

# 1 INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Seeking inexpensive land and new economic opportunities, John Bidwell, a New York native, joined an overland expedition of settlers and started westward in the spring of 1841. As a member of the first band of white settlers to cross the Sierra into California, Bidwell became enchanted with the beauty and the agricultural potential of the Chico Creek area, and purchased Rancho del Arroyo Chico on the north side of Chico Creek in 1844. As early as 1847 Bidwell maintained experimental orchards and fields along with his extensive farming operations.<sup>1</sup> He founded the City of Chico in 1860.

The original townsite was laid out in a grid pattern by J.S. Henry, a land surveyor. Chico State Normal School, the predecessor of California State University, was organized in 1887; Mrs. Bidwell donated the land and was a major benefactor. She also was instrumental in creating Bidwell Park, one of the largest public parks in the nation with over 2,000 acres. Bidwell Park was granted to the City in 1905, and the City Park Commission was created in 1918.

Outstripping its agricultural origins, Chico has grown from an individual rancho in 1844 to the center of economic activity of the Tri-county area, which includes Butte, Glenn, and Tehama counties. Currently, an estimated 46 percent of Butte County jobs are located in the Planning Area, and Chico captures about half of Butte County's retail sales, largely because of the regional malls and major discount retailers that have located in the community. Chico is a major medical and education center serving the entire north-eastern part of California.

The City's first General Plan was adopted in 1961, although long-range studies of city services and facilities preceded that date. The second Plan was adopted in 1976 and addressed a whole range of issues associated with development and environmental conservation. This Plan marks a continuum in Chico's established planning tradition. It is designed to provide the City and the citizens with a readable, accessible, and useable document containing policies to conserve and enhance the community's resources and provide for future growth and development.

Detailed information measures will be established separately, in an ordinance to be approved subsequent to plan adoption. Upon adoption by the City Council, this General Plan will replace the 1976 - 1995 General Plan, and will serve as the City's "constitution" and its statement of direction for its physical development for the next twenty or so years. It carries forward those goals and policies from the earlier Plan that are still relevant.

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<sup>1</sup> McGie, Joseph F. *History of Butte County, Volume 1, 1840-1919*. Butte County Board of Education, 1982.

This chapter provides an overview of the Plan themes, and the scope and organization of the General Plan. A glossary of planning terms follows the Appendix. The Index can be used to locate specific topics.

## **1.1 GENERAL PLAN THEMES**

The General Plan addresses citywide concerns about growth and conservation. Topics such as resource management, economic development, community design, affordable housing, safety, noise, and community services are included because they all have physical and environmental implications that are critical to the creation of a sustainable community.

The policies of the General Plan reflect nine overall themes:

- < **Sustainable Development that Balances Growth and Conservation.** Balancing concerns relating planning for growth and those focusing on conservation of resources is a key premise of the Plan. While the Plan does not dictate a growth rate, it seeks to ensure that growth does not erode those qualities of Chico that make it an attractive place in which to live and work.
- < **Resource-based Planning.** The Plan seeks to ensure that future growth will be in harmony with Chico's natural setting. Development in resource-sensitive areas will be permitted only upon preparation of plans and implementation strategies that will ensure the continued viability of the resources.
- < **Protection of Agricultural and Natural Resources.** The General Plan reaffirms the City's long-standing commitment to protect viable agricultural and natural resources. Fieldwork undertaken as part of the General Plan helped identify and establish priorities for protection of significant biotic resources in the Planning Area. The Plan outlines strategies for acquisition and preservation of sensitive habitats and creekside greenways and stipulates criteria for development in resource-sensitive areas.
- < **Setting Urban Growth Limits.** Much of the debate that accompanied Plan preparation has centered on where and how growth should occur. The General Plan Diagram reflects the citizens' desire for a compact form, with new development contiguous to existing urban areas. On the westside, the "Greenline" is maintained. On the eastside, the General Plan responds to concerns expressed about the need to limit development in the foothills and establish an urban limit line, based in part on elevation, to protect vernal pools and oak woodlands and preserve views of hillsides and open space.

- < **Enhancement of Community Character and Identity.** An assessment of community character was the first step undertaken as part of the General Plan Update. The Community Design Element outlines policies to reinforce the City's identity and to ensure that new development builds on the City's traditional character, and is responsive to pedestrians and bicyclists.
  
