

1 SETTING AND ORGANIZATION OF THE GENERAL PLAN

The General Plan establishes the City of Alameda's development policies for the period 1990-2010. Its purpose is to guide residents, businesses, policymakers and elected officials in making choices about public and private activities that shape the City's physical environment.

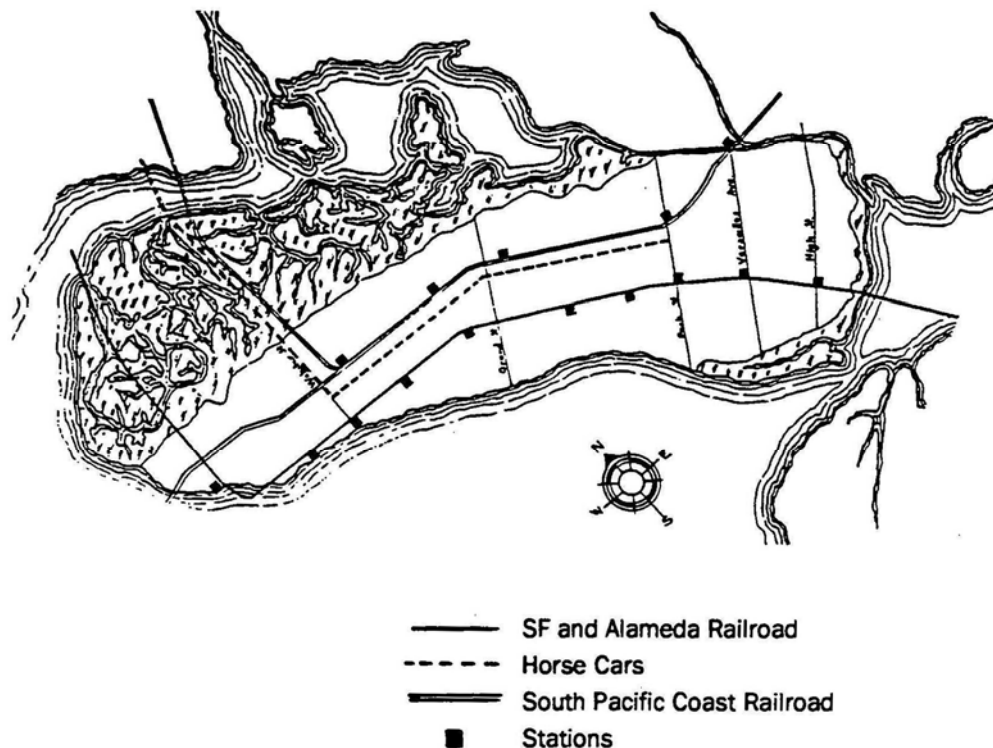
The General Plan as an expression of community values serves as a marker, both for where the community finds itself today and where it hopes to be in the future.

1.1 A CAPSULE HISTORY OF ALAMEDA

Alameda in its natural state was a peninsula covered by a dense forest of coastal live oak. Prior to the arrival of the Spanish and Mexicans it was inhabited by Coastal Miwoks who sustained themselves through hunting, fishing and gathering. Settlement by non-natives began in 1776 after Luis

Figure 1-1
Alameda Rail Transportation, 1887

Source: *Alameda: A Geographical History*, Imelda Merlin



Peralta divided part of his large East Bay land grant, the Rancho San Antonio, among his four sons. Alameda derived its original name, "the Encinal," from the large stands of native oaks ("encino" means "oak" in Spanish) on the Main Island. The name "Alameda," meaning "grove of poplar trees," was given to the City as a poetic gesture upon popular vote in 1853.

In 1849, the California Gold Rush brought Americans and Northern Europeans to San Francisco Bay. Many made their fortunes in supplying goods and services to the region's burgeoning population. Among these were two young entrepreneurs, William Worthington Chipman and Gideon Aughinbaugh, who purchased the Encinal from Antonio Maria Peralta for \$14,000 in 1851, the year after California became a state. They subdivided the land and sold tracts for residences and orchards. By 1872, three separate settlements, the Town of Alameda, Encinal and adjacent lands, and Woodstock, were established in the east, central and western sections of the peninsula. The Town of Alameda was granted a charter by the State Legislature in 1854; incorporation of all peninsula settlements under one local government occurred in 1872.

