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# City of East Palo Alto General Plan

December 1999

## CITY COUNCIL

Sharifa Wilson, Mayor  
Duane Bay, Vice-Mayor  
R.B. Jones, Councilmember  
Patricia Foster, Councilmember  
Myrtle Walker, Councilmember

## CONSULTANTS TO THE CITY IN PREPARATION OF THE GENERAL PLAN

**Cotton/Beland/Associates, Inc.**  
Urban and Environmental Planning Consultants  
San Diego and Pasadena

**Dinwiddie & Associates**  
Planning Consultants  
Oakland and San Ramon





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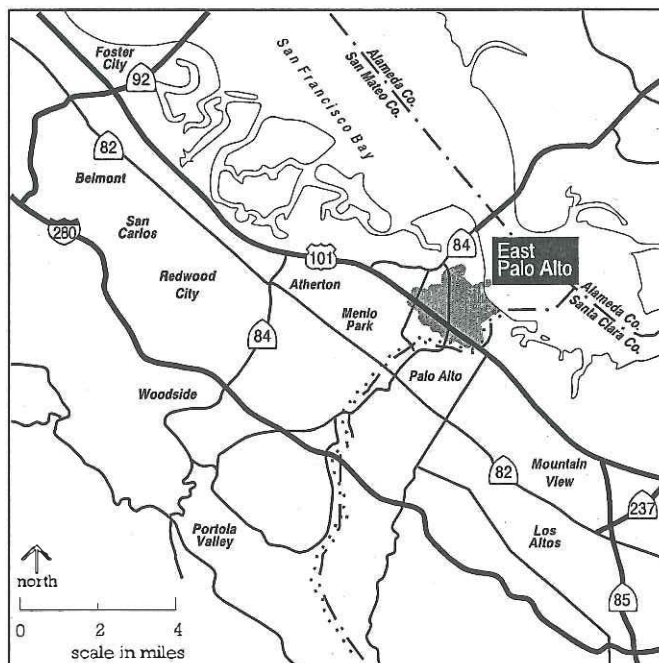
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## Need for the General Plan

East Palo Alto, incorporated in 1983, is striving to become a stable and productive community. While the character of East Palo Alto has not changed substantially over the past two to three decades, the current population has created a complex city with a wide range of needs and opportunities.

One of the responsibilities of an incorporated city is planning its future growth and development. According to state law, a city must prepare, update and adopt its General

Plan as a tool to manage growth. The City of East Palo Alto General Plan serves as a policy guide for determining the appropriate physical development and character of the City. The General Plan is founded upon the community's vision for East Palo Alto and expresses the community's long-term goals. Implementation of the East Palo Alto General Plan will ensure that future development projects are consistent with community goals and that adequate urban services are available to meet the needs of new development. The General Plan provides a continuum between the City's unique cultural heritage and the East Palo Alto of tomorrow.



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Vacant land in East Palo Alto is composed primarily of individual or small groups of parcels which are generally surrounded by development. These "infill" properties will be the site of much of the new development in the City; but the much larger, developed area of the City will continue to define the basic character of East Palo Alto. Therefore, the General Plan emphasizes redevelopment or renovation of major portions of the community critical to the achievement of fiscal stability.

### *East Palo Alto Planning Area*

Located at the southerly end of the San Francisco Peninsula's populous bayside (see Figure I-1), East Palo Alto has a warm, pleasant climate with fertile, level land. The Bay lies to the east, industrial sections and the Belle Haven area of Menlo Park to the north, and the Willows section of Menlo Park to the west. San Francisco Creek is the southern boundary of East Palo Alto and of San Mateo County.

East Palo Alto has no legal ties with Palo Alto in Santa Clara County; however, traffic, street patterns, business connections, and newspaper coverage tie the two communities together. East Palo Alto and Menlo Park work together on common projects, such as plans for the improvement of Willow Road.

Community identity was significantly strengthened through the City's incorporation on July 1, 1983. Following incorporation, the City's first General Plan was adopted in 1986.

