



# Chapter 1: Introduction



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## Introduction

### 1.1 OVERVIEW

The Murrieta General Plan is a document required by California law that provides a foundation for City policies and actions. It guides both the physical development of Murrieta and the provision of public infrastructure and services.

This General Plan places particular emphasis on economic development and keeps Murrieta in front of current policy topics, including sustainability and health. It is rooted in ten community priorities that were developed through an extensive community involvement process.

### 1.2 ABOUT THE GENERAL PLAN

#### GENERAL PLAN TOPICS

California law requires each city and county to have an adopted General Plan. State law specifies that each jurisdiction's General Plan address seven "elements," or topics: land use, circulation, housing, conservation, open space, noise, and safety. Cities are also allowed to include additional elements on matters of particular importance within that community.

The Murrieta General Plan includes the following chapters:

- **Introduction:** Purpose and contents of the General Plan, its relationship to California law, and the planning process that was followed for the General Plan Update.
- **Vision:** Context for the General Plan, including background on Murrieta, major policy initiatives behind the General Plan Update, and the community priorities that shaped the General Plan goals and policies.
- **Land Use Element:** Growth, development, redevelopment, conservation, and preservation. Parameters and desired locations for land uses such as residential, commercial, industrial, civic/institutional, parks, and open space are mapped and described.
- **Economic Development Element:** Strength and diversity of the economy, jobs, retail, and revenue for public services.

- **Circulation Element:** Transportation systems within the City that provide for automobile, truck, transit, bicycle, and pedestrian movement.
- **Conservation Element:** Biological resources, cultural resources, energy resources, solid waste reduction, sustainable development, and green building.
- **Recreation and Open Space Element:** Open space and recreation opportunities including natural open spaces, linear open space, trails, and public and private recreation facilities.
- **Air Quality Element:** Air pollution and greenhouse gases.
- **Noise Element:** Noise from various sources, including transportation corridors and commercial areas.
- **Infrastructure Element:** Facilities for water, wastewater, flood control, and drainage.
- **Safety Element:** Natural and manmade hazards including seismic hazards, flood potential, hazardous materials incidents, fire hazards, transportation hazards and crime.
- **Healthy Community Element:** Ensuring a healthy community by addressing such topics as pedestrian and bicycle safety, access to nutritional foods, mental health, and physical activity.
- **Housing Element:** The Housing Element is being updated in a separate process but is part of the updated General Plan. It addresses local and regional needs for housing.

## USE AND PURPOSE OF THE GENERAL PLAN

The role of each community's General Plan is to act as a constitution for development and the foundation upon which all land use decisions are to be based. Land use decisions encompass not only zoning, but also circulation, infrastructure, design, open space, and other factors. The Murrieta General Plan is a policy document to assist and guide local decision-makers. The General Plan also identifies land uses and their distribution throughout the City. To be considered consistent with the General Plan, a project must not only be consistent with the Land Use Plan, but it must also further the goals of all elements of the General Plan and must meet the intent of its goals and policies.

The General Plan is to be used by the City Council to make funding and budget recommendations and decisions. City Staff will use the General Plan to regulate building and development and to make recommendations on projects to the Planning Commission and City Council. The General Plan will also be used by residents, neighborhood groups, City Council and Commissions, and developers to understand the City's long-range plans, to evaluate land use changes, and to evaluate specific development proposals.



A General Plan is a legal document that must meet specific State requirements for content. The Murrieta General Plan meets or exceeds the requirements set forth in the *California Government Code* Section 65300 et seq. The General Plan is an integrated, internally consistent statement of the official land use policy for the City of Murrieta. The Plan addresses each issue prescribed by State law as it applies to Murrieta. The Plan contains land use and circulation maps. It also contains text that identifies goals, sets forth policies, and identifies implementation strategies.

The *California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)* requires all local and State governmental agencies to consider the environmental consequences of projects over which they have a discretionary authority. CEQA Statutes (*Public Resources Code* Section 21065) define a project as “an activity which may cause either a direct physical change in the environment, or a reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment.” Therefore, the City of Murrieta, as the lead agency, was required to prepare and certify an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the General Plan Update.

The General Plan EIR is a public document that assesses the overall environmental effects of the Plan update at a program level of detail and indicates ways to reduce or avoid possible environmental damage. The Program EIR generally analyzes the broad environmental effects of the General Plan Update, and provides a baseline, or “first tier,” against which future projects implemented under the General Plan 2035 horizon will be evaluated. Where subsequent CEQA documentation is required for a future project, the City must implement the applicable mitigation measures developed in the Program EIR, and focus its analysis on site-specific issues that cannot otherwise be addressed at a program or policy level of analysis.

