

# ELEMENTS OF A GENERAL PLAN

*A General Plan takes community values and puts them into practice.*

**How does it do that?**

The state of California requires that each city and county prepare a General Plan (GP) with seven elements that address the following:

**Land use:** what is the best use of our available land?

**Circulation:** how will we get around?

**Housing:** where will we live? Will there be enough housing? Can folks from all economic levels find affordable housing?

**Conservation:** how should we use our natural resources?

**Open space:** where and how much space should we set aside for agricultural use or green space?

**Noise:** what levels are acceptable where?

**Safety:** how do we protect ourselves from seismic, geologic, flood, fire and other hazards?

These elements share equal status: one does not take precedence over another. The provisions of one may not contradict the provisions of another.

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A General Plan may include optional elements like air quality, capital improvements, community design, economic development, energy, parks and recreation, flood management, geothermal, and water. Optional elements have the same legal force as mandatory elements. Once again, optional elements must be internally consistent, consistent with other optional elements, and consistent with the mandatory elements.

Calaveras County's current plan, for example, contains the required land use, housing, circulation, noise, and safety elements. The conservation element addresses the conservation, development and use of natural resources including water, forests, soils, rivers and mineral deposits.

Calaveras' open space element details plans and measures for preserving open space for natural resources, the managed production of resources, outdoor recreation, public health and safety, and the identification of agricultural land.

It also contains optional economic and public facilities elements.

Elements may be consolidated to avoid repetition. In other words, a plan does not have to have seven separate sections with one devoted to each element or with those elements as titles. Consolidation streamlines information and helps prevent inconsistencies from creeping in. Statewide, the trend is to combine elements into chapters that address issues which reappear in several elements.

How we plan and develop our communities has an enormous impact on the quality and quantity of



California's water. There are concerns across the state about adequate supplies for a variety of uses, water quality, flood damage and liability.

The Local Government Commission in Sacramento has an excellent website (<http://water.lgc.org/land-use-and-watersheds>) designed as a clearinghouse for information and resources related to land use and water resources. The relationship between land use and water will become increasingly critical given California's projected population growth and urbanization.

## Resources

*Element Consolidation: Streamlining Local General Plans*, by the California Governor's Office of Planning and Research:  
[http://ceres.ca.gov/planning/element\\_consol/index.html](http://ceres.ca.gov/planning/element_consol/index.html)

Calaveras County General Plan:  
[http://www.co.calaveras.ca.us/departments/planning/gen\\_plan.asp](http://www.co.calaveras.ca.us/departments/planning/gen_plan.asp)

***Planning is bringing the future into the present so you can do something about it now."***

- Alan Lakein, management guru

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<http://ucanr.org/landusefactsheets>