General Plan 2025 is a comprehensive revision of Walnut Creek’s 1989 General Plan.

General Plan 2025 –

- Expresses the desires of the Walnut Creek community about the city’s future physical, social, economic, cultural, and environmental character.

- Builds on the efforts and visions of the past to define a realistic vision of what the city can be in 20 years.

- Establishes what the community wants to reinforce or change, in order to preserve and enhance the best of what the city offers.

- Serves as a comprehensive and everyday guide for making decisions about the nature and location of economic and urban development and road improvements.

- Protects natural resources and the public health and safety.

- Ensures consistency of City actions, while providing the flexibility to respond to changing needs and times.

- Serves as the City’s “constitution” for conservation, land use, and community development, providing the legal foundation for all zoning and subdivision ordinances, decisions, and projects—all of which must be consistent with the general plan.

This chapter comprises 12 sections.

- Accomplishments of the 1989 Plan
- What is a General Plan?
- Legal Requirements
- Environmental Assessment
- Maps and Diagrams
- The Planning Area
- Walnut Creek General Plan History
- The General Plan Process
- Vision and Principles
- Organization of the Plan
- Annual Review by Planning Commission
- Amending the Plan

ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE 1989 PLAN

The 1989 General Plan set a variety of goals and standards and proposed a number of special planning studies to be performed over a 20-year planning period. Many of these goals and studies focused on developing and reinvigorating the Core Area and the Traditional Downtown.

Beginning in 1990, the City devoted considerable effort to creating a growth limitation program that met community goals for managing city development. After adoption of a Growth Limitation subelement in 1993, work began on bringing all other planning regulations, including the zoning ordinance, into compliance with the general plan. The revised zoning ordinance was adopted in 1996.
As directed in the 1989 General Plan, several specific plans were prepared for areas with significant potential for land use changes. The first to be completed was the North Gate Specific Plan (1991)—a joint planning effort between the City and Contra Costa County. This plan provides guidance and protection for a 507-acre area that serves as a transition from the City to the County lands adjacent to Mount Diablo.

In 1996, the East Mt. Diablo Boulevard Specific Plan was adopted for a two-and-a-half block area in the Pedestrian Retail District. (The district is mapped in Figure 4 on page 4-10.) As of 2005, two major retail projects - Broadway Pointe and Olympia Place - were constructed consistent with the specific plan.

The Geary Road/North Main Street Area Plan was adopted in 1997 to provide for new development in, and preservation of, the northwest Walnut Creek neighborhood. The plan addresses issues such as housing, land use, public improvements, transportation, and improvements to North Main Street.

The Locust Street Extension Block Plan/Special Study was approved in 1999 for the coordinated redevelopment of a two-block area along Locust Street south of Mt. Diablo Boulevard. Although not a specific plan in the legal sense, the study was prepared in much the same way, and resulted in the coordinated private development of two retail projects—Plaza Escuela and the Corners.

The City adopted the North Main Street/Ygnacio Valley Road Specific Plan in 2002. The plan focuses on roadway and pedestrian improvements and private redevelopment potential along the North Main Street corridor from Civic Drive to Ygnacio Valley Road. In 2005, the City completed the centerpiece of that planning effort, the reconstruction of public improvements in the North Main Street corridor. The project undergrounded utilities, widened sidewalks, added landscaping and street trees, reduced street width, and created an inviting pedestrian corridor between the BART station and the traditional downtown.

Preparation of the Locust Street/Mt. Diablo Boulevard Precise Plan began in 2004. This plan focuses on a one-and-one-half block area in the Traditional Downtown and is intended to ensure that any new development is compatible with its surroundings in form and height and will have appropriate parking, vehicular access, pedestrian circulation, public open space, and other amenities.

The vision of the 1985 Alma Avenue Specific Plan to create a high-density residential district in downtown Walnut Creek was realized in 2004 with the completion of the four large, multifamily residential developments and private construction of the 2.5-acre public Alma Park.

A number of significant public improvement projects were called for by the 1989 General Plan. The Geary Road improvement and widening project and the Castle Rock Sports Park were both completed in 2003. At Heather Farm Park, significant improvements were made to sports fields and parking in 2002, and a skate park was constructed in 2005.

