



CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

Santa Rosa is in a time of incredible change. The recent fires, ongoing housing crisis, electrical grid blackouts, and calls for social justice and equality provide a backdrop for an immensely important discussion on how the city will grow and change over the coming years and decades. In 2020, the City of Santa Rosa began a three-year process to comprehensively update its 2009 General Plan. This process, known as the General Plan Update, is an opportunity for the community to discuss ways that Santa Rosa can become an even more sustainable, resilient, healthy, and inclusive community in the years and decades ahead.

The General Plan Update project provides an important opportunity for the community to discuss ways to ensure housing for all, improve neighborhood quality and connectivity, foster economic development, improve public health, create more equitable access to community amenities and services, enhance education, and reinforce environmental stewardship. As a starting point for this project, the City has prepared a comprehensive inventory and evaluation of existing conditions in the Santa Rosa. This **Existing Conditions Report** summarizes information, data, and resources regarding a range of physical, environmental, and social topics important to the community.

1.2 WHAT IS A GENERAL PLAN?

A General Plan is a city’s road map for the future. A General Plan describes a community’s aspirations and identifies strategies for managing preservation and change. Sometimes referred to as the community’s “constitution,” the General Plan is a comprehensive document that provides Santa Rosa with a policy framework to guide decision-making related to land use, growth and development, public safety, mobility, sustainability, resiliency, environmental justice, and resource conservation. California State law requires every city and county to prepare and adopt a comprehensive and long range General Plan that includes the following eight mandatory chapters (referred to as “elements”): Land Use, Circulation, Housing, Open Space, Conservation, Environmental Justice, Noise, and Safety. State law also allows for the inclusion of optional elements that can be added at the City’s discretion. Any optional element has the same policy weight as the required elements, and the elements may be presented in various formats.

A General Plan establishes the policy framework to be used and implemented by residents, businesses, developers, City staff, the City Council, and appointed boards and commissions. General Plans typically include goals, policies, and implementing actions, as well as maps and diagrams. These components work together to convey a long-term vision and guide local decision-making to achieve that vision. The General Plan and its maps, diagrams, and development policies form the basis of a city’s zoning and subdivision ordinances and public works projects. Under California law, no specific plan, area plan, community plan, zoning ordinance, subdivision map, or public works project may be approved unless the City finds that it is consistent with the General Plan.

Figure 1-1. Typical General Plan Structure



1.3 HOW DOES THE CITY USE 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. Since Santa Rosa adopted its current General Plan in 2009, significant shifts have occurred in demographics, land use, transportation, economics, community character, and the housing market. As a result, many portions of the 2009 General Plan are outdated and new topics need to be addressed, so the City has initiated a comprehensive update.

The General Plan is a tool to help City staff make decisions related to programs and services, capital improvement projects, and land use and development applications. Staff uses General Plan policy to provide direction to development applicants and provide land use analysis for the City Council, Planning Commission, and other boards and commissions. In addition, the General Plan provides a detailed implementation program that identifies actions to be completed by City staff and can be used as a guide to establish annual work programs and budgets.

For the City Council and appointed boards and commissions, the General Plan is a tool to guide decisions and capital improvement programming. Future land use and development decisions and infrastructure improvements must be consistent with the General Plan.

1.4 PURPOSE OF THE EXISTING CONDITIONS REPORT

This Existing Conditions Report is the first major step in the General Plan Update process. This report analyzes and summarizes demographic, economic, land use, community character, mobility, natural resources, infrastructure, environmental justice, community health, and other conditions in Santa Rosa, with the goal of helping the community and City planning team understand the issues and opportunities facing the community. This analysis will be used to support the planning and community engagement process conducted during development of the updated General Plan.

1.5 FORMAT AND CONTENTS

The Existing Conditions Report provides an overview of the baseline (year 2020) character, form, and context of Santa Rosa organized into the following topical chapters.



Chapter 2. Land Use and Community Character

This chapter discusses baseline land use and development patterns, urban form, community character, historic and cultural resources, environmental justice, and the city's existing planning documents.



Chapter 3. Market Demand and Economic Opportunity Analysis

This chapter summarizes the city's demographic, employment, and real estate market conditions and trends.



Chapter 4. Transportation

This chapter discusses the city's commuting patterns, vehicle miles traveled, transportation equity, pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, public transit, and transportation demand management strategies.



Chapter 5. Parks, Recreation, and Open Space

This chapter discusses open space resources, parkland, and recreation programs in the city and immediate surrounding area.



Chapter 6. Community Services

This chapter provides an overview of community services and programs in Santa Rosa, particularly police, fire, school, and library services.



Chapter 7. Hazards

This chapter provides an overview of the primary natural and human-caused hazards to which the community is vulnerable.



Chapter 8. Infrastructure

This chapter provides an overview of Santa Rosa's utility infrastructure and services.