

LAGUNA NIGUEL

GENERAL PLAN EXISTING CONDITIONS REPORT



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1 INTRODUCTION

California law requires every city and county to adopt a comprehensive, long-term general plan for its physical development and update it periodically. A city's General Plan serves as a blueprint for the future, guiding decision-making for growth and development through a framework of goals, policies, and programs. It addresses issues that impact the entire city, such as land use, building placement, transportation networks, parks and open space, and public safety. All city plans, zoning, and development projects must be consistent with the General Plan.

Laguna Niguel adopted its General Plan in 1992. Except for the Housing and Land Use Elements, most of the elements remain largely unchanged since that original adoption. As identified in the City's Laguna Niguel Strategic Plan under Goal No. 5: Economic and Community Development, Strategy No. 3, a comprehensive update of the General Plan is identified as an action item to be completed between Fiscal Years 2021-2025.



The General Plan Update process includes a two-phased approach:

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

This introductory chapter provides background on the City of Laguna Niguel, summarizes the contents of this Existing Conditions Report, and describes how the General Plan will be used to guide future planning and development decisions.

1.1 BACKGROUND

Laguna Niguel is home to approximately 64,0000 residents and is approximately 14.7 square miles in land area. This includes about 5.6 square miles (38%) for residential uses and 5.7 square miles (39%) designated to parks and open space, with the remaining 3.5 square miles (23%) dedicated to commercial uses, mixed uses, public/institutional facilities, and rights-of-way. In the 2025–2026 Fiscal year, the City of Laguna Niguel has a 80-million-dollar budget and has nearly a 56-million-dollar General Fund. Seventy-two percent (72%) of Laguna Niguel's 26,187 housing units are owner-occupied. Over one-third of Laguna Niguel is designated as open space and park area. This significant amount of open space is one of the key features defining the character and form of the City. The City has two community parks, 23 neighborhood parks, three mini-parks, one dog park, two county regional parks, two small county parks, and a skate park.

Key priorities for the City include well-planned growth, public safety, community aesthetics, economic development, and enhancing overall quality of life. This includes balancing the preservation of Laguna Niguel's established neighborhoods and facilitating high-quality development and economic growth in targeted areas that provide expanded opportunities for dining, entertainment, shopping, and public gathering spaces.

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. Their 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.

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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.

1.2 EXISTING CONDITIONS REPORT CONTENTS

The Existing Conditions Report (ECR) provides an overview of Laguna Niguel's existing land uses, community character, utilities, hazards, public safety, conservation, community health, and the regulatory framework. Maps, graphics, and tables are included throughout to complement the text and serve as visual references. In addition to providing a contextual summary of current conditions, the ECR will also serve as a resource for the "existing setting" sections of the project's PEIR. The following topic areas are addressed in the ECR:

Chapter 2 Land Use and Community Character

This chapter addresses Laguna Niguel's historical and current land use context, including the existing General Plan, land use patterns, local planning considerations, and community character. It provides a baseline of existing conditions to support the General Plan Update process and will be used when formulating and considering alternate growth and land use scenarios for the City.

For the purposes of the Laguna Niguel General Plan Update, the "Planning Area" studied is defined as the area within the City's jurisdictional boundary. It is the Planning Area that is included in the analysis and planning for the approximate 20-year horizon of the City's General Plan Update. This is discussed further in Chapter 2.



Chapter 3 Utilities and Community Services

This chapter describes the existing conditions and regulatory context regarding community services and utilities, including water, wastewater, stormwater and drainage, public safety services, parks and recreational resources, and schools within the City. These facilities and services provide a framework that supports growth and development in the City. This chapter describes existing service levels, available resources, and planned expansion of services and infrastructure.

Chapter 4 Hazards, Safety, and Noise

This chapter provides a summary of the existing setting and conditions associated with natural and human-made hazards that may pose a danger to City residents, employees, and visitors including: dangers from hazardous materials sites (i.e. Superfund sites, pipelines, and sites with the potential for chemical explosion); fire hazards; flood hazards; aircraft hazards; and emergency response. Known hazardous conditions listed in available state and county databases are also described.

Additionally, this chapter includes descriptions of the characteristics of sound and noise and a description of transportation, stationary, and construction noise sources within the City. A description of the noise monitoring survey results, tabularized noise exposure contours, and an existing conditions noise contour map that reflects traffic and stationary noise sources are included. This section also provides current information on ground vibration thresholds and summarizes the existing vibration environment.

Chapter 5 Conservation

This chapter discusses conservation issues related to cultural and historical resource preservation, air quality, greenhouse gases, biological resources, geologic and mineral resources, hydrology and water quality, and visual resources in and around the City. This chapter also discusses groundwater resources, hydrologic hazards, and geologic hazards.

Chapter 6 Community Health and Wellness

This chapter addresses a wide range of topics related to the health and well-being of City residents and workers. A community's overall health depends on many factors, including the environment in which people live and work. A healthy living environment reduces risks and facilitates healthy lifestyles. Key indicators used to establish a community health baseline include: obesity rates, opportunities for physical activity, healthy food and healthcare access, and local health and wellness programs.

Chapter 7 Regulatory Environment

This chapter outlines the regulatory framework guiding the General Plan Update, including applicable federal, state, and local laws, policies, and programs.

Appendix A Glossary of Key Terms

A glossary of key words and acronyms to support the Existing Conditions Report is included as Appendix A.



1.3 GENERAL PLAN OVERVIEW

State law requires every city and county in California to prepare and maintain a planning document called a general plan. 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.

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 covers a wide range of topics, including the following state-mandated elements: land use, circulation/mobility, housing, conservation, open space, noise, and safety.. Cities and counties with identified disadvantaged communities must also address environmental justice in their general plans. Communities may also include optional elements to reflect local priorities.
- **Long-Range.** A general plan provides guidance on achieving a long-range vision for the future a city or county. To help achieve this vision, a general plan includes goals and policies that address both near-term and long-term needs. The City of Laguna Niguel General Plan Update will look ahead approximately 20 years.

- **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.

1.4 USING THE GENERAL PLAN

The General Plan is used by the City Council, appointed commissions and committees, and City staff to make decisions with direct and indirect land use implications. It also provides a framework for inter-jurisdictional coordination of planning efforts among officials and staff of the City and other government agencies such as the county, state, and federal agencies.

The General Plan is the basis for a variety of regulatory mechanisms and administrative procedures. California Planning Law requires consistency between the General Plan and its implementation programs. They include zoning and subdivision ordinances, capital improvement programs, specific plans, environmental impact procedures, and building and housing codes.

Over time, the City's population will change, its goals will be redefined, and the physical environment in which its residents live and work will be altered. In order for the General Plan to be a useful document, it must be monitored and periodically revised to respond to and reflect changing conditions and needs. As such, a general plan should be comprehensively updated approximately every 15–20 years to reflect current conditions and emerging trends.

The City's General Plan should also be user-friendly. To this end, the Laguna Niguel General Plan Update is divided into two primary documents: 1) the Existing Conditions Report (ECR), which provides a snapshot of current conditions, and 2) the General Plan Policy Document, which outlines the City's goals and policies to guide future decisions-making.

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