



Looking west along 19th Street with Newport Boulevard in the foreground

Chapter 1:

Introduction

Costa Mesa: Moving Forward

This Costa Mesa General Plan establishes the long-range planning and policy direction that guides change and preserves the qualities that define our community. The 2035 General Plan sets forth the Vision for Costa Mesa for the next two decades. This Vision recognizes that Costa Mesa’s focus remains on protecting and enhancing our diverse residential neighborhoods, accommodating an array of businesses that both serve local needs and attract regional and international spending, and continuing to provide cultural, educational, social, and recreational amenities that contribute to the quality of life in the community. Over the long term, General Plan implementation will ensure that development decisions and improvements to public and private infrastructure are consistent with the goals, objectives, and policies contained in this Plan.

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The City adopted its first General Plan in 1957, four years after incorporation and before State law required such plans. This illustrated the community’s resolve to plan a City structure that creates success, rather than react to development proposals. The second General Plan was prepared in 1970 to set the course of anticipated development of the quickly disappearing agricultural lands. The Plan was comprehensively amended in 1981, 1992, and 2002. This 2035 General Plan largely incorporates the goals, policies, and objectives from the 2002 General Plan, with focused changes made to create a more multimodal circulation network and encourage reinvestment in districts and neighborhoods where it is most needed.

Purpose

The State of California requires every city and county to adopt a comprehensive general plan that is “an integrated, internally consistent, and compatible statement of policies” to address all issues that affect the physical development of the community, as well as land outside its boundaries that potentially affect long-term planning (Government Code Section 65300 et seq.). The role of a general plan is to act as a “constitution” for development, the foundation upon which all land use and related decisions are based.

General Plans must meet minimum requirements stipulated in the Government Code. Most specifically, the General Plan is required to address several topics, or “elements”: Land Use, Circulation, Housing, Conservation, Noise, Safety, Open Space and Recreation,. Each jurisdiction has the authority to include additional elements for issues important to the long-term development of the community, such as historic preservation, air quality, or arts and culture. Under the law, optional elements have the same weight as the mandatory elements regarding adopted policy. Also, every jurisdiction has flexibility in determining how to organize its general plan, provided all required components specified in the Government Code are addressed.

The Costa Mesa General Plan consists of 10 elements, identified in Table I-1.

Table I-1: General Plan Structure

Costa Mesa General Plan Elements	Required by State Law	Optional Elements
Land Use Element	☐	
Circulation Element	☐	
Housing Element	☐	
Conservation Element	☐	
Noise Element	☐	
Safety Element	☐	
Open Space and Recreation Element	☐	
Growth Management Element		☐
Community Design Element		☐
Historical and Cultural Resources Element		☐

Community Engagement: The Great Reach

During 2012-2015, the City conducted an in-depth community engagement process— “The Great Reach” —that involved a broad and diverse constituency to refine the community vision and to identify where targeted change was warranted and desired. Great Reach events included several community workshops held early in the General Plan development process and widely attended by residents, property owners, the development community, and social service interests. The topics discussed varied by workshop, with intensive sessions focused on topics of the greatest and most immediate public concerns: parks and open spaces, traffic, bicycling, and community safety. The exchange of ideas from these workshops helped identify strongly held community values and aspirations.

Planning Commission and City Council Involvement

The Great Reach extended to the City Council and Planning Commission in a series of workshops and study sessions held in 2014 and 2015: three joint City

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Council/Planning Commission workshops, three study sessions with City Council, and one study session with Planning Commission. From the workshops and study sessions, the community decided upon a refined Vision Statement which emphasized the desire to resolve targeted land use and mobility issues as the focus points for the 2015-2035 General Plan.



The Great Reach: General Plan public workshops included seven workshops/sessions held at various locations and times to maximize participation by residents and stakeholders.

Bikeway and Walkability Committee

One outcome of the workshops in 2015 was the formation of the Bikeway and Walkability Committee, composed of 13 City Council appointed members. The Committee was tasked with crafting goals, objectives, policies, and programs for the City's first Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan. The Committee emphasized the need to accommodate bicyclists and pedestrians in transportation and recreational infrastructure.

General Plan Vision

Through the Great Reach process, community participants helped craft this refined Vision for Costa Mesa.

