
CITY OF TULELAKE INTRODUCTION TO THE GENERAL PLAN

JUNE 3, 2025



CITY OF TULELAKE
591 MAIN STREET
TULELAKE, CA 96134

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1.1 PURPOSE OF THE GENERAL PLAN

California state law requires that each city and county adopt a general plan “for the physical development of the county or city, and any land outside its boundaries which in the planning agency’s judgment bears relation to its planning” (Government Code Section 65300). General plans must also cover a wide range of topics of community importance, such as housing, safety, transportation, etc., with which to direct development of the city or county relative to those issues. In doing so, the policies in general plans serve as the foundation upon which all city and county land use decisions are based. However, general plans are more than policy documents. They also reflect the vision, values, and priorities of a community. They define what is unique and special about the community that should be preserved, and they identify strategic ways to improve the quality of life for the community’s residents and businesses.

1.2 THE PLANNING AREA

The City of Tulelake is located in northeastern Siskiyou County along State Route 139 (SR 139) in northern California, approximately 62 miles northeast of the county seat of Yreka and 2½ miles south of the Oregon border. The City is situated at an average elevation of 4,035 feet above sea level on the Modoc Plateau near its interface with the Southern Cascades. Tulelake covers an area of approximately 0.41 square miles, or 264 acres, of former lakebed reclaimed by the United States Bureau of Reclamation in the early 1900s as part of Klamath Project, an endeavor that transformed approximately 225,000 acres in the region into productive farmland. As such, the land within and surrounding the City is flat, agricultural uses are the predominant use outside the City, and irrigation canals and ditches are located within and adjacent to city limits. The Union Pacific Railroad passes through Tulelake paralleling SR 139 to the east. An aerial overview of the City and its location in the State are shown in **Figure 1-1** below. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Tulelake had 902 residents in the year 2020, or roughly 2.0 percent of the population of Siskiyou County at the time. More recently, the California Department of Finance estimated the City’s population to be 851 residents in 2025.¹

A general plan must include all of the territory within the boundaries of the jurisdiction for which the plan is adopted. It should also include any area outside the jurisdiction which, in that jurisdiction’s judgment, bears a relation to its planning concerns. Since many planning and development issues cross over political boundaries, California planning law provides for extraterritorial planning. This is a process by which a city can indicate to neighboring jurisdictions its concern for the future use of land and resources adjacent to the city. In the case of Tulelake, the Siskiyou Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) has adopted a “sphere of influence” for Tulelake, which represents the City’s probable ultimate physical boundary and service area. The City’s sphere of influence includes approximately 401 acres or 1.06 square miles and is shown on **Figure 2-16** in the Land Use Element. The planning area for Tulelake includes all area within the incorporated city boundaries as well as the City’s sphere of influence.

¹ Each of the General Plan elements includes additional background information pertinent to the topic being discussed. For a detailed description of the City’s demographics, please refer to the Housing Element.

**TABLE 1-1
CITY OF TULELAKE PLANNING AREA**

Area	Square Miles	Acres
City Limits	0.41	264
Sphere of Influence	0.63	401
Total Planning Area	1.04	665

1.3 STATE MANDATES FOR THE GENERAL PLAN

In addition to requiring that every city and county adopt a general plan, state law requires that each jurisdiction's general plan be long-range, comprehensive, internally consistent, and that specific topics relevant to the physical development of community be addressed. As specified in Government Code Section 65302, the specific topics that must be addressed are: land use, housing, circulation, noise, open space, conservation, and safety.² Each topic has traditionally been treated to its own chapter, or element, of the general plan, however, general plans may be "adopted in any format deemed appropriate or convenient by the legislative body, including the combining of elements" (Government Code Section 65301). Some elements like the land use element encompass a number of planning issues while others, such as the noise element, address a more specific topic. Because conditions are likely to vary from community to community, the relevance and importance of each issue are likely to differ as well.

1.4 SCOPE OF THE GENERAL PLAN

Since general plans affect current and future generations, state law requires general plans to take a "long-term" perspective, typically 10 to 20 years into the future. This General Plan addresses planning for Tulelake through the year 2045. Some issues, however, are of such importance to the community and the State that certain elements must be reviewed and updated regularly. In particular, the Housing Element must be updated every eight years, the Safety Element is required to be updated following updates to the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (i.e., typically every five years), and the Land Use Element is to be revisited annually and updated, as needed, in response to changes to flood hazard maps. In addition, the City may determine in the future that, due to changing circumstances and opportunities, various amendments or a comprehensive revision of the General Plan may be warranted prior to 2045.

