



City of Rancho Palos Verdes

GENERAL PLAN

Adopted September 2018



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I INTRODUCTION



I Introduction

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 to 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.

2 **History of the City**

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 barley, hay, and grain were grown 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 "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 a Los Angeles County (County) master plan and the post-World War II economic growth in the South Bay area, the remaining unincorporated part of the Peninsula (now the City of Rancho Palos Verdes), began to develop rapidly as the County granted several zone changes allowing higher-density construction. Little regard was paid to the Peninsula's beauty, openness, or sensitive environment. During the 1960's the leaders of the three existing cities and citizens of the unincorporated area repeatedly attempted to convince the County to restrain uncontrolled development and institute planning and zoning regulations more compatible with the area's unique qualities.

In the mid-1960's the Peninsula Advisory Council, a group of homeowner associations from the unincorporated areas was created to provide more clout in negotiations with the County. The Peninsula Advisory Council along with representatives from the three incorporated Peninsula cities-Palos Verdes Estates, Rolling Hills Estates and Rolling Hills repeatedly met with the County and developers to encourage proper limitations on the development of the Peninsula's coastal area.

The Emergence of Save Our Coastline (SOC)

The failure of this coalition of city leaders and the Peninsula Advisory Council's efforts to restrain unbridled development became evident when, in December 1969, the County surprised the Peninsula representatives by unveiling and adopting a new Master Plan for the area, known as the Bevash Plan. This plan enabled high-density uses including high-rise developments (up to 73 units per acre) along the coastline.

It was evident that if the unincorporated area was to be preserved, a different strategy was necessary. The incorporation of the Peninsula's fourth city efforts now intensified. In April 1970, Save Our Coastline (SOC) was created. Its function was to bring about the incorporation of the Peninsula's unincorporated areas in order to establish local control.

SOC now faced a major challenge. The incorporation laws at the time required that the assessed value of the land owned by the signatories needed to represent 25% of the total assessed land value of the proposed city. In addition, the incorporation attempt could be killed if 50% plus one of the assessed value of land ownership protested incorporation. The major developers opposing the incorporation controlled 38% of the assessed value of land so they needed only 12% more to defeat the incorporation attempt. This was accomplished with a petition that did not protest the incorporation but provided an alternative of annexing to Rolling Hills Estates, which had declared it would not annex any new properties. A lawsuit was filed alleging this was not a valid protest, however, the judge ruled that in effect it was and SOC lost that lawsuit. SOC filed a lawsuit in a California Superior Court contesting the constitutionality of a law that was based on assessed value of land rather than one-man one vote as specified in the 14th amendment.

The California Superior Court declared that using assessed value of land, as a basis for determining the outcome of an election was unconstitutional. This ruling was promptly appealed to the California Supreme Court. SOC enjoyed success when the State Supreme Court refused to hear the appeal, thereby allowing the Superior Court's ruling to stand.

Emboldened by the legal victory, SOC petitioned the County Board of Supervisors to accept the signatures on the initial petition and continue the incorporation process, since the number of voters exceeded the 25% filing requirement and the developers protest fell well short of the 50% plus one requirement. SOC's request was approved by a slim 3 to 2 vote by the Board of Supervisors.

Rancho Palos Verdes Become the Peninsula's Fourth City

The County agency responsible for conducting incorporations, the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO), set the election for the proposed city of Rancho Palos Verdes on August 28, 1973. Some 80% of the registered voters went to the polls and voted by a margin of 5 to 1 for cityhood. The name Rancho Palos Verdes was

approved and 5 candidates out of a field of 24 challengers were elected to the first City Council. They were Dave (Cisco) Ruth, Guenther Burke, Marilyn Ryan, Ken Dyda and Bob Ryan.

