

INTRODUCTION

STATE REQUIREMENTS

Section 65300 of the California Government Code states that "Each planning agency shall prepare and the legislative body of each county and city shall adopt a comprehensive, long-term general plan for the physical development of the county or city, and of any land outside its boundaries which in the planning agency's judgment bears relation to its planning." Section 65300.5 goes on to state that "In construing the provisions of this article, the Legislature intends that the general plan and elements and parts thereof comprise an integrated, internally consistent and compatible statement of policies for the adopting agency." Section 65302 requires that "The general plan shall consist of a statement of development policies and shall include a diagram or diagrams and text setting forth objectives, principles, standards, and plan proposals."

The general plan is to consist of seven mandatory elements and as many optional elements as the local jurisdiction deems desirable. The mandatory elements include Land Use, Circulation, Housing, Open Space, Conservation, Safety, and Noise. Since the Open Space and Conservation Elements have overlapping requirements, they have been combined in the Stanislaus County General Plan. The County has also adopted one optional element, the Agricultural Element.

The 1994 Stanislaus County General Plan is very similar in format to the previous plan. All elements except the Housing Element and the Agricultural Element, both of which were adopted in 1992, have been updated. Background information is found in the publication entitled "Stanislaus County General Plan - Support Documentation." For easy reference, each element of this plan is in a separate chapter whose number matches the corresponding chapter of background information in the support document. For instance, the Circulation Element is Chapter 2 of this document, with all of the reference material being located in Chapter 2A of the support document.

POPULATION ESTIMATES AND PROJECTIONS

Stanislaus County is one of the fastest growing counties in California. Based on U.S. Census data, the County's population climbed from 265,900 to 370,522 during the 1980's for a total increase of 39%, compared to 26% statewide. Since 1990 the County's population has continued to grow at an average annual rate of 3.5%, reaching a total population of 412,676 in January 1994 (California Department of Finance).

As indicated by Table One, most of Stanislaus County's population increase in the 1980's occurred in the nine incorporated cities rather than the unincorporated area of the County. Whereas the incorporated population increased 59%, the population of unincorporated Stanislaus County increased only 3%. At the same time, the percentage of population living in the incorporated areas increased from 65% in 1980 to 74% in 1990, continuing the shift from rural to urban lifestyles demonstrated in past decades.

The slower growth rate in the unincorporated area of Stanislaus County was due mainly to annexation of unincorporated lands by the cities. LAFCO records show that cities annexed more than 7,500 acres from December 1984 to January 1994. County land use policies and agreements with the cities regarding growth management within established spheres of influence also contributed to the slower growth rate in the unincorporated area.

Most of the cities in the County have recently proposed or are considering significant expansions of their spheres of influence. This, along with the ongoing immigration of people desiring to make their homes in Stanislaus County, will likely result in continued development and increased population growth. The California Department of Finance projects the population will reach 517,600 in 2000 and 670,000 in 2010 (Source: Official Population Projections, Report 93 P-1, April 1993). The Stanislaus Area Association of Governments (known as Stanislaus Council of Governments) projects that by the year 2015 the population of Stanislaus County will reach 709,100. (See Table Two.)

Table One

HISTORICAL POPULATION GROWTH

Cities	1960	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1994
Ceres	4,406	6,029	9,544	13,281	16,793	26,314	30,193
Hughson	N/A	N/A	2,459	2,943	3,032	3,259	3,550
Modesto	36,585	61,712	84,168	106,602	126,353	164,730	180,320
Newman	2,148	2,505	2,544	2,785	3,411	4,151	5,668
Oakdale	4,980	6,594	7,547	8,474	9,665	11,961	14,279
Patterson	2,246	3,147	4,031	3,908	4,804	8,626	9,577
Riverbank	2,786	3,949	4,561	5,695	6,446	8,547	12,756
Turlock	9,116	13,992	18,151	26,287	32,426	42,198	48,113
Waterford	N/A	2,243	2,256	2,683	2,917	4,771	6,264
<i>Total Cities</i>	62,267	100,171	135,261	172,658	205,847	274,557	310,720
<i>Total Unincorporated Area</i>	95,027	94,335	89,448	93,242	93,460	95,965	101,956
TOTAL COUNTY	157,294	194,506	224,709	265,900	299,307	370,522	412,676

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, California Department of Finance.

Table Two
POPULATION PROJECTIONS

CITIES	2005	2015
Ceres	51,200	73,200
Hughson	5,000	8,000
Modesto	249,400	320,000
Newman	12,000	17,000
Oakdale	19,100	24,500
Patterson	18,000	21,000
Riverbank	15,000	32,700
Turlock	72,200	95,900
Waterford	7,500	12,000
Unincorporated area	100,000	104,800
Total	549,400	709,100

Source: Stanislaus Area Association of Governments, 1992, based on California Department of Finance projection of 549,400 for Stanislaus County in the year 2005.

