

STAFF REPORT

Consent Agenda Item

DATE: March 16, 2026

TO: Honorable Mayor and Council Members

FROM: Katey Schmidt, Senior Planner

THROUGH: Amy Nilsen, City Manager

SUBJECT: **Receive the 2025 General Plan and Housing Element Annual Progress Reports and Direct Staff to Submit the 2025 General Plan and Housing Element Annual Progress Reports to the California Department of Housing and Community Development and Governor’s Office of Planning and Research**

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Receive a presentation on the 2025 General Plan and Housing Element Annual Progress Reports and direct staff to submit both reports to the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) and the Governor’s Office of Planning and Research (OPR) as required by state law.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A general plan serves as a local government’s blueprint for guiding long-term community growth and shaping its future vision. The City of Fortuna’s current General Plan was adopted by the City Council on October 26, 2010, and establishes the policies, standards, and programs that direct the City’s development through the year 2030.

Each year, Planning Division staff (Staff) prepares a General Plan Annual Report (GPAR) to inform the public and City decision-makers about the prior calendar year’s progress toward implementing General Plan goals. In accordance with Government Code Sections 65400 and 65700, the GPAR must be submitted to HCD and OPR by April 1 of each year. This document represents the 2025 GPAR.

In addition, every California jurisdiction must prepare an Annual Progress Report (APR) documenting its implementation of the Housing Element, as required by Government Code Section 65400. The APR covers the preceding calendar year and must also be submitted to HCD and OPR by April 1. HCD uses APR data to measure each jurisdiction’s progress toward meeting its Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) both annually and over the 5- or 8-year RHNA cycle. Building permits issued during the reporting year remain the primary metric for evaluating RHNA achievement. The 2025 APR accompanies this report and will be submitted jointly with the GPAR following Planning Commission direction.

GENERAL PLAN AMENDMENTS

The City continued to align land use with emerging community and economic priorities. On February 18, 2025, the City Council adopted Ordinance 2025-773 establishing the Mill District Q-Qualifying Zone to implement the Mill District Specific Plan. The Specific Plan modernizes land use designations and rezones strategic parcels to expand commercial opportunities, strengthen economic activity, and support the long-term redevelopment of the former Pacific Lumber Company mill site. These actions help ensure the General Plan remains responsive to evolving land use needs and development patterns.

GENERAL PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

The General Plan serves as the City’s primary policy framework, guiding long-term decision-making across all aspects of community development. The General Plan is organized into chapters—referred to by the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) as “elements”—with each element addressing a distinct component of the urban environment, including land use, economic development, housing, transportation, circulation, and related topics. Fortuna’s General Plan contains nine elements that collectively fulfill state-mandated requirements while also reflecting local priorities and areas of community interest. Key implementation accomplishments for each element are summarized below.

Land Use Element (Chapter One)

The Land Use Element outlines land use patterns, policies and standards for future development and redevelopment. Advancements include public workshops, Planning Commission and Council briefings, development review, and preparation of implementing zoning tools. The City’s continued investment in digital permitting systems significantly improves permit transparency, processing efficiency, and customer service. City progress toward Land Use Element goals, policies, and programs include:

- The OpenGov online permitting software continues to streamline building and planning permit submittal, review, and tracking. OpenGov utilizes a “Master Address Table” to create “flags” identifying, General Plan Designations and site constraints allowing staff to readily determine conformance with land-use designations. Staff continue to utilize ParcelQuest for real-time ownership, boundary, and graphic layer information to assist property owners in developing compliant and complete applications.
- All proposed projects are evaluated by staff for General Plan consistency.

- Staff continue to participate in local and regional planning and land use efforts to achieve maximum jurisdictional and agency coordination including the Humboldt County Association of Governments, and various regional planning roundtables.
- As noted above, significant progress was made in implementing Land Use Element goals with the adoption of Mill District Specific Plan.

Economic Development Element (Chapter Two)

The Economic Development Element establishes goals, policy direction, and implementation measures aimed at supporting long-term job creation, expanding business opportunities, and enhancing overall economic prosperity. The City advances these goals by:

- Promoting business growth and diversification, maintaining a supportive business climate, and strengthening the community’s economic foundation.
- Continuing close coordination with the Chamber of Commerce to encourage local business success and collaborative economic initiatives.
- Participating in Redwood Region Economic Development Commission meetings to align local efforts with broader regional economic strategies.
- Meeting with Developers and Business Owners to determine needs and supports that the City can fulfill encourage economic resiliency.

