

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION



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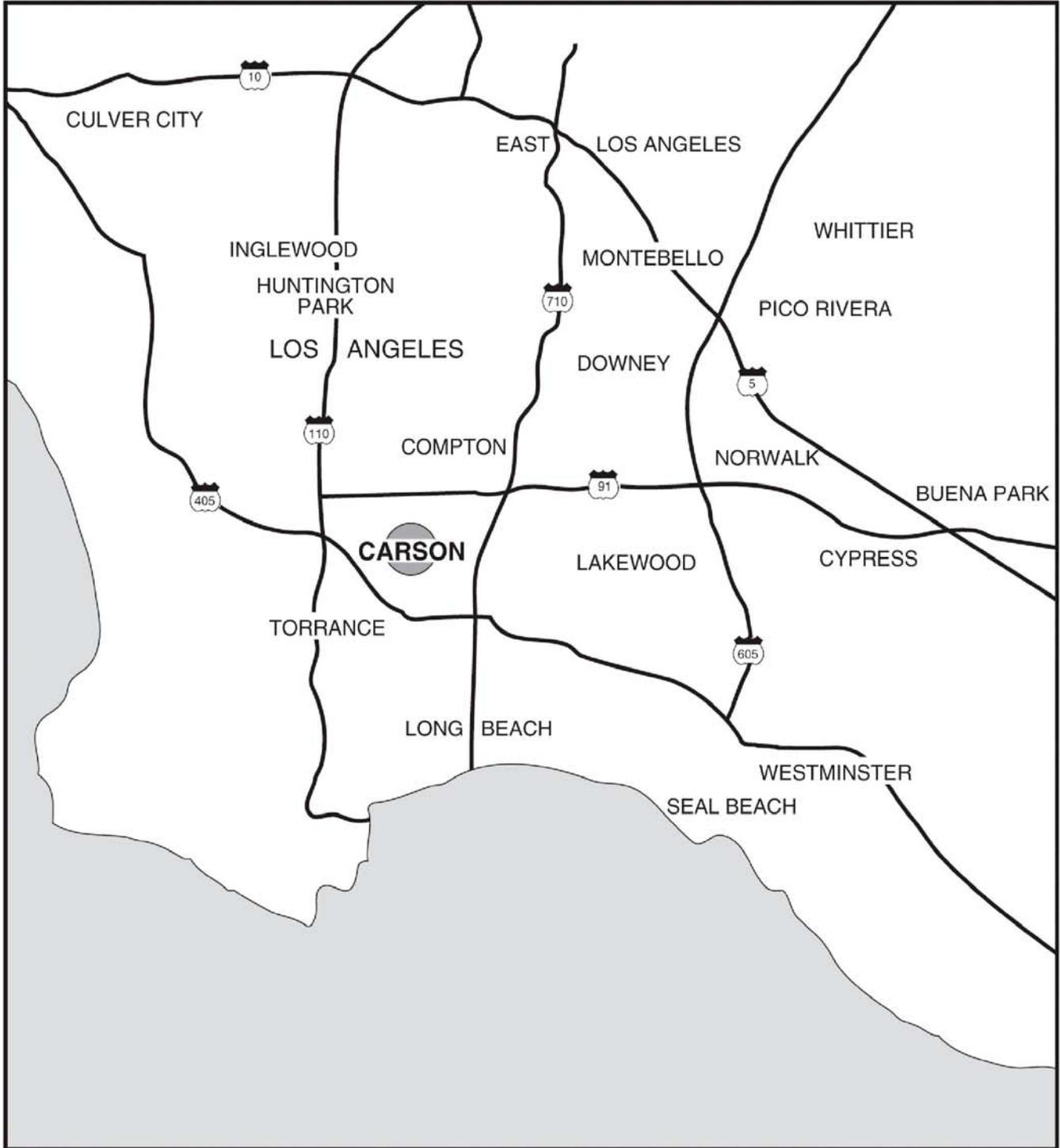
1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 LOCATION AND SETTING

REGIONAL LOCATION

The City of Carson is located in the South Bay/Harbor area of the County of Los Angeles, approximately 13 miles south of downtown Los Angeles. Carson is surrounded by the City of Los Angeles on the northwest, south and southeast. The City of Compton is adjacent to the northeast and the City of Long Beach is adjacent to the east. Unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County are located on the north, southwest and east. The City is also in close proximity to a number of points of interest: the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach are two to three miles away, as is the Long Beach Airport. Los Angeles International Airport is approximately eight miles away. Tourist attractions such as the Queen Mary, Ports O'Call, the Aquarium of the Pacific in Long Beach, and beaches are in close proximity as well.

