



**CITY OF ELK GROVE  
CITY COUNCIL STAFF REPORT**

**AGENDA TITLE:** General Plan Update: City Council / Planning Commission Joint Session

**MEETING DATE:** June 1, 2015

**PREPARED BY:** Christopher Jordan, AICP, Planning Manager  
Jeff Henderson, AICP, Special Projects Planner

**DEPARTMENT HEAD:** Darren Wilson, PE, Planning Director

---

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:**

Staff recommends that the City Council and Planning Commission receive the report and presentation and provide feedback on the General Plan Update as appropriate.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

The City is embarking on its first comprehensive update to the General Plan since 2003. This meeting will set the stage for the project, informing aspects of the scope and approach. This will be a joint meeting of the City Council and Planning Commission.

**ANALYSIS:**

Staff has prepared the attached discussion on issues and opportunities surrounding the General Plan Update (Attachment 1). This information is based upon staff understanding and comments received from decision-makers and the public on a variety of projects over the last several months. This document presents two types of issues and opportunities: 1) those about Elk Grove that identify topics the project should address; and 2) those about the General Plan update that describe the City's desired outcomes for the Project.

Staff has also prepared a diagram illustrating the General Plan Update process and anticipated timeline (Attachment 2). The diagram illustrates that the update is expected to take approximately 24 months to complete (adoption slated for July 2017). The community engagement components of the schedule will be a specific discussion item during the study session on June 1.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

The costs associated with the General Plan Update are being programmed into the current and future year fiscal budgets.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. General Plan Update: Issues and Opportunities
2. General Plan Update: Draft Process Diagram

---

**GENERAL PLAN UPDATE ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

---

**ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

In addition to fulfilling statutory requirements of California general plan law, the City seeks to take an issue-based approach to the General Plan update. While not an exhaustive list of issues and opportunities, the following paragraphs describe those identified by staff and community decision-makers preceding a City Council/Planning Commission Joint Study Session to be held on May 21, 2015. These issues and opportunities will shape the work plan and serve as a starting point for the community engagement process. We will be seeking additional comments from Commission and Council members to affirm or modify them at the May study session.

This document presents two types of issues and opportunities: 1) those about Elk Grove that identify topics the project should address; and 2) those about the General Plan update that describe the City's desired outcomes for the project.

**ABOUT ELK GROVE****Economic Vitality**

*Maximize potential of Elk Grove's social capital and physical infrastructure to attract employers and create economic destinations.*

The City has endured several economic transformations since adopting the existing General Plan in 2002. Although employment has increased in Elk Grove, it has not kept pace with housing growth. The City continues to face geographical challenges in remaining attractive to large employers due to its distance from other employment centers. Community members also desire additional reasons to stay in town and spend money on the weekends, such as for cultural, shopping, restaurant, and entertainment activities. The General Plan update should continue to maximize Elk Grove's opportunity to land future economic destinations similar to the planned sports park. The plan should identify land and establish development standards that allow the built environment to facilitate economic growth.

**Rural Areas**

*Affirm or modify the City's policy to maintain the character of Elk Grove's rural areas as a foundation for the plan.*

Since incorporation, the City has established and affirmed a policy to retain the built and natural character of its rural community, and to provide more rural infrastructure to support it. The rural community has enjoyed a certain level of self-determination, and protecting rural character is viewed as a fundamental local priority. Questions regarding why Elk Grove has sought outward expansion that is potentially inconsistent with regional plans and priorities arise on a routine basis, and the answers are related, in part, to preservation of rural areas. The questions of whether and how to continue this key policy should be addressed at the beginning of the work program as part of a community dialogue establishing Elk Grove's long-term vision. The resulting policy framework will inform both the community engagement process, and the way infill and expansion sites are selected and evaluated. The intent and desired outcomes for a number of existing rural policies (e.g., ambiguity regarding rural roads and water service provision) should also be clarified.

### **Regional Goals and Influences**

*Consider and describe Elk Grove's role in achieving regional growth, economic opportunities, and sustainability goals while protecting the ability to grow or evolve as we choose.*

The General Plan update is a visible, public process. Decision-makers and staff have expressed that others in the region simply don't "get" Elk Grove, and outside State, regional, and service providers often do not buy into the City's strategies to grow, conserve resources, and provide services. This plan presents an opportunity for the City to tell its story to the community and to the region, and to define its values and hopes for the future. The General Plan should define how the City seeks to comply with State laws and executive orders, and how it contributes to shared regional transportation, economic, sustainability, air quality, and conservation goals. The legislative authority gained by embedding these approaches in the General Plan provides the City considerable leeway to chart its own course, protecting local authority for the community to grow or evolve the way it feels is best suited for Elk Grove.