1.5 USE OF THE GENERAL PLAN

The City of Tulelake General Plan is intended to serve as a tool to assist the City Council, staff, and other city commissions and committees in their decision-making and when formulating and implementing community guidelines and policies. It is further intended to:

- Provide guidance on long-range development issues;
- Provide consistent city policy and direction over the life of the General Plan;
- Allow public agencies and private parties to design their projects consistent with city objectives;

² Cities and counties that have "disadvantaged communities," as defined in Government Code Section 65302(h)(4)(a), are also required to address environmental justice concerns in their general plans. There are no "disadvantaged communities" within the City of Tulelake's planning area.

- Provide a basis for judging whether development proposals and public works projects are in harmony with the City's long-range goals; and
- Facilitate agreement among different agencies as projects are proposed in the unincorporated portions of the City's planning area.

While the State-mandated general plan requirements emphasize planning for the physical development of the City, the General Plan also endeavors to support the social and economic well-being of city residents and businesses. As such, in developing the General Plan's goals, policies, and programs, attention has been given to the effect they may have on Tulelake's households, its businesses, to future employment opportunities in the community, and to the City's costs and revenues. When utilizing the General Plan, it is important that such interests continue to be evaluated and weighed as part of the City's decision-making process.

1.6 RELATION TO THE ZONING CODE

The City's General Plan is the foundation upon which all city land use decisions are based, and the Zoning Code is required by state law to be consistent with it. The General Plan's land use classifications, as outlined in the Land Use Element, are related to the City's zoning districts, but they serve separate purposes. For instance, more than one zoning district can occur within a single land use classification provided the densities and unit types allowed in each zoning district are consistent with the larger land use classification. Boundaries of land use classifications depicted on the Land Use Map may also be more generalized, while zoning boundaries are intended to be precise and parcel specific.³

Because general plans are long-range planning documents, they are also broader in scope than zoning regulations, which are more detailed and include development standards not included in the general plan (e.g., minimum setbacks, building height limits, off-street parking requirements, sign restrictions, etc.). Those standards, however, must still be consistent with and support implementation of the General Plan. Where there are inconsistencies between a city's general plan and its zoning ordinance, state law allows a "reasonable time" for reconciling these differences following a general plan update. The City anticipates that any inconsistencies between the General Plan and Zoning Code will be addressed within the first two years following adoption of the General Plan update.

1.7 RELATION TO THE SUBDIVISION ORDINANCE

The California Government Code specifies that cities must not approve a proposed subdivision or parcel map unless the project, including its design and proposed improvements, is consistent with the General Plan. The City is required to deny approval of any tentative or final subdivision maps not consistent with the goals, policies, and programs of the General Plan.

³ In developing both the City's Land Use Map and Zoning Map, the City utilized information developed by the County of Siskiyou. The County notes that its maps are "prepared for informational purposes only. Lines, roads, topography, culture, and other planimetric features shown on this mapping are compiled from many different sources and may not be, necessarily, current or reliable." Neither the County of Siskiyou nor the City of Tulelake assumes liability for the accuracy of the data shown.

1.8 CONTENT OF GENERAL PLAN ELEMENTS

Each element of the General Plan contains: 1) a statement concerning the legal basis for the element; 2) a brief narrative of background issues to provide context for the topics being addressed; and 3) goals, policies, and/or programs to address the issues identified.

State planning law stipulates that specific background information be adopted for certain elements (e.g., Housing Elements and Safety Elements) as part of each general plan. Background information supporting the other elements may be adopted by reference or summarized, but it should be readily available to the decision-makers and citizens alike. Local hazard mitigation plans, for instance, are normally adopted by reference as part of a general plan's safety element and made available on a jurisdiction's website.

The following terms apply within this General Plan:

Goal: A declaration of the ideal future state of the community with regard to the issue being addressed (e.g., "An economically vibrant downtown").

Policy: A specific statement that guides decision-making. It is based on and helps to achieve a goal (e.g., "The City offers a variety of incentives to retain and attract businesses to the downtown, including low interest loans and fee waivers."). For a policy to be useful, it should be clear and unambiguous.

