

1. INTRODUCTION

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1.1 GENERAL PLAN PURPOSE

This General Plan is a statement of fundamental values and shared vision for future development in the City of Hollister. Its purpose is to direct and coordinate future planning decisions. It also describes the desired character and quality of development, and the process for how development should proceed.

As the City faces continuing development pressure, it will strive to preserve its historical and rural character and traditions while rising to new opportunities and challenges. The General Plan is a tool for protecting Hollister's past while guiding its future development. The General Plan encapsulates the current state of the city and presents a vision for the next 20 years of development.

City of Hollister decision makers will refer to the General Plan when considering land use and planning decisions. City staff will use the General Plan on a day-to-day basis to administer and regulate land uses and development activity. Hollister residents can use the General Plan to understand the City's approach to regulating development and upholding community values.

The Hollister General Plan responds to and derives its authority from California state law. The General Plan addresses the eight mandated elements required by Government Code Section 65302, as well as several optional elements added voluntarily by the City.

Periodically, California cities update their General Plans to reflect changes in land development patterns, market conditions, and community preferences since the last General Plan was adopted. This General Plan is an update and reorganization of the City of Hollister's 2005 General Plan.

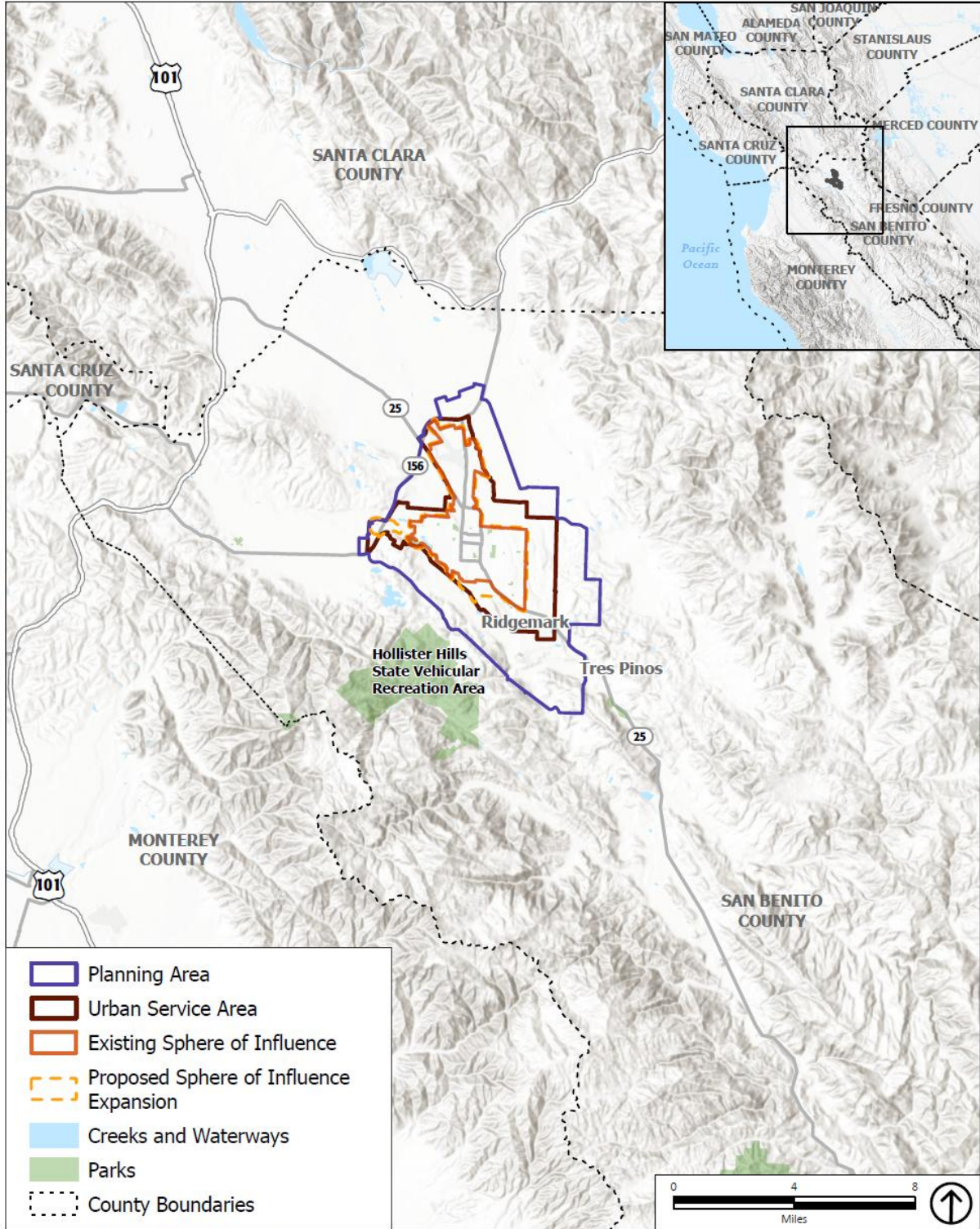
1.2 PLANNING CONTEXT

The City of Hollister is the larger of two incorporated cities in San Benito County and serves as the County seat. San Benito County is in the Central Coast region of California, about 100 miles southeast of San Francisco, 40 miles east of Monterey, and 300 miles north of Los Angeles. Figure I-1, Regional Context, illustrates Hollister's location in the region.



Photo by PlaceWorks

Figure I-1 Regional Context



Source: ESRI, 2020; PlaceWorks, 2025; San Benito County, 2020; USGS, 2019

Hollister was established as an agricultural center and much of the land use outside of the City Limits continues as agriculture. While development pressure is changing the rural character of the area, agriculture still remains an important asset to the region, as evidenced by the surrounding croplands, orchards, and vineyards, which boost the region's economy and tourism industry.

San Benito County was the fastest-growing county in California during the 1990s, and continued in the 2010s, with a pause in the 2000s due to a lack of adequate sewer infrastructure. Expansions to the wastewater treatment plant have since allowed development to resume at a fast pace. The majority of the growth has been concentrated in and around Hollister. The city has expanded from its historic center and adjacent residential neighborhoods toward outlying suburban development constructed on previously rural land. Due to Hollister's proximity to regional job markets, many of Hollister's employed residents commute to jobs outside the city.

