



# **ESCONDIDO GENERAL PLAN UPDATE**

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **1. What is a General Plan and what is its purpose?**

A General Plan is a statement of long-range public policy to guide the use of public and private lands within a community's boundaries. It is a declaration of a community's values, aspirations, and projected growth, establishing the goals for a community and providing a comprehensive program for its development. Its purpose is to provide a "blueprint" for the build-out of a community that reflects the vision of its residents.

### **2. Why is the General Plan so important?**

The General Plan is one of the City's core documents and has been described as its constitution for development – the framework within which decisions on how to grow, provide public services and facilities, and protect and enhance the environment must be made. It serves as the basis for the City Council's decision-making by defining the community's land use, circulation, environmental, economic, and social goals. As a forward-looking document, it enables the City to strategically allocate resources to meet the challenges of increased population, energy needs, and public services while addressing the quality of life for its residents.

### **3. What are the legal considerations of the General Plan?**

State law requires each city and county to prepare a general plan, which is defined as "a comprehensive, long-term general plan for the physical development of the county or city, and any land outside its boundaries which in the planning agency's judgment bears relation to its planning." State requirements call for general plans that "comprise an integrated, internally consistent and compatible statement of policies for the adopting agency."

California's tradition of allowing local authority over land use decisions means that the state's cities have considerable flexibility in preparing their general plans. While they allow considerable flexibility, State planning laws do establish some requirements for the issues that general plans must address. The California Government Code establishes both the content of general plans and rules for their adoption and subsequent amendment. Together, state law and judicial decisions establish three overall guidelines for general plans:

- *The General Plan Must Be Comprehensive.* This requirement has two aspects. First, the general plan must be geographically comprehensive. That is, it must apply throughout the entire incorporated area and it should include other areas that the City determines are relevant to its planning. Second, the general plan must address the full range of issues that affects the city's physical development.
- *The General Plan Must Be Internally Consistent.* This requirement means that the General Plan must fully integrate its separate parts and relate them to each other without conflict. "Horizontal" consistency applies as much to figures and diagrams as to the general plan text. It also applies to data and analysis as well as policies. All adopted portions of the general plan, whether required by State law or not, have equal legal weight. None may supersede another, so the general plan must resolve conflicts among the provisions of each element.
- *The General Plan Must Be Long-range.* Because anticipated development will affect the city and the people who live or work there for years to come, State law requires every general plan to take a long-term perspective.

#### **4. What are the required components of a General Plan?**

State law requires that a General Plan address seven key elements:

- Land Use:
- Housing
- Circulation
- Conservation
- Open Space
- Noise
- Safety

The City of Escondido General Plan includes “optional” elements involving:

- Community Services and Facilities
- Growth Management
- Implementation
- Specific Planning Areas

### **5. Why do we need to update the General Plan?**

Escondido’s General Plan was adopted in 1990 and designed to guide the City’s growth for 10-15 years. Circumstances and conditions have changed in the past two decades. New issues have come to the forefront, and the City faces new legal mandates. In addition to State law requiring that a city’s general plan be up-to-date, it is important to reflect the community’s most current values and priorities for future development.

### **6. What is the difference between the Sphere of Influence, General Plan, and Zoning?**

Escondido’s Sphere of Influence identifies all properties eligible for annexing to the city delineating the limit to which Escondido’s corporate boundaries can potentially extend. The Sphere of Influence is prepared jointly by the City and the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO), a state agency that oversees all jurisdictional boundary changes. LAFCO takes into account utility infrastructure, topography, service agencies, community character and input when establishing the Sphere of Influence Boundary. Spheres of Influences and annexations are adopted by LAFCO after approval by the City. Two criteria for annexing territory to Escondido are that properties shall be within the City’s Sphere of Influence and General Plan boundaries.

The General Plan, as described above in Question #1, is a comprehensive, long-term planning tool and policy document for the physical development of Escondido, and includes territory inside the City limits as well as outside the City’s boundaries that bears relation to its planning. The General Plan consists of a text and a collection of maps that is provide the overall vision for how the community will grow and develop. A property’s General Plan designation will prescribe density and intensity parameters as well as a general guidance for development based on the community’s vision. Other elements of the General Plan provide standards and policies for circulation, housing, open space, noise, conservation and safety are synchronized to ensure consistency.

