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INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1.1 SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF THE GENERAL PLAN

The South San Francisco General Plan is a document adopted by the City Council that serves several purposes. It:

- Outlines a vision for South San Francisco’s long-range physical and economic development and resource conservation that reflects the aspirations of the community;
- Provides strategies and specific implementing actions that will allow this vision to be accomplished;
- Establishes a basis for judging whether specific development proposals and public projects are in harmony with Plan policies and standards;
- Allows City departments, other public agencies, and private developers to design projects that will enhance the character of the community, preserve and enhance critical environmental resources, and minimize hazards; and
- Provides the basis for establishing and setting priorities for detailed plans and implementing programs, such as the Zoning Code, the Capital Improvements Program, facilities plans, and redevelopment and specific plans.

The General Plan articulates a vision for the City, but it is not merely a compendium of ideas and wish lists. Plan policies focus on what is concrete and achievable and set forth actions to be undertaken by the City – broad objectives such as “quality of life” and “community character” are meaningful only if translated into actions that are tangible and can be implemented. Because of legal requirements that a variety of City actions be consistent with the General Plan, regular on-going



The South San Francisco Urban Design Charette brought together a number of design professionals and community leaders who spent a day addressing specific urban design issues and community concerns in the Downtown.

use of the Plan is essential. The Plan is both general and long-range; there will be circumstances and instances when detailed studies are necessary before Plan policies can be implemented.

The updated South San Francisco General Plan has been a result a community effort. Its major policy directions has been defined through close involvement of the City Council, the Planning Commission, other boards and commissions, residents, and the business community, in all phases of the General Plan process.

REGIONAL LOCATION

South San Francisco is located on the west shore of the San Francisco Bay, in northern San Mateo County. The City is built upon the Bay plain and the northern foothills of the Coastal Range, and is strategically located along major transportation corridors and hubs, including U.S. 101, Interstate 380 and Interstate 280, the Union Pacific Railroad, (formerly Southern Pacific Railroad) and the San Francisco International Airport. Sign Hill is a distinctive landmark. The regional location of the City is shown in Figure 1-1.

PLANNING BOUNDARIES

State law requires that each city adopt a general plan “for the physical development of the county or city, and any land outside its boundaries which ... bears relation to its planning.” The Planning Area for the General Plan includes all land within City limits, and unincorporated “islands” surrounded by the city. Inclusion of unincorporated land in the Planning Area does not mean that the City is contemplating annexation; these sites are included in the report for analysis purposes only.

Figure 1-2 shows the General Plan Planning Area. San Francisco Bay to the east and San Bruno Mountain to the north provide strong natural boundaries. The cities of Brisbane, Daly City, Colma, Pacifica, and San Bruno adjoin South San Francisco.

1.2 EVOLUTION OF SOUTH SAN FRANCISCO

The modern history of South San Francisco began in 1827, when the 15,000-acre Rancho Buri Buri was given to Jose Antonio Sanchez as a provisional land grant.¹ In 1856, Charles Lux purchased 1,500 acres of the Rancho and founded the town of Baden, named for Lux's native region in Germany. At that time, the Baden area was used for cattle grazing and dairy operations.

