



1

# Introduction

# INTRODUCTION

The City of South Gate is poised for positive change over the next 20 years – change that will simultaneously transform the landscape of the City and yet maintain the small town quality and characteristics cherished by residents and respected by neighbors.

In many ways, South Gate is grappling with similar issues and forces facing many other cities in Southern California. The City’s industrial job base – historically driven by such major employers as Firestone Tires and General Motors but now dominated by warehouse, distribution and small-scale manufacturing – is being forced to transform itself and provide 21st century technologies and jobs. As with built-out “inner ring” suburbs, there is almost no undeveloped land in the City for development or parks, and most new housing and jobs must come from redevelopment, infill, densification, or adaptive building reuse. The City’s population is growing, and housing is at an increasing premium. Maintaining and upgrading South Gate’s essential infrastructure is a crucial and challenging task for the future. South Gate is also grappling with developing a multi-modal, 21st century transportation system that enhances access and mobility for all residents. Demographically, South Gate’s large Latino population, where many residents are first or second generation immigrants from Central and South America, reflects the demographic shifts occurring in the country at-large and, more specifically, in Southern California. And like many cities, South Gate is largely defined by the nature of its neighborhoods – most of which are stable, high-quality building blocks for community.

**South Gate is largely defined by the nature of its neighborhoods – most of which are stable, high-quality building blocks for community.**



**South Gate, a city with a history of opportunity, is poised for positive change and opportunity over the next 20 years.**

The issues of sustainability and climate change – strongly impacted by how cities are designed and function – are increasingly urgent, and California and South Gate are on the vanguard of addressing them. Similarly, public health and obesity – also strongly impacted by how cities are designed, and particularly how much they encourage physical activity and access to nutritious foods – are major national issues being played out in microcosm in the City of South Gate, and the City is one of the first in California and the nation to explicitly address health and climate change in its long-term comprehensive plan.

Amidst this landscape of challenges and opportunities as shared by so many other communities, South Gate's actions affect not just the City and its residents, but other communities in the region. Its efforts over the next 20 or 30 years will have real consequences locally, regionally, and globally, and the City can serve as a trend-setter for the region and the country at large. As such, South Gate is a bellwether city. It faces challenges and opportunities that are similar to many other cities throughout the state and the L.A. region, and as goes South Gate, so will go many of these cities. Because of this, the City's approach to its challenges and



**Incorporated in 1923, South Gate rapidly grew from a small town to the diverse, urban city that it is today.**

opportunities can serve as a model for other cities and neighborhoods that are also forced to address similar issues of transformation, growth, changing demographics, and maintaining the quality of community.

It is in this context that the community of South Gate has set about to generate this General Plan, thoughtfully re-examining its identity, clarifying its desires for itself, and moving into the future as one of the most stable and forward-looking cities in the region.



**The City is centrally located in the Los Angeles region and is just 8 miles south of downtown Los Angeles.**

# ABOUT SOUTH GATE

South Gate is a city of approximately 105,000 residents located 8 miles southeast of Downtown LA. The City is 7.5 square miles, and hosts a diverse mix of residential, commercial, industrial, and public buildings and land uses. The I-105 freeway is to its south, the I-110 freeway is approximately 3 miles from its western border, and the City is bisected by the I-710 freeway and several freight railroad lines.