Development has resulted in the loss of agricultural land and created severe constraints on the city's infrastructure. To address these issues, this General Plan provides the framework to encourage additional local jobs for Hollister residents; housing units affordable to all income levels; and a transportation system that accommodates all users, including automobiles, pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders.

1.3 GENERAL PLAN SCOPE

The City of Hollister 2040 General Plan addresses the following major policy areas.

1.3.1 LAND USE AND COMMUNITY DESIGN ELEMENT

The Land Use and Community Design Element establishes the type, location, density, and intensity of development activity in Hollister. It describes the goals and policies that will guide Hollister's future growth patterns and development standards. It also strengthens and protects the unique aspects that make Hollister a great place to live while enhancing the character of the city by improving the quality of design and amenities.

1.3.2 CIRCULATION ELEMENT

The Circulation Element describes the services, facilities, and capital improvements needed to facilitate vehicle, pedestrian, transit, bicycle, and emergency circulation. It also identifies future distribution, location, level of service, and extent of public and private transportation facilities to support the prescribed land uses in the General Plan.

1.3.3 COMMUNITY SERVICES AND FACILITIES ELEMENT

Community facilities are necessary in the provision of Hollister’s essential public services. These services include schools, fire and police services, childcare, civic services, and park and recreation services. Hollister’s objective is to provide high-quality public services throughout the city, now and in the future. Infrastructure serves as the foundation for all development in Hollister. This element establishes goals, policies, and actions for the following systems: water supply, wastewater collection, storm drainage and flood control, and solid waste collection and disposal. Infrastructure improvements should preserve economic vitality, accommodate new housing, increase Hollister’s revenue base, and correct existing deficiencies.

1.3.4 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ELEMENT

The Economic Development Element establishes policy guidance to support and maintain an economically viable community. This element responds to Hollister’s goal to be known as an innovation hub that attracts businesses to the city’s downtown, industrial park, and airport area. It includes policies that support efforts to improve local retail options, increase the quality and quantity of local jobs, decrease the need for commuting outside of the city, and enhance Hollister’s appeal as a tourist destination.

1.3.5 NATURAL RESOURCES AND CONSERVATION ELEMENT

The Natural Resources and Conservation Element outlines City policy for the preservation of natural resources and provision of outdoor recreation opportunities, including the San Benito River.

