

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 What is the General Plan?

Each California city and county is required to prepare and administer a long-term, comprehensive planning policy document that details how the city will physically develop. This document - the General Plan - contains seven mandated *elements* that pertain to specific aspects of development of the community:

- land use;
- circulation,
- housing,
- open space,
- conservation,
- safety and
- noise.

The primary goal of the General Plan is to facilitate a well-planned community. Firebaugh's success in fulfilling this goal will depend on how well the City adheres to the General Plan. In this regard, the General Plan can:

- guide City staff, the Planning Commission and City Council on land use, circulation, and capital improvement decisions;
- inform the public where certain types of development will occur in the community;
- educate the public on how Firebaugh's resources will be managed; and
- provide the private sector with a document upon which it can base investment decisions.

1.2 Authority

Authority for preparation and administration of the Firebaugh General Plan comes from the State of California's planning law. Specifically, Section 65300 of the State Government Code establishes the authority of cities and counties to regulate land use and development through preparation and administration of a general plan.



Firebaugh's vision and expectations for its future are best expressed through its General Plan. The General Plan may be viewed as a community "blueprint" for the future. Specifically, Firebaugh's residents have expressed their vision and expectations for the future in the goals, policies and action programs contained in the General Plan. In addition, the land use and circulation maps included in the General Plan provide a visual display of how land uses and roadways will be arranged in Farmersville.

1.3 Firebaugh

Firebaugh is located in Fresno County in the central-western portion of the San Joaquin Valley. It is located on State Route 33, a north/south highway that serves the west side of the Valley. Firebaugh is situated along the west side of the San Joaquin River, adjacent to Madera County.

Firebaugh is 35 miles west of Fresno, the county seat of Fresno County, and eight miles northwest of Mendota, the closest incorporated city.

1.4 How the General Plan Was Prepared

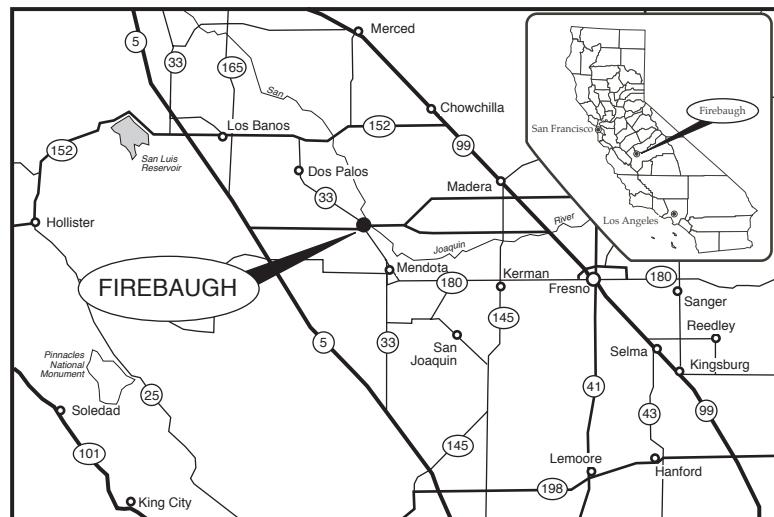
The City of Firebaugh awarded a contract for preparation of the General Plan and Environmental Impact Report (EIR) to Collins & Schoettler Planning Consultants in July, 2005. Collins & Schoettler also retained the services of several consultants with expertise in specific areas, including

- VRPA Technologies – circulation, air quality and noise assessment
- Live Oak Consultants – wildlife/biology assessment

Beginning in September, 2005 Collins & Schoettler worked with a General Plan Update committee – a group of individuals interested in the general plan and the future of Firebaugh. These meetings were open to any interested persons and included various members of the Planning Commission, City Council and residents of the community. The group generally met once per month and started by educating themselves on the basics of city planning, contents of the general plan and development processes.

A highlight of the Committee was a bus tour to view various examples of cutting edge “smart growth” developments in cities in central California, including Patterson, Turlock, Lodi, Sacramento, Davis and Suisun City. Local planners from each community boarded the bus and explained how projects being viewed came about.

Map 1-1
Regional Location



Participants were able to walk through certain projects to get a “hands on” feeling.

The Committee continued to work with the consultant and city staff in formulating goals, policies and objectives to guide Firebaugh’s growth, and crafting a map showing the location of future land uses in and around Firebaugh.

