

COVINA GENERAL PLAN INTRODUCTION



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I. Background on the City of Covina

The City of Covina is a special community. Located approximately 23 miles east of downtown Los Angeles and just north of the San Bernardino Freeway (Interstate 10), Covina lies in the heart of the mature, suburban, and prosperous east San Gabriel Valley (depicted in Map 1 at end). From its founding more than one-hundred years ago to the present, Covina has maintained a steady pulse of prosperity, vitality, and opportunity. The City, incorporated in 1901, like many communities in the region, was originally settled in the late 1800s for agricultural purposes. By the turn of the Century, because of favorable climatic and soil conditions and the construction of the Southern Pacific Railroad and the regional-oriented Pacific Electric streetcar network, both of which traversed the City, citrus became the predominant crop. In fact, Covina was the largest shipper of oranges in Los Angeles County and boasted of being the third largest in the world. Both railroad systems further brought more people to the area and gave Covina name recognition. The citrus industry remained the mainstay of the local economy through World War II, after which the citrus groves gave way to the post-War building boom that swept southern California. Between 1950 and 1960, the pressure for suburban living resulted in a City population increase of over 400% and a major expansion to the community's original one square-mile area. Much of this growth was also spawned by the opening of the San Bernardino Freeway in 1954. Covina's positive image, reputation, and public and private amenities were the catalysts for continued though slower growth in subsequent decades, which included more and more commercial and industrial developments. Despite these changes that forever transformed the composition and fabric of the community, Covina retained its pleasant, small-town flavor.

Today (1997), the City of Covina has a resident population of approximately 46,500 and is seven square miles in area with a three square-mile Sphere of Influence (unincorporated territory designated for eventual Covina annexation. Thus, the Covina General Plan covers a ten square-mile Planning Area. These boundaries are depicted in Map 2 at end.) The City is generally flat and organized upon a typical network of suburban roads. The nearby San Bernardino, Foothill, and Orange Freeways and the Metrolink Commuter Rail Line (formerly Southern Pacific Railroad) link the City to other areas of metropolitan Los Angeles. Regarding Metrolink, Covina is fortunate to have one of the Line's stations.

Covina is predominantly built-out, though future growth and redevelopment is anticipated on remaining vacant and on underutilized properties located in various neighborhoods. The City's development and land use pattern are fairly well-established, there being predominantly single-family houses, lower density apartment and condominium complexes, and low rise commercial and industrial uses dispersed throughout the community. For a suburban town, Covina possesses a relatively high percentage of commercial and industrial activities. This feature is best signified by the facts that the City has about the same daytime and nighttime adult populations, collects the highest amount of sales tax per capita of any comparable San Gabriel Valley municipality, and has a relatively high percentage of its residents that also work in the community. Covina's strong, diversified economic base reflects longstanding City government and Redevelopment Agency policies of allocating sufficient land for commercial and industrial uses and, correspondingly, of encouraging the retention and attraction of many, varied retail stores and service, manufacturing, and wholesale businesses. When considered in relation to the City's adequate, stable resident population, this solid economic foundation further renders Covina a balanced community.

Covina has retained and improved its vibrant, quaint downtown, the most famous street of which is Citrus Avenue generally between Badillo Street and just north of San Bernardino Road, as the social, economic, and geographic focus of the community. The downtown area, centered around Citrus Avenue and Badillo Street, constitutes the original settlement of the City, and, over the years, growth generally spread outward from this district in all directions. Although Covina overall has changed quite a bit over the Twentieth Century, the community remains a popular, well-regarded place in which to live, work, conduct business, shop, and seek leisure activities. Regarding the latter point, Covina has many fine City parks, a community playhouse in the downtown, a bowling alley, varied restaurants, and a state-of-the-art 30-screen movie theatre. As the community slogan states: Covina is a city full of old-town traditions and new-town opportunities.