Housing Element (Chapter Three)

The Housing Element outlines the City’s demographic profile, identifies existing and projected housing needs, and establishes the goals, policies, standards, and implementation measures necessary to preserve, improve, and develop housing in Fortuna. It includes a required inventory of residentially zoned land and demonstrates how the City will accommodate its share of regional housing needs across all income levels. State law requires each Housing Element to be updated and certified every eight years; Fortuna’s current Housing Element covers the 2019–2027 planning period. The following three sections summarize key components of the Housing Element.

Population

The California Department of Finance (DOF) estimates that Fortuna had 12,198 residents as of January 1, 2025, representing a decrease of 47 residents from the 2024 population of 12,245. This slight population decrease follows and continues the overall trend for Humboldt County.

Residential Growth and Development

The City of Fortuna continues to encourage development of a variety of housing choices, including diverse residential types, tenancies, sizes, locations, and prices. In 2025, building permits were issued for 38 new residential units.

- Ten permits are for new single-family dwellings.

- Four permits are for accessory dwelling units (ADUs).
- Three building permits were issued for a total of twelve multi-family units

Housing Needs and Affordability

The City reviews and maintains an inventory of sites zoned to allow multi-family residential housing which per market analysis tends to support lower rental prices.

- In 2025, six entitlements creating seven new residential units were approved.
- On January 5, 2025, the City Council approved Ordinance 2024-772 to amend the Fortuna Municipal Code to allow for single-room occupancy (SRO) facilities to comply with state law.
- On January 5, 2025, the City Council approved Ordinance 2024-769 to amend the Fortuna Municipal Code to add Chapter 17.10, Reasonable Accommodations Policy and Procedures.

Transportation & Circulation Element (Chapter Four)

The Transportation & Circulation Element is organized into two primary components. The first, *Circulation Diagram & Standards*, outlines the City's circulation network along with the roadway classification system and associated design standards. The second component establishes the goals, policies, and implementation programs that guide the City's multimodal transportation system. City progress toward implementing Transportation & Circulation Element goals, policies, and programs includes:

- Upgrading and enhancing transportation and infrastructure facilities essential to supporting economic growth and community development. In 2024, this work included developing improvement concepts for the Kenmar and Ross Hill Road intersection and initiating the engineering design phase for the Kenmar and U.S. Highway 101 Interchange project.
- Implementing roadway and circulation improvements for both existing streets and areas experiencing new development. During the reporting year, rehabilitation and improvement work occurred on Newburg Road and Second Avenue.

Natural & Cultural Resources Element (Chapter Five)

This element addresses the City's natural and cultural resources, including mineral, energy conservation, agricultural, biological, historical, archaeological, and Tribal cultural resources. The General Plan ensures that long-term growth remains compatible with these resources and supports their protection. Implementation of Natural & Cultural Resources Element goals, policies, and programs includes:

- Maintaining and restoring streams affected by high sedimentation through habitat enhancement projects such as installing fish-passage structures, restoring gravel beds, and creating deep pools to support aquatic ecosystems.
- Advancing design development for the Mill Creek Habitat Connectivity Project, which will replace five culverts along Mill Creek with fish-passage-friendly structures to improve habitat continuity.
- Sustaining active relationships, consultation, and information-sharing with Tribal partners, including the Bear River Band of the Rohnerville Rancheria and the Wiyot Tribe, to support cultural resource stewardship and respectful government-to-government collaboration.
- Continuing to preserve and protect open space through acquisition and development.

Parks, Recreation, & Open Space Element (Chapter Six)

Fortuna maintains a broad and diverse system of parks, recreational facilities, and open space areas. These amenities host many of the community’s annual festivals and provide opportunities for both active and passive recreation for residents and visitors. The Parks, Recreation, & Open Space Element outlines the goals, policies, and programs needed to ensure that parkland, recreational facilities, and open space resources continue to meet the community’s needs as Fortuna grows. City progress toward implementing Parks, Recreation, & Open Space Element goals, policies, and programs includes:

