

POLICY TOPIC PAPER 1.0: SPECIFIC PLANS AND SPECIAL PLANNING AREAS



BACKGROUND

The City uses a number of tools to guide and manage development. In addition to the General Plan, there are a number of Specific Plans and Special Planning Areas (SPAs), which are listed below and shown in the attached map. Some Specific Plans and SPAs were established by the County prior to incorporation and were carried forward by the City.

Adopted Specific Plans

- East Elk Grove Specific Plan (adopted by Sacramento County, 1996)
- East Franklin Specific Plan (adopted by Sacramento County, 2000)
- Laguna Ridge Specific Plan (adopted 2004)

Adopted Special Planning Areas

- Laguna Community/Floodplain SPA (adopted by Sacramento County, 1985)
- Elk Grove-Florin and Bond Roads SPA (adopted by Sacramento County, 1985)
- Laguna Gateway SPA (adopted by Sacramento County, 1999)
- Calvine Road/Highway 99 SPA (adopted by Sacramento County, 1999)
- Lent Ranch Marketplace (adopted 2003, amended 2014)
- Elk Grove Triangle SPA (adopted 2004)
- Elk Grove Old Town SPA (adopted 2005)
- Elk Grove Auto Mall SPA (adopted 2006, amended 2016)
- CMD Court SPA (adopted 2008)
- Silverado Village SPA (adopted 2014)
- Southeast Policy Area (adopted 2014)
- Calvine Meadows SPA (adopted 2016)

Specific plans are just that—specific plans for the systematic implementation of the general plan. They are prescribed in State law and have several required components, including identifying proposed major components of infrastructure needed to support planned land uses. Specific plans are used to refine the policies of the general plan for a defined geographic area.

SPAs are a zoning tool inherited from the County after incorporation. The SPA process allows the City to establish unique planning standards and regulations that otherwise could not be provided through the application of the City’s standard zoning districts. In practice, an SPA is a zoning district just like any other district. Many communities around the State have similar tools but refer to them by other names, including planned unit developments.

As the City continues to grow and approach buildout, the need for some of these planning documents may no longer exist. Some of these plans were established as tools to facilitate initial development of the properties and may not be effective in managing the properties long term.

Additionally, some plans may be outdated, meaning that the goals and objectives for the plan could be achieved through the City’s newer Zoning regulations (Elk Grove Municipal Code Title 23, hereafter referred to as the Zoning Code) and Citywide Design Guidelines, or more importantly, that the objectives of the older plan may be inconsistent with the updated General Plan.

This paper provides a summary of Specific Plans and SPAs that are good candidates for repeal through this General Plan update process.

Specific Plans

The City’s three Specific Plans are intended to guide initial development of their respective areas. The policies and programs of each describe the process of constructing backbone infrastructure, designing subdivisions, and producing development standards for buildings. Of these three plans, two—East Elk Grove and East Franklin—are near buildout. Table 1.0-1 summarizes their development status.

Table 1.0-1: Development Status for East Elk Grove and East Franklin Specific Plans

	East Elk Grove Specific Plan		East Franklin Specific Plan	
	Acres	Percent of Total	Acres	Percent of Total
Vacant No Project	7.4	1%	11.9	1%
Vacant Pending Project	63.1	5%	0	0%
Approved Projects/ In Construction	245.3	20%	22.9	1%
Utility	-	-	7.0	0.4%
Developed	793.9	65%	1767.7	94%
Preserved	109.9	9%	66.2	4%
TOTAL	1,219.6	100%	1,875.7	100%

East Elk Grove Specific Plan

The East Elk Grove Specific Plan area encompasses 1,219± acres and is 94 percent built out, with the remaining land either vacant or pending project approval. These lands consist of the Fieldstone properties along Grant Line Road and the Crooked Creek project along Waterman Road (currently under review), as well as three smaller areas along Bond Road and Waterman Road. There are still backbone infrastructure facilities to be completed; the infrastructure planned for East Elk Grove is not currently covered by a funding source or public facilities financing plan (a “financing plan”). Rather, each project is required to complete what is necessary to serve its needs.

East Franklin Specific Plan

The East Franklin Specific Plan area encompasses 1,875± acres and is 99.4 percent built out, with no properties remaining for subdivision. Undeveloped property is limited to one school site, a Sacramento County Water Agency treatment plant and several well sites, one approved multifamily residential property, and one other unapproved multifamily development listed in the Housing Element.

Laguna Ridge Specific Plan

The third Specific Plan, Laguna Ridge, was adopted by the City in 2004 and continues to build out. Approximately 40 percent of the plan is developed or in construction, with the majority of the balance approved for construction. Staff is not recommending any changes as this area is actively developing. Staff does recommend that funding be provided to republish the Specific Plan to reflect text and map amendments that have occurred since its adoption in 2004.

Special Planning Areas

Staff has reviewed the SPAs in the City. Most provide for the long-term development *and management* of land within their plan boundaries, such as the Lent Ranch Marketplace, Elk Grove Triangle, Old Town, and Auto Mall. Therefore, these plans remain relevant for managing the land within the plan area. However, three SPAs may no longer be necessary; they are discussed in further detail below.

