

I Introduction

Our Place – The Palos Verdes Peninsula

The residents of the Palos Verdes Peninsula are the beneficiaries of a unique geography, formed from millions of years of volcanic activity, plate tectonics and terracing from changing sea levels. The nine-mile wide Peninsula, once an island, now rises above the Los Angeles Basin to a maximum of 1,480 feet, with uniquely terraced configurations and steep, rocky cliffs jutting upward 50 to 300 feet from the ocean. Erosion has contributed to the creation of numerous steep-walled canyons. These physical characteristics give the Peninsula magnificent views of the Los Angeles Basin, the Mountain Ranges of Santa Monica, San Gabriel and Santa Ana, the Pacific Ocean, Catalina Island and the Los Angeles/Long Beach Harbor.

The Peninsula's history is equally interesting, from the Native American Tongva people who migrated to the area, the Spanish explorers and missionaries, cattle ranchers of the Rancho de los Palos Verdes land grant and the whalers of the late 19th century. The early 20th century brought interest in developing the land for residential use, the Palos Verdes Project and formation of its present-day cities.

With its magnificent views, beautiful rolling terrain, mild climate, and clean air, the Peninsula is a most desirable place to live. Home construction began in the 1920's and has continued to the present. The rate of construction increased dramatically in the 1960's, substantially increasing the area's density, primarily in the unincorporated areas of the Peninsula now known as the City of Rancho Palos Verdes.

History of the City of Rancho Palos Verdes

At the close of the 19th Century, the Palos Verdes Peninsula was inhabited solely by a few cattle ranchers and shepherders. The Land was mostly covered with nothing more than native vegetation. Then, for a brief period in the early 1900s, the Peninsula enjoyed prosperity not only as a cattle ranch, but also as a rich farming area. Japanese families farmed the most southern slopes, growing fields of beans, peas and tomatoes, while the manager of the cattle ranch grew barley for hay and grain on the dryer northern slopes. In 1913, Frank A. Vanderlip, president of the National Bank of New York, purchased the 16,000-acre Palos Verdes Peninsula with a vision to develop the

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“most fashionable and exclusive residential colony” in the nation. Unfortunately, his dream was put on hold after the Stock Market Crash, the Great Depression and the onset of World War II. None of these setbacks, however, reduced the beauty of the Palos Verdes Peninsula, or its potential desirability as a residential area.

Palos Verdes Estates had incorporated in 1939, and just prior to the great building boom in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the cities of Rolling Hills and Rolling Hills Estates both incorporated in 1957. In July 1953, the Great Lakes Carbon Corporation, which was leasing land on the Peninsula for mining, purchased 7,000 acres of prime undeveloped land from the Vanderlip family. After several unsuccessful mining attempts, the Great Lakes Corporation abandoned its mining operations, and hired a group of skilled architects and engineers to create a master plan for development of its vast property.

Fueled by the master plan and the post WW II economic growth in the South Bay area, the remaining unincorporated part of the Peninsula (now the City of Rancho Palos Verdes), which remained under the control of the County of Los Angeles, began to develop rapidly as the County granted more zone changes for higher density construction, with little regard for the Peninsula’s beauty, openness or sensitive environment. During the 1960’s, the citizens of the unincorporated area repeatedly attempted to convince the County to restrain from this kind of uncontrolled development, and to institute planning and zoning regulations more consistent with the area’s unique qualities. Homeowners’ associations bonded into the Peninsula Advisory Council, and the citizens’ group Save Our Coastline was created to consolidate efforts to promote proper limitations on the development of the Peninsula’s coastal areas. The majority of such attempts failed, however, as the County repeatedly authorized higher density uses of many pristine areas of the community.

Efforts to incorporate the Peninsula’s fourth city (Rancho Palos Verdes) began in 1962, and intensified in 1969 when the County’s new Master Plan for the Peninsula authorized population density far greater than that desired by the local residents. After many legal battles and several disappointing setbacks, the California Supreme Court ruled unanimously in September 1972, in the case of Curtis vs. Board of Supervisors, that landowners could not prevent voters from determining their municipal government. After this court decision, the Local Area Formation Commission (LAFCO) permitted the citywide election to take place and on August 28, 1973, of those residents in the unincorporated portion of the Peninsula that voted, an overwhelming 83% voted in favor of incorporation and elected five City Council members. With its incorporation, the City of Rancho Palos Verdes became the youngest of the four cities on the Palos Verdes Peninsula, each of which had incorporated for the same basic reason – to take control of planning and policy



implementation over the area in order to preserve its natural beauty, openness and small community atmosphere.

