
1.0 INTRODUCTION

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1.1 GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR ST. HELENA'S FUTURE

The primary goal of this General Plan is to preserve the rural, small town quality and agricultural character of St. Helena. It is this document's intent that the preservation of this small town character be the unifying philosophy that overlays all other stated goals and policies.

The St. Helena General Plan serves as the City's constitution. The General Plan is a statement of the community's collective vision for the City's future, expressing the quality of life it strives to maintain, and the common interests of the community.

Policies in this General Plan have been developed to support the development and enhancement of the following concepts as the City continues to evolve.

Quality of Life and Small Town Character: The residents of St. Helena have a strong sense of community and involvement. Generations of families have lived here and have worked together to the benefit of the community through the churches, schools, civic and service organizations, and volunteer activities.

The unifying factor that has allowed St. Helena to maintain its quality of life and sense of community is the small town environment which is conducive to volunteer efforts and the involvement and contributions of individuals, families and service groups.

It is the purpose of this General Plan to maintain or establish the policies that will preserve this rural, small town character and quality of life. By definition, this "quality" includes a central area which primarily serves the residents of the City. Policies will therefore recognize residents' basic right to services as being predominant over forces which may develop or expand the community and decentralize its focus.

This "quality" also includes the current pedestrian relationship between much of St. Helena's residential area and services in the central business area. Keeping services within convenient walking distance of residential areas maintains the vitality and convenience of a "downtown" area. Policies therefore encourage residential development to occur where possible in close proximity to the town center as opposed to outlying areas near the perimeter of the City. For these reasons, any trends toward a linear development of local serving business along Highway 29 are discouraged.

Commercial Character: The commercial character of St. Helena is an integral issue in maintaining the quality of life and small town character. General Plan policies will help maintain and/or create a strong "local serving" central area, and discourage expanding St. Helena's commercial base to that of a tourist-oriented service center. Local serving businesses are considered to be those that derive a

significant portion of their revenues from St. Helena residents and that provide services and products that satisfy local residents' day-to-day living needs. They are businesses for which the majority of their customers are regular repeat customers from the community. Policies exclude all outlet and discount type stores, as well as large retail businesses whose consumer base requires a population larger than St. Helena and its immediate vicinity and which exceed the needs of the local population being served.

The community of St. Helena is unequivocal in its desire to prevent the City's transformation from an integrated, local-serving community to a tourist-dependent and tourist-serving economy. General Plan policies clearly show an intent to create an environment to support local-serving commercial business and regulate the amount, quality and location of tourist-serving business in the City. Also, in conjunction with maintaining the vitality of the downtown area, policies exclude the extension of the Central Business zoning district south of the Sulphur Creek Bridge. Similarly, policies restrict distribution of Service Commercial (SC) zoning districts to outlying areas not contiguous with the central business district core and Highway 29.

Agricultural Base: Since its founding, St. Helena has been dependent upon agriculture. Although the crops and the economics may have changed since the nineteenth century, the community still sees itself as primarily a retail and service center to the surrounding agricultural areas. In support of this vision, the General Plan includes policies that protect agricultural lands and operations from urban encroachment, and provides policies encouraging and protecting uses that provide support services to the wine-making and agricultural industry.

Community Visual Character: The strong feelings that St. Helenans have for their community have much to do with its physical form and characteristics. The relatively compact layout of the City, the size of the blocks, the widths of streets, the scale of the buildings, the tree-lined streets, the proximity of the vineyards, and views of the hills, all play a role in maintaining community character. Community Design policies in the General Plan provide specific direction on how to integrate key characteristics from older development into future development patterns so community character will be maintained.

Historic Community: The historic character of the City's architecture adds much of the flavor to the Main Street shopping district, the older residential neighborhoods, and the wineries. The General Plan policies recognize the value of these historic resources to St. Helena's economic and cultural environment and emphasize the need to restore and preserve existing historic resources.

Tourism: While recognizing the appeal the Napa Valley has for tourists, and the benefits it brings to St. Helena in terms of support for the wine industry, support for local businesses, increased City tax revenue, and provision of goods and services that would not normally be available in a town of this size, the community is unequivocal in its desire to prevent St. Helena's transformation from an integrated, full-service community to a tourist-dependent "theme"

park/destination. General Plan policies clearly set forth the City's intent to regulate the amount, quality, and location of tourist-serving uses in the City.

Growth Management: For most of its history, St. Helena has grown at a steady but relatively slow pace consistent with its role as an agricultural service center. In recent years however, the combination of a highly scenic physical setting, an attractive and growing wine industry, and an ever-expanding San Francisco metropolitan area, has resulted in growth pressures that threaten to alter the basic character of the community. The community fears that without proper regulation rapid growth will result in serious deterioration of the quality of life as a result of increased traffic congestion on Highway 29, water shortages due to inadequate surface supplies, decline in service standards for public services such as schools and recreation, and permanent loss of prime agricultural land. To avoid such a situation, the General Plan policies restrict growth to a level consistent with the ability of the City to plan and provide the additional services necessary for a larger population.

