

LAGUNA NIGUEL GENERAL PLAN



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PRODUCED BY:
De Novo Planning Group



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INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Laguna Niguel's history is rooted in indigenous heritage, Mexican land grants, ranching traditions, and visionary urban planning, all of which have contributed to the City's modern-day character and landscape.

The area was originally inhabited by the Acjachemen (Juaneño) people, who lived in the region for thousands of years. The name "Niguel" traces back to "Niguili," a native village once located near Aliso Creek. In the late 1700s, Spanish missionaries established Mission San Juan Capistrano, bringing the area under mission control.

Following Mexico's independence from Spain in 1821, the mission lands, including what is now Laguna Niguel, were divided into private land grants. In 1842, Rancho Niguel, encompassing approximately 13,316 acres, was granted to Juan Avila. For decades, the region's rolling hills and valleys supported cattle and sheep ranching. In 1895, Lewis Moulton and Jean Pierre Daguerre purchased Rancho Niguel and surrounding properties, continuing and expanding the area's ranching legacy through the mid-1900s.

The modern development of Laguna Niguel began in 1959, when Cabot, Cabot & Forbes established the Laguna Niguel Corporation and acquired approximately 7,200 acres from the Daguerre family to develop

one of California's first master-planned communities. To achieve their vision, the firm retained Victor Gruen and Associates to design a comprehensive community plan.

The visionary plan incorporated principles of neighborhood clustering, open space preservation, and pedestrian connectivity in a setting of rolling hills and coastal proximity in south Orange County. This approach set the foundation for the City's long-term growth, community character, and high quality of life that residents continue to enjoy today.

Land sales began in 1961 in the Monarch Bay and Laguna Terrace subdivisions. In 1971, the AVCO Community Developers, Inc. acquired the Laguna Niguel Corporation and moved forward with development as originally envisioned.

During the early years of development, the Laguna Niguel Homeowners Association, later to become the Laguna Niguel Community Council, served in an important advisory capacity to the Orange County Board of Supervisors on land use issues. In 1986,



Laguna Niguel residents, looking for local governance, took the first step toward cityhood by forming a Community Services District. Three years later, on November 7, 1989, 89% of the voters favored incorporation and on December 1, 1989, Laguna Niguel became the 29th city in Orange County.

The City adopted its first General Plan in 1992. Except for the Housing and Land Use Elements, most of the Elements have remained largely unchanged since that original adoption.

The City's General Plan Update supersedes and replaces the 1992 General Plan. While the update retains some of the overarching goals and policy frameworks from the original plan, it has been thoroughly revised to address current local conditions and community priorities and goals. The

updated plan has also been reorganized to enhance clarity and usability.

The update process included a two-phased approach:

- **Phase 1 (2021-2023):** A baseline evaluation of the 1992 General Plan and the preparation of focused studies assessing traffic, market trends, and fiscal conditions.
- **Phase 2 (2023-2025):** Analysis of existing conditions not covered in Phase 1 (contained within the Existing Conditions Report (ECR)), community outreach and engagement, development of the General Plan Update itself, and the preparation of a Program Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and associated technical documents evaluating the potential environmental impacts of the General Plan Update.



Scope and Content of the General Plan

California law requires every city and county to adopt a comprehensive, long-term general plan to guide its physical development and to update it periodically. A general plan is a “constitution” or “blueprint” for the future physical and economic development of a city or county. All future planning decisions and project approvals must be consistent with the general plan, including but not limited to: area plans, specific plans, master plans, subdivisions, public works projects, public services, and zoning decisions.

State law (Government Code Section 65302) requires general plans to address specific Elements: Land Use, Mobility (Circulation), Housing, Conservation, Open Space, Noise, and Safety¹. In addition to these mandatory Elements, cities and counties may include optional Elements to address local priorities. Laguna Niguel has chosen to include Economic Development and Public Facilities and Services as optional Elements in its General Plan. The degree of specificity and level of detail of each element need only reflect local conditions and circumstances. All general plans must be consistent with the requirements of State law and address the relevant items addressed in Government Code Section 65300 and related statutes.

