

# ALPINE COUNTY GENERAL PLAN



INTRODUCTION

## **INTRODUCTION**

Alpine County comprises 723 square miles of land situated along the crest of the Sierra Nevada mountains in east-central California. The County's topography is characterized by high rugged peaks and ridges, deep canyons, mountain meadows, and numerous streams and lakes. The County is located 15 miles south of Lake Tahoe and is bounded to the east by Douglas County, Nevada. It is crossed generally east to west by State Highways 4 and 88, and north to south by State Highway 89. It is estimated that ninety five percent of Alpine County's land area is government owned and administered by the U.S. Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management. Alpine County remains the smallest County in California with a permanent population of 1100 and with only an eleven percent growth between 1980 and 1990 based on the 1990 Census data. Most of the population lives near or in the communities of Markleeville, Woodfords, Bear Valley, or Kirkwood.

Alpine County's first General Plan was adopted in 1964. New elements were added in 1969, 1970, 1973, and 1974. In 1981 the legal adequacy of the existing plan was determined to be questionable and the Board of Supervisors directed that the plan be revised. In a separate action, the Board, which serves as the County's Local Transportation Commission, directed that the 1982 Alpine County Regional Transportation Plan Update (RTP) be included as part of the total planning project.

Early public input to the 1981 General Plan Project stressed the importance of developing a plan which would "balance" environmental and social concerns. The General Plan has thus been founded upon four primary planning criteria

1. Environmental constraints.
2. Economic growth.
3. Orderly development in specified areas, and
4. Public service costs.

The General Plan identifies hazards that offer the greatest threat to the health, safety, and welfare of people in Alpine County. Measures are specified to minimize propagation of each of the hazards in future development. The Plan draws upon research presented in the Plan's Data Base and Appendices to promote wise use of the County's varied and plentiful resources. The Plan also encourages provision of adequate public services, maintenance of a balanced County budget, and maintenance of a comprehensive planning process including continuous use of the General Plan as a guideline for growth. As required by State law, the Plan contains a Land Use Map which designates the desired location, type, density and intensity of land uses County-wide. The Plan's Circulation Element serves as the County's Mandated Regional Transportation Plan and is updated biennially.

This edition of the Plan is a 1997 update of the 1981 plan. It has been prepared to update statistics and information and to reflect changes in State Law and County Ordinances. This plan also contains the 1996 Regional Transportation Plan/Circulation Element Update.

## **THE SETTING**

### **History**

Before the arrival of Euro-American settlers, Alpine County was the home of a Native American people of whom the Washoe are the latest arrivals. Frontiersmen including Jedediah Smith, Captain Joseph Walker, Kit Carson and Captain John C. Fremont, visited what is now Alpine County between 1827 and 1844. Present day Woodfords became the first settlement in the region with the establishment of Brannon Springs in 1851. With the discovery of gold and silver in the late 1850's and early 1860's the territory experienced a boom period during which towns sprang up and populations swelled

Alpine County became the forty-sixth County in the State of California on March 16, 1864. It was formed out of El Dorado, Amador, Calaveras, Tuolumne and Mono Counties and named for its majestic alp-like scenery. In 1864 total County population was estimated to be more than 11,000. The County seat was Silver Mountain City, one of several early mining towns that no longer stand today. In 1875, when the County Seat was moved to Markleeville, the population had declined to approximately 1200.

In addition to mining, lumbering was an important industry in Alpine County during the 1860's and 1870's. Lumber was needed for the construction of towns, ranch structures, and flumes built in the area. Demand was also high for cord wood necessary to drive steam engines, to provide mine timbers, and to serve other purposes.

The demonetization of silver in 1873 put an end to the silver "boom" in Alpine County and thereafter County population decreased. By 1910 the County population was less than 250. Between 1920 and 1940 it increased to 320, and then decreased back to approximately 290 by 1950. During this period the population was distributed between the towns of Markleeville, Woodfords, Paynesville and a number of other highway stops. The County sustained a small number of active cattle and sheep ranches plus limited mining and timber activity.

