

OPEN SPACE ELEMENT

Open Space

Open space may be defined as land or water areas generally free from development or developed with low intensity uses that respect natural environmental characteristics. Open space is generally non-urban in character and may have utility for park and recreation purposes; conservation of land, water, or other natural resources; and for historic or scenic purposes.

The California Government Code describes some of the more important uses of open space.

- "Open space **for the preservation of natural resources** including, but not limited to, areas required for the preservation of plant and animal life, including habitat fish and wildlife species; areas required for the ecologic and other scientific study purposes; rivers, streams, bays and estuaries; and coastal beaches, lakeshores, banks of rivers and streams, and watershed lands.
- Open space **used for the managed production of resources**, including but not limited to, forest lands, rangeland, agricultural lands and areas of economic importance for the production of food or fiber; areas required for recharge of ground water basins; bays, estuaries, marshes, rivers and streams which are important for the management of commercial fisheries; and areas containing major mineral deposits, including those in short supply.
- Open space **for outdoor recreation**, including but not limited to, areas of outstanding scenic, historic and cultural value; areas particularly suited for park and recreation purposes, including access to lakeshores, beaches, and rivers and streams; and areas which serve as links between major recreation and open-space reservations, including utility easements, banks of rivers and streams, trails, and scenic highway corridors.
- Open space **for public health and safety**, including but not limited to, areas which require special management or regulation because of hazardous or special conditions such as earthquake fault zones, unstable soil areas, floodplains, watersheds, areas presenting high fire risks, areas required for the protection of water quality and water reservoirs and areas required for the protection and enhancement of air quality."
- Open space **to control urban form**, which may include the utilization of the varied terrain and natural drainage systems in guiding and controlling the form of development.
- Open space **for scenic and visual enjoyment** for relief from continuous urban development and to help provide for the preservation of areas having outstanding scenic qualities.

Inasmuch as the intent of preserving open space is to conserve the natural resources of the City, the overlap between the Conservation Element and open space is apparent. The Open Space Element is also very closely tied to recreation and the City's park system, and to cultural resources which discusses the historic and cultural aspects of San Diego.

A direct association is made to the Seismic Safety Element in the identification of floodplains and steep slopes, both geological hazards, and a component of the open space system. And lastly the open space system is an integral implementation tool of the Urban Design Element in the creation of cohesive neighborhoods and communities.

FINDINGS

The Open Space Element is perceived as one of the tools for protecting San Diego's quality of life. It supports the conservation and enhancement of San Diego's existing communities and seeks to aid in the recreation of new communities which strive to retain and enhance natural amenities.

The open space system is based upon the natural features of the San Diego coastal plain. It capitalizes on the drainage systems, particularly the river valleys and adjoining steep hillsides which interrupt the coastal plain and link the ocean with the coastal mountain range.

Because the drainage systems contain alluvial soils and ground water they often provide good agricultural potential. Since they also often support lush stands of vegetation they are an important asset in establishing the natural amenity or quality of life for San Diego. San Diego's many canyons and valleys are not only scenic but are often particularly suitable for use as natural parks.

The limited utility of drainage systems for intensive urban development often provides an opportunity to utilize them as natural relief from urbanization in already built up areas. Similarly, canyon and hillside open spaces give form to urbanization and can enhance established neighborhood environments thus conserving the "quality of life" in San Diego's communities.

In reviewing the land characteristics of the coastal plain it is apparent that open space may also function to protect the public health, safety, and general welfare. For this reason, steep areas of unstable soil and floodplains may be restricted to development intensities that are consistent with open space objectives.

An objective of the Open Space Element is that open spaces be multifunctional. Some systems may have attractive vegetation and/or wildlife, contain streams or estuaries, and also have potential for agricultural use. Some systems may also have scenic or cultural-recreational value for future park use. In other cases, the public health, safety, and general welfare may be protected through the prevention of intensive urbanization.

Open Space Categories

Open spaces shown on the Open Space Plan Map are divided into three components: 1) Public and Semi-Public Open Space, 2) Other Open Spaces, and 3) Open Space Subsystems Outside San Diego City.

Public and Semi-Public Open Space. This category consists primarily of the many resource based parks that are located throughout the City. These unique parks contain features that not only distinguish the open space system but add significantly to the overall image and quality of life typical of San Diego. Also included in this category is the large city-owned agricultural preserve in the Lake Hodges-San Pasqual Valley. Another significant publicly owned area is the federal installation on Point Loma that includes both the Naval facility and the Cabrillo National Monument. Finally, open spaces acquired through community and neighborhood assessment districts and open space dedications resulting from the subdivision process are categorized as public and semi-public open space.

