



# STAFF REPORT

## PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

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January 24, 2023

**TO:** Honorable Chair and Commissioners

**FROM:** David Loya, Director of Community Development

**PREPARER:** Susan Diehl McCarthy, Community Development Specialist

**DATE:** January 18, 2023

**TITLE:** **Land Use and Growth Management Element Updates**

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### **RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff recommends the Planning Commission: 1) review and consider the information presented regarding the Land Use Element and Growth Management Element Updates; 2) receive public comment; and 3) ask questions and provide guidance to staff.

### **INTRODUCTION:**

The City is currently updating the 2020 General Plan, including the Land Use and Growth Management Elements. City's existing Land Use and Growth Management Elements are generally considered by staff to already successfully guide development. Staff is working to undertake modifications to the existing documents to strengthen existing guiding principles, goals, and policies, particularly related to infill housing development.

### **DISCUSSION:**

Proposed updates to the Growth Management and Land Use Elements are described below. Tracked changes versions of these Elements are included in your packet; both the tracked changes and clean versions of the Elements may be found online at <https://www.cityofarcata.org/974/General-Plan-Updates>.

The Land Use and Growth Management Elements are being brought before the commission together, as they are in a sense two sides of the same coin: policy updates propose to densify Arcata's urban core through intensifying existing infill development policies, while continuing to aggressively protect Arcata's existing greenbelt and working agricultural lands.

The majority of the City's growth has been, and is planned to be, within the present City boundary and concentrated within identified activity centers including Infill Opportunity Areas (including the Gateway Area as well as around the downtown area), existing neighborhood commercial centers, and near Cal Poly Humboldt. Growth is directed to these areas because they have existing urban services and infrastructure. In addition, infill implements the regional Climate Action Plan and the City's sea level rise adaptation plan, preserves the natural and open working lands surrounding the City, and provides needed reinvestment in existing developed areas.

As explained by the State of California Governor's Office of Planning and Research, the most fundamental decisions in planning begin with land use: what to put where. Land use planning envisions the future of a city or county and interacts with all other elements of planning. At its best, the land use element will reflect the community's vision; promote thoughtful, equitable, and accessible distribution of different land uses, including residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, and open space; and align well with other general plan elements. Planners can also use the land use element as a tool to improve public health, reduce infrastructure costs, enhance local economies, and address long-term environmental issues such as climate change and water resources.

Proposed modifications to existing Land Use Policy will generally focus on new or modified language regarding:

- Infill Opportunity Zones in addition to Gateway Area (make consistent with Housing Element)
- Mixed Use Commercial Centers, specifically Valley West
- Industrial Areas, emphasizing Little Lakes and Happy Valley as future industrial spaces
- Allowed residential densities within existing zone designations

The Growth Management Element includes guiding principles, policies and implementation to ensure municipal services and management operations are coordinated concurrently with anticipated development and consistent with Land Use and other element plans and policies. The Growth Management Element guides and sets parameters under which future development may occur, consistent with the Land Use Element. Generally speaking, modifications to the Growth Management Element are very minor and consist of clarifying language and more explicit ties to the relationship between infill development and open space preservation.

Both the Land Use and the Growth Management Element are consistent with state planning priorities (California Government Code section 65041.1) to promote equity, strengthen the economy, protect the environment, and promote public health and safety, as summarized below:

- To promote infill development and equity by rehabilitating, maintaining, and improving existing infrastructure that supports infill development and appropriate reuse and redevelopment of previously developed, underutilized land presently served by transit, streets, water, sewer, and other essential services, particularly in underserved areas, and by preserving cultural and historic resources.
- To protect environmental and agricultural resources by protecting, preserving, and enhancing natural resources, including working landscapes such as farm, range, and forest lands, natural lands such as wetlands, watersheds, wildlife habitats, and other wildlands, recreation lands such as parks, trails, greenbelts, and other open space, and landscapes with locally unique features and areas deserving special protection.
- To encourage efficient development patterns by ensuring that any infrastructure associated with development, other than infill development, supports new development that does all of the following: uses land efficiently; is built adjacent to existing developed areas; is located in an area appropriately planned for growth; is served by adequate transportation and other essential utilities and services; and minimizes ongoing costs to taxpayers.

Staff requests the commission review both the Land Use and Growth Management Element updates and provide feedback to staff. The Land Use Element will be brought back to the Commission for a

second round of review at an upcoming meeting, as it constitutes some of the more significant policy changes.

**POLICY IMPLICATIONS:**

The Land Use and Growth Management Elements have far-reaching policy implications and will modify existing policy language.

**COMMITTEE/COMMISSION REVIEW:**

The Land Use and Growth Management Elements are the purview of the Planning Commission and has not been reviewed by other Committees at this time.

**ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW (CEQA):**

An Environmental Impact Report (EIR) is being prepared for the General Plan Update and modifications to Land Use and Growth Management policy will be evaluated for environmental impacts as part of the overall analysis of the Infill Program.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

- Attachment A. Growth Management Element (PDF)
- Attachment B. Land Use Element (PDF)
- Attachment C. Land Use Map (PDF)