

# **Chapter I**

## **Introduction to the Modesto Urban Area General Plan**

The City of Modesto (City) is located in Stanislaus County, in the northern section of California’s San Joaquin Valley. The Central Pacific Railroad founded the original Modesto community in 1870, on a site near the Tuolumne River. Incorporated in 1884, the City of Modesto is the county seat of Stanislaus County (County), and has traditionally served as the regional center for the County and surrounding area.

### **A. WHAT IS THE GENERAL PLAN?**

In California, the General Plan has often been described as a “blueprint for future growth” or a “constitution for future development” of a community. The General Plan for Modesto is best described as “a set of instructions on how to build a city.” This concept is further underscored by the General Plan’s full name, the City of Modesto Urban Area General Plan.

From a practical standpoint, the General Plan is a set of policies, charts, maps, and other graphics which collectively respond to California State Law requirements (Section 65300 et. seq. of the Government Code), structured to meet local conditions. The Modesto Urban Area General Plan is intended to guide the physical development of the overall Modesto community to 2040.

### **B. WHAT IS THE VISION OF THIS COMMUNITY?**

Whether the General Plan is a blueprint, a constitution, or a set of instructions, it must be focused on the community vision(s). A brief history of Modesto’s General Plan is provided here, as well as the future visions that guide this General Plan.

#### **1. Prior General Plans**

Modesto adopted its first General Plan in 1959. The General Plan was comprehensively updated in 1974 and 1995. Since then, the General Plan has been amended several times, including periodic Housing Element updates as required by State law.

#### **2. Visions for the Future**

##### **a. Overall Mission Statement**

The following Mission Statement was originally developed by the 1995 General Plan Citizens’ Steering Committee:

The Modesto Urban Area General Plan addresses the collective challenges of the future. The General Plan presents a blueprint for the preservation of Modesto’s “quality of life” while providing direction for the growth of business and industry to meet the needs of future generations in the Modesto community.

**b. Employment Opportunities**

A guiding force in this General Plan is economic development to provide jobs to match housing and population growth. This General Plan provides for more than 5,000 total acres of new Business Park and Commercial land acreage combined, which contributes to the potential for approximately 295,000 total jobs (both existing and new / future combined) within the General Plan boundary (see Figure III-1).

**c. Comprehensive Planning**

As Modesto grows, comprehensive planning approaches are needed to respond to increasingly complex land development and public facilities and service issues.

**d. Accommodating Mobility Needs**

This General Plan envisions a street system, supplemented by transit, passenger rail and non-motorized transportation systems, to provide for efficient movement of people, goods and services, and to reduce traffic congestion and reduce vehicle miles traveled over time. Funding for new roadway improvements is provided by “Measure L,” which is a half-cent sales tax approved by voters in November 2015. This General Plan includes innovative methods for identification and resolution of traffic-related issues and problems. Chapter V, Transportation, contains related policies.

**e. Maintaining Older Neighborhoods**

Modesto’s historic and older neighborhoods provide a wide range of aesthetic and lifestyle choices. Support and reinforce the appeal, character, and economic value of existing neighborhoods. The City’s Strategic Plan calls for community partnerships to address improved public safety through collaboration with police, fire and other staff. Invest in infrastructure improvements and revitalization efforts to ensure the continued vitality of these areas (see Chapter III.C.2, Neighborhoods).

**f. Integrating New Neighborhoods and Development**

Integrate new development into the fabric of existing adjacent neighborhoods, with strong pedestrian connections, compatible scale and complementary architecture. The City’s development standards and design guidelines will help realize this vision as new development occurs (see Chapter III.C.2, Neighborhoods).

**g. Agricultural Land Preservation**

Agriculture is a leading industry in Stanislaus County. The County’s total value of agriculture production in 2015 was approximately \$3.9 billion. On April 9, 2013, the Modesto City Council adopted Resolution No. 2013-130, which directs City staff to advise development project applicants about LAFCo’s Agricultural Preservation Policy.

