



AGENDA SUMMARY REPORT

To: Honorable Mayor and Council Members

From: Dusty Duley - Community Development Director

Agenda Title: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF GENERAL PLAN LAND USE ELEMENT UPDATE.

Type: Presentation Consent Regular Agenda Public Hearing Urgent Time: 45 minutes.

Summary of Request: Receive a presentation from staff and project consultants, Planwest Partners on the Public Draft Land Use Element Update. Amendments to the City of Willits Land Use Element and Land Use Diagram include:

- (1) The identification of a Planning Area that includes the City as well as surrounding land that bears relation to City planning;
- (2) Changes to existing and new Land Use Element policy intended to expand the land supply for housing of all types, provide for focused planning for Willits' commercial centers, provide for land use flexibility and compatibility, ensure community health and vitality and environmental health and sustainability, and to expand and improve land use designations and general plan maintenance;
- (3) Changes to Land Use Designations within the City to support residential and commercial development, as well as for open space purposes, and changes to apply Land Use Designations that best reflect the use and character of existing development within the City where the current Land Use Designation is not appropriate; and
- (4) Proposed expansions to the City's Sphere of Influence (SOI), with the application of appropriate City Land Use Designations, to support a potential Sphere of Influence Amendment application to the Mendocino Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo).

Staff is bringing the Land Use Element Update to the Council in two parts. This public hearing will be focused on the proposed amendments to the Land Use Element policy and the expansion to the City SOI. A second public hearing focusing on the proposed land use changes and to receive comments on the EIR is scheduled for September 11th.

Recommended Action: Review presentation and provide feedback on the Land Use Element Update

Alternative(s): None.

Fiscal Impact: Grant funds are available to support the remaining costs to adopt the Land Use Element and the Environmental Impact Report.

Personnel Impact: Significant amount of time by Community Development staff will be necessary to implement the various Land Use Element policies.

Identified City Council Conflict of Interest: None.

2021 Adopted Goals: Community Development Goal 1...*Complete an update to the City's General Plan to be used to guide future development within the City including encouragement of housing opportunities and sustainable economic development.*

California Environmental Quality Act: This is a discussion item. Adoption of the LUE will be subject to CEQA. The Draft Environmental Impact Report was made available on July 25, 2024, and is available for review at the project website <https://willitslanduseupdate.com> or a physical copy is available at the Community Development Department or Willits Library.

This Item Relates to the following General Plan Element : N/A Land Use Circulation Conservation and Open Space Noise Housing Public Services and Facilities, Parks and Recreation Economic Development

Reviewed by: City Manager City Attorney Assistant City Manager City Clerk Finance Director
 Human Resources

Council Action: Approved Denied Other: _____

Records: Agreement Resolution # _____ Ordinance # _____ Other _____



CITY COUNCIL AGENDA STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: August 28, 2024

AGENDA ITEM NO:

TO: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

PREPARED BY: Planwest Partners, Inc.

ITEM: ***LAND USE ELEMENT UPDATE DISCUSSION***

REQUEST: To receive a presentation, hear public opinion on the matter, and to provide feedback and direction to staff regarding the Public Review Draft Land Use Element Update Proposed Policy and Sphere of Influence Area.

SUMMARY

City staff and a consultant team, Planwest Partners, have been working to update the City's General Plan Land Use Element. The Land Use Element has multiple objectives of accommodating desired growth, addressing community needs, identifying necessary amendments to reflect changes in state law and for the purpose of providing new housing opportunities, streamlining the development approval process, and accelerating housing development. The update will include an amendment to the City's Sphere of Influence (SOI) following the adoption of an updated Land Use Element.

