INTRODUCTION

CONTENTS

Overview of the General Plan 1
South El Monte at a Crossroads 1
What is a General Plan? 1
General Plan Planning Area 2
Scope and Content of the General Plan 2
Organization of the Plan 4
Community Participation 5

The Context for Planning 7
Origins of the City 7
Growth of the City 7
General Plan Focus 8

LIST OF FIGURES

I-1: General Plan Planning Area 3

OVERVIEW OF THE GENERAL PLAN

South El Monte at the Crossroads

The City of South El Monte lies at an important crossroads from both a geographic and historic perspective. Bounded by both the Pomona and San Gabriel River freeways, South El Monte has ready access to important regional travel routes that link the City to centers of commerce in Los Angeles County and beyond. From a historic perspective, the community's population and business patterns mirror the transition occurring throughout the San Gabriel Valley toward a more diverse ethnic mix and increased presence of businesses serving Pacific Rim and Asian markets both within the region and abroad. As the City moves toward the year 2020, the questions to be asked include:

- How can the City capitalize on the growing demand for industrial space to accommodate businesses serving increasingly diverse and distant markets?
- How might the City attract businesses that would benefit from the spending habits of the increasing number of motorists traveling daily along the Pomona Freeway?
- What types of support businesses are needed to meet the changing demographics of City residents and the large daytime population created by businesses in the community?
- As the local population grows, what City services and facilities need to be enhanced to meet the needs of City residents?
- Does the local circulation system require any adjustments in response to land use changes to ensure that residents and the business community can travel within and through South El Monte efficiently and safely?

This General Plan document has been prepared to help the City to look forward to the year 2020 by setting forth goals and policies addressing economic development, land use, circulation, housing, and related issues that effect the quality of life in South El Monte.

What Is a General Plan?

A general plan is a document required by State law that serves as a guide to the long-term physical development of a community. The geographical area addressed by a general plan is not limited to a city's corporate limits. In addition to establishing policies for properties within city boundaries, a city may plan for any lands outside the city limits which are not under another city's jurisdiction and which may influence the decisions and planning activities related to properties within the city's own corporate limits. A city's general plan can be thought of as a *pattern* or *blueprint* for future growth and development.

Per State regulations, a general plan must address at least the following issues: Land use, circulation, housing, noise, public safety, conservation, and open space (California Government Code, Section 65302). However, a jurisdiction can craft its general plan to deal with any issue which decision makers, city staff, residents, business owners, and other stakeholders deem important to the community.