**HOUSING ELEMENT**

The City’s Housing Element was updated in 2002. It was added to the 1989 General Plan and is incorporated by reference in General Plan 2025. The Housing Element—

- Encourages a mix of commercial and residential uses in the Core Area and Downtown.
- Proposes and facilitates higher-density residential near public transit, major thoroughfares, shopping, and employment centers.
- Encourages the development of housing affordable to seniors and accessible to people with disabilities.
Chapter 1, Introduction

- Promotes affordable housing through new ordinances and city subsidies.

In 2004, the City adopted an Inclusionary Housing Ordinance that requires all new housing projects with more than one unit to include affordable units or the contribution of in-lieu fees to the City’s affordable housing fund. In 2005, the City adopted a Commercial Linkage Fee Ordinance that requires new commercial projects to contribute in-lieu fees to the affordable housing fund.

From 2002 through 2004, 683 multifamily units and 92 detached single-family houses were either built, under construction, or had been issued permits. Another 800 multifamily units were under review as of May 2005.

In addition, between 2003 and 2005, the City initiated and approved three affordable housing developments that would provide a total of 103 housing units exclusively for seniors and 17 housing units with no age restrictions.

WHAT IS A GENERAL PLAN?

A general plan is a comprehensive, long-range, and internally consistent statement of a city’s development and preservation policies. It is a city’s primary tool to direct and manage growth and conservation.

- A general plan is comprehensive—it addresses all geographic areas within the City’s planning area and all issues relating to the physical development of the city.

- The plan is long range—it looks 20 years into the future and focuses on the broad trends that will shape tomorrow’s city.

- The plan is internally consistent—each goal, policy, and action is checked against and integrated with every other goal, policy, and action in the plan.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

State law requires that cities prepare general plans and regularly review and update them.1 The City Council adopts (and can later amend) the general plan by resolution.2 Once a general plan is adopted or amended, the zoning, subdivision, and other land-regulating ordinances must be amended to be consistent with the plan.

State law requires that a general plan contain seven elements: land use, circulation, housing, conservation, open space, safety, and noise. Optional elements added to a general plan (e.g., local economy and growth management in this plan) have the same status as mandated elements. Figure 3 at the end of this chapter shows where the seven State-mandated ele-

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1 California Government Code, §65302.
2 California Government Code, §65356.
ments and the growth management element mandated by Measure C and Measure J are found in General Plan 2025.

The general plan is to be considered and used as a whole. Case law and accepted land-use practice stress the equality of the elements in a general plan. Since all general plan elements carry equal weight, no single section, chapter, or subject can be stressed while ignoring others. All of the sections should be read together.3

While the plan must be internally consistent, an exception—passed into State law in 2004—allows the Housing Element to specify a different development density than set by the general plan.4

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Case law and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) require that an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) be prepared to assess potential environmental consequences on adoption and implementation of a general plan. The particular form of assessment used for General Plan 2025 is a Program EIR.

The City established the scope of the EIR early in the general plan update process. Issues addressed in the EIR are:

1. Land use
2. Population, employment, and housing
3. Visual quality
4. Traffic and circulation
5. Cultural resources
6. Biological resources
7. Agricultural resources
8. Mineral resources
9. Community services
10. Infrastructure
11. Geology, soils, and seismic hazards
12. Hydrology and flooding
13. Hazardous materials
14. Noise
15. Air quality

The Draft EIR was available for review and comment by the public and interested parties, agencies, and organizations beginning August 8, 2005. The public comment period was extended to September 30, 2005, beyond the 45 days required by State law. During the review period, the Planning Commission held community workshops on the Draft EIR (August 9 and 13) and a public hearing on December 15, 2005 to hear oral comments. The City also encouraged the public to submit written comments to the Community Development Department. Relevant comments were incorporated in the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR).

At the close of the public comment period, the FEIR was prepared to respond to all substantive comments on the Draft EIR. The FEIR was available for public review on December 9, 2005. The Planning Commission considered it on January 12, 2006, prior to making a recommendation on the Draft General Plan 2025 to the City Council. The City Council certified the FEIR as complete on April 4, 2006 before adopting General Plan 2025.

MAPS AND DIAGRAMS

The Land Use Map is provided at the back of this document. The map graphically expresses the plan’s development and conservation policies by showing the desired arrangement and location of land uses. The map is consistent with the general plan text, goals, policies, and actions.