- < **Neighborhood-oriented Development.** A guiding premise of the Plan is that activities and facilities used on a frequent basis, such as stores and parks, should be easily accessible to residents. The General Plan directs new growth in the form of mixed-use neighborhoods and provides sites for parks, stores and offices in neighborhoods that presently lack them. The Plan provides more, smaller neighborhood centers and restricts larger outlets to appropriate sites in community and regional centers.
  
- < **Economic Development.** In addition to ensuring that adequate sites are available for future commercial and industrial development at appropriate locations, the Plan proposes a comprehensive strategy for job creation and job retention. This includes promotional activities targeted to environmentally-sensitive industries, education and training, technical assistance and direct financial aid, and programs to enhance the use of the airport and attract industry to its environs.
  
- < **Fostering Development Patterns that Offer Alternatives to Automobile Use.** Chico's level topography and mature landscape offer a pleasant environment for pedestrians and bicyclists. Yet many of the subdivisions built in the 1970s and 1980s create circuitous routes, and the single-use pattern in areas at the city-edge adds distance to trips. The Plan counters these trends by proposing development at intensities that would make transit feasible, land-use patterns to reduce distances between uses, and a renewed emphasis on traditional street patterns providing easy access for all residents, including bicyclists and pedestrians. A more connected bicycle system and standards to monitor bike-flows are also included. This emphasis on alternative transportation also will have air quality benefits.
  
- < **Using Performance-based Standards for Services to Ensure Sustainability.** Standards for capital facilities and public services, such as streets, parks, storm drainage and fire-safety, are established to ensure that growth does not exceed carrying capacity. To maintain the quality of public services for residents, new development would be required to meet specific standards established by the Plan. In addition, the Annual Report on the General Plan will include progress made towards implementing the mitigation contained in the EIR of the Plan.

## **1.2 GENERAL PLAN REQUIREMENTS**

State law requires each California city and county to prepare a general plan. A general plan is defined as “a comprehensive, long-term general plan for the physical development of the county or city, and any land outside its boundaries which in the planning agency's judgment bears relation to its planning.” State requirements call for general plans that “comprise an integrated, internally consistent and compatible statement of policies for the adopting agency.”

While they allow considerable flexibility, state planning laws do establish some requirements for the issues that general plans must address. The California Government Code establishes both the content of general plans and rules for their adoption and subsequent amendment. Together, state law and judicial decisions establish three overall guidelines for general plans.

- < **The General Plan Must Be Comprehensive.** This requirement has two aspects. First, the general plan must be **geographically** comprehensive. That is, it must apply throughout the entire incorporated area and it should include other areas that the City determines are relevant to its planning. Second, the general plan must address the **full range of issues** that affects the City's physical development.
  
- < **The General Plan Must Be Internally Consistent.** This requirement means that the General Plan must fully integrate its separate parts and relate them to each other without conflict. “Horizontal” consistency applies as much to figures and diagrams as to the general plan text. It also applies to data and analysis as well as policies. All adopted portions of the general plan, whether required by state law or not, have equal legal weight. None may supersede another, so the General Plan must resolve conflicts among the provisions of each element.
  
- < **The General Plan Must Be Long-Range.** Because anticipated development will affect the City and the people who live or work there for years to come, state law requires every general plan to take a long-term perspective. While the time-horizon at which buildout of the Plan would occur is not specified, it is expected that the City's natural growth rate will be maintained. No targets on annual growth rates are dictated by the Plan. An on-going review and evaluation process which enables the Plans' time-horizon to be extended regularly is provided for in this Plan.

### **1.3 SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF THE GENERAL PLAN**

While the Plan is long-range and holistic, global issues such as "quality of life" and "community character", and sufficiency issues, such as "ability to provide services" or "adequacy of land to meet future needs", are taken a step farther to establish a specific set of policies and standards to guide decision-making.

