

Background and History of Los Gatos

LOCATION

The Town of Los Gatos is nestled at the base of the Sierra Azules, and is located approximately 60 miles south of San Francisco, in the southwestern portion of Santa Clara County where the Santa Clara Valley meets the lower slopes of the Santa Cruz Mountains. Los Gatos is bounded by the City of San Jose to the north and east; the City of Campbell to the north; the Cities of Monte Sereno and Saratoga to the west; and unincorporated County of Santa Clara and the County of Santa Cruz to the south.

The Los Gatos Planning Area encompasses a wide variety of terrain, ranging from flat topography at the edge of the valley floor to densely wooded hillsides. Both the valley and hillsides are interspersed with creeks, streams and riparian habitat. The sharp contrast between the valley floor and the hillsides provides the Town's picturesque background. Nestled amidst a rich natural landscape and storied past, Los Gatos is a community that harmoniously blends historical charm with modern vitality.

HISTORY

Los Gatos is one of Santa Clara County's oldest communities. In 1840, the Mexican government granted a land patent for a 6,600 acre rancho to Sebastian Peralta and Jose Hernandez. Los Gatos was originally named *La Rinconada de Los Gatos* (Cat's Corner) by early settlers due to the screams of mountain lions prowling in the night. In 1868, 100 acres of the rancho was selected as a town site. The Town was incorporated in 1887, and by 1890 the Town's population had grown to 1,652. When the first General Plan was adopted in 1963, the Town had grown to an area of approximately 4,000 acres, or 6.3 square miles, with a population in excess of 11,750.

At the time the first General Plan was revised in 1971, the Town had grown to an area of 9 square miles with a population of 24,350. In 1984, Los Gatos covered approximately 10 square miles and had a population of 27,820 persons. Today, the Town population is estimated to be 33,230 in a 15 square mile area. While most of the growth through the 1970's was due to new development, most of the growth in the 1980's and 1990's was due to annexations, in-fill development and changing demographics.

The Town originally developed at a distance from other population centers and therefore evolved as an independent community having residential, commercial and industrial areas. The economics of the Town have changed from the wheat farming, milling, logging, orchard, and cannery businesses in the 19th and early 20th centuries to the suburban, "high tech," visitor destination businesses of today. The railroad also played a major role in the growth and development of the Town. Los Gatos was either the terminus of the railroad or the transition point from standard to narrow gauge at more than one time during the railroad's operation.

The climate and easy access by rail from San Francisco made Los Gatos an early tourist destination. Today, the Town is situated within the largest metropolitan area of northern California and is closely tied to Silicon Valley and its fast-paced economy. Los Gatos, however, retains a mix of residential, commercial, and light industrial uses, still attracts visitors, and continues to retain its small-town image.

Los Gatos prides itself as a “self-contained community.” Over 3,000 businesses serve the residents and act as a destination point for visitors who are attracted to its restaurants, hotels, and variety of shops within a pedestrian oriented downtown setting. The Town is also an “inclusive” community with the full mix of ages, family sizes, and incomes. Los Gatos has many parks and greenbelt areas, as well as a vibrant downtown area. Downtown Los Gatos is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is the model of what communities strive to achieve in a downtown.

Historical Reading Material

- Bennett, Mardi, ed. - *Images of Long Ago: A Century of People, Places and Progress in the Town of Los Gatos*
- Bloomfield, Anne - *Los Gatos Toll House: Historic Structures Report*
- Bruntz, George, G. - *History of Los Gatos*
- James Alexander Forbes, builder and owner of the Santa Rosa Flour Mill on the Rancho Rinconada de Los Gatos. (Author Unknown)
- Wulf, William A., *A History of the Santa Cruz Mountains and early Los Gatos.*

* Source: Town of Los Gatos General Plan

Town of Los Gatos Mission

The mission of the Town of Los Gatos is to enhance the quality of life in Los Gatos by providing the highest quality leadership and most efficient services and facilities.

The Town strives to provide a working environment which promotes excellence; fosters cooperation; values volunteerism; and seeks to meet the needs of the community and the Town Council, employees, commissions, committees, and boards.

Town of Los Gatos Core Goals

COMMUNITY CHARACTER

GOOD GOVERNANCE

FISCAL STABILITY

QUALITY PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE

CIVIC ENRICHMENT

PUBLIC SAFETY

Community Character: Preserve and enhance the Town’s historic resources and small-town character; foster the economic vitality of all business locations; maintain and enhance diverse neighborhoods, promote sustainability practices, and protect and conserve the natural environment for present and future generations.