Laguna Community/Floodplain SPA

The Laguna Community/Floodplain SPA applies to areas along Laguna Creek/Elk Grove Creek between Elk Grove Boulevard and Bruceville Road and, today, encompasses approximately 150 acres. The original intent of this SPA was to protect the floodplain along Laguna and Elk Grove Creeks. The SPA limits development to uses allowed in the AR-5 zone, meaning it limits development to a 5-acre minimum lot area, and limits uses to residential and agricultural activities. Over the 20-plus years since initial adoption by the County Board of Supervisors, properties have gradually been removed from the SPA and placed into other zoning districts (e.g., office, residential, and commercial) as part of specific development applications. As of 2016, the bulk of the developable property remaining in this SPA is located between Sheldon Road, Bruceville Road, Big Horn Road, and Lewis Stein Road. This remaining area currently has a General Plan designation of Rural Residential.

Laguna Gateway SPA

The Laguna Gateway SPA applies to the retail areas around Laguna Boulevard and Elk Grove Creek. It also applies to the State office properties along Elk Grove Creek and encompasses

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approximately 100 acres. The intent of this SPA was to guide land planning and design and include some design guidelines for new development. Since the Board of Supervisors adopted this SPA in the 1990s, the City has established the Citywide Design Guidelines, which provide guidance for new development and redevelopment. Additionally, the majority of sites in this SPA have been developed.

Calvine Road/Highway 99 SPA

The Calvine Road/Highway 99 SPA covers the area south of Calvine Road, east of State Route 99, north of Sheldon Road, and west of Fire Station 76. It encompasses 530± acres. This SPA divided the plan area into several subareas under a concept of villages served by core commercial areas at Sheldon/East Stockton and Sheldon/Power Inn. At this time, the remaining vacant and underutilized lands are concentrated to the retail properties along Sheldon Road and a handful of low-density residential sites along Bow Street. The development standards adopted in this SPA deviate from the Citywide standards, including a reduced residential front yard setback of 12.5 feet.

PROPOSED ACTIONS

Given the varied status of each of the Specific Plans and SPAs, staff is recommending targeted changes for some areas.

Specific Plans

In the case of the City's Specific Plans, staff is recommending that the East Elk Grove Specific Plan and the East Franklin Specific Plan be removed from the Elk Grove Municipal Code and be superseded by Title 23 (Zoning). The reasons for this are:

- **Planning Simplification**—Three planning documents cover these areas: General Plan, Specific Plan, and Zoning. In some cases, the Specific Plans override a development standard in the Zoning Code; where the Specific Plans are silent, the Zoning Code applies. Any requests for development information require review and summary of all three documents. Repealing the Specific Plans would make the Zoning Code the sole resource for development standards, eliminating confusion, redundancy, and potential conflicts.

Both Specific Plans include development standards that deviate from Citywide Zoning. The majority of the nonconforming issues arise in the standards for lot area and dimensions. There are a few cases where the setback standards are also an issue. This information could be folded into the Zoning Code, creating more certainty for residents when referencing the standards. The standards that would apply would be the ones in

effect at time of initial development, which would minimize nonconforming structures and provide consistency from a code enforcement standpoint.

- **Simplify Future Development**—In the case of East Elk Grove, repealing the Specific Plan would mean that only the General Plan and Zoning for specific properties would need to be modified if future development were to deviate from the General Plan land use plan. This is important since the East Elk Grove Specific Plan provides a limit on development on a site-by-site basis. Some projects have underdeveloped, leaving a reserve for future projects. If the plan is repealed, General Plan land use designations and density ranges would drive unit capacity. Projects would still need to be consistent with the General Plan, but a site-by-site analysis of unit capacity would not be required.
- **Reflect Changes in Engineering**—Both Specific Plans identify infrastructure necessary to serve future development. While much of this infrastructure in East Franklin has been completed, there are still facilities in East Elk Grove that need to be completed. The infrastructure planned for East Elk Grove is not addressed in a public facilities financing plan. Rather, each remaining project is required to be completed only what is necessary to serve its needs. For remaining projects (primarily along Elk Grove Creek), alternative designs provide economic opportunities for landowners while not requiring major changes to existing facilities. Repeal of the Specific Plans, therefore, would eliminate the need for plan amendments.
- **Reflect Completion/Changes in Financing Plans**—Specific plans are required, under State law, to have financing plans. Both East Elk Grove and East Franklin included these components at the time of plan adoption. However, as time has gone on and the City has incorporated, the components of the financing plan have been completed, sunset, or addressed through other developer-responsible mechanisms that do not include impact fee program(s). To resolve these issues, particularly in the East Elk Grove area where some development still remains, the City would need to either create a new financing plan or remove the Specific Plan.

To address these potential objectives and issues, staff recommends establishing overlay zoning districts for both Specific Plan areas. These overlays would modify the development standards for the base districts so that they match the current Specific Plan standards. Homeowners would then refer to this new table for information about their property, such as during a remodel or addition. By having an overlay district, individual properties are held to consistent development standards without the complexity of maintaining the Specific Plans.