The boundaries of Rancho Palos Verdes (RPV) now covered the remaining portions of the unincorporated area within the Palos Verdes Peninsula School District boundaries. Three unincorporated Peninsula areas were not included, the first two known as Academy Hills and Westfield were excluded because they were not contiguous to the Rancho Palos Verdes Boundaries. The third area known as Eastview or the Western Avenue corridor was excluded due to a lack of enthusiasm for the incorporation. When the petition drive for incorporation was initiated, it quickly became apparent to SOC that the unincorporated area along Western Avenue (which was outside the school district boundaries) provided little support for cityhood. As a result the boundaries for the incorporation were changed to exclude that area. Other than a few minor boundary adjustments with Rolling Hills Estates, the Rancho Palos Verdes boundaries remained the same for the next ten years.

Major Annexation Enlarges the City of Rancho Palos Verdes

Later, a major annexation consisting of an estimated 9,055 population and 840 acres changed the boundaries of the City of Rancho Palos Verdes. When the Eastview area was deleted from the proposed RPV boundaries, SOC committed to consider annexation if cityhood was achieved. Shortly after the successful incorporation, an offer was made to the Eastview area to annex to the new city. This offer was rejected.

A short time later, the city of Lomita began eyeing the Eastview area as an annexation target. Many Eastview residents were opposed to becoming part of Lomita and requested that Rancho Palos Verdes initiate annexation proceedings for their area. RPV could not intervene since the Lomita annexation was underway. However, with the apparent strong opposition to becoming part of Lomita, the annexation boundaries were redrawn by Lomita to eliminate the Eastview area. With that action, the gateway to annexing to Rancho Palos Verdes was open to the residents of Eastview. Again, since the apparent threat from Lomita was removed, the residents of Eastview declined the opportunity to annex to Rancho Palos Verdes.

Another threat to the Eastview area arose when the City of Los Angeles published an annexation program that included several small-unincorporated areas in its boundaries. A schedule indicted that the Eastview area would be the second annexation attempt. Annexation law provided that the entire population of the annexing city and the population of the proposed annex area would determine whether annexation would occur. Eastview residents recognized that the large City of Los Angeles vote would undoubtedly overwhelm their meager vote count and force annexation. Not wanting to be part of the City of Los Angeles, the Eastview residents petitioned the City of to begin annexation prior to any attempt by the city of Los Angeles. An updated financial feasibility report prepared by the City of concluded that anticipated revenues would cover projected expenses, and that the City should proceed with annexation.

Notwithstanding this recommendation to proceed with annexation, the Eastview residents decided to implement the Municipal Organization Act of 1977 (MORGA) and take it upon themselves to annex to Rancho Palos Verdes. The MORGA Act required that the annexing area must have a contiguous boundary and share infrastructure with the adjoining city. Eastview met these provisions. The unique aspect of the MORGA was that only the residents of the area to be annexed could vote. The residents of Rancho Palos Verdes could not vote in an election that would add 20% more registered voters to the City.

In November of 1978, a group of Eastview residents submitted an annexation petition to LAFCO to annex to Rancho Palos Verdes. LAFCO undertook an environmental study and, finding no significant environmental impact, filed a negative declaration. Following a series of hearings, and after excluding a portion of Eastview from the annexation, LAFCO approved the proposal and directed the City of Rancho Palos Verdes to call a special election at which only the residents of Eastview could vote whether to approve or disapprove annexation. The residents voted in favor of annexation.

On June 28, 1979, a coalition of Rancho Palos Verdes residents and homeowners associations in the City, filed suit against LAFCO and its executive officers. The suit sought a declaration that the provisions of the 1977 Act concerning annexations of inhabited territory were unconstitutional and an injunction restraining defendants from executing a certificate of completion. The injunction was denied and the matter was remanded to the superior court. After more litigation, the MORGA Act was ruled constitutional and on January 5, 1983 the Eastview annexation area officially became a part of the City of Rancho Palos Verdes.