Chico's General Plan has five main purposes:

- < To outline a vision for Chico's long-range, sustainable, and resource-based development that reflects the aspirations of the community and a strategy for accomplishing that vision;
- < To provide a basis for judging whether specific development proposals and public projects are in harmony with Plan policies and resource-based standards and consistent with the concept of a sustainable community;
- < To provide a basis for continuing consultation with Butte County on policies and standards that are within the County's jurisdiction;
- < To allow City departments, other public agencies, and private developers to design projects that will enhance the character of the community, preserve and enhance critical environmental resources, and minimize hazards; and
- < To provide the basis for establishing and setting priorities for a capital improvement program.

The General Plan articulates a vision for the City, but it is not merely a compendium of ideas and wish lists. Plan policies focus on what is concrete and achievable and set forth actions to be undertaken by the City. Because of legal requirements that a variety of City actions be consistent with the General Plan, regular on-going use of the Plan is essential. Because the Plan is both general and long-range, there will be circumstances and instances when detailed studies are necessary before Plan policies can be implemented.

### **BACKGROUND STUDIES**

As part of the General Plan preparation, several technical studies were conducted to document environmental conditions, and analyze prospects for economic development, community character and growth, and expansion alternatives. Most important of these is the *Master Environmental Assessment*, which provides a comprehensive inventory of existing conditions in the Planning Area on topics ranging from land use, community design, transportation and environmental resources, to economic growth and community services. The *Master*

*Environmental Assessment* will be updated on a regular basis, preferably prior to the five-year comprehensive review of the Plan. Other studies include the *Community Character Assessment*, which assesses the physical character of Chico and includes results of a visual preference survey, and *Comprehensive Habitat Mapping and Biological Resource Inventory*, which includes results of fieldwork to assess biological resources. A series of policy memoranda and two working papers — *Opportunities, Constraints and Planning Options*, and *Sketch Plans* — were also produced.

While these background studies and working papers have guided Plan preparation, **they do not represent adopted City policy.**

## **1.4 PLAN ORGANIZATION**

The General Plan is organized in four main parts:

- I Community Design.** This part includes policies to conserve and promote Chico's character and identity, building on its traditional character and landscape, and the design framework for new development in the City.
- II Land Use, Transportation, and Community Development.** This part provides the physical framework for development in the Planning Area. It establishes policies related to the growth and expansion, location and intensity of development, and standards for public facilities and services. Also included is a chapter that provides specific policies that articulate an economic development strategy for the City.
- III Resource Management.** This part provides the framework for open space and environmental conservation and outlines ways to minimize the impact of safety hazards and noise.
- IV Housing.** A summary of the adopted Housing Element, including all the policies contained in the complete Element are included here.

Following Plan adoption, an Implementation Program will be prepared. It will outline the overall implementation strategy and the roles and responsibilities of the different agencies and City departments in carrying out the Plan.

The General Plan includes the seven elements required by state law (Land Use, Housing, Circulation, Open Space, Conservation, Noise and Safety) and other elements that address local concerns and regional requirements. The state-required mandatory elements are included in the General Plan, as outlined in Table 1.4-1.

**TABLE 1.4-1  
CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN REQUIRED GENERAL PLAN ELEMENTS AND SECTIONS  
IN THE CHICO GENERAL PLAN**

<b>Required Elements</b>	<b>Where included in the General Plan</b>
Land Use	Chapter 3: Land Use
Circulation	Chapter 4: Transportation
Conservation	Chapter 7: Open Space and Environmental Conservation
Housing	Chapter 10: Housing
Open Space	Chapter 7: Open Space and Environmental Conservation
Safety	Chapter 8: Safety
Noise	Chapter 9: Noise

### **ORGANIZATION OF THE ELEMENTS**

Each chapter or element of the General Plan includes a statement of purpose and a description of the requirements of state planning law for general plan adequacy. Pertinent information from the background reports is summarized and references to the *Master Environmental Assessment* (MEA) are listed for readers interested in specific detailed technical background information. The relation of each element to other Plan elements is also described. This introductory material is followed by topical sections, which include policies pertinent to the topics.

**Guiding and Implementing Policies.** The General Plan includes guiding policies and implementing policies. Guiding policies are the City's statements of its goals and philosophy. Implementing policies represent commitments to specific actions. They may refer to existing programs or call for establishment of new ones. Together, the guiding and implementing policies articulate a vision for Chico that the General Plan seeks to achieve. Guiding and implementing policies also provide protection for Chico's resources by establishing planning requirements, programs, standards, and criteria for project review.

