

TOWN OF CORTE MADERA

DRAFT GENERAL PLAN

2007
SEPTEMBER



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DRAFT GENERAL PLAN

FOR THE

TOWN OF CORTE MADERA

September 2007

PREPARED BY:

PMC

1590 Drew Avenue

Suite 120

DAVIS, CA 95616

PH: 530.750.7076

FAX: 530.750.2811

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1.1 SCOPE OF THE GENERAL PLAN

The General Plan is perhaps the single most important document a local government can adopt. The General Plan is often referred to as a “constitution” for decision-making by a local government. The General Plan is comprehensive in its scope, identifying a community’s goals, policies, and implementation measures regarding land use, circulation, housing, conservation, open space, noise, safety, and other issues of interest to the community.



PURPOSE OF THE GENERAL PLAN

The Town of Corte Madera General Plan will be used to inform citizens, developers, agencies, interest groups and others of the ground-rules that will guide development-related decisions in the community. The General Plan will provide the long-term vision for the community, and, through its implementation policies (including use of the Town’s Capital Improvement Program budget), indicate how that vision may be achieved over time. The Town of Corte Madera General Plan addresses planning through the year 2025.

The Town of Corte Madera General Plan has five fundamental purposes:

- ◆ To enable the Planning Commission and the Town Council to make informed actions on long-range development policies, environmental protection and other programs.
- ◆ To inform the public of the Town’s policy approaches and to serve as a vehicle to invite public participation in the Town’s decision-making process.
- ◆ To provide a basis for evaluating whether private and public development proposals and public programs are in harmony with Corte Madera’s short- and long-term vision.
- ◆ To provide a basis for developing implementation programs and detailed regulations and standards.
- ◆ To allow private developers and public agencies to design projects and programs that are consistent with Corte Madera’s policies.

GENERAL PLAN OVERVIEW

This document is the first comprehensive update of the Town of Corte Madera’s planning policies since adoption of the 1989 General Plan. The 1989 Plan was a significant benchmark that articulated a broad community consensus on Town planning issues. The ’89 General Plan ratified policies to protect the Town’s predominant land use character of low-density

1.0 INTRODUCTION

residential neighborhoods. Open space was permanently preserved with effective land use controls. Policies were developed for specific sites that were particularly important to the community, including Old Corte Madera Square, Triangle Marsh, and the Northwestern Pacific Railroad properties. The 1989 General Plan resolved a series of long-standing community issues.

The community's social and economic makeup continued to evolve in important ways after the 1989 Plan was adopted. The 1980's had seen the average household size in Corte Madera decline as the youngest children of the Post World War II baby boom reached adulthood and left home. The 1990's saw a demographic shift, as younger families with children started to move into the community. Property values accelerated rapidly. By 2005 many Corte Madera homes had tripled their 1989 sales prices. The housing stock had continued to age, and the starter homes of the 1950's and 60's were ready for major repairs and rehabilitation.

Expectations changed with these demographic and real estate trends. Younger families that moved to Corte Madera for the excellent schools expected to be able to expand their recently acquired homes. In the first half-decade of the 2000's there was a growing acceptance for somewhat larger, two-story homes in the neighborhoods, as long as they were well designed. The community consensus on what exactly "well designed" meant is still evolving.

Most of California's local governments were in more-or-less constant fiscal crisis after 1989. The Town of Corte Madera weathered the financial storms better than most communities due to its strong retail sales tax base. This positive economic trend was reflected in a robust capital improvement program that kept roads in good repair and continued improvements to the Town's drainage and flood control system. Residents were aware of the need to protect and enhance the community's tax base, in part due to the high costs for ongoing drainage and flood control. However, residents insisted that economic development projects be well designed and mitigate traffic congestion.

While the environmental gains of the 1970's and 80's were consolidated in the 1989 General Plan, by the early 2000's the community began to expect a more proactive approach to managing natural resources. There was a growing interest in the evolving philosophy and science of "sustainability."

