

CHAPTER ONE

THE GRASS VALLEY GENERAL PLAN

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCESS

The 1998-99 Grass Valley General Plan Update commenced June 30, 1998 with a “kickoff” meeting at the Grass Valley City Hall. Participants included:

- The Grass Valley General Plan Update Steering Committee
- Grass Valley City staff
- Consultants hired to assist with the General Plan Update and Environmental Impact Report

The Grass Valley General Plan Update Steering Committee includes seven members, appointed by the City Council. Two are Council members, two are members of the Planning Commission, and three are Members at Large.

The Steering Committee was appointed effective June 1, 1998, and participated in consultant selection and pre-project activities. The Steering Committee oversees and “steers” General Plan activities through bi-monthly meetings with staff and consultants; sponsors Public Workshops designed to afford members of the public opportunity to participate in General Plan development; and is expected to serve as the City’s decision-making body throughout General Plan formulation.

Staff support is provided by City Administrator Gene Haroldsen, City Planner Bill Roberts, and Associate Planner Gary Price. Director of the new Community Development Department, Kyle Kollar, joined the staff support group September 28, 1998.

Members of the Steering Committee are:

- Mark Johnson, Mayor
- Linda Stevens, Councilmember
- Lisa Swarthout, Planning Commissioner
- Howard Levine, Planning Commissioner
- Paul Aguilar, Member at Large
- Sharon Boivin, Member at Large
- Paul Schwartz, Member at Large

The lead consultant on the General Plan Update is Quad Knopf of Roseville, California, represented by Gene Smith, Vice President and Director of Planning Services, and Roberta MacGlashan, Principal Planner.

Sub-consultants are:

- Mogavero Notestine Associates (Community Design)
- Hausrath Economics Group (Economics, Market and Fiscal Analysis)
- kdAnderson Transportation Engineers (Transportation and Circulation)
- Brown-Buntin Associates (Noise)

Having considered alternatives and adopted a preferred draft General Plan (in early 1999), the Steering Committee will make its recommendations to the Planning Commission. The Planning Commission will follow procedures established in State and local planning law, including holding public hearings, as it considers and eventually approves a General Plan. Planning Commission approval constitutes a recommendation to the City Council. Upon Planning Commission approval, the City Council will study the recommended General Plan, hold public hearings of its own, and formally adopt the General Plan. Final Council action is projected to occur in June, 1999.

As the General Plan proceeds, an Environmental Impact Report will be initiated. Planning Commission approval will include approval of the Draft Environmental Impact Report, followed by approval of the Draft General Plan, at the same Commission meeting. The City Council will employ the same procedure in its adoption of the EIR and General Plan.

Simultaneous to Environmental Impact Report preparation, the Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Code will be revised.

The General Plan Update involves considerable technical and policy coordination with Nevada County and special districts whose jurisdictions lie within the Planning Area.

ELEMENTS

The 1998-99 Grass Valley General Plan Update includes revisions to the following General Plan Elements:

- Land Use
- Circulation
- Conservation and Open Space (formerly separate elements being combined)
- Noise
- Safety/Hazards (formerly Safety and Seismic Safety Elements, being combined)
- Community Design (formerly Urban Design)
- Cultural Resources (formerly Historical)
- Recreation

The consulting team assisting in General Plan preparation is conducting the Environmental Impact Report on the General Plan. "Issue Areas" to be addressed in the EIR are:

- Land Use and Planning
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Geology and Soils
- Hazards
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Noise
- Parks and Recreation
- Public Services and Utilities
- Transportation and Traffic
- Cultural Resources

PLANNING AREA

Figure 1-1 shows the Planning Area for the 1998-99 Grass Valley General Plan Update. The Planning Area comprises the city limits (also shown in Figure 1-1) plus unincorporated portions of Nevada County surrounding the City of Grass Valley. Figure 1-1 also shows the current Grass Valley Sphere of Influence.

City General Plans typically embrace more than just the city limits, reaching out into peripheral unincorporated areas. This practice allows General Plans, which are updated every 10 to 20 years, to include areas outside the city which are 1) likely to be candidates for annexation during the life of the General Plan, 2) affect, and are affected by, city actions and 3) receive, or might reasonably be expected to receive, city services.

All California cities have a sphere of influence, typically encompassing an area broader than the city limits. The sphere of influence is intended to enable municipalities and other affected agencies to identify (subject to subsequent change) the ultimate municipal boundaries. The sphere of influence is useful for purposes of planning service and facility extensions, and establishing joint city/county land use regulation prior to annexation. Each county in California has a Local Area Formation Commission (LAFCo), an intergovernmental body empowered, upon petition by a local government, to render final decisions on sphere of influence boundaries, annexations, and other territorial adjustments.

During General Plan updates, municipalities often delineate a “planning area,” larger than the city limits but not necessarily coterminous with the sphere of influence. The Grass Valley General Plan Update Steering Committee adopted a Planning Area boundary on August 4, 1998.

