

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the purpose and organization of the General Plan and provides an overview of what a General Plan is, why it is prepared, and why it is important. This chapter also provides an overview of the purpose, format, and organization of the General Plan Background Report.

This chapter is divided into the following sections:

- What is a General Plan? (Section 1.1)
- Using the General Plan (Section 1.2)
- Regional Setting and Planning Boundaries (Section 1.3)
- Purpose of the Background Report (Section 1.4)
- Format of the Background Report (Section 1.5)
- Organization of the Background Report (Section 1.6)

SECTION 1.1 WHAT IS A GENERAL PLAN?

Every city and county in California is required by State law to prepare and maintain a planning document called a general plan. A general plan serves as the jurisdiction’s “constitution” or “blueprint” for future decisions concerning a variety of issues including land use, health and safety, and resource conservation. All specific plans, subdivisions, public works projects, and zoning decisions must be consistent with the local jurisdiction’s general plan. The Union City General Plan contains the goals and policies upon which the City Council and Planning Commission base their decisions. California State Law requires that each city adopt a general plan “for the physical development of the city and any land outside its boundaries that bears relation to its planning.” Typically, a general plan is designed to address the issues facing the city for the next 15-20 years. The horizon year for Union City’s General Plan Update is 2040.

A general plan has four defining features:

- **General.** As the name implies, a general plan provides general guidance for future land use, transportation, environmental, and resource decisions.
- **Comprehensive.** A general plan addresses a wide range of social, economic, infrastructure, and natural resource topics. These topics include land use, urban development, housing, transportation, public facilities and services, recreation, agriculture, biological resources, and many other issues that impact the community.
- **Long-Range.** A general plan provides guidance on achieving a long-range vision of the future for a city or county. To reach this envisioned future, the general plan includes goals, policies, and implementation programs that address both near-term and long-term needs. The Union City General Plan Update looks out to the year 2040 (roughly 25 years in the future).
- **Integrated and Coherent.** The goals, policies, and implementation programs in a general plan present a comprehensive, unified program for development, resource conservation, and other issues that impact the community. A general plan uses a consistent set of assumptions and projections to assess future demands for housing, employment, and public services (e.g., infrastructure). A general plan has a coherent set of policies and implementation programs that enables citizens to understand the vision of the general plan, and enables landowners, businesses, and industry to be more certain about how policies will be implemented.



A general plan is made up of a collection of “elements,” or chapters, of which seven are mandatory. The seven State-mandated elements are: land use, circulation, housing, conservation, open space, noise, and safety. Communities may include other elements that address issues of particular local concern, such as economic development or urban design. Communities can also organize their general plan anyway they choose, as long as the required topics are addressed.

The general plan is not to be confused with zoning. Although both the general plan and the zoning ordinance designate how land may be developed, they do so in different ways. The general plan has a long-term outlook. It identifies the types of development that will be allowed, the spatial relationships among land uses, and the general pattern of future development. Zoning regulates development through specific standards such as lot size, building setback, and allowable uses. However, the land uses shown on the general plan diagrams will typically be reflected in the local zoning maps as well, as they are both required to be consistent per State law. Development must not only meet the specific requirements of the zoning ordinance but also the broader policies set forth in the general plan.

SECTION 1.2 USING THE GENERAL PLAN

The General Plan is used by the City Council, Planning Commission, and City staff on a daily basis to make decisions with direct or indirect land use implications. It also provides a framework for inter-jurisdictional coordination of planning efforts among officials and staff of the City and other government agencies (e.g., Federal, State, and local). City residents, property owners, and businesses also use the General Plan for guidance on City policies for particular geographic areas or for particular subjects of interest to them.

The General Plan is the basis for a variety of regulatory measures and administrative procedures. California planning law requires consistency between the general plan and its implementing programs, such as zoning and subdivision ordinances, capital improvement programs, specific plans, environmental impact procedures, and building and housing codes.

Over time the city's population will likely increase, its goals will evolve, and the physical environment in which its residents live and work will change. In order for the General Plan to be a useful document, it must be monitored and periodically revised to respond to and reflect changing conditions and needs over time.

The General Plan should be reviewed annually. A more comprehensive and thorough review and revision should be done every five to ten years to assess whether the plan needs to be refined to reflect changes in local conditions, new local priorities, or State law. State law permits the General Plan to be amended up to four times in any calendar year, unless special conditions apply as defined by Government Code Sections 65358(c) and (d). Each amendment may contain more than one change to the General Plan.

The Union City General Plan is made up of two documents: the Background Report and the Policy Document. The Background Report is further divided into 12 chapters so that information can be easily referenced by subject or issue. The following paragraphs provide a summary of these two component documents:

- **Background Report.** The Background Report takes a “snapshot” of current (2014) conditions and trends in Union City. It provides a detailed description of a wide range of topics within the

city, such as demographic and economic conditions, land use, public facilities, and environmental resources. The report provides decision-makers, the public, and local agencies with context for making policy decisions. Unlike the Policy Document, the Background Report is objective and policy-neutral. The Background Report also serves as the “Environmental Setting” section of the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) prepared for the General Plan.