There are four freeways that provide direct access to Carson: San Diego Freeway (I-405), which bisects the City in an east-west direction; Long Beach Freeway (I-710), which forms a portion of the eastern border of Carson; Redondo Beach/Artesia Freeway (SR-91), in the northern portion of the City; and the Harbor Freeway (I-110), which forms much of the western border of the City. Exhibit I-1, *Regional Location*, shows the City's location in a regional context.



Source: GIS Data, City of Carson
NOVEMBER 25, 2002

Regional Location

EXHIBIT I-1



LOCAL VICINITY AND AREA DESCRIPTION

The City of Carson is approximately 19.2 square miles, making it the eighth largest City in land area in Los Angeles County. The City is relatively flat with most elevations ranging from between 20 to 40 feet, with the exception of the Dominguez Hills in the northeast area of the City where elevations climb to 195 feet. The City's lowest points are at Del Amo Park with an elevation of 5 feet below sea level, and under water in the Dominguez Channel with an elevation of almost 15 feet below sea level.

As shown on Exhibit I-2, *Local Vicinity*, the City's western boundary is formed by I-110 (south of 190th Street/Victoria Street), and by Figueroa Street (north of 190th Street/Victoria Street). Alondra Boulevard is the northernmost boundary for the City, with most of the City located south of SR-91. The eastern boundary of Carson is irregular falling along portions of Central Avenue, Wilmington Avenue, I-710 (which is the furthest east the City extends), Santa Fe Avenue, and just west of the Union Pacific Railroad lines. Lomita Boulevard forms much of the southern boundary, with a small triangular area in the southeast portion of the City extending almost to Pacific Coast Highway (SR-1).

Carson's Sphere of Influence includes 710 acres of unincorporated Los Angeles County area between Wilmington Avenue and the Alameda Corridor, Del Amo north to the extension of Victoria Street.

1.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The first private land grant in the area, Rancho San Pedro, was conveyed to Juan Jose Dominguez in 1784. This land grant covered some 75,000 acres of the South Bay region, from the Los Angeles River on the east to the Pacific Ocean on the west. It encompassed what are now Carson, Torrance, Redondo Beach and the Los Angeles Harbor. The land was used primarily for cattle ranching, which severely diminished the ground vegetation and threatened the Native Americans' way of life. Also, the San Pedro Harbor was flourishing by 1800, and the Carson area felt the effects of travel between the harbor area and Los Angeles along routes now comprising the Harbor Freeway and Wilmington Avenue.

The end of Mexico's rule, California statehood in 1850 and the California gold rush increased the trade and commerce importance of the greater Los Angeles area leading to the county's opening of portions of such streets as Victoria, Dominguez, Carson, Del Amo, Wilmington and Sepulveda. This also increased the development pressures in the Carson area.

Although surrounding areas were developing, the lack of available water delayed development of the Carson area until the establishment of the Dominguez Water Company in 1911. By this time, cattle ranching had given way to sheep grazing, which in turn was later replaced by dairy farming. With the provision of water and other utilities, the Carson area began to urbanize. Initial residential development



CARSON GENERAL PLAN



Source: GIS Data, City of Carson, October 2002
OCTOBER 22, 2002

Local Vicinity

EXHIBIT I-2



began in the Keystone neighborhood and commercial development began along Avalon Boulevard and Carson Street. Farming was slowly phased out as residential, commercial and industrial development occurred.