With improvement of roads, the increase in California's population, and State-wide increases in income and leisure time, Alpine County's popularity as a recreational area began to grow. The 1970 Census recorded County population at 484. By 1980 the population had grown to 1097. The increase is primarily a result of growth in the Washoe Community on the County's eastern slope; and Bear Valley and Kirkwood on the County's western slope.

## **Population**

Characteristics of the County's 1990 population were as follows: Median age was 35 years. Approximately 25% of the population was less than 18 years of age. The ethnic make-up of the 1990 population included 772 whites (69.4 percent) and 341 non-whites, (30.6 percent). The largest ethnic minority was American Indian, 257 or (23.1 percent) of the total population.

Because the 1990 Census was conducted during April, 1990, it is anticipated that a number of seasonal residents were included in the County total. Though the total may therefore be considered high when figuring permanent residents, it does little to reflect the actual influx of seasonal residents or visitors to the County which has been estimated to exceed two million per year. The Department of Finance estimated a 1990 housing vacancy rate of 62.7 percent. At least 68% of these are

seasonally occupied second homes or resort condominium units.

## **Socio-Economic Environment**

Alpine County is divided by the crest of the Sierra Nevada into east and west slope geographic regions. Markleeville, Woodfords and other east slope communities tend to identify culturally and economically with Gardnerville, Carson City and other urban centers located in the State of Nevada.

Kirkwood is positioned to access both Nevada Communities and South Lake Tahoe. Bear Valley residents tend to utilize lower west slope communities in California for similar socioeconomic purposes. The Sierra crest becomes a most significant boundary between east and west Alpine County during winter months when State Highway 4 connecting Bear Valley with Markleeville is closed, resulting in 3-4 hours travel time between the communities in good weather.

Recreation and tourism clearly stand as a mainstay of the economy. The County's agriculture, timber, and mining resources have and will continue to provide valuable contributions.

Setting aside the incomes of seasonal residents, the per capita income of persons living in Alpine County is well below the state average and it fluctuates seasonally due to reliance on recreation and tourism. Limited population and dependence upon urban centers outside the County causes a significant drain of dollars generated in the local economy. This leakage hinders attempts to expand local business activity. The local government faces fiscal difficulties associated with a limited ability to generate property tax revenue which results in heightened sensitivity to limitations on public services and facilities.

## **THE GENERAL PLAN**

A general plan can be considered a local government's "constitution" for growth and development. In addition to background information, general plans typically contain goals, policies, objectives, and implementation measures designed to guide growth and development within the jurisdiction. One of the required maps of a general plan is the land use map, which represents the County's intentions regarding future growth.

All elements within a general plan must be consistent with one another and all local land use zoning designations must be made to conform with the general plan. Decisions regarding private developments for which County permits are necessary and those involving County Public Works Projects must be found in conformance with the general plan before approval can be granted. Counties must also review their capital improvement programs and land transactions for conformance. Under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, Federal Agencies are directed to coordinate preparation of their land use plans and regulations with local governments and their general plans.

State Law requires that a general plan must address seven subjects: land use, circulation, housing, conservation, open space, noise, and safety. The law allows a County to vary the format and degree of specificity that is used in addressing each of the required subjects, depending on local circumstances. The Alpine County General Plan is organized in six elements which incorporate the

seven State mandated subjects.

1. Conservation
2. Safety
3. Land Use
4. Circulation
5. Housing
6. Economic Development

### **Conservation**

The Conservation Element promotes wise use of the County's valuable mineral, timber, agricultural, water and energy resources. It recognizes local water, animal life, open space, historic and other resources as valuable to recreation and tourism. It considers the County's nearly pristine air, water, sound, and scenic beauty as a resource valued by County residents as well as visitors from other parts of the world. Policies and guidelines are set forth to protect such resources from degradation and incompatible land uses. The Plan also encourages the management, production, and processing of natural resources found in the County in a responsible manner for the economic benefits that could be derived for the local economy.