Explanatory material accompanies some policies. This explanatory material provides background information or is intended to guide Plan implementation. The use of "should" or "would" indicates that a statement is advisory, not binding; details will need to be resolved in Plan implementation. Where the same topic is addressed in more than one chapter, sections and policies are cross-referred, typically in italics for easy reference.

**Policy Numbering System.** Policies in the General Plan are organized using a two-part numbering system. The first part refers to the element and the second the order in which the policy appears in the chapter, with a letter designation to distinguish guiding policies from implementing policies. For example, the first guiding policy in the Land Use Element is numbered

LU-G-1 and the first implementing policy is LU-I-1. Thus, each policy in the Plan has a discrete number.

## **1.5 PLANNING AREA**

The Chico Planning Area (Planning Area) for the General Plan consists of approximately 150 square miles of land located in the west-central portion of Butte County (Figure 1-1: Regional Setting). The Planning Area includes all of the incorporated City of Chico, and surrounding land which may influence, or be influenced by, City policies. State law generally describes a Planning Area as the City and "...any land outside its boundaries which in the planning agency's judgement bears relation to its planning."

## **1.6 PUBLIC OUTREACH PROGRAM**

In November 1991, the City Council appointed a 41-member Task Force to review the City's 1976 General Plan and to advise the Council on updating the Plan. The Task Force represented a cross-section of community interests, including environmental groups, utility providers, education, recreation, social services, business and economic interests, City boards and commissions, and also included at-large members.

The General Plan Task Force, meeting over a six-month period, identified critical issues facing Chico and recommended that a comprehensive update to the Plan be undertaken. The City Council concurred with the Task Force, and a consultant team was retained to work with City Council, the Task Force, and City staff on the update.