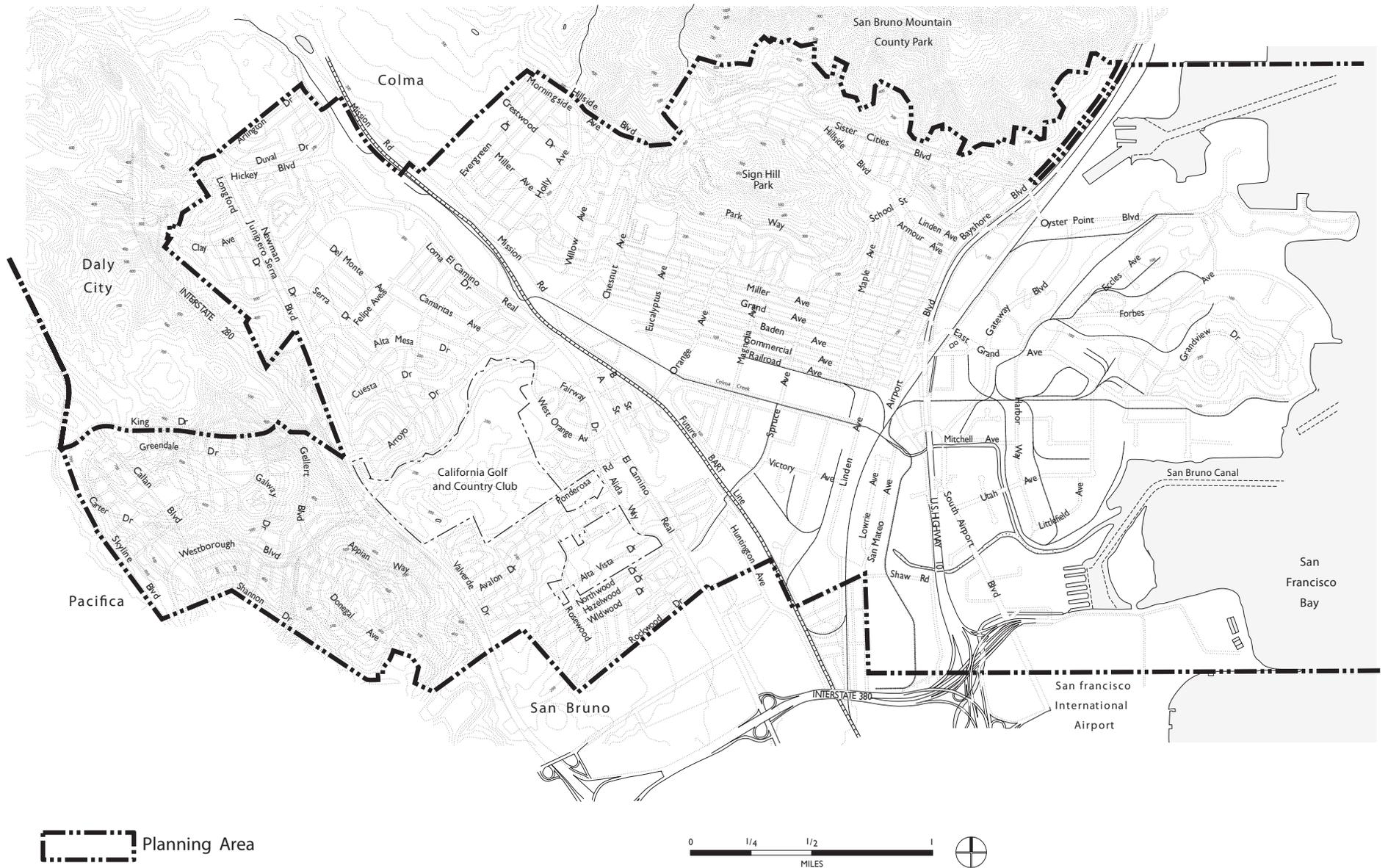
The meat industry played an important role in South San Francisco's evolution. The Gustavus Swift meat packing plant, established on Point San Bruno in 1888, was the City's first industrial development. Swift organized a "beef trust" with other Midwestern meat packing companies to join in building a community of stockyards and packing plants on Point San Bruno, and organized for the development of an industrial town.

In 1890, the South San Francisco Land and Improvement Company purchased 3,400 acres on the former site of the Rancho Buri Buri for development of the town. The arrangement of residential and industrial uses intentionally took advantage of stable ground and Bay access at Point San Bruno, as well the prevailing winds from San Bruno Gap that blew offensive odors away from residential areas and over the Bay.

COMMUNITY GROWTH

Industry and county growth have been closely intertwined throughout South San Francisco's history. The construction of the Southern Pacific Railroad (SPRR) line between San Francisco and San Jose in 1904-1907 expanded opportunities for goods shipping from South San Francisco, and steel mills began to take advantage of the city's abundant land with excellent transportation access. A major lack of housing and services and a battle over a copper smelter precipitated incorporation, allowing South San Francisco to control its industrial future and provide the services needed to attract resident workers. When the City incorporated on September 19, 1908, it had 1,989 residents and 14 major industries.

¹ Information on South San Francisco's history is primarily drawn from Kaufman, Linda, *South San Francisco: A History* (1976) and Joseph A. Blum, "South City: The Town That Could" *San Francisco Sunday Examiner and Chronicle*, September 4, 1983.



 Planning Area

Source: Dyett & Bhatia

Figure 1-5
Planning Area



Grand Avenue – 1906 (above) and 1997 (below). While the street no longer has railroad tracks, its scale has changed remarkably little over the last 90 years.