Almost 200 years after the founding of Rancho San Pedro, 142 years after the Dominguez Adobe was built, and 58 years following the Great Air Meet of 1910, the citizens of the land “to the west of the Los Angeles River” finally took a step toward independence. The citizens went to the polls on February 6, 1968 to vote on whether to officially incorporate their community as an independent city, with 62 percent of those who voted, voting in favor of incorporation. Shortly after incorporation, the founding City fathers coined a motto for their new town: Future Unlimited.

By the time Carson finally incorporated as a city in 1968, its landscape was pockmarked with the dozens of refuse dumps, landfills and auto dismantling plants that none of the neighboring cities would allow within their boundaries. As a result, the history of the City of Carson since 1968 has been the struggle of dealing with these problems.

Following its incorporation, the City acted swiftly to close down most of the unwanted facilities that had been forced upon the city in the past by enforcing a strict building and landscaping code and by attracting new commercial ventures to the City. As a result, most of the heavy industry of the past has been replaced. The new industrial parks in Carson, such as the Watson Industrial Center, are models of cleanliness and attention to appearance. Other steps the City has taken to enhance the physical environment and quality of life since it incorporated include: adoption of the initial General Plan in 1971 (and update in the 1980s); initiation of two ambitious redevelopment projects to revitalize portions of the City in 1971 and 1972, leading to the development of the Carson Mall, Watson and Dunn industrial parks, construction of the City Hall and Community Center, support for the continued growth of California State University – Dominguez Hills, and involvement in neighborhood planning, revitalization and housing rehabilitation through the ongoing community development program. In addition, beautification efforts by the City have resulted in numerous landscaped center medians, lighting projects, street improvements and public parks.

Carson today is proof of “Future Unlimited” and has emerged as one of the prominent cities in the South Bay region of Southern California.

1.3 PLANNING HISTORY

PLANNING AT THE TIME OF INCORPORATION

The City of Carson was incorporated in February 1968. Shortly following the City’s incorporation a number of annexations occurred that expanded the City’s land area. These annexations included the Lincoln-Dominguez and Stevenson Villages, and the industrial property to the east of the City.



Prior to the incorporation of the City of Carson, the County of Los Angeles was responsible for all of the land use planning functions for the area. The City's first General Plan was adopted in 1971. The City's first zoning ordinance consisted of adopting the Los Angeles County Ordinance by reference; in 1977, the City adopted its own Zoning Code.

THE EXISTING GENERAL PLAN

After the 1980 Census, the City's first General Plan was updated; the current General Plan is the one updated in the early 1980s, with subsequent elements adopted/updated later. The current General Plan consists of four units, each containing multiple elements, as well as two elements not included within a unit. Below are a summary of the elements, the units in which they are contained (where applicable), and the date of adoption.

Unit 1

Land Use, Open Space, Public Services & Facilities, and Recreation Elements
(1982)

Unit 2

Circulation Element and Bicycle Facilities Section
(1981)

Unit 3

Safety, Seismic Safety, and Noise Elements
(1981)

Unit 4

Historic Preservation, Fine Arts, Conservation, and Scenic Highways Elements
(1981)

Housing Element
(1981) (1989) (2002)

Air Quality Element
(1994)

1.4 OVERVIEW OF CURRENT GENERAL PLAN UPDATE

BACKGROUND OF CURRENT GENERAL PLAN UPDATE

The City of Carson chose a two-phase approach to updating the General Plan, as described below.

Phase One

The first phase consisted of an educational and community outreach program where input was received from residents, as well as business and property owners through a



number of means including: interviews, workshops, a survey, and an advisory committee. The Vision Plan Advisory Committee (VPAC) was composed of 20 members from the City Council, all the commissions and committees, and residents. The VPAC was formed to assimilate the information received during the outreach program and develop guiding principles. These Guiding Principles and the issues that they are to address are included in the Carson Vision. The Vision document was the final document of the first phase of the General Plan process, and served as the basis for this updated General Plan.

Additional detail regarding the visioning process is found below in Section 1.5, Carson Vision.

Phase Two

The second phase of the General Plan Update was a more technical phase. The Existing Conditions Report was the first of four major documents to be prepared as part of the second phase of the General Plan Update. The second document is the General Plan itself, within which the Land Use Plan (another major component) will be incorporated. The third is the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) that will address the impacts of the General Plan. And the fourth component is the Implementation Plan, which is incorporated into the General Plan as a series of short-term actions recommended to support long-term General Plan goals and policies.