1.5 Planning Boundaries

There are two boundaries that are important with respect to the Firebaugh General Plan (see also Map 1-2):

1. **City limits.** The city controls the use and development of land within the Firebaugh city limits. As of February, 2006 Firebaugh’s city limits contained 2,309 acres or 3.6 square miles. The location of the city limits boundary is shown on Map 1-2.
2. **Sphere of Influence (SOI).** The SOI is a line that is typically situated outside the city limits boundary and marks where the city is expected to grow (by annexations). As of February, 2006 Firebaugh’s SOI contained approximately 3,410 acres or 5.3 square miles. The location of the SOI is also shown on Map 1-2.

1.6 Time Frame

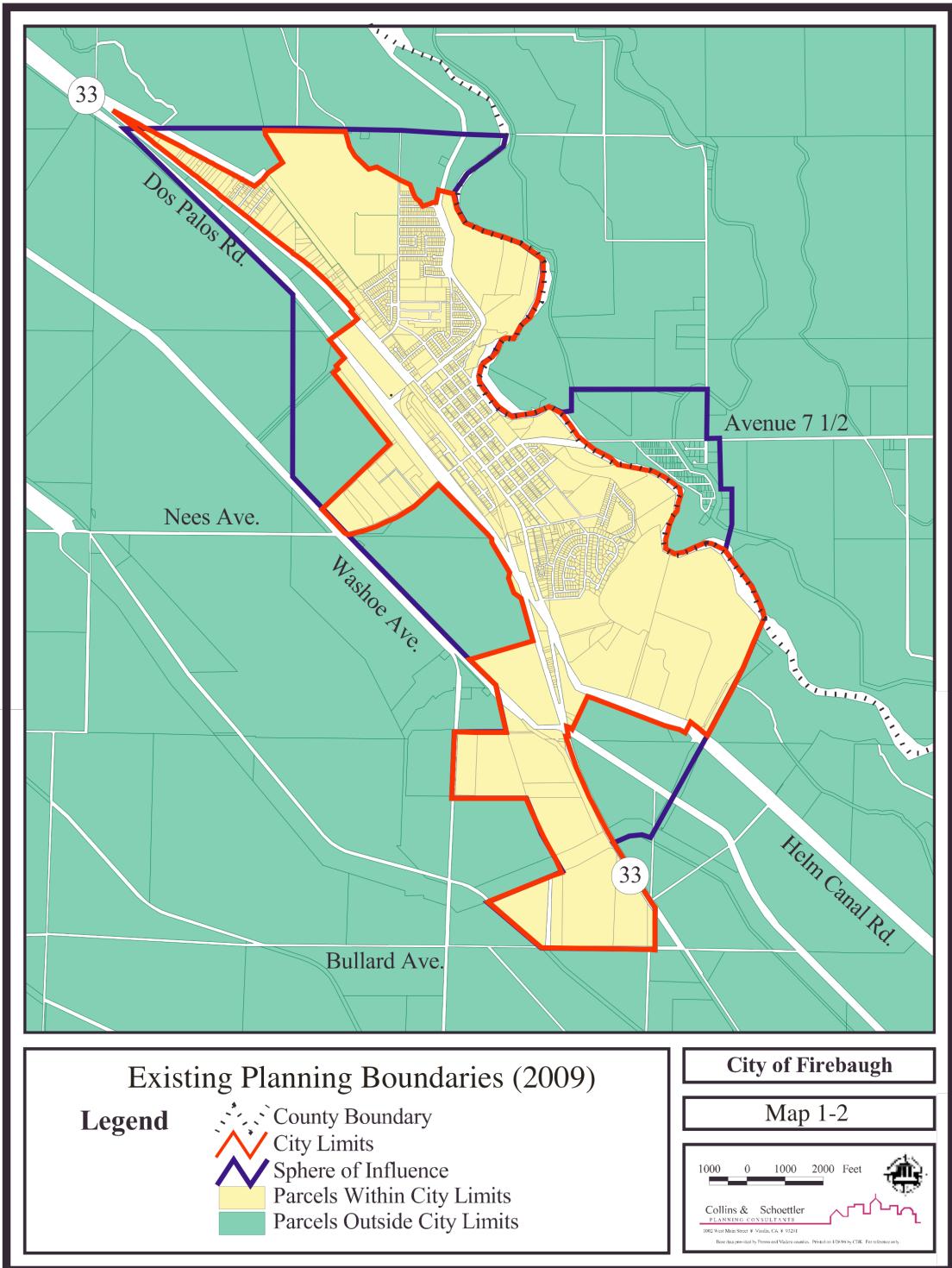
The Firebaugh General Plan is adopted to guide growth and development through the year 2030 – a span of approximately 21 years (2009 – 2030). In order to ensure the Plan remains a meaningful document, it should undergo a comprehensive review every five years. In particular the Plan’s policies and land use map should be reviewed and adjusted as necessary to ensure they accurately reflect conditions and expectations.