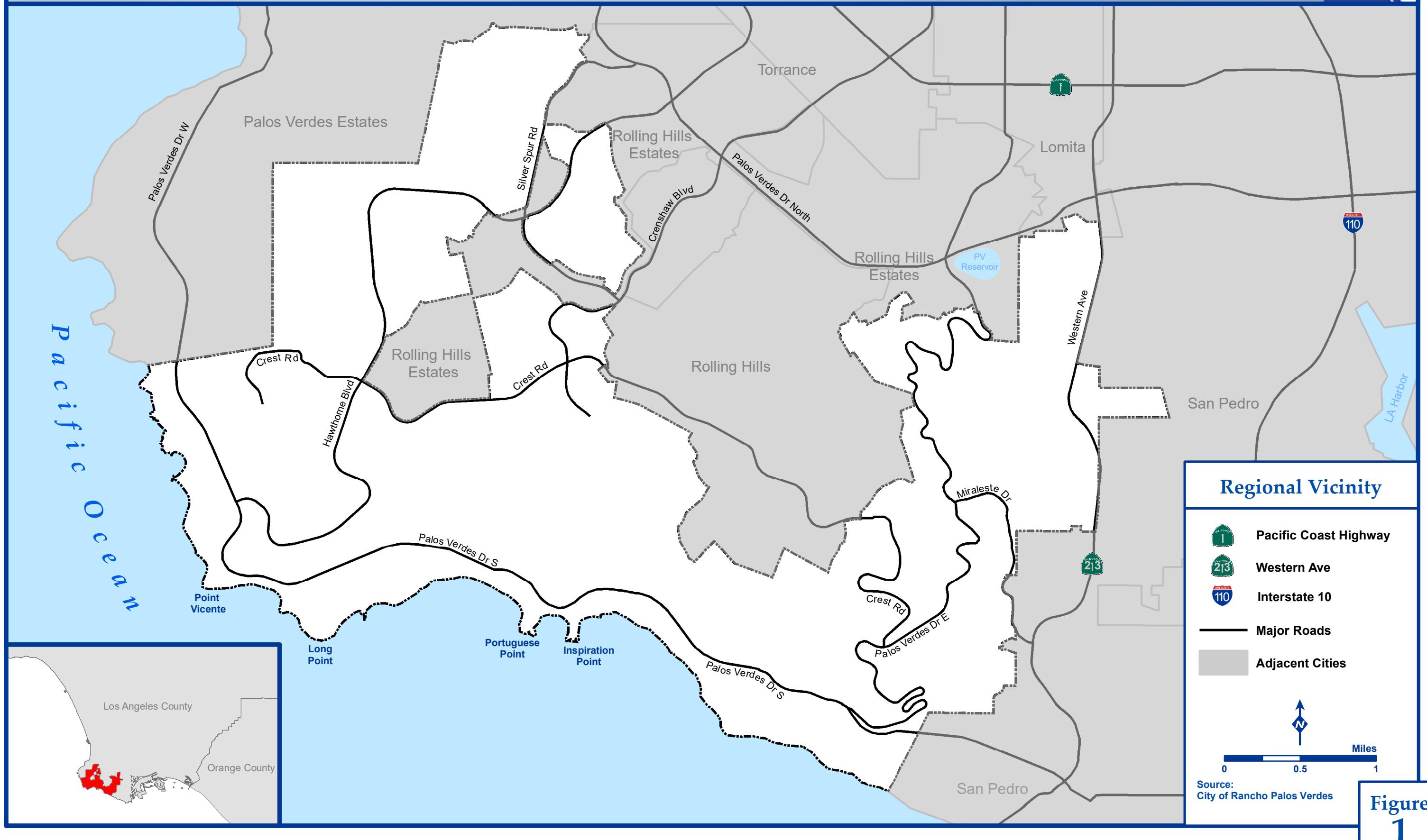
The City of Rancho Palos Verdes Today

The City of Rancho Palos Verdes is located at the southwest tip of Los Angeles County (Figure 1, Regional Vicinity). It covers 13.5 square miles of land and 7.5 miles of coastline and has a population of 42,448 as of 2016. Using 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 operation of the government and implement policies it establishes. The City was also formed as a contract city, contracting for many services including police. Fire is handled by the Los Angeles Fire District and Library by the Palos Verdes Library District. Education is provided by the Palos Verdes Peninsula Unified School District.

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.

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.