Other Open Space Subsystems. Open Space that is designated in adopted community plans forms the mainstay of this category. Also included are proposed resource based parks and proposed additions to existing resource based parks. The undeveloped portions of riverine floodplains were also made a part of this component. These floodplains were delineated by HUD and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in connection with the National Flood Insurance Program.

Open Space Subsystems Outside San Diego City. These areas represent extensions of systems within the City that fit compatibly with jurisdictions outside the City.

GOAL

- ESTABLISH AN OPEN SPACE SYSTEM WHICH PROVIDES FOR THE PRESERVATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES, THE MANAGED PRODUCTION OF RESOURCES, THE PROVISION OF OUTDOOR RECREATION, THE PROTECTION OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY, AND THE UTILIZATION OF THE VARIED TERRAIN AND NATURAL DRAINAGE SYSTEMS OF THE SAN DIEGO COMMUNITY TO GUIDE THE FORM OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT.

GUIDELINES AND STANDARDS

Although there is virtually total agreement as to the need for open space, there is by no means agreement as to specific need standards. However, it is apparent that standards for the designation of open space should primarily consider the extent to which the uses of open space alluded to earlier in this element can be identified and accommodated. In addition such standards should also consider the following variables: the extent, character, intensity, and pace of urbanization; the magnitude and distribution of the urban population; its rate of growth, mobility, and social and economic characteristics; the degree of stress and tension of urban living; and the availability of financial resources for open space acquisition.

Establishing Priorities

In establishing relative importance, the greater the number of uses or functions, the higher the system's priority should be. For example, a system which provides the opportunity to conserve natural vegetation and wildlife while also preserving agricultural lands or groundwater resources

should receive a higher priority than a system which provides the opportunity for only a single use.

The following open space uses are recommended to be considered in the establishment of priorities. These uses are described in greater detail in the introduction of this element.

- Open space for the preservation of natural resources.
- Open space for the managed production of resources.
- Open space for outdoor recreation.
- Open space for public health and safety.
- Open space to control urban form.
- Open space for scenic and visual enjoyment.

Given more than one candidate for open space which meet the criteria for multi-use, the following considerations will permit an evaluation.

Threat of Urbanization

Land designated for open space falling within urban areas on which subdivisions or improvements are proposed should receive a high priority in any considerations of acquisition. Land within urban areas but not subject to immediate development pressure should receive medium priority. Finally, an area which is not expected to urbanize in the next ten years, or land which is zoned agricultural, should receive a low priority.

Proximity to Existing Open Space

This evaluation should consider the need for open space based on the acreage devoted to existing open space within individual communities. Potential open space located in urbanized areas deficient in the provision of existing open space should receive the highest priority. Potential open space located in areas which have existing community-neighborhood open space but are deficient in regional open space should receive a medium priority. Potential open space located in areas where both community-neighborhood and regional open space exists should receive lower priority.

Size of System and Cost of Acquisition

When systems of comparable amenity and number of uses are candidates for acquisition, the opportunity to acquire large relatively inexpensive tracts of land should receive priority over smaller more costly sites. In some cases however, exceptions may be necessary, (e.g., a smaller site which is necessary to provide public access to an existing open space system or to protect a significant natural or man-made environment).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Lands that have value and utility for open space are expected to be preserved by acquisition and/or regulation. It is anticipated that open space acquisitions will be made through a combination of private and public actions. Open space that is not required may be preserved through reasonable regulatory devices and these areas will be permitted to develop in a manner that is consistent with appropriate zoning that is applied to them. Such zoning as may be applied on these properties will allow a reasonable use and promote the public health, safety and general welfare.

Acquisition

- A priority listing of open space acquisitions should be established utilizing the standards presented in this element.
- A citywide assessment district should be established for the acquisition of areas determined to have high priority.
- Specific City funds (Environmental Growth Fund) should be earmarked and priorities established for the purpose of acquiring open space as a part of the City's Capital Improvement Program.
- The establishment of community-neighborhood assessment districts should be encouraged for the acquisition of open space.
- Impact fees and/or open space dedications should be required where appropriate to provide open space in new developments.
- The City should establish an office whose function is to obtain supplemental open space acquisition funds from federal, state, and county programs, and to assist community groups in establishing and implementing community and neighborhood open space programs.
- The City should cooperate with adjacent jurisdictions and other governmental entities to preserve the open space systems shown on the Open Space Plan Map that are outside the City.

Floodplains & Hillside

Because of the size of the City of San Diego and the diverse character of land areas which may have utility for open space, it may not be possible to acquire all of the systems proposed in this element. For this reason, lands included in floodplains, steep hillsides, and some agricultural areas should be permitted to develop consistent with the appropriate zoning that is applied to them.

