

RIVERSIDE COUNTY INTEGRATED PROJECT

The Importance of Urban Management in California

Introduction

Riverside County is located in Southern California's Inland Empire. The population in Riverside County is expected to double from 1.5 million to 3 million by the year 2020, making it one of the fastest growing communities in California. The county is one of the largest in the United States covering an area of 7,200 square miles; an area slightly smaller than Slovenia and slightly larger than Kuwait.

The Riverside County Integrated Project (RCIP) reveals the importance of housing, environmental conservation, transportation links, and cooperation of all levels of government in the planning for a growing urban region. The RCIP breaks boundaries in regional planning in the state of California by integrating three main planning components into a truly regional, comprehensive planning project. The first component of the RCIP is the County General Plan that addresses land use, circulation, housing, open space, conservation, safety, and noise. The Community and Environmental Transportation Acceptability Process (CETAP) plans for four new transportation corridors to provide access within the county and to surrounding regions. The Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP) is the third component. The MSHCP will protect up to 146 species with an open space corridor through Riverside County. The RCIP's goals are to create a balanced and sustainable environment for Riverside County and to improve the quality of life in Riverside County's communities.

Government Partnerships

The Riverside County Integrated Project was initiated by the Riverside County Board of Supervisors and the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC). The project combines the efforts of the state, county, and federal governments as well as local jurisdictions and other agencies. The project is overseen by the County Board of Supervisors, although each of the components has an advisory committee and works with numerous other agencies.

General Plan

Meeting the needs of the growing number of residents in Riverside County is the primary reason for the County General Plan update. Other goals of the General Plan update are to secure a high quality of life, create a community identity, provide choices and incentives for development, collaborate with stakeholders and redefine the development process and the county.

General Plans are a mandatory part of the planning process in the state of California. State law requires cities and counties to write a long term vision of the community and how they plan to implement that vision. Seven elements are required as part of a General Plan including land use, housing, noise, conservation, open space, circulation and safety.

The Riverside County General Plan update includes policy on all of the unincorporated county land and land use maps for nineteen detailed Area Plans. The process began October 1998 with a set of fifteen Consensus Planning Principles created by a group of community stakeholders. These Consensus Planning Principles are the foundation for the General Plan update.

An advisory committee was created to oversee the development of the General Plan. The General Plan Advisory Committee is comprised of representatives appointed by each County Supervisor, as well as representatives from the Western Riverside Council of Governments, the Building Industry Association, California Department of Fish and Game, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Community Access Center, Endangered Habitats League, the Sierra Club, the Farm Bureau, Riverside County Office of Education, Riverside County Economic Development Agency, Riverside County Property Owners Association, and representatives from selected cities.

Residents of the county are also an important ingredient to developing the General Plan update. A number of public meetings were held between June and October of 1999 to find out the future needs and concerns of resident in the county. These meeting were used to engage the public in dialogue with the county, planning consultants, and county residents.

One of the distinguishing features of the Riverside County General Plan is its Foundation Components located in the Land Use Element. All land use designations in the General Plan are under one of five Foundation Components, including Community Development, Agriculture, Rural Community, Rural, and Multipurpose Open Space. The county wide General Plan Map includes only these designations. The more detailed land uses that fall under the Foundation Components are shown in the detailed Area Plans. Land uses can be changed through a General Plan Amendment within its Foundation Component. Land uses can be changed from a land use in one Foundation Component to a land use in another Foundation Component in five year intervals. For example, Low Density Residential may be amended to Medium Density Residential because they are both under the Community Development Foundation Component. Moving a piece of the land from Low Density residential to Agriculture can only be done in five year intervals because they are under different Foundation Components. This simple, comprehensive system is replacing the previous General Plan with over 200 different classifications.

The circulation element of the General Plan gives direction and implementation for CETAP and the Multipurpose Open Space element is a combination of the open space and conservation requirement in the General Plan. The Multipurpose Open Space element implements the Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP). The remaining elements are also addressed in the County of Riverside General Plan. Each element identifies needs for the future and how the county will meet these needs.

Conservation

Natural vegetation communities were once very common in Southern California, but due to rapid urbanization these communities are quickly declining. Little effort to coordinate the mitigation of development in these communities has lead to a piecemeal approach to conservation. The Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP) will connect natural areas, providing conservation for all species in the region.

The creation of the Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP) was authorized on June 17, 2003 by the Riverside County Board of Supervisors. It encompasses approximately 1.26 million acres in Western Riverside County, including unincorporated county land as well as land in fourteen cities. The MSCHP serves as a pursuant to the federal endangered species act.