### **Infill Development and Outward Expansion**

*Identify appropriate infill strategies and plan for future growth in expansion areas outside the current City limits.*

To accommodate future growth and comply with provisions of the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) Metropolitan Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (MTP/SCS), future growth strategies for Elk Grove must consider both infill and outward expansion. Infill strategies should consider innovative land use and design opportunities; on-the-ground physical, legal, and market constraints; and available and foreseeable transportation options. Outward expansion strategies must consider dynamics surrounding the City's past and future attempts to expand the Sphere of Influence (SOI). The plan should provide a strategy to streamline project review and environmental mitigation, transportation and infrastructure financing, and construction in potential expansion areas.

### **Neighborhood, District, and Community Identity**

*Create a stronger sense of place. Preserve and enhance neighborhoods. Design dynamic places for social and cultural activities and connect them to neighborhoods, districts, and employment centers with distinct identities.*

Elk Grove is a much different community today than it was in 2003 when the plan was first adopted. Housing and employment are both strong drivers for the local economy—these are marks of success for the community's first 15 years, and the City is on good footing in its second decade. However, portions of Elk Grove today lack the authentic character and visual identity that convey a sense of place. Residents have also expressed desire for a wider range of social, cultural, and recreational opportunities, and the City is actively working on the Civic Center, mall, and Old Town. Elk Grove needs a network of dynamic and transformative places. The General Plan represents an opportunity to create a design framework for the City comprising neighborhoods, districts, and centers that both establishes places for social and cultural activities and describes how these places should look, feel, and relate to one another. The transportation system should support this framework, and special consideration should be made for Elk Grove Boulevard as the potential "tie that binds" destinations together. Place-specific policies could be provided either in the General Plan or in subsequent community plans for specified locations.

**Multimodal and Active Transportation**

*Plan for a long-term transportation system that provides multiple ways to get around within the community and the region while supporting economic growth and community health.*

Today, Elk Grove is inherently an auto-oriented community. Community members typically travel long distances to access jobs and housing. Transit options connecting the City to regional employment centers, while improving, are still catching up to need and potential. While the City works actively to improve livability, options for traveling between Elk Grove and other parts of the region on a daily basis need to be improved. The General Plan provides an opportunity to consider appropriate long-term plans for local transit, rail, and active transportation, including options to connect Elk Grove to the region using Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and light rail transit. Local circulation issues include resolving congestion hot spots, providing better traffic flow at and near schools, improving local circulation between key destinations, and accommodating through trips in rural areas. This General Plan must also address changes in the way traffic problems are identified and resolved. Both level of service and vehicle miles traveled will be important metrics to describe circulation system performance going forward.

**Sustainable and Healthy Community**

*Reduce greenhouse gas emissions, adapt to a changing climate, and improve community health.*

Although Elk Grove had adopted a Climate Action Plan (CAP), implementation of the plan has been challenging, as CAP measures and actions are generally perceived as too costly and supporting resources are scarce. Recent consideration of increased energy efficiency requirements illustrated that reconsidering growth patterns and transportation options is just as important as increasing efficiency to achieve the City's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction goals. Community members have expressed a desire to make Elk Grove a better community for aging in place, and to improve obesity rates, respiratory disease, and other key community health indicators. The updated General Plan should restate and support the City's commitments to reduce GHG emissions, conserve and enhance environmental resources, improve community health, reduce exposure to greater or more frequent hazards, and ensure long-term economic prosperity. The plan can also be structured to place Elk Grove in a better position to receive future grant funding to support priority actions.

**Coordinated Services, Technology, and Infrastructure**

*Consider relationships with service providers and the City's future role in providing community services and infrastructure. Leverage technology to improve infrastructure, City services, and economic development.*

A limited number of services are being directly provided by the City. The General Plan update presents an opportunity to consider these existing partnerships, and to identify opportunities to enhance coordination and delivery of both community services and infrastructure. Key issues include ongoing partnerships and future models for collaboration with the Cosumnes Community Services District and Elk Grove Unified School District, roadway rehabilitation funding, and providing greener infrastructure. Within an integrated model, the City can leverage technology to both provide more efficient services and to promote economic development (e.g., by providing Citywide wireless service).

### **Open Space and Resource Management**

*Expand and categorize open spaces and manage changing habitat, energy, and water resources.*

Valuable open space areas are located both within and surrounding Elk Grove. The General Plan update affords the City an opportunity to categorize and create a plan for recreation areas, habitat areas, and resource production areas. The City is located at the edges of key regional open space resources, including the Stone Lakes nature preserve, greenbelts, and waterways. Enhancing access points to these locations can improve community identity. As the City continues to develop, innovative strategies to conserve important trees, Swainson's Hawk habitat, and agricultural lands remain high priorities. The General Plan should also present strategies describing how Elk Grove will conserve energy and adapt to a future with less water.

