



**CITY OF EAST PALO ALTO**

**1986**

**GENERAL PLAN**



# THE GENERAL PLAN

for the City of East Palo Alto, California

Adopted December 1986

A Comprehensive Revision of the  
1982 Community Plan & EIR

## CITY COUNCIL

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Virgus O. Streets, Ph.D., Economic Development Consultant  
Stephanie Barnes, Intern

**RESOLUTION NO. 00352**

**A RESOLUTION ADOPTING THE CITY OF EAST PALO ALTO GENERAL PLAN**

**WHEREAS**, California Government Code Section 65300 requires that each planning agency shall prepare and the legislative body shall adopt a comprehensive, long-term general plan for the physical development of the city; and

**WHEREAS**, the City of East Palo Alto was incorporated on July 1, 1983; and

**WHEREAS**, California Government Code Section 65302.5 allows a newly incorporated City thirty (30) months to adopt a General Plan; and

**WHEREAS**, the City Council of the City of East Palo Alto did adopt Resolution No. 235 on December 16, 1985, authorizing the filing of a request for a 12-month extension of the deadline for completing the General Plan; and

**WHEREAS**, the seven mandatory elements of the General Plan and one optional element have been prepared and considered at public hearings, and responses have been made to comments by the State for the Housing Element in accordance with Section 65585 of the Government Code.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** by the City Council of the City of East Palo Alto that the City of East Palo Alto General Plan, attached hereto, is hereby adopted.

**PASSED AND ADOPTED** this 15th day of December, 1986, by the following vote:

**AYES:** ABRICA, BLAKEY, BOSTIC, COATS, and MOUTON

**NOES:** NONE

**ABSENT:** NONE



Barbara A. Mouton  
Mayor

**ATTEST:**



Frederic A. Howell  
City Clerk

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\* Not included at this time

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE GENERAL PLAN**

East Palo Alto, incorporated in 1983, is on the way to becoming a stable and productive city. While the character of East Palo Alto has not changed substantially over the past two decades, the current population has created a complex city with a wide range of needs and opportunities.

Vacant land in East Palo Alto is composed primarily of individual parcels which are generally surrounded by development. These "infill" properties will be the site of much of the new development in the City, but the much larger, developed area of the City will continue to define the basic character of East Palo Alto. Therefore, the General Plan emphasizes regeneration and improvement of what exists; the completion of things begun earlier, with more attention to rounding out, fine tuning, and preserving the character of the community. Dealing with growth means greater attention to maintenance of what is presently in place; it means an anticipation of the need to renovate or rebuild portions of our community; and it means, perhaps greater attention to each of the new parts added.

The General Plan is the City's most vital and most basic policy document for directing the community's future. The Plan provides the basis for implementation tools which help ensure the rational functioning and orderly change of this most complex urban system.

East Palo Alto's population includes a multitude of ages, income, ethnic backgrounds, and lifestyles. The City responds to the people's needs for convenience and support by providing facilities, activities, and services through the public and private sectors.

Private development provides most housing, employment, and services as well as some educational and recreational opportunities. The public sector provides schools, parks, libraries, police and fire stations, other support facilities, and a circulation system for the safe and efficient movement of people, goods, and services. These elements are so linked that if one is changed, the effects are often felt throughout the entire City. One new dwelling unit brings more people, more traffic, more children for the schools, more people using the parks, another home which the Police Department must protect, and more shoppers. The General Plan is the primary City document dealing with this complex of linked elements.

The Plan is comprehensive in that it takes into account the activities of various agencies and individuals who shape the physical, social, and cultural environment of the community. It seeks to coordinate development such that diverse aspects of the physical environment may function and harmonize together to produce a community which is financially, socially, and aesthetically efficient and desirable. The Plan requires compromises,

but it can spare the community from much of the conflict and confusion which would result from implementation of single-purpose, uncoordinated plans.

The General Plan is long-range in that it looks to the future and enables us to define the shape, if not the details, of our community 5 to 10 years ahead. It must also provide the guidance for implementing the immediate and short-term steps.