- **Policy Document.** The Policy Document is the essence of the General Plan. It contains the goals and policies that will guide future decisions within the city. It also identifies a set of implementation programs that will ensure the goals and policies in the General Plan are carried out.

As part of the Union City General Plan Update process, the City will also prepare the following General Plan supporting documents:

- **Alternatives Report.** The Alternatives Report will describe the development and evaluation of land use and policy alternatives. The report will be designed to frame an active discussion among stakeholders, community members, and City decision-makers, leading to a determination from the City Council on a preferred land use alternative and direction on key policy issues, which will form the basis of the Draft General Plan.
- **Environmental Impact Report.** The environmental impact report (EIR) responds to the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) as set forth in Sections 15126, 15175, and 15176 of the CEQA Guidelines Act. The Planning Commission and City Council will use the EIR during the General Plan Update process to consider potential environmental implications associated with implementation of the General Plan and to identify feasible mitigation measures.

SECTION 1.3 REGIONAL SETTING AND PLANNING BOUNDARIES

As shown on Figure 1-1, Union City is located in Alameda County on the east side of the San Francisco Bay. Union City is bounded by the city of Hayward to the north, the city of Fremont to the south, the Bay lands on the west, and the hillside to the east. Interstate 880 bisects the city, State Route 92 is located to the north of Union City, State Route 84 is located to the south, and State Route 238 becomes Mission Boulevard in Union City.

Incorporated in 1959, Union City encompasses approximately 18 square miles. The western half of the city lies on a flat coastal plain (approximately 9 square miles) and is intensely developed, while the remainder consists of hillside areas devoted mainly to agricultural activities and permanent open space.

The General Plan uses several terms to describe the city and areas beyond, including the following:

- **City Limits.** The jurisdictional boundary of the city. The city limits includes the area within a city’s corporate boundary over which cities exercise land use authority and provide public services. State law requires cities to adopt a general plan that at a minimum addresses physical development within this boundary.
- **Sphere of Influence.** A sphere of influence (SOI) is the probable physical boundary and service area of a local agency, as adopted by a Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo). A SOI