General plans must also contain a circulation element, showing the “general location and extent of existing and proposed major thoroughfares, transportation routes, terminals, and other local public utilities and facilities, all

4 Government Code §65589.5.
correlated with the land use element.”5 Walnut Creek’s Roadway Classification Map (see Figure 3 on page 5-8) shows current and proposed arterials, collectors, and local streets; rail lines; bus routes; bikeways; and trails.

Together, the Land Use and Circulation Maps illustrate the primary ways the City plans to direct and manage growth through 2025. In addition to these two maps, the general plan contains many other maps and diagrams that augment or illustrate important information with respect to issues, policies, and action programs.

THE PLANNING AREA

Walnut Creek is a regional economic and cultural center in Contra Costa County, 23 miles east of San Francisco at the foot of Mount Diablo. (See Figure 1, this page.)

The city’s vigorous and lively downtown and the Broadway Plaza area lie directly east of the junction of north-south Interstate Highway 680 and State Highway 24. Highway 24 leads west to the Caldecott Tunnel and the bayside cities beyond.

Important planning boundaries for Walnut Creek are 1) the city limits, 2) the Sphere of Influence (SOI), 3) “lands of interest,” and 4) the Planning Area. (See Figure 2, Planning Boundaries, page 1-6.)

The city limits encompass 19.77 square miles and include all areas under Walnut Creek’s jurisdiction and control.

The Local Area Formation Commission (LAFCO), in conjunction with the City, determined the Sphere of Influence. The SOI includes lands outside the city that can ultimately be served by the City and are thus within a probable future city limit. Lands in the Sphere of Influence total 4.3 square miles.

In addition to the Sphere of Influence, State law requires the general plan to consider any territory outside the city’s boundaries that, in the City’s “judgment, bears relation to its planning.”6 These “lands of interest” to Walnut Creek total 4.4 square miles.

Thus, Walnut Creek’s Planning Area totals 28.47 square miles and includes the city, all of the SOI, and the lands of interest. The City is expected to create land use plans for all property within its chosen planning area; however, no regulatory authority is conferred by the boundary.

The 1989 planning area boundary was generalized. The General Plan 2025 boundary is parcel-based and specific. In addition, minor changes were made to the 1989 planning area boundary to better protect open spaces at the city’s edge.7

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5 Government Code §65302(b).
7 Two parcels in, and owned by, the City of Concord are part of the Lime Ridge Open Space, which Walnut Creek manages in cooperation with Concord. These two parcels and two parcels in the City of Lafayette adjacent to Acalanes Ridge Open Space are included in the Planning Area because they are “lands of interest” to the City.
Figure 2. Planning Boundaries
Chapter 1, Introduction

WALNUT CREEK GENERAL PLAN HISTORY

The City adopted its first general plan in 1961. After a series of general plan land use studies, specific plans and amendments, a new general plan was adopted in 1971. The 1971 General Plan emphasized developing the city as a subregional retail and employment center. Between 1973 and 1975, four elements were added to the plan: Open Space (1973), Safety/Seismic Safety (1974), Scenic Highways (1975), and Noise (1975). Shortly after adoption of the open space element, a 30-year bond was passed (1974) to purchase the majority of the City’s 2,700 acres of open space. The bond was retired in 2004.

The City adopted Core Area amendments to the general plan in 1975 and 1980. These amendments:

- Envisioned the Core Area as a pedestrian-friendly central shopping district
- Encouraged a strong urban design image through height and bulk guidelines
- Limited high-rise development to the area near the BART station
- Encouraged a mix of uses downtown

The 1989 General Plan focused on developing and reinvigorating the Core Area and the Traditional +Downtown as well as developing specific or precise plans for areas such as North Gate, East Mt. Diablo Boulevard, Geary Road/North Main Street, the Locust Street extension, North Main Street/Ygnacio Valley Road, and Locust Street/Mt. Diablo Boulevard.

In 1985, Walnut Creek voters approved Measure H—a citizens’ growth limitation initiative. Measure H was later ruled invalid by the California Supreme Court. However, in response to the community’s interests in growth, the City Council in 1993 amended the general plan to limit commercial growth to 75,000 square feet annually, metered in two-year increments of 150,000 square feet over 10 years. The Transportation Element also was amended.

