



*Colma is a greenbelt community with attractive cemeteries and agricultural fields surrounding a regionally oriented commercial core.*

## INTRODUCTION TO THE GENERAL PLAN

### 5.01.000 THE PLANNING CONTEXT

Colma is a greenbelt community with attractive cemeteries and agricultural fields surrounding a regionally oriented commercial core. The Town began as a community of thirteen cemeteries in the early 1900's. This was primarily due to ordinances adopted around the turn of the century prohibiting burials in San Francisco, which forced cemeteries to relocate south to the Peninsula. In order to avoid relocating again the cemetery owners incorporated as a town on August 5, 1924. Originally known as Lawndale, the name was changed to the Town of Colma on November 24, 1941. Seventeen cemeteries now exist.

During the second half of the 1900's Colma became known, not only for containing a number of regional cemeteries, but also for its farms of fresh market flowers. An expanse of 450 acres, located between Colma and Daly City used exclusively for raising violets, became a major tourist attraction.

Colma is located approximately two miles south of San Francisco on the San Francisco Peninsula, midway between the San Francisco Bay and the Pacific Ocean. The Town is bounded on the north and west by Daly City, on the south by South San Francisco, and on the east by San Bruno Mountain State and County Park. San Bruno Mountain provides the natural visual backdrop to the Town from the surrounding areas. Colma is easily reached travelling north and south by way of Interstate Highway 280, paralleling the Town's west boundary, and by State Highway 82 (El Camino Real) running through the geographic center of Town.

Within the Town boundary, the ground elevation ranges from about 100 feet to about 500 feet above Mean Sea Level. The Town boundary includes approximately 1.98 square miles of a wide valley associated with Colma Creek. Most of the land east of El Camino Real is committed to cemetery use or agricultural fields. These uses lead up to the foot of San Bruno Mountain and impart a rural atmosphere. Land west of El Camino Real is oriented more to commercial uses although Colma's regionally-oriented commercial core is bracketed on the north and south by cemeteries.

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By 1960 approximately 500 residents called the Town of Colma their home. In the early 1970's and early 1980's the Town boundaries were expanded by annexing unincorporated portions of the Sterling Park subdivision located northeast of the intersection of F Street and El Camino Real. The population as of January 1998 was estimated by the Department of Finance to be 1278 persons.

The Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) projects a steady growth in population and employment for the Colma area to at least the Year 2000. In order to allow orderly assimilation of new population and ensure the ability to provide services, the Colma City Council has adopted a Community Goal to plan for a population of approximately 1,500 by the Year 2005.

The 1990 U.S. Census indicates that Colma has a multi-ethnic population. The median family income in 1990 was \$43,967 compared to the County mean of \$53,430. Major occupations in 1990 included managerial, administrative and service jobs. The labor force consisted of 52% men and 48% women in 1990. Unemployment was 2.3% for men and 2.5% for women in the work force at that time.

Over the last two decades the Town has encouraged regional commercial facilities to locate in Town centering on Serramonte Boulevard, Collins Avenue, Junipero Serra Boulevard and Colma Boulevard. There is a significant concentration of automobile and truck dealerships located along the Serramonte Auto Sales District in Colma and there are two large shopping centers (Serra Center and 280 Metro Mall) offering a total of approximately 450,000 square feet of retail space. These facilities provide employment opportunities and most of the sales tax revenue benefiting the Town.

#### **5.01.100 PURPOSE, INTENT AND USE**

##### **5.01.110 PURPOSE AND INTENT OF THE GENERAL PLAN**

The Colma General Plan satisfies State law requiring a comprehensive, long-term General Plan for the physical development of the Town. The Plan must contain seven mandatory

elements addressing land use, circulation, open space, conservation, housing, noise and safety. Mandatory elements may be combined and elective elements may be included. The Colma Plan combines the Open Space and Conservation Elements and it includes an Historic Resources Element. Each separate element must be consistent with the others. It is intended that the General Plan be used as the principal policy document guiding City Council action on development matters. See especially the Community Goals (Section 5.01.200) and the policy sections accompanying each General Plan element.