The City of Rancho Palos Verdes is located at the southwest tip of Los Angeles County. It covers 13.5 square miles of land and 7.5 miles of coastline, and has a population of 41,643 (2010). Rancho Palos Verdes is a “general law city”. Utilizing a council-manager form of government, the City’s governing body, the City Council, is responsible for establishing policy, passing local ordinances, voting appropriations and developing an overall vision for the City. The City Council appoints a city manager to oversee the daily operations of the government and implement policies they establish. The City was also formed as a contract city contracting for public services such as police and fire protection.

Today, as a result of the foresight of its founders and residents, the City of Rancho Palos Verdes continues to offer magnificent views, open spaces and clean air, and remains an extremely desirable place to live.

What is a General Plan and what are its Regulatory Requirements?

Not unlike many other parts of the Country, major milestones in California’s Planning Law date to the early 1900’s, when the State’s cities began to experience significant development and increases in population. In response to this growth, in 1937, California directed all of its cities and counties to adopt a General Plan “*for the physical development of the county or city*”.

So, what is a General Plan? The California Supreme Court has defined the General Plan the “*constitution for future development*”. Perhaps a better description comes from the State’s General Plan Guidelines (Guidelines), which state that “*the General Plan expresses the community’s development goals and embodies public policy relative to the distribution of future land uses, both public and private*”. Basically, then, the General Plan underlies all land use decisions in a City, and, pursuant to State Law, all of the City’s subdivisions, capital improvements, development agreements and other land use actions must be consistent with the city’s adopted General Plan. Further, according to the State’s Guidelines, the General Plan serves to:

- *“Identify the community’s land use, circulation, environmental, economic and social goals and policies as they relate to land use and development.*
- *Provide a basis for local government decision-making, including decisions on development approvals and exactions.*

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- *Provide citizens with opportunities to participate in the planning and decision-making processes of their communities.*
- *Inform citizens, developers, decisions-makers, and other cities and counties of the ground rules that guide development within a particular community."*

In preparing a General Plan, certain basic considerations are essential, including

- **Comprehensiveness:** A General Plan must cover a city's entire planning area and address the broad range of issues associated with a city's development.
- **Internal Consistency:** On five different dimensions of "internal consistency," there can be no policy conflicts, either textual or graphic, between any components of the General Plan: 1) Equal status among elements; 2) Consistency between elements; 3) Consistency within elements; 4) Area plan consistency; and 5) Text and diagram consistency.
- **Long-Term Perspective:** While the time frame for specific issues may be different, a General Plan is most often designed to span a 15-20 year period for the City to make decisions that comply with all of its aspects of "internal consistency," while recognizing the future need for General Plan Amendments after such period, to adjust for possibly unforeseeable changes in land use.

While the General Plan includes text and graphics to describe existing and proposed development within the City, it more importantly includes a set of Goals and Policies used to formulate a direction or plan for the future development of the City. Additionally, In fact, State Law requires that General Plans include the following 7 mandatory elements:

- *Land Use Element* designates the type, intensity, and general distribution of uses of land
- *Circulation Element* identifies the general location and extent of existing and proposed major thoroughfares, transportation routes, and other local public utilities and facilities.
- *Housing Element* assesses current and projected housing needs for all economic segments of the community.
- *Conservation Element* addresses the conservation, development, and use of natural resources.
- *Open Space Element* details plans and measures for the long-range preservation and conservation of open-space lands.
- *Noise Element* identifies and addresses issues related to noise.



- *Safety Element* establishes policies and programs to protect the community from risks associated with such things as seismic or geologic hazards, floods, and wildfires.

In addition to these mandatory Elements, a City may also include optional Elements in its General Plan. The City's original General Plan, adopted in 1975, included the following three additional optional components -- Fiscal Element; Social Services component; and Scenic Highway component.