Good Governance: Ensure open, responsive, accountable, transparent, accessible, inclusive, and collaborative government that encourages public involvement.

Fiscal Stability: Maintain current and long-term fiscal stability while striving to deliver high-quality, cost-effective, and efficient municipal services that meet the current and long-term needs of the community.

Quality Public Infrastructure: Maintain the condition and availability of public facilities, infrastructure, and a well-connected transportation system that enables safe access for all transportation modes, including pedestrians, people with access and functional needs, bicyclists, motorists, transit riders, and people of all ages and abilities.

Civic Engagement: Foster opportunities for meaningful community involvement in government processes, encourage recreational and personal enrichment, and promote ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic diversity and equity to enhance the quality of life in Los Gatos.

Public Safety: Ensure public safety through proactive community policing, effective emergency response, community-wide emergency preparation, education, and a community design that is responsive to the full range of potential natural and human-made hazards and safety issues.

General Plan Summary

Purpose of the General Plan

The role of each community's General Plan is to act as a constitution for development, the foundation upon which all land use decisions are to be based. Land use decisions encompass not only zoning, but circulation, design, open space, and other factors. The General Plan is a policy document to assist and guide local decision makers.

The Town of Los Gatos is always evolving with new opportunities to mold the future character of the Town, while preserving the best of its past and present. The General Plan addresses the issues that are important to consider in the ongoing development of our community. The General Plan explains how our natural resources and physical features are to be maintained and enhanced and directs how we incorporate them into in-fill projects, new projects, and our community investments. The General Plan also identifies land uses and their distribution. To be considered consistent with the General Plan, a project must not only be consistent with the Land Use Plan, but it must also further the goals of all elements of the General Plan and meet the intent of its policies.

The Town Council and Planning Commission use the General Plan to evaluate land use changes, make funding and budget recommendations and decisions, and to evaluate specific development proposals. Town staff uses the General Plan to regulate building and development and to make recommendations on projects to the Planning Commission and the Town Council. Residents, neighborhood groups, and developers also use the General Plan to understand the Town's long-range plans and to evaluate specific development proposals.

Organization and Contents of the General Plan

The State requires that the General Plan contain eight elements: Land Use, Circulation, Housing, Open Space, Noise, Safety, Conservation, and Environmental Justice. Although jurisdictions are required to address all issues specified in State law, the General Plan may be organized in a way that best suits individual jurisdictions. Given Los Gatos's unique characteristics and needs, the following elements are included in the Los Gatos 2040 General Plan: Racial, Social, and Environmental Justice; Land Use; Community Design; Housing; Mobility; Public Facilities, Services, and Infrastructure; Open Space, Parks, and Recreation; Environment and Sustainability; Hazards and Safety; and Housing.

The 2040 General Plan is intended to meet multiple, and sometimes competing, policy objectives. Therefore, the Town may not be able to adhere to every policy in every decision that it makes to implement this General Plan. The Town Council has final discretion over which policy objective will have priority in instances where there are competing policy objectives affecting a single decision.

To view the 2040 General Plan please go to <https://www.losgatosca.gov/2138/General-Plan>.

Please note that a referendum was submitted suspending the 2040 Land Use Element and 2040 Community Design Elements. On April 2, 2024, the Town Council voted to rescind these two elements. In their place, please refer to the [2020 Land Use Element](#) and [2020 Community Design Element](#).

Town of Los Gatos Guiding Principles

SMALL TOWN SERVICE

COMMUNITY STEWARDSHIP

FUTURE FOCUS

Small Town Service is our commitment to providing services in a courteous, timely, equitable, and responsive manner. Los Gatos is a welcoming, family-oriented, safe, beautiful, and sustainable community where people feel a sense of belonging. Our small-town character is important to all who visit, work, and live in Los Gatos. We strive to make our customer service reflect these qualities. Small-town service is also about programs that celebrate the Town's small-town charm, such as our Library children's story times and arts workshops, the annual Spring into Green environmental and sustainability event, the 4th of July musical celebration, annual Tree Lighting, Music in the Park, Forbes Mill Footbridge children's murals, and many more.

