INTRODUCTION

Oasis On The Sun

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California state law requires each city and county to adopt a general plan "for the physical development of the county or city, and any land outside its boundaries which bears relation to its planning" (§65300). The California Supreme Court has called the General Plan the "constitution for future development." Avenal's General Plan expresses the community's development goals and embodies public policy relative to the distribution of future land uses, both public and private. State law specifies that each General Plan address seven issue areas: land use, circulation, open space, conservation, housing, safety and noise.

The Avenal General Plan provides comprehensive planning for the future. It encompasses what the City is now, what it intends to be, and provides the overall framework of how to achieve this future condition. Estimates are made about future population, household types and employment, so that plans for land use, circulation and public facilities can be made to meet future needs. The General Plan represents an agreement on the fundamental values and a vision that is shared by the residents and the business community of Avenal and the surrounding area of interest. Its purpose is to provide decision makers and staff of the City of Avenal with direction for confronting present issues, as an aid in coordinating planning issues with other governmental agencies, and for navigating the future.

- The Land Use Element provides the central policy context on which to base all land use decision-making in Avenal. It is through the implementation of the goals, objectives and polices and standards that the future land use pattern of Avenal will continue to be shaped.

- The Housing Element looks at the current and future need for housing units, the capacity in the City for additional units, the types of households that will need some form of assistance or special housing, and ways to perpetuate existing housing.

- Transportation routes, design standards for streets, and current and future traffic levels on City streets are among the issues covered in the Circulation Element of the General Plan.

- Conservation issues include strategies for an orderly transition from agriculture to urban uses, groundwater recharge, water conservation methods, and commitment to conservation of agricultural lands by establishing a greenbelt around the City.

- Open space and recreation issues include discussion of parks and recreation resources, targeted growth of these facilities, and targeting open space to function in a multi-use capacity.

- Existing and future noise from traffic and other activities are issues discussed in the Noise Element.

- The Safety Element of the General Plan analyzes conditions in the City and surrounding area that may be hazardous to those who live and work there, such as flood inundation, fire and hazardous materials.

Each of these issue areas have goals, objectives, and policies and standards designed to provide a safe and pleasant environment in the future. Avenal's General Plan contains not only the seven mandatory elements required by state law, but also several additional elements. These include: Public Facilities, Economic Development, Community Design, Urban Boundary, and Air Quality. Each General Plan chapter covers an aspect of the City's growth and development. Components of each section are interrelated and therefore must be consistent with each other. Taken together, they provide the guidance for all aspects of planning for the future.

Having adopted the General Plan, the City assumes the responsibility to implement it, to report on its continuous status, and to communicate with citizens and other agencies regarding the Plan's policies.

Organization of the General Plan

This General Plan is an update, expansion and reorganization of the 1992 General Plan. Significant changes to the 1992 General Plan have occurred; including expanding the boundaries of the Sphere of Influence (SOI) to the east and north; the inclusion of 10-year growth boundaries; an updated circulation system; and a reclassification of land use designations. The Planning Area encompasses the City limits and is coterminous with the SOI boundary.

The Avenal General Plan consists of three separate documents – a General Plan Background Report, Policies document, and the Environmental Impact Report and technical appendices. The General Plan Policies document contains ten (10) chapters. The focus of each element consists of goals, objectives and policies and standards associated with the major issue areas. Some of the elements contain related background information required by State law. The environmental impact report presents the three alternatives and documents how the proposed plan will impact the environment as compared to the alternative plans. The technical appendices contain technical reports and background information which provide a more detailed analysis.

Context

The Avenal General Plan Project Area is located within western Kings County, approximately 26 miles southwest of Lemoore and 33 miles southwest of Hanford. The Avenal General Plan covers a 22.5 square mile Planning Area which encompasses the City of Avenal and unincorporated Kings County. All lands outside of the City's SOI/Planning Area are regulated by the Kings County General Plan and zoning

designations. However, State law requires that cities plan for areas outside of their immediate jurisdiction, if the areas have a direct relationship to planning needs.