Figure 1: Regional Vicinity



3 What is a general plan and what are its regulatory requirements?

Like many other parts of the country, major milestones in California's planning law date to the early 1900s, when California'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" (Gov't Code §65300).

What is a General Plan?

The California Supreme Court has defined the general plan as the "charter to which [zoning] ordinance[s] must conform" (OPR 2017 General Plan Guidelines, page 10). Perhaps a better description comes from California's Governor's Office of Planning and Research 2017 General Plan Guidelines (Guidelines), which state that "the General Plan is a vision about how a community will grow, reflecting community priorities and values while shaping the future." 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 and the general plan land use map. Further, according to the Guidelines, the general plan serves to:

- Provide a basis for local government decision – making, including decisions on development approvals and exactions.
- Provide residents with opportunities to participate in the planning and decision-making processes of their communities.
- Inform residents, developers, decisions makers, and other cities and counties of the ground rules that guide development within a particular community.

The city's general plan must meet the following criteria:

- **Comprehensiveness** - A general plan must cover a local jurisdiction's entire planning area and address the broad range of issues associated with a city's development.
- **Geographic Comprehensiveness** - A general plan must cover all territory within the city limits, both public and private.
- **Regional Context** - Cities should coordinate plans regionally when possible and appropriate, in alignment with their sustainable community strategies, to work towards regional goals.
- **Issue Comprehensiveness** - A general plan should focus on those issues that are relevant to the planning area. The plan must address the jurisdiction's physical development, such as general locations, appropriate mix, timing, and extent of land uses and supporting infrastructure.
- **Internal Consistency** - Internal consistency requires that no policy conflicts, either textual or diagrammatic, can exist between the components of an otherwise complete and adequate general plan such as internally referenced external documents like a climate action plan or a local energy assurance plan.
- **Equal Status Among Elements** - All elements of the general plan have equal legal status. The general plan must resolve potential conflicts among its elements through clear language and policy consistency.

- **Consistency Between Elements** - All elements of a general plan, whether mandatory or optional must be consistent with one another.
- **Consistency within Elements** - Each element's data, analyses, goals, policies, and implementation programs must be consistent with and complement one another.
- **Area Plan Consistency** - All principles, goals, objectives, policies, and plan proposals set forth in an area or community plan must be consistent with the overall general plan.
- **Text and Diagram Consistency** - The general plan's text and accompanying diagrams and maps are integral parts of the plan and must be in agreement.
- **Long-Term Perspective** - Since the general plan affects the welfare of current and future generations, state law requires that the plan take a long-term perspective. Most jurisdictions select 20 years as the horizon for the general plan. The horizon does not mark an end point but rather provides a general context in which to make shorter-term decisions. Planning is a continuous process; as such, the general plan should be reviewed regularly, regardless of its horizon, and revised as new information becomes available and as community needs and values change.

While the general plan will contain the community's vision for future growth, California law also requires each plan to address 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 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 and Sensory Environment—and these have been included in this General Plan (note the Sensory Environment element was been incorporated into the new Visual Resources Element).

4 Adoption of the General Plan

The City's first General Plan was adopted on June 26, 1975, less than 2 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 on updating the City's General Plan. The City Council acknowledged that portions of the General Plan needed 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 1975 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 (former) Recreation and Parks Committee
- City's Finance Advisory Committee
- City's Traffic Committee
- City's (former) Equestrian Committee
- City's Disaster Preparedness Committee
- Council of Homeowners' Association
- Council of Homeowners' 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 1975 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 goals and policies that were created in 1975 still apply today.

Additionally, in order to assist the City's undertaking of its general plan update, in 1974, a 14 citizen committee submitted the first "Goals Report" that identified various goals for the City, one for each General Plan element. In 2002, a non-City-sponsored "grass-roots" committee of more than 210 residents prepared the second Goals Report, which was provided to each member of the Steering Committee for consideration in its report to the City Council.

During the preparation of the updated General Plan, the Planning Commission held 70 public meetings and the City Council held 13 prior to the Council's adoption of the General Plan. 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.

This update to the General Plan represents the contributions and input made by those volunteer members of the community, as well as Staff.