A general plan has four defining features:

- **General.** As the name implies, a general plan provides general guidance across several topical areas, such as land use, transportation, infrastructure, public safety, environmental sustainability, and resource management.
- **Comprehensive.** A general plan addresses a wide range of topics, including the state-mandated Elements listed above.
- **Long-Range.** A general plan provides guidance on achieving a long-range vision of the future for a city or county. To reach this envisioned future, the general plan includes goals and policies that address both near-term and long-term objectives, guiding progress over a 20-year horizon or more.
- **Integrated and Coherent.** A general plan provides a unified framework based on a consistent set of assumptions and projections to assess future community needs (e.g., housing, employment, public services, and infrastructure). This cohesive approach helps communicate the vision for the local jurisdiction to the community and provides landowners, businesses, and developers greater clarity and certainty about how planning decisions will be made and implemented.

¹. The City of Laguna Niguel is not required to include an environmental justice element because there are no identified disadvantaged communities within the City, and the City's 2021–2029 Housing Element was certified by the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) on February 22, 2024, and is provided under separate cover.

The City's General Plan provides a policy document with a 20-year horizon, outlining goals and policies to guide future decisions. It is supported by two key documents: the ECR, which provides a foundation of current data and analysis, and the General Plan EIR, which assesses potential environmental effects of the updated plan. These documents are intended to be used in conjunction with this General Plan and to serve as companions to this policy document. The General Plan addresses all of the Elements required by State law and includes two optional Elements, Economic Development and Public Facilities and Services.

The table below identifies the Elements included in the General Plan and the corresponding requirement in State law.

Table IN-1 Relationship Between General Plan Elements and State Requirements

LAGUNA NIGUEL GENERAL PLAN ELEMENTS	STATE REQUIREMENTS						OPTIONAL TOPICS
	LAND USE	CIRCULATION	CONSERVATION	OPEN SPACE	NOISE	SAFETY	
Land Use	●						
Mobility		●					
Resource Management			●	●			
Public Facilities and Services			●				●
Public Safety					●		
Noise					●		
Economic Development							●
Housing (Separate Cover)						●	

Community Engagement

Community outreach and engagement played a significant role in shaping the vision, goals, and policies of the General Plan. This involved a transparent, inclusive, and engaging process designed to encourage public participation. The engagement strategy implemented a multipronged approach to allow community members varied opportunities to participate through surveys, online platforms, and in-person options. Through these efforts, the City connected with thousands of Laguna Niguel residents, business owners, and other stakeholders.

This section summarizes how the General Plan Update process was promoted and publicized, the ways in which the community participated, and the resulting community vision statement shaped by the feedback received.



Outreach and Promotion

Opportunities for the Laguna Niguel community to participate in and learn more about the General Plan Update were promoted through a variety of outreach strategies, including:

- Direct mailer survey sent to all residential addresses in Laguna Niguel
- Social media advertisements on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram
- Advertisements on the City website
- Dedicated General Plan Update website
- Video advertisement shown as a movie trailer at the Regency Theatres Directors Cut Cinema (November 20, 2023 – December 20, 2023)
- Advertisement in the Winter Recreation Brochure
- Advertisement in the Homeowners Association Newsletter
- Open House flyers at City Facilities
- Advertisement in the Economic Development eNewsletter

Citywide Survey

In October 2023, the City mailed a combined Strategic Plan Update and General Plan Update survey to all Laguna Niguel residents to gather community input. The mailer included a cover letter from the Mayor outlining the purpose of the survey and provided information on the General Plan Update website and upcoming Open House event. Survey questions asked for residents' thoughts on topics such as opportunities, challenges, goals, values, and overall quality of life in Laguna Niguel. In addition, residents were asked about development priorities and

accessibility in taking transit, walking, or biking.

