

Chapter 1. Introduction

This Larkspur General Plan supersedes the 1990 General Plan and any and all elements of the General Plan subsequently adopted, except for the Housing Element. The Housing Element was adopted by the City in November 2011 by Resolution No. 39/10 and was revised and re-adopted by Resolution No. ~~[to be added]-31/15~~ in ~~[to be added]~~ May 2015 to be consistent with this General Plan.

The Larkspur General Plan is a comprehensive, integrated, and internally consistent statement of Larkspur's development policies for the City and its Sphere of Influence,¹ also referred to as the Planning Area. (For maps of the Planning Area, see Figure 1-1 and Figure 4-1). All Planning Area lands outside of the City limits of the City of Larkspur are regulated by the Marin Countywide Plan (adopted in 2007) and the County's zoning designations. However, State law permits the City to plan for areas outside of its immediate jurisdiction if those areas have a direct relationship to the City's planning needs. Larkspur has chosen to make its General Plan coterminous with its Sphere of Influence, and to work with the County to assure that County land use decisions within the Larkspur Sphere of Influence are compatible with this General Plan.

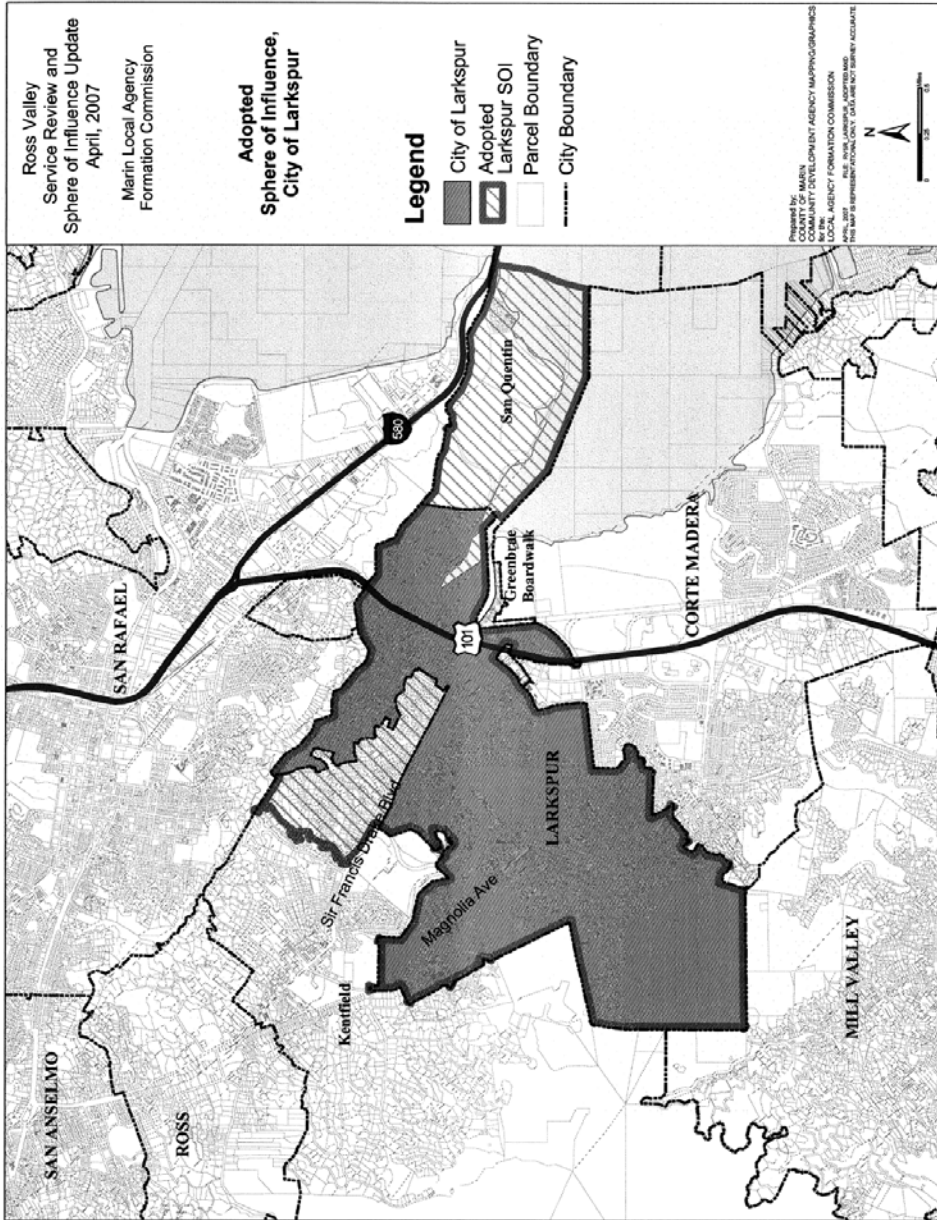
WHAT IS THE GENERAL PLAN?