Early growth of residential, commercial and industrial areas depended upon water and rail transportation, and an excellent climate. (See Figure 1-1, Alameda Rail Transportation, 1887) The City's industrial waterfront and small commercial districts ("the stations") developed in conjunction with rail improvements, while neighborhoods of Victorian homes were built, and beach resorts attracted tens of thousands of weekend visitors. In 1902, the Tidal Canal was completed and Alameda became an island. Major shipyards and Neptune Beach (the "Coney Island of the West") were established along the northern and southern shores to take advantage of the island's assets.

The decades between 1920 and 1970 witnessed cycles of boom and bust. Following an enlightened era of civic building during the 1920s, Alameda endured difficult years of political scandal and corruption through the 1930s. The entry of the United States into World War II focused the City's attention on the war effort. During World War II, shifts ran around the clock at the Naval Air Station (commissioned in 1940) and in the City's shipyards, and the City's population reached an all-time high of 89,000.

By 1973 concern about replacement of Victorian homes by boxy apartment buildings and the prospect of all-apartment development on Bay Farm Island led to passage of initiative Measure A, which prohibits residential structures having more than two units. Despite this restriction, an average of 300 homes per year were built between 1970 and 1990, mainly on Bay Farm Island. Bay Area growth pressure has facilitated redevelopment of unused shipyards on the Northern Waterfront as business park, homes, and marinas that make Alameda the yachting capital of Northern California. Approval of the last large residential project on Bay Farm Island in 1989, plus senior housing under

construction and Navy housing committed, will bring Alameda to 95 percent of residential holding capacity.

The only major committed nonresidential project is completion of Harbor Bay Business Park on Bay Farm Island, which will add space for one-third as many jobs as exist in Alameda in 1990. Entering the '90s, Alameda's greatest unknown is the effect of impending defense budget cuts on the future of the Alameda Naval Air Station (NAS), which occupies one-quarter of the City's land area and is its largest employer.

1.2 THEMES OF THE GENERAL PLAN

The General Plan's policies reinforce five broad themes:

An island: Arriving in Alameda is an event – a journey across or through the water that clearly establishes the City's boundaries and identity. General Plan policies strengthen awareness of the City's island setting by making the shoreline more visible and accessible.

Small town feeling: Alameda has always been a quiet, predominantly residential community, an ideal urban/suburban community created in an era when commutes were by rail or ferry. The City does not have or want tall buildings, freeways, highway commercial strips, or vast tracts of look-alike housing. Measure A, the 1973 initiative that was passed to prevent Alameda from becoming predominantly a city of apartment buildings, stands as a clear rejection of the change that seemed at the time to be engulfing the City.

Respect for history: The City's rich and diverse residential, commercial, industrial, and institutional architecture is continually gaining recognition as an irreplaceable asset. The Bay Area has no similar communities and none will be built. The General Plan emphasizes restoration and preservation as essential to Alameda's economic and cultural environment.

De-emphasis of the automobile: In a city where almost every street is a residential street, it is not surprising that increased traffic is seen as a major threat to the quality of life. The General Plan commits Alameda to vigorous support of transit improvements, ferry service, reduction of peak-hour use of single-occupant vehicles, and an enjoyable pedestrian environment.

Multi-use development on the Northern Waterfront: Retention of seaports and related industries, priority space for boating-related activities, and extension of an existing residential neighborhood to a new 10-acre park along the Estuary are the Plan's boldest policies for both preservation and change.

