

Executive Summary

Sonoma County is expected to grow by 130,000 people by 2025. This growth is equivalent to adding a new city the size of Santa Rosa. How will the county meet the challenge of accommodating that growth while protecting the natural areas, working farms, and distinct communities that make the county a great place to live?

Sonoma County has a blueprint for the county's growth; since 1978, its General Plan has defined where new development will go and what areas will be off-limits to development. For over 25 years, the Plan has successfully maintained extensive agricultural and natural areas while guiding new growth toward existing cities and towns. However, as times change and pressure on Sonoma County's landscape increases, the General Plan must evolve to meet new challenges.

Currently, Sonoma County is updating its General Plan. The Board of Supervisors and the Planning Commission now have the opportunity to improve the Plan. They can ensure that the General Plan will be effective at maintaining the County's high quality of life, vibrant economy, and healthy environment.

This report presents five critical issues that the updated General Plan should address to provide a blueprint for sensible growth:

1. Preserving Open Space and Wildlife Habitat
2. Protecting Farmlands and Keeping Local Agriculture Viable
3. Managing Water and Wastewater
4. Providing Affordable Housing
5. Providing Transportation That Works

On the whole, the General Plan update is headed in the right direction, but it still needs additional work on each critical issue. The following recommendations lay out specific ways to make sure Sonoma County can accommodate future growth while preserving its quality of life.



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1. Preserving Open Space and Wildlife Habitat

- The County currently has a network of community separators, which are rural or wild lands that act as buffers between towns. It should expand the network to include threatened lands that serve this function but are still unprotected. The County should also be sure to enforce existing restrictions on development in community separators.
- Local citizens involved in the General Plan update have recommended protecting 195,000 acres of the county’s forests from conversions to vineyards. This recommendation—County planning staff’s “Policy Option 3”—should be incorporated into the General Plan update.

2. Protecting Farmlands and Keeping Local Agriculture Viable

- The County should discourage non-rural uses for rural land by directing new agricultural processing facilities, like wineries, into urbanized areas instead of farmland. The County currently requires that new agricultural processing facilities built on farmland must process local produce. Currently, only 50 percent of the produce must be local; this should be increased to 75 percent to further support local agriculture.
- The County should protect rural character by adopting design guidelines for facilities permitted on agricultural lands.

3. Managing Water and Wastewater

- The County has included a Water Resources Element in its General Plan update. To be effective, this new element should require studies of the county’s groundwater supply, use, and replenishment. The element should also include a groundwater management policy that considers land use, protects watersheds, ensures groundwater replenishment, reduces water demand, and shapes local building codes.
- The County should encourage expanding the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District’s mandate to include protecting lands that help replenish groundwater.
- The County should discontinue development approvals based on the capacity to treat wastewater with a new “package treatment plant” technology. The location of new development should be based solely on the General Plan, not on whether wastewater treatment is possible. The County must strengthen its existing policy to ensure that package treatment plants are only permitted when they are consistent with the General Plan and necessary to resolve an existing public health hazard.

4. Providing Affordable Housing

- The County is encouraging the creation of affordable housing in areas that are currently designated for commercial or industrial use. This housing should be within existing urban areas and should be distributed throughout all Sonoma County’s urban service areas, so that working people all over the county can afford to live in the communities they serve.

- The County is currently considering a jobs-housing linkage fee on new commercial development, to ensure that housing production keeps up with job creation. The County should adopt this fee, and set a range of \$2.00-\$3.50 per square foot, which would be reasonable for developers and would make a meaningful contribution toward building affordable homes.
- The County is also considering an inclusionary housing ordinance, which requires new housing developments to include a percentage of affordable homes. The County should adopt this ordinance, which has the potential to create a significant amount of new affordable housing. To be effective, it should require that 20% of new homes are affordable to people making below the local median income.

