



# GENERAL PLAN AMENDMENT

October 1999

## I. Purpose

The General Plan is a comprehensive and integrated statement of development policies and principles that guide future growth and development within a given community. The General Plan defines the public interest and reflects a community's vision and character. The Petaluma General Plan establishes goals, objectives and policies for properties within the Petaluma Planning Area. The General Plan includes several mapped designations as well as written policies. A General Plan Amendment is required in order to change any of the text or maps in the General Plan. The most common type of General Plan Amendment is to the designations on the Land Use Map. The Land Use Map establishes the type of use and density or intensity of use allowed. The number of times the City can amend its General Plan each year is limited by State law to a maximum of four times per year for any required element. Several separate amendments may be combined into one general plan amendment action that are evaluated together.

Although State law permits a limited number of amendments to a General Plan each year, the General Plan is a document that should not be changed without careful consideration. The effectiveness of the General Plan as a policy guide lies in its consistency and integrity in maintaining the public interest over the long term.

## II. Criteria

State law requires that any decision on a General Plan Amendment be supported by findings of fact. At a minimum, findings and supporting factual information must address the four following criteria:

- A. The proposed amendment must be found to be in the public interest.
- B. Any proposed changes must be found consistent and compatible with the rest of the General Plan and any implementation programs that may be affected. General Plan Amendment applications are reviewed for conformance with all of the goals, objectives, policies and programs of the General Plan.

- C. The potential impacts of the proposed amendment must be assessed and the proposed changes found not to be detrimental to the public health, safety, or welfare.
- D. The proposed amendment must be processed in accordance with applicable provisions of the California Code and the California Environmental Quality Act.

## III. Process

- A. **Preliminary Review (optional).** Prior to submittal of a formal application, an applicant may apply for an initial Planning Division review of a preliminary proposal. The preliminary review process takes approximately four to six weeks, but can save considerable time and expense later by identifying and resolving issues early in the process. The Planning Division will respond in writing regarding the appropriateness of the application; conformance with the General Plan policies and applicable Zoning Ordinance provisions; environmental and neighborhood concerns which may be involved; comments from other City Departments; applicable site planning, building design, landscaping and other criteria and application fee requirements. Please refer to the Applicant's Guide for "**Preliminary Review.**"
- B. **Application.** A completed and signed application form along with supporting information, filing fees and deposit for public notice are required for a General Plan Amendment application. All project applications require an environmental determination pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Certain classes of projects are exempt from environmental review such as minor text amendments to clarify language; other amendments or text changes that alter the policy directives may have impacts that can be fully mitigated or avoided; most general plan land use amendments will have potential for impacts that will need to be addressed and may require further studies (i.e., expanded initial study or environmental impact report). Please refer to the Applicant's Guide for "**Environmental Review**" for more detailed information on the environmental review process.

Supporting information must include a written proposal statement and justification for the proposed amendment, environmental information questionnaire (unless

determined by the Community Development Director to be an exempt project), plans, exhibits and site photos. A checklist and detail of the application submittal requirements is listed below. Incomplete applications are often the main cause of delays in processing.

- C. **Completeness Review.** Once an application is received, a Planning Division staff member will be assigned as the project planner. Within thirty (30) days of the application, the project planner will review the application for completeness and will refer the application to other departments and reviewing agencies to determine if any additional information is required and identify any issues, concerns and recommended conditions. The Environmental Information Questionnaire, if required, will also be reviewed for completeness along with the other project application materials.
- D. **Project Review.** Once an application is determined by staff to be complete, copies of the proposal are sent to reviewing agencies and departments for their comments. A project planner will be assigned to conduct an analysis of the proposed project, incorporating any comments received by other departments or reviewing agencies. A preliminary environmental determination and staff report or recommendation will be prepared by staff for the decision-making body. A General Plan Amendment application requires public notice, review and recommendation by the Planning Commission and approval by the City Council as the legislative body. Copies of the staff report will be made available to the public and mailed to the applicant during the week before the scheduled hearing or action.
- E. **Planning Commission Review.** Once the preliminary environmental determination and staff analysis is completed, the project and environmental determination will be circulated for public review and a public hearing can be scheduled before the Planning Commission.