LAFCo policy requires that proposals for annexation and/or sphere of influence expansion be subject to a Plan for Agricultural Preservation. The Plan for Agricultural Preservation must specify the method or strategy proposed to minimize the loss of agricultural lands. The

policy then provides a menu of commonly-used strategies that are encouraged. Purchase of conservation easement(s), payment of in-lieu fees or municipal adoption of an urban growth boundary are examples of these commonly-used strategies, and other methods may also prove viable on a case-by-case basis.

## **C. WHAT ARE THE OVERALL GOALS BEHIND THIS COMMUNITY VISION?**

The following goals, phrased as Project Objectives, were instrumental in developing the policies presented in the Modesto Urban Area General Plan. These objectives were derived from concepts initially developed by the General Plan Steering Committee, a group appointed by the City Council in 1992 to oversee the General Plan rewrite effort, and they have been updated to reflect industry-standard best practices and new legislation.

- Goal C1.** Design future urban expansion for residential uses in the form of complete neighborhoods. These neighborhoods should contain housing, shops, schools, parks, and civic facilities essential to the daily life of the residents. This development should implement land use practices that assist in meeting state and federal environmental regulations. This General Plan promotes development at higher densities / intensities than those of the past, in order to minimize sprawl. The outcome will be an economically and environmentally sustainable City, where citizens have access to quality housing, employment, transportation and recreation opportunities.
- Goal C2.** Provide transportation and circulation systems that adequately furnish intra-city and regional transportation needs. Alternatives to the drive-alone auto mode, such as light rail, mass transit, ride sharing, bicycling, trail systems, and telecommuting should be encouraged to reduce traffic congestion and vehicle miles traveled, and to enhance air quality. The City's transportation planning should be coordinated with regional transportation planning efforts wherever possible.
- Goal C3.** Maintain an ample supply of specialized open space, strategically located and well-designed, in order to promote frequent use from the community. Preserve natural river corridors for recreational and open space opportunities.
- Goal C4.** Minimize the loss of agricultural land outside the planning area by facilitating future development that is relatively compact and of reasonably high density. Resolve potential conflicts between agricultural and urban uses through appropriate land use measures and other best practices.
- Goal C5.** Advance public health, particularly with regard to improved air quality. Development in Modesto should be consistent with:
- Regional initiatives, such as the San Joaquin Valley Smart Growth Blueprint principles;
  - State regulations, such as Gov't Code Section 65302(b) (2) et. seq. (complete streets);
  - Federal guidance, including the HUD-EPA-DOT Livability Principles; and,
  - Local priorities, focused on Downtown revitalization, infill development and transportation corridor enhancements.

## **D. WHAT ARE THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GOALS OF THIS VISION?**

The following economic development goals are supported by policies located in Chapter II, section B.

- Goal D1.** Strive for a local jobs/housing balance by facilitating business growth and encouraging the economic revitalization of the downtown. Provide adequate land, strategically located to facilitate the expansion of Modesto’s economic base, for the employment opportunities of Modesto residents. These opportunities should be focused on the types of businesses that will thrive in the 21st century.
- Goal D2.** Work to preserve and revitalize the downtown core as an identifiable center for all of Stanislaus County, and to maintain the City as a regional center for financial services, medical services, shopping, entertainment, and education. Downtown Modesto is the focal point of community life and the social, cultural, business, governmental, and entertainment center of the region.
- Goal D3.** Allow regional commercial uses within business park areas. Provide support for retention and growth of existing firms, and target new companies and industries that will help diversify the existing economic base.
- Goal D4.** Encourage and accommodate a diversity of housing types to enable citizens from a wide range of economic levels and age groups to live within its boundaries.
- Goal D5.** Manage community growth so that quality of life is enhanced without imposing significant fiscal burdens on the existing community. To the extent provided by law, the costs of public infrastructure required to serve new development should be financed from revenue attributable to that development. Provide infrastructure in advance of, or concurrent with development. There may be instances in which it would be appropriate to invest community-wide resources in public infrastructure, when such investment would lead to a significant increase in jobs or other benefits to the community.
- Goal D6.** Create and administer financing programs based on sufficient user fees and service charges that allow for those utility services to be self-supporting.