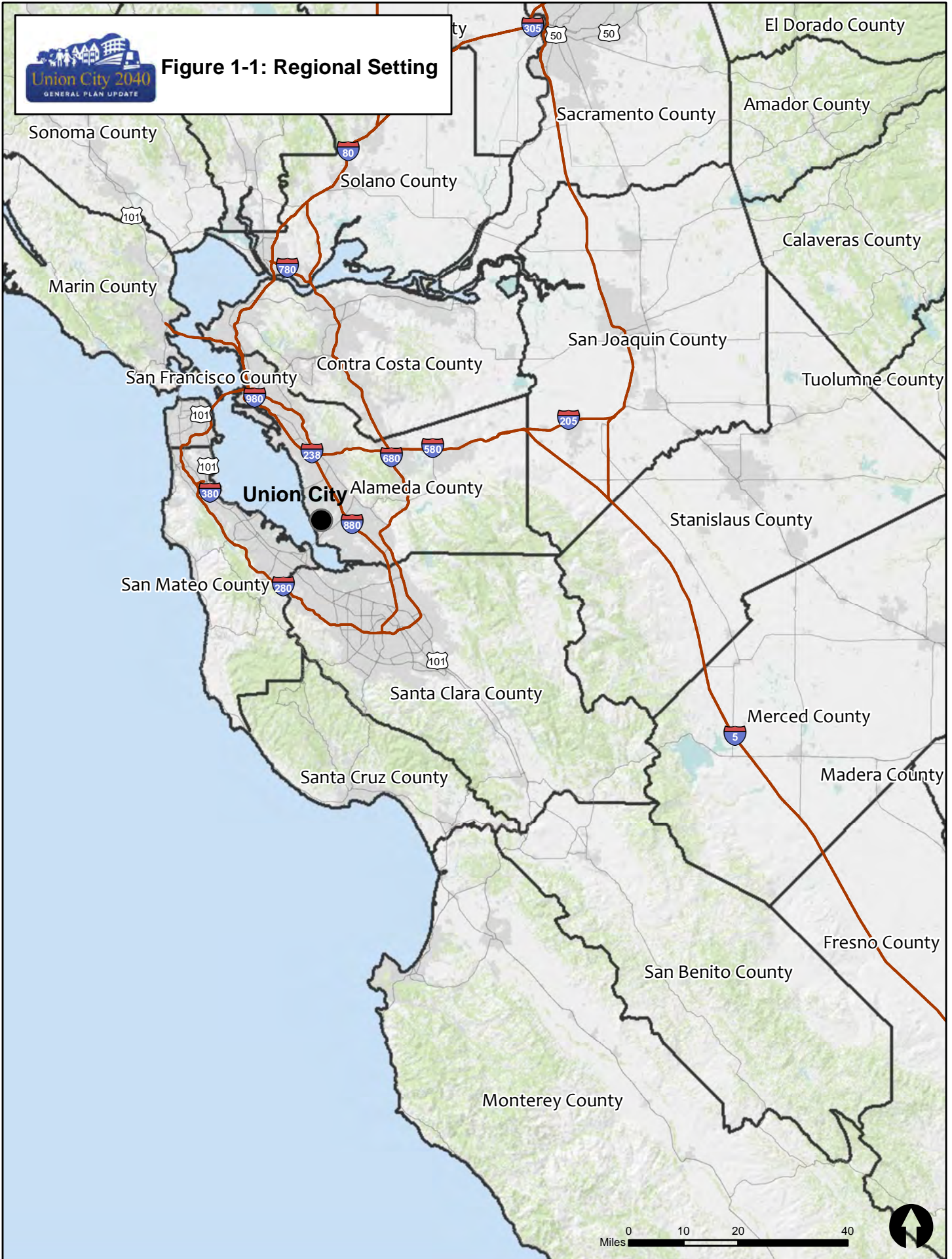


typically includes both incorporated and unincorporated areas within which a city or special district will have primary responsibility for the provision of public facilities and services.

- **Planning Area.** A general plan, pursuant to State law, must address all areas within the jurisdiction's planning area. The planning area encompasses all incorporated and unincorporated territory that bears a relationship to the long-term planning of the jurisdiction. At minimum, a jurisdiction's planning area should include all incorporated land within the city limits and all land within the city's Sphere of Influence.



Figure 1-1: Regional Setting



Source: ESRI, 2013.
Map Date: October 2014



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SECTION 1.4 PURPOSE OF THE BACKGROUND REPORT

The Background Report provides a “snapshot” in time of Union City’s existing conditions. The Background Report includes physical, social, and economic resource information required to support the preparation of the General Plan. The data and information in the report are generally current as of 2014.

The Background Report serves as the foundation document upon which planning policies and programs will be formulated later in the General Plan update. The document is also used as the “environmental setting” section of the General Plan EIR.

SECTION 1.5 FORMAT OF THE BACKGROUND REPORT

Each topical section of each Background Report chapter includes the following:

- **Introduction.** The introduction provides a brief description of the issues covered in the section.
- **Major Findings.** Each section contains a brief summary of key findings. The findings present key facts and preliminary issues from the section. These findings serve as the basis for the identification of issues to be addressed in the Policy Document.
- **Existing Conditions.** This section describes existing conditions for each resource or issue area.
- **Regulatory Setting.** Each section summarizes the laws and regulations pertaining to the topics identified. Federal, State, and local regulations are described, as applicable.
- **Key Terms.** Each section contains a list of terms that are unique to the topical areas within each chapter in the Background Report.
- **Bibliography.** Each section contains a list of documents and websites referenced and persons consulted in preparing the Background Report.

SECTION 1.6 ORGANIZATION OF THE BACKGROUND REPORT

The Background Report is divided into 11 Chapters:

1: Introduction. This chapter provides background information on the purpose of the General Plan, describes the regional setting, and outlines the organization and content of the General Plan.

2: Demographics Trends. This chapter describe the population and household characteristics in Union City.

3: Fiscal and Economic Conditions. This chapter describes the current (2015) fiscal setting and economic conditions in Union City, as well as population and employment projections.

4: Community Health and Quality of Life. This chapter describes the factors that relate to health in Union City, including physical activity options, access to healthy foods, safe neighborhoods, and environmental quality.

5: Land Use. This chapter summarizes existing land use; it describes local and regional land use plans and zoning designations in Union City.



6: Community Design. This chapter describes the character of the city’s neighborhoods and districts.

7: Transportation and Mobility. This chapter describes the transportation networks in Union City, including networks for cars, trucks, buses, bicycles, pedestrians, and passenger and freight rail services.

8: Public Facilities and Services. This chapter describes all of the services offered by the local governments and agencies, including water supply, utilities, law enforcement, schools and other city services.

9: Natural and Cultural Resources. This chapter provides an overview of water, energy, mineral, and biological features, as well as archeological and historical resources in Union City.

10: Hazards and Public Safety. This chapter describes geologic, seismic, flood, fire, and human-made hazards, as well as noise and airport safety. This chapter also describes Union City’s greenhouse gas emissions and the impact of climate change in Union City.

11: Housing. This chapter describes the existing and projected housing needs for Union City.