##### **5.01.120 ADOPTION AND AMENDMENT OF THE PLAN**

The General Plan is adopted and amended by City Council Resolution. Amendment to any one element is limited to four times each year. Amendments must not be made capriciously but only when a change is in the best interest of the community at large and when public health, safety and welfare is not endangered.

##### **5.01.130 RELATIONSHIP OF THE GENERAL PLAN TO ZONING**

The General Plan is the principal policy document for City Council reference and guidance on development matters. The location and overall orientation of land uses are designated in the General Plan. The Land Use Element is the principal reference for the distribution and intensity of present and planned future use of all land areas within the Town of Colma. The Zoning Ordinance is the principal guide to the implementation of the various land uses. It designates land use and sets forth appropriate limitations such as building heights, land coverage, off-street parking and setbacks from buildings to property lines. Zoning designations must be consistent with the General Plan.

##### **5.01.140 LAND USE ENTITLEMENTS**

Permits must typically be obtained from the Town before developing property or changing land uses. Permit procedures regulate such

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activities as the subdivision of land, grading, design of buildings and grounds, tree removal and signs in order to insure land use compatibility, to mitigate potential environmental impacts and to implement General Plan policies. A permit guidelines package is available in the office of the City Planner.

### **5.01.200 STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY GOALS**

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The following Statement of Community Goals is established by the Colma City Council and is intended to give direction and focus to the official policies and action programs contained in the individual general plan elements. Overall, the goals are aimed at sustaining essential economic, environmental and social attributes of the Town. It is intended that this community goals statement and the Colma General Plan will be valid to the year 2005. Goals are not stated in priority order and they may be amended by the City Council if unforeseen changes or opportunities arise in the future.

- 5.01.201** Preserve the uniqueness of Colma as a city of cemeteries, historical significance and regional commerce.
- 5.01.202** Promote a new tradition of flower planting to distinguish Colma from surrounding communities and to enhance local scenic qualities.
- 5.01.203** Plan for a population in Colma of about 1500 residents by the year 2005.
- 5.01.204** Promote programs which provide Colma residents and visitors with a sense of nature, relief from overcrowding and expanded recreational opportunities.
- 5.01.205** Maintain the availability of affordable housing units, both rental and for sale, for all income groups.
- 5.01.206** Plan for the orderly use of land resources throughout Colma.
- 5.01.207** Regulate land use and the development of structures to provide the maximum protection from fires,

flooding, earthquakes and geologic hazards.

- 5.01.208** Promote the improvement and upgrading of buildings, homes and properties in Colma.
- 5.01.209** Establish a program of tree planting and maintenance to enhance the scenic qualities of all streets throughout Colma.
- 5.01.210** Promote waste reduction and recycling efforts by all businesses and residents.
- 5.01.211** Develop sidewalks, pathways and dedicated routes throughout Colma to foster safe bicycle use, pedestrian safety and improved access to public transit.
- 5.01.212** Encourage residents, visitors and employees to share rides and to use private shuttles and public transit to reduce private automobile traffic in Colma.
- 5.01.213** Initiate a program to upgrade the Old Mission Road corridor including an upgrade of off-street parking, introduction of landscape improvements, protection for historical resources and provision for transit oriented residential and residential/commercial uses.
- 5.01.214** Develop design criteria applicable to remodeling and new construction to ensure architectural interest and compatibility with surrounding buildings and land.
- 5.01.215** Plan for needed community facilities including a library, post office, community play fields and a site suitable for a future public safety facility.
- 5.01.216** Encourage facilities and programs which provide care for children and senior citizens in Colma.
- 5.01.217** Diversify sources of income to the Town.

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### **5.01.300 KEY FEATURES OF THE GENERAL PLAN**

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#### **5.01.310 THE PLAN CONCEPT**

The Plan concept is to strengthen the Town's identity. Emphasis is placed on the important greenbelt theme of Colma, on enhancing its residential environment and on promoting its important status as a regional center for cemeteries and commerce.