ISSUES

Stanislaus County is an agricultural county in transition. Prior to 1960 most of the County's population lived on farms; today the population of the nine incorporated cities is nearly three times that of the unincorporated area of the County. While its economic base remains predominantly agricultural, the County's economy is diversifying, and unprecedented population growth has increased pressure to convert productive agricultural lands to non-agricultural uses. Despite the increasing pressures of urbanization, however, agricultural output in the County continues to rise, and in 1993 local crops were valued at a record \$1.1 billion. To ensure the continued success of the area's leading industry, the County adopted an Agricultural Element, which addresses agricultural land use issues such as farmland conversion, the expansion of city spheres of influence, and conflicts over agricultural operations.

A burgeoning population requires new jobs and housing to support it. Growth in nonagricultural industries such as services and retail trade has begun to stabilize employment levels and is expected to provide most of the new employment opportunities through 1998. Strategies for economic development are identified in the Land Use Element and the Agricultural Element. The County's jobs/housing balance and the issue of housing affordability are addressed in the Housing Element.

Growth also requires expansion of the infrastructure system and public services. Existing streets and roads, water and sewer systems, and solid waste management facilities will not be adequate to service the growth expected over the next twenty years. This is also true of public services such as schools, parks, fire protection, law enforcement, health care, welfare and many other services expected by people as they move into the area. The central issue of financing infrastructure improvements and public services is addressed in the Land Use Element and the Circulation Element.

Air quality, water availability and other issues of resource protection are becoming increasingly significant as the population grows. Under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the County is required to give careful attention to the impacts of development on the environment. Local, regional, state and federal agencies are routinely contacted regarding the potential impacts of projects on air, water, wildlife habitats and noise levels. Policies addressing these issues are included in the Land Use, Conservation/Open Space, Agricultural and Noise Elements.

Unprecedented population growth and development pressure have resulted in increased cooperation between the County and other agencies in efforts to find solutions to regional problems. For example, the County has reached agreement with all nine cities related to development in the spheres of influence of the cities and the collection of countywide public facilities fees. In addition, there is increasing coordination with San Joaquin and Merced Counties related to growth issues along the Interstate Five corridor. The County also participates in the San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District, a regional agency formed in 1991 to regulate air quality in the San Joaquin Valley air basin. These issues are addressed in the Land Use, Circulation, and Conservation/Open Space Elements.

Finally, a basic function of County government is to ensure public safety. The Safety Element outlines policies intended to protect the people of Stanislaus County from floods, earthquakes, and other hazards that potentially threaten their safety.

GOALS

LAND USE ELEMENT

- ONE: Provide for diverse land use needs by designating patterns which are responsive to the physical characteristics of the land as well as to environmental, economic and social concerns of the residents of Stanislaus County.
- TWO: Ensure compatibility between land uses.
- THREE: Foster stable economic growth through appropriate land use policies.
- FOUR: Ensure that an effective level of public service is provided in unincorporated areas.
- FIVE: Complement the general plans of cities within the County.

CIRCULATION ELEMENT

- ONE: Provide a system of streets and roads throughout the County which meets land use needs.
- TWO: Provide a safe, comprehensive, coordinated transportation system that includes a broad range of transportation modes.
- THREE: Maintain a balanced and efficient transportation system that facilitates inter-city and interregional travel and goods movement.

CONSERVATION/OPEN SPACE ELEMENT

- ONE: Encourage the protection and preservation of natural and scenic areas throughout the County.
- TWO: Conserve water resources and protect water quality in the County.
- THREE: Provide for the long-term conservation and use of agricultural lands.
- FOUR: Provide for the open-space recreational needs of the residents of the County.
- FIVE: Reserve, as open space, lands subject to natural disaster in order to minimize loss of life and property of residents of Stanislaus County.
- SIX: Improve air quality.
- SEVEN: Support efforts to minimize the disposal of solid waste through source reduction, reuse, recycling, composting and transformation activities.
- EIGHT: Preserve areas of national, state, regional and local historical importance.
- NINE: Manage extractive natural resources to ensure an adequate supply without degradation of the environment.

TEN: Protect fish and wildlife species of the County.

ELEVEN: Conserve resources through promotion of waste reduction, reuse, recycling, composting, ride-share programs and alternative energy sources such as mini-hydroelectric plants, gas and oil exploration, and transformational facilities such as waste-to-energy plants.

NOISE ELEMENT

ONE: Prevent the encroachment of incompatible land uses near known noise producing industries, railroads, airports and other sources to protect the economic base of the County.

TWO: Protect the citizens of Stanislaus County from the harmful effects of exposure to excessive noise.

SAFETY ELEMENT

ONE: Prevent loss of life and reduce property damage as a result of natural disasters.

TWO: Minimize the effects of hazardous conditions that might cause loss of life and property.

HOUSING ELEMENT

ONE: Encourage the provision of adequate, affordable housing including units for rent and for ownership for residents of all income groups, including very low-, low- and moderate-income households.

TWO: Maximize housing choices and opportunities throughout Stanislaus County.

THREE: Conserve and improve Stanislaus County's existing housing stock.

FOUR: Designate sufficient sites for all types of residential development required to meet projected future housing needs.

FIVE: Minimize governmental constraints to affordable housing in Stanislaus County.

AGRICULTURAL ELEMENT

ONE: Strengthen the agricultural sector of our economy.

TWO: Conserve our agricultural lands for agricultural uses.

THREE: Protect the natural resources that sustain our agricultural industry.