



SECTION 1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is organized into the following sections:

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

SECTION 1.2 WHAT IS A GENERAL PLAN?

Every city and county in California must have a general plan, which is the local government's long-term framework or "constitution" for future growth and development. The general plan represents the community's view of its future and expresses the community's development goals. The general plan contains the goals and polices 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.

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The 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. Development must not only meet the specific requirements of the zoning ordinance but also the broader policies set forth in the general plan.

SECTION 1.3 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 City guidance 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 change, its goals will evolve, and the physical environment in which its residents live and work will be altered. 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 Gilroy General Plan is made up of two documents: the Background Report and Policy Document. The Background Report is further divided into 13 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 Gilroy. It provides a detailed description of a wide range of topics within the Planning Area, 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 new Gilroy General Plan process, the City will also prepare the following General Plan support 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 direction from the City Council for a preferred land use alternative and for key policy issues as the basis for 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 implementing the General Plan and identify feasible mitigation measures.

SECTION 1.4 REGIONAL SETTING

Gilroy is located at the southern end of the Santa Clara Valley, in the Bay Area region of California. The city encompasses 16.5 square miles and is surrounded by Santa Clara County on all sides. The closest cities include Morgan Hill to the north, Hollister to the south, and Watsonville to the west. The area around Gilroy is primarily productive farm land and hillsides. Major landforms in the area include the Diablo Range in the east and the Santa Cruz Mountains to the west.

Gilroy lies at the intersection of US Highway 101, one of the State’s major north-south roadways, and State Route 152, an east-west connection between the Pacific Ocean and the Central Valley. Highway-101 North connects Gilroy with San Jose, and from there Silicon Valley and San Francisco. San Jose is the nearest large city, and is home to the nearest major airport (see Figure 1-1).

The following terms are used to describe the geographic boundaries used in the General Plan:

- **City Limits.** Includes the area within the city’s corporate boundary over which the City exercises land use authority and provides public services (see Chapter 2, Land use and Community Character, Figure 2-1).
- **Sphere of Influence (SOI).** A jurisdiction’s sphere of influence (SOI) is established by the County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO), and is defined as a planning boundary outside of an agency’s legal boundary (such as the city limit line) that designates the agency’s probable future boundary and service area. A Sphere of Influence includes both incorporated and

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unincorporated areas within which a local agency will have primary responsibility for the provision of public facilities and services.

- **Planning Area.** State law requires cities to adopt a general plan that addresses physical development within its city limits, as well as any land outside its boundaries, “which in the planning agency’s judgment, bears relation to its planning.” The Planning Area for the Gilroy 2040 General Plan encompasses the entire area within the sphere of influence. The purpose for the expanded Planning Area is to provide the opportunity to evaluate the effects of future growth on the entire SOI and to develop further analysis of the values of the surrounding open space and agricultural areas beyond the existing and planned urban area.
- **20-Year Planning Boundary.** The current General Plan, adopted in 2002, includes a 20-Year Boundary defined as the “area of land that could potentially be developed in the next twenty years.” This boundary continues to be used in this Background Report.
- **Urban Service Area.** The Urban Service Area (USA) is defined in the current General Plan as “the area of land that could potentially be developed in the next five years and to which the City is committed to providing basic infrastructure and services.” The USA includes land to which the City already provides services to support development, and City policy requires that growth must first be directed to vacant and underused areas within the USA before the City extends services outside the USA. Changes to the USA must be approved by the Santa Clara County LAFCO.

