



GENERAL PLAN LAND USE ELEMENT UPDATE

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT IS A GENERAL PLAN?

State law requires that a city have an adopted General Plan that contains policies, programs, and diagrams, arranged in “Elements” such as land use/housing/open space/safety/circulation, which relate to the identification of land for housing, commerce, industry, public services, the protection of natural resources, the identification of hazards, and the provision of municipal services. General Plans are intended to look forward about twenty years to provide for existing and planned development.

WHY UPDATE THE LAND USE ELEMENT?

The Land Use Element of the General Plan is among the most important and identifies how land can be used (allowable uses and the intensity of development) and the distribution of the uses within the City, now and in the future. The Land Use Element should reflect current and expected future demographic, economic, and environmental conditions. The City of Ferndale’s Land Use Element was last updated in 1986 and the City seeks to ensure that there is adequate land available to accommodate future business and a wide variety of housing within the City.

WHAT ARE THE IMPORTANT COMPONENTS OF THE LAND USE ELEMENT?

The Land Use Element contains the City’s Land Use Map that together with Land Use Designations identifies the kinds, intensities, and location of planned land uses within the City, such as Residential Medium-Density or Neighborhood Commercial. For each Land Use Designation, the Land Use Element identifies the range of allowable uses and the intensity of such uses in terms of the number of housing units per acre or the extent of development on a lot.

Density: Density is used for residential uses and refers to the development capacity of residential land. In the Land Use Element, density is described in terms of dwelling units per acre of land (du/ac).

Intensity: Intensity is used for non-residential development and refers to the extent of development on a lot. It is usually expressed as floor area ratio (FAR), which is the ratio between the total gross floor area (total square footage) of all buildings on a lot and the total land area of that lot.

A Land Use Element must also be based on the best available existing economic and demographic information, service and infrastructure capacity, and appropriate projections for population and employment growth.

HOW IS A GENERAL PLAN ADOPTED? WHO IS THE APPROVAL AUTHORITY?

General Plans, or any General Plan Element, may only be amended four times per year following a specific process. Adopting a General Plan or an amendment requires consultation and coordination with Native American tribes and various local, state and federal agencies, preparing draft policies and maps including alternatives which undergo environmental review, conducting robust outreach to landowners and the public, and holding public hearings subject to specific timelines. At the end of this process, the City Council may adopt the update by resolution that contains comprehensive findings of fact demonstrating that the update met the specific requirements of state planning and environmental law and involved appropriate public involvement. Per State law, the Planning Commission must make a recommendation to City Council regarding the adoption of the General Plan. The City Council is the final approval authority for the General Plan.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE GENERAL PLAN AND ZONING?

The General Plan sets forth long-term policies that guide future development. It identifies the types of development that will be allowed, the spatial relationships among land uses, and the general pattern of future development. The state planning law hierarchy requires that a city's zoning be consistent with the city General Plan – an arrangement where the General Plan serves as the “constitution” and zoning is the law that carries it out. To implement the General Plan, the zoning map and regulations divide a community into districts and establish regulations for what can and cannot be built on land within those districts. To define what can be built, zoning regulations typically address two issues: (1) the height, bulk, and sometimes design of buildings (i.e., how big they are and how they look), and (2) to what use the buildings may be put (i.e., what activities can take place). However, the land uses specified in the General Plan will be reflected in the zoning regulations. Because state law requires that zoning be consistent with the General Plan, development must not only meet the specific requirements of the Zoning Code, but also the broader policies set forth in the General Plan.

WHAT IS THE TIMELINE FOR LAND USE ELEMENT ADOPTION?

TASK	TIMING
Initial Public Outreach	Fall 2020/Winter 2021
Development of Background Information	Spring 2020 → Fall 2021
Draft Land Use Goals and Policies	Summer 2021 → Fall 2021
Land Use Map Alternatives	Fall 2022 → Winter 2023
CEQA Draft Program Environmental Impact Report	Winter 2023 → Fall 2023
Public Meetings on Draft Land Use Element	Spring 2023
Public Hearings on Revised Draft Land Use Element	Summer 2023
Land Use Element Approval	Winter 2023

HOW DO I FIND OUT MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE LAND USE ELEMENT UPDATE AND PROVIDE INPUT?

The City highly encourages everyone to participate in public meetings, Planning Commission Meetings, and City Council meetings. Review the document and make your voice heard! The Draft Land Use Element document, maps, and outreach information is available here: <https://ci.ferndale.ca.us/documents/general-plan/>. Dates and times of upcoming public meetings can generally be found here: <https://ci.ferndale.ca.us/> Written comments can be submitted to City hall or emailed to longrangeplan@ci.ferndale.ca.us



Visit the project website:
ci.ferndale.ca.us/documents/general-plan/