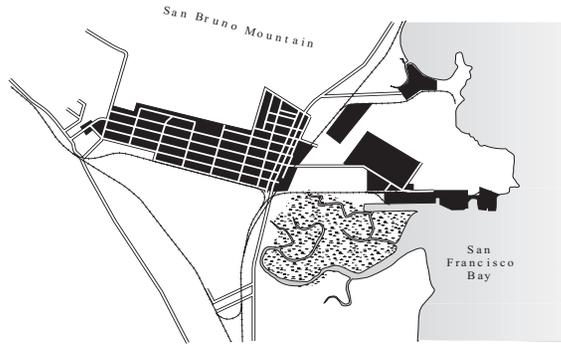


Industries continued to locate and grow in South San Francisco in the 1920s and 1930s. Bethlehem Steel, U.S. Steel, and the Edwards Wire Rope Factory were some of the city’s major establishments whose products helped build California’s modern transportation and communications infrastructure. In the 1930s, shipping also emerged as a major industry, as South San Francisco became an adjunct facility to the Port of San Francisco. Easy rail access made South San Francisco even more attractive as a shipping terminal, and the city became the central distribution point for the entire Peninsula.

Downtown and Civic Development

Grand Avenue has always been the spine of the city’s commercial core, extending west from the industrial areas, and had almost reached El Camino Real by the time incorporation occurred. With Sign Hill to the north and marshlands to the south limiting expansion, the oldest part of the city was developed with a strong east-west orientation, reinforced by a directional grid pattern of 950 by 300 foot blocks. The rail spur along Railroad Avenue formed the City’s southern boundary. The city’s growth over time, from just before incorporation in 1908 until the present, is shown in Figure 1-3.

In the years following incorporation, South San Francisco’s civic improvements kept pace with its growing industry. The City Hall was opened in 1920 and the 20-acre Orange Memorial Park was developed in 1925.



1908

A single-use pattern was established early, with industries to the east and homes and businesses to the west. The east-west grid reflects the limits imposed by San Bruno Mountain/Sierran Hill to the north and marshlands to the south.



1928

Industrial expansion occurred on Pt. San Bruno as the steel industry located in South San Francisco. The city grid evolved to conform to topography and pre-existing roadways. Marshland continued to limit southern expansion.



1960

Industrial growth during and after the Second World War helped fuel unprecedented expansion. Fill and drainage projects opened many areas for development. Junipero Serra Boulevard formed the City's western boundary.



1997

Infill development continued along the Bayshore Freeway and El Camino Real. Interstate 280 opened up the Westborough area for development. Bay fill continued at the airport, Oyster Point and Sierra Point. Remaining unincorporated pockets are the only opportunities for future expansion.

Urbanized Land

Source: South San Francisco Public Library LocalHistory Collection; Dyett & Bhatia