Community Stewardship means that we recognize the responsibility entrusted to Town leaders and staff to care about the well-being of the entire community and to carry out our obligations accordingly. We take our role seriously, as we work to maintain fiscal stability; a range of housing opportunities; historic neighborhoods; outdoor recreation opportunities; environmental sustainability; local culture and art; equitable and responsive municipal services; open and transparent government processes; a lively and accessible downtown; dynamic and thriving business community; public safety; a choice of mobility options; superior public facilities and services; and other quality of life elements. We encourage a high degree of public participation and community partnerships to carry out our stewardship role.

Future Focus reminds us to always have an eye on the future as we care for the community of today. Our goal is to ensure a high quality of life for present and future generations, positioning the Town to be resilient as the climate changes. We work to preserve and enhance the Town's historic resources, small-town character, and natural environment while guiding the community into the future. Our General Plan is subject to change as ideas develop and priorities evolve. We also keep the future in focus by looking for more efficient ways of doing business – whether it's streamlining processes or utilizing effective technologies.

Comparison Between Public and Private Corporations

Public agencies, such as the Town,

CATEGORIES OF COMPARISON	PUBLIC AGENCY	PRIVATE CORPORATION
Owners	Residents	Stockholders Investors
Policymakers	Mayor and Town Council	Chair of the Board Board of Directors
Implementors	Town Manager	Chief Executive Officer
Revenue Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sales Tax • Property Tax • State and Federal Funding • Fees for Service • Fines • Grants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investments • Sales • Profits
Products/Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of Life for Community • Services to Residents, Businesses & Visitors • Democratic Process • Regulatory Role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free Market System • Services • Goods

Town Government Structure

COUNCIL/MANAGER FORM OF GOVERNMENT

The Town of Los Gatos operates under the Council/Manager form of government, a system that combines the policy leadership of elected officials in the form of a Town Council, with the managerial expertise of an appointed Town Manager.

The Town Manager is appointed by the Council and serves as the chief administrative officer of the organization. The Town Manager is responsible for administration of Town affairs, day-to-day operations, and implementation of Council policies according to State Government Code outlined in sections 2.30.255- 2.30.305 of the Town Code.

The Town Attorney, also appointed by the Council, advises and represents the Town and Council in all legal affairs.

ELECTED OFFICIALS

Town Council

The Town Council is the legislative body for the Town of Los Gatos. Five (5) members are elected to serve staggered four (4) year terms. The Council elects one of its members annually to serve as Mayor. The Town is a General Law City operating under the provisions of the State Government Code.

TOWN SERVICES

Administrative Services Department

The Administrative Services Department, led by the Town Manager, provides overall administration, leadership and direction for the Town organization. The Manager identifies community issues requiring Council action; provides research, information, and analysis necessary for responsible decision-making; provides alternative solutions; assures that the Council's policies, programs, and services are effectively implemented; prepares the Town's budget with recommendations on the appropriate resources for Council action; fosters public awareness of municipal programs, services and goals; engages the community in Town issues; responds to citizen inquiries by explaining Town services and functions; investigates problems and resolves them accordingly; and fosters transparent government services.

The Administrative Services Department is responsible for personnel, finance, budgeting, purchasing, labor relations, economic vitality, information technology, risk management, equipment replacement, and workers' compensation. It also is responsible for preserving the legislative and recorded history of the Town government.

Town Attorney

The Town Attorney is appointed by the Town Council and serves as the legal adviser of the Town and all of its officers. This role involves advising on legal matters, representing the Town in legal proceedings, and ensuring that the Town's operations comply with the law. Other legal services provided include drafting legal documents, negotiating property transactions, managing litigation, handling claims against or on behalf of the Town, and overseeing the Town's liability insurance and risk management program.

Community Development

The Community Development Department is responsible for all current and advanced planning, housing programs, building inspection, and plan check activities of the Town. Program areas include Administration, Development Review, Code Compliance, Advanced Planning/Special Projects, and Building Inspection/Plan Check. The Department supports the Planning Commission, Town Council, and Historic Preservation Committee, as well as other advisory committees, such as the General Plan Committee.

Police

The Los Gatos/Monte Sereno Police Department provides public safety services to the Town of Los Gatos and the City of Monte Sereno. The principle aims of the Department are to reduce crime through prevention, detection and apprehension; provide for safe and orderly movement of vehicular traffic through enforcement, accident prevention and investigation; provide public safety through regulation and control of hazardous situations; recover lost and stolen property; and prevent crime through programs reflecting community needs. The Department also emphasizes a strong police/community partnership through innovative programs such as Reserve Police Officer, Volunteers in Policing (V.I.P.), Disaster Aid Response Team (D.A.R.T.), Police Chaplin program, Parking Citation Hearing Officers, and the Police Explorer Scout program.

