



## COUNTY OF SOLANO GENERAL PLAN UPDATE

# CAC WORKBOOK HOUSING

MAY 21, 2007

This workbook is designed for use by CAC members to prepare for the May 21, 2007 CAC meeting addressing residential land use issues in the General Plan to accommodate housing. The County does not propose to update the current General Plan Housing Element at the present time. The next state mandated update is June 30, 2009. However, housing issues are important because residential land use, and the supply of residential land to meet future housing needs, will be discussed as part of this General Plan update.

The workbook consists of three Parts:

- I. A summary of existing General Plan policies related to Housing and Population, drawn from the 1980 Land Use Element and 1982 Energy Element.
- II. A summary of State General Plan requirements for housing and population and a brief summary of gaps between current policies, State requirements, and background information.
- III. A summary of issues presented in the Land Use, and Population and Housing Background Report for CAC discussion. Spaces are provided for CAC members to record comments to be addressed at the CAC meeting.

**CAC members are encouraged to review the information in this Workbook, review the Land Use (Sections 1.1, 1.3, and 1.5); Energy (Sections 3.2, 3.3, and 3.4) and Population and Housing Background Report (Sections 11.2, 11.3, 11.4, and 11.6); make notes on the items listed in Section III of the workbook; and come prepared to discuss these items at the May 21, 2007 CAC meeting.**

## I. EXISTING GENERAL PLAN POLICIES

The following text and policies are drawn directly from the 1980 Land Use and Circulation Element.

### 1980 Land Use and Circulation Element

A primary goal of the Land Use and Circulation Element for Solano County is providing an overall strategy for planning and development within the County. In addition, policies for guiding provision of land use development affecting population growth and the local economy are provided.

### 2004 Housing Element

Housing policies and the 2004 Housing Element will not be updated during this General Update because it was updated in 2004 and addresses the County's housing needs through June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2009, when the next state mandated five-year update of the Housing Element must be adopted. The Housing Element establishes the County's policy direction for housing within its jurisdiction. It is the county's goal to promote and ensure adequate housing in a

satisfying environment for all residents of Solano County. The Housing Element establishes short-term objectives and policies that will overcome the major obstacles that prevent realization of the goal.

The purpose of the Housing Element is to establish a comprehensive plan to address housing needs in the unincorporated area of Solano County, with a focus on meeting the housing needs of all economic segments of the community, including low- and moderate-income households who may have trouble affording market rate housing and populations with special housing needs that may not necessarily be met through conventional housing products.

The County's housing policies located within the 2004 Housing Element focus on coordinating housing development efforts with cities; including working with the cities to provide sufficient land to accommodate Solano County's project housing needs and providing housing to meet the needs of all economic segments of the community. The County's principal housing role is to accommodate future residential development that constitutes an accessory use to agricultural (housing for farmers and farm workers) and a moderate amount of rural residential development in the unincorporated areas, and ensuring that residential development does not conflict with surrounding agricultural activities..

### 1981 Energy Element

The primary purpose of the Solano County Energy Element is to identify and document the energy needs and problems in the unincorporated County area and to establish energy policies, strategies, and programs to address the identified problems and need and promote public awareness of energy conservation.

## **HOUSING AND POPULATION TRENDS**

The total number of housing units has increased slightly from 7,122 units in 2004, when the Housing Element was last updated, to 7,433 units in 2007. The majority of units continue to be single-family homes, 6,217 units in 2004 and 6,494 units in 2007. Multi-family housing only increased by five units, 414 units in 2004 to 419 units in 2007.

To satisfy housing needs, the County and the cities each have historically played distinctive roles. The County has primarily provided for housing which has been agriculturally related or rural in character. Higher density single-family and multiple-family developments, on the other hand, have been provided primarily in the cities. This has resulted from General Plan policies and servicing constraints which have limited the range and quantity of housing which can be provided in the unincorporated area.

It is the County's goal to provide for orderly growth, which assures a harmonious relationship of land uses both rural and urban and maintains the distinctive character of each community in Solano County.

Since 1940, Solano County has seen rapid population growth. In 1980, the County population was estimated to be 235,203, more than four and one-half times the 1940 population of 49,118. Between 1980 and 2007, the population in Solano County increased to 424,823. This rapid population growth is due to two principal factors. First, five of the County's seven cities are bisected by two major routes, Interstate 80 and Interstate 680, which link the County to the San Francisco and Sacramento metropolitan regions. Easy accessibility to the metropolitan areas, along with moderate housing costs, have attracted residents to the County. Second, government has served as a major local employer through the existence of such institutions as the Mare Island Naval Shipyard (which closed as a military facility in 1996) and Travis Air Force Base, which have also drawn residents into the County.