Figure 1-2
Evolution of South San Francisco's Form

SOUTH SAN FRANCISCO GENERAL PLAN



Figure 1-4
Elevation

Source: Dyett & Bhatia; Environmental Science Associates

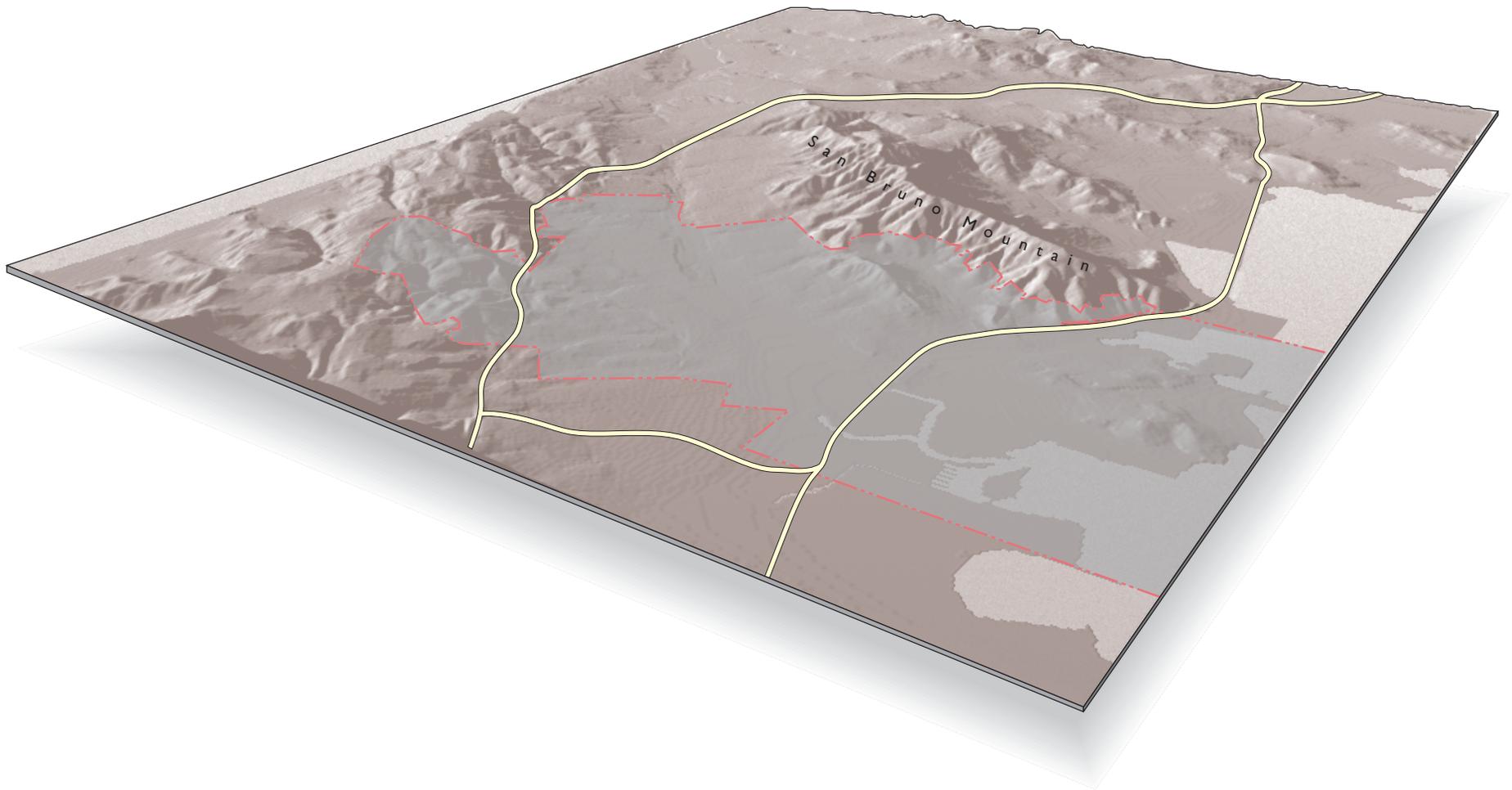


Figure 1-5
Digital Terrain Model



Looking west from Point San Bruno Knoll. The industrial and business parks in South San Francisco are concentrated in the eastern portion of the city, with residential uses in the western and downtown areas. Sign Hill and high rises on land formerly devoted to industrial uses can be seen to the right.

Residential Development and Hillside Growth

Constrained by marshlands to the south, residential development began to extend north around and along the slopes of Sign Hill as the city grew, requiring the introduction of a curvilinear street form. Industries expanded to the south and west, taking advantage of the SPRR and spurs along Railroad Avenue and other streets west of the rail right-of-way. The city's elevation ranges from sub-zero in East of 101 to nearly 600 feet in the Westborough subarea, as shown in Figure 1-4. A digital terrain model of the city is shown in Figure 1-5.

The growth of South San Francisco's steel and, later, shipbuilding industries through the 1920s and World War II helped spur residential growth. Between 1940 and 1960, South San Francisco's population increased more than six-fold from 6,290 to 39,418.² Over 46 percent of South San Francisco's existing housing units were constructed between 1940 and 1959.³

Government-built housing for military personnel and shipyard workers was developed during the war on the former marshland between Railroad Avenue, South Spruce Avenue and San Mateo Avenue. The area is still known as Lindenville after the largest government development. Demolition of the housing in the late 1950s paved the way for redevelopment of the area with warehouses, light industry, and single-family housing in the Mayfair Village subdivision.

² City of South San Francisco, Land Use, Transportation and Circulation Elements of the General Plan, 1986.

³ 1990 U.S. Census.

POST-WAR TRANSFORMATION

By the end of the 1950s, South San Francisco had essentially reached its present level of urbanization between U.S. 101 and Junipero Serra Boulevard. Many of the residential subdivisions west of Sign Hill and El Camino Real were complete. Except at the city's northwestern corner, Junipero Serra Boulevard formed the city's western edge, and Hillside Boulevard/Randolph Avenue was the northern boundary.