In the case of the East Elk Grove Specific Plan, residential development limits, requirements for density feathering, use compatibility along Waterman Road and the southern end of Grant Line

Road, and protection of sensitive natural resources are key policy components of the Specific Plan that, in some cases, were hard-fought victories for the Community Advisory Committee that helped develop the plan. For these issues (and others that may be identified), the General Plan would carry these important policies forward. This could be done either as a specific set of policies within one or more chapters/topic elements of the General Plan, or could be addressed in a new Community Plan, similar to what was done for the Southeast Policy Area. See the *Community and Area Plans* policy topic paper for more information on this idea.

Special Planning Areas

As previously mentioned, most of the City's SPAs continue to provide for the long-term development *and management* of land within their plan boundaries, but three exceptions merit further study. These are identified below, along with recommended actions:

- **Laguna Community/Floodplain SPA**—For this SPA, staff recommends repealing the SPA and adopting new General Plan land use designations as part of the General Plan update that reflect a long-term vision for the area. Depending upon the complexity of this vision, the site would either be concurrently rezoned to one or more existing Zoning districts that implement the visions, or it could be placed into a new “urban reserve” Zoning district that would serve as a “holding” district until detailed development standards were developed.
- **Laguna Gateway SPA**—As mentioned previously, the vast majority of this SPA has been developed, and the City has additional design resources beyond those existing under the County at the time of the SPA's creation. Additionally, there is a pending development project to remove properties along Dunisch Road from the SPA. Therefore, staff recommends repealing the SPA and superseding it by rezoning this area to SC (Shopping Center) and BP (Office) zoning districts, consistent with the current uses and existing General Plan designations.
- **Calvine Road/Highway 99 SPA**—This SPA is also mostly built out and remaining vacant/underutilized lands are concentrated to the retail properties along Sheldon Road and a handful of residential sites along Bow Street. For reasons similar to those described for the East Elk Grove and East Franklin Specific Plans, staff recommends retiring this SPA and replacing it with an overlay zone that maintains the modified setbacks for existing single-family development. Any new development (e.g., infill single-family or commercial) would be reviewed for consistency with the Citywide Zoning and Design Guidelines.

IMPLEMENTATION

Most of these recommendations would be achieved as part of the General Plan update, including concurrent rezoning of properties for consistency. The one exception may be the Laguna Community/Floodplain SPA, which may require additional and more advanced development standards than currently exist in the Zoning Code. If this is the case, staff recommends the creation of a new Urban Reserve Zone, which would designate the area for urban development in the future, pending development of detailed site master planning. Essentially, the Urban Reserve Zone would be a “holding” designation.

For the Specific Plan areas, staff recommends the consideration of community plans or area plans as a way to maintain unique goals and policies for each area while eliminating the burden of maintaining the plans.

In some instances, approved development projects exist within these Specific Plans or SPAs (e.g., the Fieldstone and Waterman Triangle projects in East Elk Grove). At this time, as the underlying density/intensity and use of the development is not anticipated to change with this General Plan update, the projects would maintain their development approvals pursuant to the Elk Grove Municipal Code 23.18.020 so long as those approvals were exercised within the specified time periods. Further, and because of this continued consistency, prior environmental analysis and adopted mitigation measures for these projects would likely still be applicable pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines Section 15162. This section of the Guidelines only requires subsequent analysis (a subsequent environmental impact report or negative declaration) if:

1. Substantial changes have been made to the project;
2. Substantial changes have occurred with respect to the circumstances under which the project was undertaken; or
3. New information of substantial importance has become known.

As the density/intensity and use of these proposed projects would not change and if no new information has been brought forward, the prior analysis and mitigation would continue to be applicable and no further analysis would be necessary.

Additionally, the adoption of the updated General Plan will include a new programmatic Environmental Impact Report (EIR), which would consider development of these sites under the restructured policies and regulations. Any new information or changes would be considered under this EIR.

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis contained in this policy topic paper, staff recommends the following. Commission and Council direction on these items will be consolidated with that provided on other key policy topics to inform the direction and contents of the draft General Plan update.

Policy Topic I.0: Specific Plans and Special Planning Areas

- 1.1. Repeal the East Elk Grove Specific Plan and East Franklin Specific Plan. Follow this up with the following actions:
 - a. Establish an overlay zoning district for each plan area to retain development standards unique to the plan area in Title 23 Zoning.
 - b. Incorporate key policy components of the East Elk Grove Specific Plan into the General Plan through a new Community Plan.
- 1.2. Repeal the Laguna Community/Floodplain SPA, and establish a new future land plan for the area in the General Plan.
- 1.3. Repeal the Laguna Gateway SPA and rezone properties in the area to SC (Shopping Center) and BP (Office) zoning districts, consistent with the current uses and the General Plan.
- 1.4. Repeal the Calvine Road/Highway 99 SPA and establish an overlay zoning district to retain development standards unique to the plan area in Title 23 Zoning.