5. Providing Transportation That Works

- The County is working to increase the number of local residents who use transit. These efforts should include coordinating local, regional and express buses, adding intercity and commute routes, and increasing bus frequencies to at least every 30 minutes.
- To further help local residents to get where they need to go, the County should establish transit-oriented design standards. These would encourage development around transit stops that includes a mix of shops, offices, and homes, while making sure that these areas are safe and easy to use for pedestrians and cyclists.

Sonoma County’s leaders have a once-in-a-decade opportunity to use the General Plan update to tackle growing threats to the rural character of Sonoma County and the county’s quality of life. If they incorporate these practical recommendations into the General Plan update, they will protect the county’s farmland and natural areas, and make its communities better places to live. Their legacy will be one of creating a better future for Sonoma County.



Oak trees, rural valleys, and distant forested hills are all part of making Sonoma County a great place to live. The General Plan update can ensure it stays that way.

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Introduction:

The General Plan: Sonoma County's Blueprint for the Future

Sonoma County is a remarkable place. Despite the fact that the County's population has more than doubled since 1970, much of the local farmland and open space has been protected from sprawling development. Sonoma County residents and visitors still have the opportunity to visit local farms and vineyards, hike through redwood forests, and experience the spectacular beauty of the coast.



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Sonoma County's leaders now have the opportunity to leave a legacy of protected open space and vibrant towns for future generations.

One tool that has enabled Sonoma County to protect its farmland and open space is its General Plan. The state of California requires every city and county to have a general plan. General plans are often referred to as the "land use constitutions" of communities. These plans lay out a vision for each community, usually for 15 to 20 years into the future, about where development will and will not occur, how development will occur, and what areas will be set aside as farmland, recreation areas and wildlife habitat. General plans also set out frameworks for how transportation and housing needs will be met.

Sonoma County adopted its first general plan in 1978. The plan, which has been updated once, is considered a model for other communities because it clearly directs growth into existing urbanized areas, encourages cities and towns to maintain a unique character, and establishes protections for farmland and open space.

Since 2001, the County's Permit and Resource Management Department, along with a Citizens' Advisory Committee, has been working on another update of the Sonoma County General Plan. County staff expects to submit a draft of the updated Plan to the County Board of Supervisors in late 2005, with the exception of the section on housing, which will be presented to the Board for approval in late 2004.

Sonoma County leaders face a significant challenge as they craft this General Plan update. By 2025 the County's population is expected to grow by 130,000 people—increasing the total population from about 457,000 today to over 600,000. That's the equivalent of adding a new city the size of Santa Rosa to the county in the next twenty years. In order to ensure that this growth will not pave over valuable farmland and open space, the city-centered growth vision of the General Plan not only needs to be maintained, it needs to be strengthened.

The purpose of this report is to examine the most pressing issues facing County leaders as they update the General Plan, and provide recommendations on how best to address the issues. The General Plan itself is divided into several “elements,” or chapters. This document does not address each element individually; instead, it addresses the elements within the context of critical issues facing Sonoma County. These issues include preserving open space and wildlife habitat, protecting agriculture, managing water and wastewater, providing affordable housing, and improving the county’s transportation infrastructure so all residents can get around. The report provides commonsense recommendations for how Sonoma County can address each critical issue through the elements of the General Plan.

Sonoma County’s leaders now have a once-in-a-decade opportunity to use the General Plan update to tackle serious threats to the county’s quality of life. If they incorporate these practical recommendations into the General Plan update, they will protect the county’s farmland and open space and make its communities better places to live. Their legacy will be one of creating a better future for Sonoma County.

Critical Issue 1: Preserving Open Space and Wildlife Habitat

Community Separators: Defining Our Cities, Preserving Our Open Space

Sonoma County has a well-deserved reputation as a regional leader in preventing sprawl. Eight of the county’s nine cities have voter-approved Urban Growth Boundaries that define where growth can and cannot occur. The current General Plan provides additional sprawl protection through designating several areas as “community separators”—rural buffers between cities that provide relief from continuous urbanization.