These trends were apparent as the Town worked to develop this edition of the Corte Madera General Plan. The overriding desire was to preserve Corte Madera's sense of community that is shaped by the relatively small geographic area of the Town, by proximity to the Bay and hillside woodlands, and by a built environment that has a relatively modest scale. The goals, policies, and programs that emerged from the General Plan process reflect the basic pragmatic view of residents that says, "We are willing to consider change, but it must enhance the community." The 2005 General Plan has three principle themes:

Identity

Corte Madera is committed to maintaining and enhancing its identity as a small community in a cosmopolitan setting. Residents value the local environment including the open Bay front, salt marshes, woodsy hillsides, and expansive views. An important theme in this Plan is protecting the predominant development pattern of residential neighborhoods, including historic homes representing one hundred years of West Coast architecture.



Community-Building

The General Plan provides an opportunity to enhance the “livability” of the community and to improve physical connectivity between the east and west sides of Town. Key elements of community livability include attractive, pedestrian-oriented public areas; affordable, well-designed and appropriately located housing; convenient public transit, services and shops; safe bicycle and pedestrian routes connecting gathering places; accessible parks and open space; a clean and safe natural environment; meaningful historical and ecological features; and friendly, community-oriented social environs. Policies to allow mixed-use development along with commercial expansion are important initiatives in this Plan. Perhaps the three most significant community building projects proposed in this edition of the General Plan are:

- ◆ Remodeling or replacement of the Recreation Center at Town Park.
- ◆ Updating the Storm Drainage Master Plan to include areas that are subject to flooding that are outside the 100-year flood plain.
- ◆ Four Community Plans to encourage the construction of mixed-use projects, especially in areas with good freeway access.

Enhancement of Natural Resources

The Town has long promoted preservation of its many natural resources in protected open spaces. Policies in this Plan are intended to promote community sustainability by enhancing these natural resources through means such as more focused protection, increased community awareness, and improved public access.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PLANS, POLICIES AND REPORTS

The Town of Corte Madera has several planning tools and documents in addition to the General Plan. As required by law, all of the following plans, ordinances, and policies, are consistent with the General Plan, or will be upon amendment as described in the General Plan implementation measures.



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Town of Corte Madera Housing Element

California Government Code §65580-65589.8 requires that all municipalities adopt and implement a Housing Element as part of their General Plan, to identify and review existing and projected housing needs and to form a plan for meeting those needs. The Housing Element is required to be updated every five years.

The Town of Corte Madera adopted its current Housing Element in August 2002. Although separately bound, the Housing Element is an integral part of the General Plan, and contains all of the policies and actions mandated by the State of California.

Community Plan Areas

An area or community plan is adopted as an amendment to the general plan in the manner set out in California Government Code §65350, et. seq. It refines the policies of the general plan as they apply to a smaller geographic area and is implemented by ordinances and other discretionary actions, such as zoning. This General Plan proposes Community Plans for Old Corte Madera Square, the Fifer/Tamal Vista area, the Paradise/San Clemente area, and the Tamalpais Drive/Casa Buena Drive area.

Christmas Tree Hill Community Plan

The Christmas Tree Hill Community Plan was adopted in May 1992, in response to the 1989 General Plan that called for preparation and execution of a work program to address planning and safety issues in the Christmas Tree Hill area. The Community Plan provides policy direction to the Town for residential development, determination of property lines with respect to building setbacks, on-street parking, second residential units, fire safety and trail easements. The Plan is consistent with the General Plan.

Town of Corte Madera Zoning Ordinance

The Zoning Ordinance of the Corte Madera Municipal Code (Title 18) zones property and prescribes development standards and processes within the Town limits. Adoption of the General Plan will require amendments to the Zoning Ordinance for consistency with the General Plan Land Use designations and various General Plan policies.

Marin Countywide Plan

Marin County regulates land use for unincorporated lands within the County. According to the Draft Marin Countywide Plan (June 2007), Marin County intends to work toward the long-term vision of becoming a sustainable county before the end of the 21st century. Using sustainability as the overarching theme of the update, Marin County proposes planning for communities that are designed to serve the needs of those who live and work within them, as well as sustaining the natural systems that support life.

Other Town Plans

The General Plan Update is also generally consistent with other existing Town plans, including the Bicycle Transportation Plan, the Capital Improvement Plan, the ADA Transition Plan and the Park Master Plan.