This planning effort has involved meetings with an Advisory Committee to guide the initial update's direction; the creation of a project website and interactive mapping application; a community input survey; and an Open House to gather community input. There have been two meetings with your Council to discuss changes to the City's Land Use Element, including: a meeting to discuss potential land use changes on May 10, 2023, and a meeting to discuss Land Use policy changes on June 21, 2023. In addition, in May of this year a comprehensive letter was sent to property owners within the City whose land use may be changing for one of the following reasons: (1) to create potential opportunities for new residential or mixed-use development; (2) mapping "clean ups" where the long-time, established, land uses are inconsistent with the Land Use Designation applied in 1992 or earlier. In addition, property owners outside the City within the proposed SOI were also notified. A Public review draft of the Land Use Element was published on June 26, 2024, and a draft Environmental Impact Report (SCH No. 2023030321) was published on July 25, 2024. Both documents are available on the project website at <https://willitslanduseupdate.com>. A copy of both documents is also available at the Community Development Department and Willits Library.

The objective of this public hearing is to provide an opportunity for the City Council and members of the public to consider and provide comments on the draft General Plan land use policies and proposed SOI. The essential elements of the Public Review Draft Land Use Element are modifications to existing Land Use Element policy to reflect new information and changes that have occurred over time, new policy to reflect the need of the community and changes in state

land use law, and proposed changes to the General Plan Land Use Map. A second public hearing focusing on the proposed land use changes and to receive public comments on the Draft EIR is scheduled for September 11th. The deadline to make written public comments is Monday, September 9, 2024. A final hearing to certify the EIR and approve the Land Use Element is scheduled for October 23rd.

BACKGROUND

WILLITS GENERAL PLAN VISION 2020 (1992):

The Willits General Plan Vision 2020, the current City of Willits General Plan, contains text and diagrams that expresses the goals, objectives, and policies intended to guide the community toward achieving its vision for development. City decision makers rely on the General Plan as the basis for making decisions on matters such as land use, transportation, open space and conservation, the provision of public services, and environmental quality and safety. It is also a policy document that guides decisions related to protecting and enhancing what the community values most, such as protecting and enhancing the character of the community. The City of Willits' General Plan was last comprehensively updated and adopted in 1992. Since then, the City's land use needs have changed to some degree due to demographic and economic conditions and updates are also required to comply with state guidelines and laws. General Plans are intended to be comprehensively updated at least every 20 years.

LAND USE ELEMENT DESCRIPTION:

The proposed amendments to the City of Willits Land Use Element and Land Use Diagram are comprehensive and also includes proposed changes to the City Zoning Map, which will follow the approval of the Land Use Element. The update includes:

- (1) the identification of a Planning Area that includes the City as well as surrounding land that bears relation to City planning;
- (2) changes to existing and new Land Use Element policy intended to expand the land supply for housing of all types, provide for focused planning for Willits' commercial centers, provide for land use flexibility and compatibility, ensure community health and vitality and environmental health and sustainability, and to expand and improve land use designations and general plan maintenance;
- (3) changes to Land Use Designations within the City to support residential and commercial development, as well as for open space purposes, and changes to apply Land Use Designations that best reflect the use and character of existing development within the City where the current Land Use Designation is not appropriate;
- (4) proposed expansions to the City's Sphere of Influence, with the application of appropriate City Land Use Designations, to support a potential Sphere of Influence Amendment application to the Mendocino Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo);

ZONING AMENDMENTS TO IMPLEMENT THE LAND USE ELEMENT:

The changes described above will trigger the need to amend the Zoning Map to implement the Land Use Element and changes to regulations, such as the addition of mixed-use zones. A draft Zoning Map has been prepared and the anticipated mixed-use zone is being developed. Additional amendments will also be required to fully implement the Land Use Element.

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE UPDATE:

The Land Use Element also involves a proposed expansion to the City's SOI, which is discussed in detail below.