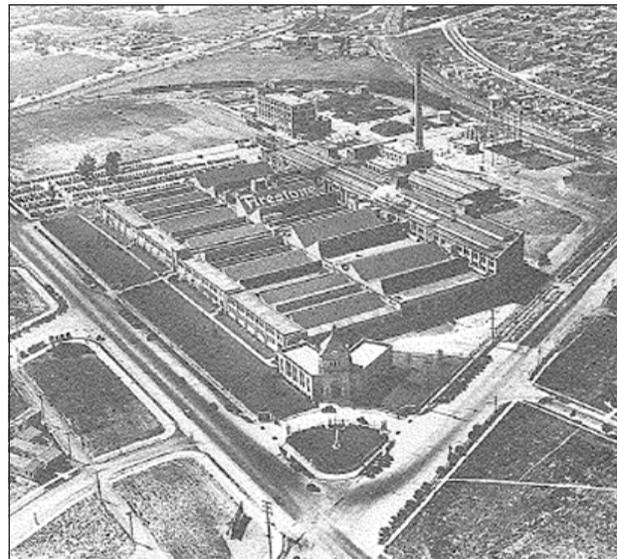
## South Gate – the Evolution of the City

The Tongva tribe and other Native American tribes were the original inhabitants of the entire Los Angeles coastal area around South Gate. The vast Rancho San Antonio – stretching from the eastern boundary of the pueblo of Los Angeles to the San Gabriel River – was granted to Spanish settlers by the King of Spain in 1810, and South Gate grew up around the literal “south gate” of this Rancho. Before the end of the 1870’s, much of the Rancho had been divided into 40-acre tracts, and by 1880 agriculture had replaced cattle ranching as the area’s primary industry. In 1918, the Rancho was further subdivided and sold to 125 pioneering homeowners. This unincorporated community known as “Southgate Gardens” included some of the City’s earliest streets, running east from Long Beach Boulevard to Otis Street and south from Santa Ana Street to Independence Avenue. Post Street, State Street, and Victoria Avenue were also designated as the “business district.”

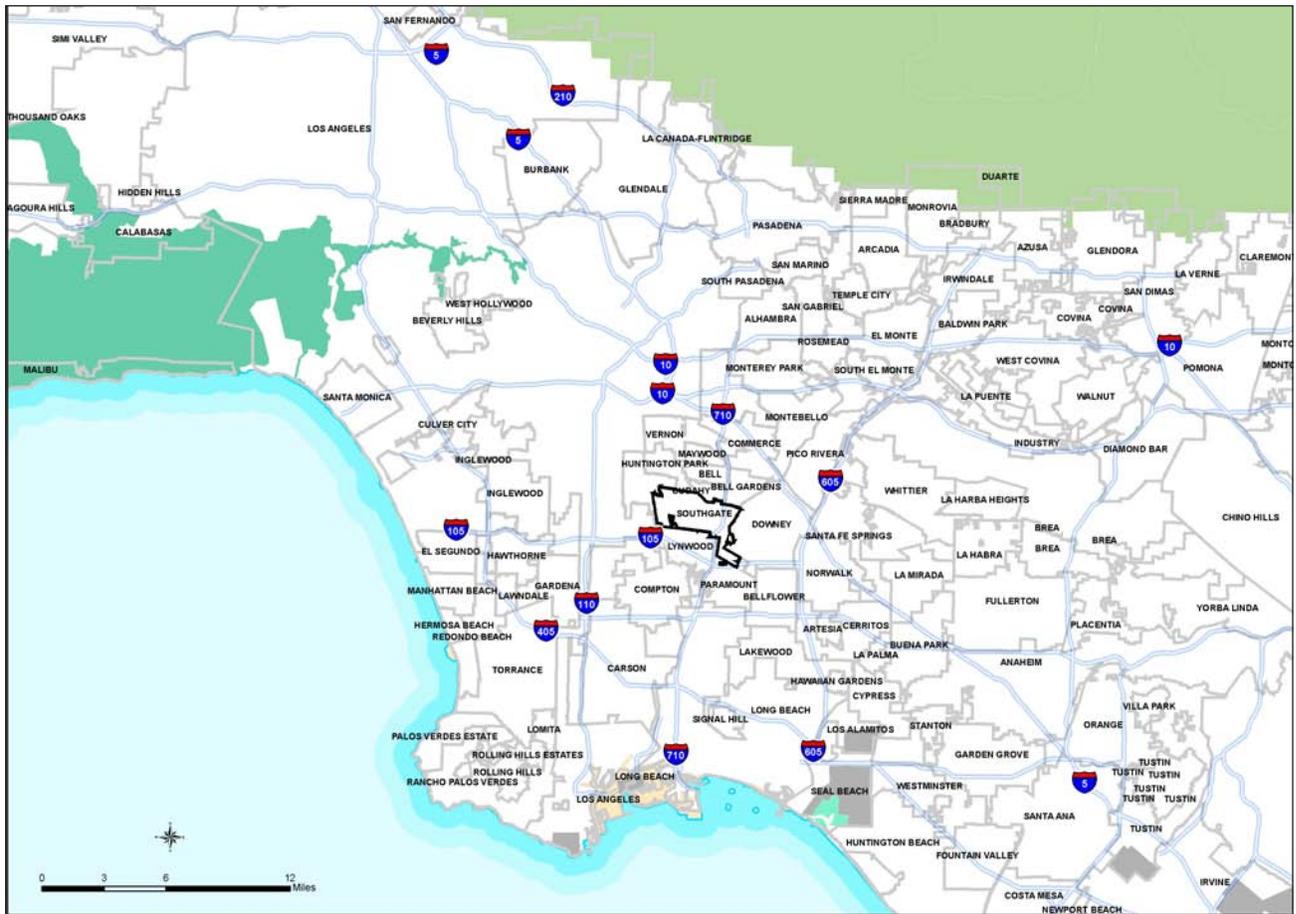
**Table I-1: Year Current Housing Units Were Built in South Gate**