Costa Mesa: A Vision for Land Use and Mobility

Costa Mesa is a vibrant community where residents and visitors can enjoy all our City has to offer. From the youthful and eclectic to the established and historical, our community features opportunities unparalleled in Southern California. Our neighborhoods are diverse, distinctive, and safe. Our commercial districts offer world-class shopping and are home to thriving businesses including the creative class, technology, and automotive ventures. Every day, hundreds of children and adults enjoy our abundant parks and open spaces. The City offers exciting and unique cultural opportunities that draw visitors from all over Southern California and enrich the lives of our residents. The founding principles that established our community as a great place to live and own a business are still in place. We anticipate, adapt, and plan ahead. As a result, we are able to respond to regional influences in ways that continue to move Costa Mesa in positive directions. The City ensures new development is economically and environmentally sustainable, and is compatible in scale and character with our neighborhoods.

Housing Our Residents

We pride ourselves in being inclusive, multi-generational, and economically and culturally diverse. Our neighborhoods reflect this diversity, both in terms of the range of available housing and household composition. From single-family homes to apartments to live/work units, residents have many choices of creative living spaces. As our community grows and develops, we aim to increase homeownership opportunities.

Sustaining Our Economy

A healthy economy leads to a thriving community. We foster conditions that support a modern and diverse economy—one that retains and attracts new businesses and industries and cultivates innovation. Costa Mesa's reputation as a well-known shopping destination represents just one part of our economic base. Local businesses, industrial districts, and urban-scale office complexes thrive in our business-friendly culture. This robust economy attracts investment and provides employment for all skills and educational

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levels. A healthy tax base sustains the ability of the City to provide high-quality services.

Providing Great Open Spaces

Parks and open spaces contribute to the health of our residents, ecosystems, and the environment. We plan for sensible growth while preserving natural open spaces. These natural open spaces are protected to continue to provide valuable functions as habitat, resource conservation/protection, and places of education. The City's commitment to well-maintained parks will ensure that residents can continue to enjoy them. At the same time, we are committed to providing flexible new gathering spaces adaptable to the evolving needs of residents of all ages.

Celebrating Cultural Life

Costa Mesa is a City of the Arts; we are “the place” to experience and enjoy visual and performing arts and cultural events. We treasure education and express this through enhancement of traditional and non-traditional learning environments, including our libraries, parks, and open spaces. The City supports intellectual and artistic creativity and celebrates Costa Mesa's historical assets. Through these, we continue to cultivate cultural enrichment and lifelong learning.

Moving in and around the City

As a city served by freeways and regional travel corridors, Costa Mesa recognizes that vehicles moving through our city can be headed to other destinations. We create improvements that channel this traffic so that our businesses have easy access, our neighborhoods are protected, and bicycles and pedestrians can move freely. To achieve this, we place transit, bicycle, and pedestrian connectivity on par with traditional roadway improvements. We plan accordingly so our residents can get around easily without a car, and recreational cyclists have many opportunities to enjoy the outdoors. We manage land use intensity so vehicle demand never exceeds planned capacity.

Community Profile

Location and Setting

Costa Mesa is located in central Orange County, adjacent to the Santa Ana River and just one mile from the Pacific Ocean. Figure I-1 identifies the City's regional location in Orange County. Costa Mesa connects easily to the region via several freeways: The San Diego Freeway (I-405), which bisects the northerly portion of the city; the Costa Mesa Freeway (SR-55), which travels north to south and terminates at 19th Street; and the Corona del Mar Freeway (SR-73), which starts at I-405 and extends southeast to south Orange County. The neighboring cities of Santa Ana, Irvine, Newport Beach, Huntington Beach, and Fountain Valley share the regional arterial roadway network that services Costa Mesa. Orange County John Wayne Airport, located along the eastern edge of Costa Mesa, provides easy connections beyond the region.

The corporate city limits encompass 15.8 square miles. The General Plan Planning Area consists of the incorporated city limits and unincorporated areas—the so-called sphere of influence—which are under Orange County's authority but have a bearing on Costa Mesa due to immediate proximity. The total Planning Area is approximately 16.2 square miles (nearly 10,368 acres). Figure I-2 identifies the Planning Area.