PUBLIC REVIEW DRAFT LAND USE ELEMENT:

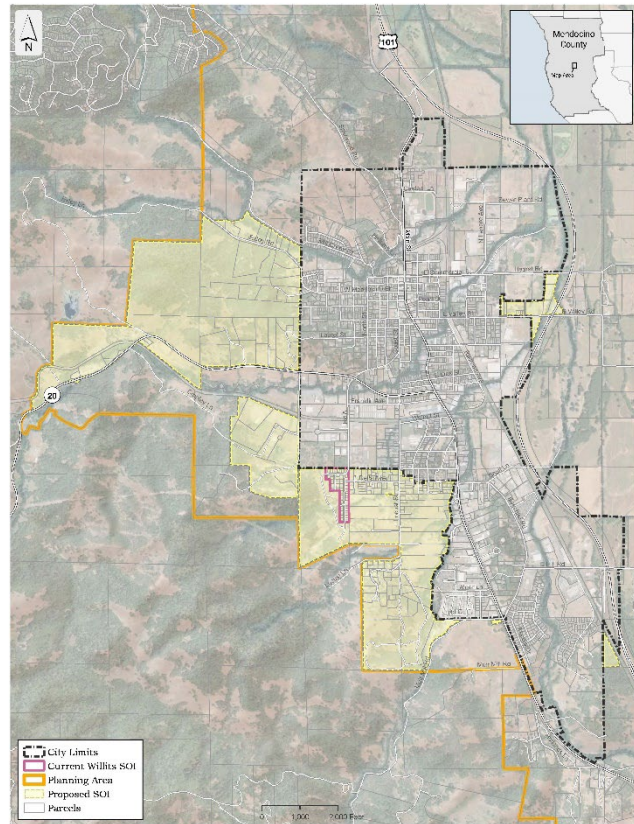
Staff is bringing the Land Use Element Update to your Council in two parts. This public hearing will be focused on the proposed amendments to Land use Element policy and the expansion to the City SOI. A second public hearing focusing on the proposed land use changes and receive comments on the EIR is scheduled for September 11th. Attachment 1 to this staff report is the Public Review Draft Land Use Element and the Draft EIR can be downloaded at the following link <https://willitslanduseupdate.com>.

DISCUSSION DRAFT LAND USE ELEMENT POLICY AND PROPOSED SOI EXPANSION FOR COUNCIL CONSIDERATION

Staff is bringing the Land Use Element Update to your Council in two parts. This public hearing will be focused on the proposed amendments to Land use Element policy and the expansion to the City SOI. To date, staff has received no specific concerns from the public about the proposed policy but has received concerns from property owners within the proposed SOI expansion area. This staff report first describes the purpose of the proposed SOI expansion and the areas included and then seeks to address public concerns by describing what it is and is not. Next, this staff report presents the proposed Land Use Element, describing the intent of the policy and why the changes are proposed.

PROPOSED SOI EXPANSION:

An SOI is defined in state law as a plan for an area outside of the City that reflects the probable physical boundaries and service area of a local agency, as determined by the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo). SOIs are intended to be reviewed by LAFCo every five years and updates to an SOI must include an analysis of the services that may be provided that considers the location and characteristics of any disadvantaged unincorporated communities within or contiguous to the sphere of influence; the present and planned land uses in the area, including agricultural and open-space lands; the present and planned capacity of public facilities, and the adequacy of public services, and infrastructure needs or deficiencies. Additional Mendocino LAFCo SOI policies include 10.1.7 Agriculture and Open Space Lands, which states that territory not in need of urban services, including open space, agriculture, recreational, rural lands, or residential rural areas shall not be assigned to an agency's sphere of influence unless the area's exclusion would impede the planned, orderly and efficient development of the area. Planning for the proposed SOI



area is a part of the Land Use Element policy groupings under Goal 1, Planning Area, and Goal 2, Planning for Growth.

Existing SOI. The existing SOI is located on the west side of the city along Meadowbrook Drive has been in place since 2019 and consists of 12 acres in the Meadowbrook Dive area, which is fully served by City water and wastewater and has very limited development potential. The SOI is part of the so-called “Southwest Annexation Area” that was identified in the 1992 General Plan.

Land within the current SOI is divided into small lots that are almost entirely developed with single family and manufactured homes. The SOI contains 61 Assessor’s parcels, 58 of which are improved with single family dwellings or manufactured homes and three are vacant (one of the vacant parcels serves as yard area for an adjacent manufactured home). The existing SOI is identified as a Disadvantaged Unincorporated Community (DUC), which is defined by state law as an area that contains 12 or more registered voters that has an annual household income that is less than 80 percent of the statewide median household income, based on the California Association of Local Agency Formation Commissions (CALAFCO) Statewide DUC Map.

