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PLANNING CONTEXT

PLANNING AREA

Contra Costa County encompasses 806 square miles, approximately 716 of which are land. About 40 percent of this area is under the planning jurisdiction of 19 incorporated cities and towns. The remainder, which is under the County's planning jurisdiction, is diverse and ranges from small agricultural communities like Byron in the county's southeast corner, with a quiet downtown and fewer than 1,200 residents, to Contra Costa Centre, a bustling mixed-use transit village with a population density of 8,400 people per square mile.

The landscape of Contra Costa County is governed and managed by a variety of agencies. The 19 incorporated cities and towns control land use and various other activities within their city/town limits. The County controls land use and development in the unincorporated areas outside of those city/town limits. Each city or town has a “sphere of influence” (SOI) that extends beyond the city/town limits and delineates unincorporated areas that the city or town may annex in the future. Once annexed, those areas become part of the incorporated city or town and are no longer regulated by this General Plan. Figure PC-1 displays the planning area boundaries in the county.


Other agencies that regulate and manage land, resources, facilities, and activities in the county include various elements of the federal and California governments and many different types of special districts, such as transit, school, park, utility, and fire districts. The jurisdictional areas of these agencies overlap with the incorporated areas governed by cities and towns and the unincorporated areas governed by the County.



Rolling hills span large portions of Contra Costa County's vast landscape. (Community-submitted photo)

GEOGRAPHIC SETTING

Contra Costa County is in the East Bay region of the San Francisco Bay Area. The county directly abuts San Francisco, San Pablo, and Suisun Bays; the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta; and Alameda and San Joaquin Counties. Beyond the Bays and Delta are the counties of San Francisco, Marin, Napa, Solano, and Sacramento.



There is a long history of people living in what is now Contra Costa County and using the land for a variety of purposes. Members of the Bay Miwok, Northern Valley Yokuts, and Ohlone Tribes were the first inhabitants (the county's native people are further discussed in the Conservation, Open Space, and Working Lands Element). Spanish colonization of what is now California began in 1769 (Contra Costa County's name is Spanish for "opposite coast" because of its location across from San Francisco). Spain controlled the area until Mexico won its independence in 1821. Under Mexican rule, much of the county was divided amongst 15 land grants, or ranchos. Acalanes, Pacheco, El Sobrante, and many other locations in the county derive their names from the ranchos or their owners. The county, along with the rest of California, was ceded to the United States in 1848 following the Mexican-American War. Contra Costa County was established in 1850 as one of California's original 27 counties, with Martinez as the county seat. Fewer than 5,000 people lived in the county at the time.

The current physical form and character of the county has largely been defined by the pattern of urban development sparked by rapid industrialization during World War II and the economic expansion and diversification that followed.

- West County was the first area to develop with urban and industrial uses. Several cities and unincorporated communities existed in the area prior to World War II, but they were relatively small (Richmond, by far the largest city in the county at the time, had a population of 23,093 in the 1940 Census). However, West County became a hub of industrial activity during the war (Kaiser Shipyards in Richmond produced nearly 750 ships, more than any other shipyard complex in the country), leading to fast and extensive urbanization. By 1950, Richmond's population approached 100,000.

- Central County experienced a wave of suburbanization during the prosperous post-World War II economy of the 1950s and 1960s. Rural agricultural communities were transformed into cities as middle- and upper-class residents, most of whom were White, were provided the opportunity to live in newly constructed housing tracts and commute via the expanding freeway network. Construction of the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) system in the 1960s and 1970s enhanced the area's desirability and facilitated additional development.



Portions of Pleasant Hill and Concord in the late 1950s, including Interstate 680, which was under construction, and new subdivisions adjacent to the agriculture that existed at the time. (Credit: Contra Costa Historical Society)

- The suburban development pattern began extending into the agricultural landscape of East County in the 1980s. Small cities such as Brentwood grew rapidly, and a new city, Oakley, was incorporated in 1999. Residents were attracted to East County by lower housing costs



and scenic open spaces, as well as the extension of BART to the Pittsburg/Bay Point Station in 1996.

