



1. Introduction

This page intentionally left blank.



Chapter 1. Introduction

THINKING AND DOING SOMETHING ABOUT HIGHLAND'S FUTURE

Highland is a fine community and it is ours. Since we incorporated in 1987, a lot has changed and, by our intention, much remains the same. The most obvious changes are physical. We have grown. Our stability, on the other hand, has to do with who we are: a suburban community with deep roots in the past and a careful eye to the future. We care deeply about our community and that doesn't change.

Like all California cities, we are required by law to have a General Plan. Unlike many cities, we take the opportunity for a major update to that Plan personally. When you read this document you know it is the citizens of Highland and their City Council members who are speaking. While we had considerable help in preparing this Plan from our excellent staff and its consultant team, our fingerprints are all over it. No bureaucracy owns this document; we do. We are proud of that ownership, just as we are proud of our community.

We suggest that you read this section of our General Plan to gain a general understanding of it—and our City. Then you can probe more deeply into whatever particular topic is of immediate interest to you.

UNDERSTANDING HIGHLAND

The information we share here is current as of September 2004. It will certainly change, influenced significantly by the direction in this General Plan. But you need to know the general time reference we use so that, as time goes by, the timeliness of this information can be appreciated.

The Highland Community and Its Potential

With over 49,000 residents and 18 square miles of territory, our City is solidly in the middle of the spectrum among California cities. In case you aren't familiar with our community, perhaps a few simple comparisons will help. If you're from southern California you will recognize places like San Clemente or La Mirada, which have similar population size.



Extending from East Highland Ranch to San Bernardino and beyond, the Base Line corridor plays a major transportation role. Providing connectivity for residents, businesses and visitors alike, it also plays a significant role in establishing the image of Highland. As such, the Base Line Corridor is given much attention throughout the General Plan, particularly from a land use, circulation and design perspective.



Coronado and San Juan Capistrano are about our physical size but have somewhat fewer residents.

Northern Californians will recognize Cupertino or Woodland—slightly smaller in area but very close to the same population. Just about everyone recognizes San Luis Obispo, with a similar population and only slightly more area.

These comparisons may help you “calibrate” where we fit in the numbers array making up California’s multitude of cities—nearly 500 in all. However, that is only part of the story and certainly not the most important part.

As with any vital place, it is the people who breathe life into a community. For example, Highland is renowned for its high level of volunteerism and the extremely low ratio of City staff to population. It is a “taut ship” fiscally and many citizens are so grateful for that quality that they invest personally in offering community services. So we are mindful of the caliber of commitment by residents and businesses that call Highland their home today as well as of those who will arrive to help us through the next phase of growth and improvement.

Many aspects of our community receive attention in this version of our General Plan. Five general themes, however, define our potential right now and are particularly basic in shaping contemporary policies to guide our future. They include:

- **Invigorating Key Activity Centers.** The time has come for action within some key locations that have been “biding their time” for years. The dynamic Inland Empire economy has connected with the maturing of our community and the result is real interest in places like the newly designated Town Center on Base Line; the “Golden Triangle,” defined by State Route 30 (SR-30), 5th Street and Boulder Avenue, and the 5th Street Corridor paralleling San Bernardino International Airport. Our focus on the quality of development expectations for these areas is newly sharpened and we expect great things to happen in these strategic areas.
- **Preserving Our Natural Setting.** We have always been grateful for the natural frame within which Highland nestles between the expansive San Bernardino National Forest and the upper reaches of the Santa Ana River, just as it drops down out of the San Bernardino Mountains at Seven Oaks Dam. Some of this natural terrain defines important spaces within Highland as well. Along with other Inland Empire communities that are realizing how crucial this natural setting is to their long-term community identity, we expand the priority for these areas in our new policies.



The San Bernardino Mountains provide a dramatic backdrop for the City of Highland. This setting is one of the many reasons people choose to live in Highland and call it their home.



- **Stimulating Jobs and Economic Health.** Highland has achieved and sustained its award-winning fiscal management results despite the fact that it is not a commercial “powerhouse.” We have never envisioned competing in the all-encompassing scramble for tax dollars that consume so many municipalities. We have long recognized, however, that some of the activity centers described above have logical potential to provide both job growth and tax revenues, given good timing and proper direction. Moreover, we are seeking to make inefficient commercial development along Base Line more valuable and supportive of improved performance for our well-located commercial centers.
- **Revitalizing Our Neighborhoods.** Ten years ago, we focused strategic thinking on how to improve some of the neighborhoods in Highland that were showing the effects of age and neglect. We have made great strides in turning around some of the worst situations and have an operating Neighborhood Improvement Program that makes new breakthroughs almost daily. A lot remains to be done and we are finding that there is increasing interest on the part of families needing entry-level housing in neighborhoods in which the pattern is toward revitalization and improvement. What goes down doesn’t have to continue that way, and we rededicate our resources toward that end in this Plan.
- **Strengthening Historic Links.** There is the overriding theme of capturing our historic roots as a proud agricultural community back before the last century. Yes, almost all of that agriculture is now gone. But the values derived from that era remain and we are committed to capturing that spirit through historic symbols integrated into contemporary development. As an example, our historic Old Town will be linked to the new Town Center and will even provide some of the architectural detailing there to convey a sense of timelessness as development evolves.