During this decade, the City converted previously unused marshlands into areas usable for industrial development, drastically reshaping the shoreline and attracting light industry to the city for the first time. Plans were announced in 1963 for a 600-acre industrial park adjacent to the newly-developed Oyster Point Marina. This industrial park was South San Francisco's first industrial development to incorporate comprehensive planning, integrated design, and performance provisions, and featured a 0.5 FAR, ample parking, and consistent landscaping and building design. The park heralded South San Francisco's industrial future.

In some ways a microcosm of American industry, South San Francisco has been making a slow industrial transformation for the past 30 years. Steel production and other heavy industries have largely been replaced by warehousing, research, development, and biotechnology. Because the city's industrial base has continued to evolve as the context for industry has changed, industry will continue to play an important role in South San Francisco's future.

With some important exceptions, land use in South San Francisco since the 1960s has stemmed from internal change rather than outright expansion. Infill development occurred along El Camino Real, Chestnut Avenue, and U.S. 101. Major expansion did occur in the Westborough area and the East of 101 area, enabled respectively by the construction of Interstate 280 and landfill at Oyster and Sierra Points. The city has recently entered its last phase of expansion with multi-use development at Terrabay on the south slopes of San Bruno Mountain. Future opportunities for growth other than redevelopment are limited to remaining unincorporated islands.



Protection of established neighborhoods from the impacts of changes occurring in other areas of the city is a General Plan theme.



Genentech, the world's largest biotechnology firm, is headquartered in the East of 101 area along the bayshore, attracting additional high-technology firms to the area.

1.3 GENERAL PLAN CHALLENGES AND THEMES

LOOKING AHEAD: THE CHALLENGES

Many significant changes in and around South San Francisco are anticipated in the coming years, representing both challenges and opportunities. These include a major expansion of the San Francisco International Airport (SFO) with doubling of passenger traffic over the next ten years and extension of Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) to SFO with stations in South San Francisco, and in San Bruno directly adjacent to the City. With demand for land exceeding availability, establishment of priorities will be essential to achieving community development objectives.

GENERAL PLAN THEMES

The unique challenges and opportunities the City faces are reflected in General Plan's nine themes, which provide the basis for detailed policies included in the Plan elements:

1. *Neighborhood-oriented Development.* The General Plan envisions South San Francisco as a community of strong neighborhoods. While the City's commercial and industrial areas continue to evolve, the Plan seeks to ensure that the City's established neighborhoods, which encompass almost 75 percent of the area west of U.S. 101, are protected from the impacts of changes elsewhere.

A guiding premise of the Plan is that activities and facilities used on a frequent basis, such as stores and parks, should be easily accessible to residents. Land uses are designated to ensure balanced neighborhood development with a mix of uses, and provision of parks, stores, and offices in neighborhoods that presently lack them. The Plan seeks to ensure that infill development in the residential areas will be of appropriate scale and character, and restricts larger outlets to appropriate sites in community and regional centers.

2. *Economic Development and Diversification.* The evolution of the South San Francisco's economy, from manufacturing to warehousing and distribution and now high-technology and biotechnology, is an opportunity for the City to strengthen its economic base. Continued economic development is vital to accomplishing many of the General Plan's objectives as well as linking economic development and land use planning; its importance is underscored by the inclusion of an Economic Development Element in the General Plan. The element articulates the City's role in economic development and outlines policies to implement these strategies. In addition to ensuring that adequate sites are available for commercial and industrial expansion, the strategies build on existing clusters of high-technology and service industries, and capitalize on SFO expansion and the BART extension. The Plan also promotes a new work/live district. In addition, targeted policies for specific areas are included in Chapter 3: Planning Sub-Areas.

3. *Increased Connectivity and Accessibility.* Freeways, railroads, and major arterials divide the city into four major segments – west of Junipero Serra (Westborough), between Junipero Serra and El Camino Real, between El Camino Real and U.S. 101, and the area east of U.S. 101. Connections between these different city segments are extremely limited, and the connecting roadway segments are major points of congestion. Integration of the different parts of the city is a theme that is reflected in several Plan policies. Roadway improvements and new streets are also proposed to link different neighborhoods. In addition, Plan proposals seek to improve residents' access to everyday commercial needs, and to parks and the shoreline.