SOCIOECONOMIC SETTING

Demographic Characteristics

Nearly 1.2 million people live in Contra Costa County. Approximately 175,000 reside in the unincorporated county, making it the most populous of Contra Costa County's 20 planning jurisdictions. Most of the county's population is consolidated along the major transportation corridors, including Interstates 80 and 680, State Routes 4 and 24, and the BART lines. Most job opportunities are within those same population centers, the majority of which are incorporated, though there are almost 40,000 jobs within the unincorporated county.

The median age of Contra Costa County residents is 40 years old. The population has been steadily aging since 1970, when the median age was about 28 years old. Since 2010, the fastest-growing age group has been seniors 65 and older as the Baby Boomer generation ages. The second-fastest growth occurred in the 55 to 64 age group, which includes younger Baby Boomers and older members of Generation X. In the unincorporated county, the majority of residents fall within the 45-64 and 5-19 age brackets. The youngest unincorporated communities are Bay Point and North Richmond, with respective median ages of 32 and 34, while the oldest unincorporated communities are Alamo and Diablo, where the median age is 51 and 56, respectively.

The median household income for a family of four in Contra Costa County is almost \$154,000. Median household incomes vary significantly across communities. The median household income for a family of four in North

Richmond is under \$60,000, while median incomes for a family of four in Alamo and Diablo are over \$250,000.

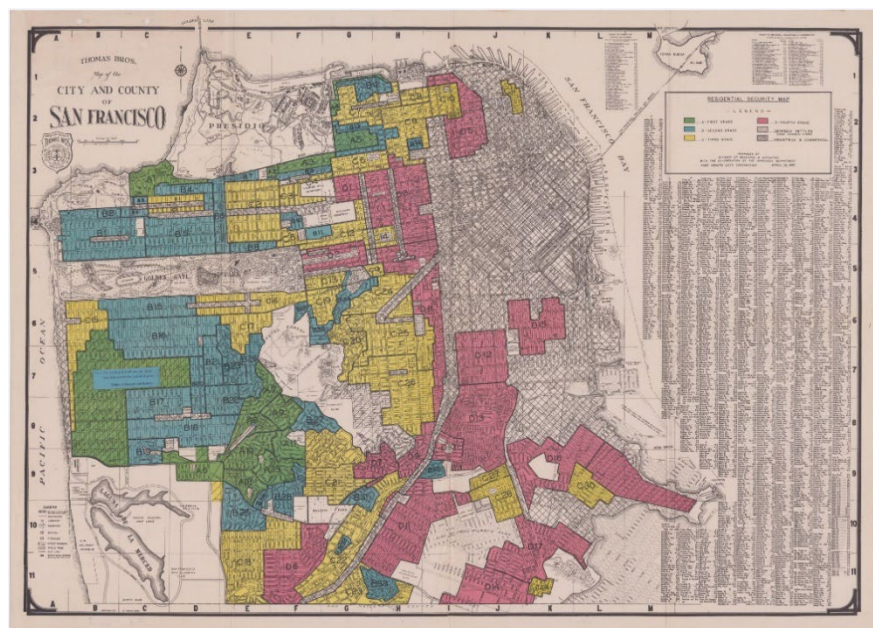
Overall, approximately 40 percent of Contra Costa County residents are non-Hispanic White, 9.5 percent are Black or African American, 27 percent are Hispanic or Latino, 20 percent are Asian, and 3.5 percent are Native American, Pacific Islander, or other races. The racial and ethnic makeup of communities also varies across the county, ranging from North Richmond, where 95 percent of residents are people of color, to Diablo, where 5 percent of residents are people of color.

Relationship Between Land Use Practices and Socioeconomic Outcomes

Land use practices across much of the United States are rooted in a legacy of discrimination. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, large American cities, including New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Boston, began experimenting with regulations similar to modern zoning. Laws were enacted to address overcrowding, the negative impacts of industrialization, and development of substantially taller buildings made possible by new technologies and construction methods. In 1916 New York adopted the first American zoning ordinance.

