

INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW

In the Fall of 2006, the Pinole City Council approved a work program to update the City's General Plan. The Pinole General Plan Update and the process provide opportunities for meaningful public participation in the planning and decision-making process.

In updating the Pinole General Plan, one of the primary goals of the City is to produce a user-friendly document. In order to provide easy reference and clear information, the General Plan has been divided into several documents, including the Background Report, Environmental Impact Report, Issues and Alternatives Report and the Draft General Plan.

The Background report is the first report to be published for the General Plan and presents a snapshot of Pinole as it is today. Other reports will be prepared and released for public review throughout the update process. After public input, information in the various individual reports will be incorporated into one comprehensive report, which will provide policy options for each of the General Plan themes.

The purpose of this Background Report is to support the City of Pinole's update to its General Plan. This report presents detailed information (data, facts and information on the existing environmental, economic, land use, public facility and service conditions of the City and its environs) to the public, decision makers and other agencies.

This Background Report effectively serves as a foundation on which the General Plan update process proceeds. This report provides the information on existing conditions used in developing the goals and policies presented in the Goals and Policies Report and serves as the basis for environmental impact assessment in the General Plan EIR that will be prepared pursuant to the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). It will serve as a resource for the General Plan and for future planning studies, environmental impacts reports or other documents.

The Background Report is the first to be published in the General Plan Update process.

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While the General Plan acts as a planning policy document for the City, this Background Report provides only information specific to the General Plan, as well as the plans and programs of other agencies that affect the City of Pinole.

WHAT IS A GENERAL PLAN?

California state law requires every city and county to adopt a General Plan that addresses physical development in the community. A General Plan serves as a blueprint that “guides the physical development of the county or city and any land outside its boundaries which bears relation to its Planning” (§65302). The General Plan is perhaps the single most important document a local government can adopt, serving as the guiding policy document.

The General Plan is comprehensive in its scope, identifying land use, circulation, environmental, economic and social goals and policies as they relate to local land use and development. The General Plan is also central to the effective management of a community’s physical and natural resources and provides a basis for local decision-making.

General Plan typically has three defining features:

- **General:** As the name suggests, the General Plan provides the basic framework and policy guidelines for future development of the city or county.
- **Comprehensive:** The General Plan addresses a broad range of physical, social, economic and environmental factors affecting the community, including land use, circulation, public facilities and other topics.
- **Long Range:** The General Plan provides long-term vision and goals for the community and includes policies and implementation programs to achieve that vision.

The goals of the General Plan are achieved in three ways:

- Policies and standards provide the basis for zoning, land subdivision, design, historic preservation and other regulations;

A General Plan is designed to serve as a ‘blueprint’ for future decisions concerning future land use development in Pinole.

The Pinole General Plan Update will provide the long-term vision for the community.

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- Findings of consistency with policies must be made when approving projects to assure that day-to-day decisions on development applications and capital improvements are consistent with the General Plan; and
- Implementing programs are identified when specific follow-up actions are needed.

PURPOSE OF THE GENERAL PLAN UPDATE

The current General Plan for the City of Pinole was adopted in 1995. The existing General Plan sets forth a series of guiding and implementing policies intended to reflect and preserve the quality of life in the City's residential neighborhoods and to continue to provide quality services and facilities. The General Plan emphasizes protecting the fragile natural environment and the existing character of the community, and includes all seven State-mandated elements: land use, open space and conservation, housing, transportation, safety and noise in addition to economic development, health, and growth management.

Since 1995, the City has experienced many physical, demographic and economic changes resulting in new opportunities and challenges for the City. The existing General Plan needs to be updated in order to reflect the changes in community attitude, land use, growth patterns and demographic and economic conditions.

The updated City of Pinole General Plan will help:

- Guide future land use and economic development,
- Ensure adequate infrastructure services and facilities to support future development, and
- Inform citizens, decision makers and other interested groups of the policies guiding future development.

Essentially, the General Plan Update will provide the long-term vision for the community, and, through its implementation policies, how that vision may be achieved over time (up to 20 years).

