

Draft Land Use and Circulation Alternatives

Frequently Asked Questions



1. What is the purpose of the alternatives exercise?

The alternatives explore different possible futures for the physical development and conservation of San Mateo. The City is proactively planning now to meet the requirements of State housing law, identify solutions to traffic and housing affordability issues, and prepare for projected population and job growth in the region and locally. The City is also looking at future alternative scenarios through the lens of equity, inclusivity, sustainability and addressing climate change. The process of evaluating the alternatives and creating a preferred alternative will serve as the foundation of the General Plan land use map, the list of future transportation improvements, and other important policies in the General Plan.

2. What is the process to create the land use alternatives? How will the preferred land use scenario be selected?

Below is a summary of the steps used to create the land use alternatives and ultimately a preferred land use scenario:

A. Choose study areas. During the summer and fall of 2019, San Mateo community members were asked to provide input at workshops, meetings, and online to help identify areas of the City to study first for potential growth or preservation over the next 20 years. **Study areas are those areas that have the potential to experience land use changes over the next 20 years.** Examples of potential study areas include areas near transit; areas where current buildings are aging, vacant, or not maintained; or areas where people have expressed interest in considering redevelopment of the property through the General Plan Update process.

B. Create a range of alternatives for each study area. In the winter of 2019, community members shared their ideas on the different types and range of development that should occur in each study area. Using public feedback gathered in-person and online, and General Plan Subcommittee (GPS), Planning Commission, and City Council input on the range of alternatives, the City and project consultants prepared three draft land use and transportation alternatives. These draft alternatives consider different locations and intensities of development that could occur over the next 20 years for each identified study area.

The three alternatives reflect recently built and approved projects and do not propose change to properties zoned R-1 (One-Family Residential), whether or not they are located within a study area.

C. Evaluate and compare alternatives. When the land use alternatives have been reviewed, vetted, and finalized through a series of several public meetings, City staff and consultants will compare the differing outcomes of these alternative scenarios. The evaluation will consider things like:

- Potential community benefits;
- Amount of development that would be allowed;
- Circulation/Traffic impacts;
- Overall character;
- Impacts on utilities and public services;
- Public health;
- Equity;
- Environmental sustainability;
- City fiscal health;
- Development feasibility; and
- Applicable State laws/regulations.

D. Select a preferred alternative for further study. The results of the alternatives evaluation will be shared with community members and decisionmakers to gather input as part of choosing a preferred alternative for each study area. This will include careful consideration of the relative benefits, trade-offs, and potential impacts of each alternative. It's likely the preferred alternative will be created by mixing and matching different alternatives in each study area.

E. Refine the preferred alternative to become the updated General Plan Land Use map. The preferred alternative will be the combination of the individual preferred alternatives for each study area and become the basis for the land use and circulation maps in the Draft General Plan before undergoing additional analysis in the Draft Environmental Impact Report.

3. Do the draft alternatives anticipate that every parcel in each study area will be redeveloped?

No. This General Plan looks out to the year 2040. It is very unlikely that all of the parcels within the study areas would redevelop (meaning that existing buildings or parking lots would be replaced by newer buildings) over the next 20 years. Although every parcel within each study area is colored, the amount of net new job growth and housing growth projected for each study area does not require or assume that every parcel would be redeveloped. The parcels most likely to redevelop would have one or more of the following qualities:

- Are within ¼ mile of transit service.
- Have had property owners or developers express interest in redeveloping their properties.
- Have structures with a lower value compared to the land value.
- Have significant amounts of surface parking. Many commercial areas have large surface parking lots with more parking spaces than currently utilized. Were these sites to redevelop, parking would be provided to meet the City's requirements.
- Are targeted for future housing development per the City's Housing Element.

4. What is San Mateo's Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA), also known as "fair share of housing" and will the sites identified in the draft alternatives meet it?

State law requires every California jurisdiction to plan for its "fair share" of the regional housing need for households of all income levels. Each city and county receives a Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA, said "ree-na"), which is the total number of housing units the jurisdiction must accommodate in an eight-year planning cycle. Jurisdictions are legally obligated to ensure there are sufficient sites zoned for housing that are affordable to very low-, low, moderate-, and above moderate-incomes.

San Mateo's 6th Cycle RHNA is expected to be approximately 7,081 units, distributed among four income categories that range from Very Low Income to Above Moderate Income. ABAG is expected to finalize the City's RHNA by late 2021. In comparison to 6th Cycle RHNA, San Mateo's 5th Cycle allocation was 3,100 units. The draft allocations throughout the Bay Area are high in part because the region's bulk allocation from HCD is more than double the last Housing Element Cycle's allocation to the region. Although the RHNA allocation is not a direct requirement to build units, the State legislature has enacted increasingly stringent requirements on localities to ensure they are doing everything possible for housing to be built and to remove common barriers to housing construction.

Working under this assumption, all three draft alternatives have been developed to include enough housing sites to fulfill the city's anticipated RHNA 6th cycle numbers. However, the General Plan extends beyond the 6th cycle, and ABAG projections were used to estimate housing sites needed to fulfill future RHNA cycles through 2040. Assuming continued 8-year RHNA cycles, and that the General Plan's expected life cycle is until 2040, the updated General Plan should designate sufficient residential land to accommodate the future 7th Cycle (Jan. 2031 to Jan. 2039) and early 8th Cycle (Jan. 2039 to Jan. 2047).