The Program EIR is to be used as a companion document with the General Plan.

## ADMINISTERING THE GENERAL PLAN

It is the intent of the City Council to implement this General Plan by establishing planning goals based on the Plan, developing ordinances and regulations to implement the Plan, and providing the requisite staff resources. The City Council is also aware that its intention to implement this General Plan is based on the availability of funding and that some goals, policies, and programs may take longer to achieve if funds are unavailable.

Once adopted, the General Plan does not remain static. As time goes on, the City may determine that it is necessary to revise portions of the text, amend the land use map, or add policies or programs to reflect changing circumstances or philosophy.

State law provides direction on how cities can maintain the General Plan as a contemporary policy guide: it requires each planning department to report annually to the City Council on “the status of the plan and progress in its implementation” (*Government Code* Section 65400[b]). The City Council may respond to the Community Development Department review by setting goals for the coming year.



## AMENDING THE GENERAL PLAN

It is necessary to periodically review, update, and revise the General Plan. State law permits General Plan amendments up to four times per year for each mandatory element (*Government Code Section 65358[b]*). Optional elements are permitted by State law (*Government Code Section 65303*), and once adopted, the optional elements carry the same legal weight as the seven mandated elements.

### 1.3 GENERAL PLAN UPDATE PROCESS AND COMMUNITY INPUT

In August 2009, the City entered into a contract with RBF Consulting to undertake a comprehensive General Plan Update.

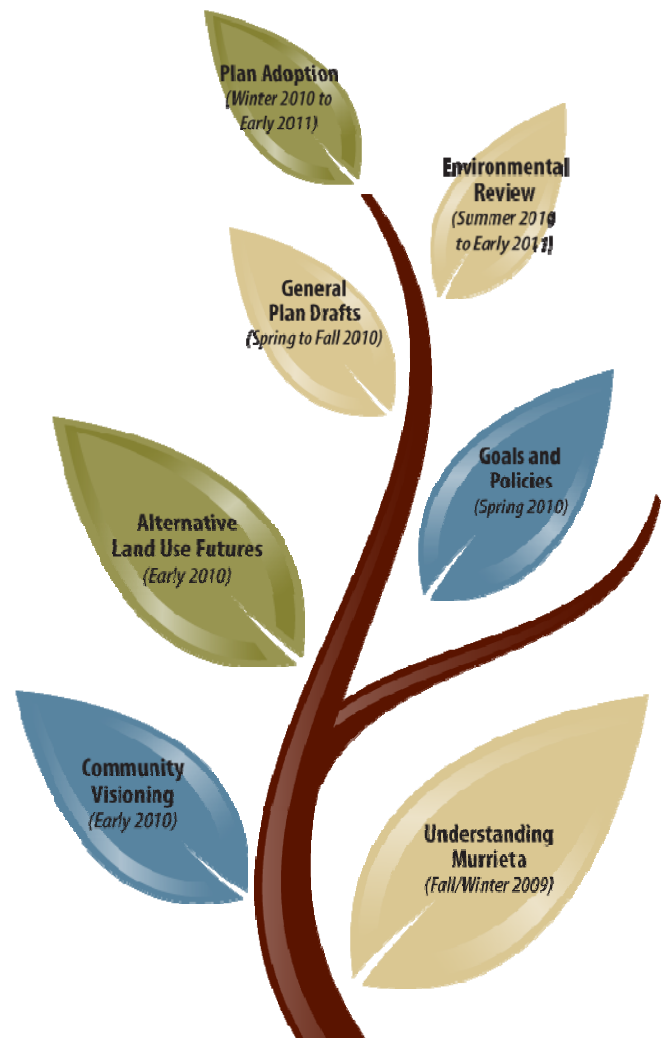
#### UNDERSTANDING MURRIETA

In this initial phase, the General Plan Team reviewed existing plans and studies, conducted site visits, and collected new data needed for the General Plan.

#### VISIONING PROCESS

The first phase of community participation in the General Plan Update was called “visioning” because it asked the community to help define a vision of what Murrieta should be in the future.

Participation opportunities included workshops and surveys, as described below. The input received from the community through these various opportunities shaped the community priorities that are described in the Vision Chapter, and which were originally presented in the Community Vision Report.



## Outreach

In January 2010, the City of Murrieta kicked off an outreach campaign to raise public awareness of the General Plan Update process and opportunities to participate. Early outreach efforts included “information centers” at City Hall and the Library, presentations to business groups, and staffed tables at local retailers (Wal-Mart) and the City’s Recreation Expo. Outreach continued throughout the process with updates to the project website, press releases, and email newsletters.