The General Plan responds to, and its authority derives from, the California Government Code, Section 65302. It is the principal policy document for guiding future conservation and development of the city. It represents an agreement among the citizens of Larkspur on basic community values, ideals, and aspirations to govern a shared environment. The Plan has a long-term horizon, addressing a 20-year time frame. Yet, it brings a deliberate, overall direction to the day-to-day decisions of the City Council, its commissions, and City staff. The Plan:

- Organizes the desires of Larkspur residents in regard to the physical, social, economic, and environmental character of the city;
- Defines a realistic vision of what the city intends to be in 20 years;
- Charts the course of conservation and development that will determine the future character of Larkspur and the nature of its environment; and
- Serves as a collective community memory of issues raised and directions chosen during the process that updated the Plan.

¹ Sphere of Influence*: The probable ultimate physical boundaries and service area of a city or district as approved by Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) of the County.

Figure 1-1: Larkspur Planning Area



Source: Marin LAFCO, 2007.

ORGANIZATION OF THE PLAN

The Plan is made up of a text, diagrams, and other illustrations. The text is arranged in chapters, or “elements”.

Starting with Chapter 2, each chapter begins with a description of existing conditions, a discussion of problems, or both. Desired future conditions are stated in the form of goals, policies, and programs which are the essence of the Plan.

Goals, Policies, and Programs

Goals are long-range in nature, while *policies* and *programs* are intermediate or short-range actions intended to achieve goals. *Goal*, *policy*, and *program* are defined below and printed with the numbering system and typeface used in Chapters 2 through 7. Each Chapter is assigned a two or three-letter identification “tag” that precedes its associated goals, policies, and programs (e.g., Land Use Element is “LU”; Circulation Element is “CIR”). Consequently, each goal, policy, and program has a unique and easily identifiable label.

Goal XX-1: A general, overall, and ultimate purpose, aim, or end toward which the City will direct effort.

Policy XX-1.1: A specific statement of principle or of guiding action which implies clear commitment but is not mandatory.² A general direction that the City elects to follow in order to meet its goals.

Action Program XX-1.1.a: An action, activity, or strategy carried out in response to adopted policy to achieve a specific goal.

In summary, goals outline the preferred end result. Policies establish what should be done and where, and programs establish who will carry out the goals and how it will be accomplished. Together they will determine the nature of the environment and the future character of Larkspur. Explanatory language that immediately precedes or follows a policy or program has the same force or obligation as the policy or program it explains.

The reader is directed to the specific goals, policies, and programs in each chapter. For convenience, the major themes of the Plan are grouped and paraphrased, below.

Chapter 2: Land Use

- Preserve and enhance Larkspur's unique physical and natural setting, while accommodating suitable new development. Maintain the City's overall residential character and the scale of its neighborhoods. At the same time, encourage a diverse demographic (especially age, family and income) mix.

² The word "shall" makes mandatory those policies in which it appears.

Commented [NT1]: The language of these themes are not strictly reflected in each element. We will circle back on these themes in conjunction with review of each element to assure consistency and refine themes as needed.

