) identifies unincorporated neighborhoods north, northeast, south, and southwest of the city limits, in addition to unincorporated islands in the city as within Santa Rosa's SOI. To be eligible for annexation by the City, land must be in the city's LAFCO-designated SOI.

As the name suggests, the UGB separates urban areas from the surrounding natural and agricultural lands, or greenbelts, and limits how far out a city can expand. In 1990, Santa Rosa

voters approved a five-year UGB, followed by a two-decade UGB measure in 1996 and an extension in 2010 to ensure that the current UGB will not be significantly changed until at least 2035. The UGB, as shown on **Figure 1-5**, covers about 45.5 square miles and encompasses all incorporated city land plus some unincorporated land expected to be annexed at some point in the future. The UGB is coterminous with the outer bounds of the SOI.

## General Plan 2050 Approach

Santa Rosa General Plan 2050 consolidates the mandated elements into six chapters that address both required and optional General Plan topics. Mandated elements include land use, transportation, open space, conservation, safety, noise, environmental justice, and housing. The General Plan includes new, optional subjects and some optional topics that are carried over from the previous plan (General Plan 2035).

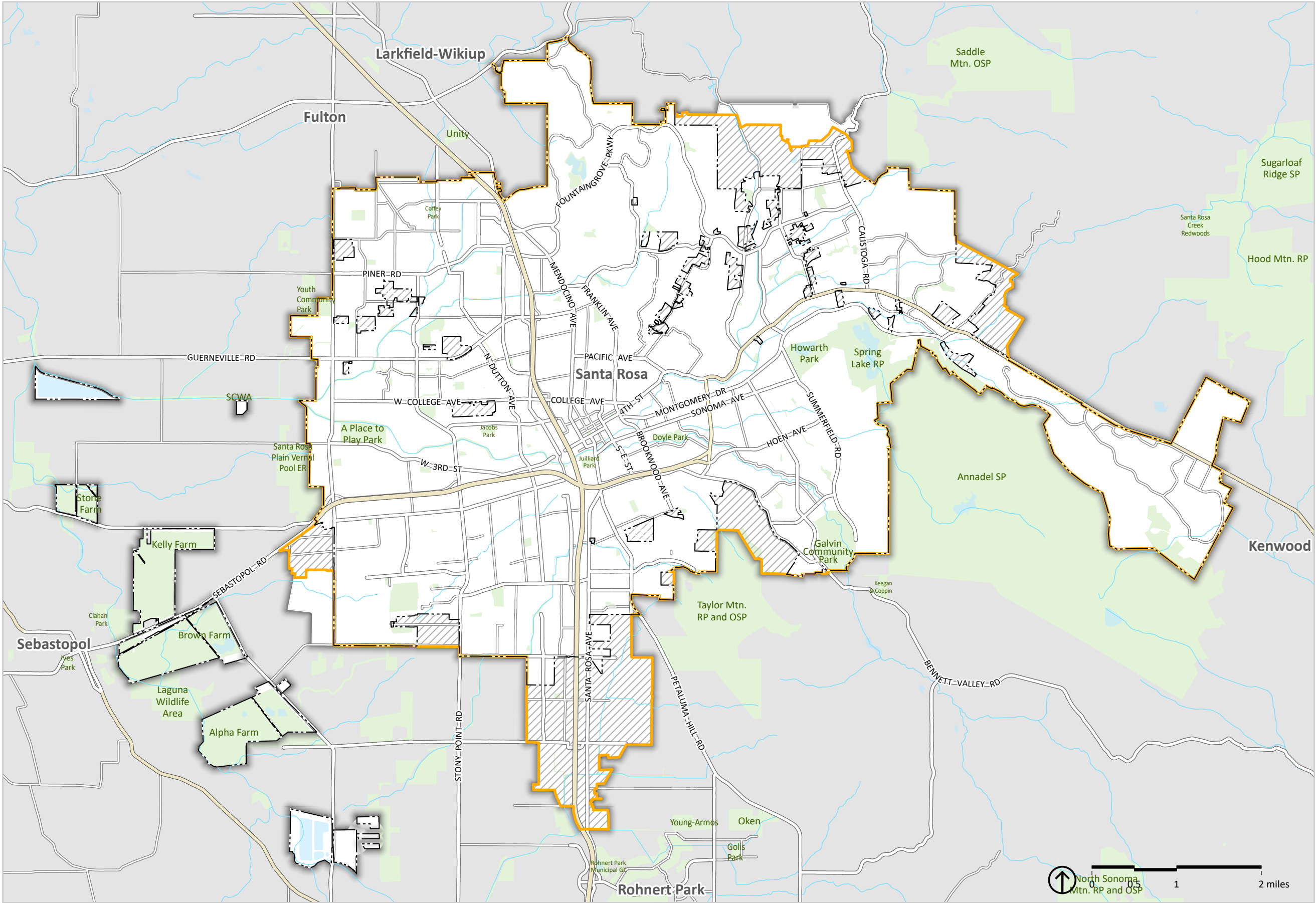
**Figure 1-6** illustrates the organization of General Plan 2050, the distribution of State-mandated and optional elements, and which optional elements are carried forward from the prior General Plan.