#### **5.01.320 SPECIAL IDENTITY FOR COLMA**

Colma is different from other Bay Area cities because of its large expanses of open space related to the cemeteries and land held by cemeteries but currently in agricultural use. Colma is protected on the east from the intrusion of different land uses by San Bruno Mountain Park. Similarly, the Town is protected on the west by the Junipero Serra Freeway (Highway 280). The Plan policies promote the retention of the greenbelt theme by strengthening the existing visual buffers at the Town's perimeter and by protecting the greenbelt experience as one travels in a north-south direction through Town.

Colma is also different from other Bay Area cities because of the regional orientation of its commercial core area. To the extent that it is practical the Plan focuses on Serramonte Boulevard as the regional commercial spine with retail activities concentrated between Junipero Serra Boulevard and El Camino Real.

#### **5.01.330 GATEWAYS TO THE TOWN**

Colma's visual image is dependent on what is seen from the road as people approach and move into Town. Colma's separate identity and sense of containment can be strengthened by the experience of entering the Town through park-like gateways. The Plan identifies six distinct gateways: (1) El Camino Real at the intersection of F Street; (2) the junction of El Camino Real at Mission Road; (3) the junction of Serramonte Boulevard at Collins Avenue;

(4) Hillside Boulevard at the intersection with F Street (5) Hillside Boulevard at the south Town limits; and, (6) Mission Road at the south Town limits. More detail about the gateways is included in the Circulation Element.

#### **5.01.340 PLANNING AREAS**

Several distinct planning areas are defined primarily by the major circulation routes through Colma. These are shown on the Planning Area Map (Exhibit I-1) and are defined as follows:

##### **5.01.341 Central Colma**

Bracketed by Woodlawn Cemetery on the north and Cypress Lawn Cemetery on the south this Planning Area contains Colma's regional commercial core and The Colma Town Hall.

##### **5.01.342 Cemetery**

Situated between El Camino Real, Mission Road and Hillside Boulevard, this Planning Area extends from F Street on the north to the Town Limits on the south and is primarily committed to cemetery use.

##### **5.01.343 Cypress Hills**

Bracketed by Olivet Cemetery on the north and Holy Cross Cemetery lands on the south, this Planning Area contains a golf course, landfill site and other lands expected to eventually be absorbed for cemetery use.

##### **5.01.344 Sterling Park**

This Planning Area contains Colma's primary residential district.

##### **5.01.345 Mission Road District**

Extending south from the junction of Mission Road and El Camino Real, this Planning Area is oriented primarily to service commercial facilities with the potential for mixed retail/residential uses to be built near the South San Francisco BART station at Colma's south boundary.

**5.01.350 SUSTAINABILITY**

“Sustainability” is a strategy by which communities seek economic development approaches that also benefit the local environment and quality of life. It has become an important guide to many communities that have discovered that traditional approaches to planning and development are creating, rather than solving, societal and environmental problems. Where traditional approaches can lead to congestion, sprawl, pollution, and resource overconsumption, sustainable development offers real, lasting solutions that will strengthen our future.

Sustainable development provides a framework under which communities can use resources efficiently, create efficient infrastructures, protect and enhance quality of life, and create new businesses to strengthen their economies. It can help create healthy communities that can sustain the present generation, as well as those that follow.

<b>SUSTAINABILITY: A DEFINITION</b>
<p><b>The United Nations’ definition of sustainability:</b></p> <p><i>A sustainable society meets the needs of the present without sacrificing the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.</i></p>

**5.01.351 Measuring Sustainability:  
Community Indicators**

“Community Indicators” are measurements of local trends that include all three dimensions of a healthy community: economic, environmental, and social. They provide information about past trends and current realities, assisting communities in staying on a course of sustainability. Community indicators help civic leaders clarify key issues and challenges, or prioritize spending when budgets are tight. Indicators can point a community toward specific initiatives or policy changes that will have a real effect on quality of life. That impact is then reflected in the indicator designed to measure it.