## LAND USE POLICIES AFFECTING HOUSING

### **Urban Growth Line**

The urban growth line clearly defines the spatial extent of urbanization for each of the cities. It represents the outermost area in which a city can be expected to expand within the timeframe of its general plan, generally 15-20 years. This represented the County's assessment in 1980 based on city adopted general plans and did not necessarily agree with Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFC) spheres of influence as they existed at that time.

### **Orderly Growth Initiative**

The Board of Supervisors adopted the Solano County Growth Initiative on July 26, 1994 extends voter approved Proposition A, which protected agricultural and open space land in Solano County by directing urban growth and development to existing cities.

The Solano County Growth Initiative:

- Amended the General Plan to restrict redesignation of lands designated "Agriculture" or "Open Space" as shown on the Solano County Land Use and Circulation Map, through December 31, 2010; and
- Amended the General Plan to restrict the density of residential and other development on lands designated "Agriculture" or "Open Space" through the year 2010, preventing large scale residential or mixed use developments outside of municipal areas.

### **Specific Policies**

1. Urban development shall be confined to land use patterns, which retain essential agricultural lands of the County and minimize energy consumption.
2. Rural and suburban development shall be confined to non-essential marginal agricultural lands with a low capability of agricultural production and in a manner, which minimizes conflicts with surrounding agricultural activities.
3. When services of a municipal or urban type are needed to support future urban development and such service can be supplied by annexation to an existing city in conformance with general plan policies, such services should be obtained through annexation to the city.
4. The unincorporated area shall not be developed with urban uses and urban services shall not be provided, except minimal public facilities and services essential for health, safety and welfare.
5. Development of the transportation system should encourage concentration of major employment and activity centers within proximity to residential areas to facilitate shorter travel distances and non-auto modes of travel.
6. The transportation system should promote the planned pattern of land uses, and limit transportation improvements to those necessary to serve existing and planned future land uses.
7. The County, in cooperation with the cities, shall maintain urban growth lines around local city jurisdictions which clearly define the extent of urbanization proposed within the general plan.
8. It shall be the County's policy to encourage phased development within urban growth lines so that first priority is given to development of vacant land currently served by public facilities and services and second priority given to development of land adjacent to existing urban areas.

9. Future city urbanization within urban growth lines shall be developed at the appropriate time through city annexations.
10. The County will not oppose the annexation of urbanized unincorporated communities within city urban growth lines as long as annexation is not contrary to the wishes of a majority of the affected residents.
11. The County shall encourage the Local Agency Formation Commission to conform sphere of influence lines with urban growth lines to clearly define those lands which are expected to be urbanized through annexation to a local jurisdiction and which establish 5-year urban expansion areas and permanent urban open space areas.
12. The County shall work with local jurisdictions in establishing city areas of interest.
13. The County shall establish formal procedures for review, comment and coordination of land use proposals and decisions within a city's area of interest.
14. The County shall make special efforts to encourage and assist cities in maintaining their community identities within defined community buffers in appropriate productive open space use.
15. The County shall participate with cities and special districts in establishing agreements, which delineate community buffers.

## RESIDENTIAL LAND USE

As stated previously, the Housing Element and Housing policies were updated in 2004 and will not be updated as part of this General Plan update. The following is a summary of the goal and policies provided within the 1980 Land Use and Circulation Element and are consistent with the updated 2004 Housing Element. The goal for residential land use stated in the Land Use and Circulation Element is to promote and ensure adequate housing in a satisfying environment for all citizens of Solano County.

### Specific Policies

1. The County shall seek to achieve coordination of housing goals, objectives, policies and plans between the County and the cities.
1. The unincorporated County's principal housing role shall be to accommodate future residential development, which constitutes an accessory use to agriculture (farm residence and farm labor quarters) and a moderate amount of rural residential development.
2. The cities' principal housing role shall be to provide low to high density urban residential development requiring the provision of urban services.
3. Housing units in the unincorporated County shall consist primarily of single family homes including manufactured dwellings certified under the National Mobile Home Construction and Safety Standard Act and meeting minimum County architectural and development standards.
4. Multi-family housing units in the unincorporated County shall be located in those areas best equipped to provide the level of services necessary to support such developments.

5. Mobilehomes may be used in the unincorporated County as temporary structures for short term purposes including farm labor and caretaker housing.
6. Residential development shall be located only in designated areas on non-essential agricultural lands without health and safety hazards.
7. Residential development shall not conflict with surrounding agricultural activities.

## RESIDENTIAL ENERGY CONSERVATION

In 1982 Solano County adopted the Energy Element as a part of the Solano County General Plan. The following policies are taken from the 2004 Housing Element and 1982 Energy Element.

