



## Legislation Text

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**File #:** 2019-1966, **Version:** 1

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**To:** Board of Supervisors

**Department or Agency Name(s):** Permit Sonoma

**Staff Name and Phone Number:** Milan Nevajda 565-2336

**Vote Requirement:** Majority

**Supervisorial District(s):** All

**Title:**

**2:00 P.M.** - General Plan Update Scoping Work Plan

**Recommended Action:**

Review and provide comments to Permit Sonoma staff on the proposed work plan to scope the General Plan update, complete consultant recruitment, and secure a contract to commence the update.

**Executive Summary:**

This item presents a work plan to scope a General Plan update for Sonoma County that spans March 2020 to July 2021. The work plan involves the following components and is detailed in Attachment 1:

- Auditing the current plan and its consistency with current State guidance for General Plans;
- Identifying the County's focus for the update and the consultant support that will be needed;
- Marketing the planning effort, conducting community outreach, and establishing a reliable engagement platform that will carry through the entire planning process;
- Establishing a realistic timeline and budget for the General Plan update and associated program Environmental Impact Report. This includes evaluating any grant or other funding that may be available to support plan development; and
- Recruiting and hiring a consultant to begin the planning work.

This item also sets expectations for general fund appropriations that are necessary to support the General Plan update. Permit Sonoma projected that a General Plan update would cost \$3.5 million when it established the General Plan Administration (GPA) account in 2009 to cover half the cost of the update (see projection details in Table 2). The general fund was expected to cover the remaining half. The GPA account is funded through building and planning permit fees. The \$3.5 million projection continues to be a realistic cost estimate to update the plan. However, this projection will cover a basic update that addresses mandatory elements and involves minimal land use policy adjustment. Extending the scope beyond base requirements-by enhancing engagement, developing significant new policies on special topics, and adding other optional tasks to enhance the General Plan-could increase the \$3.5 million base cost.

The GPA was expected to cover 50% of the cost for a General Plan update as well as ongoing General Plan implementation for the 2008 plan. Due to cost increases on the Local Coastal Plan update, expanded General Plan and Housing Element implementation, and significant policy updates stemming from state regulatory changes, the GPA account is projected to hold \$1.5 million by the end of FY 2020-21, meaning general fund appropriations totaling \$2 million are necessary to maintain the \$3.5 million base cost for the update.

The scoping work plan will conclude in June 2021 and transition to the tasks defined in a Board-approved agreement with a General Plan update consultant team. As presented to the Board on June 4, 2019, Permit Sonoma's approved Comprehensive Planning Work Plan expects that the General Plan update will be a five-year effort concluding in 2026, with full implementation via mandatory code and other regulatory revisions completed by 2028.

Permit Sonoma is seeking Board comment on the proposed scoping work plan and approval to proceed with the outlined tasks. The scoping work will identify focus areas for the General Plan update, allow for meaningful community engagement to identify issues of concern and opportunity throughout the county, and evaluate costs associated with expanding the base scope of the update. The scoping activities proposed in Attachment 1 will further validate the \$3.5 million and allow the Board an opportunity to guide the scope of the update.

Permit Sonoma will present a General Fund appropriation request commensurate with the General Plan update scope that the Board supports at the close of the scoping process. For reference, given projections for the GPA account by July 2021, Permit Sonoma estimates that the General Plan update will require at least \$2 million from the General Fund over the next six fiscal periods (\$334,000 annual appropriations beginning FY 2020-21) to maintain a \$3.5 million budget for planning work. A refined appropriation request will be presented to the Board at a subsequent General Plan update workshop.

#### **Discussion:**

General Plans are required by California State law under Government Code Section 65300. The law details required components for General Plans, which are typically organized into "elements". The Sonoma County General Plan was adopted by Resolution No. 08-0808 on September 23, 2008, with a focused update in August 2016. General Plans are intended to guide development and investment through high-level policy direction over a period of 20-30 years. As the current plan has not been comprehensively updated since 2008, it is time to update the General Plan with an accompanying Environmental Impact Report so it well serves the community.

Since 2008, the County has evolved significantly. State regulations governing General Plan update requirements also have expanded. In 2018, the California Office of Planning and Research (OPR) issued an update to its *General Plan Update Guidelines* document, summarizing new required and optional components. Table 1 below provides a summary of the County's current General Plan Elements, and whether they are required or optional under current State guidance.