The Avenal General Plan Project Area consists of three distinct geographical areas: the Kettleman Plain, west of Kettleman Hills which includes the urbanized area of the City and the Avenal State Prison; the Kettleman Hills to the north of the urbanized areas; and the San Joaquin Valley east of the Kettleman Hills.

Intent of the Plan

This General Plan was developed through a cooperative effort involving the City Council and Planning Commission, City staff and their consultants, and the General Plan Advisory Committee. The General Plan Update process disclosed that expansion of employment, recreation, industrial opportunities, circulation and adequate public facilities and services are concerns which have been instrumental in shaping the plan.

The General Plan Background Report included Planning Principles which helped to guide the development of the General Plan and asked that a General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC) review the policies appropriate to implement these principles, to develop a land use plan, and to develop appropriate zoning designations and regulations in conformance with the General Plan. The Planning Principles are as follows:

- Avenal's friendly, small town atmosphere should be preserved by ensuring diverse, appropriate scale retail services; citizen participation in decision making; quality of public schools and adequacy of public services.

- Additional services and facilities should be planned so that Avenal provides a full range of medical, office, retail, convenience and entertainment services that are needed by residents.

- The role of the downtown as a focal point for the community should be preserved. Adequate expansion area should be planned so that it will grow in proportion to the rest of the community. Sites for more retail, entertainment, specialty stores and medical services should be identified.

- The commercial opportunities afforded by Skyline Boulevard should be capitalized on.

- Development in the community should be compact and contiguous to existing developed areas. New development area should "square off" existing developed areas.

- The City's Sphere of Influence and growth policies should ensure that the community is physically distinct from others and contains an agricultural buffer area.

- Traffic conflicts should be resolved, including connectivity between neighborhoods, access to industrial areas, and critical intersections. Growth should be allocated with accessibility constraints in mind.

- Local streets and minor collector streets should be used to provide connectivity between neighborhoods while limiting cross-town trips through neighborhoods. Collector and local roads should be designed to provide good, safe connectivity between neighborhoods, services and facilities.

- The City shall encourage the development of more organized sports areas with easy access to those areas.

- Maintain and enhance Avenal's visual quality and design the community so that there is interaction among neighborhoods and a strong emphasis on neighborhood conservation.

- The Industrial area northeast of Interstate 5 will be actively marketed for new industries, have sites which are functional, have adequate public services and easy access to major streets.

Administering the General Plan Program

Once adopted, the General Plan does not remain static. State law provides direction on how cities can maintain the plan as a contemporary policy guide. Government Code section 65400 [b] directs the Planning Department to report annually to the City Council on the status of the plan and progress in its implementation.

Over time it may be necessary to re-evaluate the objectives and polices and modify them due to changes in the environment, regional considerations, and the economy. Up to four general plan amendments per year for each mandatory element are permitted by State law. It is required that any decision on a general plan amendment be supported by findings of fact.

General Plan Requirements

While they allow considerable flexibility, state planning laws do establish some requirements for the issues that general plans must address. The California Government Code establishes both the content of general plans and rules for their adoption and subsequent amendment. Together, state law and judicial decisions establish three overall guidelines for general plans.

- **The General Plan must be comprehensive.** This requirement has two aspects. First, the General Plan must be geographically comprehensive. That is, it must apply throughout the entire incorporated area and it should include other areas that the City determines are relevant to its planning. Second, the General Plan must address the full range of issues that affects the City's physical development.

- **The General Plan must be internally consistent.** This requirement means that the General Plan must fully integrate its separate parts and relate them to each other without conflict. The internal consistency requirement has five dimensions: equal status among elements, consistency between elements, consistency within elements, area plan consistency and text and diagram consistency.

- **The General Plan must be long-range.** Since the General Plan affects the welfare of current and future generations, state law requires that the plan take a long-term perspective (§65300). The General Plan

projects conditions and needs into the future as a basis for determining objectives. It also establishes long-term policies for day-to-day decision-making based upon those objectives.