*Overlooking the South Coast
Metro skyline*



Photo source: Amoeba Blog (<http://www.amoeba.com/>)

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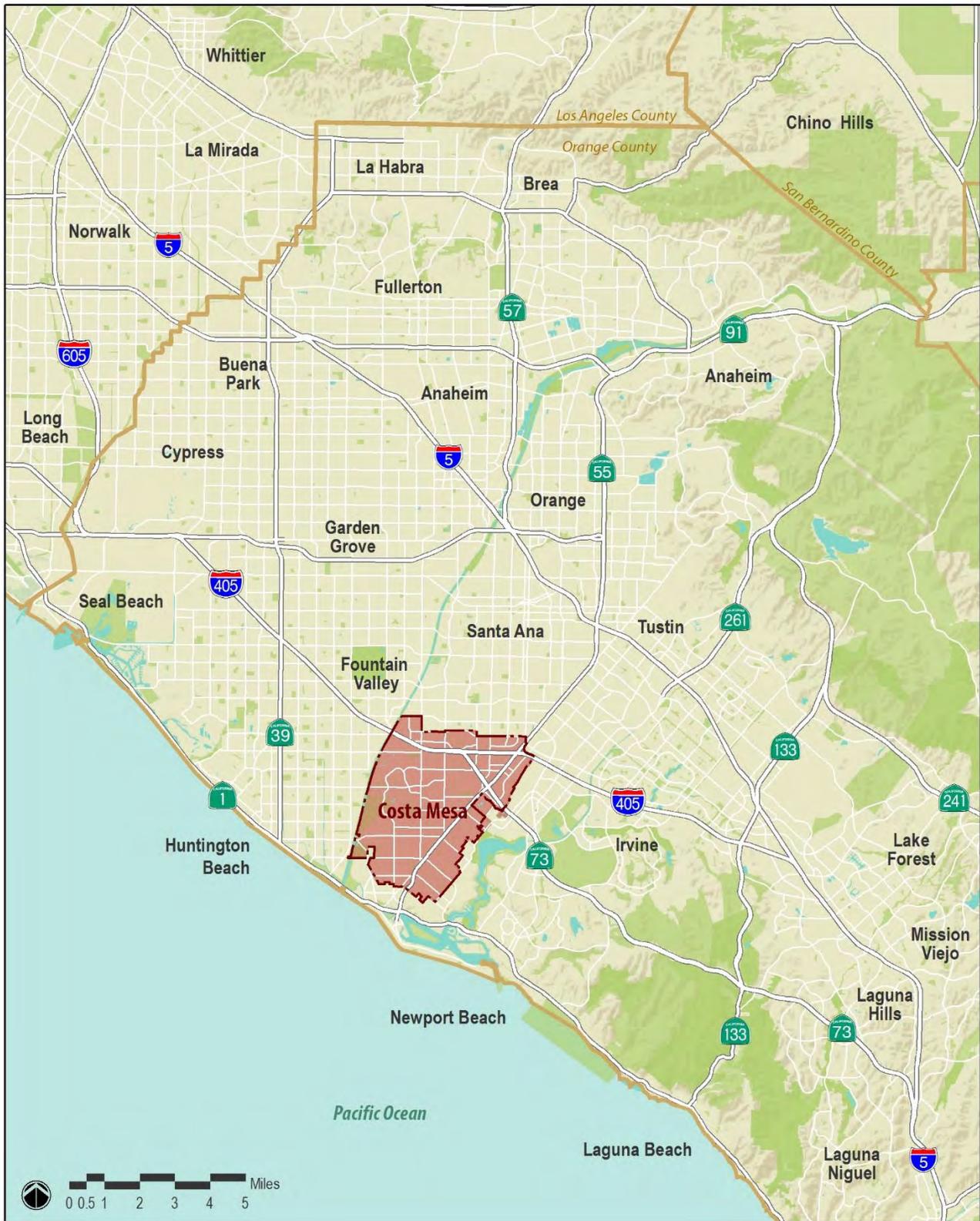
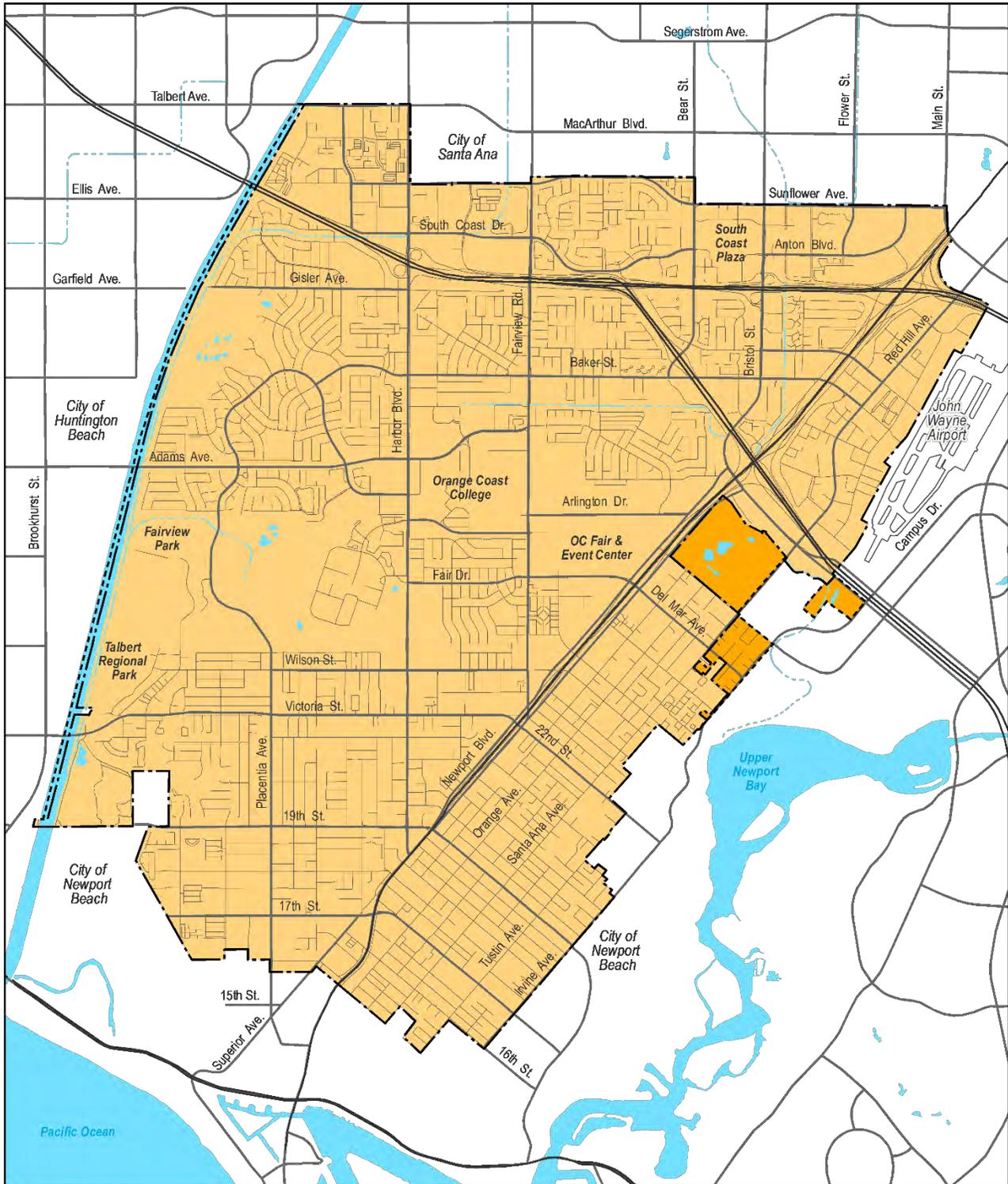