These early planning regulations and policies aimed to improve public health, but typically had racist or classist underpinnings as well. Those responsible for shaping these policies often sought to maintain, and in many cases create, segregated communities. Racially-motivated zoning plans kept communities of color in the inner city near industrial and other polluting land uses, particularly during the Great Migration when Black people were moving from rural communities in the South to larger cities in the North and West. White families, meanwhile, were encouraged to move toward urban outskirts and newly-constructed suburbs, away from the harmful aspects of city life.

These discriminatory zoning practices were initially deemed unconstitutional in *Buchanan v. Warley*, a landmark Supreme Court case from 1917, but they continued to be enforced and shaped the future of racially discriminatory housing policies. Harland Bartholomew, the first urban planner employed full-time by a major American city, stated that a goal of St. Louis' 1919 zoning plan was to, "preserve the more desirable residential neighborhoods" and prevent movement into "finer residential districts...by colored people." In 1926 another landmark Supreme Court case, *Euclid v. Ambler*, established that zoning itself is constitutional. This prompted zoning, and its ability to segregate communities, to spread rapidly throughout the country.



This 1937 map illustrates the redlining of San Francisco based on Home Owners' Loan Corporation data. (Credit: University of Richmond Mapping Inequities Project)

Redlining, a practice that emerged in the 1930s, further perpetuated community segregation as it hindered the ability for people of color to obtain

real estate loans. The Home Owners' Loan Corporation, established in 1933 as part of the New Deal, created maps to inform the risk level of a loan in a given area. Surveyors delineated and rated neighborhoods in numerous metropolitan areas; those with the lowest rating were outlined in red (hence the term "redlining"). These ratings were often based on the racial makeup of the neighborhood, with communities of color regularly ranking lowest. This practice denied people of color access to financial resources and associated opportunities, leading to disinvestment, low homeownership rates, and decreased property values. New Deal-era investments in the 1930s followed these trend lines by focusing investments in White neighborhoods.

New forms of housing-related discrimination appeared in the 1940s and 1950s. World War II veterans were entitled to benefits provided through the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the G.I. Bill, which among other things included access to low-cost mortgages and money to attend college. However, while these opportunities ostensibly were available to all who had served, they overwhelmingly benefited White veterans and facilitated "White flight" from cities to suburbs. Meanwhile, public infrastructure and redevelopment projects often displaced communities of color that remained in urban areas. Continuing through the 1950s and into the 1960s, urban renewal policies sought to eliminate blight by razing and reconstructing large sections of cities, dislocating residents and often destroying the fabric of minority communities in the process.

In the 1960s, legislation such as the Fair Housing Act and Civil Rights Act aimed to challenge exclusionary zoning and discrimination in housing. These laws prohibited discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, familial status, and age, and created a duty within all levels of government to promote fair housing and overcome segregation. Despite these efforts, the effects of exclusionary zoning practices and discriminatory housing policies still contribute to wealth disparities. Home ownership has been one of the most effective means of building family wealth in America.



Communities of color who were denied home ownership opportunities have not been able to build equity and wealth as effectively as others.

In Contra Costa County, this wealth disparity is evident through demographic data showing that many of the unincorporated communities with low median household incomes also have a high proportion of residents that are Black, Asian, or Latino. State data also indicates that the same communities suffer from higher rates of health conditions like asthma and cardiovascular disease. Proximity to pollution, lack of access to adequate healthcare, and public and private disinvestment have all contributed to these conditions.

In 2022, the County established the Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice to address local racial inequality and social injustice issues. This General Plan aligns with that mission by confronting over 100 years of discriminatory planning practices in our country, explicitly working to eliminate wealth and health disparities and progressively improve quality of life and health outcomes in communities of color.

THE GENERAL PLAN UPDATE PROCESS

The physical and socioeconomic settings of Contra Costa County are important in shaping the General Plan. Equally important are the voices of the people who shared their needs and ideas and helped the County articulate a vision for the future.