Updating the General Plan – A Community Effort

In 1973, the original City Council instituted processes to try to obtain maximum citizen participation in the creation of the City's first General Plan. Toward this purpose, the City Council appointed a Steering Committee to organize a General Plan Goals Committee. The entire Committee involved some 200 citizens who worked together in subcommittees. The Committee submitted a report to the Council that was a statement of goals, objectives and policy recommendations on the various elements of the proposed General Plan. Additionally, the City held public hearings during which citizens were invited to speak on the Plan.

The City's first General Plan was adopted on June 26, 1975, less than two years after incorporation. Since its adoption, the General Plan has received only minor amendments. Apart from State-mandated Housing Element updates, the last significant update occurred in 1984 to address the Eastview Annexation.

Recognizing the age of the original 1975 General Plan, at its January 12, 2002 meeting, the City Council discussed master plan issues and specifically focused upon updating the City's General Plan. The City Council acknowledged that portions of the General Plan need updating and directed Staff to take the initial steps to assist the City Council in determining the direction and extent of the needed update. The City Council expressed that a thorough review of the goals and policies was a necessary first step, and that this would help to define the direction and extent of future updating work to be conducted by the Council, Staff and the community. Further, as in the effort to adopt the first General Plan, the City Council expressed the importance of including public input, encouraging the use of local talent within the community, and specifically forming a General Plan Update Steering Committee to assist in the update process. The City Council then determined that one person from each of the following Commissions, Committees and Organizations within the community (two persons from the Planning Commission) should be represented on the General Plan Update Steering Committee:

- City's Planning Commission

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- City's Recreation and Parks Committee
- City's Finance Advisory Committee
- City's Traffic Committee
- City's Equestrian Committee
- City's Disaster Preparedness Committee
- Council of Homeowner's Association
- Council of Homeowner's Association – Eastview Representative
- Peninsula Seniors
- Peninsula Youth Recreation League Council
- Docents – Los Serenos de Point Vicente
- School District
- Chamber of Commerce
- Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy

The purpose of the Steering Committee was to review all of the goals and policies of the General Plan and to make recommendations as to the extent to which such goals and policies needed to be maintained, amended or eliminated, and whether new goals and policies needed to be added. Beginning on October 30, 2002, the Steering Committee held a total of 22 public meetings, on an average of once a month. Through the Committee's work, the Council learned that, apart from the need for some textual changes to the goals and policies, as well as changes to the factual information within the Plan, for the most part the statement of the existing goals and policies that were created in 1975 still applies to today.

Additionally, in order to assist the City's undertaking of its General Plan Update; a non-City sponsored "grass-roots" committee of more than 210 residents formed for the purpose of preparing a "Goals Report" that identified various goals for the City. This "Goals Report" was provided to each member of the Steering Committee, which also considered it in making the Steering Committee's recommendations in its report to the City Council.

During the preparation of the updated General Plan, the Planning Commission held **(insert # of meetings)** public meetings and the City Council held **(insert # of meetings)** prior to the Council's adoption of the General Plan on **(insert date of adoption)**. Additionally, the Finance Advisory Committee, Traffic Safety Commission and the Emergency Preparedness Committee all held public meetings and provided input on the Fiscal, Circulation and Safety Elements, respectively. Prior to each meeting on the General Plan, a public notice was published in the Peninsula News and delivered through the City's list-serve email subscribers list.



Planning for Today and the Future The RPV General Plan

A Plan Realized

The incorporation of the City was timely. The General Plan's original Goals, which laid the foundation for the City's future development, focused on:

- Conserving, protecting and enhancing its natural resources, beauty and open spaces
- Ensuring future development would recognize the sensitivity of the natural environment
- Enhancing the facility needs for a variety of groups within the City including encouraging programs for recreation, social services, cultural and educational achievement
- Controlling and directing future growth towards making positive contributions to the community
- Preserving and enhancing the existing quality living environment by enhancing the visual character and physical quality of neighborhoods and to ensure that housing met the needs of present and future residents
- Ensuring adequate public utilities and communication services
- Providing a safe and efficient system of roads, trails and paths
- Protecting life and property from natural and man-made hazards as well as the protection of the public through effective law enforcement and fire protection
- Providing for a quiet and serene residential community
- Preserving and enhancing views and vistas for the public's benefit
- Providing land uses which will be sensitive to and enhance the natural environment and character of the community

