

Introduction

Lake Forest



General Plan



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INTRODUCTION TO THE GENERAL PLAN

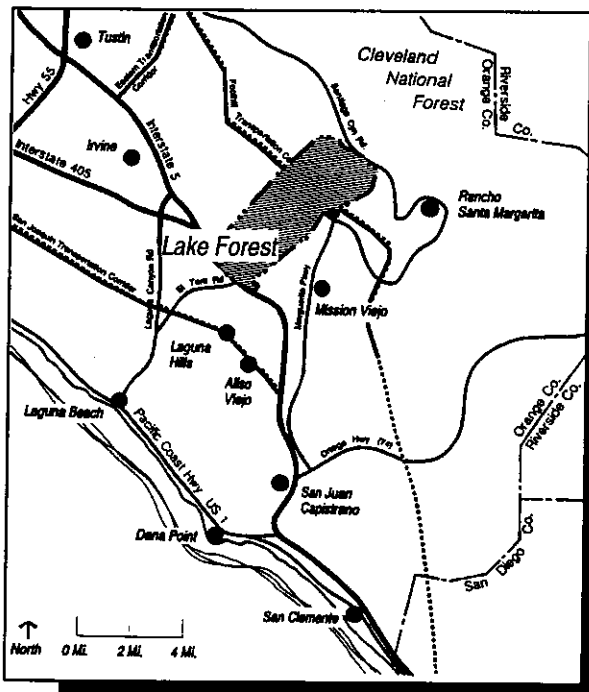
NEED FOR THE GENERAL PLAN

Located at the site of the historic town of El Toro, the City of Lake Forest is a diverse community of homes, businesses and parks. Over the last twenty years, the Lake Forest area has been developed as a series of Planned Communities among natural and created features such as rolling hills, lakes, creeks and eucalyptus groves. The name of the City refers to the lakes created as part of housing developments built in the early 1970s and the shady, fragrant eucalyptus forests that were cultivated circa 1900 and still exist.

Several of the largest Planned Communities primarily consist of single-family and multi-family development. Families within the community are benefitted by a strong business center that meets part of the service

and employment needs of the area. To establish local political control and strengthen community identity and pride, residents organized to incorporate as a city. With respect for the natural and created amenities that make the community distinctive, the residents named the new city "Lake Forest" and incorporation was finalized in 1991. The geographic relationship of Lake Forest to the south Orange County region is illustrated below.

One of the responsibilities of an incorporated city is planning its future growth and development. According to state law, a new city must prepare and adopt its first General Plan as a tool to manage growth and development. The City of Lake Forest General Plan serves as a policy guide for determining the appropriate physical development and character of Lake Forest. The General Plan is founded upon the community's vision for Lake Forest and expresses the community's long-term goals. Implementation of the Lake Forest General Plan will ensure that future development projects are consistent with the community's goals and that adequate urban services are available to meet the needs of new development. The General Plan provides a continuum between the City's unique cultural heritage and the Lake Forest of tomorrow.



LAKE FOREST PLANNING AREA

The Lake Forest Planning Area is located in southern Orange County, about halfway between Los Angeles and San Diego, on the east side of Interstate 5 (see Figure I-1, Lake Forest Planning Area). Adjacent cities include Mission Viejo on the southeast, Irvine on the northwest, and Laguna Woods and Laguna Hills on the southwest. The unincorporated communities of Aliso Viejo and Santa Margarita respectively neighbor Lake Forest on the south and southeast. The Cleveland National Forest lies immediately east of the Lake Forest Planning Area.

The Lake Forest Planning Area consists of approximately 17 square miles. This area includes all of the land contained within the City's incorporated boundaries.¹ The map on the following page shows the range of the Planning Area.

HISTORY OF THE COMMUNITY

Historically, the physical geography of Lake Forest has influenced the use of the area throughout the years. From north to south the topography transitions from the foothills of the Santa Ana mountains to the flat floor of Saddleback Valley. Serrano and Aliso Creeks traverse Lake Forest from the foothills to the valley. The hillsides and valley were originally covered with shrub vegetation and riparian vegetation grew along the creeks.

The first known occupants of the Lake Forest area were the Acagchemem. Acorns from oak trees were the staple of the Acagchemem diet, but wild animals were also hunted for food. Spanish explorers were sent to California during the 1500s to claim land for Spain, and a system of Spanish missions was established in California during the 1700s and early 1800s. The purpose of the missions was to establish Spanish presence in California and to

convert the local Indians to Christianity. Mission San Juan Capistrano, built near Lake Forest, exerted influence over the Acagchemem. Some of the Acagchemem adapted to mission life but many died from European diseases. Others attempted to continue their prior lifestyle.