Although the scale of future housing allocations is unknown, the City can rely upon ABAG projections, past allocations, and other forecasting tools to estimate future allocations. If the 7th Cycle RHNA is in the same proportion to the existing number of homes as the 6th Cycle RHNA, it would call for 8,000 to 8,500 new units, for a minimum of about 15,000 new units over the 6th and 7th cycles combined. This does not include any additional "buffer" for the two RHNA cycles, nor additional capacity for the 8th Cycle RHNA. A buffer is necessary to ensure that if the sites listed in the housing opportunity sites inventory are developed without housing, or are developed with less than the full amount of housing claimed in the inventory, there is remaining capacity to ensure an ongoing supply of sites for the full RHNA during the eight years of the Housing Element Cycle. HCD recommends a buffer of least 15%-30%, but many jurisdictions provide a buffer of up to 50%. If the City does not designate adequate residential sites to meet the future RHNAs as part of the General Plan Update, the next Housing Element, eight years from now, will need to include a process to identify and rezone additional sites to accommodate the future RHNAs.

Please visit <https://www.cityofsanmateo.org/HousingElement2023> to learn more about the City's

5. Why do we have to plan for future growth?

Although the City is largely “built out,” California law requires cities to plan for housing to accommodate a range of households and income levels. The Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) projects that between 2020 to 2040, the number of residents in San Mateo is estimated to grow between 25,000 to 28,000.¹

While these are estimates, the City of San Mateo can reasonably assume we will continue to grow, and that we will need to zone for that growth in order to meet our legal obligations to the State. The General Plan Update provides an opportunity to set the foundation for future growth that is logical, orderly, and achieves the community’s vision of San Mateo as a place that is “vibrant, livable, diverse, and healthy.”

6. How will we fit all this new development in San Mateo?

The City of San Mateo is largely “built-out,” meaning there are relatively few vacant parcels within the City limits. In order to accommodate the State RHNA numbers and projected job growth, some limited areas of the city will need to redevelop at a higher intensity. This could be achieved through increased densities and/or higher building heights. See Question 3 for a description of the sites the City anticipates are most likely to redevelop.

7. What about housing and job growth outside the study areas?

In addition to growth within the Study Areas under an updated General Plan land use map, the General Plan will anticipate and allow for continued growth outside of the Study Areas based on existing regulations.

8. How tall will buildings be in each alternative? How do the land use alternatives reflect Measure Y, the voter-approved restriction on building height?

The alternatives are based on community input gathered over the last few months and consider potential land use changes that reflect a range of allowed heights and densities for all types of development. The alternatives do not assume or propose any specific buildings or development projects, and no decisions have been made about future heights on individual parcels.

The range of land use categories used in the alternatives would maintain existing height limits in some areas, but the alternatives do explore land use designations (i.e. Residential Medium, Residential High, Mixed-Use Medium, Mixed-Use High, Office Medium, and Office High) that would allow buildings with six or more stories in limited sites throughout the study areas, particularly in Study Areas 3 and 4 near the Caltrain stations.

In November 2020, San Mateo voters approved Measure Y, which extended past voter-approved limits on new residential building heights and densities. On January 19, 2021, the City Council provided direction to move forward with the public process to review the Draft Land Use and Circulation Alternatives even though some elements of Alternatives B and C are not aligned with Measure

¹ [Projections are from 2010 Association of Bay Area Governments \(ABAG\) Projections.](#)

Y. Should the community and decision makers select a preferred land use scenario that considers heights and densities above what is allowed by Measure Y, the City would need to ask voters to approve these changes in order to implement those components prior to the sunset of Measure Y in 2030.

9. What is mixed-use development?

Mixed-use development can mean different things. A mix of residential, office, and/or retail uses could be located within a single building, often called "vertical mixed-use." Or, a mix of residential, office, and/or retail buildings could be located within a whole block or a large site, often called "horizontal mixed-use." Vertical mixed-use would most likely occur in the Downtown and in some sites near transit. However, the community could consider if horizontal mixed-use is appropriate for large sites such as the Bridgepointe shopping center and El Camino Real corridor.

10. Will the local schools be able to accommodate the projected growth?

The City is engaging with school district staff to share information and coordinate about school staff housing needs and changes to student enrollment as the city's population grows. In the next phase of the alternatives evaluation process, the City will work with the local school district(s) to look at student generation under each alternative, which will help to identify future demand for schools. The City will continue to collaborate with local school districts throughout the General Plan Update to support strong schools in San Mateo.

11. Where are new parks needed to serve current and future residents?

The current General Plan 2030 has a goal of providing 6 acres of Community/Neighborhood parks per 1,000 people. Although the City's public park lands do not currently meet this goal, it will be important that future development does not further exacerbate the existing deficiency.