Finally, the Plan is also general and so provides a rational framework for important policy. Programs are broadly defined to enable much greater detail and public discussion to determine the basic objectives and test their reality. The Plan must be general in order to assure full latitude for specific short-term, day-to-day decision-making, financing, and implementation. Future land uses, as an example, need not be precisely located with respect to individual properties; instead, zoning, specific plans, and other tools provide specificity.

## History

The history of East Palo Alto began long before the names of Ravenswood or East Palo Alto were first used. The remains of the earliest known inhabitants of the San Francisco Bay Area were discovered in what is now East Palo Alto. In 1798, the area was a portion of the Rancho de las Pulgas, the largest ranch in the Bay Area.

In 1848, a wharf was built at the end of Bay Road in the area which is now East Palo Alto. It provided shipping for the lumber from Searsville and Woodside, and for hay and other cargo. It was the first port in what was to become San Mateo County. In 1851, the almost forgotten town of Ravenswood, the first regularly platted town in San Mateo county, flourished for awhile as the hub of Peninsula shipping. The steamer "Jenny Lind" traveled between San Francisco and Ravenswood, where passengers disembarked and proceeded by stagecoach to San Jose. The site of the old Ravenswood wharf was for many years known as Cooley's Landing, named for Lester Cooley who bought the wharf and surrounding property in 1868. In 1853, the United States Coastal Survey erected near the wharf the sandstone Pulgas Base Monument which is still at the east end of Jack Farrell Park.

With the completion of the railroad from San Francisco to San Jose, transportation was diverted from Ravenswood, and the decline of the port followed. In 1910, new subdivisions were developed on higher and better drained land than that formerly used. In 1916, Charles Weeks founded the famous Weeks Poultry Colony, a cooperative venture, called Runnymede, which lasted into the 1930's. Its six hundred acres were divided into one- and five-acre plots. Its colonists prospered, and by 1925, the population of the area reached 918.

A local dispute broke out concerning the name of the school district, which had been Ravenswood since 1882. The Runnymede colonists wanted their own name, but finally in 1923, the County Board of Supervisors voted to preserve the name Ravenswood. The name of the whole area was in dispute also, and at an informal election on December 12, 1925, the compromise choice, East Palo Alto, won the majority of votes. At that time there was talk of annexing to the City of Palo Alto, but though enabling legislation was proposed, it was never enacted.

In the 1940's, with the influx of World War II veterans into new subdivisions, the population rose to eight thousand. Flower-growing became the chief agricultural activity in the large-lot areas. The first major industry, an aircraft plant, moved into the area in 1948. However, the section containing this plant and a residential section, Belle Haven, were annexed to Menlo Park in 1949, and another large industrial area also in 1960.

A more detailed description of the City's history and measures for preserving its richness are provided in the Historic Element of this Plan.

#### **EAST PALO ALTO TODAY**

Located at the southerly end of the San Francisco Peninsula's populous bayside, East Palo Alto is in a warm, pleasant climate with fertile, level land. The Bay lies to the east, industrial sections and the Belle Haven area of Menlo Park to the north, and the Willows section of Menlo Park to the west. San Francisquito Creek is the southern boundary of East Palo Alto and of San Mateo County. East Palo Alto is the newest City in San Mateo County.

East Palo Alto has no legal ties with Palo Alto in Santa Clara County; however, traffic, street patterns, business connections, and newspaper coverage tie the two communities together. East Palo Alto and Menlo Park work together on common projects, such as plans for the improvement of Willow Road.

Community identity has been strengthened through the City's incorporation which was accomplished on July 1, 1983. Thus, many services formerly based in Redwood City are now to be found in the Municipal Services Building. While some City services are conducted from scattered locations throughout the community, it is expected that all City operations will be conducted from the Civic Center, the renovated Ravenswood High School site, by no later than July 1987.

Details of the City's current demography are provided in the various chapters of this Plan.

## **General Plan Background**

A general plan for East Palo Alto, adopted by the County in 1963, was based on an analysis of residential, commercial, industrial, and agricultural areas, and on 1963 community facilities, streets, and highways. The plan had specific recommendations on zoning and development, and called for maintaining East Palo Alto as a medium-density residential community. However, in 1970, the Municipal Council and the City of Menlo Park were granted Federal funds for the first year of a two-year planning project for all of the East-of-Bayshore community to involve aspects of economics, government, housing, schools, environment, etc. Also, in April, 1971, a Department of Housing and Urban Development grant for urban renewal was approved, funding the first year of an action program for revitalization of the community, to be completed in approximately seven years.