Virtual Engagement

A dedicated General Plan Update website was launched at the beginning of the project. The website provided a one-stop shop for community members to access information about the update, learn about opportunities for public participation, and contact information for comments and/or questions. The website included:

- A project overview
- A General Plan Update video
- Translation options
- Frequently Asked Questions
- A document and map library
- Calendar of events



- Contact information

In-Person Events

To raise public awareness and encourage community input, beginning in Summer 2023 through Winter 2024, the project team and City staff hosted a series of in-person engagement events, as summarized below.

POP-UP EVENTS

Six pop-up events (listed below) were held throughout the City to provide information about the General Plan Update and hear directly from the community. Participants were invited to share what they love about Laguna Niguel, their vision for the City's future, and challenges they believe the community may face over the next 20 years. More than 1,100 visitors stopped by one or more of the pop-up events.

- Sea Country Festival: August 25–27, 2023
- Summer Concert: September 22, 2023
- Laguna Niguel Girls Softball (LNGS) at Niguel Hills Middle School: October 15, 2023
- Laguna Niguel Youth Soccer League (AYSO) at Chapparosa Park: November 4, 2023
- Tree Lighting at City Hall: December 2, 2023
- Holiday Parade: December 9, 2023

OPEN HOUSE

On October 18, 2023, the City hosted a communitywide Open House at City Hall to help inform the public about the General Plan Update and solicit feedback on key topic areas, including short- and long-term strategic planning, land use/development, and mobility priorities. More than 70 participants attended the event.

To facilitate community input, the Open House featured a series of interactive stations staffed by the project team and City staff:

- **Strategic Planning Station:** Attendees shared their input on key community assets, priorities, and potential challenges

- **Land Use/Development Station:** Participants reviewed maps of four opportunity areas (The Marketplace, Town Center, Gateway Specific Plan, and the Chet Holifield Federal Building) and were asked to identify the types of uses, such as shopping/dining, housing, employment/jobs, public spaces, mixed-use development, or other, they would like to see there in the future.

- **Mobility Station:** Attendees were given five coins to spend across seven mobility improvements, allowing them to prioritize their transportation preferences for the City.

- **Support Stations:** Additional stations allowed participants to complete a survey, view and comment on specific areas of the City on a large interactive map, and speak directly to City staff regarding key questions and ideas.