In addition, Walnut Creek voters in 1985 approved Measure A, a building-height initiative that froze the maximum height permitted on each parcel.

The Housing Element—updated, adopted, and State-certified in October 2002—is part of the general plan, but is found in a separate document and is not reprinted here. With the exception of the Housing Element, the 1989 General Plan has remained relatively unchanged since 1993—although it has been amended in lesser ways from time to time.

THE GENERAL PLAN PROCESS

The City provided a number of significant and continuing opportunities for the community to participate in creating General Plan 2025.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

From March through September 2001, the City engaged 300 residents in a series of focused and comprehensive “Community Conversations.” The conversations were designed to educate the public about future development issues, build relationships between citizens and City staff, and solicit resident and stakeholder views about the City and its future.

Participants were told that the City was required by State law to update its Housing Element by January 2002. The City also noted it likely would begin a comprehensive general plan update by 2005. Community Conversations then set out to focus on and prioritize citizens’ desires for future development and preservation.
HOUSING ELEMENT UPDATE PROCESS

What began with Community Conversations continued with discussions regarding growth limitation and revising the housing element.

In August 2001, the City held a housing forum for residents regarding area housing needs, the City’s existing housing programs, and what could be done to address unmet needs. The City also convened a separate discussion with housing professionals. Staff then held four study sessions with the Planning Commission and City Council in August, September, and November 2001.

Staff prepared three successive drafts of the Housing Element and made each available for public review and comment between January and June 2002. Formal public hearings were held in March 2002, and the City Council adopted the Housing Element on October 1, 2002.

General Plan 2025 does not change the Housing Element and incorporates it by reference. The Housing Element will be updated in 2007 in accordance with a schedule established by the State.

OTHER COUNCIL ACTIONS

In August 2002, the City Council indicated interest in updating the general plan. The Council defined the general focus and content for the update, an approach to public participation, a list of technical studies needed, staffing requirements, consultant costs, and a work schedule. In June 2003, the City Council approved a general plan work program and schedule and appropriated funds for the project.

STEERING COMMITTEE

To guide the process from the outset and prepare and recommend a plan to the Planning Commission for review and elaboration, the City Council formed a General Plan Steering Committee of seven members—the city treasurer, two planning commissioners, and one commissioner each from the Transportation; Parks, Recreation, and Open Space; Arts; and Design Review commissions. Each commission was responsible for appointing its representative and an alternate.

The Steering Committee members and alternates met 29 times from June 2003 through February 2005. Meetings were open to the public, and each meeting included a time for public comment. Information prepared for each meeting was posted in advance on the City website. Meetings were structured to allow in-depth committee and public discussion of issues identified through various sources, including Community Conversations, a December 2003 communitywide survey, and other public comment.

The committee was a knowledgeable and broadly representative body, and its members brought insights based on their experience as residents and commissioners. The committee:

- Represented a broad segment of diverse interests.
- Functioned as a conduit and liaison to the City’s several commissions.
- Evaluated the 1989 General Plan, especially the continued relevance of its goals and policies.
- Identified new issues and opportunities facing the community.
- Drafted a vision for the future of Walnut Creek.
- Drafted a set of key principles to underlie the plan.
- Reviewed and commented on 12 back-
ground reports produced by staff and consultants between January and May 2004. (The background reports described conditions existing in 2003, trends, and community issues to be addressed.)*

- Helped formulate, review, and revise a citywide set of goals, policies, and actions for the new plan.
- Examined, assessed, and chose among three land use alternatives, each covering 18 “potential change areas.”
- Recommended a set of land use changes to the Planning Commission.
- Hosted three of the four sets of community workshops (October 2003 and March and November 2004).

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

In July 2003, the City engaged a consultant to prepare an economic development strategy and appointed a 17-member advisory group for review and oversight. The advisory group included two members of the general plan steering committee. The Economic Development Plan—approved by the City Council in May 2004— influenced the drafting and selection of alternative land use plans and a number of general plan goals and policies.

**PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

Early in the general plan update process, the City sought the opinions of those who live, work, and operate businesses in Walnut Creek. All Steering Committee, Planning Commission, and City Council meetings on the general plan were widely advertised to the public and to community and business organizations. More information on the specific efforts to promote community participation follows.

**COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS**

To reach a broad segment of the community, each of the four sets of community workshops was held on both a Wednesday evening and a Saturday morning.

Outreach for the workshops was extensive.

- The City mailed postcards to over 1,000 people, including those on a general plan mailing list, downtown businesses, and addresses provided by the Walnut Creek Historical Society and the Walnut Creek Homeowners Council.
- Flyers were left at the Rossmoor administration building and social center and at the libraries, the Chamber of Commerce, the Downtown Business Association, and city community centers.
- Information was sent through weekly packets to families with children in public schools in the planning area.
- The City placed quarter- and half-page display ads in the Walnut Creek Journal.
- City staff contacted area newspapers and the San Francisco Chronicle to write about the plan, its progress, and upcoming meetings.
- The Walnut Creek Youth Council was invited to participate in all of the workshops.

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• A 24-foot-long banner announcing the workshop dates was hung at various high traffic locations.

At the first community workshops (October 2003), participants saw a slide presentation and heard an overview of the general plan process, and the demographic and land use changes since adoption of the 1989 General Plan. They then broke into small groups, raised issues to be addressed in the plan, discussed the draft vision and principles, and reported their conclusions to the full assembly.

The second round of workshops (March 2004) focused on land use, economic, and transportation issues. Participants saw a slide overview of selected land use and transportation issues. They broke into small groups, focused on specifics, and reported to the full assembly.

The third round of workshops (November 2004) focused on land use alternatives for 18 "potential change areas." The staff provided the workshop results to the Steering Committee in December 2004 and January 2005, along with traffic, economic, and visual analyses for each of the change areas.

The City convened the fourth set of workshops in August 2005, after the Public Review Draft General Plan 2025 had been published (June 3, 2005). The planning commissioners also attended these workshops and heard public comment on the draft general plan and update process.

**General Plan Survey**

In December 2003, a consulting firm conducted a random-digit-dial telephone survey to ascertain residents’ feelings about community planning issues.\(^9\) Polltakers contacted 423 residents living in the Walnut Creek planning area. Eleven questions asked at the end for statistical purposes showed the sample population closely matched Walnut Creek’s census profile.

The survey’s primary purposes were to assure that the information the Steering Committee had been receiving was an accurate reflection of broad community opinion, and to identify any new issues needing study in the general plan.

In general, survey respondents were satisfied with things as they were in 2003, and said they wanted Walnut Creek to stay largely as it was.

**Stakeholder Outreach**

Beginning in August 2003, City staff began contacting organizations and stakeholders to discuss the general plan update. A slide show explained the general plan, how it is used, and how it affects City decisions. Staff engaged each group in a discussion of where they felt the City should be heading and what issues should be addressed.

In total, staff met with 12 groups between August 2003 and May 2005:

- Chamber of Commerce
- Downtown Business Association
- Walnut Creek Kiwanis Club
- Rancho San Miguel Homeowners’ Association
- Rossmoor Community Club
- Walnut Creek School District

Community Coordinating Council
- Area equestrians
- Shadelands Major Employers Association
- City interns
- Residents of the Almond/Shuey neighborhood
- Residents of the Walden/Walnut neighborhood
- Rotary Club of Walnut Creek

Staff also worked with the Walnut Creek Youth Council, providing the teens with cameras to take photos of what they liked and didn’t like around the city. The photos were made into posters showing the teens’ visions for the city’s future. The Youth Council presented the posters to the Steering Committee, and they were displayed at City Hall and on the City’s website.

FOCUS GROUPS
The City held four focus groups in summer 2004 to get feedback on the future of the Core Area and the North Main Street commercial area. Three of the groups included business owners and managers; the other included Core Area residents.

“IN A NUTSHELL”
Throughout the process, the official City bi-monthly newsletter, In a Nutshell, carried informative articles about the general plan update. Topics covered included what is a general plan, how can people get involved in the update process, and specific issues that came out of Steering Committee meetings. The Nutshell is delivered to every home and business with a Walnut Creek address six times per year.

WEBSITE
A general plan website was created within the City’s website to provide detailed information throughout the update process. Website content included meeting schedules, agendas, staff reports, background reports, and drafts of the plan at various stages.