1.5 PHASE ONE COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

WHAT IS A VISION?

Carson Vision projects the community's desires with regard to long-range growth. It sets our sights on the horizon by saying this is what we have, this is what we want, and these are some of the actions we want to take to keep our dreams alive and well into the future. It is a flexible guide, which illustrates the interests, opportunities and concerns identified by the community; and is designed to be updated and adapted to changing times and needs. Carson Vision provides the framework from which this City of Carson General Plan has been drafted.

Carson Vision is based upon the views and input of the community collected during the course of a public outreach program conducted in late 1996 and early 1997. Property owners, residents and business owners were asked to provide their recommendations during the outreach program.

WHAT IS A GENERAL PLAN AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Every city and county in California must have an adopted General Plan, according to State law. The California General Plan Guidelines explain that a General Plan acts as a "constitution" for city development; the foundation upon which all land use decisions will be based. As stipulated in the General Plan Guidelines, adopted general plans must be periodically reviewed and revised to ensure the legal



adequacy of the document. Most general plans have a horizon period of 10 to 20 years, at which time they are updated.

Most of Carson's General Plan was adopted in the 1980s. Many laws relating to local air quality, water quality, traffic congestion management, growth management, earthquake safety, energy conservation, solid waste reduction and a number of other matters have been passed by the State legislature and Governor in recent years. Almost all of these requirements need to be included in the City's General Plan. In order for Carson to obtain maximum benefit from these regulations, while minimizing the costs of compliance, these new laws must be comprehensively coordinated as part of a general plan update. Patching a wide variety of new laws into an existing general plan can cause illegal inconsistencies, conflicts and many expensive General Plan Amendments.

Aside from State requirements, there are other reasons that cities have learned to value a sound, current and comprehensive General Plan. Economic conditions play a role in how rapidly a General Plan is implemented and what techniques are utilized. A General Plan provides evidence of a City's expectations for its growth and development and the framework for the City's leadership to meet those expectations. With predictability of the City's future increased, business investment in the City is encouraged and housing prices are supported.

State law requires that seven elements be included in each general plan. These elements are termed mandatory elements and include: Land Use, Housing, Circulation and Infrastructure, Safety, Noise, Open Space and Conservation. Cities may also chose to create additional elements to address topics that are important to their citizens, which are termed optional elements. Examples of optional elements include: Economic Development, Air Quality, and Parks and Recreation.

COMMUNITY INPUT IS IMPORTANT IN THE GENERAL PLAN

Not only does State law require citizen input in the General Plan, but it is crucial that a General Plan have the support of the community in order for it to be effectively implemented. It is also important that the General Plan address the issues that are of greatest concern to the community.

The City of Carson chose a two-phase approach to developing the General Plan. The first phase was an education and community outreach phase where input was received from residents, businesses and property owners through a number of means, including interviews, workshops, a survey and an advisory committee.

VISION PLAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Vision Plan Advisory Committee (VPAC) was composed of 20 members from the City Council, all the City commissions and boards and City residents. The VPAC was formed to assimilate the information received and to develop guiding principles that are included in this General Plan. The VPAC met on four occasions



and was primarily responsible for the drafting of the Guiding Principles contained in Carson Vision and this General Plan.

INTERVIEWS

A series of group and confidential one-on-one interviews were conducted with key decision makers, residents, business and property owners and department heads at the start of the outreach effort. The purpose of the interviews was to learn of the key issues early, in order to more easily and accurately focus on certain issue areas.

COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS

Two Community Workshops were held during the outreach effort. They were advertised in the Carson Report, flyers were distributed throughout the City and press releases were distributed to local newspapers.

On January 29, 1997, the first Community Workshop was held to receive input from the public relating to community issues. The Workshop was structured to allow attendees to voice their opinions and/or concerns about the City of Carson in the four following areas:

- Land Use and Aesthetics;
- Economic Development;
- Parks, Recreation and Community Services; and
- Transportation, Infrastructure and Public Safety.