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In order for a General Plan to be effective, it must remain current. While California state law does not specify rigid requirements or timing for updating a General Plan (other than for the Housing Element), it does establish that the responsibility for determining whether a General Plan is up to date and accurate rests with each jurisdiction.

The scope (time-line horizon) of the existing General Plan was identified as 15 years. It utilizes a land use map to depict land use (see Chapter 3, Land Use and Economic Development, Figure 3.2). The land use map sets forth a range of land use classifications, including varying residential densities, commercial, office, industrial, parks, and open space designations. The land use map is intended to work in concert with a series of guiding and implementation policies contained in each specific element.

The City Council stated its intent to update the General Plan in 2006 for several reasons including:

- The existing General Plan is not in conformance with the existing Zoning Ordinance,
- Missing key elements, and
- It did not adequately address land use and development issues.

The City Council approved a scope of work/work plan to undertake the update process. This Background Report marks the first in a series of documents supporting the update and leading to adoption of a new General Plan in 2008.

IMPORTANT TERMS

In the development of the General Plan, a number of terms will be used to describe the City and surrounding areas.

- **City Limits.** The City of Pinole has direct land use authority over an area referred to as city limits.
- **Unincorporated Areas.** Areas outside the City Limits.

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The City Planning Area Boundary is the area discussed for the Background Report and General Plan Update.

- **Sphere of Influence or Planning Area.** Incorporated and unincorporated areas that are related to the City’s current and future land use planning and growth.
- **Study Area.** All of the land inside the City Limits, the Planning Area and any additional unincorporated land that have an effect on future planning efforts of the City.

