

CITY OF LARKSPUR, CALIFORNIA GENERAL PLAN

CHAPTER 1, INTRODUCTION

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Chapter 1. Introduction

This is the 1990 Larkspur General Plan. It supersedes the 1972 General Plan and any and all elements of the general plan subsequently adopted, except for the Housing Element which was adopted by the City in October 1988 and which was revised and re-adopted in November 1990 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 (*"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.*), 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 County's General Plan 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.

Figure 1-1: Larkspur Planning Area

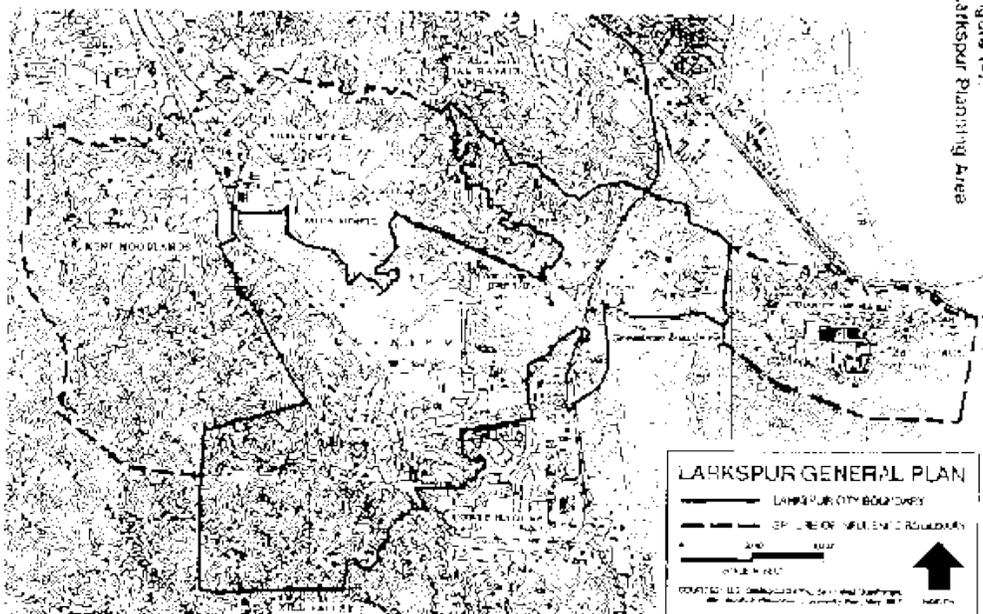


Figure 1-1:
Larkspur Planning Area

ORGANIZATION OF THE PLAN

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

Starting with Chapter 2, each chapter begins with a description of existing conditions or 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; policies and programs are intermediate or short-range. *Goal*, *policy*, and *program* are defined below, printed with the numbering system and typeface used in Chapters 2 through 8.

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

Policy a: A specific statement of principle or of guiding actions which implies clear commitment but is not mandatory (*The word "shall" makes mandatory those policies in which it appears.*). A general direction that the City elects to follow, in order to meet its goals.

Action Program [1]: An action, activity, or strategy carried out in response to adopted policy to achieve a specific goal.

In summary, goals determine *what* should be done, and *where*. Policies and programs establish *who* will carry out the goals, *how*, and *when*. 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 and family and social) mix.
- 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.

- Maintain the present mix of uses in the area east of Highway 101, especially the mobile homes affordable to seniors and to young families.

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 moving people and goods within Larkspur. 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 the connections between the several parts of Larkspur and with neighboring communities, as well as access from Larkspur to the freeway.

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.

- 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 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.

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.

Chapter 8, Trails and Paths

- 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.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

State law requires cities to prepare general plans covering at least seven subjects-land use, circulation, housing, open space, conservation, noise, and safety. 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 1989 base map.

Maximum allowable population densities and building intensities are presented in Chapter 2, Land Use, for each category shown on the Land Use

and Circulation map.

What is Adopted

The Land Use and Circulation and the noise contour maps are adopted. Also adopted, and shown on separate maps as part of Chapter 8, Trails and Paths, is the city-wide system of existing and proposed trails, paths, and bikeways. All other maps and graphic illustrations and their captions, unless otherwise specified in the related text and their titles, are illustrative or provide basic information, and are not adopted as statements of policy. Appendixes A, B, and C are informational only, and are not adopted as statements of policy.

GLOSSARY

Chapter 9 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.

TECHNICAL APPENDIX

A separate Technical Appendix contains background material used in the preparation of the General Plan, such as the Final Environmental Impact Report; three background reports on *Land Use, Public Facilities and Infrastructure*, and *Circulation*; and a description of Larkspur's neighborhoods. The background reports provided the Citizens Advisory Committee with a foundation for formulating and recommending Goals, Policies, and Programs to the Planning Commission. The Technical Appendix, while important to 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. Anyone wishing to review the Technical Appendix may do so at the Planning Department in City Hall.