The second Community Workshop was held on May 14, 1997, and focused on the review of the Guiding Principles that had been developed by the VPAC. The comments received at the Workshop were incorporated into the Guiding Principles contained in this General Plan.

COMMUNITY SURVEY

A random sample, community-wide survey was conducted in January and February 1997. The purpose of the survey was to seek information about the citizens' perceptions of conditions in the City. Survey respondents' preferences for changing, preserving or improving characteristics, appearances or services in the City provide information about how the community feels in general about certain issues and what issues should be explored further in subsequent work efforts, such as the General Plan, or Strategic Plans or Special Studies.

CITY COUNCIL/PLANNING COMMISSION WORKSHOPS

The purpose of these workshops was to inform the City's decision makers of the outreach efforts and the recommendations resulting from the outreach effort.



PRINT MEDIA

Articles in the Carson Report and press releases in local newspapers have been instrumental in informing the public about the outreach program and the findings and recommendations resulting from the work efforts. In addition, flyers distributed throughout the community were helpful in announcing the Community Workshops.

1.6 PHASE TWO COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

GENERAL PLAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

In July 1999, a General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC) was formed and was comprised of 20 members from the City Council, all the City commissions and boards, and City residents and business owners. The purpose of the GPAC was to act as a source of ideas, and act as a “clearinghouse” for ideas generated for ultimate incorporation into the General Plan. More specifically, the GPAC met on nine occasions and was primarily responsible for the development of the land use alternatives and many of the goals and policies that are included in this General Plan.

The GPAC met on the following dates: July 28, 1999; September 11, 1999; November 15, 1999; December 8, 1999; January 12, 2000; February 2, 2000; March 29, 2000; June 28, 2000; and July 20, 2000.

COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS

Four Community Workshops were held during the Phase Two outreach effort. They were advertised in the Carson Report, flyers were distributed throughout the City and press releases were distributed to local newspapers.

The four workshops were conducted in different areas of the City on the date and location specified below:

- May 18, 2000 – Veterans Park
- May 24, 2000 – Stevenson Park
- June 7, 2000 – Carson Community Center
- June 14, 2000 – Dominguez Community Center

The purposes of the workshops were threefold:

- First, to provide information to the community about the General Plan and the General Plan Update process.
- Second, to provide an opportunity for the community to ask questions and comment on the recommended General Plan Land Use Alternatives.
- Third, to provide an opportunity for the community to offer their suggestions on how to address key community issues.



The comments received from the workshops were forwarded to the GPAC for their consideration and incorporation into the final land use alternatives.

JOINT CITY COUNCIL/REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY/PLANNING COMMISSION/ ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE/GPAC WORKSHOP

On February 2, 2000, a joint meeting with the City Council, Redevelopment Agency, Planning Commission, Economic Development Committee and GPAC was held to bring together the City Council and other community leaders to share information, experience and knowledge related to the City's growth and development. The workshop provided an opportunity to report on the progress of the General Plan Update program, market overview, and land use alternatives developed for the General Plan. With respect to the market overview, Robert Charles Lesser & Company provided an overview of their work effort for the Economic Development Element and Kosmont and Associates provided an overview of the Economic Development Strategy for the Carson Street Corridor. In addition, the workshop presented two new issues that had been raised by the GPAC and the community since the development of the Carson Vision: 1) the development of a signature project and 2) city image. These issues were added to the list of issues developed as part of the Carson Vision and are addressed in this General Plan.

1.7 USE AND PURPOSE OF THE GENERAL PLAN

The role of each community's general plan is to act as a constitution for development and the foundation upon which all land use decisions are to be based. Land use decisions encompass not only zoning, but circulation, design, open space and other factors. The Plan is a policy document to assist and guide local decision makers. To be considered consistent with the General Plan, a project must not only be consistent with the Land Use Plan, but it must also further the goals of all elements of the General Plan and meet the intent of its policies.

The City of Carson is always evolving with new opportunities to mold the future character of the City, while preserving the best of it's past and present. The Carson General Plan addresses the issues that are important to consider in the ongoing development of the community. The Plan explains how the physical features and natural resources are to be maintained and enhanced, as directs how to incorporate them into new projects, infill development and community investments. The Plan also identifies land uses and their distribution throughout the City.