1.2 PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE GENERAL PLAN

The St. Helena General Plan is a legal document required by State law. It serves as the City's "constitution," identifying the City's long range plans for development of land and the conservation of resources. The General Plan is intended to guide residents, businesses, policy-makers, and elected officials in making choices about public and private activities that shape the City's physical environment. Typically, General Plans address a period ten to twenty years in the future. This is a long enough period to provide a comprehensive vision, and yet not so distant as to be meaningless. The 1993 St. Helena General Plan establishes City policy for the period between 1993-2010.

While each community's General Plan should be tailored to the specific concerns or interests of its residents, State law requires that at a minimum seven topics or "elements" be addressed. These elements include: land use, housing, circulation, conservation, open space, public safety and noise. The Plan can also include other elements as needed to address issues of local importance. Other issues that are often addressed in separate elements include: recreation, public services and facilities, community design, historic preservation, and growth management. The 1993 St. Helena General Plan addresses all of these issues, but combines some of them into single elements. The ten elements of the St. Helena General Plan and their relationship to the State-mandated elements are as follows:

<u>State Required General Plan Element</u>	<u>Equivalent Element in the 1993 Plan</u>
Land Use	Land Use & Growth Management
Circulation	Transportation
Housing	Housing
Conservation	Open Space & Conservation
Open Space	Open Space & Conservation
Public Safety	Public Health & Safety
Noise	Public Health & Safety
(Optional)	Tourism Management
(Optional)	Community Design
(Optional)	Parks and Recreation
(Optional)	Historic Resources
(Optional)	Public Facilities & Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water • Sewer • Storm Drainage/Flooding • Solid Waste • Schools

1.3 THE PLANNING CONTEXT

Located in the northern end of the Napa Valley, the community of St. Helena was founded during the mid-1800's as a commercial center to serve the farmers of the area. The current form and character of the community was largely determined during the last quarter of the nineteenth century when, with the arrival of the railroad, the community established itself as a major trading and shipping center for the surrounding area, including not only the Valley lands but also the Howell Mountain region, Pope Valley, and the eastern valleys. County Road (now Highway 29/Main Street), which extended the length of the Valley, became Main Street for the new community. During the prosperity of the 1870's and 1880's, the rich brick and stone buildings that distinguish the Main Street streetscape, and the well-ordered neighborhoods of attractive victorian homes located just west of Main Street, were developed.

From the beginning, agriculture was the mainstay of the local economy, with products such as fruit, vegetables, grain, and dairy products being shipped south to Napa City and beyond to San Francisco. As early as the 1860's, viticulture had begun to establish itself as a major industry for the community. By the 1880's, a number of wineries were located in or near the community. In addition to agriculture, the Napa Valley was also acclaimed throughout the state and the nation for the curative powers of its mineral waters and hot springs. Wealthy San Franciscans, prominent County families, and others from farther away all sought relief and entertainment at the area's spas. While these spas were not located in St. Helena, the community served as a disembarkation point for visitors and health seekers traveling to the springs and baths in the surrounding area. Over time, many of the wealthy visitors built country estates in the foothills, convenient to the services of the town and the fashionable watering holes.

Located as it was in the middle of a wine-making region, St. Helena was particularly hard hit by Prohibition. Growth and change in the community slowed dramatically during this period and for decades after. Not until the 1970's, when there was renewed interest in the Napa Valley as a wine-making region, did conditions change measurably. The boom in the wine industry resulted in a significant surge in new development in the entire Valley, including St. Helena. Growth in the community involved both residential and non-residential uses. The explosive growth in the wine-making industry led the way with new wineries proliferating throughout the Valley, but perhaps more significantly a major wine-related tourist industry was spawned. After years of relative inactivity St. Helena was suddenly faced with a surge in visitor-serving uses such as restaurants, hotels, and boutique-type retail uses. The success of the wine industry also resulted in increased interest in residential development in the community. After decades of averaging less than 2% residential growth per year, the 1970's saw a jump to approximately 5.5% per year.

Concerned that such rapid change would adversely affect the physical character of the community and the quality of life of its residents, the City instituted policies and programs in its last General Plan to restrict the rate of residential growth, limit the types of visitor-serving uses permitted, and restrict the location of visitor-serving uses. The combination of these policies, with subsequent sewer facility limitations and water shortages caused by the on-going drought, resulted in minimal residential growth during the 1980's. In the non-residential arena, the City's attempts to manage development of visitor-serving uses in the community had some success, however, there was still an overall increase in such uses during the 1980's, and pressures to develop more of such uses continue to be strong in the 1990's.

