

INTRODUCTION

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Each of us has a vision of what Palo Alto should be like in the future. Although our visions are different, they share common qualities. We aspire to create a safe, beautiful City for ourselves, our children, and future generations. We envision a City with diverse housing opportunities and a sustainable transportation network, where the natural environment is protected, where excellent services are provided, and where citizens have a say in government. We aspire to create a City that is economically healthy and a good place to do business.

The Palo Alto Comprehensive Plan strives to build a coherent vision of the City's future from the input of a diverse population. It integrates the aspirations of the City's residents, businesses, neighborhoods, and officials into a bold strategy for managing change.

The Comprehensive Plan is the primary tool for guiding the future development of the City. On a daily basis the City is faced with tough choices about growth, housing, transportation, neighborhood improvement, and service delivery. A Comprehensive Plan provides a guide for making these choices by describing long-term goals for the City's future as well as policies to guide day-to-day decisions.

PURPOSE OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Palo Alto Comprehensive Plan contains the City's official policies on land use and community design, transportation, housing, natural environment, safety, business and economics, and community services. Its policies apply to both public and private properties. Its focus is on the physical form of the city.

The Plan is used by the City Council and the Planning and Transportation Commission to evaluate land use changes and to make funding and budget decisions. It is used by City staff to regulate building and development and to make recommendations on projects. It is used by citizens and neighborhood groups to understand the City's long-range plans and proposals for different geographic areas.



The Plan provides the basis for the City's development regulations and the foundation for its capital improvements program.

The Comprehensive Plan is a legal document and must meet specific State requirements for content. State law establishes the topics that must be addressed and the maps and diagrams the Plan must contain. The Plan must be comprehensive, long-range, and internally consistent. Its policies apply to all property within Palo Alto's "sphere of influence," a boundary that includes all land within the City limit, the Stanford University campus, and other property in unincorporated Santa Clara County. Although the County is not obligated to comply with the Plan in the unincorporated area, mutual cooperation provides benefits to the City, County, and University. The 1985 Land Use Policy Agreement between the City, the County, and University outlines this cooperation.

MAJOR THEMES OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Palo Alto Comprehensive Plan has eight major themes, summarized here.

BUILDING COMMUNITY AND NEIGHBORHOODS

Palo Alto's diverse, livable neighborhoods are the building blocks of the community. Public facilities, schools, libraries, parks, arts and community centers and small businesses, and cultural, environmental, social service and neighborhood associations are essential components of neighborhood life and help build the bridge between neighborhoods and the wider community. The City is committed to building upon the strengths of its neighborhoods, keeping them safe and attractive, maintaining a distinct identity for each, and delivering top-quality community services that meet the needs of and benefit all residents.

MAINTAINING AND ENHANCING COMMUNITY CHARACTER

The community treasures the special qualities of the city, including its historic buildings, pedestrian scale, high-quality architecture, thriving urban forest, and beautiful streets and parks. Maintaining the physical qualities of the city is an overarching consideration, incorporated in all parts of the Plan. The Land Use and Community Design Element includes specific provisions to maintain Palo Alto's best features and enhance and improve those areas where these features are lacking. Future land use decisions will encourage sustainable development, infill within the Urban Service Area, and neighborhood preservation.

REDUCING RELIANCE ON THE AUTOMOBILE

The Plan provides new policies and specific actions for reducing traffic congestion and auto emissions by facilitating an increase in pedestrian, bicycle, and transit use and encouraging evolving technologies like electric vehicles. In the future, a greater emphasis will be placed on improving the City's multi-modal transit stations. Expanded Caltrain service, bus service, shuttles, and pedestrian and bicycle facilities are envisioned. In coordination with other transportation demand management initiatives, the Plan provides parking-related policies and parking management strategies that optimize use of existing spaces. Caltrain grade separations will be prioritized to improve east-west connections for automobiles, transit, pedestrians, and bicyclists, and to reduce traffic congestion, improve safety, and reduce noise impacts. The City will strive to create a development pattern where people can walk, bicycle or take public transit rather than drive, and will work collaboratively to find regional solutions that reduce single-occupant vehicle trips.