- Enhance the attractiveness and viability of existing commercial areas. Ensure that they provide neighborhood-serving businesses and are accessible by means other than the auto. Preserve the historical character of Downtown and its surrounding neighborhoods. Establish a town center or civic nucleus.

Chapter 3: Community Character

- Preserve, enhance, and strengthen Larkspur's livable and attractive environment, its community identity, and its special "sense of place." Promote a greater awareness of and sensitivity toward Larkspur's historic and archaeological heritage.

Chapter 4: Circulation

- Provide safe and efficient transportation facilities for all system users. At the same time, give quality of life and protection of the environment a higher priority than "traffic mobility," and do everything possible to ameliorate the negative impacts of local and regional traffic on Larkspur.
- Assure adequate transit service in Larkspur (bus, ferry, airport limousine) as alternatives to the auto.
- Improve all forms of connections (i.e., pedestrian, bicycle, and auto) between the several parts of Larkspur and with neighboring communities, as well as access from Larkspur to the freeway.
- Make it easier to move around Larkspur without having to use a car. Provide safe, paved, bicycle and pedestrian paths to schools, shopping areas, recreation facilities, and open space preserves. Improve traffic safety for bicyclists and pedestrians.

Chapter 5: Community Facilities and Services

- Provide park facilities and recreation programs for all age groups.
- Cooperate with the several school districts to share resources and provide a high level of cultural, recreational, and community use of public buildings and lands. Preserve all existing school sites for future public use, giving school use the highest priority.
- Renovate and expand public buildings and facilities to meet growing demands for services over the next 20 years.
- Maintain or increase public sector service levels (e.g., police, fire, and public administration).
- Ensure the availability of quality child care in Larkspur.

Chapter 6: Environmental Resources

- Preserve and enhance open space features, including marshes and wetlands along San Francisco Bay and Corte Madera Creek, wildlife habitats, view corridors, and ridgelines. Maintain the Corte Madera and Southern Heights Ridges as open space and as community separators between Larkspur and Mill Valley and between Larkspur and San Rafael.
- Protect open space and shoreline/marsh conservation areas from any degradation that could result from development or public facility improvements such as roads, paths, sewers, or flood control projects.
- Reduce water consumption.
- Reduce the total volume of the City's waste stream.
- Ensure that all development within the City conforms to State and local green building principles and standards.
- Implement the City's Climate Action Plan to achieve the greenhouse gas emission reduction targets established by the City Council.

Chapter 7: Community Health and Safety

- Do what the City can, within reason, to protect the community from injury, loss of life, and property damage resulting from natural disasters and hazardous conditions. Increase public awareness of flooding, seismic, landslide, fire, and other natural hazards, and of methods to avoid or mitigate their effects. Deter development in areas prone to such hazards.
- Protect Larkspur from accidental exposure to hazardous materials from spills, leaks, vapor releases, and improper or illegal storage and disposal.
- Reduce the adverse effects of noise upon persons living or working in Larkspur, especially the escalation of sound levels in areas where noise sensitive uses exist.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

State law requires cities to prepare general plans covering at least subjects, or "elements": land use, circulation, housing, open space, conservation, noise, and safety, State law also requires certain jurisdictions to provide an environmental justice element to address health risks, promote civic engagement, and prioritize improvements for disadvantaged communities. As the City of Larkspur does not contain a disadvantaged community, as defined by Section 39711 of the California Health and Safety Code, an environmental justice element is not required. State law also requires all jurisdictions

within the San Joaquin Air Pollution Control District to must also provide an Air Quality element. However, the City of Larkspur is not within the San Joaquin Air Pollution Control District. Figure 1-2 at the end of this chapter shows the relationship of the Larkspur General Plan chapters to the issues that State law requires to be addressed.

Maps and Diagrams

Accompanying this text as an integral part of the General Plan is the official Land Use and Circulation map. The map is provided at two different scales: one inch to 400 feet and one inch to 800 feet, on a 2011 base map. Maximum allowable population densities and building intensities are presented in Chapter 2, Land Use, for each defined land use category shown on the Land Use and Circulation map.