PHONE LINE
To promote public contact with the City regarding the general plan, a dedicated phone line was installed. It answered with a recorded message on the update process and allowed calls regarding the general plan to be answered quickly. The City also prepared and distributed general plan business cards with the direct phone line number and webpage address.
VISION AND PRINCIPLE PROCESS

One of the initial efforts of the steering committee was to define the community’s vision for the future and shared community values. A brief discussion of what committee members and the public liked and did not like about living in Walnut Creek led to a draft vision statement and set of principles. The draft was refined by the committee over a few meetings and reviewed by the public at the first set of community workshops. The committee then recommended the resulting document to the Planning Commission for input. After review by both the Planning Commission and City Council, the vision and principles were accepted as a working draft, guiding development of the new general plan.

VISION AND PRINCIPLES

VISION

The 2025 Walnut Creek Vision emphasizes the quality of life in the community. The vision sees Walnut Creek as a city that:

- Maintains and enhances a high quality of life for the diverse members of the community by promoting safety, public health, a rich variety of active and passive cultural, recreational, and educational opportunities, and support facilities.
- Supports a vital and diverse economy, which fosters entrepreneurship, economic opportunity, and a healthy mix of employment opportunities.
- Preserves and manages the integrity of the natural environment and vistas, including vistas of and from the hills, and protects and expands access to natural resources, including the open spaces, trails, parks, and creeks that surround and connect the community.
- Creates and sustains a highly livable built environment that maintains its traditional downtown and combines retail, restaurants, arts, entertainment, and housing in an environment that is vibrant, active, and accessible.
- Supports a variety of neighborhoods with housing of various types, densities, and prices that accommodates all income levels and ages, and where new development blends successfully into existing neighborhoods.
- Preserves its cultural heritage.
- Provides sensitive transitions between different land uses and building types.
- Provides transportation options that allow people to move easily around the community and region.
- Ensures that City government interacts positively and consistently with the community, is fiscally responsible, provides regional leadership, and continues to forge cooperative regional relationships.

PRINCIPLES

Five categories of principles were drafted early in the planning process and guided development of the general plan goals, policies, and actions: Quality of Life, Natural Environment, Built Environment, Transportation, and Governance. The principles underlie five of the general plan’s eight chapters.

QUALITY OF LIFE

Principle: Community

Walnut Creek values the uniqueness of each individual and works to create a strong community by identifying and achieving common goals. The City fosters a sense of belonging to neighborhood and community.
Chapter 1, Introduction

**Principle: Arts and Culture**
Walnut Creek will continue to be a leading regional center for the arts in the Bay Area; will expand its role in providing arts, arts education, and theater venues; and will promote participation in, and an understanding, appreciation, and enjoyment of, a wide variety of arts and cultural activities.

**Principle: Recreation Services**
The City promotes a wide and expanding variety of recreation activities for all interests, ages, and abilities, as a way to encourage healthy and active lifestyles.

**Principle: Education**
Walnut Creek recognizes that schools are an important part of the community and contribute to its socioeconomic health. The City supports the continued excellence of the schools, school programs, and the opportunities they provide for lifelong learning. The City seeks to facilitate cooperative and productive relationships among the schools, City government, and the community in such areas as after-school programs, adult and vocational education, and joint use of City and school facilities.

**Principle: Libraries**
Walnut Creek understands that excellent libraries are essential to a vibrant community, serving families and children, small business, and the continuing education needs of a diverse population. The City supports partnerships with other public agencies and support organizations to ensure the provision of library facilities and services that meet the needs of a growing community.

**Principle: Economic Development**
The City’s economic vitality is essential. Walnut Creek requires a strong sales tax base if the City is to continue to provide a broad range of community services. Walnut Creek strives for a diverse economy that supports a high quality of life and provides a supportive environment for businesses, small and large. The City works to encourage a strong local employment market and a balanced mix of jobs and housing.

**Principle: Public Safety**
The City promotes the real and perceived security of persons and property by facilitating timely delivery of professional police, fire, and emergency services appropriate to the need.

**NATURAL ENVIRONMENT**

**Principle: Parks, Trails, Creeks, Vistas and Open Spaces**
Walnut Creek believes the parks, trails, creeks, vistas, and open spaces that surround and traverse the city contribute substantially to quality of life. In concert with other public agencies, organizations, and people, these assets will be expanded, connected, made accessible, protected, maintained, and enhanced for current and future generations.