One of the most important elements of a successful “indicator set” is that it is as relevant as possible to the community that it serves, making it more possible for it to spur constructive change. Table I-1 outlines Community Indicators for Colma.

<b>TABLE I-1 COMMUNITY INDICATORS FOR COLMA</b>
<p><b>COMMUNITY ECONOMIC VITALITY</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of business licenses</li> <li>• Percent of households that can afford median house price</li> <li>• Percent of households that can afford median rent price</li> <li>• Gross retail sales per square foot of retail space</li> </ul>
<p><b>COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council contributions to non-profit organizations</li> <li>• Percent of registered voters who vote</li> <li>• Number of businesses represented at Holiday Party</li> <li>• Number of child care spaces provided</li> </ul>
<p><b>COMMUNITY MOBILITY</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Level of Service (LOS) at the four most heavily-traveled intersections</li> <li>• Number of public bus routes serving El Camino Real and Junipero Serra Boulevard</li> <li>• Pavement condition on arterial and collector streets</li> </ul>
<p><b>COMMUNITY HEALTH AND SAFETY</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Average police call response time</li> <li>• Average fire call response time</li> <li>• Number of alcohol/narcotics arrests annually</li> <li>• Percent of waste diverted from landfills</li> </ul>
<p><b>COMMUNITY APPEARANCE AND CULTURE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hours of programmed events at Community Center annually</li> <li>• Linear feet of street trees</li> <li>• Linear feet of street-oriented flower plots</li> <li>• Acres of public park space</li> <li>• Litter Index (number of littered properties facing arterial and collector streets)</li> </ul>

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#### **5.01.400 ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS**

A Negative Declaration was prepared to address the environmental effects of updating the Colma General Plan. The full text of the Initial Study is on file at Colma Town Hall. The following environmental effects and findings were considered by the City Council.

**5.01.401** The revised 1999 General Plan is consistent with zoning provisions. The Land Use Element policies are designed to assure compatibility of land uses, provide for the orderly development of the community and avoid disrupting or dividing the physical arrangement of the community.

**5.01.402** Given the limited availability of developable land resources in the Town of Colma, implementation of the General Plan will not exceed official regional or local population projections. In addition, implementation of the General Plan will not induce substantial growth in any area of the town, given the policy to limit the number of residential units annually to 50. None of the policies or designated land uses in the Land Use Element will displace existing housing.

**5.01.403** The Safety Element identifies geologic hazards present in Colma. The entire Town is subject to seismic ground shaking in the event of an earthquake. Policies are designed to assure that development in Town meets the highest standards of safety through the requirement of a geologic report and engineering calculations at the time of submittal for a building permit.

**5.01.404** A portion of the Town of Colma is in a narrow valley influenced by Colma Creek. This area at lower elevation is subject to flooding in periods of extreme rain. This situation will be improved by flood control and drainage improvements proposed to be constructed beginning in 1999.

**5.01.405** The Town of Colma enjoys good air quality. At full build-out of the General Plan, air quality is expected to remain good based on land uses within Colma, given that no land uses directly contributing to local air pollution are anticipated to be located within the Town. However, land uses and land use decisions made by adjoining cities could have a negative impact on air quality. The extension of BART will offer a regional transportation alternative that may help ease auto use, and subsequently reduce auto emissions affecting Colma. Policies are included to encourage pedestrians and bicyclists.

**5.01.406** At full build-out of the General Plan, traffic within the Town of Colma will remain within acceptable levels. However, development decisions in neighboring communities could have spillover effects. New development and housing will likely occur along the El Camino Real and near the BART right of way. Higher density residential uses near BART stations are expected to support BART ridership.

**5.01.407** Land area surrounding Colma is home to at least six endangered wildlife species and at least six endangered plant species. Man made water features in local cemeteries may provide a suitable habitat for two of the endangered wildlife species. Raptors may also be present in existing stands of trees within the town. The General Plan includes policies which would require appropriate levels of environmental review if there is a possibility of disrupting a potentially sensitive area. The General Plan also discusses tree preservation. A tree removal permit process is currently in place to protect existing trees. Areas designated for urban development are considered infill sites and are surrounded by urban development. Development of infill sites is not expected to impact any biological resources.

