

7 *Introduction*

I.1 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.

I.2 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 sheepherders. 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.

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. 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.

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, an overwhelming 83% of the residents of the unincorporated portion of the Peninsula **[Greg – please check who voted in the election to be sure the facts are correct]** 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 42,964 (2008). 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, clean air, and remains an extremely desirable place to live.

I.3 What is a General Plan and What are its Regulatory Requirements?

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

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 or amending 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. More specifically, there must be: 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.

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. 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/elements: Fiscal Element; Social Services; and Scenic Highway. These component/elements continue to be included within this updated General Plan.

I.4 Adoption of the General Plan

The original City Council instituted processes to try to obtain maximum citizen participation in the development 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 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.

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 (but two persons from the Planning Commission) should be represented on the General Plan Update Steering Committee:

- City's Planning Commission
- City's Recreation and Parks Committee
- City's Finance Advisory Committee

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- 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 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 own review and findings 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 provided input on the Fiscal, Circulation and Safety Elements, respectively, during public meetings. 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.