

2023–2024
Yolo County Civil Grand Jury
June 12, 2024

The Yolo County General Plan
***LET'S START THINKING ABOUT
TOMORROW***



Photo courtesy of juror, Daniel Gumpy

YOLO COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY

THE YOLO COUNTY GENERAL PLAN

LET'S START THINKIN' ABOUT TOMORROW



-Photo by Juror Daniel Gumpy-

"By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail"

-Benjamin Franklin

SUMMARY

General Plans chart the course for a county, a strategy for how the county will proceed in dealing with growth and development in the foreseeable future. General Plans are often referred to as "The Constitution" for local governments. It is a living document, amended regularly, as it is expected to remain current with Yolo County's changing environment and the concerns of its citizens. Last comprehensively updated in 2009, the Yolo County General Plan's next update is expected in fewer than six years.

The 2009 update was preceded by years of planning, which included governmental and public workshops, the use of private consultants, and meetings with each of the cities within Yolo County, numerous county advisory committees, local agencies, non-profit groups, community organizations and individual landowners and residents. The cost was over a million dollars and will be significantly more expensive for the 2030 update. Concern has been expressed that planning for this important, but costly, endeavor should begin now. Funding should begin to be allocated now, regardless of when the process begins.

BACKGROUND

The Yolo County General Plan was first adopted in 1958, updated in 1983, and again in 2009 [1]. However, some portions, such as the Housing Element, are required by the state to be addressed more frequently, with the Housing Element requirement to be every five years.

The 2009 major update to the Yolo County General Plan involved over five years of planning which included governmental and public workshops, the use of private consultants, and numerous Board of Supervisors' meetings. State law provides that each mandatory General Plan element may be amended no more than four times per year.

Updates to the Current General Plan Elements

1. **Use Element:** Provides overall land use policies for county properties and includes, among other uses, policies for housing, recreation, business, and open spaces.
2. **Circulation Element:** This is a transportation plan and focuses on major streets and transportation facilities.
3. **Public Facilities and Services Element:** Covers issues related to water facilities, wastewater collection and treatment, storm water collection facilities, as well as public services such as schools, parks, and recreation.
4. **Agriculture Element:** Covers issues related to agricultural land use and preservation, cultivation, and economic viability planning.
5. **Conservation and Open Space Element:** Addresses issues regarding conservation, military installations, and protection of Native American sacred sites. It also addresses biological resources, water resources, mineral resources, cultural resources, air quality (including climate change) and energy conservation.
6. **Noise Element:** Addresses noise problems in the community.
7. **Safety Element:** Includes policies to protect the community from risks associated with the effects of environmental hazards and airport safety. It also covers emergency preparedness in the county.
8. **Housing Element:** Is legally required to be updated every five years and to include specific components regarding supply and demand.

Amendments to the General Plan Since 2009 [2]

- 2014:** Minor changes were made to the zoning code. Corrections to antiquated subdivision and parceling issues were made.
- 2015-2016:** Two parcels were redesignated to accommodate a condominium project. One parcel was redesignated involving Yolo Landfill. Clarksburg parcels were also redesignated, and Flood Hazard Implementation Actions were brought up to State standards. One parcel was redesignated in Dunnigan.
- 2017:** Dunnigan, Elkhorn, Madison, and Knights Landing Specific Plan references in the General Plan were removed and replaced. A historic business was allowed to be demolished for health and safety concerns.

- 2018:** Revision of text related to “Rural Residential” were made; policies were revised relating to the expansion of reliable internet service; and redesignation of properties in Yolo, Woodland, and Esparto were made.
- 2019:** The 2018 Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan Update was approved and the Esparto Community Plan Update was adopted. The Bryte Landfill Remediation Project was implemented. An update to the Cache Creek Area Plan was adopted, and minor amendments to the General Plan Table in the Land Use and Community Character Element were made.
- 2020:** There were no amendments to the General Plan made in 2020.
- 2021:** The Housing Element was updated for the planning period 2021 through 2029 and included the county's housing needs for all income levels. In addition, the Cannabis Land Use Ordinance was addressed with changes to the policies in the Land Use and Community Character Element and Agriculture and Economic Development Element. Policies involving cannabis use in the unincorporated area of the county were also addressed.
- 2022:** The General Plan Land Use Map was amended to extend the Mineral Resources Overlay (MRO) land use designation over an additional 212 acres to cover the 319.3-acre Teichert Shifler Aggregate Mining site (ZF2018- 0078). In addition, the Barn at Utter Ranch was added to the County’s list of recognized Historic Landmarks and updated the list of addresses for Historic Landmarks within the Conservation and Open Space Element of the General Plan (ZF2021- 0047).
- 2023:** The Land Use and Community Character Element, Conservation and Open Space Element, and Health and Safety Element were amended to conform with State requirements. This included adding policies to address environmental justice, climate adaptation, resiliency strategies, and vulnerability assessments.