General Plan Planning Area

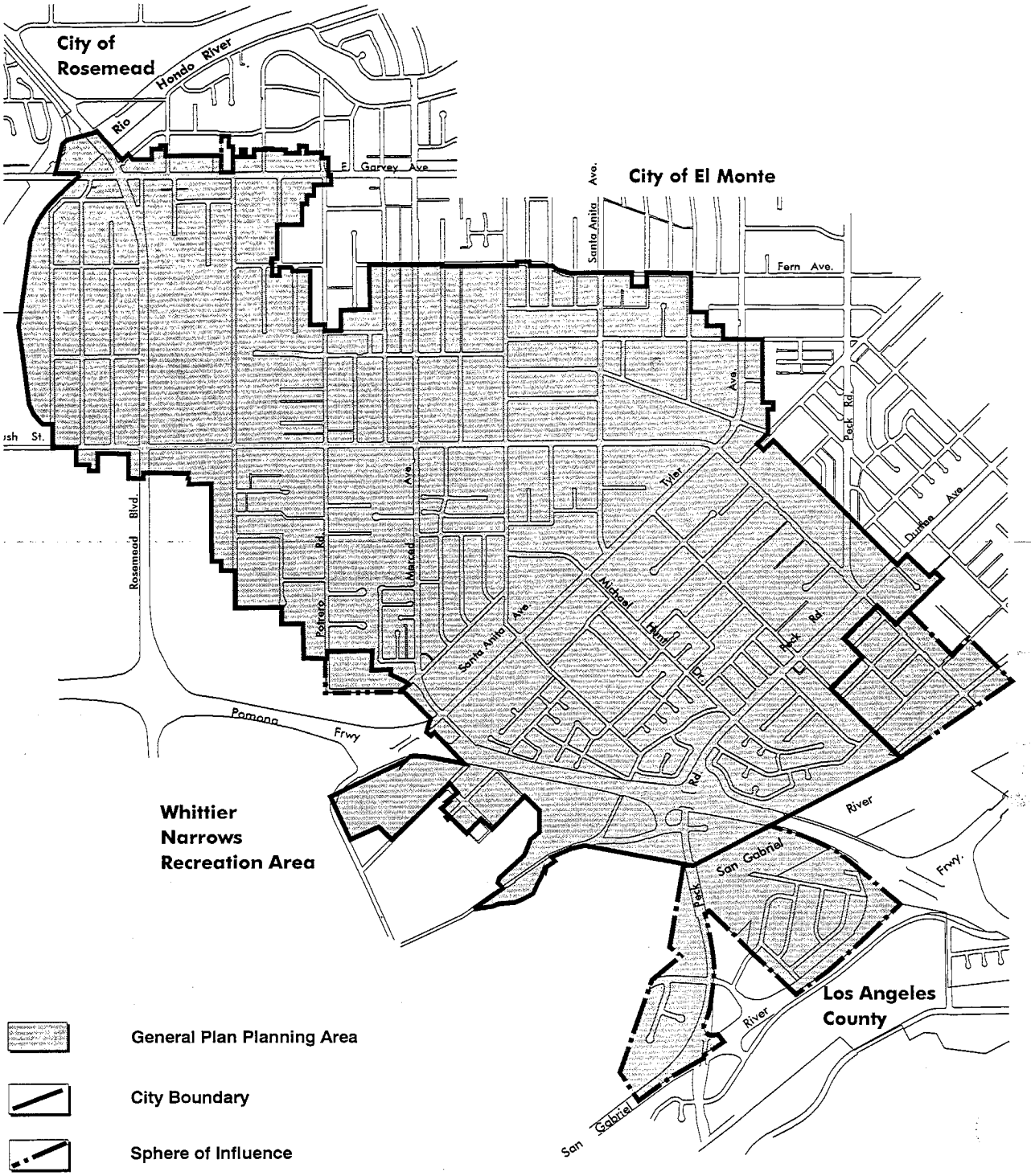
As of 2000, South El Monte's corporate limits encompassed 2.8 square miles of land. Abutting the City boundaries are several areas containing unincorporated lands (under the jurisdiction of Los Angeles County) and a property owned by the U.S. Army. These properties, highlighted in Figure I-1, relate to development within South El Monte and have a bearing on how the City makes decisions regarding circulation, land use, and public safety. Therefore, the Planning Area addressed in this General Plan includes all properties within the corporate City limits, as well as those properties identified in Figure I-1. Altogether, these properties total 2,071 acres, or 3.3 square miles.

Scope and Content of the General Plan

As described above, State law requires that a General Plan address land use, circulation, housing, noise, public safety, conservation, and open space. The South El Monte General Plan discusses these topics in a series of chapters called *elements*. This Plan contains six elements that focus on the required issues and the City's economic development goals. The six elements are: the Land Use Element, the Economic Development Element, the Circulation Element, the Housing Element, the Resources Element, and the Public Safety Element. The chart on this page illustrates how each of these elements responds to the requirements of State law regarding general plan content.

Relationship of South El Monte General Plan Elements to State-mandated Elements

South El Monte General Plan Elements	State-mandated General Plan Elements						
	Land Use	Housing	Circulation	Noise	Safety	Conservation/ Open Space	Optional
Land Use	●						
Economic Development							●
Circulation			●				
Housing		●					
Public Safety				●	●		
Resources						●	



General Plan Planning Area

City Boundary

Sphere of Influence

Area of Interest

N

1000' 0 1000' 2000'

South El Monte General Plan

Figure I-1
General Plan Planning Area

Organization of the Plan

In addition to the six elements, this General Plan also contains a Glossary and an Implementation Plan (see Appendix A). The Glossary defines key terms and phrases used in the Plan. The Implementation Plan, which is adopted separately from the General Plan elements and requires annual review, identifies the specific actions the City will undertake to implement the goals and policies contained in the elements. Annual review of the Implementation Plan allows the City to adjust programs and planned actions to respond to new or refocussed priorities, to address annual budget constraints and/or opportunities, and to account for change in any physical condition or circumstance in the community (for example, occurrence of a natural disaster).