Parks and Public Works

The Parks and Public Works Department engages in the maintenance and operation of parks and public improvements, provides engineering services, and manages projects in the following major areas:

- Street pavement, sidewalks, curbs and gutters, medians, and street lights
- Parks, trails, urban forests, playgrounds, play fields, and play lots
- Storm drainage systems
- Public facilities, equipment, vehicles, parking structures/lots and private buildings
- Traffic control devices and features
- Transportation innovations such as traffic calming and enhanced pedestrian and bicycle mobility.

Library

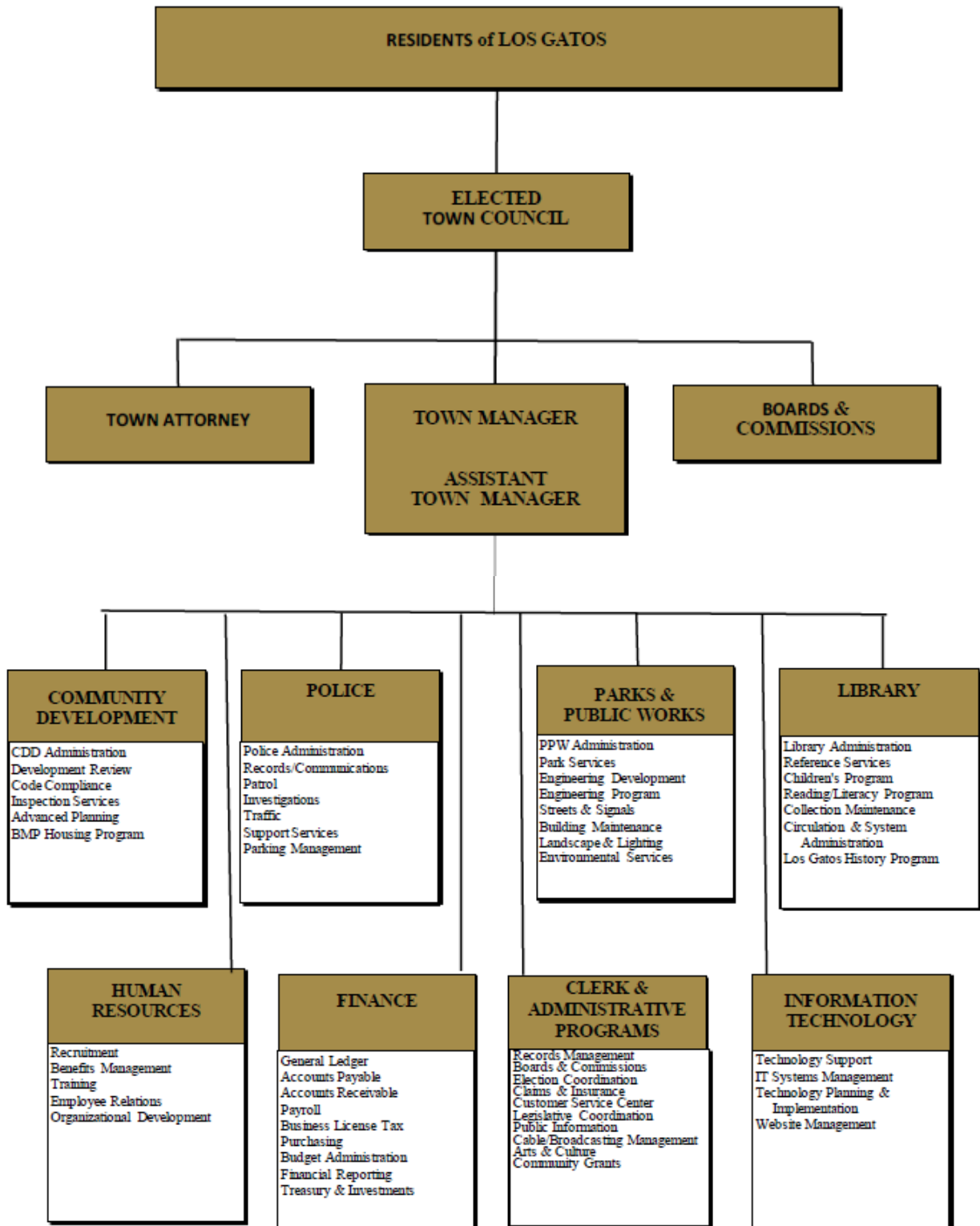
The Los Gatos Public Library serves as the Town's primary provider of information services and as a center for cultural enrichment and lifelong learning. The Department's goals are to provide collections and services which anticipate the needs of the community; encourage an interest in reading and learning; support students and the elementary and secondary level with appropriate materials and services; provide the current library-related technologies and training; create a welcoming environment; and provide a knowledgeable and service-oriented staff that is responsive to the community's need for access to information. The Library provides high-demand, high-interest materials in a variety of formats for people of all ages. The Library provides a year around series of children's programs and a Summer Reading Club, a book discussion group for adults, and Internet classes.