The purpose and intent of regulating floodplains is to control land use and development in a manner that protects the public health, safety, and general welfare. Floodplain regulations also

seek to reduce the financial burden of the City by eliminating the need for the construction of expensive flood control facilities. In attaining these goals, floodplain regulations also tend to conserve the environmentally sensitive qualities of floodplains.

- Floodplain regulations should be applied to all areas subject to flooding as identified by the National Flood Insurance Program.
- Concurrent with the floodplain zoning program, plans should be prepared for all major drainage systems. Such plans should distinguish between urban (e.g., Mission Valley) and non-urban systems (e.g., San Dieguito Valley). These plans should emphasize preservation rather than protective approaches, retention of agriculture in floodplains, encouragement of water conservation techniques, and the development of park and recreational uses wherever possible.

The purpose and intent of regulating hillsides is to provide for the reasonable use of slopes exceeding 25 percent gradient while protecting the public health, safety, and general welfare. These regulations seek to ensure that development results in minimum disturbance of natural terrain and does not create soil erosion, silting of lower slopes, slide damage, flooding problems, and severe cutting or scarring. Careful administration of hillside regulations also serves to protect environmental resources that are associated with hillsides, to protect significant views of and from hillsides, to maintain a clear sense of natural hillside topography in steeply sloping areas, and to encourage sensitive forms of development of San Diego's hillsides.

- Where hillsides falling within the HR category exist and the community desires to acquire such systems, their acquisition should be given priority over development; however in the event that acquisition is not possible within a reasonable time period development should be permitted in conformance with the HR Zone.

Agriculture

The purpose of adopting agricultural regulations is to provide appropriate zoning of areas which are rural in character, and presently may be zoned for agricultural purposes, only on an interim basis. It is intended that the agricultural zones be applied to undeveloped areas not yet ready for urbanization and awaiting development, those areas where agricultural usage may be reasonably expected to persist, or areas designated as open space in the General Plan.

- That permanent agricultural zones be applied in areas where climate, ground water quality, and soil conditions are conducive to the production of agricultural products on an economically viable basis.
- That a Council policy be established which identifies the City's intent to establish agricultural preserves in agriculturally zoned areas, conserve agriculturally productive lands, and establish a process for administering Williamson Act and open space easement applications for tax abatement purposes.

General

- Apply floodplain and hillside regulations to all areas of the City that meet the criteria for these regulations.
- Where appropriate initiate rezoning to more restrictive classifications of those floodplains, hillsides, and potentially productive agricultural areas that are in R-1-20 or less restrictive zones.
- The installation of public and private improvements in designated open space areas should respect the natural environment to the maximum extent possible.
- Provide Open Space Elements for those adopted community plans that do not have Open Space Elements.
- Revise floodplain zones, hillside zone and agricultural zones to reflect the objectives of the Open Space Element.

OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF SENSITIVE LANDS

Sensitive Land

In addition to the hillside review, floodplain and agricultural zoning tools which help ensure proper development of obviously sensitive areas, planned development permits are utilized.

The intent is not to apply any of these regulatory methods solely for the purpose of preserving open space lands. Instead, these controls will be exercised when site conditions exist which preclude standard zoning patterns and practices. For example, adverse geologic formations may preclude or make development on a portion of the site difficult; preservation of natural drainage may cause cluster of development on one portion of the site; the need for visual relief from contiguous development may be achieved by shifting development on a site. In summary, given the fact that development will occur on sensitive lands, alternative methods outside of standard zoning may ensure the best use of the site while protecting public health and safety.

- Require a planned development permit on sites when sensitive landforms or soils are known or found.
- Include in community plans the areas where planned development permits should be required.

Community Plans

The preservation of open space and the development of sensitive lands are major concerns of the City of San Diego as has been stated in this element. The City has adopted Council policies aimed towards acquisition and retention of lands for open space purposes as well as ordinances designed to restrict development in certain sensitive areas. Given the general nature of this

element, and the other elements of the General Plan, and given the unique neighborhood characteristics of each of San Diego's communities, an Open Space Element for each community would be appropriate to assure that the goals of this element and the purpose of Council policies will be applied to each community.

Recommendation

Establish an Open Space and Sensitive Land Element for each community plan with specific criteria on which to identify open space and sensitive land areas; to describe their function, their purpose, and develop a specific recommendation of either retention or development.

Definitions

Sensitive Lands - Identify in each community plan lands of significant environmental value because of the steepness of the topography (which enhances its contribution to the urban form and aesthetic character of the community, and which makes development difficult without extensive disturbance), certain biological habitats (which have significant value for wildlife or are the locations of high interest plant species), geological hazards (which may require substantial grading to correct), erosion concerns (where disturbed soils may be unusually difficult to stabilize or revegetate), and visual prominence of the area (its contribution to defining the predominant community character or its relationship to parks or open space areas).