### **Safety**

The Safety Element calls for all future development to be properly located and designed to prevent threat to the health, safety and welfare of people in Alpine County due to fire, earthquake, unstable slopes of earth or snow, flood, noise, or hazardous materials. Policies are established to promote fire prevention and to build fire protection into all new development. The Plan also requires that maps and/or deeds subdividing lands in areas identified as subject to flash flood or seismic activity must contain written warnings informing future land owners that such hazards exist. Future developments will need to investigate and address the potential for landslide or avalanche. The General Plan's Land Use Section and Land Use Map establish standards to protect future development from flood, stream bank erosion and other factors.

### **Land Use**

The Alpine County General Plan sets forth objectives for the provision of specific public services or facilities that will be needed to aid the County's orderly growth and development. It lists policies and actions that are necessary to help finance public services and facilities especially during the present period of declining revenues. A special section is provided to help implement and maintain an effective and comprehensive planning process. The Plan's Land Use Map designates areas of the County in which certain types of development would be best located. Descriptions and mapping of each land use designation are presented in the Land Use Element.

### **Circulation**

The long-range Transportation Plan addresses periodic improvements of State highways and bridge

reconstruction. The need for maintenance and reconstruction of existing County roads will generally supersede the need for new roads. Funding County road maintenance is a growing issue that will need to be resolved. New developments will be required to construct roads to County standards and new provisions (road districts) may be required to fund their long-term maintenance. Efforts will be made to stimulate recreation and tourism thereby increasing already high percentages of out-of-county traffic. Actions may be necessary to generate additional County revenues for road maintenance and other public services necessitated by recreational visitors.

The County will continue toward implementation of the County Airport Master Plan. Private aviation working facilities should include construction of new heli-pads at Bear Valley and Kirkwood. Bicycle and pedestrian facilities should be considered where reasonable in all new development as a means of improving local travel as well as adding to the County's recreational attractiveness. The County will continue to enforce parking requirements and may upgrade regulations to attenuate existing or anticipated parking problems. County circulation policies will encourage efficient use consistent with the preservation of General Plan goals and policies. Pipe and utility lines should be minimized by measures such as combining lines to the fewest possible corridors and minimizing extensions to new areas consistent with the County's land use policies. The County is opposed to any trans-sierra utility corridors through Alpine County.

In general, the short-range Transportation Plan consists of the County's highest priority improvement projects and those goals and policies which address the most current and important issues.

## **Housing**

The purpose of the Alpine County Housing Element is to stimulate the private sector and facilitate the supply and quality of housing available to Alpine County residents. The Housing Element is designed to inform citizens and decision-makers in the County about population and housing and provide a sound basis for future planning decisions to meet identified housing needs and objectives within local means.

## **Economic Development**

The Economic Development Element establishes the response of Alpine County to economic conditions which result from the lack of revenue and job generating industrial and commercial development in the County.

## **ORGANIZATION**

### **The Document**

The General Plan is organized in four parts:

1. Introduction
2. General Plan Elements
3. Definitions

#### 4. Summary of Goals, Policies, Objectives and Implementation Measures

A Data base, Environmental Impact Report and Technical Appendices that support the General Plan are available in the Alpine County Planning Department.

All general plan elements contain discussions of various planning related issues based upon information collected for the data base. Each discussion of issues is followed by a list of goals, objectives, policies and implementation measures which are intended to help resolve the issues. A goal is the end toward which effort is directed. It is general and timeless, but theoretically attainable.

A policy is a course of action that guides present and future decisions. An objective is more precise and is capable of both attainment and measurement. Actions or implementation measures suggest or define the steps necessary to accomplish objectives and name the agencies or persons that would be responsible. The Circulation and Housing Elements vary slightly from the format used in other elements in order to satisfy the State's particular requirements for Regional Transportation Plans, and Housing Elements.