- Continuing coordination with the Rohner Community Recreation and Parks District to develop funding strategies and advance planning for a Community Pool.
- Securing a \$171,000 grant from the California State Parks Habitat Conservation Fund to acquire approximately 6.25 acres of redwood forestland adjacent to the existing 13-acre Vancil parcel and the 55-acre Rohner Park/Rohner Community Forest. This acquisition would create a contiguous 74.25-acre publicly owned forest. The City also submitted a \$126,000 grant request to the USDA Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program to complete the acquisition.
- Receiving notice of a forthcoming \$1,000,000 State Coastal Conservancy (SCC) award for acquisition of 237 acres along the Lower Eel River. Of this acreage, 7.2 acres near the River Lodge will remain under City ownership, while 229.6 acres will be returned to the Wiyot Tribe for ceremonial, restoration, and public access uses. This award supplements \$620,194 in funding from the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) River Parkways Program. Additional administrative steps with SCC remain before final acquisition.
- Continuing to facilitate key annual community events, including the “Before I Do” Wedding Show at the River Lodge, the Easter Egg Hunt, Forest Moon Festival, Fireworks Festival, Rodeo Week, AutoExpo, Hops in Humboldt, Apple Harvest, Spookathon, and the annual Holiday Craft Faire.

Public Services & Facilities Element (Chapter Seven)

The City is responsible for the development, maintenance, and daily operation of its public services and facilities. The Public Facilities & Services Element describes the City's existing and planned public infrastructure systems and outlines the City's emergency response capabilities. Implementation of Public Services & Facilities Element goals, policies, and programs includes:

- Preparing and annually reviewing public facility master plans (e.g., water, wastewater, and drainage).
- Updating these master plans every five years to ensure compliance with applicable State and Federal laws, incorporation of modern and cost-effective technologies, and consistency with current land use policy.
- Monitoring the capacity of the water, wastewater, and storm drain systems each year and completing needed upgrades to maintain system reliability.
- Ensuring, through the development review process, that adequate public facilities and services are available to support new development.
- Regularly updating the Capital Improvement Program to address both existing and projected public facility needs.
- Establishing and implementing fair-share fee programs that require new development to contribute to system-wide improvements for water, wastewater, and storm drainage infrastructure needed to serve new growth and maintain adopted service levels through 2030.
- Ensuring the reliable, safe, and adequate provision of water for all existing and future development within the City.
- Providing police and fire facilities, equipment, and personnel necessary to maintain adopted public safety service standards, supported by modern law enforcement and fire technologies.

The City is also actively participating in the Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan update, which is expected to be adopted in late spring or early summer of 2025.

Police

The Fortuna Police Department is comprised of 30 dedicated full-time and part-time employees who provide twenty-four-hour public safety service. The department's many divisions and specialized positions offer a wide variety of services; some of which are highlighted below:

- *Police Administration* manages and oversees public safety operations and ensures the department works across all City departments and the community to increase public safety.
- *Patrol* patrols the community proactively enforcing crime and investigating calls for service.
- The *Investigations* team is comprised of three full-time Detectives. Two detectives investigate crimes within our community, and one Detective is assigned as a Humboldt County Drug Task Force Agent working to combat drug trafficking operations within Fortuna and throughout the county.

- The City's *K-9 Team* is comprised of two Police Canines and their handlers trained in patrol operations, narcotics detection, and tracking.
- The *School Resource Officer* works with schools, youth and families.
- *Communications* handles Public Safety Dispatching services for our community, Fortuna Volunteer Fire Department, and the cities of Ferndale and Rio Dell.
- *Community Services* includes two Community Services Officers and one Kennel Attendant. The Community Services team maintains our animal control facility, responds to animal related calls, conducts parking enforcement, handles misdemeanor crime reports, maintains department evidence, and much more.
- A part-time *Code Compliance Officer* addresses Fortuna Municipal Code violations, blighted properties, and abandoned vehicles.
- *Records* maintains and routes records for prosecution, conducts live scan services for the community, and much more.

In addition to paid staff, the department hosts a wide variety of volunteer programs which allow community members to work alongside employees to enhance public safety services. Some of the department's volunteer programs include:

- *Chaplin* Program which provides services to employees and community members in times of need.
- *Citizen's on Patrol* Program consisting of volunteers who have undergone a Citizen's Academy. These volunteers patrol the community, report suspicious activity, conduct vacation house checks, assist with community events, and much more.
- *Police Explorer* Program which engages youth and young adults interested in public safety. Explorers attend monthly meetings, assist with community events, and ride-along with patrol officers, gaining knowledge and providing assistance when appropriate.