Escondido's zoning ordinance consists of two parts: a map and text. The zoning map shows how the community is divided into different use districts or zones. Zoning districts include residential, commercial, office, industrial, Specific Plan, and agricultural. The zoning map shows precise boundaries for each district on a parcel-by-parcel basis. The zoning text serves two important functions. First, it explains the zoning rules that apply in each zoning district. These rules establish a list of land uses permitted and conditionally permitted in each district plus a series of specific standards governing lot size, building height, and required yard and setback provisions. Second, the text sets forth a series of procedures for administering and applying the zoning ordinance.

**7. When was the Escondido General Plan adopted and when was it last updated?**

Escondido's General Plan was adopted in June of 1990, and was last updated in November of 2002. The Housing Element was updated in 2004.

**8. Will all of the current General Plan be revised?**

The entire General Plan will be reviewed to ensure its compliance with state law and public support. It is anticipated that a more focused revision will be conducted in key areas in the General Plan to address planning trends, an updated community vision and revised policies.

**9. What is the relationship between the General Plan and the Capital Improvement program?**

The City's General Plan is used as a foundation for establishing the Capital Improvement Program, or CIP, which is a short-range plan, usually four to six years, that identifies capital projects and equipment purchases, provides a planning schedule and identifies options for financing the plan. Essentially, the plan provides a link between the City's General Plan and the annual budget.

The CIP allows for a systematic evaluation of all potential projects at the same time and offers the ability to stabilize debt and consolidate projects to reduce borrowing costs. The CIP also serves as a public relations and economic development tool by focusing on preserving the city's infrastructure while ensuring the efficient use of public funds.

## **10. What issues will be evaluated in Escondido's General Plan update?**

The General Plan Update will address the following:

- Re-Evaluating Current Policies
- New State and Federal Mandates
- Regional Coordination
- Smart Growth and Green Principles
- Traffic Congestion
- Expanding Public Transit
- Aging Infrastructure
- Economic Development
- Water Quality
- Sense of Place
- Affordable Housing
- Quality of Life Standards
- Fiscal Issues

## **11. What are Escondido's Quality of Life Standards?**

Quality of Life Standards establish minimum thresholds of service levels for various public improvements and facilities including transportation, schools, fire and police service, water and sewer service, parks and open space, libraries, air quality, and economic prosperity. These are found in the [General Plan Introduction](#).

## **12. What are the steps in amending the General Plan?**

The first step in amending the General Plan is to establish baseline conditions. Citizen participation will be relied upon to garner input on public opinions, visioning, recommendations and perceptions. A draft General Plan will be crafted along with alternatives that will be studied and analyzed. The City will make strategic use of consultants to complete certain technical studies required for analyzing the plan. Public input will be sought throughout the process during workshops, Planning Commission and City Council public hearings. For Escondido to fully adopt the General Plan, a general or special election may be required.

## **13. How can the public get involved?**

The City will hold public hearings, visioning workshops, presentations, and take public comment on the General Plan Update. Information about these events will be posted on the City of Escondido's General Plan Update website.

**14. How much will it cost?**

The City Council has set aside funds for updating the General Plan. A significant portion of the update is anticipated to be accomplished utilizing City staff in order to reduce costs. Certain technical studies and preparation of the environmental documentation may require consultant expertise.

**15. How long will it take to complete?**

It is estimated that the General Plan Update process will take approximately 3 years to complete given the involvement anticipated by the public as well as required consultation with numerous public agencies. Additionally, the Environmental Review will involve several technical studies that can not commence until after a draft of the updated General Plan is nearing completion.

**16. What is Proposition S and how does it affect the General Plan update?**

Proposition S was ballot initiative approved in 1998 requiring City residents to approve amendments of certain Land Use, and Implementation Policies contained in the General Plan. Increasing permitted residential densities, or altering General Plan Residential land Use Categories, are subject to voter approval in a special or general election. It is unclear at this time whether the General Plan Update will require a public vote.

**17. Does the General Plan Update affect pending development applications?**

The City Council has not directed staff to suspend processing development applications while updating the General Plan. Project applications will be processed concurrently with the General Plan Update.

**18. Will individual requests for General Plan amendments be considered as part of this process?**

The City Council has directed staff to process certain individual General Plan amendments on a case-by-case basis while the update is underway. City Council initiation of all General Plan Amendment requests is required in order for staff to formally process the application. Contact City staff if you have further questions or seek a General Plan amendment.