All residents in the SOI area have City of Willits water service. The Meadowbrook Manor County Sanitation District (MMCSO) is the wastewater provider to the entire SOI plus 47 additional parcels located outside the SOI along Della Avenue and Locust Street. The MMCSO has an agreement with the City of Willits to provide wastewater service to improved parcels within the District. There is one vacant parcel within the SOI and if it is to be developed it must be connected to the wastewater system, because the Mendocino County Code prohibits any development utilizing onsite septic within the MMCSO.

Proposed SOI Expansion Area. Based on the characteristics described above, the existing SOI provides little or no housing development potential, without redeveloping some or all of the SOI. Given that almost all properties are under separate ownership and average about 6,500 square feet in size, it would be challenging to feasibly assemble parcels in a manner where the area can be developed with higher density housing. As a result, additional areas have been evaluated for inclusion in the SOI.

To define an SOI expansion area, the City evaluated land within the Planning Area guided by characteristics including: the land use designation applied as part of the Mendocino County General Plan and the use of land; proximity to the City and its neighborhoods and how an area may contribute to a logical City boundary; the presence of existing City water or wastewater services and the relative difficulty in expanding or establishing service; the presence of sensitive natural resources or natural hazards; and proximity to City and regional transportation networks.

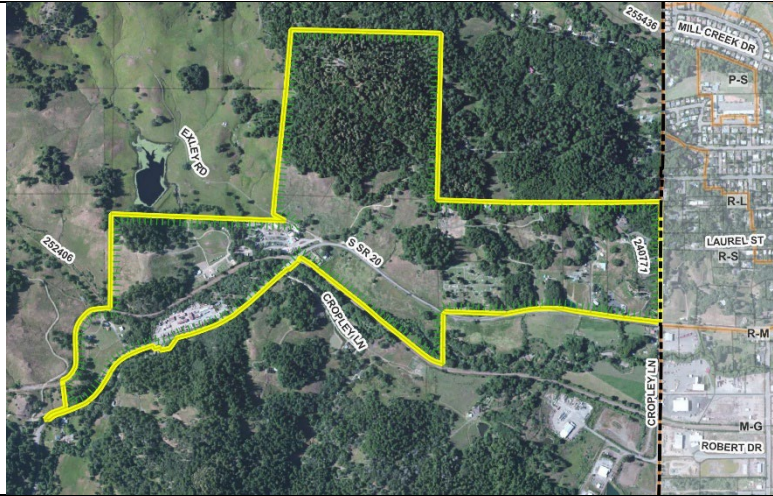
Consistent with the LAFCo definition, the proposed SOI area includes all area served by City sewer and a significant portion of the City’s out of agency water service areas (generally excluding those areas that are not contiguous with the City boundary or that area planned for resource related uses such as agriculture) and identifies areas into which it may be logical and appropriate for the City to expand when the supply of land within the City that is planned for residential, commercial, industrial, and public service uses is not adequate to support the housing or employment needs of the City.

The proposed SOI is approximately 886 acres and is divided into seven distinct areas:

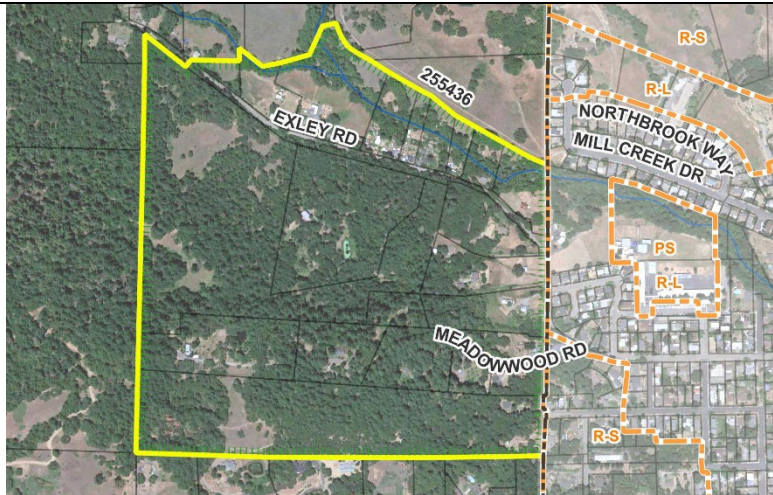
<p>Muir Mill Road – An approximately one acre developed parcel at the intersection of SR 20 south and Muir Mill Road planned by the County for multiple family residential development and served by City water.</p>	
<p>East Valley Street – 23 acres between the east City boundary and U.S. 101 along East Valley Street and comprised of 15 parcels, several planned by the County for multiple family residential development, all served by City water and within a state mapped Disadvantaged Unincorporated Community (DUC).</p>	
<p>Locust Street Area – A large area on the west side of the City that surrounds the existing SOI. This area is defined by the Sherwood Valley Rancheria and casino to the northwest, smaller parcels containing manufactured homes and single-family residences to the northeast, and large-lot rural residential parcels in the lower three-quarters. The northern 162 acres, including the Sherwood Valley Rancheria, is a Disadvantaged Community. This area contains 145 parcels (326 acres total, 20 vacant parcels ranging from 4,600 square feet to 8.5 acres and averaging 1.4 acres).</p>	

Most developed parcels have City wastewater service, and all parcels have City water service.

West SR 20 – A 278-acre area extending approximately 1.25 miles west of Willits on either side of State Route 20 containing sloped rural residential land, bottom grazing land, an RV park, and vacant industrial area with 30 parcels, 14 vacant parcels ranging from ½ acre to 80 acres and averaging approximately 18.0 acres. City water service is provided to most parcels.



Mill Creek Area – An area west of Mendocino Avenue with mostly developed parcels along Exley Road and Meadowood Road containing 148 acres within 23 parcels, most receive City water service. The proposed Land Use Designation and Zoning would be set to match the current County plan and zone, five-acre minimum.



Cropley Lane Industrial – An approximately 90-acre area consisting of seven parcels containing industrial development and served by City water. Properties are designated as Industrial by the County and located adjacent to existing industrial development within the City.



East of Grove Street – A vacant eight acres parcel containing an area with rolling terrain east of the Heahl Creek subdivision area.



The proposed SOI is significantly larger than the existing SOI. The purpose of the SOI expansion is to include property that receives city services and to create an inventory of land adjacent to the City that can incrementally and logically be added to the City over time to allow the City to be responsive to the levels of business and housing demand that may occur during the 20-year General Plan planning period. The General Plan prioritizes infill development and seeks to annex new areas only when monitoring indicates that the current supply is not adequate to accommodate housing and employment development needs. There is no immediate need to annex land, City staff is not recommending any specific plan for annexation, and there are no property owners that have requested to annex.

However, there are some benefits to property from being within an SOI. As noted above, most property within the proposed SOI receive City water service and many outside the proposed SOI also receive water service. State law approved since these water services were established requires that land be within a City SOI in order for LAFCo to approve the extension of services (Government Code 56133 requires LAFCo approval prior to extending services outside a City boundary). Service extensions outside an SOI may only be approved by LAFCo in response to an existing or impending threat to the health or safety of the public or the residents of the affected territory.

The countywide population has been declining over the last few years and state projections indicate no growth for the next five or so years and then slow growth back to approximately the County's 2020 population level in the next 20 to 30 years. Despite little or no population growth countywide, growth within cities may still occur. The proposed Land Use Element continues to assume that the City's buildout population will be approximately 7,500 residents (Policy LU-2.1, Planned Growth).

