

# Factors Involved with the General Plan Population and Buildout

## *ISSUE PAPER: POPULATION*

### **BACKGROUND**

The Land Use Element of the General Plan establishes the location and intensity of planned land uses. The General Plan Buildout refers to the maximum number of potential residential units and maximum amount of commercial, industrial, and non-residential square footage. A jurisdiction's Quality of Life Standards determine what infrastructure and services are needed to accommodate the desired mix of land uses.

Escondido has Quality of Life Standards that address fire and police response times, economic prosperity, amounts of parkland, schools, libraries, drainage, sewer, water facilities, and circulation. Escondido's Quality of Life Standards are based on the buildout number of dwelling units rather population since the population per household can vary significantly over time and necessitate many facility plan revisions.

The Buildout shapes how the community will look and feel and drives municipal infrastructure and facility needs. Detailed Public Facility Plans that delineate the location and improvements associated with each public facility are prepared once the Buildout and service standards are determined. Once Facility Plans are developed, Development fees are determined. New development can only be charged for their fair share of infrastructure facilities needed to implement Escondido's General Plan and cannot fund deficiencies. Development fees only fund physical improvements, so other funding sources are needed for ongoing maintenance and operations (M&O).

If buildout estimates are too high, un-necessary improvements will be planned and the per-unit fees will be too low. If buildout is underestimated then facility plans will not be able to accommodate actual development. In most cases facilities cannot be expanded on an ongoing basis, commensurate with the rate of population growth. Larger incremental expansions are often necessary from either a technical or economic perspective. Therefore, attention must be given to managing growth to ensure adequate facilities exist on an ongoing basis.

California's Planning and Zoning Laws require Cities and Counties to accommodate their fair share of anticipated Regional Growth. Therefore, Escondido's General Plan Update must coordinate with the Regional Growth Forecasts established by the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG). It should be noted that natural increase has surpassed in-migration as the major component of growth. Therefore, growth will continue to occur whether or not new development occurs. Issues with overcrowding can occur if population outstrips available housing opportunities.

## **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this paper is to:

- ❖ examine existing General Plan buildout policies that are affected by population trends
- ❖ discuss Housing Element legislation and the process for allocating population growth to communities;
- ❖ discuss how various assumptions would affect future population projections
- ❖ describe options for effectively addressing population increases in Escondido's General Plan Update.

## **EXISTING GENERAL PLAN BUILDOUT POLICIES & POPULATION TRENDS**

Escondido's current General Plan contains a policy regarding population buildout. Development Monitoring Policy F.1.1 states:

*The City Council will consider ordinances or policies to meet the maximum population objectives of 150,000 to 165,000 with a maximum anticipated population of 155,000.*

There are approximately 163,000 persons currently living within Escondido's General Plan area. This includes approximately 143,000 persons residing within the City of Escondido (based on 2008 population estimates) and approximately 20,000 persons currently residing in the unincorporated area of Escondido's General Plan area that is outside the existing city limits. This estimate is derived by multiplying the existing number of county residences by the estimated population per household size of 3.13 persons PPH. There are still several thousand vacant residential properties within Escondido's General Plan area that could be developed and increase this total.

The General Plan population cap of 155,000 within the General Plan Area has been exceeded. There are two primary factors regarding the ability to meet Escondido's buildout objective:

### *1. Population Per Household Increases*

The General Plan approved in 1990 was based on the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) estimates anticipating an average of 2.44 persons per household (pph), which was accurate when the General Plan was adopted. Individual household population is a factor that the City cannot control but it is affected by the supply of housing. Household sizes can increase and overcrowding can occur when there is a shortage with the supply of housing, immigration, longer life spans, children living at home longer, larger families, and other factors. Over the last 20 years Escondido's average population per household has increased to over 3 pph where it is expected to slightly increase further before leveling off. SANDAG currently forecasts the population within Escondido's *existing* city limits will exceed 169,000 by 2030.

It should be noted that Escondido's existing city limits constitute *less than one-half* of the land area within its General Plan boundary (for which the 155,000 population objective applied). Most of the acreage in Escondido's General Plan Area that lies outside the city boundaries are public lands, low density residential, and constrained by steep slopes and/or sensitive habitat.