1.3 THE PLANNING PROCESS NEED FOR REVISION OF THE 1979 COMBINED LAND USE PLAN (CLUP)

The City's 1979 CLUP is a 270-page volume crammed with detailed information and proposals. It includes three of the seven General Plan Elements mandated in 1990 by the State: Land Use, Open Space, and Circulation. Separately prepared and adopted elements are the Conservation Element (1973), Safety (including Seismic Safety) Element (1976), Noise Element (1976), Scenic Highways Element (1976, now optional), Energy Element (1979, optional), Historic Preservation Element (1980, optional), and Housing Element (1990).

CLUP policies were based on a 1975 Community Goals Study prepared by a committee of 600 citizens. Some of the CLUP's key proposals call for Zoning Ordinance amendments that, as of 1990, have not been implemented. Many CLUP policies are reaffirmed by this General Plan – the major policy changes involve the Northern Waterfront. The CLUP, other Plan elements, and the Strategic Plan adopted by the City Council in 1989 have been valuable resources for General Plan revision.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN PLAN-MAKING

Work on plan revision began in late 1988, and three community workshops were held in February 1989 (East End, West End, Bay Farm Island) to identify planning issues facing Alameda. More than 150 issues or ideas were offered by 100 workshop participants – some of whom attended all three sessions. A list of planning options (choices) was prepared for review by the City Council and Planning Board, and a Working Paper (Existing Conditions, Issues and Options) analyzing the options selected by the City Council for study was published in June 1989.

At a second round of four community workshops in July and August a professional facilitator aided clear communication, and participants used an electronic voting machine to register their anonymous opinion of each option. Following review of the Working Paper and summaries of the workshops, the City Council discussed the options and requested further study of Northern Waterfront alternatives. In March 1990, after hearing public comment and considering Planning Board recommendations made at the close of two hearings, the City Council gave direction to the planning consultants for preparation of the Draft General Plan.

Council decisions were on major issues such as new access routes to Alameda, the future of housing in areas that have long been zoned for commercial use, and underused land on the Northern Waterfront. The purpose of the Draft General Plan is to enable a constructive community debate on Alameda's

future. There are many policies in the Draft that the Planning Board and City Council have not discussed. Revisions and additions are expected and invited as the Planning Board and City Council hold public hearings prior to adoption of a revised General Plan.

1.4 NATURE AND SCOPE OF THE GENERAL PLAN

A city's General Plan has been described as its development constitution – the set of policies within which development regulations and decisions must fit. The General Plan is a statement of the community's vision of its long-term or ultimate physical form and, desirably, a guarantee of stable development policies.

State Law requires each city and county to adopt and maintain a General Plan. Actions relating to zoning, subdivision approval, housing allocations, and capital improvements must be consistent with the General Plan.

The Alameda General Plan is not simply a compendium of ideas, data and wishes: it consists of a diagram (a drawing that shows arrangement and relations) and carefully worded policies, accompanied by explanations needed to make the reasons for the policies clear. The Plan has three purposes:

- To enable the Planning Board and City Council to reach agreement on long-range development policies;
- To provide a basis for judging whether specific private development proposals and public projects are in harmony with policies; and
- To allow city departments, other public agencies and private developers to design projects that are consistent with City policies, or to seek changes in those policies through the process of amending the General Plan.

The Alameda General Plan must be:

- **Long-range:** However imperfect our vision of the future is, almost any development decision has effects lasting more than 20 years. The Alameda General Plan is geared to buildout, which is expected to be reached in about 20 years.
- **Comprehensive:** It must coordinate all major components of the community's physical development. The relationship between land use intensity and traffic is most obvious.
- **General:** Because it is long-range and comprehensive, the Plan must be general. The Plan's purpose is to serve as a framework for detailed public and private development proposals. It establishes requirements for additional planning studies where greater specificity is needed before the City can act on development proposals.

The General Plan is implemented by staff in making administrative decisions, the decisions of the Planning Board and City Council, and by the zoning and subdivision ordinances, specific plans, redevelopment plans and the City's capital improvement program.