The City and the local business community have identified the lack of available housing as being directly related to lack of population growth. Further, the local business community has indicated a need to hire more workers and feel that the lack of new housing is the primary issue limiting recruitment efforts. As a result, the City has proposed to increase the supply of land to accommodate potential demand for development, in particular land for housing, in areas served by existing infrastructure and services.

Because City General Plan Land Use Designations alone change the preferences of individual property owners or their desired timing to develop their land, the City is proposing to expand its Sphere of Influence to add additional land for potential future annexation, as needed. The City's intent is to plan this additional land for residential, industrial, and public facility development, increasing the available supply of residential lands in particular, to increase the likelihood that

interested developers can find willing landowners to provide new housing units to accommodate growth. In addition, the General Plan includes programs to limit the potential for leapfrog development and to ensure that growth occurs in a logical manner.

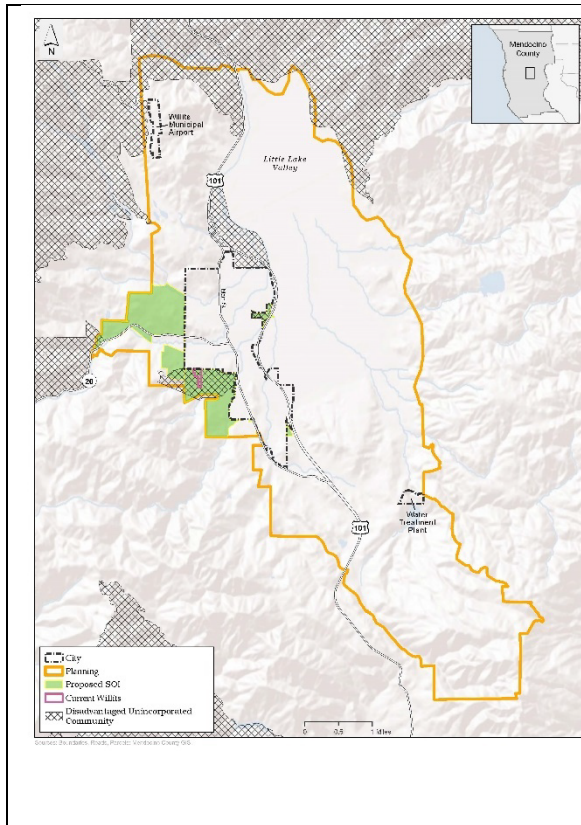
Planning for the SOI, like the City's General Plan, should have a long-range scope and involve the consideration of many factors such as location (proximity, connectivity, topography), open space, natural and agricultural resources, land development planning and capacity, and utilities and services. Comprehensive SOI planning must consider LAFCo's policy objectives (protection of open space and agricultural land, logical boundaries that discourage sprawl, and the efficient delivery of municipal services), consideration of county and city general plans, and must undergo thorough environmental review.

Land in a city SOI remains subject to the land use jurisdiction of the County and cannot be annexed into a city unless approved by LAFCo. Although, around the City of Willits most development uses City water and is therefore subject to city water utility regulations. Consistent with LAFCo law, property owners who have land outside the City and seek new City water or wastewater service must be within the SOI, or if outside the SOI the City, there must be a documented threat to health and safety, and any service extension must be approved by LAFCo. Any future effort to annex land within the SOI would be based on the results of city monitoring of the land supply within the City and would be planned by the City in close coordination with property owners as part of a public process (proposed Policies LU-2.3, Land Use Changes and LU-2.4, Annexations). Further, LAFCo has extensive notification and outreach requirements whereby landowners would receive ample notice, opportunity to participate, and to protest.

PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE LAND USE ELEMENT POLICY:

The proposed Land Use Element Update contains an extensive introduction that describes past City planning efforts and recent land use planning that has resulted in this update. The Land Use Element goals, policies, and implementation measures are organized in policy groupings that relate to the Land Use Element focus areas. The following is a brief discussion of each policy grouping, describing the purpose and intent of each group. The complete Land Use Element is available for download at <https://willitslanduseupdate.com> or a physical copy may be viewed at the Community Development Department or Willits Library.