The Path to the Present

Highland’s original town site was founded in 1891. The community soon became an important part of the citrus industry—and we still have historic packinghouses to prove it! Our historic Old Town still displays commercial and residential structures from our early period. They remain as symbols of the sense of community and respect for tradition that characterize Highland today.

When Highland finally incorporated in 1987, our population stood at roughly 29,500. A great many observers at the time suggested that this fledgling municipality just wouldn’t make it, largely because of fiscal



Highland has a rich history, and the community embraces it as an important asset. The General Plan seeks to preserve its historic resources and respect its traditions in the Historic Village District, East Highlands Village and the new Town Center.



limitations. In fact, Highland today is one of the strongest cities in the County from a fiscal standpoint. It emerged as one of the most desirable places to live in the burgeoning Inland Empire. It is now poised as a hot spot for smart investment in the next phase of Inland Empire growth.

Since incorporation, Highland's population has grown by an astounding 67 percent. That rate is not going to prevail over the remainder of our development potential because there just isn't enough land for that. However, we do expect to eventually be home to some 70,000 residents—just over 40 percent beyond our current population.

Looking Now to the Future

In light of that anticipated growth, our focus on quality becomes even more crucial. That orientation accounts for the excellent new neighborhoods created as part of the East Highlands Ranch—now a highly successful residential magnet for move-up families looking for outstanding value. That same mentality must now be directed toward new commercial and industrial development as well as infill housing.

One area that stands out as a potential to further expand housing choices in Highland toward exclusive residential development is the recently annexed Seven Oaks area that now defines the most easterly reaches of Highland. A magnificent setting just downstream from Seven Oaks Dam, this area is slated to become another successful chapter in the evolution of our community.

This leads naturally to one of the most strategic factors of our community's character and future: its special location. This factor is central to much of the discussion above and it influences most of the direction expressed in this Plan. As the current SR-30 is completed and becomes part of the continuous route of the I-210 regional link, this position will become even more pivotal. Added to that is our proximity to the San Bernardino International Airport and the permanent natural setting at the edge of development in this part of the San Bernardino Valley—well, you get the idea.

The Power of Vision

Ever since our first General Plan was prepared after incorporation, we have had a distinct vision for our community. It has been refined and updated, but not fundamentally changed. You can read it at the front of this document. The point of having a vision is to motivate and sustain our best practices in community development—and to engage those who wish to develop or locate here in sharing that same commitment.

The centerpiece of our vision is the idea of home—for individuals, for families, for our entire community. This is a place in which small town



values and heritage combine with contemporary standards and practices to sustain an economically vibrant and environmentally sound future. We can ask for no more and will settle for no less.

We tell people that they can “come home to Highland.” Everything we undertake as a community is aimed at making good on that offer.

UNDERSTANDING THE GENERAL PLAN

Its Functions

The simplest way to state the function of the General Plan is to say that its job is to implement the Highland Vision. This isn't to say that everything necessary to make our Vision a reality can or should be accomplished through the General Plan, but it is the main policy vehicle for doing so. In performing this basic role of carrying out the Vision, our General Plan:

- Organizes our commitments to quality and defines what quality means to us;
- States goals in key subject areas;
- Sets development policy within the City;
- Influences policies and actions by other governments on behalf of Highland;
- Offers a stable and comprehensive reference for those wishing to invest or do business in Highland;
- Complies with the requirements of the California Government Code;
- Provides intent for the various ordinances governing development here, including the Development Code;
- Influences implementation priorities;
- Establishes guidance for the major issues, themes and locales considered most pivotal at the time of this update;
- Establishes a contemporary environmental baseline for use in subsequent development projects; and
- Conveys what matters most about their community to the resident and business citizens of Highland.

Its Scope and Structure

Our General Plan scope and structure are simple. The Plan includes both mandated and optional topics as provided in the California Government Code. Chapters are arranged as follows, with mandated topics shown in **bold** type.



Chapter 1, Introduction: Thinking and Doing Something About Highland's Future, sets the stage for the entire document. It serves as both a general introduction and a description of the context in which the City of Highland functions.

Chapter 2, **Land Use**, describes the land use policies and designations used to guide physical development of the City. An important subtopic in this chapter is the policy guidance for preservation of historic places and structures within Highland.