Adoption of the Coastal Specific Plan followed in 1978, encompassing all of the property seaward of Palos Verdes Drive West and South. The Coastal Specific Plan provides a detailed analysis of the City's coastal areas focusing on the Natural Environment, Socio/Cultural Environment, Urban Environment, Infrastructure, Safety and Fiscal issues. Following the lead of the General Plan, the Coastal Specific Plan includes a variety of Policies that mirror the context of the General Plan and have been implemented over the years in a manner that has protected the valuable resources common to the coastal environment by allowing limited development activity while providing enhanced access to and along the coast.

In 1983, the City annexed an unincorporated area of Los Angeles County along Western Avenue known as Eastview.

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In the years since incorporation, the City has carefully reviewed each new development proposal for consistency with the General Plan, acquired parkland and open space whenever feasible, and kept local tax rates low. In short, the 1975 General Plan has served exceptionally well as a planning tool to define and implement the character and vision of the semi-rural atmosphere envisioned by the City's forefathers as evidenced by what can be found in the City today – an ideal place to live and raise a family.

A Plan for the Future

In 1993 the City Council adopted a Vision Statement for the City to have a community that has the following qualities:

- A safe community where citizens can enjoy their property and community amenities without the fear for their safety
- Both public and private property will be maintained in a manner that will be compatible with the aesthetic setting of the Peninsula
- A sound community economic base will be developed and maintained
- As part of the economic base, the City will provide an opportunity for the development of quality recreation facilities
- A high "customer satisfaction" level among users of City services
- A commitment to maintaining open space and public access in a manner that will not harm critical resources

The Vision Statement is clearly in line with the Goals established with the original General Plan and along with those Goals continues to lay the foundation for the future of the City.

In 2002, when the City embarked on its path to update the General Plan, it realized that the original General Plan was an exceptional planning tool that realized a dream of those that took the lead in the formation of the City. The City Council formed the 14-member General Plan Update Steering Committee to review the existing Goals and Policies with the intent on determining how much of an update was really needed to the original General Plan. As what was anticipated the Committee's two year process yielded changes to the original Goals and Policies, but not from a contextual standpoint, instead only updating them to bring them into today's standards and to continue the vision into the future.

This updated General Plan continues the City's vision that has been in motion since incorporation. With a City that is now almost built out, implementation of the vision does not speak as much to new development activity, although some new development activity is anticipated, as it does to maintaining the existing semi-rural atmosphere and way of life. This General Plan includes eight elements that work



together in providing a future plan for the City. Below is a brief description of each element and some of its hi-lights:

- **Conservation and Open Space:** This element mainly focuses on the City's conservation efforts pertaining to the natural environment and its preservation and enhancement of open spaces. It opens up by discussing the various ecological units that are found in and/or affect the City and then classifies resources to identify areas within the City that need to be considered for public health and safety, and areas that need to be considered for the preservation of natural resources. A hi-light of the Element is its discussion of the City's efforts in adopting an NCCP that will guide the City's preservation efforts into the future. The element also discusses Energy Conservation, Cultural Resources, and an inventory of the City's valuable open spaces and recreational areas.
- **Land Use:** During the preparation of the City's first General Plan in 1975, this element had a very direct relationship with the Conservation and Open Space element, which was used to clearly identify those areas in the City that could be developed and those that should remain as open space. Today, as the City is primarily built out, while the relationship between the two is still important, the relationship is now one of preserving the character of the City that was created through that original plan; focusing on the limited amount of vacant land to be developed and any potential for re-development of existing sites. This element also identifies the various types of land uses, both natural and urban, within the City; including the establishment of a new land use – "Open Space Preservation" – that encompasses all of the land within the City's NCCP area, ensuring its protection into the future. The element also discusses the future of development activity within each of these land uses and develops population projections based upon the potential build-out of the vacant developable land.
- **Circulation:** This element focuses upon the City's transportation systems and its infrastructure systems. The City has an extensive trail system through public and private land that is discussed in some detail, and the discussion provides a future framework for increasing the trail network. The infrastructure portion of this element focuses upon the issues the City faces with its aging infrastructure and its efforts to address the potential resulting impacts.
- **Visual Resources:** The original 1975 General Plan included a brief discussion of visual resources and scenic roadways. Much has happened since 1975 that has affected the visual resources found in the community,

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including the adoption of Proposition M, the City's View Protection Ordinance. This new element focuses on the three types of visual resources within the City – views, vistas and urban design. It provides a framework for how visual resources are viewed through viewing sites, viewing points and visual corridors. The element focuses on views to be preserved and restored and concludes with the various implementation tools to continue preserving, restoring and enhancing visual resources in the City.