1.7 General Plan Objectives

A broad set of guiding objectives, agreed upon by the City Council, Planning Commission and the General Plan Committee are listed to the previous page.

Table 1-1
General Plan Objectives

- o project Firebaugh’s future growth and make provisions for this growth through the General Plan;
- o create a unique and attractive city by investing in projects that will enhance Firebaugh’s appearance and marketability;
- o provide a safe and pleasant environment and enhance property values throughout the community by avoiding and eliminating land use conflicts;
- o promote increased sales tax revenue in Firebaugh by providing sufficient land for a wide range of commercial uses.
- o Protect and preserve natural resources, such as farmland, air and water quality and native vegetation, while facilitating growth of the community.
- o provide for a greater variety of housing choices and shopping opportunities; Provide an adequate supply of housing opportunities, affordable to all economic segments of the community.
- o ensure that there are adequate public facilities to serve Firebaugh in the future;
- o ensure that Firebaugh’s infrastructure system can effectively serve the land use framework;
- o enhance the character of Firebaugh by creating an improved and revitalized downtown area;
- o promote economic development and enhanced employment opportunities in Firebaugh by designating sufficient land for industrial uses, retail stores, and office parks;
- o recognize the changing conditions and trends in the planning area and market place and make appropriate amendments to the General Plan;
- o recognize past land use approval actions and adopted land use policies;



1.8 Organization of the Firebaugh General Plan

The General Plan is organized to facilitate ease of use. The Plan is divided into two Parts:

1. **The General Plan.** In addition to this introductory chapter, this part includes the six elements of the plan referenced to the right:

- Land Use Element
- Circulation Element
- Open Space and Conservation Element
- Noise Element
- Safety Element

Note: The Housing Element has been prepared separately

2. **Community Profile.** This part includes background information on the City of Firebaugh, and is sectioned into three parts, each with its own subsections:

- Human Environment
 - History
 - Population
 - Socioeconomic Conditions
 - Housing
 - Public Services
 - Land Use
 - Infrastructure
 - Circulation
- Physical Environment
 - Climate
 - Topography
 - Soils
 - Geology
 - Seismicity
 - Water
 - Flooding
- Resources
 - Visual Environment

The six elements of Firebaugh's General Plan:

Land Use

The land use element details how future land uses will be arranged and what form they will take

Circulation

The circulation element shows where future roadways will travel and what kinds of traffic roadways will likely carry. Other modes of transportation, like bicycles, walking and transit are also considered.

Open Space & Conservation

The open space/parks and conservation element plans for recreational needs and also sets forth policies to conserve resources, such as agricultural land and air quality.

Housing

The housing element includes policies and action programs to ensure that housing is provided for all of Orange Cove's income groups.

Safety

The safety element establishes policies to ensure future citizens and property are as free as possible from safety hazards

Noise

The noise element provides policies designed to minimize the impacts of noise on new development.

- Agriculture
- Biotic Resources
- Cultural and Historic Resources
- Air Quality
- Water Quality

1.9 Environmental Impact Report (EIR)

In addition to the General Plan and Community Profile, the City has prepared a draft and final Environmental Impact Report to assess potential impacts of the General Plan on the environment. Preparation of an EIR for the General Plan is required by the California Environmental Quality Act (Section 21000 of the State Public Resources Code).