The process to update the General Plan began in December 2017 when the Board of Supervisors directed the Department of Conservation and Development (DCD) to oversee updates to the General Plan and Zoning Code, which itself had never been comprehensively overhauled since its original adoption in 1947. The Board subsequently directed DCD to concurrently update the County's 2015 Climate Action Plan. Substantive work on the updates began in September 2018, with public outreach kicking off in February 2019. Over the next four years, the County held or

participated in over 125 public and community-organized meetings with residents, community advocates, stakeholders, and public officials, including:

- Meetings of the Board of Supervisors, Planning Commission, Sustainability Commission, Library Commission, Hazardous Materials Commission, Arts and Culture Commission, Sustainability Committee, Historic Landmarks Advisory Committee, Aviation Advisory Committee, and all 13 Municipal Advisory Councils.
- Almost 50 community meetings, workshops, and open houses held across the county.
- Stakeholder meetings on environmental justice, community health, sustainability, and economic development.
- Native American tribal consultations.
- Over 20 meetings with various community-based organizations representing a wide range of interests in the county.

In addition, throughout the process the Envision Contra Costa website provided information about upcoming meetings, access to draft documents, and online tools that community members used to share their thoughts. The online tools were especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic, as they allowed community members to remain engaged and even attend meetings virtually. Input and direction from the public and County officials were incorporated into each component of the General Plan.

The first phase of the process included research and documentation of baseline conditions in Contra Costa County. This effort resulted in an online Briefing Book that established a shared understanding of important characteristics of the county, and highlighted assets to build from and challenges to address as the General Plan was updated.



The Briefing Book was used during the initial phase of community outreach, which focused on individual unincorporated communities, to support conversations about community-specific challenges and opportunities. Input from this phase formed the basis for preparation of draft Community Profiles that provide a description of the community and its unique context and present a policy framework for a desired future. For communities with a robust set of concerns to address, the County held subsequent rounds of community meetings to present the draft Profiles for feedback and discussion, working to ensure the vision and policy guidance reflect each community's values and hopes.



Community members in North Richmond shared their concerns and ideas for the North Richmond Community Profile and the countywide environmental justice policy guidance.

This phase of outreach and engagement also supported preparation of goals, policies, and actions to address environmental justice throughout the county. While many issues raised during the community meetings were specific to a community and required community-specific policy guidance, as provided in the Community Profiles, some issues were common across

communities, and lent themselves to the countywide policy framework. The County held three to four meetings in each community that is most impacted by environmental justice issues (i.e., Impacted Communities, which are defined and discussed in the Stronger Communities Element) to identify and understand the issues and consider policy approaches. These meetings were supplemented by two collaboration meetings with environmental justice stakeholders and about 15 meetings with community-based organizations who work with Impacted Communities to identify Impacted Communities, key environmental justice issues, and appropriate policy approaches. In addition, a three-part meeting series with environmental justice stakeholders was held to review and refine draft policy guidance, and several meetings were scheduled with the Board of Supervisors Sustainability Committee and the County's Sustainability Commission and Hazardous Materials Commission to discuss draft policy guidance. The County also conducted a hard copy and online survey to solicit feedback on draft environmental justice policy guidance, working with community partners to distribute hard copies at strategic locations to reach people during the COVID-19 pandemic, including at schools, libraries, farmers markets, food banks, and soup kitchens.

Following refinement of the Community Profiles and preparation of draft environmental justice policy guidance, the County prepared draft goals, policies, and actions for all remaining topics that apply throughout the unincorporated area. The countywide policy framework is based on a combination of guidance from the 1991 General Plan, input from community members and decision-makers throughout the process, State and local laws, and best practices in the planning field. The County Planning Commission and other commissions and committees reviewed the draft policy guidance during study sessions in the first half of 2022, and an online survey was distributed to community members to gain additional feedback.



During the second half of 2022 and into 2023, the County refined the countywide goals, policies, and actions and prepared the remaining components of the General Plan (e.g., maps, context, and glossary). The entire draft General Plan, along with the draft Climate Action Plan and draft Environmental Impact Report, were released for public review in Fall 2023.