



## MEMO TO THE PLANNING COMMISSION

**HEARING DATE: November 4, 2021**

Case Number: 2018-004217GPA  
Project Name: Overview of General Plan Amendments  
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**Recommendation:** None (Informational)

### Background

California law requires that cities maintain a General Plan to serve as the blueprint for guiding physical change. General Plans establish a vision for how communities grow and change, reflecting the community values and priorities. Over time, the scope and scale of topics that the General Plan should address has grown. The [most recent guidance](#) from the State Office of Planning and Research recommends that new amendments to the General Plan focus on four key themes: 1) climate change; 2) economics; 3) healthy communities; and 4) equitable opportunities.

In addition to state law, San Francisco's [City Charter](#) requires consideration of social, economic and environmental factors. General Plan provisions found in the Charter consider regional issues as well and urge the Planning Department to "include plans for systems and areas within the Bay Region which have a planning relationship with the City and County."

As the breadth of topics that local government is mandated to address within General Plan grows, the capacity for many jurisdictions to keep up with these requirements have been strained. According to the state Office of Planning and Research, "*As of 2015, more than half of local jurisdictions have general plans that are over 15 years old. Often, this is because the process of adopting a general plan has become too time-consuming and costly.*"

### Historical Arc of San Francisco's General Plan

#### Beginning In 1941

The Planning Commission decided to formally establish the Planning Department and San Francisco's first General Plan was adopted by the Commission in 1945. The Plan was intended to serve as a living document as "the first step in the continuous process of planning." The plan consisted of three chapters: 1) Transportation and Utilities; 2) Land Use Plan; and 3) Redevelopment of Blighted Areas.

Through the late 1960s and early 1970s

The General Plan was revised, with new plans moving toward halting the spread of freeways, fighting the destruction of redevelopment, and recording principals for urban form. The 1971 Urban Design Plan sought to protect the City's existing fabric and cultivate human-scale amenities. Created at a time when most American cities sought to emulate the suburbs, it proposed a radical reinvestment in the urban fabric and urban livability.

### In the 1980s

The City began a major effort to sculpt downtown growth while keeping high-rises out of Chinatown, North Beach and the Tenderloin. The resulting Downtown Plan sought to leverage developer's desire to build towards defined public benefits through impact fees for transit, open space, and child-care. It also required public amenities such as public art and privately-owned public open spaces or POPOS. This effort was followed by growth management in the downtown adjacent neighborhoods with plans for Chinatown, South of Market and Van Ness Avenue.

### In the 2000s

The General Plan was updated with comprehensive Area Plans for urban neighborhoods well-served by transit, shifting the focus to finding more space in mid-rise, mixed-use neighborhoods where new housing could be sustainably integrated into complete neighborhoods. The plans such as the Market & Octavia, Eastern Neighborhoods, Central Waterfront, Glen Park, and Balboa Park Station Areas moved street designs away from auto-centric uses, and reinforced pedestrian-oriented buildings similar to the City's historic building stock.

## State of San Francisco's General Plan

The Commission Presentation will consist of a brief review of the state and local requirements for San Francisco's General Plan; a review of the status of the ten "Elements" of the General Plan; an overview of the four primary amendments in progress, namely the "Housing Element", the "Safety and Resilience Element", the "Environmental Justice Framework", and the Transportation Element"; and a sequence for regular, rotating updates to ensure that the General Plan remains timely will be offered.

## Schedule

A generalized schedule shows the four primary General Plan updates currently underway.