Community separators are protected by constraints on subdivision, so they remain as large parcels of land, suitable for agriculture. Typically, land within community separators cannot be subdivided into parcels smaller than ten acres, and only one building can be placed on each parcel. Development that does occur within community separators must blend in with the rural landscape.

Currently, Sonoma County contains eight designated community separators, which together cover approximately 17,300 acres. Unfortunately, the current separators will not be sufficient to preserve Sonoma County’s rural character in the face of the county’s projected population growth. Many of the county’s rural lands surrounding urban communities—like Healdsburg and Cloverdale—are not protected as separators. Because of their proximity to roads and other existing infrastructure, these unprotected lands are prime targets for sprawl in the next 20 years.

The General Plan update presents a critical opportunity to expand community separator protections to the county’s most vulnerable landscapes. The Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District has already identified unprotected lands that separate communities, which it terms “greenbelts,” as priorities for acquisition. The County should protect these lands.



One exemplary community separator is the striking landscape at the southern entrance to Sonoma County. On either side of Highway 101, the Petaluma/Novato separator protects over 3,000 acres of rolling oak-studded hills.

Greenbelt Alliance policy recommendation for the Open Space Element:

- The County should use the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District’s “greenbelt” designations as a basis for expanding community separator protections to lands around cities including Healdsburg, Cloverdale, Rohnert Park, and Cotati. The County should also enforce the community separator protections that are already in place.

Timber Conversion Policy: Protecting Sonoma County’s Forests

Like the farmland and rolling hills protected in community separators, Sonoma County’s forests are part of what makes the county special. In addition to helping make Sonoma County one of the world’s most beautiful places, the county’s forests perform important environmental functions like helping to clean our air and water. Sonoma County’s forests are also home to endangered species including coho salmon, steelhead trout, and the northern spotted owl.

In recent years, there has been a rapid increase in applications to the California Department of Forestry to log forests and replace them with vineyards. In part, these requests are driven by the wine industry’s recent discovery that the soils and climate found high in the forests of the Coast Range are particularly good for growing premium pinot noir grapes. It is true that the wine industry is a driving force behind Sonoma County’s economy and also contributes significantly to the county’s unique character. However, it is possible to support the wine industry without sacrificing valuable forests to haphazard vineyard conversions.

Large-scale vineyard conversions could cause many negative and irreversible effects on the county’s natural resources and quality of life. These conversions could entail clear-cutting forests on coastal ridgetops as well as heavy grading and re-contouring of the land, which could lead to soil erosion, flooding, and the loss of habitat for threatened species.

These conversions could also increase development pressure on the county's natural resource lands by bringing new road construction, agricultural support structures and housing for vineyard workers. They could fuel sprawl, paving the way for a new wave of rural estates and vacation homes in these remote areas.



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Converting forests into vineyards can entail clear-cutting forests and heavy grading and re-contouring of ridgetop land, resulting in erosion, flooding, and habitat loss for wildlife, as well as fueling sprawl.

Sonoma County has an opportunity through the General Plan update to protect much of the county's remaining forests. Sonoma County contains 230,000 acres of forested lands. The County has the opportunity to protect the 195,000 acres that are designated as Resource and Rural Development lands, which are currently vulnerable to conversions. There is already an ample amount of land available for vineyards; additional forested land should not be opened to vineyard conversion and its attendant erosion, habitat loss, and sprawl. These 195,000 acres should remain as forests, and vineyards should be directed onto the plentiful land that is already zoned for agriculture.

Greenbelt Alliance policy recommendation for the Resource Conservation Element:

- Accommodate agricultural production on lands that are not forested, and protect Sonoma County's forests from conversion to vineyards. To do this, adopt "Policy Option 3" as described by County planning staff and recommended by local citizens. This would prevent conversions on the 195,000 acres of Sonoma County forests designated as Resource and Rural Development land in the current General Plan. Also, include specific language to protect key watersheds and habitat for fish and other wildlife. Explicitly protect lands with geologic hazards, steep slopes, poor soils or water, high risk of fire or flooding, or high biotic or scenic value from intensive development.