The General Plan is to be used by the City Council and Planning Commission to evaluate land use changes, make funding and budget recommendations and decisions, and to evaluate specific development proposals. City Staff will use the Plan to regulate building and development and to make recommendations on projects to the Planning Commission and City Council. The Plan will also be used by residents, neighborhood groups, City Commissions and Councils, and developers to understand the City's long-range plans and to evaluate specific development proposals.



A General Plan is a legal document that must meet specific State requirements for content. The Carson General Plan meets or exceeds the requirements set forth in the California Government Code (Sections 65300 et. seq.). The Plan is an integrated, internally consistent statement of the official land use policy for the City of Carson. The Plan addresses each issue prescribed by State law as it applies to Carson. The Plan contains land use and circulation maps. It also contains text that identifies goals, sets forth policies and identifies implementation strategies.

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires all local and State governmental agencies to consider the environmental consequences of projects over which they have a discretionary authority. The State CEQA statutes, Section 21065, define a project as “an activity which may cause either a direct physical change in the environment, or a reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment.” Therefore, the City of Carson, as the lead agency, was required to prepare and certify an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the General Plan Update.

The General Plan Update EIR is a public document that assesses the overall environmental effects of the Plan update at a program level of detail and indicates way to reduce or avoid possible environmental damage. The Program EIR generally analyzes the broad environmental effects of the General Plan Update, and provides a baseline, or “first tier,” against which future projects implemented under the General Plan Update 2020 horizon are evaluated. Where subsequent CEQA documentation is required for a future project, the City must implement the applicable mitigation measures developed in the Program EIR, and focus its analysis on site-specific issues that cannot otherwise be addressed at a program or policy level of analysis.

The Program EIR is to be used as a companion document with the General Plan Update.

1.8 ORGANIZATION OF THE GENERAL PLAN

The last comprehensive update of the General Plan was completed in the 1980s. A revised Housing Element was certified by the State of California in 2002. As part of this update, all elements have been reviewed, revised, reorganized and reformatted. This General Plan includes the seven mandated elements and three permissive elements listed below:

- **Land Use Element - Chapter 2.0**
- Economic Development Element – Chapter 3.0
- **Transportation and Infrastructure Element – Chapter 4.0**
- **Housing Element – Chapter 5.0**
- **Safety Element – Chapter 6.0**
- **Noise Element – Chapter 7.0**
- **Open Space and Conservation Element – Chapter 8.0**
- Parks, Recreation and Human Services Element – Chapter 9.0
- Air Quality Element – Chapter 10.0



The mandatory elements are shown in bold print. The Carson General Plan is organized in a traditional element oriented format. The elements, however, are organized into functional chapters. Each of the elements includes a statement of authority, a summary of existing conditions, and the goals and policies pertaining to a particular issue.

THE HIERARCHY OF THE GENERAL PLAN

Developing a general plan is a significant undertaking. Beginning with a big picture perspective before delving into detail makes the effort much more understandable and comprehensive. With this in mind, the Carson General Plan was developed using the following hierarchical system.

Framework. A framework is the structure on which the rest of the General Plan is built.

Guiding Principle. A guiding principle is an assumption, fundamental rule, or doctrine that guides general plan goals, policies and implementation strategies.

Goal. A goal is a direction setter. It is an ideal future end, condition, or state related to public health, safety, or general welfare toward which planning efforts are directed. A goal is a general expression of community values and works to further the guiding principle under which it falls.

Policy. A policy is a specific statement that guides decision-making. It indicates a clear commitment of the local government. A policy is based on goals, as well as current and future trends.

Implementation Strategies. An implementation strategy is an action, procedure, project, program, or technique that carries out a policy.

1.9 FRAMEWORK—SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The framework on which this General Plan is built is sustainable development. Sustainable development means following principles that provide for today's needs while ensuring that future generations have the resources available to meet their needs. It means enhancing the quality of life today and tomorrow. It means to provide balance. Balance of economic growth and environmental preservation, balance of housing and jobs, balance of technology and reduction in pollution and waste, balance of economic development and environmental justice, balance of alternative transportation types. Sustainability involves conflicts—and balance--among the factors of environment, equity, and economy.