IMPLEMENTATION OF KEY GENERAL PLAN PROGRAMS

The General Plan contains a wide range of goals, policies and implementation actions. While all are important and deserve attention, several of them are of particular importance to the community and rise to the highest priority for implementation. They are:

- ◆ Updating the Zoning Ordinance
- ◆ Preparation of Community Design Guidelines
- ◆ Adoption of Community Plans
- ◆ Preparation of a Parks and Recreation Master Plan
- ◆ Remodel/Replacement of the Town's Recreation Center
- ◆ Updating the Storm Drainage Master Plan

As such, these items shall receive priority focus for use of Town funding through its Capital Improvement Program and other budgetary actions, availability of Town staff to undertake work programs, and other steps necessary to complete these actions in a timely manner.

1.2 Document Organization

The Corte Madera General Plan is organized into eight chapters addressing a wide range of issues for the Town:

- ◆ Introduction (Chapter 1)
- ◆ Land Use (Chapter 2)
- ◆ Resource Conservation and Sustainability (Chapter 3)
- ◆ Circulation (Chapter 4)
- ◆ Community Design (Chapter 5)
- ◆ Parks and Recreation (Chapter 6)
- ◆ Flooding and Flood Plain Management (Chapter 7)
- ◆ Public Safety and Hazards (Chapter 8)

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Within each chapter, an introduction is provided to identify the general purpose of the chapter. The regulatory framework for the chapter is provided, and then specific issue areas are discussed. Each chapter concludes with Goals, Policies, and Implementation Programs for the issue areas addressed by that chapter.

1.3 COMMUNITY LOCATION AND CHARACTERISTICS

The Town of Corte Madera is located in Marin County, approximately nine miles north of San Francisco. Incorporated in 1916, Corte Madera occupies approximately 4½ square miles of land, plus additional area in bay and tidelands. The eastern border of the Town is on San Francisco Bay; the western edge is bordered by unincorporated Marin County lands, mostly in open space preserves. Mount Tamalpais lies immediately west of the Town. Adjacent to Corte Madera are the City of Larkspur to the north, the City of Mill Valley to the south, and the Town of Tiburon to the southeast. Corte Madera's regional location is shown in **Figure 1.1**.

Highway 101, the main freeway connecting San Francisco with other communities in Marin County and Sonoma County to the north, bisects Corte Madera. With a current population of 9,400, and its convenient location along Highway 101, Corte Madera serves as a "bedroom" community to larger employment centers in San Francisco. It also provides regional shopping opportunities for the Marin County area with two large shopping centers.