THE GENERAL PLAN PROCESS

In 1988, the City decided to consolidate and update its General Plan to provide public decision-makers and private developers with clearer and more effective policy guidance. The two-year planning process to prepare the Plan began in January 1989 and culminated in the adoption of a new plan late in December 1990. Highlights of that process include:

- *Appointment by the City Council of a Citizens Advisory Committee of 65 persons with a variety of talents and interests and representing all of Larkspur's neighborhoods as well as many business interests. The Committee met six times between February and June 1989 and*

- regularly during the public hearing process.
- *Consultant preparation of detailed 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 Citizens Advisory Committee to help formulate the General Plan's Goals, Policies, and Programs.
 - *Eighteen public hearings before the Planning Commission and City Council.*

The result of this effort is a new 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

Once adopted, the General Plan does not remain static. State law permits up to four General Plan amendments per mandatory element per year (Government Code §65358[b]). 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 on "the status of the plan and progress in its implementation" (§65400 [b]). 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 would follow the procedure generally outlined below. (More detailed information on processing and timing is available from the Planning Department.)

1. Prior to filing an official application for a General Plan amendment, the prospective applicant or his or her agent should discuss the proposed amendment with the City's Planning Director. This gives the applicant a first-hand opportunity to find out the details of the amendment process as well as any concerns the City may have about the proposed changes.
2. Should the applicant decide to proceed with an amendment, the next step is to file an official application with the Planning Department and pay the

required processing fees.

All applications requesting a change in land use designation must be accompanied by a development plan of sufficient detail to ascertain the potential impacts of the proposed project on the site and the surrounding area. What constitutes sufficient detail is determined by the Planning Director on a case-by-case basis.

Environmental review in accordance with the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) will be required of every General Plan amendment.

3. Once an application is submitted, it will be placed on an agenda for public hearing before the City Planning Commission according to the schedule established by the Planning Commission for General Plan amendments. Prior to the Planning Commission hearing, the City, in accordance with State Government Code, will provide notice to the public of the hearing date and the item to be discussed. For an individual amendment, this typically involves a legal notice in the *The Twin Cities Times* or the *Marin Independent Journal* or both, and a notice mailed to all property owners within 300 feet of the subject property. (Major amendments affecting the entire community, such as this update of the Plan, are noticed differently because of their scale and impact. In such cases, State law provides alternative methods of notification that do not require notice to be mailed to individual property owners.)

4. Planning Department staff will prepare a report to the Planning Commission for the public hearing, describing in detail the proposed amendment, any environmental or other impacts that may result, and comments from other City departments or affected governmental agencies. The staff also will state whether the Commission should recommend the amendment to the City Council for approval or denial. The staff report is sent to the Commission and the applicant. The staff report, comments from the applicant, and other public testimony become factors in the Commission's action.

State law requires that any decision on a General Plan amendment must be supported by findings of fact. These findings are the rationale for making a decision either to approve or deny a project. At least the following standard findings should be made for each General Plan amendment:

1. The proposed amendment is deemed to be in the public interest.
2. The proposed General Plan 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).

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

<u>MANDATED ELEMENTS</u>	<u>GENERAL PLAN Chapter</u>
<i>LAND USE ELEMENT</i>	
Distribution of Housing, Business, Industry and Open Space	2
Population Density/Building Intensity	2
Land Use Map	
Distribution of Recreation Facilities, Educational Facilities, and Public Buildings	5
Flood Areas	7
Implementation	2
	<u>GENERAL PLAN Chapter</u>
<i>CIRCULATION ELEMENT</i>	
Description of Existing System	4
Map of Existing System	4
Description of Proposed System	4
Map of Proposed System	4
Utilities	6
Implementation	4

HOUSING ELEMENT - Separate Document

Potential Housing
Map of Housing Sites
Governmental Constraints
Non-Governmental Constraints
Energy Conservation
Quantified Objectives
Implementation
Public Participation
Progress on Housing Programs

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Chapter

CONSERVATION ELEMENT

Forests/Rivers/Wildlife/Implementation
Water/Implementation
Soils/Implementation
Flood Control/Implementation

6

6

7

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Chapter

OPEN SPACE ELEMENT

Description
Trails
Implementation

6,8

8

6,8

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Chapter

SAFETY ELEMENT

Seismic Hazards/Maps/Implementation
Slope Instability/Maps/Implementation
Flooding/Implementation
Fire Hazard/Implementation
Emergency Response/Implementation
Hazardous Materials/Implementation

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Chapter

NOISE ELEMENT

Noise Sources	7
Noise Contours	7
Implementation	7