Year Built	Units Built	Percent
1939 or Earlier	3,381	13.8%
1940 to 1959	11,773	48.2%
1960 to 1969	4,333	17.7%
1970 to 1979	2,781	11.4%
1980 to 1989	1,221	5.0%
1990 to 1994	378	1.5%
1995 to 1998	295	1.2%
1999 to 3/2000	115	0.5%
4/2000 to 5/2006	164	0.7%
Total	24,441	100.0%

Sources: 2000 Census; State Department of Finance, Population and Housing Estimates, May 2006 for estimated housing construction since the 2000 Census.



Major manufacturers, such as Firestone Tire (pictured above), flourished in South Gate from the 1920s to 1950s.



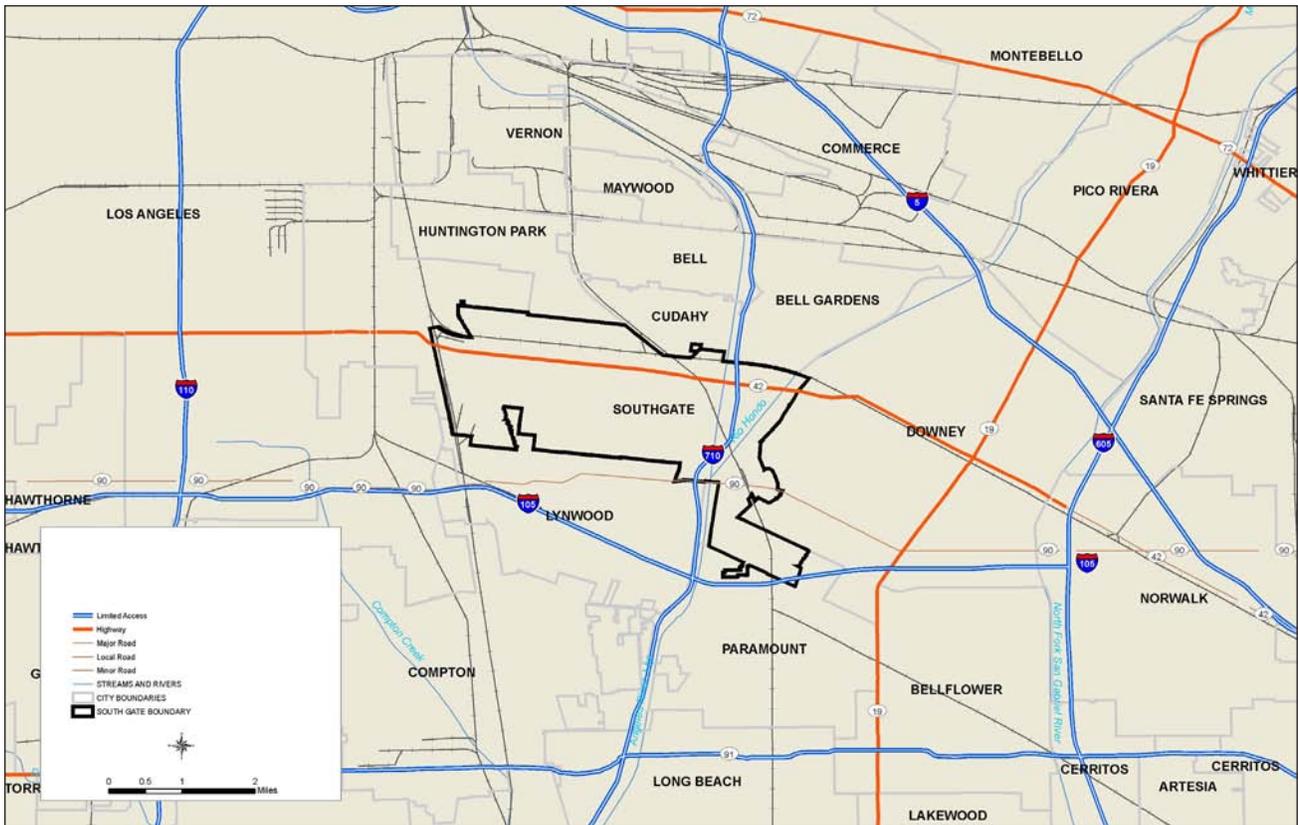
### Location of South Gate in the greater Los Angeles Region

When the City was incorporated in 1923, it had a population of around 2,500, but as California – and particularly nearby Los Angeles – boomed in