1.3.6 HEALTH AND SAFETY ELEMENT

The Health and Safety Element covers two of the eight State-mandated General Plan elements: Safety and Noise. This section identifies and assesses hazards in the community and establishes the goals, policies, and actions necessary to ensure community safety. Additionally, the Health and Safety Element addresses hazards associated with climate change, seismic and geologic activity, flooding, wildland and urban fires, emergency preparedness and emergency operations, and hazardous materials. In addition, the Noise Element is meant to provide a means for protecting the community from harmful effects of noise exposure.

1.3.7 OPEN SPACE AND AGRICULTURE ELEMENT

The Open Space and Agriculture Element outlines City policy for the preservation of open space and agricultural areas. This element responds to Hollister’s desire to maintain productive and viable agricultural land while providing for economic development, growth, and expansion.

1.3.8 ARTS AND CULTURE ELEMENT

The Arts and Culture Element outlines City policy for creating a lively arts scene that encourages self-expression and ensures the representation of Hollister's arts and cultural communities. The element includes policy direction to expand arts programming, support funding efforts, and develop a distinct identity for Hollister as a regional destination for arts, culture, and creative enterprises.

1.3.9 ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ELEMENT

The Environmental Justice Element identifies impacted communities and sets policy direction to minimize effects of environmental hazards on these communities, with an emphasis on pollution exposure, food access, and safe and sanitary homes. The element also establishes policy guidance to promote physical activity and ensure adequate access to public facilities and services.

1.3.10 HOUSING ELEMENT

Hollister's ability to attract employment-generating uses will depend on its ability to provide a wide range of housing choices for families and nonfamily households so that all economic segments of the community have the ability to obtain safe, decent, and affordable housing. The Housing Element quantifies the estimated housing needs of Hollister's future population and sets forth the actions to ensure that the future need is satisfied. The Housing Element is a separate, stand-alone element of the General Plan, and has not been updated as part of the 2040 General Plan.

1.4 IMPACT OF PLAN ADOPTION

Once adopted, the General Plan is the basis for land use and other municipal decisions. The plan itself is not a regulation; for implementation, it relies on tools such as the zoning ordinance, subdivision ordinance, design review, capital improvement program, and a variety of special purpose ordinances and programs.

In accordance with California law, the City's zoning ordinance and other implementation tools must be consistent with the General Plan. This means that the zoning ordinance will need to be reviewed after adoption of this plan to ensure consistency. During the preparation and public review of zoning ordinance amendments, topics such as building height, densities, and allowed uses will be discussed for specific parcels. The general rule is that the zoning ordinance can be more restrictive than the General Plan, but cannot allow a greater level or completely different type of development than that described by the policies and standards in the General Plan.

1.5 PROCESS FOR DEVELOPING THIS GENERAL PLAN

1.5.1 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The 2005 General Plan, on which this 2040 General Plan Update is based, was developed through a public sharing process, consisting of issue exploration, alternatives analysis, and policy development. A General Plan Advisory Committee provided overall direction, with the assistance of citizen representatives who worked closely with the consultant team and City staff to guide the public process for updating the plan.

The process that resulted in this update also had significant public involvement and guidance from City leadership. During both summer 2020 and spring 2021, the City and its consultant team held multiple virtual workshops and public meetings to receive input on the vision statement and policy options as part of the General Plan Update. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which began in early 2020, the City collected community input through virtual workshops and online activities. Although the workshops were virtual, they still allowed for dialogue and small group participation so community members could share ideas and hear feedback from their neighbors. The outreach program included:

- Four virtual workshops in the summer of 2020 and three General Plan Advisory Committee meetings in the fall of 2020 to receive input and provide direction on the vision statement and background reports.
- Two public workshops in March 2021, five General Plan Advisory Committee meetings in March and April 2021, a Spanish language workshop in May 2021, and a Planning Commission meeting on May 24, 2021, where input and direction on the draft policy options was received.
- In addition to public meetings, a policy options survey, which was available in both English and Spanish on the City's General Plan Update website for members of the community to also provide comment on the General Plan Update and policy options. This survey was also circulated via email to the project mailing list, and advertised on City social media accounts.

The public input received from the workshops, survey, and General Plan Advisory Committee meetings helped inform this General Plan Update.

The working draft General Plan Update was subsequently reviewed in public discussion and refined before adoption.