Figure I-1: Regional Location



City Boundaries
 Costa Mesa City Boundary
 Costa Mesa Sphere of Influence

Source: City of Costa Mesa, 2015.



Figure I-2: Planning Areas

Historical Perspective

Located on the “coastal tableland” above Newport Bay, Costa Mesa was once grazing grounds for cattle. At the beginning of the 19th century, adobe structures like the “Estancia,” were built as waystations for the cattle drivers who tended the herds. This structure still stands at 1900 Adams Avenue and was restored and transformed by the City into a museum.

In 1810, this same area was a part of the Spanish land grant Santiago Del Santa Ana made to Jose Antonio Yorba. By 1880, settlers had begun buying portions of the rancho from Yorba’s heirs and in the same decade, established the town of Fairview. A schoolhouse and church were built near the present intersection of Harbor Boulevard and Adams Avenue, and a 25-room hotel accommodated visitors to the nearby sulfur hot springs. In early 1889, a storm washed out the railroad and brought financial disaster to the community, which soon reverted back to farming.

By this time, the little town of Harper, named after a nearby rancher, had emerged on a siding of the Santa Ana and Newport Railroad. Its first business, Ozmen’s General Store, stood on the corner of Newport Boulevard and 18th Street and contained the City’s first post office, established in 1909. On May 11, 1920, Harper officially changed its name to Costa Mesa, which means “coastal tableland” in Spanish. The City continued as an agricultural community, growing sweet potatoes, corn, tomatoes, strawberries, and apples.