the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, so did South Gate. Major manufacturers such as Ameron, Firestone Tires, General Motors, Purex, the Star Roofing Company (now U.S. Gypsum,) and the Weiser Hardware Company flourished in the new city, and the population increased. Most of the housing in South Gate was built between 1920 and 1970 to house blue collar and industrial workers in and around the City. Los Angeles’ intense post-WWII urban sprawl eventually surrounded the once rural South Gate and brought it into the center of one of the United States’ largest metropolitan areas (around 18 million people live in the greater Los Angeles area today).<sup>1</sup>



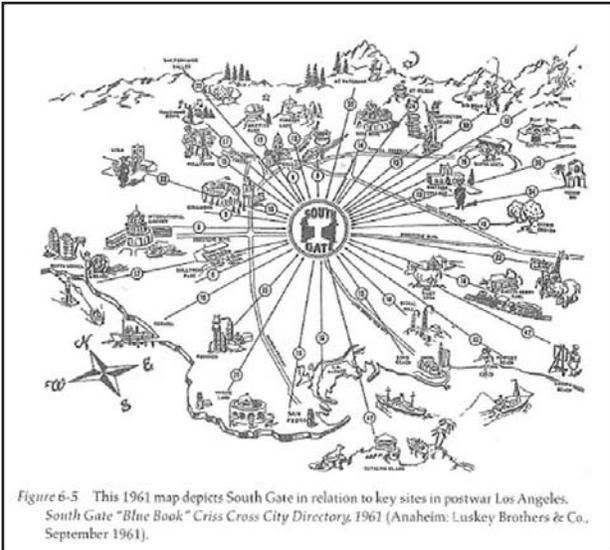
The Firestone Tire factory remains a symbol of South Gate’s manufacturing heritage.