Commented [NT2]: This may change—we are in process of developing mapping, with separate Land Use, Circulation, and Noise (contour) maps.

Commented [NT3]: This will change - We are in process of developing mapping based upon Marion County GIS database.

GLOSSARY

Chapter 8 is a glossary of terms. It is provided to assist the reader in understanding the Plan and to ensure that the terms used in the Plan are clearly defined to establish intent and to prevent misinterpretation. The glossary will be compared to the definitions in the City's zoning ordinance so that any conflicts may be promptly remedied at the time of Plan adoption, or soon thereafter.

Commented [NT4]: Not reviewed by the CAC. This will be updated as part of GPUSC process.

TECHNICAL APPENDIX

A separate Technical Appendix contains background material used in the preparation of the General Plan, including background reports on Land Use, Public Facilities and Infrastructure, and Circulation, and a description of Larkspur's neighborhoods. The background reports provided the Citizen Advisory Committee with a foundation for formulating and recommending goals, policies, and programs to the Planning Commission. The Technical Appendix, while important for a thorough understanding of the General Plan process, is not adopted as policy by the City, nor is it essential to the day-to-day use and implementation of the Plan. Further background is provided in the final Environmental Impact Report (EIR). Anyone wishing to review the Technical Appendix or Final EIR may do so at the Planning Department in City Hall or on the City website.

Commented [NT5]: We are in process of updating background reports

THE GENERAL PLAN PROCESS

The City Council initiated the General Plan update process in 2010. In doing so, the Council recognized the 1990 General Plan's continued relevance to community values and its effectiveness as a planning tool over the past twenty years. However, the City underwent significant changes since 1990, including the development of several residential neighborhoods, and in 2011 anticipated even further land use changes in response to regional transportation projects (e.g., the SMART commuter train and the Highway 101 Greenbrae/Twin Cities Corridor Improvement Project; see Chapter 4,

Circulation) and planning efforts. Community values had also shifted to highlight new development and conservation priorities.

This updated General Plan addresses anticipated land use changes and community values and priorities, and provides public decision-makers and private developers with clear and effective policy guidance. The planning process to prepare the Plan began in June 2010 and culminated in the adoption of this new plan. Highlights of that process include:

- Appointment by the City Council of a Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) of 27 residents with a variety of talents and interests representing Larkspur neighborhoods as well as business interests. Five of the CAC members were members of standing City Boards and Commissions. The CAC met ~~[number of meetings to be added]~~ 26 times between August of 2010 and June of 2011 and ~~regularly during the public hearing process, conducted tours of the commercial district in the northern portion of Magnolia Avenue and the industrial area and mobile home parks east of Highway 101. The CAC completed their work on the Draft on November of 2011, with their comments and recommendations reflected in a CAC Draft General Plan dated December 12, 2011.~~
- In 2017, The City Council appointed a General Plan Update Steering Committee (GPUSC) comprised of two Councilmembers and two Planning Commissioners to assist staff in finalizing the draft, including evaluation of policies on recent developments, studies, and/or state mandates not previously considered by the CAC, as well finished formatting, graphics, maps, and figures. The GPUSC met times between February of 2018 and of 2018.
- Consultant preparation of background reports on Land Use, Public Facilities and Infrastructure, and Circulation. The reports (which can be found in the Technical Appendix) describe existing conditions and potential planning opportunities, and were used by the CAC and GPUSC to help formulate their advisory review and recommendations for General Plan goals, policies, and programs.
- **[Number of public hearings to be added]** public hearings before the Planning Commission and City Council.

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The result of this effort is a General Plan built upon the ideas of Larkspur's citizens - a guide in text and maps to opportunities and conditions for new development based on an optimal balance among the social, environmental, and economic needs of (and costs to) the community.

ADMINISTERING THE GENERAL PLAN

The goals, policies, and programs established in this General Plan are not intended to be considered in isolation from each other. Rather, they should be interpreted and considered in a balanced manner that recognizes the policy direction of all other General Plan goals, policies, and programs.