The County currently has four optional Elements: Agricultural Resources; Air Transportation; Water Resources; and Public Facilities and Services. The Open Space & Resource Conservation Element covers the mandatory

topics under OPR's Open Space, Conservation, and Air Quality Elements. OPR lists several optional Elements that are becoming more commonplace as county governments across the State update their General Plans: health, equity, community development, climate change, and resiliency. Elements are an organizational method for policies; there is no limit to the types of policy discussions or elements that a community can adopt in a General Plan so long as the policies are internally consistent, consistent with State and Federal law, and actionable. For instance, Sonoma County may wish to include a Tribal Element in the next General Plan update to organize related policies.

*Table 1 - Sonoma County General Plan Elements and OPR Guidance*

Sonoma County's Elements	2018 OPR Guidelines	Required/Optional
Land Use	Land Use	Required
Circulation & Transit	Circulation	Required
Open Space & Resource Conservation	Open Space, Conservation, Air Quality	Required
Noise	Noise	Required
Safety	Safety	Required
Housing*	Housing	Required on 8-year cycle
N/A	Environmental Justice	Required
Agricultural Resources		Optional
Air Transportation		Optional
Water Resources	Water	Optional
Public Facilities and Services		Optional
N/A	Health	Optional
N/A	Equity	Optional
N/A	Community Development	Optional
N/A	Climate Change*	Optional
N/A	Resiliency*	Optional

\* Climate change and resilience are conflated. While there are certainly overlapping concepts between the two, resilience in the realm of general plans is a broader-reaching goal that refers to a community's ability to dynamically respond, recover, and adapt to evolving economic, social, political, and ecological/environmental changes. In that sense, resilience relates more to equity issues because it seeks to decrease infrastructure and social vulnerabilities.

## Housing Element 2024-2032

The Housing Element is unique within a General Plan because it must be updated on a separate eight-year schedule. The current 5<sup>th</sup> Housing Element cycle covers January 2015 to February 2023. Housing Elements for the 6<sup>th</sup> cycle (2024-2032) must be prepared and submitted for certification by the California Department of Housing and Community Development by December 2022. Given that the General Plan update will commence

July 2021, the Housing Element update will occur concurrently with, but ahead of the remainder of the General Plan. Housing Element updates are a routine function for Permit Sonoma Comprehensive Planning section staff; additional funding and staff resources for the Housing Element update are not required and are considered outside the General Plan update scope.

The 2018 OPR Guidelines also summarize new laws governing General Plan Element contents-a list that continues to expand each year with new State legislative updates. The General Plan update will need to address all statutory requirements that apply to Sonoma County.

### **Preparing for a General Plan Update**

On June 4, 2019 the Board approved the Permit Sonoma Comprehensive Planning Work Plan, which included preparing for and commencing a General Plan update for the County. The approved Work Plan anticipated that the General Plan update and associated program Environmental Impact Report would commence with a consultant on board by the end of FY 2020-21. The Work Plan also identified the process as:

1. Scoping the General Plan through to July 2021
2. Conducting a General Plan update with a consultant over a 5-year period ending in 2026
3. Implementing mandatory code on regulatory changes following plan adoption over a two-year period ending in 2028.

The first step in preparing a General Plan update for a county of this scale, with multiple distinct communities, numerous anticipated focus topics, and limited resources, is to establish an achievable scope. What will be the focus of the update? Which policy guidance is most crucial to allow our communities to thrive? How do we best protect and cultivate what we hold dear? How do we ensure security and well-being over the next 25 years for Sonoma County's residents, businesses, and way of life? Given the significance of the General Plan, and its broad reach, there is tendency toward preparing an update that would solve everything. This is unrealistic and has partly led to some of the implementation challenges with the existing General Plan. To build broad acceptance of the next General Plan-and to complete the plan within a reasonable timeframe and on budget-the scope must be meaningful and manageable.

Permit Sonoma has prepared a work plan that will identify the scope of the General Plan update, allow the County to recruit an effective consultant team, and begin an organized process for the General Plan update by July 2021. The work plan includes seven tasks:

1. **Overview.** Audit the existing General Plan's policies and implementation programs.
2. **Outreach Preparation.** Develop methods and outlines for outreach.
3. **Major Issues.** Identify preliminary issues to explore through community outreach.
4. **Outreach.** Market the planning effort to increase awareness/participation; reach out to community members and stakeholders for input on focus topics.
5. **Scope/Financing.** Provide the Board with options for the planning scope and budget.

6. **Recruitment.** Recruit a consultant to prepare the Board-approved scope.
7. **Commencement.** Begin the update and complete a draft document within four years.