1.10 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following guiding principles were developed as part of Carson Vision and set the tone for each of the General Plan elements and provide direction for the policy guidance related to realize the community's vision for Carson.



LAND USE

The City of Carson is committed to providing a sustainable balance of land uses, including residential, commercial, industrial, educational, recreational, and open space. The City is also committed to providing quality development which incorporate features such as integrated, walkable, and mixed use neighborhoods. Furthermore, the City is committed to facilitating the adaptive reuse of former landfills and contaminated sites.

The City of Carson is committed to creating an attractive environment for its citizens by developing, implementing and enforcing community design guidelines which will assure quality development and the maintenance and beautification of properties.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The City of Carson is committed to aggressively pursuing, retaining, and promoting quality and sustainable economic development and jobs, on both local and regional levels, through the utilization of the City's natural advantages which include, but are not limited to: the City's strategic location in the South Bay to the ports; access to freeways and airports, and the Alameda Corridor; multi-cultural communities; international trade; California State University, Dominguez Hills; and a diverse and skilled labor force.

TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The City of Carson is committed to providing a safe and efficient circulation system that improves the flow of traffic while enhancing pedestrian safety, promoting commerce, and providing for alternative modes of transportation. The City is committed to maintaining and improving all forms of infrastructure including water, sewer and storm drainage facilities, as well as communication and other technological facilities to provide a sustainable system.

HOUSING

The City of Carson is committed to providing and improving a broad range of quality housing opportunities, promoting home ownership, and enhancing residential neighborhoods.

SAFETY

The City of Carson is committed to promoting community safety in order to enhance the livability, quality of life, business environment, positive image of the community, and reduce the effects of crime and environmental hazards to all citizens.

NOISE

The City of Carson is committed to preventing, regulating, and controlling unnecessary and excessive noise emanating from uses and activities within the City. To this end, the



City will continue promoting compatible land uses, considering sensitive receptors, and implementing enforcement procedures and mitigation measures.

OPEN SPACE AND CONSERVATION

The City of Carson is committed to conserving and enhancing its key natural features and resources, including, but not limited to, trees and vegetation, open space, water, and other natural resources. To this end, the City shall continue promoting environmental awareness and practices to protect these resources.

PARKS, RECREATION AND HUMAN SERVICES

The City of Carson is committed to expanding the recreational, cultural, and human services facilities and activities within the City by providing commercial recreational uses, affordable recreation opportunities, various services, and a variety of public and private recreational facilities. The City is also committed to promoting the assets associated with the diversity of the community by involving its citizens in a broad spectrum of cultural and recreational activities and programs.

AIR QUALITY

The City of Carson is committed to improving air quality by: reducing total air emissions, educating the public on pollution control measures, minimizing dust generation, and encouraging the use of best available technology.

1.11 ADMINISTERING THE GENERAL PLAN

It is the intent of the City Council to implement this General Plan by establishing annual planning goals based on the Plan, developing implementing ordinances and regulations, and providing the requisite staff resources. The City Council is also mindful that its intention to implement this General Plan is based on the availability of funding and that some goals, policies, and programs might not be achieved if funds are unavailable.

Once adopted, the General Plan does not remain static. As time goes on, the City may determine that it is necessary to revise portions of the text or add policies or programs to reflect changing circumstances or philosophy.

State law provides direction on how cities can maintain the General 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” (Government Code Section 65400[b]). The City Council may respond to the planning department review by setting goals for the coming year. In addition, the City should review the Plan every five years to determine whether or not its content and policies are still appropriate and consistent with community values and conditions.



1.12 AMENDING THE GENERAL PLAN

It is necessary to periodically review, update and revise the General Plan as the City and its resources are developed. State law permits General Plan amendments up to four times per year for each mandatory element (Government Code Section 65358[b]). Optional elements are permitted by State law (Government Code Section 65303), and once adopted, the optional elements carry the same legal weight as the seven mandated elements. However, State law does not specify any limitations regarding the number of times an optional element can be amended per year.