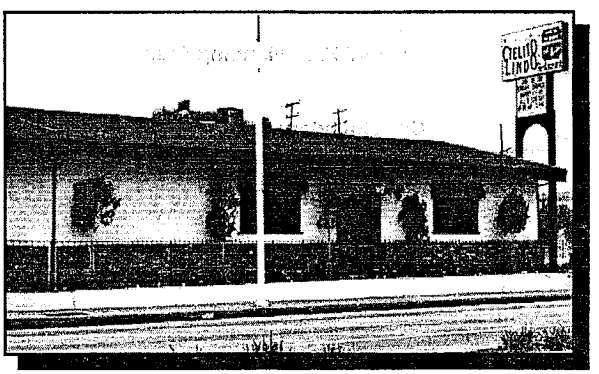
Each of the six elements, with the exception of the Housing Element, is organized in the following manner:

- **Overview of the Element** - The overview contains a discussion of each element's purpose, defines key terms and concepts used in the element, describes plans adopted by other agencies who have concurrent jurisdiction over particular issues, and summarizes the issues of concern.

- **Issues** - Each element addresses a range of issues related to the broad element category. For example, topics covered in the Circulation Element include the Local Street System, Regional Transportation, Public Transportation, Alternative Modes of Transit, Parking, and Traffic Safety. For each specific topic, the element presents related goals and policies.

The structure of the Housing Element varies slightly because State law is very specific about the items that must be addressed in a housing element. In addition to broad goals and policies, the Housing Element contains numeric goals for housing rehabilitation and new housing construction, as well as descriptions of programs the City will pursue toward those goals.

The structure of the elements allows readers to easily locate issues of interest and to read a summary of the City's goals and policies relative to a particular topic. However, General Plan readers should realize that the General Plan is an integrated document. The policies contained in the various elements are interrelated and should be examined comprehensively. For example, many of the Economic Development Element policies tie closely to policies contained in the Land Use Element. All policy components must be considered together in any decision-making process.



Cielito Lindo, home to Mariachi bands

Community Participation

Because the General Plan reflects the goals and ideals of the community, citizen input represents an integral part of the General Plan preparation process. Both South El Monte residents and representatives from the business community contributed insight and vision into the planning efforts and helped develop the goals and policies contained in the Plan. Public participation took the following forms:

- A *General Plan Advisory Committee* met three times prior to General Plan preparation to identify and discuss issues, and to develop goals and policies. The Committee convened a fourth time to review and fine tune the Draft Plan prior to its general release for broad-based public review and comment.

- The City Council conducted a series of *Town Hall meetings* prior to preparation of the General Plan. The meetings were designed to solicit input from residents about issues of importance to the community.

- Copies of the Draft Plan were made available in public locations throughout the community, and were provided free of charge through the Planning Department.

- Prior to formal public hearings, City staff conducted a *study session with the City Council* to review the format and content of the Draft General Plan. The public was invited to attend the study session.

- The Draft General Plan and supporting documents were circulated for public review and comment before and during *formal public hearings* held before the Planning Commission and City Council.

THE CONTEXT FOR PLANNING

Origins of the City

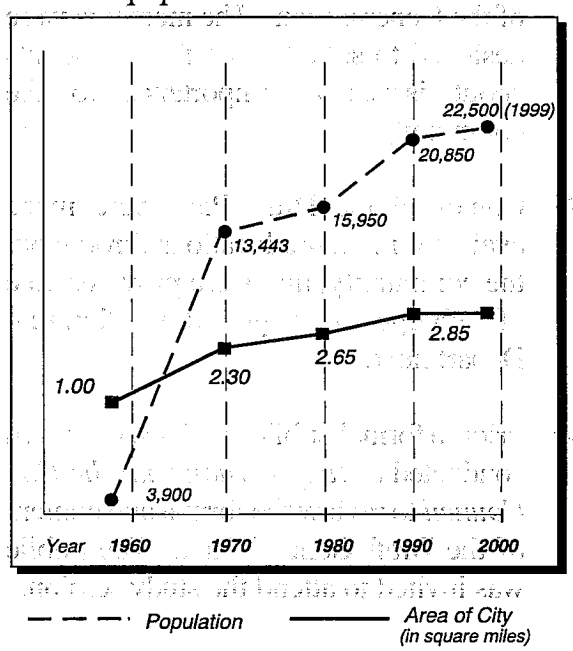
South El Monte, located approximately 18 miles east of downtown Los Angeles, lies in a geographic region known as the San Gabriel Valley. The City is bounded on two sides by the San Gabriel Valley's two major drainage features: the Rio Hondo River on the west and the San Gabriel River on the east. Both rivers are contained within concrete-lined channels and flow into the Whittier Narrows immediately south of South El Monte. Whittier Narrows is a regional open space resource and flood control feature formed by a major erosional gap between the Puente and Merced Hills.