II. Definition and Purpose of the Covina General Plan

The Covina General Plan is the City's blueprint for long-range growth and development and redevelopment. Under State law (California Government Code Section 65300 et seq.), every city and county must prepare, adopt, and implement a general plan to guide and shape its physical as well as social and economic development and environmental resources and to address various growth-related statutes of the State over a long-term (typically twenty-year) timeframe. The role of each local government's general plan is to act as a constitution for development, the foundation upon which all land use and affiliated decisions and actions are to be based. The general plan, which must also address certain regional issues, such as air quality, housing, and transit, expresses community development goals with respect to both the man-made and natural environments and sets forth the policies and implementation measures or programs to achieve them for the welfare of those who live, work, and do business in the community. Therefore, the plan is of importance to decision-makers as well as to residents, property owners, employers, businesses, and community groups. State law further specifies the below-discussed substantive and procedural requirements of general plans. Because Covina is, as stated in the previous section, basically, a well-established and built-out community, general plan implementation or planning in the City relates to guiding future changes in land uses that occur as a result of anticipated recycling and redevelopment activities, limited new construction, and additions and/or modifications to existing public and private facilities.

Furthermore, State planning law places the general plan atop the hierarchy of the tools of local government that regulate land use. The Covina General Plan therefore also serves as a basis for the preparation and administration of various documents concerning the City's community development, such as the Zoning Ordinance, Design Guidelines, Subdivision Ordinance, Capital Improvement Program, and Redevelopment Implementation Plan, which have a more short-term or day-to-day orientation. The above and similar items, other development-related master plans, like the Covina Park System Master Plan, and all site- or area-specific private proposals, such as shopping center additions, or public projects, like widening a particular street, must conform to the General Plan.

The forces that affect the course of community development are constantly changing. These influences include, but are not limited to, the state of the local economy, land values and other market factors, a shifting demographic structure, and evolving community values and desires. Therefore, the general plan must also change in order to reflect current community needs, changing circumstances, and/or new information. State law provides for these occurrences by allowing amendments to be made to a general plan. The document must be as dynamic and meaningful as the community it represents. Additional situations under which revision to the general plan is warranted pertain to changes in State statutes and requests by property owners, businesses, residents, or others that further the public interest. (However, the plan may not be changed more than four times in any calendar year.) This Covina General Plan thus constitutes a complete update over a previous Plan so that the City may better guide and shape future growth, development, and revitalization and will address recent changes in State planning law.

III. Content and Organization of the Covina General Plan

The Covina General Plan consists of text and maps. The text is divided into six chapters or Elements that address particular issue areas. These Elements, which meet the requirements of State law, are as follows:

- 1. Land Use Element** – Land Use is the central General Plan Element, the one that correlates land use and related issues among all Elements and is the most frequently referenced chapter. The Element designates the proposed general distribution/location and extent of the uses of land for housing, business, industry, open space, education, and public buildings and grounds.
- 2. Circulation Element** – The Circulation Element focuses on the movement of people and goods. Specifically, the Element identifies the general location and extent of existing and proposed highways, major roads, railroad and transit routes, trails, and terminals, all closely correlated with the Land Use

Element. In addition, the chapter addresses the general location and extent of local public utilities and facilities.

3. Housing Element – This Element establishes a framework for addressing and meeting local housing needs, particularly those of lower income persons, for identifying and resolving local housing problems, and for recognizing and implementing State, regional, and local goals concerning the preservation, improvement, and development of housing. Under law, this Element must be revised every 5 years and consider various specific State and regional housing-related statutes and/or guidelines.

4. Natural Resources and Open Space Element – Natural Resources and Open Space is the Element of the General Plan that serves to identify, protect, and conserve local natural resources and to establish a framework for preserving, managing, and enhancing the community’s open space areas. Natural resources include water, soils, water bodies, vegetation, wildlife, and air; open space lands pertain to parks and related recreational facilities and trails.

5. Safety Element – The Safety Element functions to protect the community from any unreasonable risks associated with the effects of various potential natural and man-made disasters, including earthquakes, floods, fires, hazardous materials accidents, and landslides. Possible hazards are identified and appraised to best reduce death, injuries, property damage, and economic and social dislocation resulting from such incidents. The Element also provides for emergency preparedness.

6. Noise Element – The Noise chapter of the General Plan identifies and assesses major noise problems in the community for the purposes of developing and maintaining compatible land use patterns and an appropriate, day-to-day administered Noise Ordinance to protect local residents and others from excessive sound exposure. In Covina, the primary noise generators affecting the local environment are the San Bernardino Freeway, the major streets, and the Metrolink Commuter Rail Line.