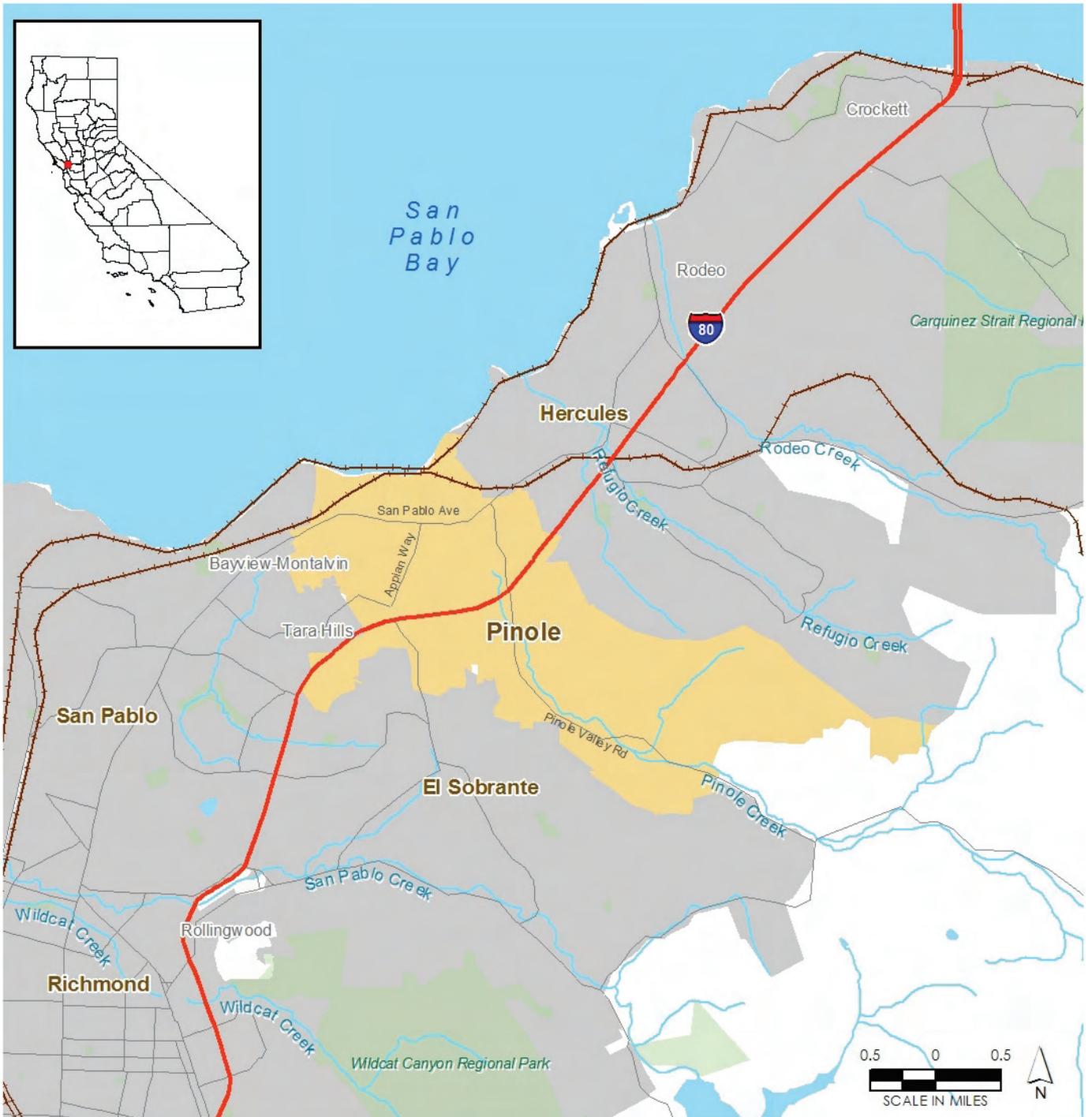
REGIONAL AND LOCAL SETTING

Located in the San Francisco Bay Area and 20 miles northeast from San Francisco, the City of Pinole is situated on the shores of San Pablo Bay in West Contra Costa County (See **Figure 1.1**). It is well connected to the cities in Central Contra Costa County (Martinez, Concord, and Pleasant Hill) and rest of the Bay Area (San Francisco and Oakland) by State Route 4 and Interstate Highway 80 and 680.

The City of Pinole occupies an area of thirteen square miles with a land area of approximately five square miles. With a current population of 19,039, Pinole is a “bedroom” community within the San Francisco and Oakland employment centers. The City is characterized by gently rolling hills and steep hillsides on the north and south, and cohesive residential neighborhoods.

Surrounding communities around Pinole include the unincorporated areas of Montara Bay, Rancho Road and El Sobrante and the cities of San Pablo, Richmond and Hercules. The City of Pinole is largely built-out with development opportunities only for infill housing and commercial development.

Site Plan for Figure 1.1



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Pinole 100 Years Ago

Early development in Pinole was directly influenced by the success of the California Powder Works Plant.



*Prairie Style Bungalow
Fernandez Mansion*

The construction of I-80 and the shift in industrial activity changed Pinole's character from and industrial town to a suburban bedroom community.

HISTORY

Once home to the Huchiun Indians 5,000 years ago, the City of Pinole was discovered by Don Pedro Fages, a Spanish Commandant, who led an exploration through Contra Costa. It got its name from the Aztec word “pinolli” meaning ground and toasted grain.

In 1823, Don Ignacio Martinez was awarded a Mexican land grant northeast of San Francisco. The 17,000 acres of land Martinez received was known as “El Pinole”. He built a hacienda (ranch) in Pinole Valley on the present Pinole Valley Park. During the 1850s, Bernardo Fernandez, a Portuguese immigrant built a trading facility and the historic Fernandez Mansion.

The settlement thrived and grew with the Southern Pacific Railroad in 1878 and with the establishment of the California Powder Works Plant in Hercules. The town of Pinole became the service center for the plant and served as the housing center for the workers. The city also served as a regional and commercial banking center and had an active waterfront that served agricultural and railroad shipping purposes.

Pinole’s architectural character reflects its history and commercial activity including the Gold Rush; agricultural and railroad shipping; California Powder Works Company; and, World War II.

The City of Pinole was incorporated in 1903 and developed rapidly with the construction of I-80 in 1958. Much of the industrial activity in the Bay Area shifted to other areas and Pinole became a suburban “bedroom community” to San Francisco/Oakland workforce.

