

1 INTRODUCTION

A. 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 infill 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 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.

California Government Code Section 65300 requires that the General Plan be comprehensive, internally consistent, and long-term. The Plan should be clearly written, available to all those concerned with the community's development, and easy to administer. The Los Gatos 2020 General Plan supersedes the previous General Plan, adopted in 2000.

The 2020 General Plan focuses on promoting sustainability which, for the purpose of the General Plan, means using resources in the present in a manner that does not compromise the choices and quality of life of future generations. This goal can be met several ways, including increasing alternative modes of transportation, maintaining a healthy local economy, and preserving open space.

B. Background and History

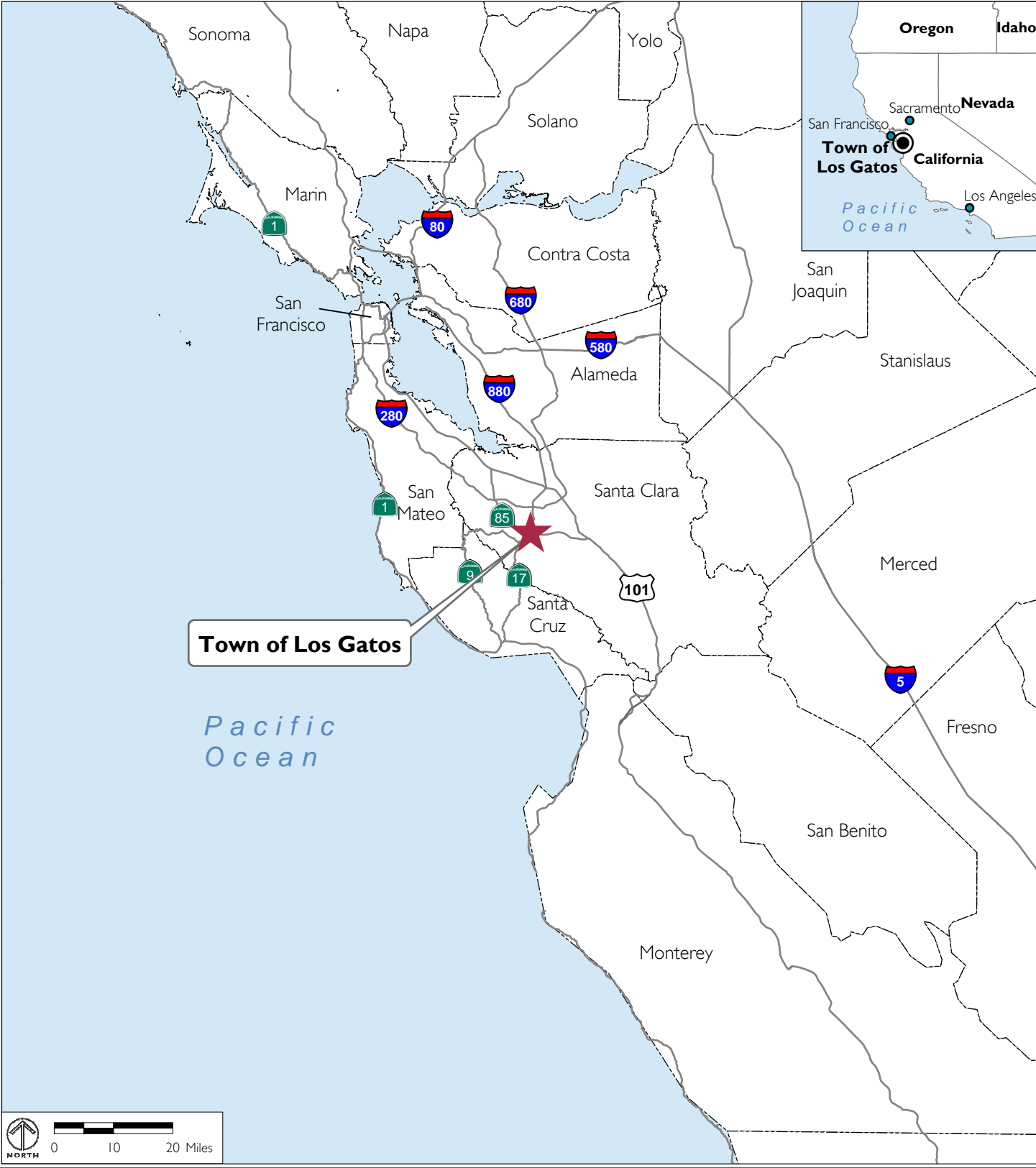
1. Location

The Town of Los Gatos is located approximately 43 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 areas of the County of Santa Clara and the County of Santa Cruz to the south. Figure INT-1 shows the Town's regional location and Figure INT-2 identifies the Town's boundaries.