4. *Redevelopment of Older Industrial Areas.* The city's continued status as a goods transportation hub, stemming mainly from proximity to SFO, but echoing its role as the central distribution point for the Peninsula in the 1920s and 1930s, is reflected in the presence of large tracts of land, formerly used for heavy industry, east of U.S. 101. In contrast, Lindenville, which lies south of downtown, emerged through piecemeal transition from residential to industrial use late in the city's history.

As high-technology businesses have moved into many of these older industrial areas, conflicts, such as between automobile and truck traffic, and land



Industrial site near the San Bruno BART Station. The General Plan proposes a transition of the area near the station to a high-intensity, mixed-use center.

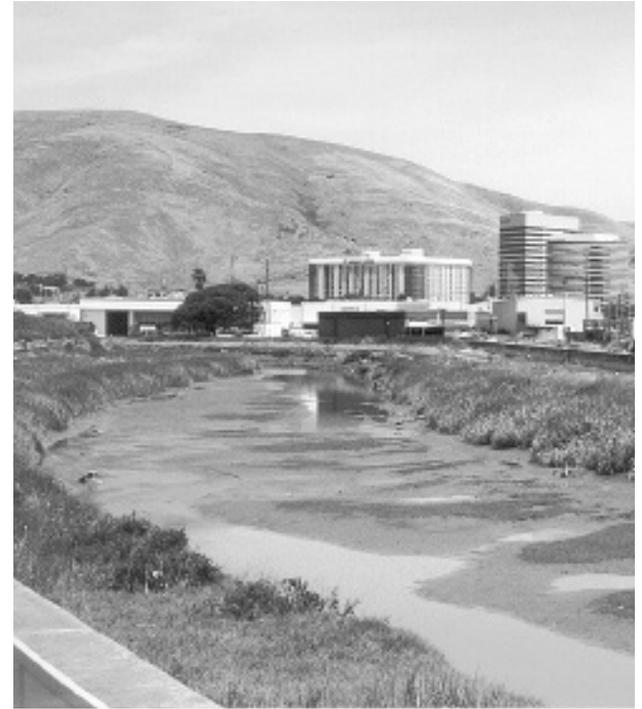


Downtown South San Francisco. The General Plan seeks to reinforce Downtown's identity and role as the city's center.

use and visual character have become increasingly pronounced. The needs of business centers—smaller blocks, more through street connections, ancillary facilities such as restaurants, easier connections to transit, sidewalks and bikeways, and higher landscape standards—are much different from those of warehousing and industrial areas. The General Plan outlines a cohesive strategy that protects selected industrial areas and policies to guide transformation of others.

5. *Land Use/Transportation Correlation and Promotion of Transit.* Land uses, mixes, and development intensities in the General Plan have been designed to capitalize on major regional transit improvements underway, and to promote alternative forms of transit. High-intensity, mixed-use districts are proposed near BART stations, and land use incentives are offered for the provision of specific transit-oriented amenities. Improved connections between residential and employment centers and transit hubs are also proposed.
6. *Reinforcement of Downtown as the City's Center.* The General Plan seeks to reinforce Downtown's identity and role as the physical and symbolic center of the city. Plan strategies include increased residential development to increase downtown's population base, better connections with Lindenville and other surrounding neighborhoods, and ensuring that commercial uses outside downtown do not compete with Downtown.
7. *Enhancement of Community Character.* The General Plan includes specific urban design policies are included for areas, such as Lindenville and the East of 101 area, that are undergoing change. Strategies are offered for providing a cohesive image and identity for key corridors, such as El Camino Real.
8. *Coordinated Shoreline Development and Increased Accessibility.* South San Francisco's four-mile long shoreline along the San Francisco Bay is a tremendous resource. The General Plan seeks to increase shoreline accessibility through physical improvements and location of activities near the water.
9. *Performance-based Standards for Services to Ensure Sustainability.* Standards

for capital facilities and public services, such as streets, parks , storm drainage, and fire safety, are established to ensure that growth does not exceed carrying capacity. To maintain the quality of public services for residents, development would be required to meet specific standards established by the plan. In addition, the Annual Report on the General Plan will include progress made towards implementing the General Plan policies.



Colma Creek in the East of 101 area. Protection and enhancement of the city's natural resources is a General Plan theme.

1.4 GENERAL PLAN REQUIREMENTS

State law requires each California city and county to prepare a general plan. A general plan is defined as “a comprehensive, long-term general plan for the physical development of the county or city, and any land outside its boundaries which in the planning agency’s judgment bears relation to its planning.” State requirements call for general plans that “comprise an integrated, internally consistent and compatible statement of policies for the adopting agency.”

