

ABAG Growing Smarter Awards Richmond General Plan 2030

Full Description

On April 25, 2012, the Richmond City Council adopted a new General Plan to guide the City's sustainable growth and development. The General Plan provides a comprehensive framework for developing a healthy city and healthy neighborhoods. While General Plans are required by the State of California to contain seven elements, the City of Richmond's General Plan 2030 contains 15 elements addressing land use, economic development, housing, transportation, climate change, public safety, arts and culture, and open space conservation strategies. Additionally, the City of Richmond is one of the first cities in the country to include a comprehensive element dedicated to community health and wellness.

The General Plan 2030 seeks to accommodate open space and increased access to public parks as well as growth in mixed-use, high-density infill development around the City's intermodal transit center and along its key commercial transit corridors. The General Plan 2030 also articulates a vision for revitalizing Richmond's Southern Gateway area anchored by the Richmond Field Station site, which is the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory's preferred site for their second campus. All development projects approved in the City must be consistent with the goals and policies of the newly adopted General Plan.

Principles and implementing actions that support sustainability, environment, complete streets, health equity, affordable housing are interwoven throughout the Richmond General Plan 2030. We would like to highlight this perspective and its impact through some of the General Plan Elements. In just a few years of the General Plan's adoption there have been many accomplishments:

Land Use and Urban Design Element

The Land Use and Urban Design Element sets goals, policies and programs to realign its land use and development pattern to reflect the community's history, active neighborhoods, Bay Area location, and sense of community. This development strategy focuses on providing higher-density and mixed use developments in urban transit corridors in key nodes throughout the City and within priority development areas. To implement this Element, the City has completed a draft Form-Based Zoning Code (FBC). The FBC will regulate development characteristics and standards including building placement, form, height, frontage, and land use. FBCs seek to foster predictable built results and a high-quality public realm. As an alternative to conventional zoning, they focus on the creation, revitalization, and preservation of vibrant, walkable urban places. They utilize physical form, rather than use, as their primary organizing principle, and provide standards for both private and public realms. The FBC features a number of zones that will allow for a variety of housing types including single-family homes, second units, multifamily housing, group housing, residential care facilities, transitional/supportive housing, live/work, and work/live. While the FBC does not regulate density through minimum or maximum units per acre, the FBC will exceed densities allowed under the current zoning and accommodate

General Plan densities of up to 125 units per acre. In addition, the FBC will incentivize infill residential development through larger buildable areas, increased building heights, mixed-use sites, relaxed parking standards, and streamlined permit review. Specifically, the draft FBC provides for significant increases to maximum building heights for buildings with 25 percent or more affordable or senior units and the elimination of parking requirements for affordable or senior units in numerous zones. The FBC will also introduce new opportunities for multifamily housing on sites that were formerly reserved for commercial uses.

Energy and Climate Change Element

This Energy and Climate Change Element acknowledges the city's pivotal role in developing climate policy at the local level and how local decisions influence regional, state, and national objectives. City of Richmond residents have long been active in sustainability and environmental justice efforts reflected in this element. An explicit goal reflected in the policies and actions of the Element is to reduce local greenhouse gases. Current accomplishments include Richmond's expanded local clean energy options by joining MCE Clean Energy, California's only operating Community Choice Aggregation entity, to provide residents with a competitive, renewable energy alternative to the standard utility provider. The City has also led an initiative to replace the entire street light stock, both City and utility owned, with LED lights that save energy, reduce cost and increase quality of life. Furthermore, the City has collaborated with the non-profit GRID Alternatives to provide free and low cost solar energy systems to almost 150 low-income homeowners who otherwise would not be able to afford it. All these accomplishments emphasize this Element's intent to make sustainability accessible to all populations, especially underserved groups. The City is also currently collaborating with UC Berkeley to develop a community-based Climate Action Plan that will implement further goals from this element and expand sustainability and environmental justice endeavors in the community.

Circulation Element

The Richmond community seeks to create an interconnected, multimodal transportation system that builds on its role as a regional transportation hub connecting people to destinations throughout the Bay Area. The goal, policies and actions in this element support a balance of modes of travel for pedestrians, cyclists and automobiles. Some early successes include adoption of new Bicycle Master Plan and Pedestrian Plan; bicycle and pedestrian improvement for most resurfacing projects completed; 11 miles of bikeways, 113 ADA-compliant curb ramps, 1.5 miles of road diets, and Safe Routes to School improvements which included bike lanes, crosswalks, curb ramps, and bulb-outs at Coronado, Highland, Nystrom, Washington, and Wilson elementary schools.

Community Health and Wellness Element

Compared to the rest of Contra Costa County, a disproportionate number of Richmond residents are at a high risk of developing poor health conditions. This pioneering element in the General Plan acknowledges the City's and residents' commitment to implement preventive health measures in broad areas including, improved access to open space, safety, healthy food, medical services, public transit, affordable housing, economic opportunities, complete

neighborhoods, and environmental quality. As was stated by Dr. Tony Iton MD, JD, MPH, “Richmond residents deserve recognition for adding a health component to their General Plan. Such an effort can improve community safety and health, which will help build a stronger, more vibrant Richmond.” Some of the accomplishments in this area include the implementation of built environment projects in neighborhoods in Richmond with poor health outcomes that promote walkability, safety, and increase physical activity and the development of a Health in All Policies (HiAP) Strategy for the City to operationalize the General Plan. The HiAP Strategy takes an integrated and comprehensive approach to bring health, well-being, and equity considerations into the development, implementation & monitoring of public decisions. HiAP is city management as “preventative medicine” and all city staff are “community clinicians.” Health Equity is a goal for all departments.

Richmond’s General Plan 2030 is the culmination of an extensive five-year community visioning and planning process that involved the participation of over 2,000 community members and representatives from local non-profit organizations, advocacy groups, public agencies, industry and business representatives, educational institutions, and nearby local governments. The public participation process led by community based organizations and the city has been highlighted across the state as a best practice.

The impact of our General Plan regionally, statewide and nationally has been a source of pride for Richmond residents and city staff. The City of Richmond, Richmond residents (Neighborhood Councils), and CBO’s (ex. REDI coalition) work on the General Plan has influenced many other cities to take a comprehensive approach to address equity challenges and opportunities throughout their planning documents.