Policy

It is a policy that every community plan and specific plan shall contain an Open Space and Sensitive Land Element to include the following:

1. Acknowledge the general character of the community as being either urbanized or planned urbanizing as established in the General Plan.
2. Identify and map all hillsides, canyons, water resources, bluffs, beaches, farm land, parks, open space areas, natural resources, and special urban spaces.
3. Areas identified on the open space retention list should be listed, their order of priority, and the recommended method of retention identified.
4. Describe the primary functions of the open space area, as well as the goals for the area.

Possible uses and goals include:

- a. preservation and/or management of natural resources;
- b. outdoor recreation;
- c. historic and cultural preservation;

- d. control of urban form and design; and
 - e. scenic and aesthetic enjoyment.
5. Identify and describe potential development conflicts and development opportunities associated with each open space system, with recommendations designed to reduce such conflicts.
 6. Identify specific methods of implementation. These methods would include:
 - a. Placing area on the open space retention list;
 - b. Rezoning to a zone which will maintain open space characteristics of the land;
 - c. Overlaying the Hillside Review Zone on sensitive slopes having prominent features and panoramic vistas as well as reviewing and updating the existing Hillside Review Zone to assure accuracy;
 - d. Creating special development regulations for the open space system;
 - e. Zone floodway, floodplain fringe or sensitive coastal resource, as appropriate;
 - f. Require that sensitive areas be placed in a permanent open space easement or given in fee to the City either through the subdivision or planned development permit process; and
 - g. Develop specific development guidelines for those areas slated for development.
 7. Provide phasing plan for implementation of the recommendations contained within the Open Space Element.
 8. Define all terms and strengthen long range planning review of current planning projects.
 9. Each area shall be evaluated using the following criteria. These criteria can be used to develop specific recommendations for each area.

URBAN FORM CONSIDERATIONS

A. General Plan Consistency

As stated in this element, "the extent, character, intensity and pace of urbanization" should be considered. Open space areas adjacent to fully developed communities, versus areas only partially developed or undeveloped, receive high consideration for retention of land character and open space corridors.

B. Community Identity

1. Retention of Open Space

Land designed as open space on which subdivisions or improvements are proposed would receive high consideration for retention.

Lesser consideration would be given to urban area land which is not subject to immediate development pressure, to areas not expected to urbanize within the near future, or to land which is zoned agricultural or floodway.

2. Lack of Parks in Neighborhoods - Areas deficient in General Plan population based park standards would receive a higher consideration for retention than areas meeting those standards.

C. Size and Area Considerations

1. Length and Area - provide an objective measurement that is easily calculated. Respond to the need to differentiate open space and sensitive lands that:

- a. importantly contributes to City identity or otherwise possesses citywide value or utility; or
- b. primarily serves to define or separate community areas and has both citywide and community value; or
- c. serves to define or separate neighborhoods within their respective communities and thus has mainly community value; or
- d. serves to provide focus and identity within neighborhoods.

2. Urban Form - San Diego's canyon and hillside open spaces give form to its urbanization, while also providing visual or psychological relief. These criteria measure how the open space gives form to what otherwise would be:

- a. continuous urban development;
- b. how the open space buffers or physically demarcates one community from another and how much the open space possesses in terms of scenic and aesthetic attractiveness;
- c. whether the open space would provide a useable linkage directly to other open space or park area; and
- d. whether the varied terrain and natural drainage systems may be used in guiding or controlling the form of development.

D. Scenic Criteria

Scenic criteria consider whether the area:

1. is primarily in its natural state, and its preservation would maintain or enhance the conservation of natural or scenic resources;
2. has outstanding scenic and visual qualities;
3. has quality long vistas either to or from the open space, and
4. provides for scenic and visual enjoyment or relief from continuous urban development.

E. Access and Recreation Potential

1. Access - is evaluated against both the number and quality of potential public access points into an open space area. Considerations include:
2. Recreational Potential - also recognizes areas particularly suited to recreational activities, such as those containing streams and trails. The most consideration is given to areas that offer multiple recreational uses such as pedestrian, bicycle and equestrian trails, open play areas, picnicking, etc.

F. Environmental Considerations

1. Fauna and Flora Features - Areas where endangered animals and vegetation are located, and highly vegetated areas, such as those with many or varied trees and flora.
2. Geological Features

Geological open space capitalizes on our City's geological features - mountain ranges, drainage systems, river valleys, and coastal plains. It also includes safety considerations, such as earthquake fault zones and other geological hazards such as steep areas of unstable soil. Areas identified as "moderate" (C), "high" (D), or "variable" (BC or AC) risk zones as identified on the geotechnical land use capability maps referenced by the Seismic Safety Element of the General Plans shall be mapped.