The area that is now South El Monte was originally part of two Spanish land grants given to early settlers. The lands were used for ranching and other agricultural pursuits. Through the 1930s, South El Monte and much of the region remained in agricultural production. Leading up to and following World War II, however, the region experienced significant industrial growth, with a accompanying boom in the housing market. South El Monte, due to its location adjacent to rail lines and new freeways, successfully attracted a broad base of industrial users.

The growth of industry during this period, together with local desires to protect and utilize the increasing tax revenues, provided reason for local businesses and residents to petition for incorporation. When South El Monte incorporated on July 30, 1958, the town encompassed barely one square mile and had 3,900 residents.

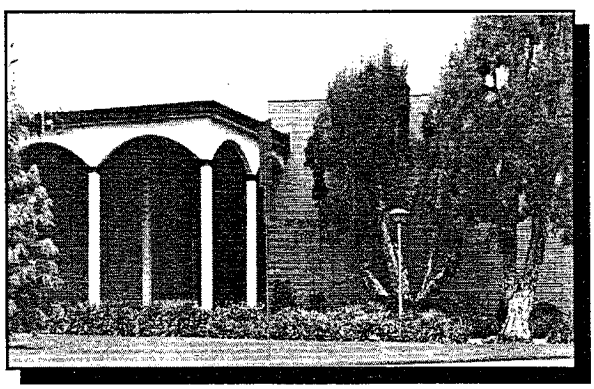
Growth of the City

Between 1958 and 1980, a series of annexations grew the City to almost three square miles and 16,000 residents. Through this period, industry continued to remain the major factor in the City's economy, with 1,100 businesses reported in 1980. During the 1980s and 1990s, South El Monte experienced gradual, limited growth resulting primarily from further annexation of peripheral lands. As of January 1999, the City reported a resident population of 22,500 within the corporate City limits of 2.85 square miles. The chart below traces the City's increase in size and population since 1958.



Geographic and political barriers prevent the City from increasing in size much beyond its current boundaries (Figure I-1). The Rio Hondo River and City of Rosemead bound the property on the northwest, and the City of El Monte's corporate limits share South El Monte's northern and eastern edges. Whittier Narrows Recreation Area wraps around the south and southwestern City limits. Scattered pockets of unincorporated County areas exist along the northern and southeastern edges. These unincorporated but fully developed pockets lie within South El Monte's sphere of influence and as described above, are included within the City's Planning Area for the purpose of this General Plan.

Given these physical constraints, one might wonder how South El Monte might continue to build its industrial base, create additional housing opportunities, and provide more commercial businesses and services to meet the needs of local residents and the daytime business population. Although South El Monte is almost completely built out, many properties are not used to their full potential (so-called *underutilized* parcels), and private redevelopment efforts result in newer buildings and uses. So, despite its appearance as a fully urbanized city, South El Monte can expect to realize continued economic growth and limited physical development on through the year 2020.



South El Monte City Hall, 1999

General Plan Focus

This General Plan focuses on the opportunities the City has to build upon its strong industrial base and to expand housing choices for existing and future residents. The Plan also responds to the long-term circulation needs associated with growth activity, demands for commercial and public services, and public safety needs. Key goals and policies contained in the General Plan include:

- Retaining existing industrial businesses, and providing a business environment that allows existing uses to thrive, and new enterprises to contribute to the healthy industrial base.
- Facilitating and encouraging development of local and regional-serving commercial uses at key sites in the City.
- Creating opportunities for new multi-family housing development to meet the needs of the population.
- Ensuring that the local street system provides safe and efficient travel routes for City residents and the business population.
- Protecting residents and employees of local businesses from natural and human-induced hazards affecting the community.

- Providing adequate parks, open space, and recreation resources for City residents.