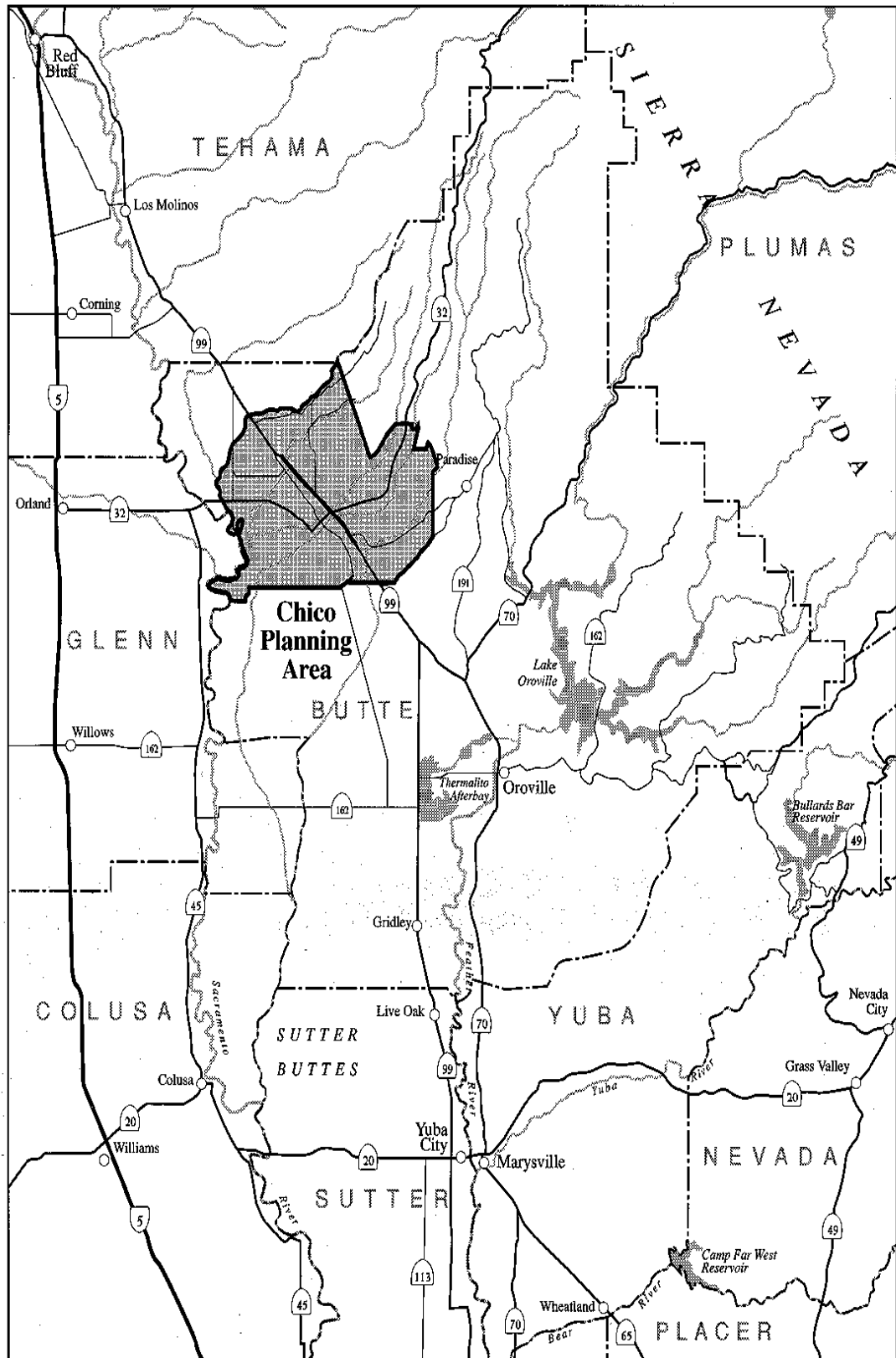


Figure 1-1: Regional Setting

In the following months, issues were refined, and a series of background studies, as outlined in Section 1.3, were undertaken to analyze existing conditions and evaluate prospects for growth and conservation. These were supplemented with interviews with residents representing a broad community viewpoint, including agricultural, business, environmental, student, minority, and development groups and service providers. Focused meetings, such as for scoping environmental issues, were also held.

Policy memoranda, sketch plans, and working papers were presented to the Task Force and were discussed and debated in meetings and in workshops. The City Council and the Planning Commission were involved at key decision-making points throughout the process. This involvement included numerous work sessions with the Task Force to review and comment on the Discussion Draft General Plan prior to publishing the Draft General Plan. An extensive outreach program to involve the public in the update of the Plan, summarized as follows, was also undertaken.

### **PUBLIC AWARENESS AND PARTICIPATION**

Throughout the General Plan update process, the City Council was committed to an active public outreach program. The program helped to increase public awareness and provided opportunities for the public to participate actively in the creation of a new vision for Chico.

Public awareness techniques included:

- < **Newsletters.** Newsletters were prepared periodically and distributed to agencies, groups, and interested parties. They were also provided to community organizations to insert in their own mail-outs, reaching a direct audience of an estimated 3,000 area residents.
  
- < **Display Boards.** These provided information about the update and were leased throughout the process. They were placed at high visibility locations and events, such as the North Valley Plaza and Chico malls, Butte County Library, City Council Chamber Lobby, Chico Silver Dollar Fair, Endangered Species Fair California State University, and Chico Earth Day.
  
- < **Video.** A video describing many of the important issues and opportunities facing the community in the Plan update was prepared early in the process in collaboration with Butte College. This video was made available on loan and shown at several community events.

In addition to the City Council and Planning Commission meetings, forums for residents to provide input included:

- < **Community Meetings.** These were held at two stages of the update process. Nine meetings were conducted during Spring 1993, and a second series of community meetings was held on the Draft General Plan in Summer 1994. Comments at the latter meetings were provided to the Planning Commission and City Council during hearings leading to adoption of the Plan.
- < **Cable Television.** Live call-in shows were held twice during the update process. Residents participated by calling in their questions or comments during the program. City staff, City Council members, Task Force representatives and the General Plan consultants responded to the questions live. The success of these programs has led to periodic City Council call-in shows.

The television media was also used during the process to provide live coverage of several joint City Council, Planning Commission, and Task Force work sessions on growth and land use issues, the Discussion Draft work sessions, and later on the Draft for Public Review of the General Plan. Final public hearings were also televised to the public.

## **1.7 THE PLANNING PROCESS**

The City's planning process includes monitoring and updating the General Plan and preparing of specific plans, resource management plans, neighborhood and special plans. An Annual General Plan Report will provide an overview of the status of the General Plan and its implementation programs.

