

GENERAL PLANS: PRACTICING COMMUNITY VALUES

UC UC Cooperative Extension
CE Land Use Fact Sheet Series

9



A General Plan is a statement of community values and a promise to enact those values.



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What exactly is a General Plan?

California law requires that every county and city in the state prepare a comprehensive, long-term General Plan to guide future physical development. *See Fact Sheets 8, 10, 14 and 16 for more GP information.* General Plans cover a county or city's boundaries and "any land outside it boundaries which bears relation to its planning." A county's or city's land-use actions must be consistent with the adopted plan. Let's look at these requirements more closely.

What does it mean for a General Plan to be comprehensive?

First, it must be inclusive in a geographic sense. A county must address all its unincorporated areas, while a city must address land within its boundaries and within its legally established "sphere of influence."

A county should also consider the plans of every city within its boundaries. Thus, Plumas County needs to take into consideration Portola's plan, while Sierra County must consider Loyalton's. Such proactive planning can help avoid city-versus-county disputes over the same land. In fact, a city and county can jointly prepare and separately adopt a General Plan or individual elements of a plan.

For it to be geographically inclusive, a county's General Plan must also examine regional issues like air quality, transportation and floodplain management.

A General Plan must broadly address the community's general welfare—physical and environmental—but may also look at its social and economic health.

How long is long term?

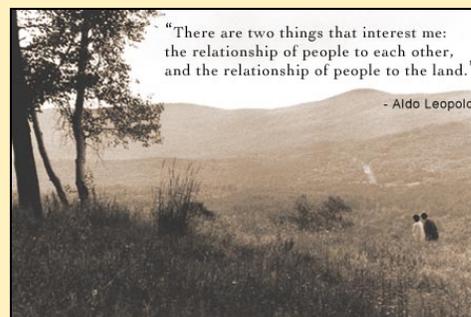
Planning is a continuous process. A General Plan is a living thing, a dynamic document based on continually evolving community conditions and values. It should be revised regularly as conditions change on the ground—an increase in population, new development in a neighboring county—and values shift.

The lifespan of a plan is usually 15-20 years. The Governor's Office of Planning and Research, a clearing-house for planning information, is required to notify a city or county when its plan has not been revised in eight years; if a city or county hasn't revised its plan within 10 years, the OPR must notify the state attorney general.

State law requires that the housing element in a General Plan be revised every five years.

What must be consistent with what?

A General Plan must be internally consistent, with no policy conflicts between plan components and amendments, either in the text itself or in accompanying maps and diagrams. Each individual component must be internally consistent as well.



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<http://ucanr.org/landusefactsheets>

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