## Online Survey

Residents were invited to participate in an online survey from January 8 to February 8, 2010 and describe what about Murrieta they wanted to stay the same, the challenges they felt Murrieta needs to overcome, and their hopes for Murrieta’s future (Treasures, Challenges, and Visions). There were 94 responses to the visioning survey.



## Workshops

Visioning workshops began with the same questions as the survey, asking for ideas on Treasures, Challenges, and Visions. Participants then worked in groups to provide further direction on the popular topics. Students at Vista Murrieta High School participated in a youth visioning workshop which engaged 48 students from grades 9-12 on January 22, 2010 and led students to create vision statements for Murrieta. This was followed by two workshops for the community at large, held at Murrieta Mesa High School on the evening of Thursday, January 28, 2010 and duplicated on the morning of Saturday, January 30, 2010. Over 60 people participated in these community workshops, suggesting objectives and action steps for several topics.



A visioning workshop was held for the rural Los Alamos area on April 13, 2010. Approximately 50 participants did a Treasures, Challenges, Visions exercise and then worked in groups to write vision statements for the Los Alamos area.

## Feedback on Community Priorities

A summary of the initial visioning input was placed online and provided a detailed description of participation in the survey and workshops. In that summary, the General Plan Team distilled all input into several “community priorities” for the future of Murrieta. The public was then asked



to provide feedback on these community priorities through a second online survey and a room-wide polling exercise at the land use workshop on March 27, 2010.

A *Community Vision Report* presented the ten final community priorities, a summary of visioning activities, and verbatim input from the community. The report was posted on the General Plan Update website in August 2010.

## LAND USE DIRECTION

The next major phase in the planning process considered and analyzed different scenarios for land use change, with many opportunities for community input.

Before commencing work on the General Plan Update, the City Council decided on four “Focus Areas” that were targeted for land use change:

- North Murrieta Business Corridor
- Clinton Keith/Mitchell Area
- Golden Triangle North (Central Murrieta)
- South Murrieta Business Corridor

These areas included key locations along freeway corridors that are suitable for major land development and redevelopment to carry out the City Council’s economic development strategy. It also included rural residential areas north of Clinton Keith Road that are adjacent to major new development along I-215.

Through the General Plan Update process, three additional areas were identified:

- Multiple Use 3 (MU-3) – Land Use Change
- Historic Murrieta Specific Plan – Policy Input
- Los Alamos Hills – Policy Input

## Community Workshops

The General Plan Team sought input on land use changes in five Focus Areas from local residents, property owners, and other stakeholders by holding a series of land use workshops from March to June 2010. A community workshop was held on March 27, 2010 in which participants worked in groups to provide general direction on land use in the five Focus Areas.



Local meetings were held in each of the Focus Areas to discuss land use in those areas. Formats of these meetings were tailored to the needs for each area. Generally, the first meeting for each area asked participants for open-ended input on land use, and a follow-up meeting presented land use alternatives for additional feedback. These meetings were held as follows:



- North Murrieta Business Corridor – March 23 and June 2, 2010
- Clinton Keith/Mitchell – March 25 and June 8, 2010
- South Murrieta Business Corridor – March 29, 2010
- Multiple Use 3 (MU-3) Area – April 22 and June 7, 2010
- Golden Triangle North – May 3 and June 10, 2010

The input received at those meetings, and submitted in writing, was summarized in the *Land Use Summary Report: Community Workshop and Land Use Area Meetings*, which was posted on the General Plan Update website in June 2010.

### City Council and Planning Commission Workshops

Joint meetings of the City Council and Planning Commission were held on June 23, 2010 and July 6, 2010, so these officials could review a series of land use alternatives for five Focus Areas and provide direction to City Staff and the General Plan Team on a Recommended Land Use Alternative.

### GOALS AND POLICIES / GENERAL PLAN DRAFTS

#### “Goals for a Healthy Murrieta” Workshop

A public workshop on October 21, 2010 had the dual purpose of obtaining direction on General Plan Update goals and hearing ideas on how Murrieta can be a healthy community. A brief presentation at the beginning of the workshop reviewed the purpose and progress of the General Plan Update. The presentation then described the relationships between the built environment and health, and provided information on health in Murrieta. Groups of participants were asked to write goals that could help the City to achieve the Community Priorities derived in the visioning process, and to suggest ways to promote health while pursuing those goals.

### City Council and Planning Commission Workshops

Two joint workshops of the City Council and Planning Commission were held on November 30, 2010 and January 11, 2011 to provide a preview of the major features of the updated General Plan, in anticipation of the release of the public review draft. Presentations at these workshops reviewed some of the draft goals and policies, and introduced the concept of separating the land use map from the zoning map. Public comments were received at both workshops.



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