Once adopted, the General Plan does not remain static. State law permits up to four General Plan amendments per mandatory element per year.³ Most amendments propose a change in the land use designation of a particular property. As time goes on, the City may determine that it is also necessary to revise portions of the text to reflect changing circumstances or philosophy.

State law provides direction on how cities can maintain the plan as a contemporary policy guide. It requires each planning department to report annually to the City Council, the State Office of Planning and Research, and the State Department of Housing and Community Development on "the status of the plan and progress in its implementation" and "the progress in meeting its share of regional housing needs" (see the Housing Element for more detailed information regarding statutory reporting requirements).⁴ The report must also detail how the General Plan complies with the guidelines established by State law. In addition, the City should comprehensively review the Plan every five years to determine whether or not it is still in step with community values and conditions.

AMENDING THE PLAN

Any citizen wishing to amend the General Plan should carefully review what the present General Plan calls for in the location or area affected. A proposed land use change should be compatible with the surrounding uses and provide a logical progression for the City's development. A citizen wishing to amend the General Plan shall follow the procedure outlined below. (Information on processing and timing is available from the Planning Department and on the City's website.)

Commented [NT6]: Revised this section to make process mandatory, rather than "should"

~~1. **Project Consideration.**—The applicant should carefully review what the present General Plan calls for in the location or area affected. A proposed land use change should be compatible with the surrounding uses and provide a logical progression for the City's development.~~

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~~In addition, the applicant should review the proposed amendment in advance with area residents, property owners, and other parties who may be affected by the proposed changes. Local utilities and other special agencies should be contacted and consulted regarding the requirements for future development in the area, if necessary.~~

2-1. Preliminary Review and Discussion with Staff. Prior to submittal of an application, an appointment ~~should~~shall be made with Planning Department staff to discuss the feasibility of the request, the history of similar proposals, the intent of city policy, possible environmental concerns, and required submittal data and procedures to be followed through the process. In addition, the applicant should review the proposed amendment in advance with area residents, property

³ Government Code §65358(b).

⁴ Government Code §65400(a)(2).

owners, and other parties who may be affected by the proposed changes. Local utilities and other special agencies should be contacted and consulted regarding the requirements for future development in the area, if necessary.

3-2. Request to Proceed from City Council. After consultation with the potential applicant, the City will receive a written request for a General Plan Amendment. Staff will forward the request to the City Council with a recommendation on whether to proceed with acceptance of a formal application and a study of the request. The City Council will make the determination as to whether a formal application will be accepted and studied. This determination may include direction relative to needed actions required to prepare and submit the application. If the City Council does not authorize the application submittal and study, staff will not proceed any further.

4.3. Filing of Application. If the City Council authorizes the application submittal and study, the applicant will submit a completed Planning Application, a deposit to cover staff's time, and other required data. A staff planner will be assigned to review the material to make sure all the required information is provided.

The applicant will be notified within 30 days after filing as to whether the application is complete or whether additional information is required. An application processing fee will be charged to compensate for the time staff spends on the project. The final processing cost will vary depending upon the project's complexity.

5-4. Environmental Review. The environmental review process will begin after the application is complete. The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires all General Plan amendment requests to have an environmental assessment to determine potential environmental impacts, if any. Most General Plan amendment requests will require either a Mitigated Negative Declaration or an Environmental Impact Report, dependent on the environmental review required. The environmental review process generally takes six to 12 months.

6-5. Public Hearing Notice. Staff will prepare a Notice of Public Hearing to announce when and where the General Plan amendment application will be heard by the Planning Commission. The notice will also be posted in front of City Hall and on public notice boards, and published in the Marin Independent Journal.

7-6. Preparation of Staff Report. Prior to preparing a staff report for the Planning Commission, the project planner will review the General Plan's current policy or land use designation, conduct an investigation of the site and surrounding uses, and review any other pertinent information.

The project planner will prepare a written staff report for the Planning Commission that analyzes the requested change, makes findings for approval or

denial, and states the staff's recommendation for approval, approval with modifications, or denial. A copy of this report will be available to the applicant five days before the scheduled Planning Commission hearing. Copies of the staff reports are available to the public on request. Agendas and staff reports for General Plan amendment requests are also posted on the City's website.