In 1982, the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors, upon the recommendation of the East Palo Alto Municipal Council, adopted the East Palo Alto Community Plan and EIR. Since incorporation, the City has addressed the need to have a General Plan that is both responsive to the requirements of State law and reflective of the Community's desires. On December 16, 1985, the City Council adopted Resolution No. 00235, requesting an extension of the required completion date for a general plan for a newly incorporated municipality. This document represents completion of the Genral Plan in accordance with the extended deadline. It also incorporates some of the conclusions found in the final report from the East Palo Alto 2000 Committee.

## **Format**

The land use and other policies reflected in the General Plan do indeed act to shape the character of the City. For example, the City's large amount of higher residential densities on the west side resulted from conscious zoning decisions made years ago. However, no one could envision the magnitude and type of growth now evident in Silicon Valley. Nor could anyone forecast the change in life styles which would lead to smaller family sizes and major changes in demographic patterns. These changes required a reexamination of the assumptions and conclusions of the 1982 Community Plan and EIR.

This revision is the product of assessment of community data, surveys, background studies, and community input. It is a plan for a population of approximately 23,000 people. The new General Plan is intended to be more concise, more understandable, and hopefully, more relevant to present issues than prior plans.

The Plan represents a refinement of goals and policies contained in the 1982 Community Plan and EIR as well as changes subsequently adopted by the City. Included in this document are the following Council-approved elements:



Land Use  
Housing  
Open Space  
Conservation  
Noise  
Circulation  
Safety  
Economic Development

While the first seven are mandatory elements, the latter is optional, that is, the City has a choice but after an optional element is adopted, it becomes official policy as with the mandatory elements. Additionally, the Council has authorized preparation of the following two elements:

Historic  
Community Services

Each of these elements appears as a separate chapter in the Plan.

The Plan format stresses the importance of not only stating goals and policies, but also of identifying means of implementation including: Specific Plans, Capital Improvement Programs, City budgets, zoning, City review processes, new laws and influence on regional and state actions.

### **Public Participation**

Each of the chapters was individually prepared and reviewed by the Planning Commission and City Council. In each case, extensive public participation was invited and received. City Staff, outside agencies, commissions, citizens committees, and City Council, all contributed significantly to the process through formal reviews, study sessions, and public hearings. This public participation was essential to the creation of a broad-based set of policies which respond to this diverse community's concerns and needs.

Continuation of this public participation will be a major part of the periodic updating and review necessary for keeping the Plan current.

Provided below is a listing of the standing boards and commissions in East Palo Alto, reflecting the broad range of active citizen participation in this new City.

Arts & Culture  
Economic Development Task Force  
Human Services  
Parks & Recreation  
Public Works

Rent Stabilization  
Planning  
Personnel  
Public Safety.

### **Implementation Strategy**

Implementation is critical to the real worth of the General Plan. The Action Program of each element calls for initially prioritizing measures identified in this Plan and commencing action on them. It also provides for periodically evaluating these programs, adjusting priorities, and directing the City's zoning, specific plans, budgeting process, and Capital Improvements programs to the accomplishment of the Plan over a period of several years. Various implementation measures will require the efforts of many citizens, community organizations, private enterprise, every City operating department, commissions, and the Council. The implementation program will be reviewed by the Planning Commission and adopted by the City Council.

While the overall General Plan has a 10-year horizon, State Housing Element Guidelines specify a five-year plan. In order to comply with these guidelines, several of the action programs have been designated as the maximum housing program.

### **Updating the General Plan**

In order to serve as a useful, continuous guideline for policies, the general Plan must be periodically reviewed and updated. Therefore, it is the intent of this plan that there be an updating of the General Plan a minimum of every three years to keep it relevant, to provide mid-course changes, and to sustain understanding and ongoing support. Time-consuming efforts to totally redo the General Plan should not be necessary in the foreseeable future.

From time to time, actions of the City Council may have been taken which will change or modify statements as of the dates reflected and all people who have referenced this document should take note of that fact and make inquiry. Such changes will be reviewed and incorporated in the periodic updating.