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 setting.

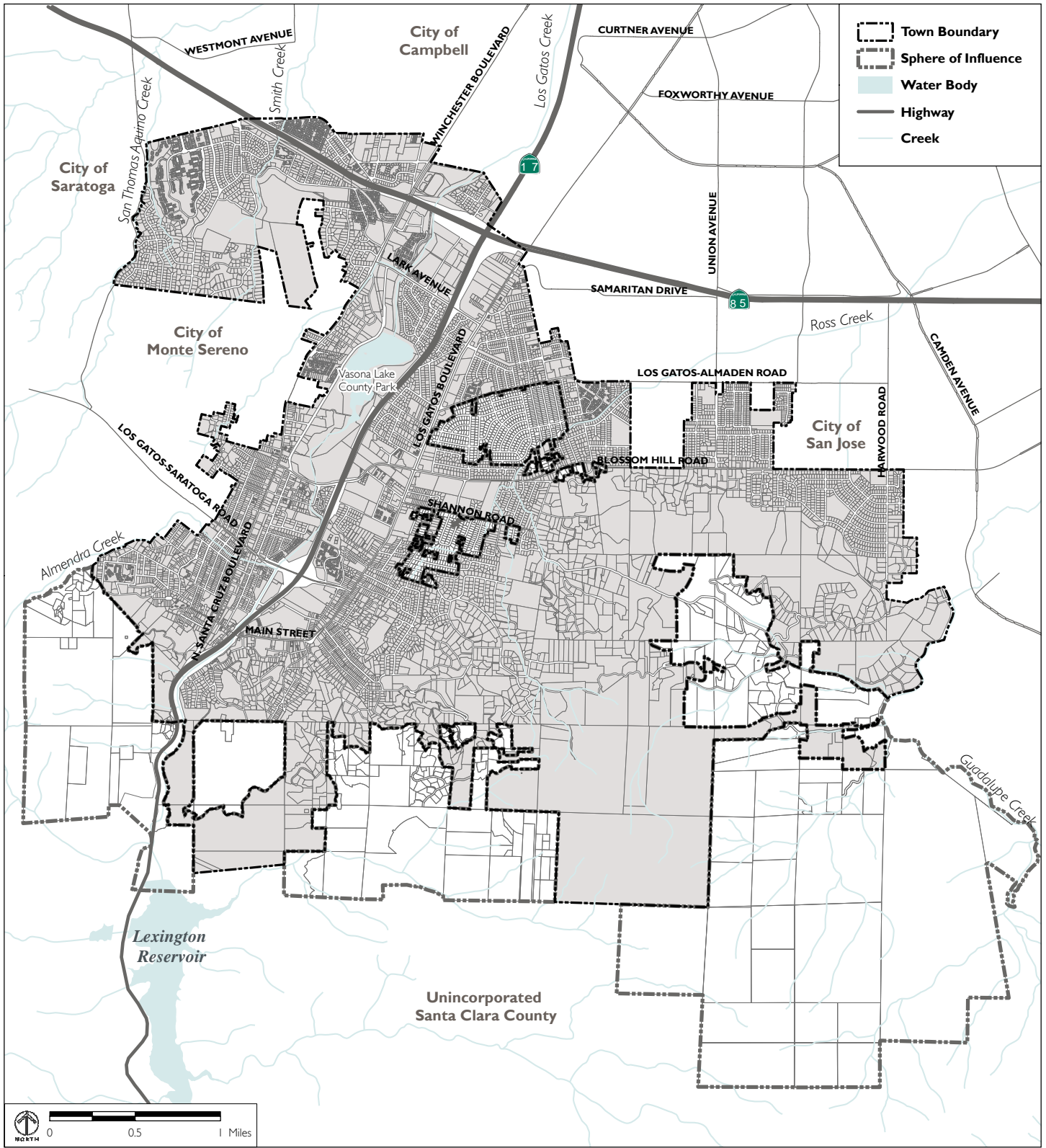
2. History

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 because of the calling mountain lions that prowled the area by night.



Source: Town of Los Gatos; DC&E GIS, 2008.

FIGURE INT-1
REGIONAL LOCATION



Source: Town of Los Gatos, 2008.

FIGURE INT-2

TOWN BOUNDARY AND SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

In 1868, 100 acres of the rancho were selected as a town site. The Town was incorporated in 1887 and by 1890 the Town's population had grown to 1,650. 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.