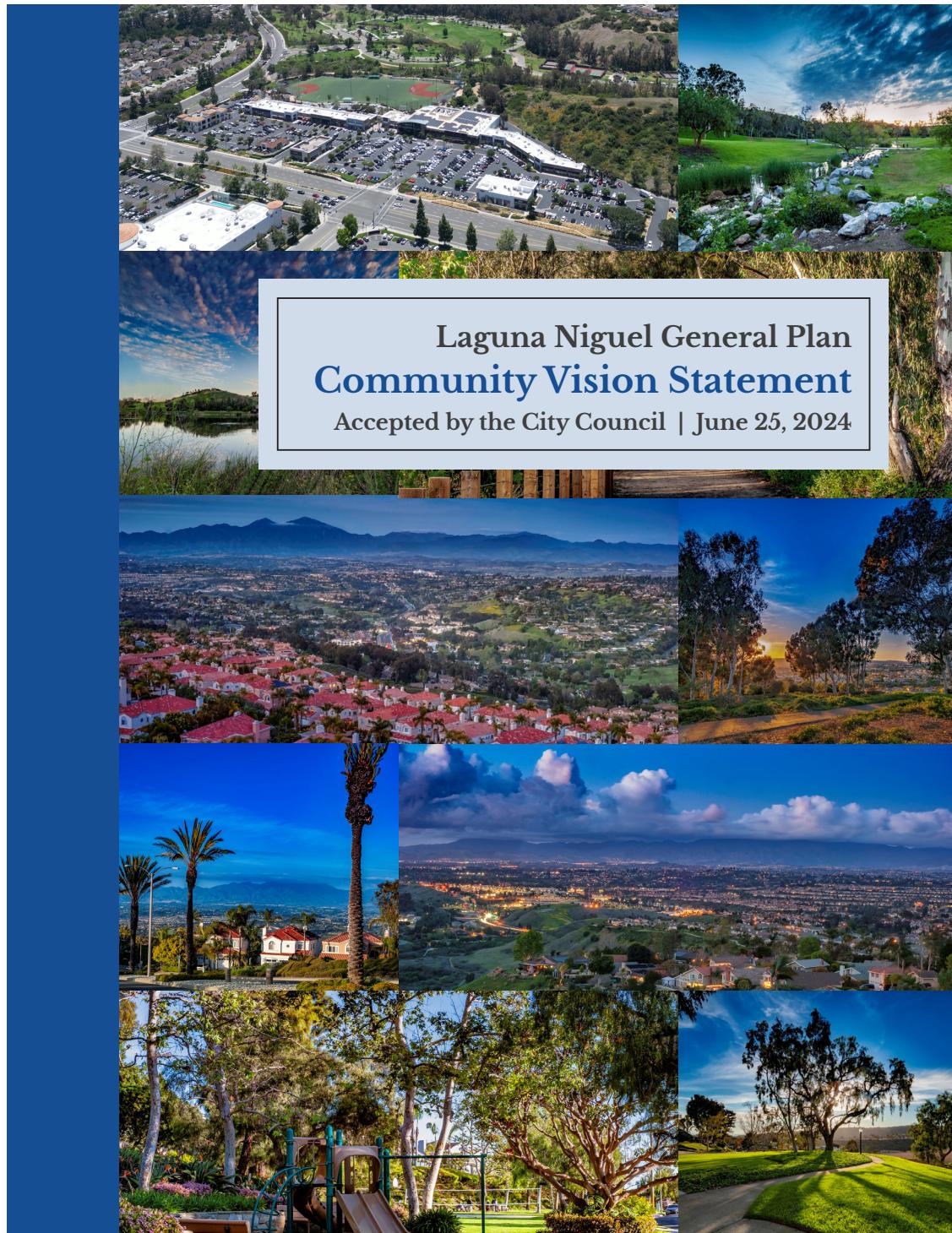
STAKEHOLDER GROUP MEETINGS

In addition to engaging the broader community, the project team and City staff provided updates and sought feedback from several City elected and appointed bodies and stakeholder groups, including:

- Laguna Niguel City Council
- Laguna Niguel City Commissions (Planning Commission, Planning, Traffic and Transportation, Parks and Recreation)
- Laguna Niguel Youth Committee
- Laguna Niguel Chamber of Commerce
- Other general stakeholder meetings

Development of a Community Vision Statement

Based on the extensive public input received, a Community Vision Statement was prepared to serve as the foundation for the General Plan. The Vision Statement and associated Guiding Principles, presented in full on the following pages, was reviewed by the Laguna Niguel City Council on June 25, 2024.



Laguna Niguel General Plan Community Vision

The Community Vision is a statement which describes the City of Laguna Niguel now and in the future.

Laguna Niguel is a visually stunning and welcoming Sea Country community recognized for its lush greenery, proximity to the Pacific Ocean, vast open spaces, safe neighborhoods, and fiscal responsibility.

Our park and trail system, variety of recreational programs, restaurants, shopping, school options, location, and climate make Laguna Niguel stand out in South County as a highly desirable place to live, do business, and visit. We have a strong and resilient economy supported by thriving businesses that meet the various needs of our residents. As a defining characteristic of this premiere master planned community, our established residential neighborhoods are valued, preserved, and protected. To promote multi-generational growth and vitality, key opportunity areas throughout the City accommodate a dynamic blend of appealing commercial spaces, entertainment options, and complementary residential offerings. A well-connected mobility network allows people of all ages and abilities to get around the community safely and efficiently using a variety of transportation options, including walking, cycling, driving, and taking transit.

We are committed to preserving and enhancing our natural and open space resources, providing well-maintained infrastructure, promoting community collaboration, and valuing innovation. Using a strategic planning mindset, we are prepared to successfully address any future opportunity or challenge the City may face over time.