8.7. Planning Commission Review. The Planning Commission is required to hold at least one public hearing on any proposed General Plan Amendment. At the public hearing, staff will present a report and make a recommendation to the Planning Commission. The applicant and any interested persons may give their comments to the Commission. Following the public testimony, the Planning Commission considers the staff report, the environmental information and documentation, and public testimony in order to make their decision.

If the Commission recommends approval, its recommendation will be forwarded to the City Council and a City Council public hearing will be automatically scheduled. If the Commission recommends denial, no action will be taken by the City Council unless a written appeal has been filed with the City Clerk within ten (10) days after the Planning Commission's final action.

8. City Council Review. At the City Council public hearing, the Council will take into consideration public testimony, staff's report to the Council, environmental information and documentation, and the Planning Commission's recommendation. The City Council may close the public hearing and make its decision, continue the public hearing to a specific time, date, and place, or refer the matter back to the Commission for further evaluation. The decision of the City Council is final.

For a General Plan amendment to be approved, at least the following standard findings are required:

1. The proposed amendment is deemed to be in the public interest.
2. The proposed amendment is consistent and compatible with the rest of the General Plan and any implementation programs that may be affected.
3. The potential impacts of the proposed amendment have been assessed and have been determined not to be detrimental to the public health, safety, or welfare.
4. The proposed amendment has been processed in accordance with the applicable provisions of the California Government Code and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Most changes to a General Plan land use designation will also require a change in the City's Zoning Ordinance, thus requiring a rezoning application. Procedures for rezonings will be provided to the applicant early in the process, if required. In most cases, the

applicant can initiate the processing of a rezoning application and development plan review at the same time as a General Plan Amendment.

City-initiated amendments, as well as amendments requested by other public agencies, are subject to the same basic process and requirements described above to insure consistency and compatibility with the Plan. This includes appropriate environmental review, public notice, and public hearings leading to an official action by Council resolution.

Fig. 1-2: Relation of General Plan Chapters to State-Mandated Elements

MANDATED ELEMENTS	GENERAL PLAN	
	Chapter	Pages
LAND USE ELEMENT		
Distribution of Housing, Business, Industry and Open Space	2	
Population Density/Building Intensity	2	
Land Use Map	Pocket	
Distribution of Recreation Facilities, Educational Facilities, and Public Buildings	5	
Flood Areas	7	
Implementation	2	
CIRCULATION ELEMENT		
Description of Existing System	4	
Map of Existing System	4	
Description of Proposed System	4	
Map of Proposed System	4	
Utilities	6	
Trails	4	
Implementation	4	
HOUSING ELEMENT- Separate Document⁵		
Public Participation	H.Introduction	
Existing Conditions	H.4I	
Governmental Constraints	H.2II	
Non-Governmental Constraints	H.2II	
Energy Conservation	H.2II	
Potential Housing Sites	H.2II	
Quantified Objectives	H.3III	
Implementation	H.IV	
Map of Housing Sites	Appendix A	
Progress on Housing Programs	Appendix B	
CONSERVATION ELEMENT		

Commented [NT7]: Update figure as we review and finalize individual elements

⁵ [20402015-2023](#) Housing Element adopted in [November of 2010](#) [May of 2015](#).

	Forests/Rivers/Wildlife/Implementation	6	
	Water/Implementation	6	
	Soils/Implementation	7	
	Flood Control/Implementation	7	
OPEN SPACE ELEMENT			
	Description	6,4	
	Implementation	6	
SAFETY ELEMENT			
	Seismic Hazards/Maps/Implementation	7	
	Slope Instability/Maps/Implementation	7	
	Flooding/Implementation	7	
	Fire Hazard/Implementation	7	
	Emergency Response/Implementation	7	
	Hazardous Materials/Implementation	7	
NOISE ELEMENT			
	Noise Sources	7	
	Noise Contours	7	
	Implementation	7	