In 2025 the Department handled 15,882 incidents, made 642 arrests, issued 670 citations, received 5,895 "911" calls, and 26,220 business calls. The department utilizes the National Incident Based Reporting System (NIBRS) to track and report crime statistics. In 2025 there was a 9.46 % increase in "Group A" crimes, which are the major crimes tracked and reported, some of which include, homicide, sex crimes, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, motor vehicle theft and arson. In June of 2024 the Police Department staff moved into their new facility at 2600 Newburg Road, allowing the department to enhance its services to the community and provide room for future growth.

The Police Department continues to implement the Special Needs Alert Program (SNAP). The program assists vulnerable members of the community like the elderly and those with disabilities and special needs with interactions with first responders. The program is voluntary and designed to identify individuals needs in advance to help first responders ensure aid is provided and their

needs are accommodated during moments of crisis.

Fire

The Fortuna Fire Protection District (District) provides fire protection services including prevention, public education, preparedness, and emergency response to the City of Fortuna and the communities of Alton, Hydesville, Metropolitan, Fernbridge, and Palmer Creek. The District encompasses 26 square miles with a population of 17,000. The District equips the Fortuna Volunteer Fire Department (Department) with essential resources, including five fire engines, one ladder truck, two water tenders, five command vehicles, and three rescue trucks.

In addition to providing emergency response, the Department actively participates in Fortuna community events. Firefighters volunteer to set up and remove event banners and seasonal decorations, take part in parades with their fire trucks, and offer free rides on their antique fire engine. During rodeo week, they organize entertaining water games for kids and engage in friendly competitions for the enjoyment of the crowd.

In 2024 the Department responded to a total of 1,279 requests for service including:

- Fires - 82
- Rescues and Medicals - 833
- Hazardous Conditions - 30
- Service Calls - 161
- Good Intent - 116
- False Alarms – 57
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Health & Safety Element (Chapter Eight)

The Health and Safety Element establishes the goals and policies necessary to safeguard the community by identifying and addressing potential natural and human-caused hazards. Implementation of Health & Safety Element goals, policies, and programs during the reporting period included the following actions:

- **Conducting quarterly in-house safety meetings** to reinforce workplace safety practices, ensure staff compliance with adopted protocols, and support ongoing training across departments.
- **Ensuring that all new buildings intended for human habitation**—except where otherwise required by State law—are designed and constructed in accordance with the most current editions of the California Building Code, California Fire Code, and all other applicable local and state safety standards.
- **Reviewing all new development proposals for consistency with the City’s noise standards** to minimize exposure to excessive noise and to ensure new projects maintain acceptable community noise levels.

Community Design Element (Chapter Nine)

The Community Design Element provides goals, policies, and programs to ensure all stakeholders (e.g., developers, the City, community members) share a common understanding of what constitutes good design in Fortuna and includes requirements that individual project design is evaluated for consistency with community character as a whole. Progress implementing Community Design Element goals, policies, and programs includes:

- Continuing to encourage new development along major corridors to comply with the following minimum standards:
 - ✓ All outdoor storage of goods, materials, and equipment and loading dock areas shall be screened from major roadways;
 - ✓ Developments with multiple buildings should have a uniform design theme and sign program;
 - ✓ Earth tones shall be used as the dominant color; colors such as white, black, blue, and red should be used as accents. Building surfaces should have color schemes that reduce their apparent size;
 - ✓ Metal buildings shall be allowed only with enhanced architectural and landscaping treatment (such as use of trim bands, wing walls, parapets, and reveals); and
 - ✓ All exterior elevations visible from major roadways should have architectural treatment to alleviate long void surfaces. This can be accomplished through varying setbacks, breaking buildings into segments, pitched roof elements, columns, indentations, patios, and incorporating landscaping into architectural design.

NEXT STEP

Staff will submit the 2025 General Plan and Housing Element Annual Progress Reports to OPR and HCD upon Planning Commission direction.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The 2025 General Plan and Housing Element Annual Progress Reports are not a project under the CEQA Guidelines Section 21065 definition of “project” and are therefore exempt from additional environmental review pursuant to Section 153378(b)(5).

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Motion to direct staff to submit the 2025 General Plan and Housing Element Annual Progress Reports to the California Department of Housing and Community Development and Governor’s Office of Planning and Research. Consent Agenda vote.

ATTACHMENT:

- 2025 Housing Element Annual Progress Report