Two key topics of the General Plan, **Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Reduction** and the interrelated subjects of **Health, Equity, and Environmental Justice**, are discussed in detail in dedicated chapters (see **Figure 1-6**), but other aspects of the General Plan touch on these issues as well, so there are goals, policies, and actions throughout the plan chapters that address them. **Table 1-3** highlights where these goals, policies, and actions are in the General Plan.

In addition to the six topical chapters in the General Plan, as noted previously, State law requires an update to the General Plan Housing

Element every eight years. The most recent Santa Rosa Housing Element, which was adopted in February 2023, covers the planning period through 2031. General Plan 2050 does not involve any amendments to the Housing Element.

Figure 1-5  
Planning Area

























- City Limits
- Urban Growth Boundary
- City Sphere of Influence
- Planning Area
- Outside of Planning Area
- Parks and Open Space
- Creeks and Waterways

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Figure 1-6: Santa Rosa General Plan 2050 Contents

Chapters		<div></div> Required	<div></div> 2035 GP	<div></div> New, not required	
<b>CHAPTER 1</b> INTRODUCTION	<div></div> <div>Introduction</div>				
<b>CHAPTER 2</b> LAND USE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	<div></div> <div>Land Use</div>	<div></div> <div>Economic Development</div>			
<b>CHAPTER 3</b> CIRCULATION, OPEN SPACE, CONSERVATION, AND GREENHOUSE GAS REDUCTION	<div></div> <div>Circulation</div>	<div></div> <div>Open Space</div>	<div></div> <div>Conservation</div>	<div></div> <div>Greenhouse Gas Reduction</div>	
<b>CHAPTER 4</b> URBAN DESIGN, CULTURAL AND TRIBAL CULTURAL RESOURCES, HISTORIC PRESERVATION, AND ART AND CULTURE	<div></div> <div>Urban Design</div>	<div></div> <div>Hillside Policies</div>	<div></div> <div>Tribal Cultural Resources</div>	<div></div> <div>Historic Preservation</div>	<div></div> <div>Art and Culture</div>
<b>CHAPTER 5</b> SAFETY, CLIMATE RESILIENCE, NOISE, AND PUBLIC SERVICES AND FACILITIES	<div></div> <div>Safety</div>	<div></div> <div>Climate Resilience</div>	<div></div> <div>Public Services and Facilities</div>	<div></div> <div>Noise</div>	
<b>CHAPTER 6</b> HEALTH, EQUITY, ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE, AND PARKS	<div></div> <div>Community Health</div>	<div></div> <div>Equity</div>	<div></div> <div>Environmental Justice</div>	<div></div> <div>Parks</div>	<div></div> <div>Children and Families</div>
<b>CHAPTER 7</b> HOUSING	<div></div> <div>Housing</div>				

**Table 1-3**  
**Greenhouse Gas Reduction and Environmental Justice in the General Plan**

Chapter/Subsection	GHG Reduction	Health, Equity, and Environmental Justice
Land Use and Economic Development		
General Plan Priority Areas and Populations	✓	
Land Use	✓	✓
Economic Development	✓	✓
Circulation, Open Space, Conservation, and Greenhouse Gas Reduction		
Circulation	✓	✓
Open Space and Conservation	✓	✓
Greenhouse Gas Reduction	✓	
Urban Design, Cultural and Tribal Cultural Resources, Historic Preservation, and Art and Culture		
Urban Design		✓
Tribal Cultural and Historic Resources		
Art and Culture		✓
Safety, Climate Resilience, Noise, and Public Services and Facilities		
Safety		✓
Climate Resilience	✓	✓
Noise		
Public Services and Facilities	✓	✓
Health, Equity, Environmental Justice, and Parks		
Health for All Residents		✓
Food Access and Urban Agriculture	✓	✓
Recreation and Parks	✓	✓
Children and Families		✓

## Plan Structure

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The General Plan includes this introduction, six topical chapters, and a glossary. The chapters cover all elements required by California State Government Code Section 65302, as well as topics of particular interest to the Santa Rosa community. The General Plan structure is as follows:

- **1. Introduction:** Describes the context of the General Plan update and history of the city; provides an overview of general plans, outlines the process to develop General Plan 2050; highlights key foundational milestones; identifies the required elements of the General Plan and summarizes the approach, structure, and key components of General Plan 2050; and provides information on how the plan is used by the City; how it can be used by the community, and how and when future updates can be made.
- **2. Land Use and Economic Development:** Provides overall land use and economic development policies for the city. The State-mandated land use content addresses the connection between land use and transportation, utilities, and other infrastructure.
- **3. Circulation, Open Space, Conservation, and Greenhouse Gas Reduction:** Satisfies the State law requirement to address transportation (circulation) in the plan and provides the general location and extent of existing and proposed major streets and other transportation facilities. This chapter correlates with Chapter 2, Land Use and Economic Development, to provide adequate transportation to serve both new and existing land uses.
- **4. Urban Design, Cultural and Tribal Cultural Resources, Historic Preservation, and Art and Culture:** Includes goals, policies, and actions related to urban and environmental design, cultural and tribal cultural resources, historic preservation, and art and culture. These are optional General Plan topics, but each is considered essential to the character and future growth of the Santa Rosa community.
- **5. Safety, Climate Resilience, Noise, and Public Services and Facilities:** Addresses State-required safety considerations. It provides information about risks in Santa Rosa due to natural and human-caused hazards, and its goals, policies, and actions are designed to protect populations, property, and critical facilities. It specifically addresses risks associated with flooding and storm drainage, geologic and seismic hazards, hazardous materials and waste, and fires. This chapter also includes goals, policies, and actions addressing public services

and facilities, climate resilience, and the legally required topic of noise.

- **6. Health, Equity, Environmental Justice, and Parks:** Addresses the newly required Environmental Justice element, along with optional element topics of community health, equity, parks, and children and families. Together, these topics all support a healthier, more equitable, and just community.
- **7. Housing:** The City's Housing Element (2023-2031) addresses the city's projected housing need at all income levels over the element's eight-year cycle. Santa Rosa's 2023-2031 Housing Element was adopted by the City Council on February 14, 2023, and was certified by HCD on April 7, 2023.
- **8. Glossary:** Defines key terms used in the General Plan 2050.
- **Appendices:** The City's Community-wide Greenhouse Gas Reduction Strategy (**Appendix A**) and Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment Report (**Appendix B**) are included as appendices to the General Plan.

The goals, policies, and actions are a critical component of General Plan 2050. Goals determine what should be done and where. Policies and actions together establish who will do the work and how and when they will carry out the goals. Together, they describe the steps the City and the community must take to make the vision of the General Plan a reality. The General Plan is meant to be a useful, everyday guide for what to do and how to make decisions for the future. Where needed, explanatory text ties the goals and policies to the community vision, and every action is listed and numbered under a specific policy. Public Resources Code Section 21081.6(b) and California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines Section 15126.4(a)(2) establish that mitigation measures may be incorporated into the General Plan. Where policies and actions in General Plan 2050 serve to mitigate environmental impacts, they are denoted with "(EIR)" at the end of the policy/action.

As with other City policy documents, timing and priority for implementing the policies and actions are subject to the resources that the City and its partners have to carry them out.

## Goals, Policies, and Actions

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General Plan 2050 is made up of goals, policies, and actions that work together to achieve the community's future vision. As summarized in **Figure 1-7**, General Plan goals are statements that describe the end-state the community wants to accomplish to resolve a particular issue or take advantage of an opportunity. General Plan policies and actions guide day-to-day decision making and continued progress toward the attainment of goals.

## New to General Plan 2050

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General Plan 2050 introduces several changes from the previous General Plan 2035 to serve the community vision and enhance usability and implementation.

- General Plan 2050 presents an **integrated and cross-sector approach to reducing GHG emissions** in Santa Rosa. The General Plan includes goals, policies, and actions that support reductions from community-wide and municipal sources of emissions integrated throughout most chapters and is supported by a stand-alone Community-wide GHG Reduction Strategy, which replaces the City's Community Climate Action Plan. The Community-wide GHG Reduction Strategy consolidates the City's GHG reduction measures and presents detailed quantification and other details consistent with CEQA Guidelines Section 15183.5, to support the State's goal of reaching net carbon zero by 2045 and ongoing reductions through 2050.
- Since adoption of General Plan 2035, the State Legislature passed Senate Bill 1000, adopted in 2016 (Government Code Section 65302[h]), requiring the inclusion of an **Environmental Justice Element** in local general plans to address environmental health disparities experienced by many low-income communities and communities of color.
- As described under the Plan Structure section, General Plan 2050 includes goals, policies, and implementing **actions**. These actions guide the City's implementation of the plan and will populate a work plan

that will identify responsible department(s) and/or agency(ies) and the timeline for implementation—near-term, medium-term, long-term, or ongoing.