1.4 ORGANIZATION OF THE GENERAL PLAN

The St. Helena General Plan consists of two documents: the *City of St. Helena Master Environmental Assessment* and the *General Plan Policy Document*. The *Master Environmental Assessment* serves as a background report for the General Plan, identifying existing conditions and trends in St. Helena. The *Master Environmental Assessment*, which provides the formal supporting documentation for General Plan policy, addresses ten subject areas: land use; population and housing; historic resources; public services;

traffic and circulation; air quality; noise; biological resources; hydrology and water quality; and geology, soils, and seismicity.

The *General Plan Policy Document* includes the policies, programs, and the land use and circulation diagrams that constitute the formal policy of the City of St. Helena regarding land use, development, and the conservation of resources. The text of the Policy Document includes both adopted policies and supporting text describing the intent or rationale for such policies. Two categories of policies are presented for each topic: guiding policies and implementing policies. Guiding policies are general statements of City goals and philosophy, and imply clear commitment and intent. Implementing policies describe action, procedures, programs, or techniques that will be used to carry out the guiding policies. Implementing policies are as specific as is appropriate given the City's current level of knowledge and consensus on each issue. All policy statements are labeled and numbered for ease of reference.

The *Policy Document* is divided into eleven chapters, including this introduction and ten General Plan Elements: Land Use and Growth Management; Tourism Management; Community Design; Transportation; Open Space and Conservation; Historic Resources; Parks and Recreation; Public Health and Safety; Public Facilities and Services; and Housing.

In addition to the *Master Environmental Assessment and Policy Document*, an *Environmental Impact Report* analyzing the impacts and implications of the St. Helena General Plan will be prepared and certified prior to adoption of the General Plan. The EIR, which is not a formal part of the General Plan, will be prepared to meet the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The final EIR, in conjunction with the MEA, will facilitate and streamline the CEQA review process for subsequent projects that are consistent with the General Plan.

1.5 ADMINISTERING THE PLAN

The General Plan is implemented through the decisions of City staff, Planning Commission, and City Council in the exercise of the City's corporate and police powers, and through the City's Zoning and Subdivision ordinances, specific plans, redevelopment plans, and the City's capital improvements programs.

The General Plan sets forth long range policies and programs based on the best available information at the time of writing. To be effective however, the Plan cannot remain a static document. Over time, the Plan will need to be revised and updated to respond to changes that may occur in community attitudes, the economy, and the environment. In recognition of the need to keep the General Plan current, the Government Code and State General Plan Guidelines encourage regular, one- and five-year, reviews of all General Plan elements, and provide procedures for amending the Plan. The City of St. Helena requires the planning commission to conduct a comprehensive review of the General Plan map and text at least once a year, and report its findings to the City Council.

In order to prevent casual or automatic General Plan amendments, State law limits the number of times a community can amend its plan and requires that certain findings be made prior to adoption of an amendment. It is the policy of the City that the community is best served by having a General Plan which is stable, widely understood and accepted; and that such stability, understanding, and acceptance is jeopardized by too-frequent amendment of the General Plan. While recognizing that the General Plan must evolve over time, the City's intent is to limit the rate and manner of amendment to the General Plan so that the community, individually and collectively, may make its own plans in reliance on a reasonable constancy of the General Plan.

Under State law, each community is allowed to amend the mandatory elements not more than four times per year, although there is no limit to the number of changes that can be made during each amendment. The City of St. Helena reviews applications for amendments twice a year, in March and September. A General Plan amendment may be initiated by a majority vote of the planning commission or of the City Council or by an application filed by a property owner or the owner's authorized agent. All amendments initiated by a property owner must be consistent with the provisions of Chapter 26 of the Municipal Code.

To initiate a General Plan amendment a property owner must submit a completed application form to the planning department at least thirty days prior to the scheduled review date. The application must then undergo a preliminary review by the City Council to determine whether the application for a General Plan amendment will be processed. If the City Council authorizes the application to be processed, the matter is referred to the planning commission, which will hold public hearings pursuant to state law after the necessary environmental review process and staff analysis have been completed. The City will generally consider a General Plan amendment if it:

- Allows for consideration of an element not initially considered at the time of General Plan approval;
- Reflects changes in goals, policy, physical, social or economic conditions;
or
- Corrects projected land uses which are no longer feasible due to naturally occurring physical constraints or changes.

Any decision on a General Plan amendment should be supported by findings of fact. These findings are the rationale for making a decision either to approve or deny a project. While specific findings may be appropriate on a project-by-project basis, at a minimum, the City should make the following standard findings:

- The proposed amendment is deemed to be in the public interest.
- The proposed amendment is consistent and compatible with the other policies and programs in the General Plan.

- The proposed amendment has undergone environmental review and been determined not to be detrimental to the public health, safety, or welfare.
- The proposed amendment has been processed in accordance with the applicable provisions of the California Government Code and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).