- **Safety:** First focusing on the various types of hazards (wildfire, flood, geologic, seismic, air quality and others) affecting the community, the element then identifies the emergency and safety services available to address those hazards.
- **Housing and Social Services:** Although not mandated by the State, the 1975 General Plan included a social services component that was naturally consistent with the way of life in the mid-1970s. The Housing and Social Services element continues with maintaining the social services component and adds a new senior services component to address the large population of seniors found in the City. Additionally, as required by State Law, the City already adopted its mandatory Housing Element in 2009, which was certified by the State Department of Housing and Community Development. The Housing Element, which includes many technical appendices, is too lengthy and of a different format to include within this document and thus is a stand-alone element. However, the Housing and Social Services element references the certified Housing Element and its goals, policies and programs, as the stand-alone Housing Element is an important component of the overall General Plan.
- **Noise:** This element considers the fundamentals of noise, the components of the noise environment within the City, and identifies through a separate recently prepared noise study measurements of noise within the City through the use of noise level contours. In conjunction with the Land Use and Circulation Elements, it then projects noise growth through build-out and identifies measures to reduce potential noise effects.
- **Fiscal:** During the preparation of the City's first General Plan in 1975, fiscal issues concerning the operation of this newly incorporated City were naturally very important and thus resulted in the creation of the Fiscal element. Fiscal issues continue to be a very important aspect of the operations of the City. Fortunately, the City's fiscal health has been very good over the years. This element discusses the City's financial management,



fiscal health, revenue and expenditure structure and its fiscal sustainability into the future.

In addition to these eight elements, the General Plan also includes three recently prepared studies (Traffic/Circulation, Safety and Noise), which were used in the preparation of the Circulation, Air Quality and Noise elements. The General Plan uses these studies to support its analysis, conclusions and recommended policies. Although not a part of this document, copies of the studies can be obtained from the Community Development Department.

Implementing the General Plan

The General Plan is not intended to be a stagnant document that rests on a shelf for the next 30 years. Instead, it is a living, breathing document that shall be used consistently in all land use decisions in the City wherein all land use actions must be consistent with the General Plan. Additionally, given the variety of topics addressed within the Plan, it shall also be used in all other operations of the City; providing direction into the future.

From time to time the General Plan will necessitate amendments, both to its Land Use map as well as the text depending upon any changes in direction that the City may pursue. The State also requires mandatory periodic updates to the General Plan Housing Element; however, this will remain as a separate document for ease in updating.

In order to ensure that the General Plan remains as a living, breathing document used in the operations of the City, the General Plan Update Steering Committee developed the following two Implementation Goals:

- Periodically (such as every five-years) City Staff should present to the Planning Commission changes ~~in natural elements or changes arising from technological advances which~~ **that might** warrant revisions to policies or goals. Staff is encouraged to suggest proactive steps or work that will result in greater safeguards or protection to the environmental elements (examples include grading for slope stability, corrections of sea cliff erosion, hydrology improvement, etc.).

(NOTE: THIS IS A PLANNING COMMISSION RECOMMENDED CHANGE TO THE GOAL)

- Develop an on-going program to improve public awareness of the policies and goals contained within the General Plan. Such a program should include publishing and periodically distributing (not merely upon initial publication)

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of brochures, articles in local newspapers, City cable television programs, and school programs.

(NOTE: THIS IS A PLANNING COMMISSION RECOMMENDED CHANGE TO THE GOAL)

In addition to these implementation efforts, the City will conduct an annual evaluation of the implementation of the General Plan and report such evaluation to the City Council, while also conducting a 5-year thorough review to ensure that the document is kept up to date with emerging trends and direction.