A city’s general plan has been described as its constitution for development – the framework within which decisions on how to grow, provide public services and facilities, and protect and enhance the environment must be made. California’s tradition of allowing local authority over land use decisions means that the state’s cities have considerable flexibility in preparing their general plans.

While they allow considerable flexibility, State planning laws do establish some requirements for the issues that general plans must address. The California Government Code establishes both the content of general plans and rules for their adoption and subsequent amendment. Together, State law and judicial decisions establish three overall guidelines for general plans.

- *The General Plan Must Be Comprehensive.* This requirement has two aspects. First, the general plan must be geographically comprehensive. That is, it must apply throughout the entire incorporated area and it should include other areas that the City determines are relevant to its planning. Second, the general plan must address the full range of issues that affects the city’s physical development.
- *The General Plan Must Be Internally Consistent.* This requirement means that the General Plan must fully integrate its separate parts and relate them to each other without conflict. “Horizontal” consistency applies as much to figures and diagrams as to the general plan text. It also applies to data and analysis as well as policies. All adopted portions of the general plan, whether required by State law or not, have equal legal weight. None may supersede another, so the general plan must resolve conflicts among the provisions of each element.

- *The General Plan Must Be Long-range.* Because anticipated development will affect the city and the people who live or work there for years to come, State law requires every general plan to take a long-term perspective.

1.5 PLAN ORGANIZATION

GENERAL PLAN STRUCTURE

The South San Francisco General Plan is organized into nine chapters:

1. *Introduction and Overview.* This includes General Plan themes, requirements for Plan monitoring, review, and amendments.
2. *Land Use.* This chapter provides the physical framework for development in the Planning Area. It establishes policies related to location and intensity of development, and citywide land use policies.
3. *Planning Sub-Areas.* This chapter includes detailed policies for each one of the 14 sub-areas that the Planning Area is divided into.
4. *Transportation.* This Element includes policies, programs, and standards to enhance capacity and circulation. It identifies future improvements and addresses alternative transportation systems bicycling and pedestrian facilities, and parking. *(Amended by City Council Resolution 26-2014. Adopted February 12, 2014)*
5. *Parks, Public Facilities, and Services.* The chapter outlines the policies and standards relating to parks and recreation, educational facilities, and public facilities.
6. *Economic Development.* Although not required by State law, this Element outlines the City's economic development objectives and serves to ensure that economic decision-making is integrated with other aspects of the city's development.
7. *Open Space and Conservation.* This chapter outlines policies relating to habitat and biological resources, water quality, air quality, green house gas emissions and historic and cultural resources conservation. *(Amended by City Council Resolution 26-2014. Adopted February 12, 2014)*
8. *Health and Safety.* This chapter addresses the risks posed by geologic and seismic hazards, flooding, hazardous materials and waste, and fire.

9. *Noise*. This required Element promotes a comprehensive, long-range program of achieving acceptable noise levels throughout the city.

Arrangement of Required General Plan Elements

The General Plan includes six of the seven elements required by State law (Land Use, Circulation, Open Space, Conservation, Noise and Safety) and other elements that address local concerns and regional requirements. The Housing Element is a separately published volume. The State-required mandatory elements are included in the General Plan, as outlined in Table 1-1.

ORGANIZATION OF THE ELEMENTS; POLICY STRUCTURE

Each chapter or element of the General Plan includes brief background information to establish the context for policies in the Element. This background material is neither a comprehensive statement of existing conditions nor does it contain any adopted information. Readers interested in a comprehensive understanding of issues related to a particular topic should refer to South San Francisco General Plan: Existing Conditions and Planning Issues (September 1997). This background information is followed by two sets of policies:

- *Guiding policies are the City’s statements of its goals and philosophy.*
- *Implementing policies represent commitments to specific actions. They may refer to existing programs or call for establishment of new ones.*

Together, the guiding and implementing policies articulate a vision for South San Francisco that the General Plan seeks to achieve. They also provide protection for the city’s resources by establishing planning requirements, programs, standards, and criteria for project review.

Explanatory material accompanies some policies. This explanatory material provides background information or is intended to guide Plan implementation. The use of “should” or “would” indicates that a statement is advisory, not binding; details will need to be resolved in Plan implementation. Where the same topic is addressed in more than one chapter, sections and policies are cross-referred, typically in italics for easy reference.