The area covers a diverse landscape from urban areas to mountainous regions. The plan calls for the preservation of approximately 500,000 acres of land. The goals of the MSHCP include:

- Biological Goal: In the MSHCP Plan Area, Conserve Covered Species and their Habitats.
- Economic Goal: Improve the future economic development in the County by providing an efficient, streamlined regulatory process though with Development can proceed in an efficient way. The MSHCP and the General Plan will provide the County with a clearly articulated blueprint describing where future development should and should not occur.
- Social Goal: Provide for permanent open space, community edges, and recreational opportunities, which contribute to maintaining the community character of Western Riverside County (Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan, 2003).

A MSHCP Advisory Committee was created to help County staff and consultants with the development of the plan. The plan requires coordination and cooperation from cities, owners of public land, the private sector, the county, Federal and State Wildlife Agencies, and the Western Riverside County Regional Conservation Authority (RCA). Cities can implement the plan by adopting an ordinance or resolution that establishes the MSHCP and procedures for its implementation. Cities must also adopt an ordinance to impose the Local Development Mitigation Fees. MSHCP is implemented in the County thorough the General Plan Multipurpose Open Space element and through a mitigation fee on all unincorporated land. Collected mitigation fees from both the County and the Cities will be transmitted to the RCA. The Regional Conservation Authority is responsible for collecting mitigation fees as well as administering the implementation of the plan. The RCA also manages the MSHCP Conservation Area property.

The plan relies on incentives to developers to protect species and their habitats. The Habitat Evaluation and Acquisition Negotiation Strategy (HANS) is the main incentives process for property owners and developers on land that may be needed for the MSHCP Conservation Area. Incentives may include fee waivers, density bonuses, fast tracking application process, or compensation. A Criteria Area boundary has been set up to anticipate areas that may need to be included in the MSHCP Conservation Area. This process helps to determine which properties will be evaluated for acquisition and Conservation in the MSHCP.

In addition, RCIP includes a Special Area Management Plan (SAMP) that will create a balance between water resource management and economic development. The SAMP is designed to create a balance between resource protection and economic development. This plan will help to protect and restore aquatic areas, while still letting development occur. The SAMP final product will include an expedited regulatory permit program under the Clean Water Act.

Transportation

The final main component of the Riverside County Integrated Project is the Community and Environmental Transportation Acceptability Process or CETAP. CETAP defines the process for locating new transportation facilities to meet the needs of the rapidly expanding Western Riverside County. The main objective of CETAP is to try to minimize the impacts of new transportation systems on the community and the environment. In the next few years CETAP will identify four new transportation corridors and mass transit routes to be developed in the future.

The Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) is the leading agency responsible for studying and funding the new transportation projects. CETAP was included in the preparation of the circulation element of the General Plan. An Advisory Committee was formed to help guide the process. The two main goals of CETAP are to:

- Identify and set aside areas for major transportation facilities (both highways and transit) that will be necessary to support the future growth in Western Riverside County
- Ensure that the transportation infrastructure will be in place to foster the economy of Riverside County and provide access for our citizens to jobs, schools, shopping, and other daily activities (www.rcip.org).

RCTC has been working with local governments, California Department of Transportation, state environmental agencies, and federal agencies including the Federal Highway Administration to determine the best alternatives to locate needed transportation facilities in Western Riverside County. There have been hundreds of public forums in the last three years to gain valuable feedback from the community. Each of the cities in Riverside County also has a representative in the RCTC to ensure that the needs of the local communities are met.

Currently two internal corridors have been identified, a north-south corridor from Winchester to Temecula and an east-west corridor from Hemet to Corona/ Lake Elsinore. After decisions on final routes are made the right-of-way for the corridor will need to be preserved until the corridor is needed. One external corridor has also been identified by CETAP from the Moreno Valley to San Bernardino County that will be important for residents in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties. For this corridor both Riverside County and San Bernardino County are working together to improve transportation between the counties.

According to the CETAP Fact Sheet, benefits from CETAP include one and a half to two hours more time per week for commuters to spend at home. Internal corridors will save residents as much as \$40 to \$70 million dollars per year in transportation costs. In addition there will be less traffic and less stress for drivers as well as better access to jobs, schools, and other facilities.

Conclusion

Although planning is an on going process, the Riverside County Integrated Project has shown that collaboration and coordination in all levels of government can insure a better community for a rapidly growing urban region. Each component of the Riverside County Integrated Project is an integral step for planning the future of Riverside County. Each of the three main parts of the RCIP makes up a partnership between all levels of the government, governmental agencies, and the public. The components are interlinked to balance land use, conservation, and transportation needs for the future of Riverside County. This integrated process is a unique way of planning for a growing urban region. The collaboration of the advisory boards, local governments, the County, state and federal governments makes the Riverside County Integrated Project a regional and comprehensive plan to guide the future.

References

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- Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP). Volume 1 - The Plan. 17 June 2003.
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