

General Plan Elements

In statute, the general plan is presented as a collection of “elements,” or topic categories ([Gov. Code §65302](#)). The mandatory elements for all jurisdictions are land use, circulation, housing, conservation, open space, noise, and safety. These elements are briefly summarized below.

- **Land Use:** designates the type, intensity, and general distribution of uses of land for housing, business, industry, open space, education, public buildings and grounds, waste disposal facilities, and other categories of public and private uses.
- **Circulation:** correlates with the land use element and identifies the general location and extent of existing and proposed major thoroughfares, transportation routes, terminals, and other local public utilities and facilities.
- **Housing:** assesses current and projected housing needs for all economic segments of the community. In addition, the housing element embodies policies for providing adequate housing and includes action programs for that purpose. By statute, the housing element must be updated every, five or eight years, according to a schedule set by the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD).
- **Conservation:** addresses the conservation, development, and use of natural resources, including water, forests, soils, rivers, and mineral deposits.
- **Open Space:** details plans and measures for the long-range preservation and conservation of open-space lands, including open space for the preservation of natural resources, the managed production of resources, agriculture, outdoor recreation, and public health and safety.
- **Noise:** identifies and appraises noise problems within the community and forms the basis for land use distribution determinations.
- **Safety:** establishes policies and programs to protect the community from risks associated with seismic, geologic, flood, and wildfire hazards, as well as from other concerns such as drought.
- **Environmental Justice** (if completed as a standalone element): identifies objectives and policies to reduce pollution exposure, improve air quality, promote public facilities, improve food access, advance access to housing, and increase physical activity in identified disadvantaged communities.
- **Air Quality:** establishes policies and programs to reduce impacts to air quality in the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. Air quality considerations are also required for cities and counties who are required to include an environmental justice element in their general plans, and are optional elements in other areas of the state.