<sup>1</sup> City of South Gate, [www.cityofsouthgate.org/theearlyyears.htm](http://www.cityofsouthgate.org/theearlyyears.htm)



**South Gate and its immediate environs.**

By 2000, South Gate was home to an estimated 96,375 people, double what it was in 1960 and 10% more than in 1990. By 2005, the estimated population was 103,547 (based on the American Community Survey). The actual current population may be 10-20% higher than that estimate because of the large immigrant and undocumented population in the City. If these trends continue, it is projected that by the year 2035 the population of South Gate will likely increase by almost 30,000 people over the year 2000 levels. Having fully transitioned away from its beginnings as a small agricultural outpost, South Gate can now be characterized as a rapidly growing, increasingly urbanized city in greater Los Angeles that still retains a “small-town” identity, with a continued but diminishing manufacturing and industrial presence, and a still prevalent Spanish and Latino heritage.



*Figure 6-5 This 1961 map depicts South Gate in relation to key sites in postwar Los Angeles. South Gate “Blue Book” Criss Cross City Directory, 1961 (Anaheim: Lusky Brothers & Co., September 1961).*

**This 1961 map shows South Gate’s proximity to key regional destinations.**

## South Gate Today

**Table 1-2: South Gate's Population Growth**

Year	Population	Percent Change
1960	53,831	---
1970	56,909	5.7%
1980	66,784	17.4%
1990	86,284	29.2%
2000	96,375	11.7%
2005	103,547	7.4%

Sources: City of South Gate Housing Element of the General Plan, 1989; 2000 Census; 2005 American Community Survey.

At its core, South Gate is a city of families and neighborhoods. In 2000, 86% of all households in the City were made up of families (couples with or without children or single people living with children), an increase from 82% in 1990. Many families are young. More than one third of the population is 18 years old or younger, the City's median age is 27, and the 27-54 year old demographic is by far the fastest growing age group. Many of these young families live in single family residential homes, which are the most common type of housing found in most residential neighborhoods. The City is also strongly Latino. Many residents are first or second generation immigrants, and 92% of residents were identified as Hispanic in the 2000 census.



**South Gate's population is relatively young. The City's median age is just 27 and 86% of households are families.**

South Gate residents are about as likely to be renters as to be owners. According to the 2000 Census, approximately 47% of South Gate's housing units are owner-occupied and 53% are renter-occupied. However, both rental and for-sale housing in South Gate is at an increasing premium as the population (and therefore housing demand) continues to grow faster than the housing stock. For instance, from 1990 to 2000, South Gate's housing stock increased by 5.8% while the population increased by 11.7%. Similarly, while the housing stock increased by 0.7% from 2000 to 2006, the population increased by 7.4% from 2000-2005. Such a relative shortage of housing has contributed to increased costs and overcrowding in existing units, and to long commutes for local employees unable to find appropriate housing near their jobs. Another measure of housing availability in a community is the vacancy rate. In South Gate, vacancy rates are below five percent for rental housing and below two percent for ownership housing. These numbers point to a very tight rental and housing ownership market.

South Gate has a strong and active workforce, although many residents work in jobs that are vulnerable to a globalizing and rapidly changing economy. In 2000, 5.5% of South Gate residents were unemployed, significantly lower than Los Angeles County's unemployment rate of 8.2%. Those who were employed primarily worked in production (33%) and sales (28%) occupations that paid low wages, and the median household income was \$35,695. By 2005, unemployment in South Gate had increased to 6.5%, even though the countywide rate had dropped to 5.3%. There are fewer jobs in South Gate city limits (19,960 in 2003)<sup>2</sup> than housing units (24,411 in 2005)<sup>3</sup>, and many residents that cannot find suitable jobs within city limits commute elsewhere for work. The jobs that exist in South Gate city limits are primarily in the industrial sector, with a low number of office or service jobs. Within this demographic and

<sup>2</sup> Southern California Association of Governments estimate, 2003.  
<sup>3</sup> California Department of Finance, 2006.