## **E. HOW DOES THE STRATEGIC PLAN REFLECT THIS COMMUNITY VISION?**

The 2015 City of Modesto Strategic Plan consists of four (4) basic Commitments, described below. While these Strategic Commitments were developed independently of the Community Vision, they are reflective of the Community Vision. Following each of the Strategic Commitments is a list of General Plan Goals that relate to and support the applicable Strategic Commitment.

- Goal E1. Great, Safe Neighborhoods Strategic Commitment** – Explore new approaches to public safety through community partnerships, to reduce crime and maintain a safe and inviting community in which to live, work and play. Increase collaboration with city neighborhood groups and school districts to achieve quality of life improvements and safer neighborhoods through supporting community self-reliance, problem-solving and public-private partnerships (supported by Chapter I Goals C1, C2, & C3, Chapter II Goal II.F, and Chapter III Goals III.B & III.C).

- Goal E2. Healthy Economy & Great Quality of Life Strategic Commitment** – Increase the City’s proactive economic development efforts by creating and preserving jobs, strengthening our local economy and strategically enhancing the City’s revenue base (supported by Chapter I Goals D2, D3 & D5, Chapter II Goals II.B & II.D, and Chapter III Goals III.B & III.H).
- Goal E3. Effective, Responsive & Transparent Government Strategic Commitment** – Develop new and creative methods to leverage technology, market organizational strengths and remain dedicated to seeking efficiency and continuous improvement (supported by Chapter II Goals II.D, II.E, II.G, II.H & II.K).
- Goal E4. Vibrant Infrastructure & Sustainable Environment Strategic Commitment** – Strengthen and maintain a safe infrastructure of city roads, water supply, storm sewers, transit and airport needs for residents, businesses and visitors (supported by Chapter I Goals C1 & C2, Chapter III goal III.E, and Chapter V Goals V.D, V.E, V.F, V.G & V.H).

## **F. GENERAL PLAN MAINTENANCE**

### **1. Annual Report to the State / Maintenance of the General Plan**

Each year, the Governor’s Office of Planning and Research (OPR) conducts the Local Government Planning Survey to simplify and standardize local governments’ compliance with Section 65400 of the Government Code. Section 65400 requires California cities and counties to report annually to OPR and the State Department of Housing and Community Development on their planning activities. The survey also identifies local issues and problems, which OPR may be able to help remedy by providing technical assistance.

### **2. Maintenance of the General Plan Master Environmental Impact Report**

The General Plan Master Environmental Impact Report (MEIR) is the General Plan companion document that provides environmental analyses associated with the “project” (future development described in the General Plan), as required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The MEIR promotes significant streamlining of subsequent projects if they are consistent with the General Plan, as well as the assumptions, conclusions, and mitigation measures presented in the MEIR. The MEIR may streamline further CEQA review for subsequent projects, which are defined in Section 21157.1 of the Public Resources Code. This streamlining results in economic benefits for developers of projects that are consistent with the General Plan and MEIR.

### **3. General Plan Amendment Process**

Over time, various sections of the Modesto Urban Area General Plan may need to be revised. The policies presented in this General Plan contain some degree of flexibility, but any General Plan Amendments must be judged by relatively fixed criteria. The following process must be followed in reviewing proposed General Plan Amendments:

#### **a. Description of Amendment**

Proposals to amend the Urban Area General Plan must be accompanied by detailed information to document the change requested. This information should include revised

General Plan text (or excerpt thereof) and a revised Land Use Diagram, where relevant, depicting the amendment requested.