MEETING HOUSING SUPPLY CHALLENGES

Palo Alto is perceived as a built-out city and has a substantially higher number of jobs than residents. This imbalance has contributed to skyrocketing housing costs, affecting long-time and new residents and creating concern about Palo Alto's future diversity. Providing a mix of housing types is a community priority and this Plan seeks to increase the supply of housing that is affordable. The Plan also safeguards existing single family neighborhoods, encourages smaller units such as studios and cottages, and sets the stage for redevelopment where higher densities are allowed in appropriate locations and includes new policies to ensure that the remaining housing sites are used efficiently. The Housing Element is updated more frequently than the rest of this Plan and must respond to very specific State requirements.

PROTECTING AND SUSTAINING THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

With most of the baylands and foothills already protected as permanent open space, the Comprehensive Plan's focus turns inward to the fragile ecosystems within developed portions of the City. The natural infrastructure, which consists of a connected network of open spaces, parks and other green spaces, will provide access to nature. The City's urban forest, which benefits humans, plants, animals, and microorganisms, will be promoted throughout the city. The Plan fosters energy and water conservation, and maintains a sustainable water supply. During the life of this Plan, climate change is expected to affect Palo Alto's physical infrastructure and

natural ecology. To minimize these impacts, and to protect the natural environment, Palo Alto will maintain a holistic approach to managing its creek corridors, habitat areas, and green infrastructure, which have been a source of civic pride. Implementation of the climate change adaptation strategies identified in the Plan will ensure that Palo Alto meets today's needs without compromising the needs of future generations.

KEEPING PALO ALTO PREPARED

Like every community, Palo Alto is subject to the unpredictability of future natural and human-caused hazards. Particularly in the face of climate change, the Plan implements a range of adaptive improvements that will ensure the City's natural and built infrastructure are resilient. The Plan also reinforces the City's commitment to preparing for emergencies, raising awareness of risks, and minimizing the impacts of these hazards to Palo Alto residents and visitors alike. The framework in the Plan complements the City's existing disaster preparedness strategies and balances a complex series of safety-related factors through the adoption of best practices and technological innovations, as well as through coordination with relevant organizations. The City believes that safety begins internally, and the Plan affirms education, awareness and action at the neighborhood level.

MEETING RESIDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL NEEDS

Palo Alto is well known as a desirable residential community and as a City with a dynamic, vital business community. Meeting the needs of all facets of the community is a major theme of the Plan. The Plan establishes the physical boundaries of residential and commercial areas and ensures that business and housing remain compatible and interdependent. It encourages a thriving business community that provides services to local residents and revenue to the City while also working to protect neighborhoods and the environment. The City is committed to retaining existing businesses, maintaining vibrant commercial areas, and attracting innovative small and independent businesses, especially in the areas of mobility and greenhouse gas reduction.

PROVIDING RESPONSIVE GOVERNANCE AND REGIONAL LEADERSHIP

The Plan emphasizes the City's commitment to strong community participation. It encourages collaboration among citizens, businesses, and local officials. It acknowledges Palo Alto's role as an effective participant in addressing planning issues and initiatives at a regional scale.

USE AND ORGANIZATION OF THE PLAN

Palo Alto’s Comprehensive Plan is to be used by all members of the community, as well as any other person or organization interested in the future of the city. The hundreds of citizens and officials who have participated in the preparation of the Plan hope you will find it a useful, easy-to-read document.

State-Mandated Element	Palo Alto Comprehensive Plan Element
➤ Land Use	➤ Land Use & Community Design
➤ Circulation	➤ Transportation
➤ Housing	➤ Housing (adopted 2015)
➤ Open Space	
➤ Conservation	➤ Natural Environment
➤ Noise	
➤ Safety	➤ Safety
Optional Elements	
	➤ Business & Economics
	➤ Community Services & Facilities

* This table shows the Elements of the Comprehensive Plan; other components that are not Elements are described below.