Although Land Use is the central and most frequently referenced chapter, under law, all Elements have equal legal status, must be internally consistent, and must complement one another. Without meeting these requirements, the General Plan cannot effectively serve as a clear guide for future development and redevelopment. Moreover, State law calls for the General Plan or Elements thereof to meet or consider various statutes pertaining to content, analysis, and policy formulation, though grants to local governments flexibility in document organization and preparation to best suit local circumstances and conditions. Furthermore, as indicated earlier, the timeframe of General Plan implementation is long-term because the Plan affects the welfare of both current and future generations. The State strongly encourages local governments to thoroughly review their general plans at least once every five years and revise the document as necessary. Lastly, the General Plan must be written so as to serve as a clear and useful guide to decision-makers, citizens, and others, an obligation that Covina has herewith met, as well as be available to all those concerned with the community’s long-term growth and changes. Regarding the latter point, this document is available for review at the Covina Public Library and is readily accessible for study, comment, and/or purchase in the Community Development Department, Planning Division at Covina City Hall.

In addition to the six-chapter or –Element General Plan document, which, again, provides direction for the City’s growth, development, and redevelopment, the General Plan as a whole also consists of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR). The EIR documents how the Plan would affect the environment over long-term implementation. Covina’s General Plan EIR, which is also available for public review at the Covina Library and at the Planning counter at Covina City Hall, has been prepared consistent with the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA, California Public Resources Code Section 21000 et seq.).

Each of the six Elements of the Covina General Plan described above is divided into eight to thirteen sections. The reason for this variation is that some of the Elements have additional information required by State law for that particular issue area. Generally, the sections of all Elements consist of and are arranged according to the following content headings:

1. Introduction/Background – This first section describes the purpose and focus of the Element, key applicable State requirements, the organization of the Element, and general features about Covina, particularly in relation to the specific topical area.

2. Issues Identification – This area, which covers one or more sections in the Elements and varies in arrangement and heading, identifies, discusses, and analyzes or appraises various planning matters warranting attention in the particular General Plan chapter and forms the basis for subsequent and below-discussed goals, objectives, policies, plans, and/or programs/implementation measures. These matters consist of issues State planning law requires to be addressed as well as all locally relevant physical, social, and economic planning concerns. In addition, the Elements have separate Technical Appendices that provide further background information describing generally base conditions in the community. The Technical Appendices are legally part of the General Plan. This section also introduces other plans and programs outside of the General Plan that must be followed to meet particular legal requirements and achieve General Plan goals and objectives.

3. Goals, Objectives, and Policies – Goals, objectives, and policies are the chief tools with respect to evaluating and making decisions on matters, issues, and public and private proposals and developments for the subject area of each Element. These components, which are based on the previously-noted issues section(s) and technically function closely with programs/implementation measures (discussed below), bridge the gap between where the community is and what type of city it wishes to become.

A goal is defined as a general expression of an ideal future condition or state toward which the community wishes to advance. An objective, on the other hand, is similar to a goal but more specific in focus. Several objectives generally “branch off” or clarify the state or direction of which the goal leads. Lastly, a policy is a statement that most directly guides decision-making and actions. In order for policies to be meaningful and useful, they must be clear and unambiguous, a guideline that this Element has followed. Policies must indicate local government commitment.

It is noted that objectives are utilized in the Land Use and Housing Elements only, as those chapters are of a type and intricacy that warrant inclusion of this particular item. The City believes that all other Elements can be most efficiently carried out through a more straightforward goal-policy framework. Furthermore, the Housing Element contains a unique section entitled “quantified objectives” that refers to specific legal targets for dwelling unit construction, rehabilitation, and conservation, which differ from general future ends or conditions.

The goals, objectives, and policies for each chapter of the General Plan are arranged in hierarchy from the most general to the most specific. Thus, each Element begins with one or two goals. Policies are subsequently listed under either the objectives (for the Land Use and Housing Elements) or topical areas relating to the particular General Plan chapter. The City maintains some generality and flexibility in carrying out the General Plan’s goals, objectives, and policies to most effectively and appropriately respond to changing and unforeseen physical, environmental, social, and economic conditions.