## 2. *The Previous Plan's Assumption that Density Would Decrease in Many Areas*

Many of Escondido's General Plan multi-family designations were approved for 15, 24, and 30 units per acre prior to the 1990 General Plan adoption. When the current General Plan was adopted these multi-family designations were reduced to 12, 18, and 24 units respectively. However, much of the community's multi-family areas were already developed at the pre-1990 General Plan densities and granted legal non-conforming status.

While consideration was given that non-conforming properties would eventually recycle with fewer units, the likelihood of re-developing all of the multi-family designations at current lower densities remains remote. Retaining these legal non-conforming units has achieved some benefit for the community by helping to decrease overcrowding in the community. Additionally, the increased population associated with the legal non-conforming units has enhanced the community's opportunity to attract desirable retail uses and strengthen transit ridership.

Since the adoption of the General Plan in 1990 the development potential for several thousand acres of the community has been eliminated, such as Daley Ranch and the Montreaux projects, which were re-designated for open space and habitat protection. This action resulted in several thousand fewer dwelling units than originally anticipated in the General Plan buildout. Several other projects have been approved that increase the community's population, including Paramount and Venue which were not factored in the original buildout density. When considering actions to eliminate development opportunities in areas and add density in other areas there are still fewer units than originally anticipated in the General Plan but the overall population exceeds original estimates.

### **POPULATION ALLOCATION PROCESS**

The California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) is responsible for allocating each region's share of the statewide housing need to regional Councils of Governments (COG) based on Department of Finance population projections and forecasts used in preparing regional transportation plans. For the San Diego area (including Escondido), SANDAG serves as the regional COG. SANDAG, in conjunction with local jurisdictions, develops a Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) allocating the region's share of the statewide need to cities and the county of San Diego. The RHNA's objectives are to promote the following objectives:

- ❖ increase the housing supply and the mix of housing types, tenure and affordability in all cities and counties within the region in an equitable manner;
- ❖ promote infill development and socioeconomic equity, the protection of environmental and agricultural resources, and the encouragement of efficient development patterns; and,
- ❖ promote an improved intraregional relationship between jobs and housing.

Recently legislation has been adopted and strong efforts at state and regional have directed that growth and development in a more compact manner, where transit and public facilities exist. This allows for more efficiency in providing public services, using less water, more efficient use of mass transit, saving energy, and curbing greenhouse gasses that have been tied to climate change issues. Sprawl in outlying areas is discouraged from both an environmental and economic impact.

### **HOUSING ELEMENT LEGISLATION**

State law requires each city and county to adopt a general plan containing at least seven elements including a Housing Element. Unlike the other mandatory general plan elements, the Housing Element, required to be updated approximately every five years, is subject to detailed statutory requirements and mandatory review by HCD. Escondido's Housing element was last adopted by the state in December 2005 and the next review is slated for 2010-2011.

Housing Element Law requires local governments to adequately plan to meet their existing and projected housing needs, including their share of the regional housing need. Housing Element Law is the State's primary market-based strategy to increase housing supply, choice, and affordability. The law recognizes that in order for the private sector to adequately address housing needs and demand, local governments must adopt land-use plans and regulatory schemes that provide opportunities for, and do not unduly constrain, housing development.

Housing Elements have been mandatory portions of general plans since 1969. This reflects the statutory recognition that the availability of housing is a matter of statewide importance and that cooperation between government and the private sector is critical to attainment of the State's housing goals. The regulation of the housing supply through planning and zoning powers affects the State's ability to achieve its housing goal of "decent housing and a suitable living environment for every California family" and is critical to the State's long-term economic competitiveness.

Housing Element Law recognizes that the most critical decisions regarding housing development occurs at the local level within the context of the general plan. The RHNA component of the general plan requires local governments to balance the need for growth, including the need for additional housing, against other competing local interests. The RHNA process of Housing Element Law promotes the State's interest in encouraging open markets and providing opportunities for the private sector to address the State's housing demand, while leaving the ultimate decision about *how* and *where* to plan for growth at the regional and local levels. *While land-use planning is fundamentally a local issue, the availability of housing is a matter of statewide importance.*

Housing Element Law requires local governments to be accountable for ensuring that projected housing needs can be accommodated. The process maintains local control over where and what type of development should occur in local communities while providing the opportunity for the private sector to meet market demand.