When the first General Plan was adopted in 1963, the Town had grown to an area of approximately 6 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 roughly 10 square miles and had a population of 27,820 persons. In 2010, the Town had a population of 30,802 in a 14-square-mile area. While most of the growth through the 1970s was due to new development, most of the growth in the 1980s and 1990s was due to annexations, infill development, and changing demographics. Little has changed over the past decade, and today the Town of Los Gatos remains the same geographic size with an estimated population of about 28,800 residents as of 2008.

The Town originally developed at a distance from other population centers and therefore evolved as an independent community with residential, commercial, and industrial areas. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, wheat farming, milling, logging, orchard and cannery businesses were the economic drivers of the community. Since then, Los Gatos has evolved to its current status as a community with lovely neighborhoods, a vibrant downtown, and valued small-town character.

Today, the Town is situated within one of the largest metropolitan areas of Northern California and is closely tied to the fast-paced economy of Silicon Valley. Nevertheless, the Town of Los Gatos still retains its small-town image, providing a rich community fabric composed of a varied mix of residential, commercial, and light industrial uses that serve the residents and attract visitors.

Los Gatos prides itself as a “self-contained community.” Over 3,700 businesses serve the residents and draw visitors to the restaurants, hotels, and 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 and a variety of businesses, including headquarters and startups to businesses located along Los Gatos Boulevard that offer a range of goods and services for the community. The Los Gatos Commercial Historic District in Downtown Los Gatos is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and Downtown Los Gatos is the model of what communities strive to achieve in a downtown.

Los Gatos is a General Law Town with a five-member Council and an annually rotating Mayor’s position.

C. General Plan Update Process

On February 4, 2008, the Los Gatos Town Council directed staff to initiate a General Plan Update to refine the *2000 Town of Los Gatos General Plan* based on four focus areas identified by the Town Council: environment and sustainability; parks and recreation; youth needs; and senior needs. This update includes revising existing goals, policies, and actions and adding relevant new goals, policies, and actions for each of the four focus areas.

The 2020 General Plan was developed with extensive community input and involvement and reflects the community’s vision for Los Gatos. The General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC) oversaw the 2020 General Plan Update, and the General Plan Committee (GPC) oversaw the update of the Housing Element. The GPAC, GPC, major 2020 General Plan milestones, and public participation opportunities are discussed below.

1. Community Involvement

As part of the 2020 General Plan Update process, the Town encouraged extensive community involvement through the following:

- ◆ **General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC).** The 17-member GPAC appointed by the Town Council included individuals from the Town Council, various Commissions and Committees, and members from the community at large. The GPAC provided input and direction, reviewed materials, and made recommendations to the Planning Commission and Town Council. GPAC meetings were noticed and open to the public.
- ◆ **General Plan Committee (GPC).** The GPC is a standing committee and advised staff and consultants on the update of the Housing Element. GPC meetings were noticed and open to the public.
- ◆ **Community Workshops and Panels.** Between November 2008 and August 2009, Town staff hosted three Community Workshops and a series of Community Panel discussions to provide opportunities for public involvement and input on the 2020 General Plan.
- ◆ **General Plan Website.** The Town developed a website, www.lggeneralplanupdate.org, to effectively disseminate information to the public regarding the General Plan process.

2. 2020 General Plan Phases

There were four phases in developing the 2020 General Plan. In the first phase, Town staff and consultants collected data on existing conditions in Los Gatos, which was summarized into a Background Report published on February 12, 2009. In the second phase, the GPAC worked with Town staff and consultants to update and add new goals and policies to the existing General Plan. This policy development work was done at GPAC meetings in August, September, and October 2009. In the third phase, with input from the Los Gatos community and the GPAC, Town staff and consultants developed the 2020 General Plan and Environmental Impact Report (EIR), which were published on March 10, 2010. In the final phase, Town staff and consultants developed the Final 2020 General Plan and EIR. Public hearings before the Planning Commission on the Final General Plan and EIR occurred

on June 30 and July 7, 2010. Public hearings before the Town Council were held on August 2, August 16, August 18, and September 20, 2010.

D. Organization and Contents

This section explains how the General Plan is organized and gives an overview of its contents.

1. Elements

The State requires that the General Plan contain seven elements: Land Use, Circulation, Housing, Open Space, Noise, Safety, and Conservation. 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 elements described below are included in the Los Gatos 2020 General Plan.

- ◆ **Land Use Element.** The State-required Land Use Element designates all lands within the Town for specific uses such as housing, commercial, industrial, and open space uses. The Land Use Element also provides development regulations for each land use category and overall land use policies for the Town. Additionally, the Land Use Element addresses agricultural and Williamson Act lands.
- ◆ **Community Design Element.** This optional Element is used to establish a strong sense of place and local identity for the Town through policies that address physical elements and design features of Los Gatos.
- ◆ **Housing Element.** Government Code Section 65588 requires Housing Elements to be updated at least every five to seven years and to include specific components such as analysis of the existing housing stock, analysis of existing and projected housing needs, and quantification of the number of housing units that could be developed, preserved, and improved through its policies and actions. The Housing Element is updated utilizing a separate process required by State law and is not published with the 2020 General Plan. However, it will be included in the final adopted General Plan.