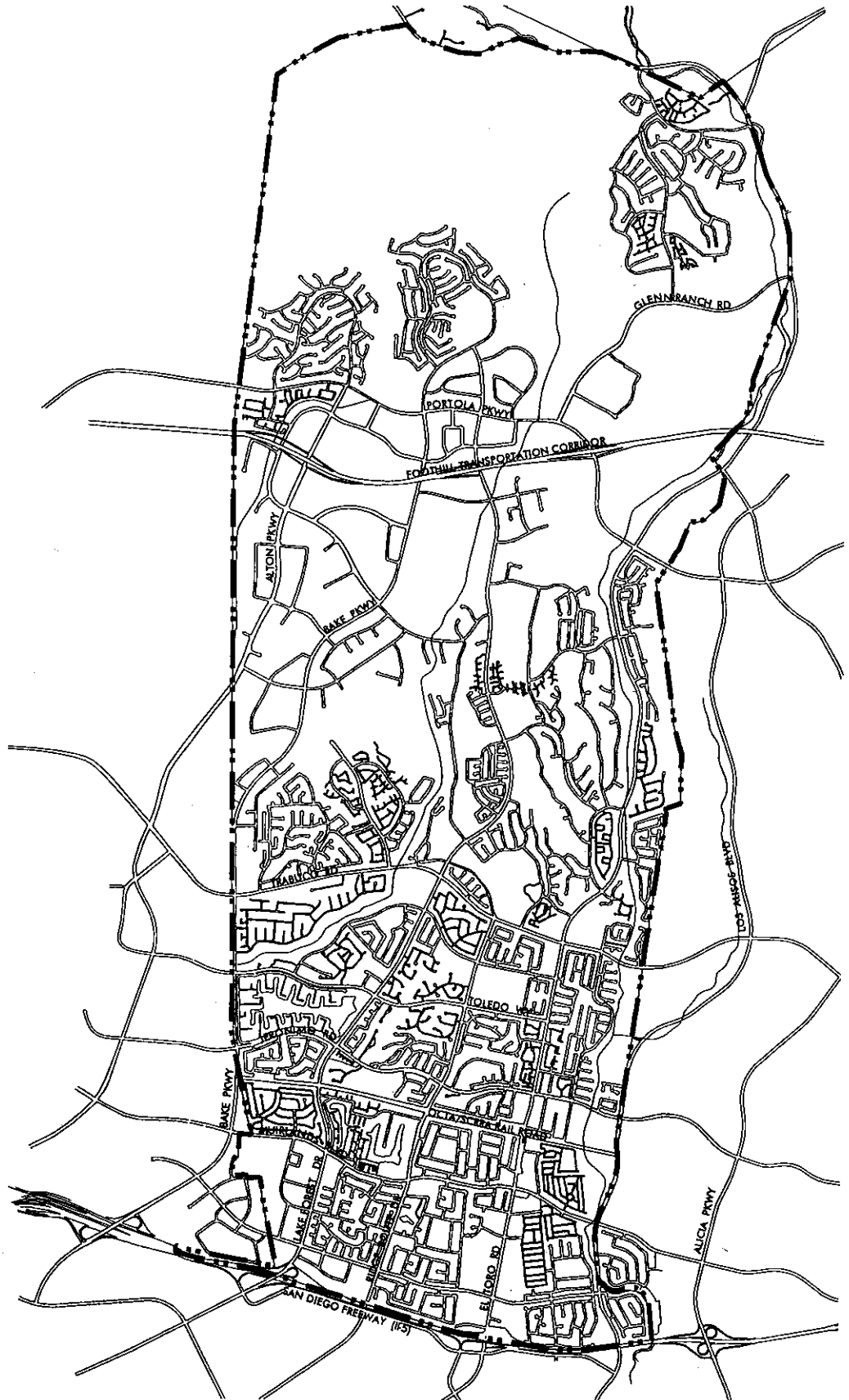



After Mexico became independent of Spain in 1821, the Mexican government took over the mission lands and sold or gave the land to men as a reward for service. These land

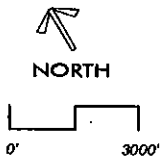
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grants were typically called ranchos, or grant ranches, and were used to graze cattle for beef production. In 1842, José Serrano was granted Rancho Cañada de Los Alisos, ("The Valley of the Sycamores"), which encompasses the modern-day City of Lake Forest. Serrano's rancho totaled nearly 11,000 acres. Like other rancheros, or ranchers, in southern California, Serrano grazed cattle on his land and constructed several adobe homes for his extended family. While managing the cattle consumed a great portion of the rancheros' days, substantial time was allocated for traditional fiestas and the rancheros were known for their endless hospitality.