### *History of the Community*

The history of East Palo Alto began long before the names of Ravenswood or East Palo Alto were first used. The remains of the earliest known inhabitants of the San Francisco Bay Area were discovered in what is now East Palo Alto. In 1798, the area was a portion of the Rancho de las Pulgas, the largest ranch in the Bay Area.

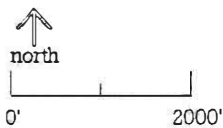
In 1848, a wharf was built at the end of Bay Road in the area which is now East Palo Alto. It provided shipping for the lumber from Searsville and Woodside, and for hay and other cargo. This area provided the first port in what was to become San Mateo County. In 1851, the almost forgotten town of Ravenswood, the first regularly platted town in San Mateo county, flourished for a time as the hub of Peninsula shipping. The steamer "Jenny Lind" traveled between San Francisco and Ravenswood, where passengers disembarked and proceeded by stagecoach to San Jose. The site of the old Ravenswood wharf was for many years known as Cooley's Landing, named for Lester Cooley who bought the wharf and surrounding property in 1868. In 1853, the United States Coastal Survey erected near the wharf the sandstone Pulgas Base Monument, which is still at the east end of Jack Farrell Park.

With the completion of the railroad from San Francisco to San Jose, transportation was diverted from Ravenswood, and the decline of the port followed. In 1910 new subdivisions were developed on higher and better drained land. In 1916, Charles Weeks founded the famous Weeks Poultry Colony, a cooperative venture, called Runnymede, which lasted into the 1930's. Its six hundred acres were divided into one- and five-acre plots. Runnymede colonies prospered, and by 1925, the population of the area reached 918.





City Boundary



SOURCE: City of East Palo Alto

Figure I-1  
East Palo Alto

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A local dispute broke out concerning the name of the school district, which had been Ravenswood since 1882. The Runnymede colonists wanted their own name, but in 1923, the County Board of Supervisors voted to preserve the name Ravenswood. The name of the whole area was also in dispute and at an informal election on December 12, 1925, the compromise choice, East Palo Alto, won the majority of votes. At that time there was talk of annexing to the City of Palo Alto, but proposed enabling legislation was never enacted.

In the 1940's, with the influx of World War II veterans into new subdivisions, the population rose to 8,000 people. Flower-growing became the chief agricultural activity in the large-lot areas. The first major industry, an aircraft plant, moved into the area in 1948. However, the area containing this plant and a residential section, Belle Haven, were annexed to Menlo Park in 1949.

During the 1960s and 1970s annexation began to take a heavy toll on the community of East Palo Alto. The City of Menlo Park annexed "...Belle Haven, Newbridge Park, North Palo Alto, and part of Runnymede, as well as Cooley Landing, vast tracts of bay front open space and two industrial parks." (*A History of East Palo Alto*). The City of Palo Alto managed to have San Francisquito Creek diverted and East Palo Alto's southern boundary redrawn in order to annex the airport area and golf course.

This annexation by neighboring communities left the City of East Palo Alto with little industrial or commercial land use and had a direct impact on the City's ability to generate a revenue base large enough to provide services if the area decided to incorporate. Consequently, East Palo Alto applied to the City of Palo Alto for annexation in 1966, but the application was denied. Two other

attempts at annexation (1978 and 1981) to the City of Palo Alto also failed.

A 1980 study found that East Palo Alto incorporation was not economically feasible and recommended annexation to the City of Menlo Park. The East Palo Alto Municipal Council contested these findings and the final incorporation report included a recommendation for incorporation, under certain conditions. Pro-City supporters filed papers in the spring of 1981 seeking to place the issue on the November ballot. After two elections, East Palo Alto incorporated in 1983. Several lawsuits were filed and one case went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. The High Court declined to hear the matter and East Palo Alto was successfully incorporated, becoming the first city in the nation to have a black woman mayor.

Today, East Palo Alto is an ethnically diverse community. While the percentage of African Americans has declined in recent years, the number of Hispanics, Pacific Islanders, Asians and other races has increased. Nearly one-third of the City's residents were born outside the United States.