**b. Presentation of Need for Amendment**

Any proposals to amend the General Plan must document the need for such changes. The applicant should indicate the economic, social, or technical issues that create the need to amend the General Plan.

**c. Criteria for Analysis of General Plan Amendment**

Any proposal to amend the Modesto Urban Area General Plan should be analyzed for the amendment's effects with regard to the following issues:

- (1) Compatibility with surrounding, existing, and planned land uses;
- (2) Traffic impacts, both existing and planned;
- (3) Air quality impacts, as addressed in the MEIR;
- (4) Water quality impacts, as addressed in the MEIR;
- (5) Water supply and wastewater, as addressed in the MEIR;
- (6) Preservation of open space, both existing and planned;
- (7) Public Facilities and Public Services; and,
- (8) Consistency with the overall goals and policies contained within the General Plan.

**G. READER'S GUIDE TO THIS GENERAL PLAN**

Each of the General Plan elements, data sets, analyses, goals, policies, and implementation programs must be consistent with and complement one another. The General Plan is “a set of instructions on how to build the City.” Briefly stated, the “instructions” are presented in the eight (8) chapters listed below. This list also references which chapters relate to each of the required nine (9) elements of the General Plan: *Land Use; Open Space; Conservation; Housing; Circulation; Noise; Safety; Air Quality; and, Environmental Justice*. Much of the element-specific content for each of the nine elements is not necessarily presented in a “stand-alone” dedicated chapter or section, but rather it is dispersed among the various relevant chapters, sections, goals, policies, maps, diagrams and exhibits. Individual goals and policies also contain these element-specific references.

The new Environmental Justice element was prepared according to SB1000, which establishes the requirements for related content and analyses. Through review of CalEPA's CalEnviroScreen tools and resources, staff has noted that the vast majority of Modesto qualifies as Disadvantaged. As a result, the Environmental Justice element is intended to apply within the entire GPA 2040 boundary. Disadvantaged communities are generally associated with high poverty levels and pollution exposure. The Environmental Justice element is intended to improve conditions within Disadvantaged communities and

neighborhoods by applying policies that could reduce pollution, enhance housing options, improve access to healthy foods and create additional opportunities for physical activity. General Plan’s EJ policies that relate to housing are contained within the Housing Element, which was last amended and certified in 2016, and which is not a part of the GPA 2040 project.

Chapter I, *Introduction to the Modesto Urban Area General Plan*.

Chapter II, *Community Growth Strategy and Economic Development*, contains policies and a diagram to help define the quality, quantity, and direction of future urban growth. Content related to Economic Development is also included. (*Land Use, Environmental Justice*)

Chapter III, *Community Development Policies*, contains the “instructions” for building the actual physical components of the City in a manner consistent with Chapter II. (*Land Use, Air Quality, Environmental Justice*)

Chapter IV, *Housing*, adds “affordable housing” policy requirements to the physical community developed through Chapter III. (*Housing, Land Use*)

Chapter V, *Transportation*, describes the various transportation-related goals, policies and infrastructure needed to support the physical community developed through Chapter III. (*Circulation, Air Quality, Environmental Justice*)

Chapter VI, *Community Facilities and Services*, presents information related to public utilities, services and resources – including public safety. (*Circulation, Noise*)

Chapter VII, *Environmental Resources and Open Space*, presents the local open space plan and physical and environmental resources in the community. Policies required by state law to consider certain safety issues such as landslides, flooding, and emergency evacuation rates are also included. (*Conservation, Open Space, Safety, Land Use*)

Chapter VIII, *General Plan Implementation*, presents a variety of tools available to the City to help build the physical City envisioned in Chapter III.

Appendix A, *The Consolidated Plan Executive Summary*, directs the City’s investment of federal funds to meet priority needs for housing, public services, and community and economic development.

Appendix B, *Amendments to the General Plan*, lists amendments to the 1995 General Plan.