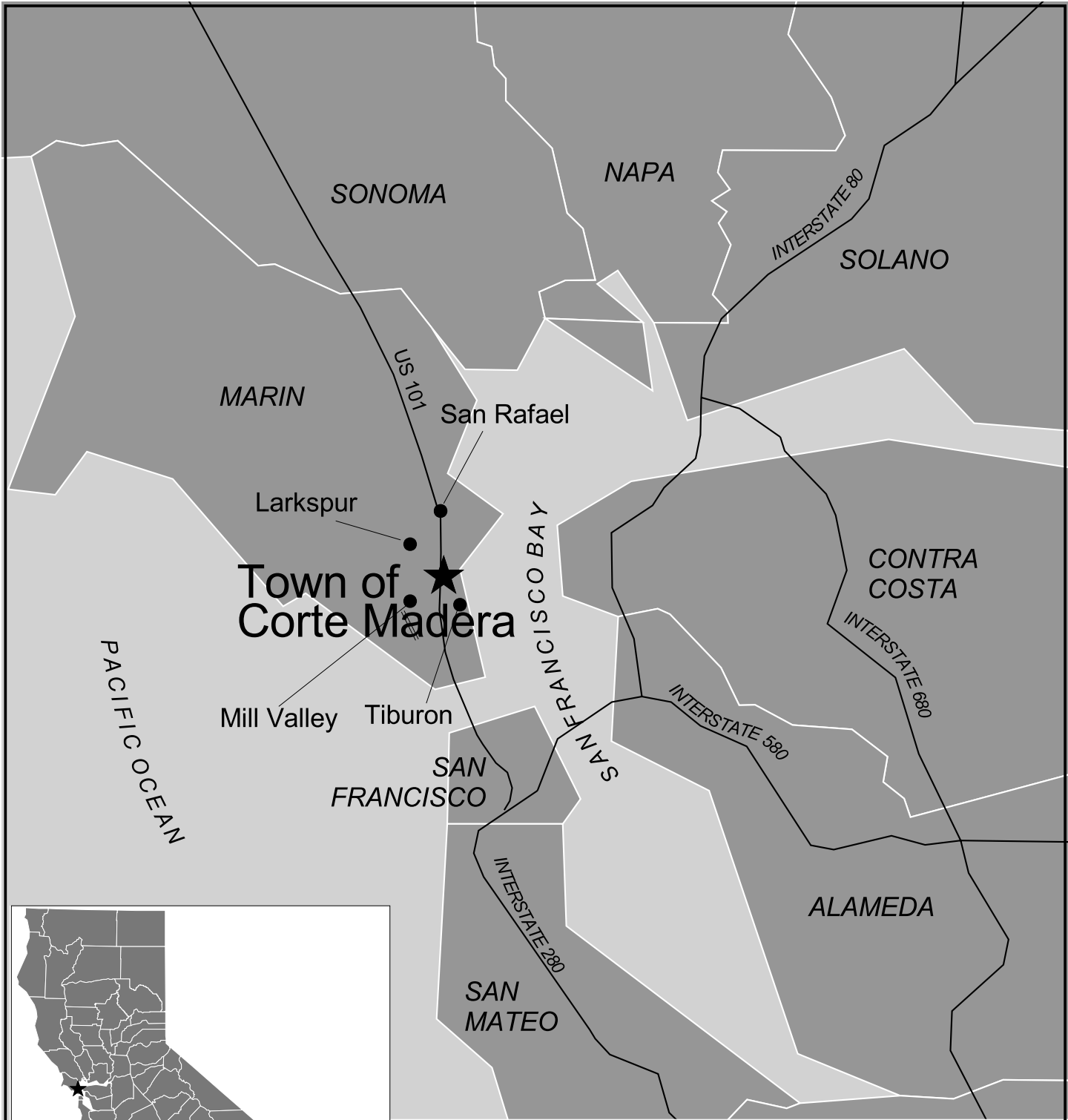


Figure 1.1
Regional Location:
San Francisco Bay Area
TOWN OF CORTE MADERA

COUNTY OF MARIN COMMUNITY
 DEVELOPMENT AGENCY MAPPING/GRAPHICS
 California State Plane Zone III, Nad 83, Feet, January 23, 2002.
 THIS MAP IS REPRESENTATIONAL ONLY. DATA ARE NOT
 SURVEY ACCURATE.



The Town is largely built-out, with only a few individual parcels left undeveloped that aren't otherwise classified as open space or environmentally preserved lands. The existing land use pattern is generally a mix of residential neighborhoods and commercial centers, combined with parks and open spaces. Several distinct areas characterize the Town, including:

- ◆ *Regional shopping centers* (the Village Shopping Center and Town Center regional shopping malls), located near the center of Town at the Highway 101/Tamalpais Drive interchange.
- ◆ *Town Civic Center* buildings and facilities, including the Town Hall, Town Park, Fire offices/station, Post Office, and Recreation Center, located along the north side of Tamalpais Drive.
- ◆ *Historic Old Corte Madera Square and Menke Park*, in the western portion of the Town at the intersection of Tamalpais Boulevard and Corte Madera Avenue. The Park, located near the Town's historic passenger rail station, is surrounded by a series of older buildings, now mostly in commercial use.
- ◆ *Eastern residential neighborhoods*, primarily characterized by detached single-family residences, located east of Highway 101 along the Paradise Drive corridor.
- ◆ *Western residential neighborhoods*, characterized by detached single-family residences and some multi-family residential units, located west of Highway 101.
- ◆ *The upslope residential neighborhoods*, Chapman Hill and Christmas Tree Hill, characterized mostly by detached, single-family residences built on steep terrain and winding residential streets, located south of Tamalpais Drive and above Corte Madera Avenue.
- ◆ *Ecological/Open Spaces*, such as the Corte Madera State Ecological Reserve, tidal marshlands and various Marin County Open Space Preserves, located along the edge of the eastern and southern Town limits.



1.4 LEGALITY OF THE GENERAL PLAN

State law mandates that each city and county adopt a general plan that addresses physical development in the community. Section 65300 of the Government Code states:

“Each planning agency shall prepare and the legislative body of each...city shall adopt a comprehensive, long-term general plan for the physical development of the...city.”