1.5.2 ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

In addition to the public participation noted, the General Plan Update process has included the preparation of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Descriptions of the environmental setting and the specific public actions resulting from the General Plan are included in the body of individual sections of the plan. These sections provide the description of the General Plan and its environmental setting for the EIR.

The EIR provides the project summary, impact analysis, and associated mitigation measures to reduce environmental effects to a level considered less than significant, where feasible. It also addresses other mandated components of an EIR for a General Plan. Following circulation of the draft Hollister General Plan and EIR, responses were prepared for the comments received, and the Final EIR was certified prior to adoption of this General Plan Update.

1.6 UPDATING THE GENERAL PLAN

Once adopted, the General Plan does not remain a static document. According to Government Code Section 65358(b), State law permits up to four General Plan amendments per mandatory element per year. Most amendments usually propose either a change in the land use designation of a particular property or a text amendment. It is important to note that amending the plan can often result in internal inconsistency of the plan. In this context, the decision-making bodies are advised to take care in making decisions regarding General Plan amendments and to adopt the findings listed on the following page.

General plans are based on analyses and assumptions concerning social, economic, and physical conditions that may be subject to change over time. Having now been adopted in its final form, the Hollister General Plan should be reviewed annually and, if necessary, updated to reflect new conditions and information.

After adoption of a General Plan, the City of Hollister may also adopt subsequent “area plans” and “specific plans” to address local concerns in additional detail.

An area plan is a specialized plan that addresses a particular region or community in Hollister’s Sphere of Influence. Such plans refine the policies of the Hollister General Plan as they apply to a smaller area. They are implemented by local ordinances, such as those regulating land use. Area plans are focused planning policy documents that become part of (and must be internally consistent with) the Hollister General Plan. Unlike a specific plan, State law does not stipulate the minimum contents of an area plan. However, to be considered for adoption in the City of Hollister, area plans must include sufficient information to enable a comprehensive evaluation of a given area in relationship to the General Plan.

Unlike an area plan, a specific plan would not be an amendment to the Hollister General Plan but would be designed to implement the goals and policies of the General Plan for a specific geographic area. When a specific plan is adopted, it represents a separate document that must be fully consistent with the goals and policies stated in the Hollister General Plan. A specific plan is a hybrid policy statement and/or regulatory tool that places the emphasis on development standards and criteria that would supplement those stated in the Hollister General Plan. The text and diagrams of a specific plan must address land use (including open space), infrastructure, standards for development and natural resource conservation, and implementation measures.

General Plan amendments that are approved by the City Council must be supported by findings of fact. Findings provide a rationale for making a decision to approve or deny an amendment. While specific findings may be applied on an amendment-by-amendment basis, the following minimum standard findings should be made for each General Plan amendment:

- The proposed amendment is deemed to be in the public interest.
- The amendment is consistent and compatible with the rest of the General Plan and any implementation programs that may be affected.
- The potential impacts of the amendment have been assessed and have been determined not to be detrimental to the public health, safety, and welfare of the community.
- The amendment has been processed in accordance with the applicable provisions of the California Government Code and CEQA.

City-initiated amendments, as well as amendments requested by other public agencies, are subject to the same basic process and requirements described previously to ensure consistency and compatibility with the General Plan. This includes appropriate environmental review, public notice, and public hearings leading to an official action by resolution of the City Council.

1.7 GOALS, POLICIES, AND ACTIONS

Each element of this General Plan contains background information and a series of goals, policies, and actions. Figure I-2 illustrates that policies and actions are at the same level of importance and are intended to implement goals. In most cases, goals have both implementing policies and actions. However, it is also possible for a goal to be implemented exclusively through policies or actions. The following provides a description of goals, policies, and actions and explains the relationship between them:

- A **goal** is a description of the general desired result that the City seeks to create through the implementation of its General Plan.
- A **policy** is a specific statement that sets standards to guide decision making as the City works to achieve a goal. Such policies, once adopted, represent statements of City regulation. A policy is ongoing and is implemented by City staff, the Planning Commission, and City Council in their review of land development projects and in decision making about City actions.
- An **action** is an implementation measure, procedure, or technique intended to help achieve a specified goal. The City must take additional steps to implement each action in the General Plan. An action is something that can and will be completed in a specific timeframe during the General Plan planning period.

These goals, policies, and actions provide guidance to the City on how to direct change and manage its resources over the next 20 years.



Figure I-2 Hierarchy of General Plan Goals, Policies, and Actions

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