One obstacle to providing additional parkland is the lack of vacant land that could accommodate large new park sites. Some of the study areas, such as Study Area 10 at Bridgepointe, have large parcels that may enable the clustering of buildings, leaving substantial room for a new park or new privately-owned open space that is accessible to the public. This idea is represented by the green P in these study areas in some of the alternatives.

For areas like Study Area 4, Downtown, or Study Area 1, along El Camino Real, where most parcels are small, the General Plan Update will explore potential strategies to generate new privately-maintained open spaces, parks, plazas, and other recreational facilities. Part of this conversation will be to examine what incentives, if any, should be offered to developers to build community benefits such as parks and open space.

12. Do the alternatives consider changes to existing single-family neighborhoods?

The study areas shown in the draft alternatives do not include properties with an existing residence on a single-family zoned property (i.e. R1). However, the draft alternatives do anticipate that some

single-family homeowners would add an Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) within their properties as permitted by existing State law and municipal code.

ADUs (also known as granny flats or in-law units) are intended for independent living and are smaller than the main single-family dwelling unit. The number of ADUs permitted in San Mateo doubled in 2018 and again in 2019. Based on this trend, and recent changes in State law that have expanded the number and type of properties where ADUs must be allowed, the draft alternatives anticipate an uptick in ADU construction in many neighborhoods over the next few years, including in single-family neighborhoods.

Homeowners interested in adding an ADU may learn more at:

<https://www.cityofsanmateo.org/3907/Accessory-Dwelling-Unit-ADU>

13. Have the alternatives considered displacement? What will happen to existing renters and small businesses if their land use designation changes?

At this stage, we are creating land use and circulation alternatives that will need to be evaluated. Equity considerations, such as displacement, will be an important component of the evaluation, to explore how different alternatives might affect both current and future residents and businesses in San Mateo.

Following the selection of the preferred alternative, the community will take part in a robust policy discussion about a range of topics. As part of this discussion, the City will ask the community for feedback on strategies to address and mitigate displacement, which could be incorporated in the General Plan Update.

14. How does each alternative affect historic and cultural resources?

The alternatives have not yet been evaluated for potential impacts on specific resources. As part of the General Plan Environmental Impact Report (EIR), any proposed land use change that could affect a historic or cultural resource would be subject to the requirements in the City's Historic Preservation Ordinance and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) guidelines (State CEQA Guidelines, Section 15064.5).

In addition, the General Plan offers guidance on the protection and preservation of historic and cultural resources. For more information, please refer to the City's handout on historic resources:

www.cityofsanmateo.org/DocumentCenter/View/64534/Historic-Resources-Info-Handout

15. What is the status of the Caltrain grade separation project? Is that taken into account in these alternatives?

In October 2019, Caltrain adopted a Long Range Service Vision (<https://caltrain2040.org/wp-content/uploads/Caltrain-Business-Plan-Final-Service-Vision.pdf>) to increase Caltrain ridership over the next 20 years. Should the Long Range Service Vision be fully implemented, it would quadruple

Caltrain ridership, carrying as many travelers as adding another Highway 101.² The expansion of Caltrain service would require all 42 at-grade crossings to be fully separated grade crossings. Of the 42 at-grade crossings, ten are located within the City of San Mateo.

The City of San Mateo has made significant progress on the 25th Avenue Grade Separation Project (https://www.caltrain.com/projectsplans/Projects/Caltrain_Capital_Program/25th_Avenue_Grade_Separation.html), which includes three new grade separated crossings and an updated Hillsdale Caltrain station. The City recently completed the new East 28th Ave. overpass in March 2021. Future enhancements are currently under way for E. 25th Ave. and 31st Ave. The project received funding from San Mateo County Transportation Authority, California High Speed Rail Authority, Caltrans, and the City of San Mateo. Given the significant cost of grade separation projects, it is unknown how and when grade separation of the remaining nine crossings in San Mateo would be funded. The location of the nine at-grade crossings are identified on the Circulation Board.

16. How do the land use alternatives incorporate City parking requirements? How much parking will each alternative provide?

All future development projects will be responsible for providing parking consistent with the City's adopted parking standards, which are contained in the zoning code. While the land use alternatives depict the allowed use for a given parcel, parking requirements are based upon the specific uses of a proposed development. Once a project applicant submits an application for a proposed project on a specific site, the project proposal will be analyzed for consistency with applicable code requirements including parking requirements.

Specific parking standards are not anticipated to change as part of the General Plan Update, but the General Plan will set guidance on things such as whether and where to allow or encourage shared parking and/or reduce parking standards if certain conditions are met. Following the adoption of the General Plan, the City will update the Zoning Code so that it is consistent with the updated General Plan, which may include changes to parking standards.

17. What circulation improvements will accompany future developments?

The circulation alternatives explore ways to improve the pedestrian and bicycle network, transit service, and vehicle circulation. Many of the recommendations come from existing documents, such as the Pedestrian Master Plan, Bicycle Master Plan, and Sustainable Streets Plan. These improvements include closing sidewalk gaps, expanding bike lanes, shuttle connections, traffic calming techniques, and much more.

For information on the above documents, please see the city's website at:

<https://www.cityofsanmateo.org/2125/Parking-and-Transportation>