## 2020 Board Retreat

On January 28, 2020 the Board held a planning retreat to develop a strategic direction for the County. The process is centered around several topics (Healthy and Safe Communities, Racial Equity and Social Justice, Climate Action, Organizational Excellence, and Infrastructure) that are all relevant to the General Plan update and can ultimately be reflected priorities, or as new or refined policies within the plan. Following the Board retreat, the strategic planning process involves plan drafting through March and a Board checkpoint in April. Community engagement will occur through May/June and the strategic plan will be presented in August. The proposed work plan to scope the General Plan aligns with the strategic planning process so that the community can be engaged in both efforts seamlessly. The proposed scoping work plan includes an audit of the General Plan in May to coincide with the Board checkpoint on strategic planning, and engagement beginning in late summer 2020. The Board's strategic plan will provide valuable direction and framing to community conversations that would occur for the update.

## Funding the Scoping Process and General Plan Update

County General Plans are considerable undertakings because of the scope and scale of issues involved. In 2008, upon adoption of the current General Plan, the County established a dedicated General Plan Administration (GPA) account to implement the newly adopted plan and prepare for this update. The account is funded by building and planning permit fees. When the account was developed, Permit Sonoma established accrual fees based on a projection for the cost of various long range planning efforts, including the Local Coastal Plan update and General Plan update.

The projected cost for a General Plan update totaled \$6 million inclusive of the near term implementation that would follow plan adoption (e.g. the immediate ordinance amendments that would be needed to ensure consistency between new General Plan policies and County Codes). However, the projection did not factor counsel time to assist Permit Sonoma with the update. \$3.5 million of the \$6 million was assigned to drafting the update (with the associated environmental impact report) and presenting it to the Board for adoption (see Table 2). Half (\$1.75 million) of the 2008 estimated update cost was assigned to the GPA account and half to a general fund match.

*Table 2 - General Plan Update Funding*

General Plan	2008 Estimate	2020 Estimate	Annual FTE	2020 Funding: FTE	2020 Funding: Appropriation	2020 Funding: GPA Account
Planner III	\$3,840,000	\$2,308,200	2.00	100%	0%	0%
IS Mgr	\$21,000	\$21,000	0.01	34%	33%	33%

GIS tech	\$197,500	\$197,500	0.20	34%	33%	33%
Director	\$15,960	\$15,960	0.01	50%	25%	25%
Dep Director	\$142,800	\$142,800	0.10	50%	25%	25%
Comp Plng Mgr	\$497,280	\$497,280	0.30	0%	50%	50%
Secretary	\$317,400	\$317,400	0.40	0%	50%	50%
Env Rev Mgr	\$35,280	\$35,280	0.02	60%	20%	20%
Consultant Services	\$820,000	\$1,700,000		0%	50%	50%
Printing	\$33,200	\$40,000		0%	50%	50%
Public Notice/Legals	\$25,000	\$25,000		0%	50%	50%
County Counsel	\$0	\$645,000	0.25	0%	50%	50%
ISD	\$84,000	\$84,000		0%	50%	50%
Total, 2008 Estimate	\$6.03 M	NA	3.3	\$2.5 M	\$1.75 M	\$1.75 M
Total, 2020 Estaimte	NA	\$6.03 M	3.3	\$2.5 M	\$1.75 M	\$1.75 M
Funding July, 2021	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	\$1.5 M

As detailed below, the GPA account is not expected to accrue the projected \$1.75 million that was anticipated by July 2021 when the General Plan update would begin. Furthermore, the anticipated approach to the General Plan update requires revision. The 2008 estimate presumed the same model for completing the update: a staff-driven effort with minimal consultant support. Current best practice for county-level General Plan updates involves more reliance on consultant support. Given Permit Sonoma's commitment to emergency operations and emergent issues, a consultant-oriented model better ensures consistent progress through the update. Table 2 provides an updated funding projection that redistributes staff hours to a consultant team and county counsel to more accurately reflect the funding for the update.