**Amendments to the General Plan.** As the City's constitution for development, the General Plan is the heart of the planning process. It is intended to be a living document and, as such, will be subject to more site-specific and comprehensive amendments over time. Amendments also may be needed from time to time to conform to state or federal law passed since adoption and to eliminate or modify policies that may become obsolete or unrealistic due to changed conditions (such as completion of a task or project, development of a site, or adoption of an ordinance or plan).

State law limits the number of times a city can amend its general plan. Generally, no jurisdiction can amend any mandatory element of its general plan more than four times in one year, although each amendment may include more than one change to the general plan. This restriction, however, does not apply to amendments to:

- < Optional elements (such as the Community Design or Economic Development chapters of the Chico General Plan);
- < Allow development of affordable housing;
- < Comply with a court decision;
- < Comply with an applicable airport land use plan; or
- < Implement a comprehensive development plan under the Urban Development Incentive Act.

**Specific Plans.** To provide specific direction for development in certain geographic areas, the General Plan calls for preparation of specific plans (for example, the Diamond Match site or the Airport Environs, east of Cohasset Road). The legal requirements for such plans are established in the Government Code, and topics to be addressed in each specific plan are listed in Chapter 3: Land Use.

The City Council may establish, and from time to time modify, a schedule of fees imposed for the adoption and amendment of specific plans. The City Council, after adopting a specific plan, may impose special fees upon persons seeking governmental approvals which are required to be consistent with the specific plan. Consistent with state law, these fees would cover the cost of preparation, adoption, and administering the plans.

**Resource Management Plans.** To protect sensitive biological resources, the General Plan requires preparation of resource management plans before any subdivision or development may be approved that would affect certain sensitive biological resources. The location of these resources are mapped, and the specific requirements for these plans are presented in Chapter 7. If these plans are prepared as part of specific plans, the City Council may establish fees to recoup plan preparation costs.

**Neighborhood and Special Area Plans.** The General Plan envisions that, in certain circumstances, neighborhood and special area plans may be prepared to provide specific design guidelines and standards for the conservation and enhancement of neighborhoods and other areas possessing distinctive features or character. Such plans may accommodate new development on infill sites and also provide for the gradual elimination of incompatible uses. Neighborhood and

special area plans would be tailored to individual areas and may not necessarily address all of the topics required by state law for specific plans.

**Annual General Plan Report.** The Government Code requires that an annual report be submitted to the City Council on the status of the General Plan and progress in its implementation. This report also is to be submitted to the Governor's Office of Planning and Research and the Department of Housing and Community Development. It must include an analysis of the progress in meeting the City's share of regional housing needs and local efforts to remove governmental constraints to maintenance, improvement, and development of affordable housing. In addition, mitigation monitoring and reporting requirements prescribed by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) should be addressed in the Annual Report because they are closely tied to Plan implementation. Finally, the Annual Report should include a summary of all General Plan amendments adopted during the preceding year and an outline of upcoming projects and General Plan issues to be addressed in the coming year, along with a work program and budget.

The Annual Report will be prepared by City staff during the early stages of the budget process and submitted for review to the Planning Commission, which will make a recommendation to the City Council. Public comments on the Annual Report may be submitted in writing to the Community Development Department. The Planning Commission and the City Council also will hear public comments on the Annual Report at duly-noticed public hearings.

**Five-Year Review.** The City will undertake a comprehensive review of the General Plan every five years after adoption. This review will include:

- < Comprehensive evaluation of Plan policies;
- < Analysis of the effectiveness of implementation programs and strategies initiated to carry out the Plan;
- < Review of five-year growth trends and re-assessment of future urban land needs in light of the Planning Area's carrying capacity and available land inventory; and
- < Systematic assessment of the resource-based thresholds, environmental standards, and resource management plans.

The focus of this five-year review will be to determine how well the General Plan has performed — whether policies related to development and environmental conservation have been effective. A report summarizing City staff's findings and recommendations will be circulated for public comment and then presented to the Planning Commission. The Planning Commission will review the report on the five-year review and make a recommendation to the City Council. The Planning Commission and the City Council also will hear comments on the report at duly-noticed public hearings.