As such, the general plan literally serves as a blueprint and constitution for development of a city through the plan's goals, policies and implementation actions.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In order for a General Plan to be effective, it must remain current. While State law does not specify rigid requirements or timing for updating a General Plan (other than for the Housing Element), it does establish that the responsibility for determining whether a General Plan is up to date and accurate rests with each jurisdiction. The Town Council adopted the last Corte Madera General Plan in December 1989. Since that time, the Town has experienced population growth, economic development, residential development and other changes that should be addressed in an updated General Plan. Community interests and attitudes may also have changed since 1989. Additionally, planning, development and environmental laws have changed since the General Plan was last adopted. The 2008 General Plan addresses pertinent planning, development and environmental statutes.

GENERAL PLAN ELEMENTS

The Corte Madera General Plan is organized into eight Chapters, covering all of the elements required by State law (Government Code Section 65302) as well as optional issues of concern to the community. **Table 1.1** identifies the title of each General Plan Chapter and its relationship to the required elements.

TABLE 1.1
REQUIRED GENERAL PLAN ELEMENTS AND CORRESPONDING GENERAL PLAN CHAPTERS

Required Elements	General Plan Chapter
N/A	1 – Introduction
Land Use	2 – Land Use
Circulation	4 - Circulation
Housing	2 – Land Use; also, separately bound Housing Element
Conservation	3 – Resources
Open-Space	3 – Resources; 6 – Parks and Recreation
Noise	8 – Public Safety and Hazards
Safety	8 – Public Safety and Hazards
Optional Elements	General Plan Chapter
Flooding	7. Flooding & Flood Plain Management
Community Design	5 – Community Design
Parks and Recreation	6 – Parks and Recreation

REQUIRED CHARACTERISTICS

In addition to addressing the required elements, the General Plan must also have the following characteristics:

Long-Range Scope

The General Plan must have a long-term perspective, establishing durable policies upon which daily decisions can be made for a period of many years. Although the Housing Element requires an update every five years, goals and objectives for other sections may consider community values or needs over a period of 15 to 20 years. This General Plan establishes goals, policies, and implementation measures for a period from 2008-2028.

Geographically Comprehensive

The General Plan must consider all areas within the Town Limits, as well as “any land outside its boundaries which in the planning agency’s judgment bears relation to its planning” (Government Code §65300). This area includes the Town’s Sphere of Influence, as well as extraterritorial areas where issues require.

Topically Comprehensive

The General Plan must cover a broad range of issues relevant to the planning area. Land use designations in the Town’s General Plan consider impacts on environmental, social, and economic concerns.

Internally Consistent

No policy conflicts can exist within the General Plan. The requirement for internal consistency is reflected in five dimensions:

- ◆ *Equal status among elements:* policies of one element are not legally superior to policies of any other element.
- ◆ *Consistency between elements:* every element of the General Plan must be consistent with all other elements.
- ◆ *Consistency within elements:* each element’s analysis and goals, policies, and implementation measures must be consistent and complementary.
- ◆ *Area plan consistency:* all goals, policies, and implementation measures in an area plan must be consistent with the General Plan.
- ◆ *Text and diagram consistency:* figures and tables must be consistent with the text supporting them.

1.5 PROCESS USED IN PREPARING THE GENERAL PLAN

The process of updating the General Plan began in Fall 2001. The process began with a cooperative assessment of existing conditions by the Town’s planning consultant, Pacific Municipal Consultants (PMC) and various Town staff including Planning, Public Works, the

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Town Manager’s office, Parks, Fire, and Police personnel. This effort served to describe the scope of the project, identify existing data, and establish involvement with the General Plan review process.

The General Plan update process then turned to focus on development of a Community Participation Program. This program included several elements and was developed in order to obtain input from a broad spectrum of the public. The programs’ objectives were:

- ◆ Team building and management
- ◆ Community education about the General Plan update
- ◆ Developing core General Plan policies
- ◆ Community ownership of the Plan.

Central to the Community Participation Program was the formation of a 15-member General Plan Steering Committee (GPSC), which served as the primary means for soliciting public involvement in the General Plan update. A series of meetings throughout the process addressed a wide range of issues for consideration in the General Plan update, and provided a forum for community input on the General Plan. In addition to the GPSC, multiple other means of public involvement and outreach were employed (see adjoining text boxes).