The City's "Vision for the Future" expresses a desired direction for today's community. Developed by the General Plan Advisory Committee this vision statement provides a foundation for the General Plan.

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## *Vision for the Future of East Palo Alto*

"By the year 2005, the City of East Palo Alto envisions itself as a vibrant urban community which embraces the diversity of its heritage, people and cultures. East Palo Alto will be known for its community attributes and special natural resources. The City supports a General Plan that maintains social richness and fosters a holistic approach to growth.

The General Plan will be a practical guide for growth and development of the City, as directed by members of the community. Planned economic growth and development will create a strong fiscal basis and sustainable community, conserving resources and providing a range of living opportunities. Also envisioned are focal points within neighborhoods to promote friendly, neighborly collaboration and cooperation, as well as community identity and active citizen participation.

### *Purpose of the General Plan*

California state law requires each City to adopt a comprehensive, long-term General Plan to guide the physical development of the incorporated city and any land outside of the city boundaries which bears a relationship to its planning activities. In essence, a city's General Plan serves as the blueprint for future growth and development. As a blueprint for the future, the plan must contain policies and programs designed to provide decision makers with a solid basis for decisions related to land use and development.

The East Palo Alto General Plan addresses many issues that are directly related to and influence land use decisions. In addition to land use, state law requires the Plan to address circulation, housing, conservation of natural resources, preservation of open space, noise, and protection of public safety (Section 65302 of the California Government Code).

These issues are discussed to the extent that they apply to East Palo Alto. The Plan also covers topics of special and unique interest, such as economic development.

According to state law, the General Plan is the primary document the City utilizes to regulate land use. Consequently, the Zoning Ordinance, Specific Plans, and individual public and private development proposals must be consistent with the Plan goals, policies and standards.

### *Organization and Use of the General Plan*

The City of East Palo Alto General Plan contains goals, policies, and plans which are intended to guide land use and development decisions into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The General Plan consists of a Land Use Policy Map and the following seven elements, or chapters,

which together fulfill the state requirements for a General Plan:

- Land Use Element
- Circulation Element
- Conservation and Open Space Element
- Safety Element
- Noise Element
- Economic Development
- Housing Element

The table below shows the relationship between the seven elements of the East Palo Alto General Plan and the state-mandated elements. The East Palo Alto elements sometimes deviate from the state-mandated elements. For instance, public utilities are included in the state requirements for the Circulation Element, but are addressed in the Land Use Element of the East Palo Alto General Plan.

**Supporting Documentation**

Several supporting documents were produced during the development of the East Palo Alto General Plan, including the General Plan Program Environmental Impact Report (Program EIR) and the 1994 Community Profile. This document provides substantial background information for the General Plan. Additional information was obtained from published documents and City staff. These documents are identified within the introductions for each element.

The General Plan Program EIR analyzes the potential environmental impacts associated with development of East Palo Alto according to the General Plan land use policy, and implementation of the General Plan.

**Relationship of East Palo Alto General Plan Elements To State-Mandated Elements**

East Palo Alto General Plan Element	State-Mandated General Plan Elements						
	Land Use	Housing	Circulation	Conservation/ Open Space	Safety	Noise	Optional
Land Use	✓						
Circulation			✓				
Conservation and Open Space				✓			
Safety					✓	✓	
Noise							
Economic Development							✓
Housing		✓					



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**Organization  
and How to  
Use the Plan**

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The General Plan is comprised of this Introduction and seven elements. Each element is an integral part of the General Plan and each element is designed to be consistent with all other elements of the Plan. The General Plan is accompanied by an Appendix that includes an Implementation Plan and Glossary. The elements and the Implementation Plan will help the City achieve the vision for the future. Each of the seven General Plan elements is organized according to the following format: 1) Introduction; 2) Issues, Goals and Policies; and 3) Plan.

The Introduction of each element describes the focus and the purpose of the element. Also identified are other plans and programs outside of the General Plan that may be used to achieve specific General Plan goals. The relationship of the element to other General Plan elements is also specified in the Introduction.