Critical Issue 2: Protecting Farmlands and Keeping Local Agriculture Viable

New Wineries Policy: Supporting Local Growers and Maintaining Rural Character

Agriculture has been a critical part of Sonoma County's economy and landscape since the 1850s. To remain viable, the industry has had to be responsive to changing markets. In the last decade, this has meant that the county has seen tremendous growth in vineyards, in response to increasing demand for quality wines.

This demand for wine has also meant an expansion of the construction of wineries and other facilities that process, distribute, and sell wine. Though these facilities are related to vineyards, they are fundamentally non-agricultural uses of agricultural land. There are now over 200 wineries in Sonoma County. Many include a significant tourism component. Though this expansion of wineries and tourism helps support the county's wine industry, it also results in increased traffic and development of rural lands. A large part of the wineries' success is due to the rural character of the lands surrounding them; degrading that character will hurt the wineries as well as local agriculture. The County must act to minimize the negative impacts of winery expansion, allowing the industry to thrive without compromising the character of rural Sonoma County.



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Vineyards are an important component of Sonoma County's rural character, but the expansion of wineries on farmland poses a threat to that character.

Currently, to ensure that wine processing and other non-agricultural facilities support rather than threaten local agriculture, the General Plan requires these facilities to process products that were primarily grown within the county. This policy has been interpreted to mean that half of the product being processed must come from Sonoma County. The intent is to ensure that, if local farmland is taken out of production for a processing facility, the facility is used to meet the needs of Sonoma County farmers.

Yet the growing concentration of new wineries in rural areas has become a significant issue for county residents and leaders. In 1990, faced with similar problems, Napa County required that 75 percent of the wine grapes processed in any winery proposed for agricultural land must be grown in Napa County. This requirement protects local farmland by limiting the development of large facilities on agricultural land unless they significantly benefit the working farms. The policy has supported local farmers and has not made wineries any less competitive in the marketplace.

If Sonoma County followed Napa's lead to make the local content rules more stringent, there would be two effects. First, such a policy would further direct the construction of

large wineries and other processing facilities into urban service areas. Second, the stronger rules would ensure that if agricultural land were developed for processing facilities, it would significantly support Sonoma County farmers by encouraging the purchase of local grapes.

Greenbelt Alliance policy recommendations for the Agricultural Resources Element:

- The County should discourage non-rural uses for rural land by directing new agricultural processing facilities, like wineries, into urbanized areas instead of farmland. For new or expanding wineries on agricultural land, require that 75 percent of the wine grapes they process must be grown in Sonoma County.
- To ensure that new and expanding wineries and processing facilities have a minimum impact on the character of rural Sonoma County, adopt rural character design guidelines for such facilities permitted on agricultural lands. These guidelines would require structures to be compatible with surrounding properties and the natural landscape and not be detrimental to the scenic quality of the rural area.

Critical Issue 3: Managing Water and Wastewater

The Water Resources Element: Sustaining Sonoma County's Water Supply

As Sonoma County's population grows, demand for water will increase. Already, county residents—both humans and wildlife—are beginning to experience water shortages. Increasingly, residents in rural areas are being forced to lower pump depths in their wells, replace dry wells with new deeper wells, or, as a last resort, depend on water deliveries by truck. Springs are drying up, and creeks and streams that once flowed year-round—like upper Mark West and Atascadero Creeks—are now dry in the summer and fall.

Currently, Sonoma County does not have a groundwater management plan. In fact, the County issues 500 new well permits every year without considering whether surrounding wells are going dry. The County has included a new Water Resources Element in the General Plan, which is a very positive first step. The Water Resources

Element should require studies of the County's major groundwater basins to determine how much water they contain, how much is being extracted, and where and how the supply is being replenished. Comprehensive groundwater studies have not been conducted in Sonoma County since the 1970s. These studies are critical to an understanding of the extent of our remaining water supply and how to manage it for future generations.