Public Outreach Efforts	Public Involvement Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Meeting Notices and Materials ◆ Community Announcement of the General Plan Update ◆ Presence at Community Events (including Corte Madera’s Oktoberfest celebrations in 2001, 2002, and 2003) ◆ Maintenance of the General Plan Update website (including the opportunity to provide comments via e-mail) ◆ Newsletters ◆ Press Releases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ General Plan Steering Committee Meetings ◆ Public (Community-Wide) Workshops ◆ Small Working-Group Meetings ◆ Community Speaking Programs by the Town ◆ Public Hearings ◆ Community Preferences Survey

Committee-members included:

- ◆ Two members of the Town Council, with the Mayor acting as Committee Chair.
- ◆ Two members of the Planning Commission.

- ◆ One member of the Flood Control Board, Parks and Recreation Commission, and the Transportation Advisory Committee,
- ◆ One representative from each of the local school districts.
- ◆ One member of the Chamber of Commerce.
- ◆ Five at-large representatives from the community.

Other components of the General Plan update included:

DATA COLLECTION

Information from the Town of Corte Madera, County of Marin, adjacent cities and towns, Association of Bay Area Governments and other agencies was collected and reviewed. Additionally, an Urban Community Character and Design Analysis was conducted in an effort to identify the existing conditions within Corte Madera. A visual inventory of the Corte Madera's urban design was taken, and the identified elements were assessed to characterize the Town.

BACKGROUND REPORT

Based on the findings of the design analyses and the collected information, a Background Report for the Town of Corte Madera General Plan update was prepared in July 2002. This Report included background data and information specific to certain elements of the General Plan.

COMMUNITY PREFERENCES SURVEY

A Community Preferences Survey was developed in cooperation with the GPSC and approved by the Town Council. The survey included questions addressing citizens' attitudes and preferences regarding Parks and Recreation, Residential Construction, Residential Property Development and Maintenance, Quality of Life and the Environment, Traffic and Circulation, Commercial Centers, Natural Hazards and Safety. The survey was mailed to all households and businesses in the Town, and had a 30% response rate. Survey results suggested that respondents were generally pleased with the Town's existing operation and livability, while also interested in opportunities to improve upon conditions involving such topics as transportation, parks, and the environment.

GENERAL PLAN ALTERNATIVES

Once background and data collection efforts were completed, various alternatives for the General Plan were discussed with the GPSC. The alternatives included an analysis of associated economic and fiscal opportunities and constraints. This in turn led to the formulation of a Framework Report, which was presented to the GPSC, the Planning Commission, and the Town Council. The document was based on a consensus assessment of key planning approaches for the General Plan from the GPSC. This Report provided the

1.0 INTRODUCTION

conclusion of preliminary work toward formulation of the General Plan vision, and led to the preparation of the Draft General Plan and associated Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR).

1.6 DEFINING GOALS, POLICIES, AND IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAMS

The Corte Madera General Plan is supported by Goals, Policies, and Implementation Programs that set forth the guiding principles upon which future decisions can be made. The goals, policies, and implementation programs for each General Plan Element are located at the end of each Chapter. These components of the General Plan are defined and organized as shown in the following diagram. Each of the components, in descending order, provides more detail about how the Town will achieve the components above it.

GOAL:

A broad statement reflecting community values and ideal future vision.



POLICY:

A clear and specific statement that guides decision-making in order to promote the achievement of a goal. In some instances, a policy may be specific enough so as to include a clear sense of how implementation will occur.



IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM:

An action or procedure that carries out a General Plan Policy. Each policy typically has one or more corresponding Implementation Program.

An example of this format is provided below, using the Land Use Chapter:

GOAL LU-1

A mix and distribution of land uses that enhances community character and serves the needs of existing and future Town residents.

POLICY LU-1.2

The development review process shall protect and enhance the character of the built and natural environments in Corte Madera.

Implementation Program LU-1.2.a Design Guidelines

Prepare and adopt Design Guidelines for the review of residential and non-residential development.

Responsibility:	Planning and Building Department
Timeframe:	Within three years of General Plan adoption
Resources:	General Plan Maintenance Fee