The Issues, Goals and Policies section of each element contains a description of identified planning issues, goals and policies related to the element topic. The issues, goals and policies are based on input received from the General Plan Advisory Committee; members of the City Council, Planning Commission and Public Works and Transportation Commission, City staff, and the community.

The issues represent the opportunities, constraints or concerns that are addressed by the General Plan. The goals are overall statements of community desires and are comprised of broad statements of purpose or direction. The policies serve as guides to the City Council, Planning Commission, Public Works and Transportation Commission, and the City staff in reviewing development proposals and making other decisions that

affect the future growth and development of East Palo Alto.

Each element also contains a Plan section. The Plan provides an overview of the City's course of action to implement the identified goals and policies. For example, the Land Use Element contains a "Land Use Plan" indicating the types and intensities of land use permitted in the City. The Circulation Element contains a "Circulation Plan" describing the overall circulation system required to meet the future needs of East Palo Alto. Wherever possible, the Plan contains illustrative maps, diagrams and tables.

Following the elements is the Implementation Program (in Appendix A) which identifies specific actions to achieve the goals, policies and plans identified in each General Plan element. The Implementation Program is reviewed and updated periodically to update specific actions, schedules, responsible parties and measures to ensure that General Plan goals, policies and plans are implemented. The Glossary is also an appendix of the General Plan and provides a set of definitions for technical terms.

The organization of the General Plan allows users to turn to the section that interests them and quickly obtain perspective on the City's policies on the subject. However, General Plan users should realize that the policies in the various elements are interrelated and should be examined comprehensively. Policies are presented as written statements, tables, diagrams and maps. All of these policy components must be comprehensively considered when making planning decisions.

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## *Community Participation in the General Plan Program*

Active citizen input has historically been a valuable community asset of East Palo Alto. Continuing this tradition, the public played an important role in the updating of the East Palo Alto General Plan. Because the General Plan reflects vision for the future, citizen input was essential in identifying issues and formulating the vision. Public participation in the General Plan preparation process occurred through the following methods:

- ***A Program Initiation Workshop*** launched the public participation program for the General Plan. The purpose of the Initiation Forum was to stimulate interest in the General Plan and create community-wide recognition of program commencement, content and schedule.
- ***Four General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC) workshops*** were held during the public participation program. The first three workshops were sessions designed to review the overall program, develop a Vision Statement for the Plan, identify issues and suggest sections to address those issues. A final General Plan Advisory Committee workshop was held to review the Preliminary Draft General Plan before the beginning of public hearings.
- ***Four City Council/Planning Commission workshops*** were held during the public participation program. These decision maker workshops included discussion of: a) issues, goals and policies; b) review of land use and circulation alternatives and selection of a preferred alternative for inclusion in the Plan; and c) review of a

preliminary Draft General Plan.

- The public had opportunities to address decision makers directly regarding issues, concerns and desires at ***four GPAC workshops and four City Council/Planning Commission workshops***.
- The Draft General Plan, Draft Environmental Impact Report, and supporting documents were circulated for public review and comment before and during ***General Plan public hearings*** held before the Planning Commission and City Council.

## *Connection to the Future*

East Palo Alto is facing technological, environmental and economic changes. The changes create opportunities for greater prosperity. Existing land use and transportation patterns are established, but many new opportunities for residential and economic development exist. Because the area is primarily developed and basic land use patterns are determined, planning efforts will focus on stimulating new economic development, revitalizing older areas, and enhancing the amenities and environmental features that make East Palo Alto unique.

The General Plan and its "Vision for the Future" provide a connection between the community of today and desired community of the future. Strategies are established to take advantage of technological, environmental and economic opportunities, and to achieve community goals. The policies and plans in the elements, together with the Implementation Program provide guidance for dealing with changing conditions and specific

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actions to optimize the community's potential. The connection established in the General Plan is an integrated union of the enduring historic values and innovative approaches to achieve the "Vision for the Future."