The Community Vision is supported by the following Guiding Principles:

- » Thriving community
- » Strong and resilient economy
- » Environmental stewardship
- » Connecting people and places
- » Innovation for a better future



Thriving Community

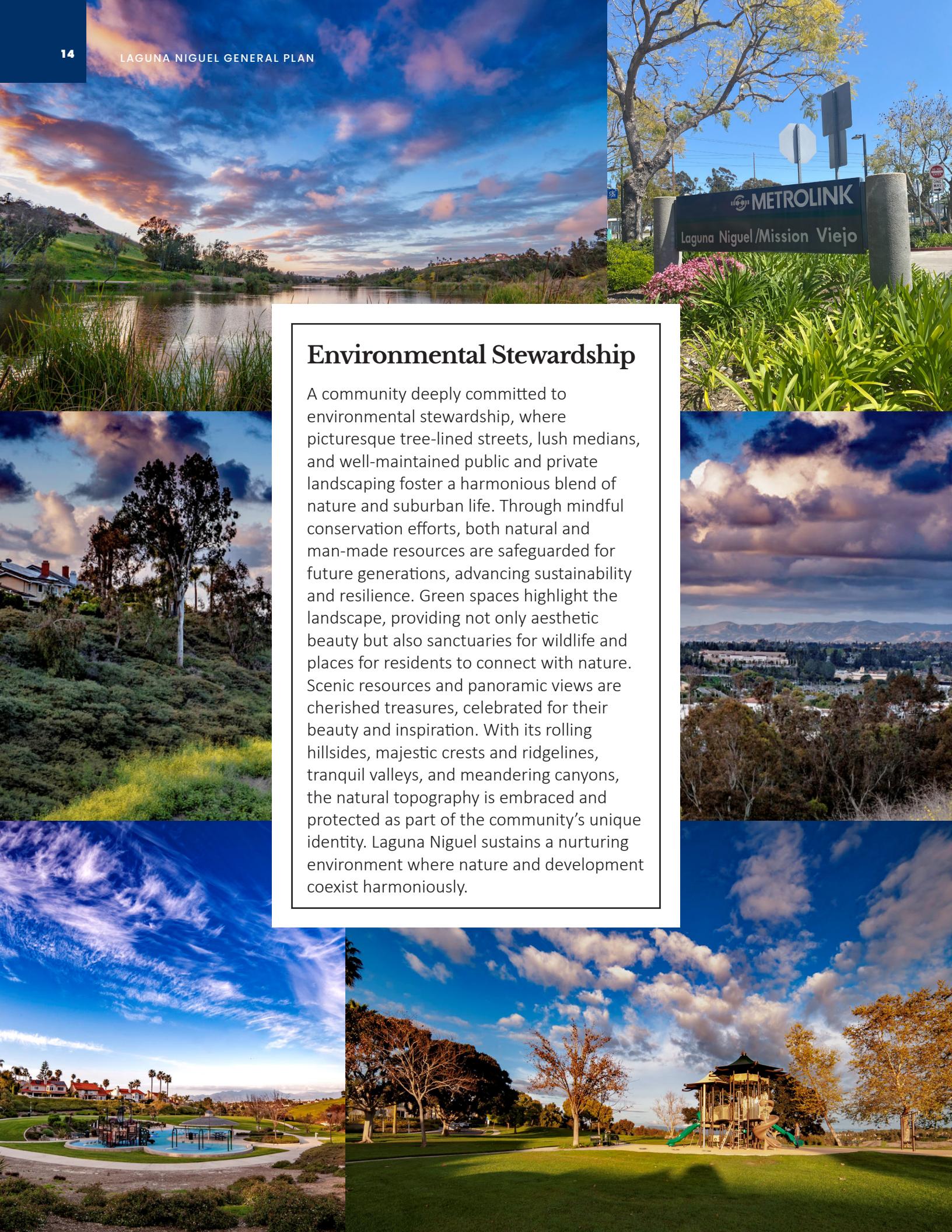
A thriving community where plentiful park and recreation options intertwine with engaging community events, fostering a deep sense of pride and connection among residents. Safe, clean, and quiet neighborhoods provide a serene backdrop, enhanced by thoughtful community aesthetics and design that reflect the area's character. Strategic integration of mixed-use development transforms opportunity areas into bustling hubs of activity. An informed community that flourishes on open communication and participation, creates space for all voices to be heard. Abundant activities for residents of all ages create a dynamic environment where every generation finds joy and purpose. In Laguna Niguel, every day brings new possibilities for connection and growth.