### South Gate City Limits

economic environment, South Gate’s future success will depend on its ability to develop high-quality jobs and attract residents who can succeed in them. To its advantage, the City has a central location accessible to numerous destinations in the LA area, which makes it an attractive location for many industries and businesses.



The City boasts a wide variety of community-oriented events such as the Miss Azaleita contest.

# ABOUT THE GENERAL PLAN

## Purpose of and Need for the General Plan

The South Gate General Plan is the primary legal document to guide long-term growth, development and conservation in the City. Its purpose is to identify planning goals; provide a basis for decision-making; provide citizens a forum for input on their community's direction; and inform citizens, developers, decision-makers, and other cities of the ground rules for development within the City.<sup>4</sup>

Just as South Gate evolved from an agricultural outpost to an urbanized residential and industrial community, it continues to change and already faces a variety of challenges that didn't exist in 1986, the last time the City's General Plan was comprehensively updated. Since then, the City's population has continued to increase, and the need to better plan for community design, housing, transportation and economic vitality has rarely been greater in its history. The current General Plan is dated, lacks the detail needed to direct staff and elected officials on policy decisions



**A unique characteristic of the City is its residential areas.**

<sup>4</sup> List summarizes Curtin, Daniel J. Jr. and Cecily T. Talbert, Curtin's California Land Use Planning Law, 26th Edition, Solano Press Books, Point Arena, California, 2006, p 12.

and does not reflect the substantial advancements that the planning profession has made in the last 20 years.

The City's General Plan should reflect its most recent evolution, its plans for the future, and the ways it thinks about itself. It also should reflect residents' desires and aspirations for their community. South Gate has unique opportunities to develop economically, revitalize the City, shape the built environment in a better way, and take advantage of the City's existing qualities to enhance citizens' quality of life. In order to achieve these goals, this General Plan reflects extensive community input. Much of its content was developed through an intensive series of community workshops as described in the "Development of the General Plan" chapter below. The General Plan also represents some of the most current thinking about Smart Growth planning, such as using land use designations that rely on "Place Types" instead of conventional designations, revitalizing corridors and districts with mixed use development and activity nodes, and preserving and enhancing existing neighborhoods. As South Gate continues to evolve, this General Plan aims to more carefully guide the character of its growth and development.

## Statutory Requirements

Legally, the State of California requires that "each planning agency shall prepare and the legislative body of each county and city shall adopt a comprehensive, long-term general plan for the physical development of the county or city." (Gov't Code § 65300). Within this general requirement, some aspects of the general plan are tightly prescribed, while others are left to the discretion of individual cities or counties. In sum, the general plan:

- Must set forth a "statement of development policies" that includes "objectives, principles, standards, and plan proposals," and must include seven mandatory elements – land use, circulation, housing, conservation, open space, noise, and safety – as well as any optional elements the City chooses. (Gov't Code § 65302).
- Must be an "internally consistent and compatible statements of policies." (Gov't Code § 65300.5).
- "... may include any other subjects which, in the judgment of the legislative body, relate to the physical development of the county or city." (Gov't Code § 65303).
- Should "accommodate local conditions and circumstances" (Gov't Code § 65300.7)
- "... may be adopted in any format deemed appropriate or convenient by the legislative body, including the combining of elements," provided it meets other minimum requirements (Gov't Code § 65301).

This General Plan both meets the above legal requirements and also introduces some discretionary elements that the City has deemed appropriate (i.e. the Public Facilities and Services, Healthy Community, and Economic Elements as well as discretionary sections of elements such as the Green Building and Climate Change sections of the Green City Element).



**Parks are a defining feature and a source of pride for South Gate residents.**

Throughout the Elements, this General Plan also addresses the cross-cutting themes of sustainability and community. General Plans are long range planning tools, and the planning horizon for this General Plan update is the year 2035. The Planning Area and Sphere of Influence for the General Plan are demarcated by South Gate city limits.