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- 5.01.408** The proposed General Plan, through proposed policies, seeks to reduce consumption of non-renewable resources and promote development and housing that will reduce auto dependence in favor of alternative transportation. There are no known mineral resources of value classified or designated by the State within Colma.
- 5.01.409** The Town of Colma is subject to natural hazards such as fires, earthquakes, flooding and landslides. The General Plan includes policies related to the processing of applications for new development to require that new buildings and facilities are built to meet or exceed standards to mitigate against natural hazards. In addition, the Town is prepared to respond in the event of a natural disaster.
- 5.01.410** The Noise Element of the General Plan indicates sources of local noise, mostly attributable to the auto. No new roadways or expansions to roadways are proposed which may lead to an increased ambient noise level with the exception of the proposed Hickey Boulevard extension which will be the subject of its own Environmental Impact Report. Due to the location of Colma's principal residential neighborhood away from commercial uses and the large amount of land devoted to cemetery use, Colma residents enjoy a relatively quiet living environment.
- 5.01.411** The Town of Colma does not have a fire station within its corporate limits. Fire service is provided by a volunteer paid fire force. If current development continues in Colma, fire protection services would need to be expanded, thus the recommended limit of 50 new residential units per year to plan and expand existing services. In a like manner, the Police Department is cramped at their facility located in the Town Hall building. Eventual expansion will be needed.
- 5.01.412** There are no schools within Colma. Future residential units will generate incremental increases in school attendance. The ability of local schools to accommodate new students should be determined as part of the project review process.
- 5.01.413** Policies in the General Plan express the Town's strong emphasis on quality of design and aesthetics for new projects. The Town has adopted a series of design policies for new construction. Each project will be reviewed (and a separate environmental review conducted) for compliance with General Plan policies and the Zoning Ordinance. The General Plan also discusses the importance of protecting and enhancing scenic vistas.
- 5.01.414** The new Historic Resources Element of the General Plan identifies 30 sites or districts with historical significance. Eight buildings and four districts are eligible for listing on the National Register. The element provides information on available preservation programs and laws that can provide opportunities to further preservation programs in Colma. This new element should have positive environmental, cultural and social effects through the recognition and preservation of resources for the enjoyment of future generations.
- 5.01.415** The Open Space/Conservation Element of the General Plan identifies two new recreational facilities that the Town wishes to pursue. These include land for ballfields and a site for a picnic and historic park. Combined with other programs and facilities the Town maintains, any further development in the community should not significantly increase the demand for recreational facilities.

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## 5.01.500 FINDINGS

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**5.01.501** The Initial Study and Checklist prepared for the 1999 General Plan update indicates that the update will not significantly adversely affect the environment, either in the alteration of the community or by creating short- or long-term adverse impacts.

**5.01.502** The General Plan project Negative Declaration was prepared in accordance with the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act of 1970, as amended and applicable guidelines. A copy of the Initial Study and Checklist and related material may be reviewed at the Colma Town Hall.

**5.01.503** Approval of the 1999 General Plan Update will not cause a significant or individual or cumulative impact on the environment.

- a. The update serves to clarify and update goals to provide for orderly development, safety, preservation, and the enhancement of open space. When fully implemented, the level of development will not constitute a significant individual or cumulative impact on the environment. Individual projects

will be reviewed for environmental impacts at the time they are proposed.

- b. Implementation of the 1999 General Plan Update will not degrade the quality of the environment. Policies are included to preserve, protect and enhance the quality of the environment.
- c. Fish and wildlife habitat will not be substantially reduced.
- d. Implementation does not threaten the elimination of rare or endangered plants or animals or important cultural resources, but rather identifies them and their location.
- e. Human beings will not be adversely affected by the proposed update.

**5.01.504** Approval of the 1999 General Plan Update does not conflict with the adopted environmental goals of the community.

**5.01.505** Approval of the 1999 General Plan Update is permitted by State law and consistent with local ordinances.