

POLICY TOPIC PAPER 2.0: COMMUNITY AND AREA PLANS



BACKGROUND

A general plan serves as the policy framework for an entire city or county. The components apply universally across all aspects of the community. As a city or county grows and diversifies, this blanket approach may not capture the nuances of some unique areas. As described in the State’s 2003 General Plan Guidelines below, community or area plans can provide an additional framework for addressing neighborhood issues:

“Area plan” and “community plan” are terms for plans that focus on a particular region or community within the overall general plan area. An area or community plan is adopted by resolution as an amendment to the general plan, in the manner set out in §65350, et seq. It refines the policies of the general plan as they apply to a smaller geographic area and is implemented by ordinances and other discretionary actions, such as zoning. The area or community plan process also provides a forum for resolving local conflicts. These plans are commonly used in large cities and counties where there are a variety of distinct communities or regions.¹

In 2014, the City adopted its first community plan for the Southeast Policy Area (SEPA). The SEPA Community Plan, adopted as part of the General Plan, is a policy document that provides policy guidance for future land use, circulation, parks and recreation, infrastructure, and community character. It is implemented by zoning regulations contained in the SEPA Special Planning Area document (adopted as part of the City’s Zoning Code, Title 23 of the Municipal Code). From a structural standpoint, the SEPA Community Plan provided an opportunity for the City to establish unique policies for the area without distributing them throughout the General Plan or appending them to one element, such as Land Use. It created a common location for these related policies to live in the General Plan.

Many other communities throughout the State use community or area plans to establish neighborhood-level policies and reflect local values. Local examples include the City of Sacramento and Sacramento County. Prior to incorporation, Elk Grove was managed by Sacramento County through two community plans: the Elk Grove Community Plan and the Laguna Community Plan. Neither of these documents were carried forward through incorporation.

¹ General Plan Guidelines, State of California, Office of Planning and Research

2.0. COMMUNITY AND AREA PLANS

Specific plans are a similar planning tool to community and area plans, in that they contain policy statements and are used to address the needs of specific geographic areas. However, State law imposes additional requirements on specific plans, including that they provide a program of implementation measures including regulations, programs, public works projects, and financing measures necessary to carry out the plan. Specific plans are adopted in the same way as general plans through resolution; however, if they include zoning regulations, they should be adopted by ordinance and as part of the community's zoning code. The City of Roseville uses the specific plan process to provide for neighborhood-level planning. However, its specific plans only address policies and implementation programs; all development standards are deferred to the citywide zoning regulations or specialized overlay zoning districts.

PROPOSED ACTIONS

As part of the General Plan update, staff is exploring the value of creating additional community or area plans. The intent of community or area plans is not to divide the City into discrete planning areas. Rather, it would be to address unique conditions and long-range objectives. Therefore, placing every area of the City into a community plan should not be the end result of the exercise at this time. The City could add additional community plans at a later time if desired. The following are possible questions to consider:

1. What are unique geographic areas of the City that could benefit from localized policies that would be distinct from the Citywide set of policies?
2. Are these policies unique enough to this specific area and are there enough of them to warrant consolidation in one section of the General Plan? Or could they stand together with the other General Plan policies?
3. Would the creation of a community plan create a potential "divide" within the community, as expressed at the December 2015 Joint Study Session, or does it help address an underlying issue or need?

Based upon prior community and Council/Planning Commission comments, as well as ideas and considerations expressed in the *Specific Plans and Special Planning Areas* topic paper, staff is recommending that the following geographic areas be considered/analyzed for development of possible community or area plans. Other areas could be considered, either as part of this General Plan update or as part of a future effort.

- Sheldon/Rural Area
- East Elk Grove
- Central Elk Grove

The following sections analyze these areas based upon the considerations described above.

Sheldon/Rural Area

The Sheldon/Rural Area has been a major discussion point during the General Plan update and was a critical topic during the development of the existing General Plan. Further, several targeted planning and outreach efforts have occurred in the Sheldon/Rural Area since 2006 to address circulation issues. Based upon this work, it is clear that unique policies exist, or additional policies are desired, to address this area. These include preservation of the rural heritage, agricultural production and compatibility, prohibition of urban services, and rural circulation standards and design limitations. All are unique to the Rural Area, and would not be applied in a more urban context.

Further, from a usability perspective, locating all of these policies in one location of the General Plan (with appropriate cross-references) could make the document more user-friendly. If a development project or public improvement were proposed in the Rural Area, the reader could, theoretically, start with the community plan for focused policies and land use information that are specific to that area. In the alternative, where policies are listed by topic rather than geography, the reader would, for example, reference the citywide list of traffic policies before getting to the specific rural area policies, and these would be connected to other Rural Area policies by cross-reference. In some cases, the cross-references could be rather exhaustive, potentially limiting the usability of the document.

Staff does not see this as creating a divide within the community, as it would allow the City to highlight policies and programs that celebrate and preserve its rural and agricultural heritage.

East Elk Grove

As discussed in the *Specific Plans and Special Planning Areas* topic paper, the residential development limits, requirements for density feathering, use compatibility along Waterman Road, and the southern end of Grant Line Road, along with protection of sensitive natural resources, are key policy components of the Specific Plan that, in some cases, were hard-fought victories for the Community Advisory Committee that helped develop the plan. If the Specific Plan is retired, these policies should be retained, as they form key parts of the foundation of this neighborhood. Given that these policies are unique to the East Elk Grove area, they stand alone and should organizationally be presented as such in the document. These policies would not divide the community, as they reflect the unique conditions of the neighborhood.

Central Elk Grove

Central Elk Grove comprises the core of the City east of State Route 99 and west of Waterman Road, south of Bond Road. This area includes the Old Town area, the Elk Grove-Florin Road

2.0. COMMUNITY AND AREA PLANS

corridor between Joseph Kerr Middle School and Elk Grove High School, Elk Grove Regional Park, and the industrial area located along the Central/Southern Pacific Railroad track. This is the historic core of Elk Grove, and it embodies both a small rural town and a suburban community.

Preparing a community or area plan for this portion of the City could provide a number of opportunities for unique or targeted policies. In addition to addressing the needs and future planning for the Old Town Area, potential policies could also address a variety of reinvestment opportunities along Elk Grove Boulevard and Elk Grove-Florin Road. Examples include, but are not limited to, the “Green Streets” enhancement project discussed at the January 27, 2016, City Council meeting, and promotion and incentive opportunities for property owner-initiated redevelopment of existing commercial centers.

IMPLEMENTATION

Community and area plans can provide a framework, within the general plan, for policies specific to defined geographic areas. As part of the general plan, they create a common location for the city’s policies, rather than creating another planning document. Additionally, they provide an opportunity to cross-reference the community plan policies within the larger citywide policy framework.

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis contained in this policy topic paper, staff recommends the following. Commission and Council direction on these items will be consolidated with that provided on other key policy topics to inform the direction and contents of the draft General Plan update.

Policy Topic 2.0: Community and Area Plans

- 2.1. Further formalize provisions in the General Plan for the establishment and implementation of both existing and potential future community plans.
- 2.2. Retain the Southeast Policy Area Community Plan in the draft General Plan.
- 2.3. Establish a new Sheldon/Rural Area Community Plan as part of the draft General Plan.
- 2.4. Establish a new East Elk Grove Community Plan, which replaces the East Elk Grove Specific Plan, as part of the draft General Plan.
- 2.5. Establish a new Central Elk Grove Community Plan as part of the draft General Plan.