**BUILT ENVIRONMENT**

**Principle: Urban Design**
The City promotes diversity, creativity, and quality through urban design and landscaping standards and provides opportunities for public art and open spaces. Excellence in urban design, architecture, and landscape architecture will mitigate impacts and strengthen interrelationships at the boundaries between land uses and building types and at transitions between the natural and built environments.

**Principle: Environmental Integrity**
The City is committed to reducing negative impacts on the environment through education; the efficient use of energy and water; minimizing air and water pollution; reducing noise, sound and light pollution; tree planting and preservation; reducing litter; and recycling programs.
Chapter 1, Introduction

**Principle: Growth**
Walnut Creek will carefully plan and phase growth of the built environment to provide residents and businesses with opportunities and choices that enhance livability. Growth will be concentrated in specific, designated areas. New development will be pedestrian-friendly, will use land efficiently, and will promote transportation alternatives.

**Principle: Downtown**
Walnut Creek will provide for a vibrant downtown community that encourages people to gather in a compact, pedestrian-friendly environment and successfully combines a unique mix of businesses, culture, and a variety of housing. Walnut Creek will continue to support development that adds positively to this mix. Additionally, the City will promote an accessible downtown that provides parking near stores and services and is connected both to transit and to safe, friendly pedestrian and bicycle routes.

**Principle: Neighborhoods**
Walnut Creek values the identities of, and will protect the safety, privacy, and character of, its neighborhoods. Walnut Creek will work to make and keep its neighborhoods safe and accessible to pedestrians of all ages.

**Principle: Housing**
Walnut Creek supports housing of various types, densities, and prices to meet the needs of current and prospective residents of all income levels and ages. The City will promote opportunities for housing and will strive to meet the State-mandated regional fair-share numbers. The City encourages housing along transit corridors, housing for the local workforce, and housing that is attainable by and suitable for the diverse populations that call Walnut Creek home.

**Principle: Historic Preservation**
The City encourages the preservation of its cultural heritage.

**TRANSPORTATION**

**Principle: Circulation**
The City seeks to provide for a convenient flow of people, goods, and services by managing traffic congestion and by working with regional agencies to address regional transportation issues. The City encourages housing opportunities near jobs, businesses oriented to the street, and the creation of a pleasant walking environment.

**Principle: Accessibility**
The City recognizes the importance of accessibility to various destinations in and around the city, including for those who don’t drive. The City will look at ways to improve accessibility and transit alternatives.

**GOVERNANCE**

**Principle: Involving the Community**
City government will proactively communicate with the community and will encourage a high level of citizen involvement and participation. The City will use technology to achieve these communication objectives, where appropriate.
**Principle: Fiscal Responsibility**
City government will continue to be fiscally responsible and will work to creatively use existing revenue sources and to promote a diverse and stable economic base.

**Principle: Regional Leadership**
Walnut Creek will continue to be a regional leader, working closely with other governments and agencies to forge regional alliances, cooperative solutions, and decisions that work for both the city and the region.

**ORGANIZATION OF THE PLAN**

**GOALS, POLICIES, AND ACTIONS**

*General Plan 2025* is built around a series of goals, policies, and actions. “Goals” are end-state; they are the long-range answers to what the community wants to accomplish to resolve a particular issue or problem. “Policies” and “actions” are medium-range or short-range. Policies and actions guide day-to-day decision-making so there is continuing progress toward the attainment of goals. Goal, policy, and action are defined below.

**Goal:** A general, overall, and ultimate purpose, aim, or end toward which the City will direct effort during the 20-year timeframe of the general plan.

**Policy:** A specific statement of principle or guidance that implies clear commitment; the direction the City elects to follow in order to meet its goals.

**Action:** A program, activity, or strategy carried out in response to adopted policy to achieve a specific goal.

Goals determine what should be done and where. Policies and actions together establish who will do the work and how and when the goals will be carried out. The text explains why.

The plan is purposely brief. It is meant to be a useful, everyday guide for what to do where and when. Explanatory text is provided where needed, as in this chapter and wherever the concise goal, policy, and action statements need augmentation.

Every action is listed and numbered under a specific policy; however, an action often can implement more than one policy. Therefore, there are places in this plan where two or more related policies are listed in sequence, followed by one or more action programs.