**Table 1.1-1
Correspondence Between Required General Plan Elements and Chapters in the South San Francisco General Plan**

Required Element	Where Included in the General Plan
Land Use	Chapter 2: Land Use
Circulation	Chapter 4: Transportation
Conservation	Chapter 7: Open Space and Environmental Conservation
Open Space	Chapter 7: Open Space and Environmental Conservation
Safety	Chapter 8: Health and Safety
Noise	Chapter 9: Noise

Policy Numbering System

Policies in the General Plan are organized using a two-part numbering system. The first part refers to the section and the second the order in which the policy appears in the chapter, with a letter designation to distinguish guiding policies from implementing policies. For example, the first guiding policy in Section 3.2 is numbered 3.2-G.1 and the first implementing policy is 3.2-I.1. In Chapter 2: Land Use, Chapter 6: Economic Development, and Chapter 9: Noise, the policies are all numbered with the chapter number. Thus, each policy in the Plan has a unique number.

1.6 RELATED STUDIES

As part of the General Plan preparation, several technical studies were conducted to document environmental conditions, and analyze prospects for economic development, community character and growth, and development alternatives. Studies prepared include:

- Existing Conditions and Planning Issues; September 1997;
- Fiscal Evaluation of Land Uses; January 1998;
- Sketch Plans; February 1998;
- Draft Environmental Impact Report; June 1999; and
- Final Environmental Impact Report; September 1999.

While these background studies and environmental documents have guided Plan preparation, they do not represent adopted City policy.

1.7 THE PLANNING PROCESS

The City's planning process includes monitoring and updating the General Plan and preparing specific plans, resource management plans, and neighborhood and special plans. A General Plan Annual Report will provide an overview of the status of the General Plan and its implementation programs.

AMENDMENTS TO THE GENERAL PLAN

As the City's constitution for development, the General Plan is the heart of the planning process. It is intended to be a living document and, as such, will be subject to more site-specific and comprehensive amendments over time. Amendments also may be needed from time to time to conform to State or federal law passed since adoption, and to eliminate or modify policies that may become obsolete or unrealistic due to changed conditions (such as completion of a task or project, development on a site, or adoption of an ordinance or plan).

State law limits the number of times a city can amend its general plan. Generally, no jurisdiction can amend any mandatory element of its general plan more than four times in one year, although each amendment may include more than one change to the general plan. This restriction, however, does not apply to amendments to:

- Optional elements (such as the Planning Sub-Areas or Economic Development chapters of the South San Francisco General Plan);
- Allow development of affordable housing;
- Comply with a court decision; or
- Comply with an applicable airport land use plan.

Process for General Plan Amendments

City-initiated Amendments

The number of City initiated amendments will be limited to four in any one year, per State law, although more than one change to the General Plan may be made as part of the amendment. The City may initiate amendments more frequently if so needed in the public interest or to comply with a new law or a court-ordered change.

SPECIFIC, AREA, AND NEIGHBORHOOD PLANS

The General Plan includes policies for each of the planning sub-areas in Chapter 3: Planning Sub-areas. To provide additional direction for some of these areas, the City may prepare detailed area or specific plans. Such plans may accommodate development on infill sites and also provide for the gradual elimination of incompatible uses. Requirements for specific plans are spelled out in the State Government Code. Neighborhood and special area plans would be tailored to individual areas and may not necessarily address all of the topics required by State law for specific plans. All specific plans, neighborhood and area plans, and redevelopment plans will need to be consistent with the General Plan.

ANNUAL GENERAL PLAN REPORT

The California Government Code requires that an annual report be submitted to the City Council on the status of the General Plan and progress in its implementation. This report also is to be submitted to the Governor's Office of Planning and Research and the Department of Housing and Community Development by July 1 each year. It must include an analysis of the progress in meeting the City's share of regional housing needs and local efforts to remove governmental constraints to maintenance, improvement, and development of affordable housing. Finally, the

Annual Report should include a summary of all General Plan amendments adopted during the preceding year and an outline of upcoming projects and General Plan issues to be addressed in the coming year, along with a work program and budget.

The Annual Report will be prepared by City staff during the early stages of the budget process and submitted for review to the City Council. Public comments on the Annual Report may be submitted in writing to the Community and Economic Development Department. The City Council also will hear public comments on the Annual Report at duly-noticed public hearings.

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