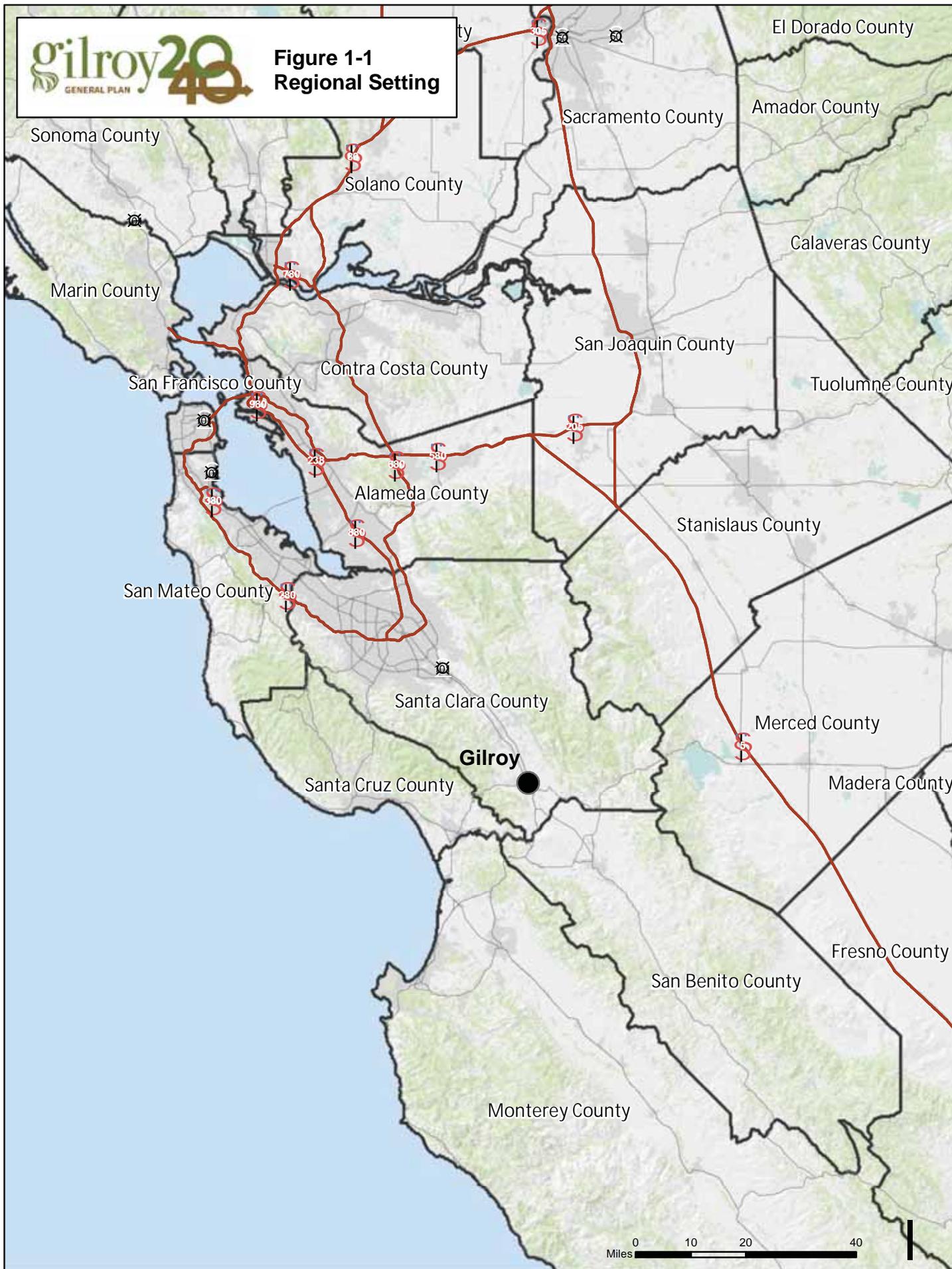
SECTION 1.5 ORGANIZATION OF THE BACKGROUND REPORT

The Background Report is divided into 14 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. **Land Use and Community Character.** This chapter summarizes existing land use; describes local and regional land use plans and zoning designations that affect the Gilroy Planning Area; and describes the character of the city’s neighborhoods and districts.
3. **Transportation and Circulation.** This chapter describes the transportation networks in the Gilroy Planning Area, including networks for cars, bikes, pedestrians, airplanes, and freight vehicles.
4. **Economics and Demographics.** This chapter describes the population, household characteristics, and current economic conditions in the Gilroy Planning Area.
5. **Natural Resources.** This chapter describes the water, energy, mineral, and biological resources in the Gilroy Planning Area.
6. **Cultural Resources.** This chapter describes the archaeological and historical resources in the Gilroy Planning Area.
7. **Open Space and Recreation.** This chapter describes the scenic resources and recreational opportunities in the Gilroy Planning Area.
8. **Hazards and Safety.** This chapter describes geologic, seismic, flood, fire, and human-made hazards, as well as noise and airport safety.



**Figure 1-1
Regional Setting**



Source: ESRI, 2013.

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9. **Public Facilities, Services, and Infrastructure.** 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.
10. **Air Quality.** This chapter describes the types of air pollutants, contaminants, and odors in the Gilroy Planning Area.
11. **Climate Action Planning.** This chapter describes Gilroy's greenhouse gas emissions and the impact of climate change on Gilroy.
12. **Healthy Communities.** This chapter describes the factors that relate to health in the Gilroy Planning Area, including physical activity options, access to healthy foods, safe neighborhoods, and environmental quality.
13. **Housing.** The Draft 2015-2023 Housing Element Background Report describes the existing and projected housing needs for the City of Gilroy; describes the resources available for housing, including land, financial and administrative resources, and energy conservation opportunities; analyzed potential governmental and non-governmental constraints; and evaluates progress in implementing the previous Housing Element.

SECTION 1.6 FORMAT OF THE BACKGROUND REPORT

Each section within the Background Report chapters includes the following:

- **Introduction.** Each section includes an introduction that provides a brief description of the issues covered in the section.
- **Major Findings.** Each section contains a brief summary of key findings. These findings serve as the basis for the identification of technical issues to be addressed in the Policy Document.
- **Existing Conditions.** This subsection describes the existing conditions as of January 2014 for each resource or issue area.
- **Regulatory Setting.** This subsection describes the regulatory context for the topical area, including Federal, State, and local regulations as applicable.
- **Key Terms.** This subsection acts as a glossary and defines the important terms used in the section.