Building and oil drilling industries were just beginning to bring new growth to Costa Mesa when the depression hit Southern California. Industries collapsed and the local bank closed. More disaster followed when the 1933 Long Beach earthquake shook the town, damaging businesses and the Costa Mesa School.

World War II brought many thousands of people to the area for training at the Santa Ana Army Air Base, located on what are now the Orange County Fairgrounds, Orange Coast College, and the Civic Center. When the war ended, many returned with their families to begin the population boom.

On June 29, 1953, the City incorporated a City Council-Manager form of government. The new City had an area of 3.5 square miles and a population of

16,840. By 2015, the population had risen to 113,455¹ and the area to 15.8 square miles.

Costa Mesa Today

Costa Mesa is a major commercial and cultural hub in Orange County. The City is home to South Coast Plaza, a luxury shopping institution known across the country and internationally. The robust retail, professional office, and industrial businesses in Costa Mesa provide more than 87,000 jobs. The Orange County Fair & Event Center hosts the Orange County Fair every summer, among other events. The Pacific Amphitheater and Centennial Farm host events and community programs year-round.

In the South Coast Metro Center area north of I-405, the Segerstrom Center for the Arts—which consists of the Renee and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall, Samueli Theater, Segerstrom Hall, Judy Morr Theater, and the Arts Plaza—is a 14-acre cultural and arts complex that bustles with public art, cultural performances, and open spaces.

A wide array of community facilities contribute to the community’s quality of life, including 32 parks, 25 public schools, Orange Coast College, Vanguard University, several private colleges, three recreational community centers, two public libraries, two community gardens, a municipal golf course, and a senior center.

Foremost, residential neighborhoods define the community. Neighborhoods cover approximately 50 percent of the land area and extend into all areas of City. Residents live in single-family neighborhoods like Mesa Verde and the Eastside, as well as townhomes, apartments, and live/work units that provide places for people to live near commercial activity centers, to which they can easily walk and bike.

¹ As reported by the California State University, Fullerton Center for Demographic Research, September 2015.

Organization of the General Plan

The Elements

Land Use Element

The Land Use Element serves as the long-range planning guide for development in the City by indicating the location and extent of development allowed. More than the other elements, the Land Use Element has a major impact on the form and character of Costa Mesa. Land use policies and land use designations aim to maintain both an exceptional quality of life for residents and a thriving local economy for commerce.

Circulation Element

The Circulation Element establishes a mobility network designed to accommodate all modes of travel and is consistent with the Land Use Element. The Circulation Element calls for implementing a “Complete Streets” approach to moving people within and through Costa Mesa, with streets designed and managed to meet the needs of pedestrians, cyclists, and transit users equal to the needs of motorists. The element includes Costa Mesa’s first comprehensive Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, influenced by the work of a dedicated committee of residents.

Integral to circulation planning is the City’s use of a traffic model created to forecast long-range traffic volumes compatible with the Orange County Transportation Analysis Model (OCTAM). City staff uses this model to establish and manage trip budgets for defined geographic areas, thus regulating the volumes of new vehicle trips produced and added to already strained road segments.

Growth Management Element

In 1991, Orange County voters approved Measure M to fund regional transportation improvements. The initiative included a requirement for cities to adopt Growth Management Elements to illustrate how they would regulate growth consistent with Measure M plans for mobility improvements. With the sunset of Measure M in 2011, Measure M2 took its place, authorizing

continuance of the program through 2041. While Measure M2 no longer requires cities to maintain Growth Management Elements, the Costa Mesa General Plan maintains its strong commitment to balance physical growth with the ability of the local road network to support it. The element is designed to minimize duplication between Measure M2 and regional Congestion Management Program requirements.

Housing Element

The Housing Element provides programs and policies that assist the State and region in meeting comprehensive goals to provide suitable housing for all socioeconomic segments of the population. This element identifies specific actions the City will take to accommodate its regional fair-share housing allocation for all income groups, addresses the needs of at-risk and special needs populations, and responds to emerging housing trends. The Housing Element set forth policies and programs that promote preservation, improvement, and development of diverse types of housing throughout Costa Mesa.