Chapter 3, **Circulation**, describes our transportation system and provides guidance on achieving mobility within and through our City. This is one of the critical support systems for the land use commitments described in Chapter 2.

Chapter 4, Public Facilities and Services, describes the systems and sets policy for water, sewer, drainage and other infrastructure systems that also support proposed land uses. In addition, it provides policy direction for service programs related directly to the use of these facilities.

Chapter 5, **Open Space** and **Conservation**, combines two mandated topics because they are so interconnected. This chapter provides guidance on the permanent preservation of open space and habitat in and around the City, as well as conservation of natural resources. Furthermore, it provides policies to enhance Highland's recreational resources, including parks and trails. Taken together, these essential topics provide for the preservation of our irreplaceable natural setting.

Chapter 6, **Public Health and Safety**, sets direction for methods and facilities aimed at protecting the health of our population and assuring the safety of both life and property. Given the vulnerability of our community to fire and flood, this is a crucial area of public policy to sustain the City.

Chapter 7, **Noise**, provides policy direction for the protection of people and sensitive uses from excessive noise levels, especially those generated by the airport, highways and industry.

Chapter 8, **Housing**, contains the Housing Element approved through a separate process prior to the current General Plan Update. It is included here by reference to ensure internal consistency within the General Plan, as required by state law.

Chapter 9, Economic Development, explains the policies and strategies for achieving the desired level of economic development and supply of jobs for Highland. This chapter provides a critical foundation for the land use designations and patterns contained in Chapter 2.



Chapter 10, Community Design, provides policy guidance for design of our physical development—a major factor in achieving the quality environment we seek.

Chapter 11, Airport, recognizes the importance of the San Bernardino International Airport and how its operation and future growth affect economic growth and quality of life in Highland.

Appendix A, Implementation, sets the foundation for implementation commitments contained in the Plan. It documents the importance and role of implementation as an expression of policy commitment embodied in the Plan.

Its Use

The Highland General Plan is our primary reference when making development and conservation decisions that involve or impact Highland. This is true for public as well as privately owned land. It also serves as a foundation document for City initiatives and resource allocations that may not be associated with any particular development or conservation proposal.

Each policy is expressed with a certain expectation and the entire Plan is to be applied when the following kinds of decisions are contemplated:

- Review of proposed public or private development projects;
- Consideration of public acquisition or disposal of land;
- Budget decisions that impact our City’s physical development or implementation of any aspect of the General Plan;
- Proposals by other governmental entities that would impact Highland;
- Taking positions on proposed legislation of interest to Highland;
- Decision making by intergovernmental organizations that would impact Highland; and
- Approval of proposed programs or actions to implement our General Plan in addition to those described above.

Two types of policies are expressed in our General Plan:

- 1) One form consists of maps that show the location and extent of certain policies. This may entail land use designations, infrastructure systems, environmental factors or any number of other geographically distinct applications of policy.
- 2) The second form—most typically associated with policy—consists of written policy statements. They express guidance or, often, mandates when certain kinds of decisions are encountered.



For some policy subjects (such as design, for example), additional diagrams and illustrations are included to assist in interpreting policy intent.

One of the most important things to understand about our policies is that we don't have the same expectations for every one of them. We expect some to be carried out rigorously, others to be implemented more selectively. We use different action words in policy statements to signify the level of commitment we are making and the outcome we expect from applying the policy. These distinctions are important and we urge the user of this Plan to observe them.

Another important factor to keep in mind is that our policy is intentional. By that we mean it is to be taken seriously by others because we do. Policies in our Plan are not taken lightly. Since the process of setting policy is for us quite rigorous and the language is carefully selected, we in turn expect a rigorous application of policy by the appropriate parties.

The following action terms are the most commonly used in this Plan:

- **Shall.** We will always follow the policy. This represents an absolute commitment. We expect that the policy will definitely be implemented under all circumstances.
- **Should.** We will follow the policy in almost all cases. Exceptions or degrees of implementation are acceptable for good reason, as long as the rationale for departure from the policy is well documented and the implications are superior to a rigorous application of the policy. We expect that the policy will be followed under most circumstances.
- **Allow.** We will permit someone else's initiative and support it unless there is a very good reason not to. This type of policy applies to what someone else is going to do, not what that City initiates. The test here is not as rigorous as with "should" policies. We expect that the policy will be implemented under most circumstances.
- **Coordinate.** We will join with another entity to implement the policy. It may involve public or private parties or both. We expect that the policy will generally be implemented in some form of partnership.
- **Consider.** We will investigate an idea, proposal or subject and determine the appropriate level of commitment based on our findings. We expect that an open-minded effort will be made to discover the facts and evaluate their implications for Highland. We will then decide what our policy will be.