### ABOUT THE GENERAL PLAN UPDATE PROCESS

#### **Up-to-Date, Forward Thinking Plan**

*Update and refresh the community vision to address changed conditions, and chart a long-range course for the future.*

Changes in state law, as well as changes in the community, indicate that it is time to update the General Plan. The plan should describe the City's vision to both grow and conserve resources in the long-range future: clearly defining where it will go, what it will do, and how it will do it. It should be both a long-range blueprint and a road map, used to remember the big picture of what the City is trying to achieve as it works through the details of specific projects.

#### **Accessible and Usable Format**

*The plan layout and style should prioritize readability, graphic communication, easy updating, and access for all users.*

The format of the existing General Plan has become dated, and staff has indicated that it is becoming increasingly difficult to navigate. Contemporary General Plans are often presented in both printed and online digital format, and some jurisdictions have chosen to go solely with an online plan that is organized by issue and includes extensive cross-references. The updated plan should include fewer policies, directed primarily to local issues the City has jurisdiction to directly control. The plan could also be organized so that the vision, goals, and policies are contained in a 20-year policy plan, while implementing actions are contained in a five-year action plan that can be updated incrementally to respond to changing priorities. Plans and priorities should be communicated using graphics where possible, and the City should consider reorienting the plan to a landscape format, making mapping easier to incorporate as Elk Grove is oriented west to east.

#### **Clarity and Flexibility**

*The plan should provide both clarity and flexibility to withstand future economic, environmental, and political changes.*

As economic, environmental, and political forces affecting development and conservation are continually changing, it is important that the plan retain flexibility regarding how the City achieves the vision. Goals established in the plan should be measurable. Creating a five-year action plan for the General Plan can also provide a desired level of flexibility to change course along the way, while retaining the clarity of the vision. The City should also use the plan to create review and approval pathways that make community-desired projects happen through steps

such as providing for more ministerial planning and design review approvals, and streamlining the environmental process for projects consistent with the plan.

**Active and Engaged Community**

*Unify the community around shared opportunities and solutions. Include voices of community members who traditionally interact with the City; those who are typically absent from public process; and key economic, environmental, and social stakeholders.*

Compared to when the first General Plan was adopted in 2003, the Elk Grove community has become more actively engaged in local government decision-making. The community is essentially divided by Highway 99 into two parts. West Elk Grove is mostly a series of newer subdivisions and master planned communities. Residents here are generally satisfied with what is offered by their surroundings and actions taken by the City. Eastern Elk Grove was the more established community when the City incorporated. Here, legacy issues inherited from the County continue, including a lack of adequate infrastructure in some locations, a lack of desired commercial and social destinations, and blending of rural and urban landscapes. These two communities have different attitudes, wants, needs, and perspectives. Some community members are concerned with planning for the whole City. Others will focus primarily on their neighborhood. The General Plan should both unify the community and celebrate its differences. This could be addressed by preparing a vision and a comprehensive plan for the entire City, or by preparing visions and plans for each community or neighborhood. This decision should be reached early in the process, during the formulation of the vision and guiding principles. The project should also provide community members with options to participate online at varying scales of commitment and detail.

**Engage City Staff and Decision-Makers**

*Leverage experience and perspective of City staff and check in with decision-makers at key points in the update process.*

Elk Grove's staff and decision-makers have extensive institutional knowledge and unique perspectives on the community. Engaging staff in multiple departments in the update is important, and could be conducted both through standing department head meetings that occur following City Council meetings, and through fireside chats held with all City staff on a semiannual basis. Engaging the Planning Commission and City Council at transition points between project phases is critical to ensure that there are no surprises at public hearings held at the end of the process. Study sessions present a good format for this engagement, and joint study sessions allow the City Council and Planning Commission to discuss key policy questions together.

**Fiscally Viable Plan**

*Prioritize and select policies and programs that can be supported by existing and foreseeable funding.*

The updated General Plan should not be a wish list. It should be a road map and work plan. The plan can convey a broad long-range vision while still establishing achievable near-term priorities based on existing and foreseeable funding sources. At the beginning of the update process, all ideas are welcome and should be on the table. However, as the process proceeds toward developing an updated General Plan, priorities should be set that limit the content of the resulting plan to those policies and programs that directly advance the vision and can be funded and accomplished within the plan time frame. The plan should provide policy guidance

## **GENERAL PLAN UPDATE ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

---

regarding cost recovery for infrastructure and services and describe how infrastructure costs should be shared.