Strong & Resilient Economy

A strong and resilient economy where a diverse range of commercial settings and activities caters to the local community's needs and fosters an adaptable and responsive local job market. High-skill, high-wage jobs attract top talent and drive innovation, while fiscal responsibility and prudence underpin sustainable growth. A thoughtful mix of land uses accommodates a variety of needs, from commercial to residential, enhancing the community's functionality and appeal. Housing choices attainable for Laguna Niguel's next generation, community service providers and professionals, and also transitioning seniors, provide welcoming homes where everyone can thrive. This is a city where economic vitality and inclusive growth go hand in hand, building a prosperous future accessible to every member of the community.



Environmental Stewardship

A community deeply committed to environmental stewardship, where picturesque tree-lined streets, lush medians, and well-maintained public and private landscaping foster a harmonious blend of nature and suburban life. Through mindful conservation efforts, both natural and man-made resources are safeguarded for future generations, advancing sustainability and resilience. Green spaces highlight the landscape, providing not only aesthetic beauty but also sanctuaries for wildlife and places for residents to connect with nature. Scenic resources and panoramic views are cherished treasures, celebrated for their beauty and inspiration. With its rolling hillsides, majestic crests and ridgelines, tranquil valleys, and meandering canyons, the natural topography is embraced and protected as part of the community's unique identity. Laguna Niguel sustains a nurturing environment where nature and development coexist harmoniously.



Connecting People & Places

Seamlessly connecting people and places, transportation networks and public spaces weave a lively and accessible tapestry of activity. Mobility is paramount, but it's not just about getting from point A to point B; it's about enriching the journey itself. From the hills to the sea, every voyage through the community is a safe and enjoyable experience. Active transportation initiatives, such as promoting cycling and walking, and developing well-designed bike lanes and pedestrian paths, foster a culture of health and sustainability, while also reducing congestion and pollution. Smart traffic management systems optimize movement, promoting efficient flow and minimizing delays. Community-building events and activities transform public spaces into bustling centers of interaction, further weaving the fabric of social cohesion. Recognizing the profound impact of public spaces on community well-being, every plaza, park, and gathering spot becomes a catalyst for connection. This is a city where every path leads not just to a destination, but to a deeper sense of unity and belonging among its residents.





Innovation for a Better Future

Innovation fuels progress, propelling Laguna Niguel towards a brighter tomorrow.

Meticulously maintained and continually updated infrastructure forms the backbone of connectivity, laying the foundation for transformative change. By embracing new technologies, we enhance public services, making them more efficient, accessible, and responsive to the needs of our community members. Emerging businesses, fueled by entrepreneurial spirit and visionary thinking, breathe new life into the local economy, fostering growth and prosperity. Guided by strategic planning, we navigate the complexities of our evolving city with foresight and determination, seeing to it that every step forward brings us closer to realizing our collective potential. In Laguna Niguel innovation isn't just a buzzword; it's a guiding principle, shaping a better, more sustainable future for all.





Applying the General Plan

The General Plan is intended for use by City decision-makers, staff, developers, and community members to:

- Define goals and policies for land use, growth, transportation, environmental sustainability, economic development, and community services and facilities;
- Establish long-range conservation and growth goals and policies;
- Guide both public and private improvements to the City's infrastructure and transportation networks;
- Inform the City's Capital Improvement Program for projects related to transportation, parks, open space, and community facilities;
- Provide a basis for evaluating whether development proposals and public projects align with the City's goals and policies; and,
- Serve as a communication tool for Laguna Niguel's vision, goals, and policies over the next 20 years.