Program: A measure or action that the City intends to take to support and/or carry out a policy of the General Plan (e.g., Apply for CDBG economic development funds to support business retention and development along Main Street"). It has been observed that a few well-conceived measures will usually accomplish more than a long list of possibilities.

1.9 TULELAKE GENERAL PLAN HISTORY

Prior to 2024, the City last comprehensively updated the City of Tulelake General Plan in 1978, with the Open Space Element updated in 1973. The City subsequently amended the Safety Element in 2019 to incorporate the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan by reference, and the City has made regularly scheduled amendments to the Housing Element as required by state law. Due to the City's use of multiple planning grants with differing timelines to prepare this General Plan, the most recent update occurred in phases between 2024 and 2025. The update consisted of a comprehensive overhaul and technical update of each element of the General Plan to ensure the document meets current state requirements, represents the community's vision for itself, and provides the guidance necessary to accomplish this vision. Importantly, the General Plan was enhanced with additional background information, graphics, and diagrams to ensure the Plan remains useful well into the future.

1.10 FUTURE GENERAL PLAN AMENDMENTS

It should be noted that the programs in the General Plan are not intended to be exclusive. That is, the City may undertake any activities that are consistent with and further implementation of the General Plan without needing to amend the Plan. At the same time, the General Plan is a living document, and it should be updated periodically (1) as circumstances change, (2) in response to changes to state or federal law, or (3) to modify policies that may become obsolete or unrealistic over time. For example, each year the City prepares a general plan annual progress report in accordance with Government Code Section 65400 that is presented to the City Council for review

and acceptance prior to submittal to the State. The general plan annual progress report serves as a useful opportunity for the City to reflect upon the goals, policies, and programs contained in the General Plan to better assess where the City has been successful in meeting its objectives, where it could possibly do better, and if applicable, where changes to the General Plan or direction of the City should occur. At times like these, the City may identify the need for new programs or changes to existing programs that were not anticipated at the time the General Plan was adopted. The fact that these measures were not identified prior to the Plan's adoption does not make them inconsistent with it. The critical test for the inclusion of new or amended goals, policies, and programs is whether the changes are consistent with the remainder of the General Plan.

While the City anticipates little need for regular amendments to the General Plan, amendments to the General Plan may be made up to four times a year, and each amendment may include more than one change to the Plan. Minor changes or updates to background information that do not affect land use classifications or adopted goals, policies, or programs are not considered General Plan amendments.

1.11 KEY PLANNING STRATEGIES

The key planning strategies used in the development of the General Plan are as follows:

Compact Growth. The General Plan seeks to achieve the City's growth needs for the current planning period entirely within the existing city limits. Thus, the Plan emphasizes mixed-use development in centrally located areas of the City, infill development, and redevelopment of distressed and underutilized properties.

Downtown Revitalization. The General Plan seeks to encourage a broad array of retail, professional, entertainment, residential, social, civic, and other uses that contribute to a vibrant, pedestrian-friendly environment in centrally located areas of the City through the introduction of a mixed use land use classification that provides for a compatible mixture of residential and nonresidential uses.

Accessible and Walkable City. The General Plan emphasizes a balanced, multimodal transportation system that includes expansion of the existing walking and bicycling network, and improved access to public transit and paratransit.

Diversity of Housing Choices. The General Plan provides for a wider range of housing types than previously permitted by right in the City, as well as areas of mixed-use development to facilitate production of a range of housing types to meet the needs of people of all incomes, abilities, and stages of life, with a focus on affordable housing and improved access to economic opportunities.

Preparation, Adaptation, and Resiliency. The General Plan seeks to prepare for and protect the City and its residents from potential hazards, in part through the Plan's strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and through programs that better prepare the community for natural hazards and the effects of climate change.

1.12 REFERENCES

- California Department of Finance. 2025. E-5 City/County Population and Housing Estimates, 2020-2025. <https://dof.ca.gov/forecasting/demographics/estimates/e-5-population-and-housing-estimates-for-cities-counties-and-the-state-2020-2025/>
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- Siskiyou Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo). 2021. City of Tulelake Municipal Services Review and Sphere of Influence Update. https://www.siskiyoucounty.gov/sites/default/files/fileattachments/lafco/page/27346/laf2021_04_msr_tulelake.pdf



Source: Enplan 2024, Google 2024

Figure 1-1, Aerial Overview