4. Plan Presentations – This next section of the General Plan actually pertains to the Land Use and Circulation Elements only. Under law, these chapters are required to have maps to illustrate how the General Plan goals and (relating to Land Use) objectives and the policies will be carried out. For example, the Land Use Element must contain a Land Use Plan, which establishes land use districts that identify the permitted type of uses, building character, and extent of new and modified development and redevelopment throughout the community. This Land Use Plan is in fact the backbone of the Element and therefore of the entire Covina General Plan process. The Circulation/Infrastructure Plan of the Circulation Element indicates the location and functional classification and accompanying standards of the major roadways that transport cars, buses, and trucks through and within Covina. Because of the inextricable relationship between circulation and land use, Covina’s Circulation/Infrastructure Plan is illustrated on the Land Use Map. Furthermore, the Land Use Element consists of an additional Future Public and Quasi-Public Facilities Map, showing the location of public facilities, such as City Hall, the Covina Public Library, and City Fire Stations. The City believes that separating public facilities from the primary Land Use Map

clarifies the overall land use strategy and related policies and is appropriate because such facilities compose a very small percentage of the land uses. Therefore, including the public facilities on the Land Use Map would obscure land use distributions. The above Plans thus serve a similar planning function to programs/implementation measures, which most General Plan Elements are required to contain and that are discussed below.

5. Programs/Implementation Measures – State law requires certain General Plan Elements to contain programs/implementation measures, which are a coordinated set of specific actions that facilitate achieving the goals and objectives and carrying out the policies. And in the central Land Use Element, the programs or measures further supplement the previously-noted Land Use Plan/Map in Element implementation. Like the organization of policies in most General Plan chapters, the programs/implementation measures are listed under particular topical areas. Furthermore, as is the case with all goals, objectives, and policies, the City maintains a degree of generality and flexibility in fulfilling the programs/measures to most effectively and appropriately respond to changing and unforeseen physical, environmental, social, and economic conditions.

6. Relation To and Consistency With Other General Plan Elements – Every Element of the General Plan describes how the Element relates to and is consistent with all other chapters of the document. Each Element must be consistent with all other chapters in terms of everything from supporting data and information to policy orientation to implementation. The State requires inter-Element consistency as an essential ingredient for General Plan adequacy. Each such section of the Elements of the Covina General Plan mentions that the City has met this consistency requirement by updating all Elements simultaneously, with one common data and information base and with the same community input, thus ensuring that goals, objectives, policies, plans, and programs/implementation measures have been prepared based on the same foundation and according to identical or similar methodology.

7. Citizen Participation in Element Formation – In updating a general plan, State law requires the local government to provide ample opportunities for public participation to best ensure that the document reflects community goals and sentiments. As described in this other latter section of each Covina General Plan Element, the City of Covina has recognized the importance of community input in revising the General Plan document through achieving interaction among City staff, the Planning Commission, the City Council, and Covina residents, property owners, business persons, and local groups. Specifically, the views and desires of the community were ascertained by City staff by distributing questionnaires, conducting public forums, preparing television commercials, distributing flyers at City Hall and around the community, and preparing press releases and articles in various newspapers and City publications. In addition, City personnel received numerous comments from the public at City Hall in the course of site-specific project reviews, met with what was called the General Plan Update Committee, which was comprised of City Council and Planning Commission members, and came together with various City advisory bodies. The public comments ascertained from these and other measures were carefully studied by City staff and incorporated into the body of data and information that was used in identifying certain issues and in subsequently developing goals, objectives, policies, plans, and programs/implementation measures. Copies of the Draft Covina General Plan as well as the accompanying Environmental Impact Report (EIR) had been distributed to interested individuals and organizations and to required agencies. Moreover, as previously stated, copies were made available for public review at the Covina Public Library and at the Community Development Department, Planning Division at Covina City Hall. And additional public involvement has been encouraged through the Planning Commission and City Council public hearing processes.

8. Monitoring Element Implementation – Once the General Plan is adopted, the City must implement and monitor its application over time. The last section of each Element of the Covina General Plan discusses this process as required by State law and is important to ensure that the Element is implemented as proposed or that any identified problems with respect to policies, programs/implementation measures, or other matters are adequately handled. Here, the City states its intention to fulfill the monitoring obligation by following the General Plan in making decisions and preparing a mandatory annual report for the Planning Commission and the City Council on the status of the General Plan.