A large number of historic residences, all of which were built for individuals who worked in Pinole or at the Hercules Powder Plant, remain in good condition throughout the Old Town area of Pinole. The Pinole Powder Plant was a stabilizing force in the community during

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Old Town Pinole still preserves its historic and architectural character.



Bank of Pinole in Old Town Pinole Today



Hip Roof Cottage 656 Quinana in Pinole

the 1970s. Due to this influence, Pinole's residential neighborhoods were not exposed to major changes created by land development or speculation. These homes, which can be categorized as Queen Anne Cottages (1880-1905), Hip Roof Cottages (1870-1910), and Bungalows (1915-1930), are simple in character and gain importance by their neighborhood groupings.

Since the 1970s, the City has steadily grown in population and in physical development. Most of the regional and local shopping centers in Pinole today have been developed since 1970.

In spite of the population growth and development over the years, Old Town Pinole still preserves its historic and architectural character.

ORGANIZATION AND SCOPE OF THE BACKGROUND REPORT

The Background Report provides baseline information and data specific to elements of the General Plan. It provides detailed information of the land use, economic, environmental, public facilities, transportation systems, environmental factors, health and safety.

This report is organized into eight chapters, as follows:

Chapter 1, Introduction. This chapter provides an introduction to the Background Report with a brief outline about the General Plan, the purpose of a General Plan Update and a brief overview to Pinole's setting, history and demographics.

Chapter 2, Demographics and Fiscal Conditions.

This chapter describes the population and demographics that exist in Pinole, including population, age, income, housing and other statistical information as reported by various agencies. These topics are presented in the following sections.

- Local and National Demographic Trends
- Economic Conditions in Pinole

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- Housing Trends and Issues
- Employment Conditions and Trends

Chapter 3, Land Use and Economic Development. This chapter provides an overview of existing land uses, land use regulations and economic and growth management strategies employed by the City. These topics are presented in the following sections.

- Land Use
- Growth Management
- Economic Development

Chapter 4, Community Services and Facilities. This chapter provides an overview of existing community services and facilities in Pinole including: City government facilities; fire and police protection; youth and child care; recreational facilities; arts and cultural facilities; medical and social services; education; libraries; water supply, treatment and distribution; storm drainage and flooding; solid waste collection, disposal and recycling; and, energy communication systems. These services and facilities are provided in the following sections.

- City of Pinole: Services and Facilities
- Recreational and Cultural Facilities and Services
- Health-Related Services and Facilities
- Education-Related Facilities and Services
- Utility Facilities and Services

Chapter 5, Traffic and Circulation. This chapter describes the existing transportation conditions in the City of Pinole. It describes the various modes of the existing transportation system, the existing traffic volumes on area roadways, and current levels of service. Existing transportation conditions are provided in the following sections.

- Roadway Classifications
- Key City Roadways
- Level of Service Standards

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- Signalized Intersection Analysis
- Existing Levels of Service
- Bicycling Facilities and Programs
- Pedestrian Systems
- Transit Systems
- Other Transportation Systems
- Transportation Programs

Chapter 6, Open Space and Biological Resources. This chapter describes the existing open space and environmental conditions in the City of Pinole including discussion of existing neighborhoods and community parks in the City. These open space areas and biological resources are provided in the following sections.



Open Space in Pinole Hills

- Open Space and Environmental Protection Background
- State and National Perspectives on Open Space and Parks
- Regional Parks and Park Reserves
- Community and Neighborhood Parks
- Bicycle Paths
- Habitat Values and Visual Resources
- Open Space and the City's Responsibility

Chapter 7, Health and Safety. This chapter describes the health and safety considerations in Pinole including the following:

- Seismic and Geologic Hazards
- Flooding Hazards
- Wildland Fire Hazards
- Hazardous Materials and Waste
- Emergency Response Preparedness
- Air Quality
- Homeland Security
- Noise

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*Homes along Tennent Avenue
in Old Town Pinole*

Chapter 8, Growth Management. This chapter describes the growth management considerations in Pinole including:

- Introduction
- Jobs/Housing Balance
- Housing Needs Identified in the Housing Element
- Traffic Capacity
- West County Action Plan 2000 Update
- Description of Other Service Capability