## General Plan Contents

The South Gate General Plan includes the legally required elements for a General Plan as well as some optional components that the community feels are important to address. Once adopted, the optional elements have the same legal status as the mandatory elements. The seven legally required elements have been reorganized in some cases to accommodate the specific needs of South Gate. Each chapter of the General Plan has a specific purpose and focus as described below. Together, they present a consistent policy platform as required by law. No single element or subject supersedes any other, and all are internally consistent.

## Vision Statement and Guiding Principles

During the General Plan update process, South Gate residents developed a clear vision for the future of the City. This was supported by eleven guiding principles to guide implementation of the General Plan.

### 1. Introduction

This introduction explains the need for a General Plan, how South Gate has evolved over the years, the statutory requirements that a general plan must meet, and how to use this General Plan.

### 2. Development of the General Plan

This section describes the award-winning public participation program that the City and community engaged in to determine the vision for the future of South Gate. It also presents a brief outline of the overall General Plan update process.

### 3. Community Design Element

This section meets the land use element requirement and provides regulation for the use of land in South Gate. The chapter also addresses a variety of city-wide topics such as the intended character and density of development in the City, preservation of cultural resources, elimination of blight, and contact between land uses. It also subdivides the City into unique districts, corridors and neighborhoods, and for each district and corridor provides a vision and policy guidance that will direct growth and conservation over time.

### 4. Mobility Element

The Mobility Element identifies how people and goods will move around the City, and it is closely correlated with the Community Design Element. It provides a vision for South Gate's transportation infrastructure, including public transit service and bike, pedestrian and automobile facilities, and defines to which levels of service the infrastructure will be maintained.

### 5. Economic Element

Though not required by law, this Element clarifies the City's vision for economic development. This includes policies about which types of jobs and economic activity the City wishes to foster and the economic desirability of different types of development.

## 6. Green City Element

This chapter contains goals and policies to create a “greener” city, and includes directions for parks, civic plazas, open space, rivers, trails, equestrian facilities, the conservation of natural resources, energy and climate change, and green buildings. It encompasses the topics that are required by the State of California for the Open Space and Conservation Elements.

## 7. Healthy Community Element

This chapter addresses what is one of the fundamental legal and historical rationales for planning: protecting the health and welfare of a city’s residents. The chapter includes much of the mandatory contents for the required safety element, along with additional policies related to overall well-being, physical activity, nutrition, access to health care, and a safe transportation system.

## 8. Public Facilities and Services

This chapter provides information and policy guidance to ensure that sufficient facilities and services will be provided to support existing and new development in South Gate. Topics addressed include police and fire services, schools, waste, services for recycling, water and wastewater, and stormwater.

## 9. Noise Element

The required Noise Element identifies policies for limiting the community’s exposure to sources of excessive noise.

## 10. Acknowledgements

This section lists document references and identifies the team involved with preparing the General Plan.

## 11. Glossary

The glossary defines key regulatory and conceptual terms used throughout the General Plan.

*(Note: The Housing Element is part of the General Plan but is printed as a separate document, and not included in this document)*

# HOW TO USE THE GENERAL PLAN

The South Gate General Plan is the primary tool for guiding the future development of the City. The Plan provides a policy guide for making the tough daily choices the City faces about growth, housing, transportation, the environment, and community resources. At the same time, it is a visionary document that lays out the community's long-term goals and objectives. It contains the City's official policies on land use and community design, mobility, housing, green infrastructure, economics, health, and public facilities and services. Its policies apply to both public and private properties.

The General Plan is used by the City Council and Planning Commission to evaluate development proposals and to make funding and budget decisions. It is used by city staff to direct their day-to-day activities, particularly those related to building and development. It is used by citizens and neighborhood groups to understand the City's long-range plans and proposals for different parts of the City.

