

REPORT TO GENERAL PLAN 2040 STEERING COMMITTEE

Subject: General Plan Organization

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There are many different options for organizing the General Plan document, but all involve a series of topical chapters (or “elements”) containing goals, policies, actions on issues relating to the city’s future. General Plan 2020 (adopted 2004) included 16 separate “elements.” The simplest option would be to carry the 16 elements forward, revising each one to ensure compliance with current state laws. Other options should be considered, including combining some of the elements and/or adding new elements addressing emerging priorities. This memo addresses the factors to be considered in this discussion.

REPORT

General Plan 2020 includes 16 elements, organized into four broad categories as follows:¹

Our Use of Land

- **Land Use**
- **Housing**
- Neighborhoods
- Community Design

Our Foundation

- Economic Vitality
- **Circulation**
- Infrastructure
- Governance
- Sustainability

Our Quality of Life

- Culture and Arts
- Parks and Recreation
- **Safety**
- **Noise**

¹ Elements mandated by State law are in **bold**.

Our Natural Resources

- **Open Space**
- **Conservation**
- Air and Water Quality

Seven of the 16 elements are considered “mandatory” under state law and nine are considered “optional.” Once adopted, the optional elements have the same legal weight as the mandatory elements. Many of the topics covered by the optional elements are legally required under the Government Code but are covered in other elements in most cities (for example, air and water quality is usually covered in the Conservation or Safety Element and parks are typically covered in the Open Space Element).

As of January 1, 2018, cities are also required to include an Environmental Justice Element in their general plans. This can be a freestanding chapter (like the 16 listed above), or a “thread” of policies that appears throughout the document (on topics such as housing, transportation, and safety).

The table on the following page (excerpted from the 2017 General Plan Guidelines) shows the relationship between different topics and the mandatory elements. The table includes topics that are statutorily required under the Government Code and topics that are commonly included because they are of general interest to residents and decision-makers.

Alternatives to the Current Organization

Although we are “updating” General Plan 2020 (as opposed to developing a brand new Plan), we can still consider changes to the document’s organization. The goal of such changes should be to make the plan easier to use and more relevant to the challenges facing the city today. In general, it is unusual to have 16 separate elements in a General Plan; possible consolidation of some of these elements should be considered to avoid redundancy and recognize the integration of topic areas. As an example, the City of Sunnyvale recently consolidated its 22-element General Plan into five elements.

The present organization of General Plan 2020 results in a number of topics being addressed in more than one place. For example, historic preservation is covered in the Community Design Element and again in the Culture and Arts Element. Air quality is addressed in the Sustainability Element and again in the Air and Water Quality Element. Sustainability itself is both its own Element and a guiding principle that underpins other elements, such as Conservation and Land Use.

Table 2 provides an overview of Element headings for 10 other cities in the Bay Area that have completed General Plan Updates in the last five years. Looking beyond the Bay Area, there are even more “outside the box” ideas for organizing the General Plan that could be considered.

Topics, Elements	Land Use	Circulation	Housing	Conservation	Open Space	Noise	Safety	Environmental Justice
Agriculture	■		■	■	■		■	■
Air Quality	■	■	■		■		■	■
Airports	■	■	■		■	■	■	■
Bicycle and Pedestrian Routes	■	■	■				■	■
Climate Change (Adaptation)	■	■	■	■	■		■	■
Climate Change (GHG Emissions)	■	■	■	■	■		■	■
Density	■	■	■				■	■
Education	■	■	■				■	■
Social Equity	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Environmental Justice	■	■	■				■	■
Fire	■		■		■		■	■
Fisheries	■			■	■	■	■	■
Flooding	■	■	■	■			■	■
Food Access	■	■	■				■	■
Forests/Timber	■	■		■	■		■	■
Health	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Housing	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Industrial Uses	■	■	■			■	■	■
Land Reclamation				■			■	■
Land Use	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Military Compatibility	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Minerals	■	■		■	■		■	■
Noise Contours	■	■	■			■		■
Public Buildings	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Railways and Yards	■	■	■			■	■	■
Recreation	■	■		■	■		■	■
Scenic Resources	■	■	■	■	■	■		■
School Siting	■	■	■		■	■	■	■
Seismic Hazards	■	■	■	■	■		■	■
Soil Conservation	■	■	■	■	■			■
Soil Instability	■	■	■				■	■
Transportation Routes	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Transportation Terminals	■	■		■		■	■	■
Utilities/ Easements	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Waste Facilities	■	■	■			■	■	■
Water Quality	■			■	■		■	■
Water Supply	■		■	■	■		■	■
Watersheds	■		■	■	■		■	
Waterways/Water Bodies	■		■	■	■	■	■	
Wildlife	■	■	■	■	■			