Following interviews with planning staff in peer jurisdictions that are currently taking on or recently took on County General Plan updates (Ventura-in progress, Kern-in progress, Contra Costa-in progress, Humboldt-adopted 2017, initiated 1999), Permit Sonoma has confirmed that the \$3.5 million cost projection is realistic. However, a direct comparison to any specific county's effort is impossible because of the unique geopolitical context of each jurisdiction. General Plan update costs range widely depending on the focus issues for the update, whether new and major policy concepts will be developed, and the extent of community controversy/engagement. A current example from Ventura County is instructive: the Ventura General Plan update was authorized with a \$4.4 million budget-with \$2.3 million to cover consultant costs. While this budget exceeds Sonoma County's projections, Ventura's initiative included creating Water Resources and Agricultural Resources Elements (Sonoma County already has Elements covering these topics; while these could be refined through the update, a entirely new policy framework is not needed), a new Economic Vitality

Element, and a comprehensive overhaul of existing Area Plans. Because Ventura included an overhaul of land use policy, the effort resulted in considerable community reaction and dramatically expanded engagement costs. The proposed scoping work plan will allow Permit Sonoma and the Board to determine which bold policy objectives should be anticipated in the Sonoma County General Plan update and the related costs.

A basic General Plan update, covering only the required Elements and minimal policy overhaul would cost up to \$3.5 million with \$1.7 million for consultant support. Adding deeper analysis into targeted issues, and new optional Elements (such as a Tribal, Resiliency, Equity, or others) would increase costs. The GPA account balance is expected to close fiscal year 2020/21 with a balance of approximately \$1.5 million because existing comprehensive planning projects have expanded beyond their expected scope (notably, the Airport Specific Plan, Springs Specific Plan, and continual housing policy updates), and building activity (which generates fund accrual) was not adequate to cover these expenses. If the update begins by July 2021, the account would maintain a sufficient balance to support 43% of the projected \$3.5 million General Plan update cost, assuming current permitting levels. An impending development fee study could increase the accrual rate for the fund, which may bridge the shortfall to allow the account to reach 50% of the projected cost. To maintain adequate funds for a \$3.5 million General Plan update, a general fund match totaling \$2 million is needed over the next six years. This equates to a \$334,000 annual Board appropriation beginning with the fiscal year 2020/21 budget. Permit Sonoma is not requesting an appropriation at this time because the scope of the General Plan needs to be determined, with Board participation and community input.

In terms of staff resources, a typical county General Plan update requires approximately two to four full-time planning staff to support a consultant team. The Permit Sonoma Comprehensive Planning Work Plan has already reserved the required staff hours for this initiative. Table 2 highlights the staffing requirements for the update and its implementation.

Given the constrained financial resources, and the desire to complete a General Plan update within a reasonable period, the County must begin the update with a scoping effort ahead of hiring a consultant team. This will allow the consultant team to begin with a clear mandate and direction, resulting in efficiencies. Interviews with peer jurisdictions repeatedly emphasized the value of folding scoping work into the overall approach to a General Plan update. The scoping will also identify the general fund appropriations that are necessary for the planning effort. With investment in community engagement and issues-identification early in the process, the Board would be able to authorize a planning process to address issues that resonate with Sonoma County residents and that is right-sized for available County resources. The attached work plan (Attachment 1) includes staff analysis into the cost to address particular policy areas that may emerge as foci for the community. Staff will also identify whether external funding is available to support the project.

### **Board Discussion**

Staff recommends that the Board review the attached work plan (Attachment 1) to scope the planning effort, providing feedback on improvements or modifications. Staff is seeking input on the following issues:

1. The approach to community engagement, as well as options to improve the efficacy of community outreach. The work plan includes the general approach outlined below.
  - Hire an engagement consultant to develop an engagement plan, methods, materials, and to train staff on community outreach best practices.
  - Conduct initial meetings with stakeholders and specific advocacy groups to identify issues relevant to Sonoma County.
  - Conduct several large community workshops on broad themes and pair these workshops with concurrent online engagement.
  - Conduct focused community outreach in locations throughout the county. Use a variety of engagement methods, leverage major community events to reach people where they are and at their comfort level, and take necessary steps to ensure that hard-to-reach groups are included (e.g. by providing translation services, modifying meeting times, connecting with community associations, and engaging community ambassadors).
2. Broad themes or policy topics that should be explored more carefully.

**Prior Board Actions:**

June 4, 2019: Authorized Comprehensive Planning Two-Year Work Plan for 2019-2020

January 28, 2020: Board strategic planning retreat

**FISCAL SUMMARY**

**Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:**

There are no direct fiscal impacts associated with this discussion of the General Plan update scoping work plan. The work plan includes staff returning to the Board with a refined request for general fund appropriations for the General Plan update. This item sets Board expectations of the scale of appropriations that should be anticipated (at least \$334,000 annually for six years) in the subsequent Board item.

**Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):**

Not applicable

**Attachments:**

ATT 1 - General Plan Update Scoping Work Plan

**Related Items “On File” with the Clerk of the Board:**

Not applicable