Using the information gained from these water supply and usage studies, the County should adopt a countywide groundwater management policy as part of the General Plan to ensure a sustainable water supply for future generations. Groundwater management policies regulate the extraction and use of water based on supply. They are already included in other jurisdictions' general plans, including those of Napa and Monterey Counties.

To ensure its effectiveness, the groundwater management policy should include a land use component; this will affect water demand, supply, and quality. Limiting new development will ensure that demand does not exceed the amount of available groundwater. Preventing suburban sprawl in agricultural and natural areas will allow water to percolate through the soil and help to maintain natural cycles of groundwater replenishment. Ensuring that new development is compact and close to transit will reduce the need for driving; this will reduce runoff of gasoline, oil, and heavy metals, and preserve water quality.



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Solid understanding of the county's water supply and good planning for the future will keep creeks and streams flowing and keep water clean and plentiful.

A comprehensive groundwater management policy that is based on good information will keep Sonoma County's water plentiful and its water quality high.

Greenbelt Alliance policy recommendations for the new Water Resources Element:

- Undertake a comprehensive groundwater basin study to fully understand the extent of Sonoma County's groundwater supply, usage and recharge.
- Develop and adopt a countywide policy for practical groundwater management that includes the following:
 - Land use policies to protect watersheds and natural groundwater recharge areas from development; this will allow water to percolate through soil and replenish groundwater.
 - Measures to substantially reduce overall water demand.
 - The incorporation of these measures in building codes administered by the Sonoma County Permit and Resource Management Department.
- Include acquisition and enhancement of groundwater recharge areas in the mandate of the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District.

Package Treatment Plants Policy: Protecting Sonoma County's Rural Landscape

Historically, much of Sonoma County's rural landscape has not been open to development because of a lack of sewage treatment capacity; in these areas, physical constraints like soil, hydrology, and slope made traditional septic systems impossible. Today, however, this barrier to development is increasingly being overcome through the installation of "package treatment plants." These plants are a significant departure from traditional septic tanks that operate on a small scale, generally serving a single household. Package treatment plants are privately owned facilities that, like a conventional sewage treatment facility, can serve users on a much larger scale, on many parcels of land. If package treatment systems are permitted, planning staff estimate that they could make the development of over 17,000 parcels feasible throughout unincorporated Sonoma County. There are only 20,000 parcels of land in the entire county; a development threat to 17,000 is clearly a major concern.

As this technology has advanced, requests for package treatment plant permits have steadily increased, but questions about how these plants will affect the county's lands and water have not been answered. In addition to obvious concerns about opening up vast tracts of rural lands to development, local residents have also raised questions about where water would go after treatment, whether wastewater could contaminate surface water and groundwater, and how these large-scale privately owned facilities would be monitored.

The current County General Plan states that package treatment plants are only permitted in order to resolve existing public health hazards. The Plan also discourages the use of package treatment plants that would serve multiple users. Over the last decade, the Board of Supervisors has permitted several package treatment plants serving large users such as Sears Point Raceway, The Vintner's Inn and John Ash Restaurant, Geysers Peak Winery,

and the Rodney Strong Winery. None of these permits were needed to resolve public health hazards.

Despite existing policy, a number of package treatment plants are now proposed that would serve large-scale developments, on land that is isolated from existing services and presents no public health hazard. For example, the Sonoma Country Inn, recently approved outside Kenwood, would include two package treatment plants. The project is proposed for land currently designated both as agricultural and as a community separator, and would include a winery, 50-room inn, 125-seat restaurant and bar, gift shop, administration building, meeting rooms, swimming pool, gymnasium and spa. Eleven custom homes, approximately 8000 square feet each, are also included in the proposal. This project's approval ignored General Plan policy in multiple ways by permitting a package treatment plant where no public health hazard existed, and permitting development on land protected as a community separator.