- ◆ **Transportation Element.** State law requires a Circulation or Transportation Element to specify the general location and extent of existing and proposed major streets and other transportation facilities. As required by law, all facilities in the Transportation Element are correlated with the land uses foreseen in the Land Use Element.
- ◆ **Vasona Light Rail Element.** This optional Element focuses on addressing land use opportunities and challenges created by the extension of the Vasona Light Rail to Los Gatos along Winchester Boulevard.
- ◆ **Open Space and Recreation Element.** The Open Space and Recreation Element identifies both public and private open space within the Town. It addresses acquisition of open space, access to open space, open space and existing neighborhoods, open space and hillside preservation, and open space and development. This Element also addresses parks and recreation, and properties owned by the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District.
- ◆ **Environment and Sustainability Element.** This Element satisfies the requirements of State law for a Conservation Element. It establishes policies to protect natural resources, including biological resources, water resources, and energy resources. It also establishes policies for water service, wastewater, stormwater, and solid waste and recycling services. Policies to reduce negative impacts to air quality and greenhouse gas emissions are also included in this Element.
- ◆ **Noise Element.** State law requires a Noise Element as part of the General Plan to address the noise environment in the community and analyze and quantify current and projected noise levels from a variety of sources. The Noise Element includes goals, policies, and actions to address current and foreseeable noise problems.
- ◆ **Safety Element.** State law requires the General Plan to include a Safety Element. It provides goals, policies, and actions intended to protect the community from risks associated with the effects of seismic and other geologic hazards, urban and wildland fires, flooding and dam inundation,

and emergency preparedness. This Element also includes policy direction for police and fire services.

- ◆ **Human Services Element.** This optional Element includes goals, policies, and actions that address residents' needs and available resources. "Human services" refers to services in the community, both public and private, designed especially to meet the social, health, communication, education, and artistic needs of people, including youth and seniors. This Element also includes policy direction for school and library services.

2. Goals, Policies and Actions

Each element of the 2020 General Plan contains background information, guiding principles, and a series of goals, policies, and actions.



- ◆ **Goals:** A goal is a description of the general desired result that the Town seeks to create through the implementation of its General Plan.
- ◆ **Policies:** A policy is a specific statement that guides decision-making as the Town works to achieve a goal. Such policies, once adopted, represent statements of Town regulation and require no further implementation. The General Plan's policies set out the standards that will be used by Town staff, the Planning Commission, and Town Council in their review of land development projects and in decision-making processes.
- ◆ **Actions:** An action is a program, implementation measure, procedure, or technique intended to help achieve a specified goal. The Town must take additional steps to implement each action in the General Plan.

These goals, policies, and actions provide guidance to the Town on how to direct change and manage its resources over the next 10 years. Many of these goals, policies, and actions are long term in nature and therefore all of them may not be fully realized by 2020 due to fiscal constraints.

Policies and actions are at the same level of importance, and are both intended to implement goals. In most cases, goals have both implementing policies and actions. In some cases a goal may be implemented exclusively through either policies or actions. In general, policies that use the word "shall" or "require"

are mandatory. Policies that use the word “should” or “explore” are not mandatory; these policies provide guidance to the Town, but the Town is not required to follow them if the Town finds that the policy is not appropriate for a particular situation or if there are other factors, such as budget limitations, that would make it difficult to follow the policy direction. Policies that use the word “encourage” or “promote” communicate to landowners, applicants, and other persons policies that the Town supports but either does not have the authority to enforce or prefers not to make mandatory.

This 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.

3. The Green Leaf Symbol

Since the last General Plan Update in 2000, the issue of sustainability has gained importance at the local, State, national, and international level. Sustainability was one of four specific focus areas, along with parks and recreation, youth, and seniors, that the Town Council identified for in-depth attention during the creation of the 2020 General Plan. The 2020 General Plan includes a new Environment and Sustainability Element that reflects the importance of this fundamental issue.



However, there is increasing awareness that a sustainable approach, whether to daily life or to government operations, encompasses a wide variety of different activities, from driving less to conserving water to reducing solid waste generation. For that reason, policies and actions that support the Town’s goal of being a more sustainable community are not only contained in the Environment and Sustainability Element but are integrated throughout the 2020 General Plan. Wherever these policies and actions occur, they are identified with a green leaf symbol.

TOWN OF LOS GATOS
2020 GENERAL PLAN
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