Conservation Element

The Conservation Element identifies and establishes policies relative to the identification, establishment, preservation, and management of natural resources. This element discusses air quality, biological resources, coastal resources, energy and water resources, wastewater, water quality, and waste management. Critically, the element identifies:

- Areas in Costa Mesa with substantial natural resources that require management to prevent waste, destruction, or neglect
- Policies related to permissible uses and development standards within conservation areas, as well as programs to ensure the conservation of resources
- Desired courses of action/strategies to implement the City's conservation policies

Noise Element

The Noise Element identifies projected noise levels associated with many noise sources in the community and includes strategies to limit exposure of the community to excessive noise levels. The baseline and projected noise levels adjacent to freeways, arterial roadways, and areas impacted by John

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Wayne Airport operations are depicted, and projected noise levels are used to guide future land use decisions.

Safety Element

The Safety Element guides the City Council, all City departments, and individuals in understanding the natural and human-caused hazards confronting Costa Mesa. The Safety Element establishes policies aimed at reducing death, injuries, property damage, and economic and social dislocation resulting from these hazards: Geologic and seismic conditions, flooding, urban and wildland fire, crime, and hazardous materials.

Community Design Element

The Community Design Element promotes quality design for buildings, districts, landmarks, natural features, and significant landscaping. While this element does not outline specific design guidelines, it does establish a framework of sufficient design review processes focused on ensuring that projects meet the community's expectations for design and development quality.

Open Space and Recreation Element

The Open Space and Recreation Element outlines a strategy to preserve open space areas and to meet residents' evolving recreation needs. Open space includes neighborhood and community parks, community centers, open space easements, and golf courses. Additional resources include County-owned regional facilities within and adjacent to the City and acres of institutional land.

Historical and Cultural Resources Element

The Historical and Cultural Resources Element provides a framework for identifying, maintaining, and restoring the City's historical and cultural resources. The element promotes the identification and protection of resources and defines adequate measures for use and improvements of such buildings, structures, sites and natural features with significant historical, archaeological, cultural, architectural, and community value.

Administering the General Plan

The City Council will implement this General Plan by establishing annual planning and budgeting goals based on the Plan, and by adopting

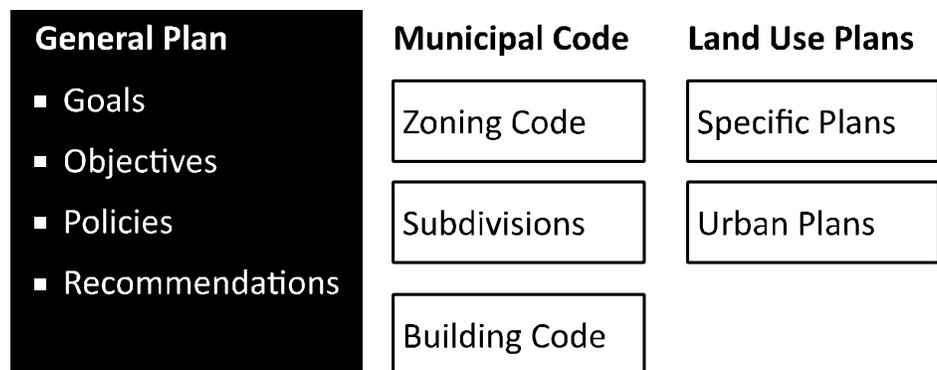
implementing ordinances and regulations. City departments will use General Plan policies to guide their programming and planning and, importantly, to review development applications for consistency with the City’s Vision.

Once adopted, the General Plan will not remain static, and the Vision will continue to inform considerations to amend the Land Use Plan and other goals, objectives, or policies. Over time, the City may determine that it is necessary to revise portions of the text or add policies or programs to reflect changing circumstances or philosophy.

State law provides direction on how cities can maintain the General Plan as a contemporary policy guide. The State requires each planning department to report annually to its City Council on “the status of the plan and progress in its implementation” (§65400[b]). Moreover, it is the policy of the City Council to review the General Plan periodically to maintain the currency of its goals and policies, as well as its background and technical information. This General Plan has been adopted pursuant to this policy.

The City regulates the use of property within its jurisdiction through the General Plan in conjunction with the zoning, subdivision, and building codes; specific plans; and urban plans (see Figure I-3: *Regulating Use of Property*). The General Plan is the basis of all of these land use regulations. Following adoption of the General Plan, any regulations in zoning, subdivision, building, and other ordinances that are not consistent with the General Plan will be amended to ensure consistency.

Figure I-3: Regulating Use of Property



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