The location of new development should not be decided by whether wastewater treatment is possible. Development approvals should be based on where local citizens and their elected officials have decided new growth should go, as laid out in the General Plan. If land is designated for agriculture or community separation in the General Plan, it should not be developed, regardless of whether new technology is available to treat the wastewater.



Package treatment plants have opened up rural lands like these to large-scale resort development. If policies already in the current General Plan were enforced, this development would not be allowed, and rural lands would be protected.

Greenbelt Alliance policy recommendation for the Public Facilities Element:

- Strengthen Sonoma County's existing policy to ensure that package treatment plants are only permitted when they are consistent with the General Plan and necessary to resolve an existing public health hazard. Specify that new treatment plants shall not encourage new development and their use must not be in conflict with other General Plan goals and policies.

Critical Issue 4: Providing Affordable Housing

The Housing Element: Making Our Cities Affordable Places To Live

The skyrocketing cost of housing in the Bay Area over the last decade has put the dream of homeownership out of reach for a majority of working people, and has forced them to pay high percentages of their monthly income for rental housing. The lack of affordable housing near Sonoma County job centers has serious consequences. The people who need this housing are the people who keep our communities running—everyone from firefighters and policemen to schoolteachers and office workers. Local workers are being forced to move farther away—to Lake and Mendocino Counties—to find homes they can afford, resulting in longer commutes and hours spent in traffic instead of with family and friends.

The County must ensure that future development contains adequate affordable housing in order to maintain the strength of the local economy. Supplying affordable housing will help ensure that people of all incomes can afford homes near their jobs and that businesses have access to a high quality workforce. By locating affordable housing near job centers and shopping, we can reduce the amount of driving necessary in day-to-day life and prevent increased traffic problems.

Sonoma County must also take into account its projected growth of 130,000 people over the next 20 years. It will take careful planning to accommodate current and future residents while protecting Sonoma County's farms, forests, and unique character. The task is not insurmountable. If new development is constructed at the maximum densities currently allowed, the projected growth could be accommodated within the county's existing urban areas, where roads, water and sewer lines, and other services already exist. But the County must commit to encouraging density and look at creative ways to build new housing, especially affordable housing, within its cities.

Two proven policies that are creating affordable housing throughout the Bay Area are jobs-housing linkage fees and inclusionary housing policies. Jobs-housing linkage fees are fees on new commercial development that go toward building affordable homes. These fees help ensure that the number of homes in a community will keep up with the number of jobs. Inclusionary housing policies require new residential developments to include a percentage of homes that are affordable to people making less than the median income. Both of these policies encourage building homes within existing cities instead of on rural lands or natural areas. They also help ensure that people don't have to move to the region's outskirts to find a home they can afford.



Compact development within cities uses land efficiently, takes advantage of existing infrastructure, and enables residents to get around without cars.

Greenbelt Alliance policy recommendations for the Housing Element:

- Encourage the location of homes near jobs and shops by allowing affordable housing in areas currently designated for commercial or industrial use. Protect agricultural and natural lands by ensuring that all new affordable housing is located inside urban service areas. To allow the entire county to benefit, distribute sites for affordable housing throughout all the urban service areas from Penngrove to Larkfield/Wikiup, and from Roseland to Guerneville.
- Include a jobs-housing linkage fee ordinance that establishes a per square foot fee for new commercial development to fund the creation of affordable housing. The fee levels should range from \$2.00 - \$3.50 per square foot depending on the land use, as proposed in the Workforce Housing Commercial Linkage Fee Study, commissioned by the County in December 2001. Fees in this range would be affordable for developers, while making a meaningful contribution toward building homes.
- Include an inclusionary housing ordinance requiring that 20 percent of housing units in market-rate housing developments be affordable housing for people who make below the local median income. This ordinance should provide developers with the flexibility necessary to abide by the ordinance by including provisions for in-lieu fees, land dedications, or the location of the affordable housing units on alternative sites.