### Specific Policies

1. Manufactured, modular, and innovative housing designs that make use of new technologies and materials that bring about cost and energy efficiency shall be encouraged by the County.
2. The County shall encourage the use of siting, construction and landscaping of structures to minimize energy consumption in housing.
3. The County shall encourage improvements in the energy efficiency of existing residential structures through the installation of cost effective conservation measures.
4. Accelerate local development of renewable energy sources including: wind turbine electric generation, solar energy, wood burning and others.
5. Support cost effective regulations to increase energy efficiency of new residential buildings.
6. Locate each residential unit on its lot for optimum use solar equipment and passive solar design
7. Increase the utilization of energy conserving landscaping in residential developments.
8. Improve the energy efficiency of existing residential structures through the installation of cost effective conservation measures.
9. Promote reduction of energy costs through energy conservation practices for low income households.
10. The County shall promote reduction of energy use and cost through energy conservation assistance programs for low-income households.

## II. GAPS ANALYSIS

This section of the workbook examines State General Plan requirements and identifies gaps between current County General Plan policies, State requirements, and new background information presented in the Land Use, Local Economy, Energy, and Population and Housing Background reports.

### State Requirements

State of California requirements for general plan content are provided in the *California General Plan Guidelines*, which are published by the Governor’s Office of Planning and research (OPR). Population and housing issues are typically encompassed by the Land Use and Housing Elements of the General Plan.

**Land Use Element Requirements**

General plan law requires the Land Use Element guide planners, the general public, and decision makers as to the ultimate pattern of development for the county at build-out. The Land Use Element should provide the location and distribution of all land use types, including public facilities (schools, solid waste facilities, etc.). The Land Use Element must provide quantifiable standards of population density for each of the land use categories contained in the plan. The land use element should also focus on the future growth and physical development of the community and planning area.

**Housing Element Requirements**

Because the Housing Element is not being updated, see the 2004 Housing Element for more information regarding the Housing Element requirements and housing policies and programs. However, one of the requirements to be considered as part of the General Plan update is accommodating the next round of Regional Housing Needs Determination (RHND) by ABAG. Jurisdictions are required to have identified adequate sites, appropriately zoned with adequate services to accommodate the RHND. As part of the 2004 Housing Element update, Fairfield, Vacaville, Benicia and Rio Vista agreed to accept the County’s RHND allocation. ABAG’s estimate for the next 5 year allocation for unincorporated Solano County to be addressed in the 2009 Housing Element is a total of 105 units. Another requirement of state law is that the Housing Element address residential energy conservation.

Recommendations

EDAW and County staff recommend the following approach to resolving known policy gaps as part of the General Plan update, as described in the General Plan Issues discussion in the subsequent section.

1. Incorporate the County’s growth management principles and update policies accordingly.
2. Ensure growth policies and policies that conserve and preserve open space and agriculture do not conflict.
3. Ensure that policies are consistent with the existing Housing Element.

**CAC Comments**

Are there other gaps to the County’s population growth and development policies that should be addressed?

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**III. GENERAL PLAN ISSUES FOR CAC DISCUSSION**

Based on existing trends regarding population and housing, EDAW and County staff have identified the following General Plan issues. Spaces are provided below each topic discussion for CAC members to record comments for

discussion at the May 21, 2007 meeting. The issues are identified at the end of the following reports: 1) Land Use Report pages 1-55 –1-57 and 2) Population and Housing Report pages 11-41.

**The CAC should discuss these issues and provide guidance to EDAW and County staff regarding a preferred approach to each. Following CAC discussion, EDAW and County staff will then complete draft policies and chapters of the updated General Plan for CAC review prior to consideration by the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors.**

## RESIDENTIAL LAND USE

There are four issues for the CAC to consider regarding population growth and development, the first two are extracted directly from the Land Use Background Report and third and fourth issues are from the Population and Housing Background Report:

### ISSUE 2: URBAN GROWTH THROUGH ANNEXATION

#### Issue Summary

The County's city-centered growth strategy has many facets. Perhaps the most fundamental goal of this strategy is to preserve the open spaces of the unincorporated County areas. Urban growth in the County has largely occurred within incorporated areas. However, directing urban growth to the cities does not necessarily mean that this will be compact growth that preserves the maximum amount of land in open space. Because land is less valuable when zoned for agriculture rather than for urban uses surrounding Solano County cities, property owners have much to gain from annexing, entitling, and subdividing agriculturally-designated land for urban growth. Financial incentives governments create for urban development at the fringe of cities may conflict with the County's goals for open space and farmland preservation, as well as natural resource conservation goals. Although city annexation of County lands is not a process controlled by the County, as a part of the General Plan update, the County can consider what can be done, through cooperation with the cities and LAFCo, to reduce urban development pressures to convert large amounts of important open space in areas surrounding the cities to urban development.