Public Notice. A public notice describing the proposed action and hearing date will be published in the local newspaper and mailed to nearby property owners and residents at least 10 days in advance of the scheduled action (for projects determined to be exempt); 20 days in advance (for projects determined to have no environmental impacts); and 30 to 45 days in advance (for projects for which an EIR was prepared). All costs associated with public notice and processing the application are paid by the applicant.

Public Hearing. All General Plan Amendment applications require a public hearing before the Planning Commission and recommendation which is forwarded to the City Council. At the public hearing,

the Planning Division will present the staff report and recommendations. Testimony from the applicant and other interested persons will then be permitted.

Action. The Planning Commission will consider the staff report and any comments received and may recommend approval, approve with conditions, deny the application, or continue the hearing for additional consideration.

- F. **City Council Action.** Prior taking any action on the proposed amendment, the City Council will review the application, the Planning Commission's recommendations, staff reports and any written comments received. The City Council may conduct a public hearing and must approve the environmental determination before approving a General Plan Amendment.
- G. **Outcome.** General Plan Amendments are approved by City Council resolution and are effective immediately. General Plan Amendments denied by the Council are final.
- H. **Other Permits.** After a General Plan Amendment to change a land use designation has been approved, rezoning is typically required. Rezoning applications may be processed concurrently with a General Plan Amendment application. Other permits such as a use permit and site design review may also be required for certain types of projects. Please refer to the "Overview of the Development Review Process" for additional information.

**IV. Timeframe**

The actual time for processing a General Plan Amendment application will vary depending upon the type of environmental review required, the complexity and magnitude of the proposal, the workloads of Planning Division staff and the availability of time on the Planning Commission's agenda, but can generally be estimated as follows:

From the date a General Plan Amendment application is determined to be complete to scheduled action:

	<u>weeks</u>
Projects exempt from environmental review	4-6
Projects with not potential impacts or fully mitigated	6-10
Projects requiring expanded initial studies	10-20
Projects requiring an EIR	20-50

## V. Submittal Requirements

- A. **Application Form.** Including applicant's signature and property owner's signature or authorization to act as agent (if different from applicant).
- B. **Application Fees, Public Notice Deposit and Deposit for Additional Studies (if required).**
- C. **Proposal Statement and Justification.** Applications for a General Plan Amendment must be accompanied by a detailed proposal statement and justification describing the type and purpose of the proposed amendment.
- D. **Environmental Information Questionnaire.** An environmental information questionnaire (available at the Planning Division) must be completed by the applicant and submitted with the Uniform Application along with the required fees.
- E. **Plans and Exhibits.** All plans and exhibits should be submitted in sheet sets with typical dimensions of 24" x 36" folded to approximately 9" x 12" (unless otherwise approved by Planning staff). Twenty copies of the plans and exhibits and one reduced copy (report size) must be submitted along with the application materials. Plans and exhibits must be drawn accurately to scale with scale, north arrow, date and name and phone number of person preparing the plan. Errors in dimensions or incomplete plans shall require submission of correctly revised drawings prior to City action.
  1. **Site Plan.** All applications require a site plan which shows existing features for the subject property and surrounding area (within at least 300'). Information on existing features may be derived from aerial photos available at the Planning Division. For a

General Plan Amendment application, the site plan must depict the following information:

- a. General location/vicinity map of the proposed site in relation to major streets and geographic features, such as the Petaluma River.
  - b. All property lines with distances and including any existing and proposed easements.
  - c. All existing features on the site including topography, structures, streets frontage improvements (i.e., curbs, gutters, sidewalks, edge of paving), utilities, power poles, easements, parking areas, trees, creeks, drainageways, etc., and name of adjoining streets, or right-of-way easements and nearest cross street.
  - d. Land uses on adjacent properties and location of structures and features including: residences, buildings, power lines, drainageways and trees.
2. **Development Plan.** All applications for changes in land use designation must be accompanied by a development plan of sufficient detail to ascertain the potential impacts of the proposed changes. The level of detail required is determined by the Community Development Director depending upon the site conditions and surrounding land uses but should generally include: the general location of proposed uses including all building areas, outdoor use areas, access roads, driveways, parking areas, service or loading areas, drainage areas and landscape areas.

For further information, please contact the City of Petaluma Planning Division at (707) 778-4301.