- General Plan 2050 is a **streamlined document** compared to the previous plan, designed to support ease of use by community members, City staff, and City leadership. Core content of General Plan 2035 that continues to serve the community well is carried forward to this General Plan, and **many goals and policies** were omitted if they were no longer relevant or were sufficiently addressed by other City documents. The **2035 Urban Growth Management Element is not included** in General Plan 2050; instead, this General Plan clearly identifies Areas of Change where urban infill will occur and acknowledges that expansion of the city into surrounding lands is no longer a focus of City planning efforts. The resulting, simplified suite of goals, policies, and actions focus on feasibility and realization of the community's vision for the future.



Figure 1-7: Goal, Policy, and Action Hierarchy

## Goal, Policy, and Action Hierarchy



### GOAL

A general, overall, and ultimate desired outcome the City will direct to achieving over the lifetime of the General Plan.



### POLICY

A specific statement that regulates activities in the city, guides decision-making, and directs implementing action to achieve a Goal. General Plan policies guide City staff, the Planning Commission, and City Council decision-making and their review of land development projects.



### ACTION

A measure, procedure, or technique intended to implement one or more policies to help reach a Goal. An action may be ongoing or something that can be completed in a discrete timeframe.

# General Plan Application and Amendments

## How to Use This Plan

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Elected and appointed City officials and City staff use the General Plan as a point of reference, as do community members, business owners, individuals proposing new development projects, and others. The General Plan is useful when making decisions regarding topics such as subdivisions, new residential, commercial, and industrial development, capital improvements, and neighborhood rehabilitation. The policies in this General Plan are intended to provide clear guidance and explanation about the City land use decision-making processes and how Santa Rosa may grow, change, or stay the same. Santa Rosa's decision-making bodies have discretion in how they interpret General Plan goals and policies as they evaluate projects and make determinations of consistency.

In general, actions that use "require," "prohibit," or "shall" are mandatory. Policies that use "encourage," "promote," "discourage," "consider," or "should" are not mandatory, and the City may choose to modify its course of action in cases where a policy may not prove appropriate for a particular situation or if extenuating factors, such as competing priorities or budget limitations, would make it infeasible to follow policy direction verbatim. Some policies and actions in the General Plan serve to mitigate environmental impacts as evaluated in the General Plan EIR. These Policies and Actions are denoted with "(EIR)."

The General Plan update process involved a wide variety of stakeholders and interests. As a result,

this General Plan addresses multiple and sometimes competing policy objectives, and the City may not be able to strictly adhere to every policy in every decision that it makes to implement the overall goals of this General Plan. The City Council will continue to have discretion over prioritizing overall policy objectives to implement this General Plan in instances when multiple policy objectives may affect a single decision.

Finally, the General Plan is intended to be understandable and easily available to the public, in part because policies will be carried out only if they continue to merit community support. If and as conditions in Santa Rosa change, the General Plan can and should be interpreted and modified as necessary to reflect and remain consistent with the City's and community's desires and priorities.

## Amending the Plan

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The General Plan is intended to be as dynamic as needed by the Santa Rosa community. As such, it may be necessary to amend the General Plan over time to meet any shift in needs.

Requested amendments in Santa Rosa tend to be proposed by landowners seeking to change the land use designation for specific properties. In addition, the City could amend the General Plan in response to changes in growth and market demand or for other policy reasons.

The General Plan Land Use Diagram or the text of any element generally may be amended up to four times per year per State law. Exceptions to this limitation are allowed to streamline approval of specified affordable housing projects.

General Plan amendment applications may be filed by individual applicants or initiated by the City. Applications for an amendment to the General Plan must address why an amendment is warranted.

Applications for General Plan amendment and/or City-initiated General Plan amendments should be grouped together as a single amendment package. The Planning Commission may conduct hearings regarding General Plan amendment packages in the spring, summer, fall, and winter of each year, followed by City Council consideration and action.

The City is required to report annually to the State regarding progress toward achieving General Plan goals, and cities regularly review General Plan goals and policies to determine whether they still reflect the community's values and the city's physical and economic conditions. By statute, the General Plan is required to be updated periodically, but no requirement says how often, and the planning period has traditionally been 15 to 20 years. Some cities and counties update their General Plans as often as every five years, and others update in portions over time. The Housing Element must be updated and certified by HCD every eight years. The City must also review and, if necessary, revise the Safety Element with each revision of the Housing Element or Local Hazard Mitigation Plan, but not less than once every eight years. The City's Local Hazard Mitigation Plan was adopted in January 2017. No other elements of the plan have mandated update or review periods. State law requires the California Office of Planning and Research to publish the names of jurisdictions with general plans older than 10

years and to notify the respective decision-making bodies of these jurisdictions.