¹General Plan Amendment 01-01A, dated July 17, 2001.



 City Boundary



Lake Forest



General Plan

Lake Forest Planning Area

The United States captured California from Mexico during the Mexican War but the United States honored the property rights of the rancheros, including José Serrano. The romantic rancho system faltered during the 1860s due to a persistent drought. Little vegetation grew from lack of water and cattle died by the thousands from starvation. The rancheros were forced to borrow money from American banks to maintain their lifestyle. However, the drought persisted and the rancheros continued to lose money. The rancheros were unable to pay the debt incurred and the banks took over the land. In the case of Serrano's rancho, the bank then sold the majority of the ranch to Dwight Whiting.

Some of the land was bought by several real estate investors who mapped out a town and called it Aliso City. The investors hoped to take advantage of the railroad that ran through the site. Aliso City only attracted a handful of residents and businesses and remained a very small rural town. Another town along the railroad had a name like Aliso City so the residents changed the name of the new town to El Toro. Dwight Whiting bought the town site when the city failed and proceeded with a number of plans over the years to attract new residents and develop the town. Whiting's attempts to make El Toro economically productive included establishing a colony for gentleman fruit farmers, a eucalyptus plantation for construction wood, an olive grove, and dry farming with tenant farmers.



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Whiting's plans for El Toro were responsive to the climate and to the limited amounts of groundwater for irrigation. The success of Whiting's endeavors was typically limited by periodic years of drought. In the meantime, homesteads were established around El Toro, and the homestead families worked their land and performed odd jobs to earn cash money.

About 1920, citrus fruit production was made possible in El Toro by new technology for drilling deeper wells to obtain greater amounts of irrigation water. The new crop was hugely successful and the cultivation of extensive orchards permanently changed the appearance of the El Toro landscape. Downtown El Toro served as a shipping point and commerce center. Just as important, downtown served as a social focal point where families from near and far came together. One of the most important attractions of downtown El Toro was the community hall which housed dances, wedding receptions, church services, club



meetings, school graduations, and other social events. The town did not begin to grow substantially until the 1970s. The local groundwater supplies were too limited to support urban development and imported water infrastructure was not extended into the area until the 1960s.

Several Planned Communities were developed during the 1970s and 1980s. Lakes were constructed in some of the communities to provide unique recreational opportunities and develop a distinctive community image. Citrus groves were replaced with single-family homes, commerce centers and parks, and a modern suburban landscape evolved. Residents of El Toro organized in 1989 to turn the area into a city. Lake Forest was the name

avored by the local residents and in 1991 the City of Lake Forest became the thirty-first city to incorporate in Orange County.

The dreams of the "Aliso City" founders for a dynamic city finally materialized some 100 years later. While the face of the landscape has evolved from the natural terrain of the Acagchemem to the modern day city, the spirit of human ingenuity and productivity persists. Present day residents enjoy the mild weather and mountain vistas that attracted the Spanish rancheros and American farmers, and the emphasis on family and community life endures as the City of Lake Forest enters the 21st Century based on its "vision for the future."



Vision for the Future of Lake Forest

To guide future growth and development in the City, the "Vision for the Future" of Lake Forest is the foundation of the General Plan and the sustaining basis for its goals, policies, and programs:

"In the future, Lake Forest is envisioned as a community supported by active citizen participation and involvement. Major public activity areas will create a distinctive, individual identity for the City that relies upon the established image of lakes, creeks, forests and open space. Fiscal stability, and necessary public services and facilities will be sustained through the expansion of economic activities and retention of existing businesses.

Expansion of the transportation system and services will improve access throughout Lake Forest. Improved recreational facilities and open space will offer a sense of place and connection with the community's natural setting. The neighborhoods of Lake Forest will provide a diversity of housing and a sense of safety and well being. Working co-operatively with other public agencies to address issues and opportunities of mutual interest, Lake Forest will provide an attractive, safe, and healthy environment in which to live, work, and recreate."

PURPOSE OF THE GENERAL PLAN

California state law requires each City to adopt a comprehensive, long-term General Plan to guide the physical development of the incorporated city and any land outside of the city boundaries which bears a relationship to its planning activities. In essence, a city's General Plan serves as the blueprint for future growth and development. As a blueprint for the future, the plan must contain policies and programs designed to provide decision makers with a solid basis for decisions related to land use and development.

The Lake Forest General Plan addresses many issues that are directly related to and influence land use decisions. In addition to land use, state law requires the Plan to address circulation, housing, conservation of natural resources, preservation of open space, noise environment, and protection of public safety (Section 65302 of the California Government Code).