## Policy Language

Each element of this General Plan contains goals, objectives, policies and implementation actions. All of these guide decision-making, and are defined as follows.<sup>5</sup>

- **Goals** – Goals are general direction setters. They provide a long-term vision that may or may not be realized. “**Goal GC 1: An extensive system of parks, civic plazas, and open space**” is an example of a goal in the South Gate plan.
- **Objectives** – Objectives are specific ends or conditions – ideally, measurable and time-specific – that will bring about a goal. “Maintain the fiscal revenue stream generated by the current economic base” is an example of an objective in the South Gate General Plan.
- **Policies** – Policies seek to bring about objectives by mandating, encouraging, or permitting certain actions. The following are examples of policies in the South Gate General Plan:
  - “The City will attempt to maintain a job to housing ratio of 1.5 jobs for every housing unit.”
  - “The City should assess all new development’s use of green building techniques as a formal stage of design review.”

---

<sup>5</sup> See 2003 State of California General Plan Guidelines, Governor's Office of Planning and Research, pp 14-17, on the internet at [www.opr.ca.gov](http://www.opr.ca.gov).

- **Implementation Actions** – An implementation action is a specific task the City will undertake to carry out the vision of the General Plan. The following are examples of implementation actions in the South Gate General Plan:
  - **Community Design Element Action CD 9: Review and Revise the Redevelopment Project Area**  
Based on the desired outcomes of this General Plan, the City, working with the Redevelopment Agency, should review the current boundaries of the Redevelopment Project Areas and determine if the boundaries should be modified.
  - **Healthy Community Element Action HC 5: Create Guidelines for Healthy Food at City Buildings/Events**  
Develop an ordinance that creates guidelines for the types of foods that should be served at City-sponsored events and in City vending machines. At minimum, the ordinance should require that there are healthy food options available.

The Policies and Implementation Actions in this General Plan use language that reflects the following principles:

- **“Will”** – indicates that compliance with the policy or action is mandatory.
- **“Should”** – indicates that a policy or action is strongly encouraged by the City, but not mandatory. Although compliance is voluntary, the particular policy or action is a recommendation about how to meet the goals and objectives of the General Plan.
- **“May”** – indicates a permissive but not required policy or action.

## Implementation

The General Plan provides a vision for the future of South Gate and guidance about how to attain that future. City staff, the City Council, the Planning Commission, and other Boards and Commissions, as part of their duties to the City, will carry out the goals, objectives, policies and implementation actions of the plan. Plan implementation will be achieved through the adoption, implementation and revision of the municipal code, annual budget, capital improvements program, and through on-going decisions about development proposals. Indeed, all City programs, policies and actions must and will be made consistent with this General Plan to meet state requirements.

The General Plan will be implemented over an extended period of time (20+ years, with a time horizon of 2035). During this time, the long-range planning efforts for South Gate will continue using the goals and objectives as a guide. However, the General Plan is a living document. It presents the outcomes desired by the community based on their current goals and local conditions. As the City grows and changes, it may become necessary to amend specific policies and implementation actions as economic and demographic conditions change and new ideas about growth and conservation are formed. In fact, State law encourages annual reviews of implementation actions and recommends that the entire General Plan be thoroughly reviewed every five years to ensure that it is still consistent with the community’s goals.

Any part of a general plan may be amended to accommodate changing conditions. Property owners, the Planning Commission, the City Council, or City staff may propose amendments. Proposed changes must be reviewed by the Planning Commission and the City Council at public hearings and the potential of environmental impacts must be evaluated in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act.

Community members, neighborhood groups and local organizations are encouraged to get involved in the on-going planning efforts of the City and to participate in the implementation of the General Plan. By active, thoughtful involvement, City residents can be part of the process of shaping and growing South Gate to make it an even more active, prosperous and welcoming city than it is today.