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# Introduction

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Each city and county in California must prepare a comprehensive, long term general plan to guide its future. To assist local governments in meeting this responsibility, the Governor's Office of Planning and Research is required to adopt and periodically revise guidelines for the preparation and content of local general plans (Government Code §65040.2).

The 2003 edition of the *General Plan Guidelines* supercedes all previous editions. Important changes since the 1998 edition include the following:

- ◆ Guidance for addressing environmental justice in the general plan.
- ◆ Guidance on developing optional water and energy elements.
- ◆ Expanded guidance on public participation in the development of the general plan.
- ◆ Revised and expanded housing element guidelines.
- ◆ Guidance on developing optional water and energy elements.
- ◆ Expanded guidance on consolidation of individual general plan elements.
- ◆ Suggested reporting formats for the annual general plan progress report.

The 2003 edition of the *General Plan Guidelines* is the first to incorporate an extensive public review process. OPR hosted a series of forums in early 2002 to gain preliminary input into the *General Plan Guidelines*. A preliminary draft of the revised *General Plan Guidelines* was available for public review from October through December, 2002. Two public hearings were held in Sacramento in December, 2002, with teleconference links to Eureka, Alameda, Bakersfield and San Diego. A second draft was released in July 2003 for a 30 day review period. The final document reflects many of the suggestions received by OPR during this process.

This document is arranged into the following chapters. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the general plan. Chapter 2 provides guidance on integrating environ-

mental justice into the general plan, and relates environmental justice to the broader issue of sustainable development. Chapter 3 outlines how to prepare or revise the general plan within the framework of planning law.

Chapter 4 elaborates on the statutorily required general plan elements, citing relevant court interpretations and Attorney General opinions. Chapter 5 discusses formatting options for the general plan and opportunities for element integration and consolidation. Chapter 6 offers suggestions on preparing selected optional elements and includes new guidance for energy and water elements.

Chapter 7 reviews the California Environmental Quality Act's integral role in the general plan process. Chapter 8 discusses the role of public participation in the general plan process.

Chapter 9 discusses a wide range of general plan implementation techniques and offers suggestions on how to prepare the required annual general plan implementation report.

Chapter 10 explains the local general plan's relationship to other statutory planning requirements, such as the California Coastal Act, the Seismic Hazards Act, and the federal and state Endangered Species Acts.

The *General Plan Guidelines* concludes with several appendices, a glossary, and a bibliography of both printed and on-line planning references.

The *General Plan Guidelines* is advisory, not mandatory. Nevertheless, it is the state's only official document explaining California's legal requirements for general plans. Planners, decision-making bodies, and the public depend upon the *General Plan Guidelines* for help when preparing local general plans. The courts have periodically referred to the *General Plan Guidelines* for assistance in determining compliance with planning law. For this reason, the *General Plan Guidelines* closely adheres to statute and case law. It also relies upon commonly accepted principles of contemporary planning practice. When the words "shall" or "must" are used, they represent a statutory or other legal requirement. "May" and "should" are used when there is no such requirement.