A key concept in each Element of the Plan is the idea of a Vision for Palo Alto—a shared dream of Palo Alto in the future. The long-term aspirational thinking embodied in each vision statement was the foundation of the development of the Plan.

State law requires that local plans contain seven mandatory sections, or “elements.” The State provides considerable flexibility in how these elements are organized. Table 1 above shows the State-mandated elements and their counterparts in the Palo Alto Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan addresses all the topics required by State law but, as permitted by the law, has tailored the organization of the topics to the Palo Alto context.

Palo Alto's Plan utilizes the flexibility allowed by state law to include local goals and issues in a number of ways. The scope of the Land Use Element has been broadened to address community design. The Natural Environment Element incorporates open space, conservation, energy, climate change, and noise. The Safety Element encompasses both natural and human-caused threats to public safety. The Plan also includes a Business and Economics Element and a Community Services and Facilities Element. Although these two elements address topics that are not required by State law, the issues they address are fundamental to the future quality of life in Palo Alto. Once adopted, the optional elements have the same legal status as the mandatory elements. No single element or subject supersedes any other.

The Elements of the Plan share a common format and use similar terms and references. Each Element contains background information on specific subjects to make the Comprehensive Plan more useful as a reference document and to provide the technical basis for its policies and programs. Each Element contains maps that provide current information about the City, or graphic illustrations of the City's policies for specific geographic and topical areas, as well as sidebars to highlight major themes and concepts.

Each Element includes goals, policies, and programs that are the essence of the Plan and provide a framework to guide decisions on a wide range of issues. The meaning of goals, policies and programs is described below.

- **A Goal** is a general end towards which the City will direct effort.
- **A Policy** is a specific statement of principle or of guiding actions that implies clear commitment. A general direction that a governmental agency sets to follow, in order to meet its goals and objectives before undertaking an action program.
- **A Program** is an action, activity, or strategy carried out in response to an adopted policy to achieve a specific goal or objective. Programs require resources - primarily time and money - to complete. This is a long-range plan and the City intends to implement these programs over time. The Planning and Transportation Commission and City Council will conduct regular reviews of the Implementation chapter to prioritize programs for implementation.

OTHER COMPONENTS OF THE PLAN

The **Land Use Designations Map** is probably the most familiar part of the Plan and identifies land use designations for each property in the city. The type of development allowed within each designation shown on the Map is described in the Land Use and Community Design Element.

The Plan includes a **Governance Chapter** intended to provide guidance to citizens and community groups participating in City decision-making. The Governance Chapter is a vehicle for implementation rather than a Plan element and is, therefore, not subject to the State requirements for consistency and comprehensiveness. It is background information, not policy direction.

The Plan also includes an **Implementation Chapter** that identifies specific actions to be taken to carry out the Plan. For each action, the priority, anticipated level of effort, and responsible agency or department is identified. Like Governance, the Implementation Chapter is not a Plan Element, but is intended as a description of the steps to be taken in order to achieve the Plan's goals.

In the **Appendix** is the Housing Element Technical Document, which contains detailed information on the City's housing programs; as well as one or more concept plans which contain policies specific to key areas of the City.

A **Glossary** and **Index** are provided for reference.

Although not a component of this Plan, an **Environmental Impact Report (EIR)** has been prepared for this Plan and is contained in a separate document. The EIR evaluates the effects of the Plan's policies and programs on Palo Alto's environment. It identifies where more detailed environmental analysis may be required as specific projects are proposed in the future.

HOW THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN WAS DEVELOPED

The Comprehensive Plan (Our Palo Alto 2030) is the product of a multi-year effort that involved hundreds of Palo Alto residents and other interested parties. As a city that experiences acute development pressures associated with its location in the heart of Silicon Valley, issues such as traffic congestion, housing affordability, and environmental protection are important to its residents, and contributed to strong interest in the Comprehensive Plan Update process.