Most actions in this plan continue programs already in effect in Walnut Creek.

**STRUCTURE**

*General Plan 2025* has eight chapters, a glossary, and appendices.

1. **Introduction**
2. **Quality of Life - Neighborhoods, local economy, community services, arts and culture, and recreation**
3. **Natural Environment and Public Spaces - Open space, creeks, trails, and parks and plazas**
4. **Built Environment - Land use, growth management, urban design, environmental integrity (including air and water quality), housing, and community facilities**
Chapter 1, Introduction

5. Transportation - Regional networks, local networks, transit, transportation demand management (TDM), and downtown mobility

6. Safety and Noise

7. Governance - City government framework, regional leadership, local leadership, fiscal responsibility, and public information and education

8. Implementation - Information in tabular form on the timeframe and responsibility for implementation

Chapters 2 - 5 and Chapter 7 take their titles from, and build on, the five categories of principles.

The Technical Appendix contains background material—the opinion survey and several of the background reports—used in preparing the general plan and to provide information to the Steering Committee and the public. All the reports were employed to identify issues and formulate goals, policies, and actions.

The Technical Appendix is bound separately from the adopted plan. It is not essential to the day-to-day use and implementation of the plan and, like the glossary, is not adopted as City policy. Anyone wishing to review the Technical Appendix may do so at the Community Development Department in City Hall or at the public libraries.

Figure 3 at the end of this chapter shows where the major components of the State-required general plan elements are found in General Plan 2025. Topics like local economy and governance are not required by State law and do not appear in the Figure 3 table. However, the table shows where to find Growth Management, an element required for compliance with Contra Costa County Measures C (1988) and J (2004).

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## Figure 3: Relation of General Plan Chapters to State-mandated Elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MANDATED ELEMENTS</th>
<th>GENERAL PLAN</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAND USE</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Population Density &amp; Building Intensity</td>
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<td>Land Use Map</td>
<td>Appendix C</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Flood Areas</td>
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<td>6-4, 6-7, 6-8</td>
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<td>Implementation</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8-1 to 8-29</td>
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<td>5-1 to 5-24</td>
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<td>Map of Existing System</td>
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<td>5-8, 5-9, 5-18</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>5-8, 5-9, 5-18</td>
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<td>II-31 to II-33</td>
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<td>II-34</td>
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<td>IV-3 to IV-9</td>
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<td>III-4 to III-5</td>
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<td>III-1 to III-3</td>
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<td>IV-17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quantified Objectives</td>
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<td>VI-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>Separate volume</td>
<td>VI-26 to VI-28</td>
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<tr>
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<td>8</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**GROWTH MANAGEMENT***

|                |                              | 4     | 4-13 to 4-16 |

ANNUAL REVIEW BY PLANNING COMMISSION

State law provides direction on how cities can maintain the plan as an up-to-date policy guide. California requires the Planning Commission to report on the following, by October 1 of each year, to the City Council, the State Office of Planning and Research, and to the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD):

- The status of the plan and progress in implementing it
- The City’s progress in meeting its share of regional housing needs pursuant to §65584
- Local efforts to remove governmental constraints to the maintenance, improvement, and development of housing pursuant to §65583(c)(3)
- The degree to which the plan complies with the general plan guidelines developed and adopted pursuant to §65040.2
- The date of the last revision to the general plan

In addition, the State expects the Planning Commission to review the City’s capital improvements program annually for consistency with the general plan.

AMENDING THE PLAN

The adopted general plan is a dynamic, not static, document. State law allows up to four general plan amendments per mandatory element per year. Most amendments propose a change in the land use designation of a particular property (and thus propose a change to the land use element).

As time passes after a number of such amendments, the City may find it desirable to revise portions of the general plan text to reflect the land use map changes or other changing circumstances or philosophy. It generally is recommended that the City comprehensively review the plan every five years to determine whether it is still in step with community values and physical and economic conditions. State law requires California’s Office of Planning Research to publish the names of jurisdictions with general plans older than 10 years and to notify the respective city councils of these jurisdictions.

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11 Government Code §65400(b).
12 The housing element portion of the annual report is to be prepared using forms and definitions adopted by HCD.
13 Government Code §65103(c).
14 Government Code §65358(b).
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