### ISSUE 3: RESIDENTIAL GROWTH IN UNINCORPORATED AREAS

#### Issue Summary

Much of the remaining vacant single-family land is located in the Green Valley/Rockville area and the North Vacaville area. To the extent that the County wishes to accommodate any new residential development, the General Plan could provide policy direction on whether such development should be focused in any one area. The County has little to no vacant land designated for multi-family residential development. In recent iterations of the County's General Plan Housing Element, it was affirmed that cities are the appropriate location for this urban growth. There are substantial public service and infrastructure challenges that must be met for the County to consider allowing higher-density housing. If the County establishes any area for focused residential growth, would that include multi-family residential opportunities or other land uses? If the County approves lower-density development in the unincorporated area, this may conflict with core values such as support for alternatives to vehicular travel and reducing vehicle congestion, a city-centered growth strategy, maintaining community buffers, agricultural land preservation, and energy conservation.

### ISSUE 11-1: LAND/RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND ITS IMPACT ON RESIDENTIAL LAND AVAILABILITY

#### Issue Summary

The scarcity of land and the relatively higher price of land and housing throughout the rest of the Bay Area allow Solano County to attract population growth and provide opportunities for affordable housing.

Existing population centers are mostly located along the I-80 corridor. Focusing development here could create a viable heavy-use transit corridor. This would allow much of the new housing in the County to be concentrated along this corridor, allowing remaining natural areas and agricultural areas in the remainder of the unincorporated County to be preserved as is.

The County lies within commuting distance of two major metropolitan areas (The Bay Area and Sacramento). The County also lies within commuting distance of other smaller cities (i.e., Santa Rosa, Stockton). Potential lies in historic cores in each city in the county, especially Vallejo. Working with the cities to focus housing development here can prevent further sprawl and annexation of unincorporated areas.

Potential General Plan Approaches

- Policies to promote compact growth.
- Policies to promote cooperation with the cities and LAFCo, to reduce urban development pressures to convert large amounts of important open space in areas surrounding the cities to urban development.
- Policies to focus development.

**ISSUE 11-2: CONSTRAINTS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

Issue Summary

Much of the unincorporated County consists of agricultural land that should ideally be preserved, considering the loss of agricultural land that has already occurred throughout much of California, this limits the availability of land that can accommodate new population growth in the unincorporated County.

There is a need to accommodate farmworker population in the unincorporated County as this demographic group is employed in the unincorporated County and has some of the lowest wages and highest needs for affordable housing of any demographic group.

Potential General Plan Approaches

- Policies that encourage development of farmworker housing.

CAC Comments

What additional steps would you like to see the County take to address the residential land use issues?

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## RESIDENTIAL ENERGY CONSERVATION

*(Note: The following is from the County’s 2004 Housing Element.)*

The average unincorporated area household uses more electrical energy than the average incorporated area household because (a) there is a higher proportion of single-family homes, which tend to be larger and consume more energy for heating, cooling, and other domestic use than multifamily units; (b) the newer homes are larger than newer homes in the incorporated areas; and (c) additional electricity is needed to pump household water in unincorporated areas. The highest potential for energy use conservation is in a heated swimming pool which can consume more energy than any other residential use. If solar energy were used for pool heating, substantial amounts of fossil fuels could be conserved.

To meet the County's conservation goals, some of the conservation techniques which could be used include weather stripping and insulation techniques, shading techniques (such as wider eaves, exterior shutters, shades and awnings), and wind deflectors (such as landscaping, beams, screens and fences). Also, architectural techniques which take advantage of site orientation and window placement to maximize winter heat gain and minimize summer heat gain could be applied. Among these techniques, weather stripping and increased insulation could be particularly effective retrofits for existing older buildings.

### POTENTIAL GENERAL PLAN POLICY APPROACHES

In addition to greater residential energy efficiency through building standards and the rehabilitation of older dwellings, the County can guide new residential developments through General Plan policies that promote less energy-consuming lifestyles.

- Explore and pursue use of alternative energy sources.
- Plan for new land uses and land use patterns that consume less energy (by taking advantage of solar, wind, and other natural features; planning new communities to promote more walking and biking; etc.)

### CAC Comments

Should the County pursue the approaches listed above within the General Plan update?

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What additional steps would you like to see the County take to address energy sources and conservation?

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**ADDITIONAL POPULATION AND HOUSING ISSUES**

What additional housing and population issues would you like to see the County address in the General Plan update?

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PRELIMINARY DRAFT FOR CAC