



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Sonoma County has launched its General Plan Update! The General Plan lays out the community's vision for how our county will look, feel, and change over the next 20 years. See below for answers to frequently asked questions about the General Plan Update and to learn more about why the General Plan is important.

What is a General Plan?

The General Plan is the document that provides the policy framework for growth, conservation, and community life in unincorporated Sonoma County. A General Plan is often described as the “constitution” that guides the long-term development of a city or county. It establishes a vision for the future, as well as the policies and implementation programs that will help the community achieve that vision. At a minimum, it must address the eight topics required under State law: land use, circulation and mobility, housing, conservation, open space, noise, safety, and environmental justice. It is the foundation on which all land use and regulatory decisions affecting the unincorporated county are made.

Why is it called the Community Vision Phase of the General Plan?

Sonoma County has set up General Plan Sonoma as a two-phase process. The initial Community Vision Phase will also include auditing the General Plan 2020 and engaging the community to identify and understand key issues, opportunities, challenges, and changes that should be addressed in the update to reflect the current and future conditions of Sonoma County. This will result in the creation of a detailed plan for the second and final phase of General Plan Sonoma.

Why update the General Plan?

Every city and county in California must adopt a General Plan per State law. The State Office of Planning and Research (OPR) guidance states that General Plans have traditionally covered a 15- to 20-year timeframe. Most experts agree that General Plans should be updated every 10 years to account for the 15- to 20-year planning horizon. The "planning horizon" is not an end date but refers to the timeframe within which a jurisdiction makes short-term planning decisions and develops strategies. Some cities and counties update their General Plans as often as every 5 years, while others update in portions over time. The Housing Element is the only portion of the General Plan that is on a mandated update schedule - 4, 5, or 8 years, as listed by the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD). The County last updated its General Plan as a whole in 2008. General Plan Sonoma will provide an opportunity for the community to review the current policies and make changes that will guide Sonoma



County through the next 20 years. Furthermore, the County will need to incorporate new information and policy guidance to remain compliant with current State law.

How will the General Plan affect me?

The General Plan determines how and where future growth and development may occur and how growth will be managed to protect the quality of life in the county. It also serves as the foundation for zoning requirements, which specify how you can use your property and how your neighbors and others can use their properties. Moreover, the General Plan specifies how the County will make decisions about important issues that affect all of us! Things like traffic, jobs, housing, environmental quality, natural disasters, and public services and guides policymakers and staff on how to prioritize improvements and investments related to these issues. Other specific ways that the General Plan could affect you are:

- How easy it is to get to your job and services
- Where housing, businesses, schools, and other land uses are located in your community
- The number and quality of parks available to you
- How the transportation system is improved to meet the needs of your community
- The risks to you and your property from hazards
- How cultural and natural resources around you are protected

We encourage you to get involved so the General Plan will reflect your ideas and vision for Sonoma County's future.

How can I participate in the General Plan Sonoma process?

General Plan Sonoma is an opportunity for community members to weigh in on Sonoma County's future. There will be many ways to participate, including community workshops and events, online engagement and surveys, and public hearings. Please join our mailing list to receive updates about upcoming events, and visit permitsonoma.org/generalplan

What will the County do with my input?

The General Plan will reflect the community's vision and priorities and your voice is crucial to produce a Plan that creates a shared vision for the County's future. When you participate in the process through a workshop discussion, survey, online activity, or comment at a public hearing, your comment will be documented and compiled as part of a summary from that event. County staff will look to that input for guidance when drafting the General Plan, and we will share that input with decision-makers, like the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors, for consideration when we ask for their direction at key milestones.



Who is the project team working on General Plan Sonoma?

General Plan Sonoma is being led by staff from Permit Sonoma, under the direction of the Board of Supervisors and in partnership with PlaceWorks.

How long will the General Plan Sonoma take?

The Community Vision Phase of General Plan Sonoma is expected to be completed in Summer, 2025. At that time, a schedule for the Policy Development Phase will be available. Preliminarily, the County expects it will take several years to complete the update and adopt the new General Plan.

How can I learn more?

Visit the General Plan Sonoma website to learn more: permitsonoma.org/generalplan



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