FACTORS AFFECTING PLANNING AREA BOUNDARY AND PLANNING AREA DELINEATION

State law provides that the general plan must cover all territory within the boundaries of the adopting city, as well as “any land outside its boundaries which, in the planning agency’s judgment bears relation to its planning” (Government Code Section 65300).

In practice, the planning area should comprise a geographic area in which a City will exercise authority and/or provide public services at some point in the future. The planning area need not, however, be limited to an area projected to be annexed into the City within the time frame of the General Plan being updated (in this case, 20 years, or 2019).

Several factors affect the selection of an appropriate planning area. Most obvious, is the requirement that the entire jurisdiction (i.e., city limits) be included in any General Plan.

Ideally, the existing sphere of influence would be the boundary of a City’s planning area. Use of the sphere as the planning area would assure inclusion of the existing City limits and the eventual extent of the City limits in the future. It would also assure exclusion of areas which will never be annexed, thus avoiding confusion about why the City is involved in planning for them. Grass Valley’s current policy is to provide services only within the city limits, precluding extraterritorial service delivery. One might anticipate that the current sphere of influence will be expanded in the future to encompass “serviceable” areas external to the existing sphere.

The factors involved in delineating the sphere of influence and the planning area may be different, resulting in a different set of boundaries. Areas receiving city services and facilities (now and projected into the future) are important factors in sphere of influence delineation. Planning area boundaries, on the other hand, may consider factors such as commuting patterns and “market area” which can extend beyond sphere of influence boundaries.

A third type of boundary worth noting in Nevada County is the Community Region boundary (around Grass Valley, other incorporated municipalities, and unincorporated communities such as Lake of the Pines and Penn Valley). The Community Region concept appears in numerous citations in the Nevada County General Plan (1995). The County General Plan defines Community Region as “the areas of the County within which growth should be directed to provide compact areas of development where such development can be served most efficiently and effectively with necessary urban services and facilities” (Nevada County General Plan -- 1995, Volume I, page 18).

Within the Community Region, higher densities than allowed in other unincorporated areas are assumed to be possible. Everything outside a Community Region “shall be considered to be in a Rural Region”, according to the General Plan. A heightened degree of coordination between County and “Community” is required in the Community Region.

In essence, the Community Region is similar in concept to the sphere of influence, without reference to the hypothetical ultimate City limits.

The Grass Valley Planning Area is an amalgamation of the current Sphere of Influence and the Community Region, designated by the Nevada County General Plan. The two are very close to identical, with a few exceptions reconciled by the General Plan Update Steering Committee.

The General Plan Update Steering Committee reserved the flexibility to study or consider any area outside the Planning Area deemed appropriate. This left the door open to studying areas of reciprocal impact with Grass Valley (Alta Sierra, the Highway 49 corridor, the entirety of the Wolf Creek drainage basin) without having to include them in a formally delineated “planning area”. It also left the door open to amending the Planning Area as the General Plan Update proceeded, to include areas not included in the initially designated Planning Area.

There is no perfect formula for determining a General Plan planning area. The best approach is to start the process with a reasonable boundary and to provide for amendments and alterations as the planning process unfolds. With these factors in mind, the adopted 1998-99 Planning Area is the current sphere of influence selectively merged with the Community Region boundary from the 1995 Nevada County General Plan. The following changes to the existing sphere of influence result in the adopted 1998-99 Planning Area:

1. Add the Nevada County Airpark, Loma Rica Industrial area, and the Airpark Addition. There exists a reasonable possibility of city services being provided these areas in the future. Services might include fire service at the Airpark and sewer service to Loma Rica Industrial area, located within the Wolf Creek Drainage Basin and serviceable by a gravity-flow sewerage system.
2. Add the area south of Ridge Road and north of the existing sphere of influence boundary, to include Nevada Union High School and residential areas to the south of Ridge Road.
3. Add a portion of the Ventana area. This area, approximately 30 acres, has already been annexed to the city.
4. Exclude Starbright Acres, southwest of the city limits, and the area north of Starbright Acres to Highway 20. The Nevada County General Plan (1995) places this area outside the Community Region boundary, suggesting permanent rural status and discouraging consideration of future annexation or urban services provision by Grass Valley.

URBAN LIMIT LINE

A number of cities and towns in the United States have imposed so-called urban limit lines. The urban limit line, theoretically, is a defined boundary beyond which urban services are not to be extended, and “urban-type” development is to be discouraged in combination with a “greenbelt” policy designed to retain open space and rural land uses. The fundamental purpose of the urban limit line and/or greenbelt is to stop urban sprawl from emanating outward in an unimpeded development pattern.

Although previous Grass Valley General Plans have gone so far as to advocate greenbelts or equivalent open space patterns girding the City, no formal implementation program has been established.