These issues are discussed to the extent that they apply to Lake Forest. The Plan also covers topics of special and unique interest, such as growth management and recreation.

According to state law, the General Plan is the primary document the City utilizes to regulate land use. Consequently, the Zoning Ordinance, Specific Plans, and individual public and private development proposals must be consistent with the Plan goals, policies and standards.

ORGANIZATION AND USE OF THE GENERAL PLAN

The City of Lake Forest General Plan contains goals, policies, and plans which are intended to guide land use and development decision into the twenty-first century. The General Plan consists of a Land Use Policy Map and the following six elements, or chapters, which

together fulfill the state requirements for a General Plan:

- Land Use Element
- Housing Element
- Circulation Element
- Recreation and Resources Element
- Safety and Noise Element
- Public Facilities/Growth Management Element

The table on the following page shows the relationship between the six elements of the Lake Forest General Plan and the state-mandated elements. The Lake Forest elements sometimes deviate from the state-mandated elements. For instance, the state-mandated Housing Element must contain a Housing Needs Assessment. In the Lake Forest Plan, the Housing Needs Assessment is included as an appendix rather than in the Housing Element. Public utilities are included in the state requirements for the Circulation Element but are addressed in the Public Facilities/Growth Management Element of the Lake Forest Plan.

Supporting Documentation

Several supporting documents were produced during the development of the Lake Forest General Plan, including the Lake Forest Master Environmental Assessment (Lake Forest MEA) and the General Plan Master Environmental Impact Report (Master EIR). These documents provide substantial background information for the General Plan.

**RELATIONSHIP OF LAKE FOREST GENERAL PLAN ELEMENTS
TO STATE-MANDATED ELEMENTS**

| Lake Forest General Plan Element | State-Mandated General Plan Elements | | | | | | Optional |
|--|--------------------------------------|---------|-------------|-------|---------------|-------------------------|----------|
| | Land Use | Housing | Circulation | Noise | Public Safety | Conservation/Open Space | |
| Land Use | * | | | | | | |
| Housing | | * | | | | | |
| Circulation | | | * | | | | |
| Recreation and Resources ⁽¹⁾ | | | | | | * | * |
| Safety and Noise | | | | * | * | | |
| Public Facilities/ Growth Management ⁽²⁾ | | | | | | | * |

(1) The Recreation component of this Element is optional.

(2) While Growth Management is not a state-mandated Element, it is mandated by Measure M for all jurisdictions in Orange County.

The MEA provides an environmental database that defines the environmental and community conditions of the Lake Forest Planning Area. Information from the MEA is used to formulate General Plan goals, policies and plans to effectively address the development opportunities and constraints. The MEA will also be useful for reviewing proposed development projects in Lake Forest. Several technical reports were prepared by professional consultants and incorporated into the MEA. Additional information was obtained from published documents and City staff.

The General Plan Master EIR analyzes the potential environmental impacts associated with development of the Lake Forest Planning Area according to the General Plan land use policy, and implementation of the General Plan.

Organization and How to Use the Plan

The General Plan is comprised of this Introduction and six elements. Each element is complete in itself but is an integral part of the General Plan. The General Plan is accompanied by an Implementation Plan and

Glossary. The elements and the Implementation Plan will help the City achieve the vision for the future. Each of the six General Plan elements is organized according to the following format: 1) Introduction; 2) Issues, Goals and Policies; and 3) Plan.

The Introduction of each element describes the focus and the purpose of the element. The Introduction also identifies other plans and programs outside of the General Plan that may be used to achieve specific General Plan goals. The relationship of the element to other General Plan elements is also specified in the Introduction.

The Issues, Goals and Policies section of each element contains a description of identified planning issues, goals and policies related to the element topic. The issues, goals and policies are based on input received from community workshops; members of the City Council, Planning Commission, and Parks and Recreation Commission; telephone survey conducted City-wide; and City staff.

The issues represent the opportunities, constraints or concerns that are addressed by

the General Plan. The goals are overall statements of community desires and are comprised of broad statements of purpose or direction. The policies serve as guides to the City Council, Planning Commission, Parks and Recreation Commission, and the City staff in reviewing development proposals and making other decisions that affect the future growth and development of Lake Forest.

Each element also contains a Plan section. The Plan provides an overview of the City's course of action to implement the identified goals and policies. For example, the Land Use Element contains a "Land Use Plan" indicating the types and intensities of land use permitted in the Planning Area. The Circulation Element contains a "Circulation Plan" describing the overall circulation system required to meet the future needs of Lake Forest. Wherever possible, the Plan contains illustrative maps, diagrams and tables.