APPROACH

The Grand Jury became aware of the increasingly pressing issue of updating Yolo County’s General Plan by 2030. All the county’s departments are affected and thus should be actively involved. The Grand Jury focused on the involvement and whether the departments had begun communications for a coordinated effort of procuring funding for the new general plan project. The Grand Jury reviewed information via background research, utilized past historical information on the subject, newspaper articles, and interviewed multiple levels of county officials.

DISCUSSION

California Government Code Section 65300 requires the General Plan to be comprehensive, internally consistent, and long-term. Although required to address the eight elements and issues specified in State law, the General Plan may be organized in a way that best suits the county. The General Plan should be clearly written, available to all those concerned with the

county's development and easy to administer. The General Plan meets these requirements while also presenting a vision for the county's long-term physical form and development. It serves as a basis for future decision-making by county officials, including county staff, County Counsel, the Planning Commission, and the Yolo County Board of Supervisors (BOS).

The process of updating the 2009 General Plan began in May of 2003, as directed by the BOS. At the outset of the process, the BOS elected to undertake an extensive process of public outreach and involvement. A comprehensive list of stakeholders was identified and throughout 2004 and 2005 over 20 public workshops were held throughout the county in the cities and unincorporated communities to gain input and ideas from the community.

The current planning process and funding allocation for updating the Yolo County General Plan is deficient. Preparations to update the General Plan for 2009 began six years prior to the implementation and had previously set aside necessary funding to facilitate the process.

Even though six years remain until the anticipated update of the General Plan by 2030, the Grand Jury believes that the current process will be more complex than the previous planning process. The addition of new policies mandated by the state including ones addressing Housing and the Unhoused, Environmental Justice and Climate Action will be especially time consuming.

The Grand Jury suggested making the link to "The General Plan Annual Progress Reports" on the County website more accessible and visible to the general public. After discussions and multiple interviews with Yolo County Community Services staff, the link was established in January 2024.

FINDINGS

The Grand Jury recommends the following findings:

- F-1 The failure to commit the funds necessary to plan for the next Yolo County General Plan prolongs the lengthy and expensive process required to plan for the future of Yolo County.
- F-2 The General Plan process is lengthy and will take years to finalize. The failure to establish a timeframe for the General Plan risks a potential setback due to the length of time it will take to complete.
- F-3 The General Plan Annual Progress Reports were neither current nor easily located on the Yolo County website. This made it difficult for the public to stay informed on annual progress changes to the General Plan. Once apprised of this concern, the Community Services Division established the link in January 2024.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Grand Jury makes the following recommendations:

- R-1 By September 1, 2024, the Yolo County Board of Supervisors should begin committing the funds needed to develop the new General Plan. The General Plan is a process that

will undoubtedly take years to complete. Allocating the funds needed over multiple years would have less impact on the Yolo County budget.

R-2 By September 1, 2024, the Yolo County Board of Supervisors should direct Yolo County staff to begin establishing timelines for the new General Plan. It will undoubtedly take years to complete, necessitating the allocation of time and resources now to ensure completion by the expiration of the current General Plan.

R-3 The Department of Community Services - Planning Division should continue to provide a link on the Yolo County website allowing the public to locate and navigate the General Plan Annual Progress Reports. This will continue to allow accessing previous Annual Reports and provide complete transparency to the public.

COMMENDATIONS

The Grand Jury was pleased that the Department of Community Services - Planning Division agreed to make their annual reports more accessible on their web site.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code section(s) 933 and 933.05, the Grand Jury requests responses to its Findings and Recommendations within 60 days as follows:

- Yolo County Board of Supervisors F-1, F-2; and R-1, R-2

INVITED RESPONSES

The Grand Jury also invites responses from the following individual within 90 days:

- Director of the Yolo County Department of Community Services F-1, F-2; and R-1, R-2

ACROYNMS/GLOSSERY OF TERMS

A “Living Document” is a document that is constantly updated and revised as and when needed.

ENDNOTES

[1]

<https://www.yolocounty.org/home/showpublisheddocument/14470/635289380535200000>

[2]

<https://www.yolocounty.org/government/general-government-departments/county-administrator/general-plan/adopted-general-plan>

Note: The links above is the Adopted 2009 General Plan, valid through 2030

DISCLAIMER

This report was issued by the Grand Jury with the exception of a juror who has a personal friendship with a Yolo County employee in a supervisory position. This grand juror did not participate in any aspect of the investigation, including interviews and deliberations, or the writing and approval of this report.

Reports issued by the Civil Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code Section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Civil Grand Jury