### **ANTICIPATED INCREASES IN POPULATION PROJECTIONS**

The San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) estimates that an additional 1 million people will reside in the San Diego region by 2050 necessitating an additional 400,000 dwelling units. When calculating all projected dwelling units identified at build-out in the various existing general plans throughout the region there is a shortfall of approximately 96,000 units. Details of how the population will be dispersed in the region have not been completed. Based on previous allocations and population percentages allocated by SANDAG, Escondido is projected to add an additional 5,000-8,000 housing units by 2030 above the current adopted General Plan. Local fertility rates will account for two-thirds of this projected growth, while one-third of new population growth will be from residents relocating to our area.

## **OPTIONS FOR ACCOMMODATING FUTURE GROWTH**

At recently conducted General Plan Community Workshops, concerns were expressed regarding the state's process for allocating population and the appropriateness of accepting future growth. However, trends have shown that growth has occurred through increases in household population sizes, not simply increasing land use densities. Even under a "no growth" scenario--where none of the communities in the region increase their General Plan holding capacities--SANDAG predicts that the consequences of a housing supply shortage would be overcrowding, increased housing costs, and more inter-regional commuting. In such a scenario it would be anticipated that facilities and services would strain to meet the increased demands and the region's quality of life would decline with no additional funding provided by this growth to fund necessary infrastructure.

Comments at community workshops were also expressed seeking assurances that population growth would not materially affect General Plan Quality of Life Standards. Comprehensive and coordinated planning should provide the fundamental building blocks for effectively accommodating future residential growth. Determining where this growth should be focused, establishing appropriate fees to fund necessary infrastructure, and ensuring adequate resources and services are available to meet future demand will be critical for accommodating future growth.

The General Plan must include sustainable policies that meet the state's housing needs, expand home-ownership opportunities, revitalize existing neighborhoods, build attractive and livable communities, and allow for continued economic prosperity. Sustainability is generally designed to coordinate and plan for growth through common goals expressing the public's interest in conservation and wise use of lands to preserve the environment, encourage economic development, and ensure the health, safety and high quality of life enjoyed by citizens.

Incorporating "Smart Growth" principles and policies in the General Plan Update would be in accordance with state mandates. Smart Growth is a planning doctrine that advocates compact, transit-oriented land use and the concentration of growth in the city's core. It encourages communities to take the wide view and prioritize long-term regional sustainability over short-term interests in order to prevent inefficient urban sprawl. This approach takes advantage of existing infrastructure and strengthens existing neighborhoods. It also results in a more sustainable land use pattern that enables people to drive less. Concentrating future growth in Smart Growth Areas will be a step in ensuring Escondido's sustainability.

The main elements of Smart Growth are:

### *Compact, Pedestrian- and Bicycle-Friendly Neighborhoods*

Focus is placed on improving the quality of neighborhoods by balancing affordability, convenience, attractiveness, and safety creates a healthy environment, a sense of place, and a more livable community.

### *Transit-Oriented Development*

Previous land-use planning has placed housing far from jobs and services and placed heavy reliance on the automobile. Smart Growth advocates mixing uses and concentrating development near public transit in order to provide several convenient transportation options.