During preparation of the Data Base and Appendices, research was focused on seven special planning areas which, due to factors such as terrain and private ownership, were considered most likely to receive development pressure. Various categories of information regarding the County and its inhabitants were applied to base maps for each of the seven planning areas. These maps are displayed in the Appendices. Transparent overlays of the maps were used in drafting the General Plan's County-Wide Land Use Map.

#### AMENDMENT

A general plan amendment is required in order to change any text or map in the General Plan. State Law permits up to four General Plan Amendments per mandatory element per calendar year (Government Code 65358b). The most common type of General Plan Amendment is to the Plan's Land Use Map. In addition the County may determine that it is occasionally necessary to revise portions of the text to reflect changes in circumstances or philosophy. State Government Code 65400b requires the Planning Department to report annually to the Board of Supervisors on the status of the plan and progress in its implementation.

#### **The Process**

The County's process for amending the General Plan is specified in Section 18.84 of the Alpine County Codes (Zoning Ordinance) as summarized below.

1. Amendments to the General Plan may be initiated by application of petition of one or more landowners, resolution of intention of the Board of Supervisors or resolution of intention by the Planning Commission. Applications initiated by the public must accompany include fees set forth in the County Fee Ordinance.
2. Applications are reviewed by the County Planner and if accepted as complete

for processing are scheduled for a public hearing before the Planning Commission. Public notice of the hearing is provided in accordance with State Law.

3. Prior to the Public Hearing the Planning Department prepares a staff report to the Planning Commission describing the proposed amendment, any environmental or other impacts that may result, and comments from other departments or affected governmental agencies.
4. The Planning Commission holds the Public Hearing, makes the required findings of fact and decides upon a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors.
5. The Board of Supervisors holds a Public Hearing and either adopts or denies the proposed amendment.

### **Review for Consistency**

In order to be an effective policy guide a General Plan must be internally consistent. State Government Code 65300.5 requires that the General Plan be integrated and internally consistent, both among the elements and within the elements. Any amendments to the text or map must be supported by findings that clearly state that the amendment conforms with the General Plan. The following is a guideline for Planning Staff, the Planning Commission, and the Board of Supervisors to follow in determining General Plan consistency.

1. Consistency among the Elements. Compare the proposed element to be amended with other elements in the plan. For example:
  - a. Land use designations in the land use element should not conflict with planned land uses in the open space, circulation, or conservation elements;
  - b. Projected traffic impacts from proposed land use designations in the land use element should be planned for in the circulation element;
  - c. Allowed uses in a land use designation should be consistent with noise standards specified in the noise element for that same land use designation;
  - d. Proposed amendments to Goals and Policies in an element must be consistent with Goals and Policies of the other elements in the Plan; and
  - e. Assumptions, projections, standards and statistics used in a proposed element amendment should be consistent with those used in other elements of the Plan.

2. Consistency within an Element. Compare the proposed amendment with other data, analyses, goals, policies and implementation measures within the same element.
3. Text and Diagram Consistency. Compare existing or proposed maps and diagrams with existing or proposed text and policies. For example:
  - a. Land use designations given to an area on the Land Use Map should be consistent with text describing and policies related to features of that area; and
  - b. Proposed land use designations for a specific area on the map should not conflict with proposed roads or highways on the circulation map.

### **Findings of Fact**

Any decision on the General Plan Amendment must be supported by findings of fact. These findings are the rationale for making a decision to adopt an amendment.

Section 18.84.030 of the Alpine County Zoning Ordinance requires that the Planning Commission make the following findings when considering an amendment for recommendation to the Board of Supervisors.

1. The proposed amendment is in conformance with the County General Plan;
2. The proposed amendment is in harmony with the zoning code and other County Ordinances; and
3. The amendment is not detrimental to the health, safety, peace, morals and general welfare of the County of Alpine or its people.