Palo Alto recognized the need to update the Plan in 2006 and began the process in earnest in 2008, when a consultant was retained to work with staff and the City's Planning and Transportation Commission (PTC). The 2015-2023 Housing Element was created and adopted through a separate process to meet State legal deadlines. The first phase of the process focused on Concept Area Plans for two parts of Palo Alto most likely to change over the next 10 to 15 years: the California Avenue area, including the Fry's Electronics site; and the East Meadow Circle/Fabian Way area. City staff reached out to key stakeholders, interest groups, residents, neighborhood organizations, business representatives, home owners' associations, school district representatives and other interested parties who desired to be involved in the update process. The draft Concept Area Plans are intended to preserve space for small businesses, preserve of retail and community services to support new residential growth, and incorporate sustainability concepts.

The PTC's review of the Comprehensive Plan continued from 2010 to 2013 and was provided to the City Council in early 2014. The PTC focused on organizational changes to delete redundancies and make the text more accessible and user friendly, emphasizing the existing Comprehensive Plan themes and ensuring they were represented throughout document, as well as increasing the emphasis on environmental sustainability issues.

After considering the PTC's work product, in early 2014, the City Council adopted a schedule and strategy for "reframing" the long-running update to include expanded community engagement and a full evaluation of alternatives, cumulative impacts, and mitigation strategies. A Leadership Group of local citizens formed in 2014 to advise City staff on community engagement portion of the planning process. The Group met monthly between late 2014 and mid-2015 and was a key resource in planning engagement activities.

At the May 30, 2015 Summit, the City hosted a gathering of over 350 community members that included presentations, informational booths, and small group discussions. Participants brainstormed approaches for managing growth, improving the jobs-housing balance, preserving ground-floor retail, providing a diversity of housing types, encouraging transportation innovations, and reimagining the future of the City's major transit corridors. .

Following the Summit, the Council appointed the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) made up of 21 community members, plus 3 non-voting members representing Stanford University, the Palo Alto Unified School District (PAUSD), and the PTC. On a monthly basis over almost two years, from July 2015 to May 2017, the full CAC held 23 public meetings, and CAC subcommittees held 26 public meetings, to advise the Council on incorporating PTC input and other changes to the existing Comprehensive Plan policies and programs. At these meetings, the CAC considered public comment and discussed critical issues to arrive at their recommendations regarding the policies and programs for each of the Plan's seven Elements or to propose policy options for Council consideration.

Over the course of 2016 and 2017, the Council reviewed and provided direction on the draft Elements forwarded by the CAC. The PTC reviewed a complete draft Plan in summer and fall 2017, and the Council considered and incorporated PTC input at final adoption hearings in late 2017. The Comp Plan was adopted on [date.]

IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

Long-range planning in Palo Alto does not end with the adoption of this document. It is important to continue the steps necessary to bring forth the vision of the Plan. As such, decisions about development projects, capital improvements, subdivision maps, specific plans, area plans, and other plans and policies affecting land use, transportation, and the physical environment will be reviewed to evaluate consistency with the Plan, thus advancing its vision and policy framework. The Plan is intended to be a living document, to grow and change as local conditions change. In fact, the Palo Alto Municipal Code requires the PTC to review the Comprehensive Plan annually and recommend to the City Council any modifications that it considers necessary. Additionally, the City Council may change the prioritization of programs through the regular five-year review cycle of the Implementation Plan.

It may, at times, be necessary to amend the Plan. While some amendments change the land use designation of a particular property, any part of the Plan may be amended as circumstances change. Amendments may be initiated by property owners, the PTC, the City Council, or City staff. All amendments require public hearings by the PTC and City Council and evaluation of the potential impacts to Palo Alto's physical environment, in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Only through continuing to use, evaluate and amend the Plan on a regular basis can Palo Alto reach towards the vision sought by all the dedicated people who contributed to the development of the Plan.

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