■ Identified in statute ■ Closely related to statutory requirements

Table 1:
Relationship Between Mandatory Plan Elements and Plan Issues
Source: 2017 General Plan Guidelines

Table 2: Element Headings for Recently Completed General Plans in Bay Area Cities

<p>NOVATO (2017)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Great Places (Community Character, Land Use, and Housing) 2. Environmental Legacy (Natural Communities, Open Space, Air and Water Quality, Climate) 3. Living Well (Parks/Rec, Noise, Health) 4. Economic Vitality 5. A City That Works (Mobility, Safety, Services, Governance) 	<p>MILL VALLEY (2013)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Land Use 2. Mobility 3. Community Vitality 4. Natural Environment 5. Climate Action 6. Hazards and Public Safety 7. Noise 8. Housing
<p>WINDSOR (2015)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Community Development (Design, Development Pattern, Economic Development, Transportation, Community Services and Facilities) 2. Housing 3. Environmental Resources (Open Space, Conservation, Air and Water, Energy, Cultural Resources, Scenic Resources) 4. Public Health and Safety 	<p>EAST PALO ALTO (2016)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Land Use and Urban Design 2. Economic Development 3. Transportation 4. Health and Equity 5. Parks, Open Space, and Conservation 6. Infrastructure, Services, and Facilities 7. Safety and Noise 8. Area Plan(s)
<p>SAN LEANDRO (2016)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Land Use 2. Transportation 3. Economic Development 4. Open Space, Conservation, and Parks 5. Environmental Hazards 6. Historic Preservation and Community Design 7. Community Services and Facilities 8. Housing 	<p>HAYWARD (2014)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Land Use and Community Character 2. Mobility 3. Economic Development 4. Community Safety 5. Natural Resources (incl Air and Water) 6. Hazards 7. Lifelong Learning 8. Community Health and Quality of Life 9. Public Facilities and Services 10. Housing
<p>PALO ALTO (2017)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Land Use and Community Design 2. Transportation 3. Housing 4. Natural Environment 5. Safety 6. Community Services and Facilities 7. Business and Economics 8. Governance 	<p>VALLEJO (2017)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Community and People (Health, Equity, Parks, Governance) 2. Nature and Built Environment (Natural Resources, Open Space, Land Use, Hazards, Waterfront) 3. Economy, Education, and Training 4. Mobility, Transportation, and Connectivity 5. Arts and Culture
<p>FREMONT (2012)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sustainability 2. Land Use 3. Mobility 4. Community Character 5. Housing 6. Economic Development 7. Conservation 8. Parks and Recreation 9. Public Facilities 10. Safety 11. Community Plans 	<p>VACAVILLE (2015)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Land Use 2. Transportation 3. Conservation and Open Space 4. Parks and Recreation 5. Public Facilities and Services 6. Safety 7. Noise 8. Housing

Ideas for Consideration

Below is a list of questions for consideration/ discussion by the Steering Committee:

General

1. Are there any overall issues with the current General Plan structure that Committee members feel need to be addressed? Is there interest in moving toward more thematic headings? Does one of the alternatives shown in Table 2 resonate more than the others?
2. Should we rethink the four overarching categories (Our Use of Land, Our Foundation, Our Quality of Life, our Natural Resources) or do they still work?
3. How “outside the box” should we go?

Specific

1. Should we retain a separate General Plan Element for “Neighborhoods” (the alternative would be to move the citywide content of this chapter into the Land Use Element, but still retain policies for individual neighborhoods in a separate section of the Plan)
2. Should Sustainability continue to be a free-standing Element of the Plan, or can its policies be distributed throughout the Plan, with sustainability serving as an overarching theme that informs land use, transportation, conservation, and other topic areas?
3. Can the Air and Water Quality Element be combined with Safety or Conservation?
4. Can the Parks and Recreation Element be combined with Open Space? (e.g., “Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Element”)
5. Should we add a new Element on Environmental Justice or can we re-work the “Governance” Element so that its principal focus is on equity and access to opportunity for all residents? (In this instance, Governance would likely be replaced by a new “Health, Justice, and Equity Element”)
6. Can the Noise Element be combined with the Safety Element? (which would more broadly address all environmental hazards, and include a shift in focus toward Resilience and Adaptation?)
7. How (where) should public health and education issues be addressed, if at all?
8. Can historic preservation policies be consolidated in one section of the Plan, instead of split between Arts/Culture and Community Design?
9. Should we replace the Infrastructure Element with a “Community Services and Facilities” Element that also addresses police, fire, schools, libraries, senior services, child care, etc.?
10. Is there a preferred way to address technology and its impacts on life in San Rafael in the future?