- **Restrict.** We will limit a particular action or aspect of development. This level of commitment is aimed at containing a possibility within certain bounds because of its likely implications for Highland. We expect that implementation will occur, but within certain specified limits.
- **Prohibit.** We will prevent a specified condition or action from occurring. This is the strongest stance we can take against, rather than for, something. We expect that the action or condition will not occur under any circumstance.

We may use other terms in some of our policy statements. Where that happens they should be interpreted according to their similarity to the terms described above.

Where policy intent beyond what is contained directly in this Plan is desired, two other sources provide supplemental information. The first is the Appendix to this Plan. The Appendix offers detail regarding certain aspects of the General Plan or its update process that is not needed in the body of the document. The second source is the Environmental Impact Report (EIR), which also contains considerable information supplementary to the policy content of the Plan. Since the mitigation requirements of the EIR are closely linked to relevant policies in the General Plan, these topics offer particularly valuable insights.

It is in everyone's mutual best interest to understand clearly what our General Plan seeks to accomplish. We do not want uncertainty and misconceptions to make decision making more difficult for the private sector or for public agencies. So we recommend that readers who intend to seek approval for a proposal that requires compliance with the General Plan start by consulting with the City Community Development Department. Interpretations at that level may be appealed, if desired, first to the Planning Commission and then to the City Council.

Finally, updating the Plan and approving any subsequent amendment to it must comply with the California Government Code. Generally, mandatory elements of the Plan may not be amended more than four times in one calendar year. Such changes require recommendation from the Planning Commission and an adopting resolution by the City Council. However, this limitation does not apply to the optional elements of the Plan. Other provisions of the law also apply, for example, those pertaining to environmental clearances.

We want the use of our General Plan to help create the Highland Vision. Thank you for being part of that.



The Highland community, including residents and local businesses, played an important role in shaping the vision for Highland. In turn, their input helped guide the policy foundation of the General Plan.



APPRECIATING THE PROCESS

The Update

It had been ten years since a comprehensive look at our development policies led us to start a new update process. There was a sense that certain changes in circumstances over the decade required a new validation of our vision and perhaps some refinement in direction. It turns out that this intuition was right: the dynamics of change in the region generally, our local community specifically, and the City explicitly were beginning to usher in a new chapter in the growth and development of Highland. While there was some trepidation about spending the money required for a thorough update, the task was undertaken.

Midway through the process, a major leadership change on the City Council significantly impacted the process. Strong Council participation, as well as support from the Planning Commission, characterized the entire update process. This level of decision-maker involvement in the process resulted in a document more carefully attuned to a supportable policy direction than could possibly have been prepared without such engagement by community leaders.

Two-Year Work Program

In 2001, the City of Highland was awarded the prestigious Helen Putnam Award for Excellence by the California League of Cities for its Two-Year Work Program. The process begins every other December when staff prepare a list of proposed work items to be considered by the City Council. Staff complete an in-depth analysis of their ongoing work in a time utilization study, which determines the amount of time available for any new work items. Based on a rating system, the City Council then prioritizes the work items and places urgent and high priority items on a timetable for completion.

A Citywide Celebration and several Focus Group meetings, augmented by City Council/Planning Commission workshops, kept the process on track and generated extensive insights and improvements in the General Plan. The process was also sharpened by a concurrent fine-tuning of the City's Zoning Ordinance. This way, policy and regulation were able to "feed" each other and thus become more responsive to our needs.

A critical aspect of the update process was the effort placed on validating our Highland Vision. While the basic ideas didn't change, their intent was clarified and a set of principles was devised to link each aspect of the Vision to policy attention in the General Plan. These principles not only guided the preparation of the Plan, they will also assist in interpreting and applying the Plan after its adoption. In fact, they are so important that we have included them below as the final ingredient in this introduction to Highland and its future.

The reason we can say that the General Plan reflects the Highland Vision and represents the aspirations of this community is because it was shaped so intentionally by the community leaders, in consultation with the citizenry. That provides the best assurance possible that the Plan will be implemented.



Implementation

Action is not a choice if one cares about community; it is imperative. For a number of years, Highland has operated a unique budgeting process that results in City Council determination of priorities for expending City resources (money, staff time, equipment, etc.). A two-year cycle assures that proper attention is given to setting these priorities. Appendix A to this Plan presents a list of implementation actions required to ensure that the General Plan performs its central function as the blueprint for community development here. Reality dictates that everything cannot be done at once. It also demonstrates that some actions must always be underway if the Plan is to have any meaning. We have intentionally embarked on the implementation program associated with the General Plan as a continuation of Highland's cost-effective way of marshalling limited resources to achieve optimum results. The implementation program will become an integral part of our total operating system and will be refined as circumstances demand and achievements are accomplished.



This page intentionally left blank.