The General Plan applies to all land within the City's incorporated boundaries. Under State law, development projects, specific plans, zoning, subdivisions, and public agency projects must be consistent with the General Plan.

Interpreting the General Plan

In reading the General Plan, it should be inferred that the goals and policies are limited to the extent that it is financially feasible and appropriate for the City to carry the goals and policies out and to the extent legally permitted by law. For example, policies and measures which indicate that the City will “provide,” “support,” “ensure,” or otherwise require or carry out do not indicate an irreversible commitment of City funds or staff resources to those activities, but rather, that the City will support the goals and policies when the City deems that it is financially feasible and appropriate to do so. In some cases, the City will carry out various policies and measures by requiring development, infrastructure, and other projects to be consistent with the policies and actions of the General Plan. In other cases, the City may include General Plan items in the Capital Improvement Program, annual budget, or other implementation mechanisms, as the City deems appropriate.

How to Read Laguna Niguel’s General Plan

As the roadmap for future development and desired conditions, the General Plan is designed to be accessible to the general public, including residents, business owners, and the development community. Each element contains a brief introduction, a set of goals, and supporting policies aligned with the City’s long-term vision.

A “goal” is a broad, aspirational statement of community values. It is a generalized ideal which provides a sense of direction for action. A “policy” is a statement that provides more specific guidance to help achieve these goals. Policies inform City decisions but are not decisions themselves. While policies must be clear to be useful, they may range in terms of commitment of resources, importance, and anticipated outcomes. Recognizing these distinctions will help readers interpret the General Plan more effectively.



Policies contained within the General Plan that incorporate sustainable principles and practices are marked with a leaf symbol.

Amending the General Plan

The General Plan is intended to be a dynamic and evolving document that is responsive to the City's changing needs. It is based on an on-going assessment of current conditions and future projections. City decision-makers are afforded broad discretion in interpreting the General Plan and its purposes and are allowed to weigh and balance its various goals and policies when applying them.

Recognizing the need for a general plan to remain relevant and responsive to local priorities, State law allows periodic amendments. These updates help maintain alignment with the community's values, expectations, and evolving conditions. While specific findings may be applied on a case-by-case basis, the following minimum findings are required for any proposed amendment to a general plan:

- The amendment is deemed to be in the public interest;
- The amendment is consistent and/or compatible with the rest of the General Plan;
- The potential impacts of the amendment have been assessed and have been determined not to be detrimental to the public health, safety, or welfare; and
- The amendment has been processed in accordance with the applicable provisions of the California Government Code, the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and the City's Municipal Code.

Amendments initiated by the City or proposed by other public agencies are subject to the same process described above to ensure consistency and compatibility with the General Plan. This includes appropriate environmental review, public notice, and public hearings, and formal action by the City Council.



Timing

Under State law, the mandatory Elements of the General Plan may be amended up to four times per calendar year. State law further requires that the Housing Element must be reviewed and updated at least once every eight years.

Exemptions

Recognizing that occasions arise which require some flexibility, California Government Code Section 65358, allows certain amendments to be exempt from the four times per-year limitation. These exemptions include:

- Amendments to optional Elements.
- Amendments requested and necessary for affordable housing (Section 65358(c)).
- Amendments necessary to comply with a court decision in a case involving the legal adequacy of the General Plan (Section 65358(d)(1)).
- Amendments to ensure compliance with an airport land use plan (Section 65302.3).

Annual Reporting

Given the long-term nature of the General Plan, it is essential to periodically evaluate its effectiveness and track implementation of its policies. State law provides direction on maintaining the General Plan as a useful policy guide and requires the City to annually report “the status of the plan and progress in its implementation” to the City Council (California Government Code Section 65400(b)).