Critical Issue 5: Providing Transportation That Works

The Circulation and Transit Element: Improving Transportation Options

Traffic congestion on Sonoma County roads has reached unprecedented levels. It is expected to increase steadily as Sonoma County's population continues to grow. In the next 15 years, the county's transportation planners predict that the volume of vehicles on Highway 101 will be so high that even if the highway is widened to six lanes between Windsor and Marin County, rush hour traffic will extend for several hours during both the morning and the afternoon. At the same time, the county's public transit system is woefully inadequate. It is increasingly difficult to get around the county by bus, as the routes are infrequent, poorly coordinated between County, City and Golden Gate Transit operators, and fares are high.



Well-designed streetscapes like this one in Healdsburg provide safe, inviting places for people to walk instead of having to drive.

The long-range solution to congestion in Sonoma County is investment in a functional and effective transit system, which encourages alternate modes of travel and reduces the need for automobile use. Marin and

The high cost of new road construction and improvements coupled with increasingly limited federal, state and local funding continue to hamstring the county's ability to expand road capacity. Moreover, substantial evidence suggests that simply expanding highway capacity encourages growth. This growth leads to greater traffic volumes, and, in turn, more congestion.



This historic building and popular coffee shop are a good beginning for transit-oriented development around Railroad Square in Santa Rosa, a proposed SMART stop. Adding homes around the stop will provide riders and make transit viable.

Sonoma Counties have been collaborating on planning for commuter rail service through the Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit District (SMART), which is an important effort and should be continued. In addition, the County and Cities need to make a firm commitment to creating an affordable, countywide bus system. To make rail and buses effective, the County must encourage increased ridership. The County can do this in the near term by coordinating transit services and increasing bus frequencies, and over the longer term by promoting dense development, including housing, around new and existing transit hubs. Increasing residents' travel options—making it possible to walk, bike, or take the bus instead of driving—is the most effective way to reduce congestion over the long term.

Greenbelt Alliance policy recommendations for the Circulation and Transit Element:

- Reduce auto dependency by increasing ridership on public transit systems and encouraging alternate modes of travel. This should be accomplished through coordinating regional, express and local bus services, adding commute and intercity service routes, and increasing bus frequencies to at least every 30 minutes throughout cities and unincorporated communities.
- Encourage alternatives to driving by establishing transit-oriented design standards and requiring that all new development and road improvement projects comply with these standards. The design standards should promote dense development around existing transit stops. They should also encourage bus use and walking by including new bus turnouts, bike lanes, passenger shelters, and sidewalks that connect to destinations.

Conclusion: A Better Future for Sonoma County

Sonoma County's current General Plan has brought the county from 1978 to the present day in a way that has preserved our farms and forests while accommodating over 150,000 new residents. But today the growth pressure is higher—and the county has less available land. It is time to strengthen the Plan.

This report outlines where the General Plan currently falls short. If the update does not address these issues, Sonoma County's quality of life will be threatened. That could mean more sprawling development and traffic; the loss of forests, farmland, and plentiful water; and economic pressures on farmers and urban workers. Alternatively, if the General Plan update does address these issues, it will help to ensure that the county's scenic areas are protected and enjoyed by local residents, its cities are compact and vibrant, and its farms are healthy and productive.

As the Sonoma County Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors update the General Plan, they have the chance to steer the county away from potential threats and toward a bright future. This report presents practical steps they can take to meet the challenges of new growth. Now it is up to Sonoma's leaders—and their constituents—to ensure that the county remains a unique and wonderful place to live.



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Acknowledgments

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Photographs by: Scott Hess, Jamie Hall, Kelly Brown

Graphic assistance by: Sonia Taylor

Many thanks to the following reviewers:

Peter Ashcroft, Maria Cipriani, George Ellman, Stephen Fuller-Rowell, Rue Furch, Stephen Harper, Caryl Hart, David Keller, Bill Kortum, Jake Mackenzie, Margo Merck, Steve Perry, Del Rydman, Dee Swanhuysen, Sonia Taylor

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