1.10 Relationship to Other Plans, Policies and Documents

In preparing and administering the Firebaugh General Plan, the City must be aware that other plans, policies and laws affect growth and development in the community. A brief summary of these documents is as follows:

Firebaugh Policies and Ordinances

- **Firebaugh Zoning Ordinance.** This set of rules divides the city into various zones and regulates what types of uses are permitted and how property within each zone may be developed.
- **Firebaugh Subdivision Ordinance.** These rules apply to the subdivision of land within the city and specify what types of improvements are required when lots are created, including but not limited to streets, water, sewer, storm drainage, street lamps, parks and other public facilities.
- **Standard specifications.** This document includes drawings that show how public improvements must be designed, including such items as streets, water, sewer, and storm drainage lines among other facilities.
- **Firebaugh Redevelopment Plan.** The Firebaugh Redevelopment Agency (RDA) was established in 1983 with the mission to eliminate blight in designated redevelopment areas of Firebaugh. The



City and the RDA have formulated and adopted a redevelopment plan, including several major amendments. The areas within the redevelopment plan currently cover approximately 853 acres and were found to have a significant amount of blighted conditions, including substandard housing and other structures, poorly maintained properties and some instances of deficiencies related to infrastructure (streets, water, sewer, storm drainage, etc.). The RDA is tasked with utilizing tax revenues to improve conditions within the project areas. Twenty percent of the RDA's revenues must be utilized for low income housing programs. The Firebaugh City Council acts as the Redevelopment Agency Board and the City Manager as the Executive Director.



Other Agencies

Policies and standards are maintained by other agencies that may affect growth and development in Firebaugh. The most important include

- **Fresno County General Plan.** Similar to Firebaugh's General Plan, the County General Plan establishes policies to guide growth and development on unincorporated land around Firebaugh. Closely related to the General Plan, the Fresno County Zoning Ordinance regulates the use and development of land within the County.
- **Fresno Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo).** With respect to Firebaugh, this agency reviews and takes action on requests for annexations of land. Among other requirements, LAFCo must find that the City can adequately serve development on land that is being annexed. The City and County of Fresno have entered into a tax sharing agreement that governs annexations. Whenever land is annexed from the County to the City, the tax sharing agreement provides a mechanism that divides a portion of property and sales tax between both agencies.
- **San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District** maintains the San Joaquin Valley Air Quality Attainment Plan. This Plan includes policies and standards to improve air quality in the San Joaquin

Valley air basin to ensure the basin meets state and federal air quality standards. The District has oversight with respect to development in Firebaugh, including regulations that pertain to businesses and industry that may generate air pollution. The District also has regulations to ensure that dust is controlled during the construction of new development.

- **Council of Fresno County Governments** (COG) acts as a voluntary association of local governments, providing a cooperative body for the discussion and resolution of issues which go beyond their individual boundaries. The COG works with cities and the County on a variety of common policies particularly related to transportation and air quality. The Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) is a document prepared by COG that establishes programs and policies for congressional management, transit, bicycles and pedestrians, roadways, and freight countywide, including Firebaugh.
- **Regional Water Quality Control Board** has jurisdiction over certain aspects of development related to water quality. In particular the Board regulates the operation of Firebaugh's wastewater collection and disposal system. The Board also has jurisdiction over storm drainage and runoff from construction sites.



1.11 All Actions of a City Must be Consistent with the General Plan

City decisions that are not consistent with the General Plan place that community in a legally tenuous position and subject to legal challenge. In Friends of "B" Street et. al. v. City of Hayward, et. al., 106 Cal. App. 3d 988 (1980), the court concluded that construction of public improvements (e.g. street projects, sewer lines, etc.) must be consistent with the General Plan. Further, the court stated that the General Plan essentially is the constitution for all future development within the city.

A General Plan, which is internally inconsistent, lacks one or more of the mandatory elements, or is lacking required information, can potentially prevent a city from issuing land use approvals, including building permits, zone changes, and subdivisions, if the Court finds that any one

of the aforementioned conditions exist (Sierra Club v. Kern County, 126 Cal. App. 3d 698, 704 (1981); Resource Defense Fund v. County of Santa Cruz, 133 Cal. App. 3d 800, 803 (1982); Camp v. Mendocino, 123 Cal. App. 3d 334 (1981)).

For example, the Firebaugh Housing Element may include a policy that states that the city provide adequate sites for a range of housing types, including multi-family residential uses. The Land Use Element would have to be consistent with this policy by designating sufficient land area for this type of development.

Another example of inter-element consistency involves the use of population projections, which is the basis for future land needs for housing units and other types of land uses. The Land Use and Housing Elements must use the same population projections in their needs analysis to avoid inter-element inconsistencies.