Following the elements is the Implementation Plan (Appendix A) which identifies specific actions to achieve the goals, policies and plans identified in each General Plan element. The Implementation Plan is reviewed and updated periodically to update specific actions, schedules, responsible parties and measures to ensure that General Plan goals, policies and plans are implemented. The Glossary is also an appendix of the General Plan and provides a set of definitions for technical terms.

The organization of the General Plan allows users to turn to the section that interests them and quickly obtain a perspective on the City's policies on the subject. However, General Plan users should realize that the policies in the various elements are interrelated and should be examined comprehensively. Policies are presented as written statements, tables, diagrams and maps. All of these policy components must be comprehensively considered when making planning decisions.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN THE GENERAL PLAN PROGRAM

Active citizen input has historically been a valuable community asset to Lake Forest. Continuing this tradition, the public played an important role in the preparation of the Lake Forest General Plan. Because the General Plan reflects the community goals and objectives, citizen input was essential in identifying issues and formulating goals. Public participation in the General Plan preparation process occurred through the following methods:

- An *Initiation Forum* launched the public participation program for the General Plan. The purpose of the Initiation Forum was to stimulate interest in the General Plan and create community-wide recognition of program commencement, content and schedule. The Initiation Forum was widely advertised to maximize attendance;
- After the Initiation Forum, issues were identified through a *telephone survey* conducted during the initial stage of the General Plan program. Designed to achieve statistically valid results, the survey elicited a representative consensus of resident thoughts about the future of the City. Interviews with a total of 407 households in the Planning Area were completed.¹ According to the results of the survey, the five areas of greatest concern are: a) prevention of graffiti and gangs; b) provision of strong police protection services; c) preservation/ enhancement of open space, public landscaping and trees; d) retention and expansion of existing businesses and jobs; and e) coordination with the school district to expand recreational opportunities provided through the public school system.

¹General Plan Amendment 01-01A, dated July 17, 2001.

- A 30-minute *cable television program* focusing on the Lake Forest General Plan program was shown on a local cable channel. Information presented in the program described what a General Plan is, how a General Plan is prepared, and why a General Plan is important to Lake Forest;
- A total of *six community workshops/open houses* were held during the public participation program. The first set of three workshops/open houses were informational sessions to answer questions about the planning process and to allow citizens and the business community to voice concerns and identify issues. The third workshop focused on business community concerns with an invitation extended to all business in Lake Forest. The second set of community workshops/ open houses were to present draft General Plan goals and policies, to solicit comments about the draft goals and policies from the public and to receive public input regarding land use alternatives. A final community workshop/open house was held to review the Draft General Plan before the beginning of public hearings.
- *Two additional community workshops* focusing on park and recreation issues were held during the public participation program. Questionnaires were distributed at the workshops to provide an opportunity for participants to express their desires and concerns. In addition, questionnaires were sent to individual homeowner associations in the City. The workshops and questionnaires provided the means to determine the adequacy of existing recreational facilities in Lake Forest as well as desires for future recreational opportunities;
- The public had opportunities to address decision makers directly regarding issues, concerns and desires at *eight City Council, Planning Commission, and Park and Recreation Commission workshops* both

prior to preparation and during review of the Draft General Plan; and

- The Draft General Plan, Draft Environmental Impact Report, and supporting documents were circulated for public review and comment before and during *General Plan public hearings* held before the Planning Commission and City Council.

STEPPING STONE TO THE FUTURE

The community is facing technological, environmental and political changes with abundant opportunities for continued prosperity. The incorporation of Lake Forest has given the City the ability to control land use at the local level. Much of the City is developed. The substantial undeveloped area located to the east of the Foothill Ranch community, known as The Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park, has been designated for open space.¹ The newly completed Foothill Transportation Corridor provides new freeway access to the central portion of Planning Area. Existing land use and transportation patterns will consequently change and new opportunities for residential and economic development will flourish. Because the area is primarily developed and land use patterns are determined, planning efforts must focus on stimulating new economic development, revitalizing older areas, and enhancing the amenities and environmental features that make Lake Forest unique.

The General Plan provides the stepping stone between the community of today and desired community of the future. Strategies are established to take advantage of technological, environmental and political opportunities, and to achieve community goals. The policies and plans in the elements and the Implementation

¹General Plan Amendment 01-01A, dated July 17, 2001.

Program provide guidance for dealing with changing conditions and specific actions to optimize the community's potential. The path established in the General Plan is an integrated union of the enduring historic values responsible for modern prosperity and innovative approaches to achieve the vision for the future.