Boards, Commissions, Committees

Members of the Boards, Commissions, and Committees are volunteers who are appointed by and serve at the pleasure of the Town Council. The Town of Los Gatos currently has a number of advisory Boards, Commissions, and Committees that were established to provide citizen input and advice in specific areas. The primary purpose of the Boards, Commissions, and Committees is to gather information, weigh public opinion, and carefully examine issues to make recommendations to the Council. Each Board, Commissions, and Committees will study issues within its area of specialization, expand the opportunity for citizen input and participation, and provide recommendations to the Council that align with the Town's strategic priorities.

As advisory bodies, the Boards, Commissions, and Committees are not authorized to set Town policy or direct staff work. However, a Town staff member is appointed to each Board, Commission, and Committee to provide administrative support to help facilitate meetings, create meeting materials, manage Commission membership, advise members, and ensure that the Ralph M. Brown Act (Brown Act) and parliamentary procedure are not violated. The staff member also serves as a liaison between the Town Manager and the Commission.

Town of Los Gatos Organizational Structure



General Plan Vision Statement and Guiding Principals

After community discussions at the General Plan Update Advisory Committee and Planning Commission, the Los Gatos Town Council approved a Vision Statement and set of Guiding Principles for the Los Gatos 2040 General Plan on August 20, 2019. The Vision Statement is written in the present tense to describe the Town in the year 2040.

Vision

The Town of Los Gatos is a welcoming, family-oriented, and safe community nestled in the beautiful foothills of the Santa Cruz Mountains. The Town is a sustainable community that takes pride in its small-town character and provides a range of housing opportunities, historic neighborhoods, local culture and arts, excellent schools, and a lively and accessible downtown. Los Gatos offers a choice of mobility options, superior public facilities and services, and an open and responsive local government that is fiscally sound. The Town includes a mix of businesses throughout Town that serve all residents, workers, and visitors. Los Gatos has a dynamic and thriving economy that includes a mix of businesses throughout Town that serves all residents, workers, and visitors.

Guiding Principles

- **Community Vitality**
Invigorate Los Gatos as a special place for community gathering, commerce, and other activities for residents and visitors. Foster the economic vitality of all Los Gatos business locations. Preserve and enhance the Town's historic resources and character while guiding the community into the future.
- **Connectivity**
Emphasize the importance of connecting all facets of the Town to build a strong sense of community through building design, walkability, and safe streets.
- **Diverse Neighborhoods**
Foster appropriate investments to maintain and enhance diverse neighborhoods, housing opportunities, and infrastructure to meet the needs of all current and future residents.
- **Fiscal Stability / Responsibility**
Provide high quality municipal services to the Los Gatos community while sustaining long term fiscal wellbeing.
- **Government Transparency**
Conduct governmental processes in an open manner and encourage public involvement in Town governance.
- **Inclusivity**
Value the importance of and promote ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic diversity and

equity to enhance the quality of life in Los Gatos.

- **Mobility**

Provide a well-connected transportation system that enables safe access for all transportation modes, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders of all ages and abilities.

- **Promote Public Safety**

Maintain and enhance Los Gatos as a safe community through preparation and planning, education, and community design that is responsive to the full range of potential natural and man-made hazards and safety issues.

- **Protect Natural Environment**

Protect and enhance the natural environment and biotic communities that define Los Gatos, including but not limited to open space preserves, recreational trails, surrounding hillsides, and natural waterways.

- **Sustainability**

Manage, conserve, and preserve Los Gatos' natural environment for present and future generations. Identify and provide opportunities to enhance the Town's sustainability policies and practices.