The Zoning Ordinance includes detailed use classifications and standards. The Zoning Map should be consistent with the General Plan Diagram, but it is not intended to be identical to it. Several zoning districts may be consistent with a single General Plan land use classification, and boundaries of zoning districts may be similar to but not identical with General Plan designations. Zoning Map changes affecting the extent of a Neighborhood Business District, for example, will be based on detailed parcel-by-parcel study and may not match the General Plan boundary precisely.

USING THE GENERAL PLAN

The Plan text distinguishes adopted policies from information describing the reasons for a policy. *Guiding Policies* are the City's statements of its goals and philosophy. *Implementing Policies* represent commitment to consistent actions. Implementing Policies are as specific as is appropriate given the City's current level of knowledge and consensus on each issue. Adopted policy statements are printed in roman type; explanatory material appears in italics and is not adopted.

The General Plan Diagram in the pocket at the rear of this volume depicts the desired ultimate land use and street network. The Diagram must be used in conjunction with the Plan text. The Land Use Classifications (See Section 2.2) explain the legend on the Diagram and specify density and intensity ranges for each category. A glossary defines technical terms. To make the General Plan diagram readable, it is necessary to omit isolated use designations smaller than an acre. Places of religious assembly are not shown.

ORGANIZATION OF THE PLAN

California's General Plan Law is a product of the incremental nature of the legislative process. If literally followed, it creates confusion as to where some topics should be located and some duplication among the seven mandatory Plan elements. Fortunately, Government Code 65301(a) allows a city to reorganize the material as long as all topics are covered. The exception is the Housing Element, which is required by State guidelines to contain extensive data as well as policies focusing on housing production. Alameda adopted a Housing Element for the period 1990-1995 in December 1990. The content of the remaining six state-mandated elements (land use, transportation, open space, conservation, safety and noise) appears in the sections of the Alameda General Plan as noted:

Land Use Element establishes land use classifications, sets densities and intensities for development, and creates a pattern of land uses (including open space) to meet space needs.

City Design Element (Optional) provides ideas and policies to enhance Alameda's design quality and maintain its strong visual image.

Transportation Element (formerly Circulation Element) contains policies for streets, transportation systems management, transit, pedestrian routes, bikeways, and movement of goods.

Open Space and Conservation Element (Open Space and Conservation Elements) includes policies for management of categories of open space lands and prescribes policies for conservation of both natural and cultural resources.

Parks and Recreation, Shoreline Access and Development, Schools and Cultural Facilities Element (Optional). These facilities are interrelated in Alameda so are treated in a separate element rather than included under Land Use or Open Space.

Airport Environs Element (Optional) contains policies that otherwise would appear under Land Use, Safety and Noise, but are grouped for convenient reference and to direct attention to the City's concern about airport impacts.

Health and Safety Element (Safety and Noise Elements) considers strategies to cope with the management of seismic, geologic, and soils hazards, fire and flooding, hazardous materials, and noise.

Alameda Point Element (Optional) contains site-specific policies regarding land use, transportation, open space, and cultural resources, and health and safety which address the redevelopment of the former Alameda Naval Air Station.

Northern Waterfront Element (Optional) contains site-specific policies which address the redevelopment of certain lands generally located along the northern waterfront between Sherman and Grand Streets.

KEEPING THE GENERAL PLAN CURRENT

All public works projects, subdivision map approvals, and zoning text or map changes must be consistent with the General Plan. From time to time, changes in policy as well as unforeseen opportunities or needs will require amendment of the General Plan. In an effort to prevent casual or automatic General Plan amendments, State law allows each mandatory element to be amended not more than four times per year, although there is no limit to the number of

changes made during each amendment. Most requests are likely to be for map changes, but each must be screened to determine effects on text policies.

The entire Plan should be reviewed and updated at least every five years. State law requires the Housing Element to be updated on a five-year schedule, and specifies 1990 and 1995 as revision years.

The Land Use Element is the core of the General Plan. It is composed of text, policies and a land use plan, called the General Plan Diagram, which designates the proposed general location, distribution, and extent of land uses. Land use classifications, shown as different patterns on the Diagram, specify a range for population density and building intensity for each type of designated land use.