### Preserving Open Space

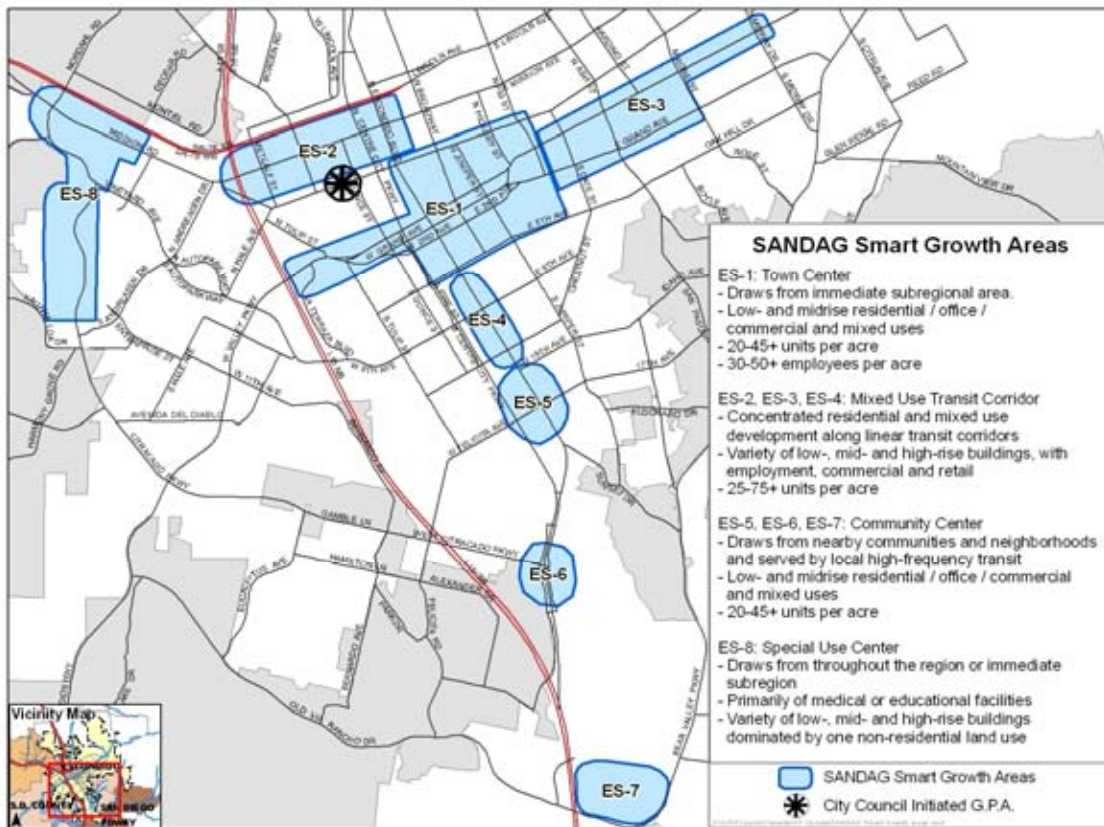
By encouraging infill development, Smart Growth aims to preserve natural resources while providing an attractive landscape, recreational facilities, cleaner air, and fresher drinking water.

### Improving Existing Communities

Smart Growth focuses investment in areas where people live today. Improving roads, sewers, and services in existing communities, rather than constructing new developments in outlying areas, ensures that all residents benefit from prosperity in an equitable way.

Working with local communities SANDAG adopted the Regional Comprehensive Plan in 2004, establishing a framework for coordinating land use and transportation planning with the goal of concentrating regional growth into urban areas and Smart Growth communities. SANDAG has since created a Smart Growth Concept Map which identifies over 200 existing, planned, and potential Smart Growth areas in the region.

The City of Escondido has several Smart Growth opportunities with population densities ranging from 20-75 units per acre. Downtown Escondido is designated as a "Town Center," with mixed-use transit corridors along East Valley Parkway and Escondido Boulevard. Special-Use Centers such as the Escondido Research and Technology Center are included as well as area around the Nordahl Road Transit Station, future California High-Speed Rail Stop, and Westfield Shoppingtown (see map).



The General Plan will need to include Growth Management policies that effectively combine certainty for development decisions, reasonable environmental protection, long-range planning for cost-effective infrastructure, and fiscal impacts to accommodate sustainable growth. Among the goals of growth management, the General Plan should provide for sufficient buildable land capacity, economic development, affordable housing, and adequate infrastructure.

The General Plan Update process will evaluate alternative buildout scenarios for the identified Smart Growth areas. Dwelling units and densities will be distributed among the Smart Growth areas rather than in established neighborhoods, taking into account community input and visioning as well as infrastructure capacities. Quality of Life Standards (utilities, safety, parks, libraries, etc.) will also be factored in to the scenarios to ensure that these areas remain desirable places to live.