Planning Area. California planning law requires Cities to adopt a general plan for lands within its limits and any land outside of its boundaries which bears relation to its planning. Defining a Planning Area that includes land outside of its boundaries is a means by which a City can communicate its desires to annex land to the City or its objectives and concerns for the future of surrounding lands under the jurisdiction of the County.



GOAL LU-1...ensure logical and appropriate annexations that maintain a compact City boundary as well as surrounding open space, working lands and natural resources and support disadvantaged communities.

Policies

- LU-1.1 PLANNING AREA
- LU-1.2 SPHERE OF INFLUENCE
- LU-1.3 COUNTY GENERAL PLAN LAND USE WITHIN SPHERE OF INFLUENCE
- LU-1.4 AREAS OF INTEREST
- LU-1.5 DISADVANTAGED UNINCORPORATED COMMUNITIES

Implementation Measures

- LU-1A NOTIFY AGENCIES OF PLANNING AREA BOUNDARY
- LU-1B SEEK APPROVAL OF THE EXPANDED SPHERE OF INFLUENCE.

The City Planning Area has been identified to include areas of interest to the City such as the City’s watershed and the important regional groundwater resource; hazard areas around the City including the airport; areas where the City provides water and wastewater services; and areas where it may be logical for the City to grow when housing and employment demand exceed the City’s land supply.

The City should request that the County notify the City of development in this area given that there may likely be a request for City service or have some other potential impact to the City (Policy LU-1.1, Planning Area) and request that responsible agencies, including Mendocino County, the Mendocino Local Agency Formation Commission, and Caltrans give special consideration to the recommendations and comments of the City of Willits (LU-1.4, Areas of Interest). The City should also seek agreement with the County on land use, zoning, and development standards to ensure that new development that occurs prior to annexation is compatible with the City of Willits General Plan (LU-1.3, County General Plan Land Use within Sphere of Influence)

Planning for Growth. The Land Use Element seeks to create a supply of land that is responsive to the levels of demand that may occur during the next 20 years. A mixed-use land use designation is proposed to be added to accommodate demand for housing and commercial development and to accommodate growth in areas served by existing infrastructure and services. Because City General Plan Land Use Designations alone cannot determine the preferences of individual property owners or their desired timing to develop their land, the City is proposing to expand its Sphere of Influence to plan additional land for potential future annexation. The City’s intent is to plan this additional land for residential, industrial, and public facility development, increasing the available supply of residential lands in particular to increase the likelihood that interested developers can find willing landowners to build housing units to accommodate growth.

The General Plan includes programs to limit the potential for leapfrog development and to ensure that growth occurs in a logical manner.

	<p>GOAL LU-2...promote growth within infill and redevelopment sites near neighborhood commercial areas.</p> <p>Policies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> LU-2.1 PLANNED GROWTH LU-2.2 INFILL DEVELOPMENT LU-2.3 LAND USE CHANGES LU-2.4 ANNEXATIONS <p>Implementation Measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> LU-2A POPULATION AND GROWTH LU-2B RESIDENTIAL LAND SUPPLY
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Future growth could change significantly, and the Land Use Element adds a mixed-use land use designation to accommodate demand for housing and commercial development and to facilitate growth in areas served by existing infrastructure and services (LU-2.2, Infill Development). As described above, there is no immediate need to annex land, City staff is not recommending any specific plan for annexation, and there are no property owners that have requested to annex. Staff will monitor actual population growth within the City and report annually to the City Council and, as necessary, recommend additional land use changes within the City or potential annexations (LU-2.3, Land Use Changes and LU-2.4, Annexations).

Character, Vitality, and Sustainability. To foster a healthier community, the City and the Land Use Element have placed a strong emphasis on providing accessible parks, recreational facilities, and services. These Willits parks serve not only city residents but also benefit the neighboring areas, underscoring the City's aspiration to amplify its influence as a provider of regional park services. Furthermore, as a part of its endeavors, the City is actively engaged in the development of a segment of the Great Redwood Trail, a project that assumes vital significance as a pivotal north-south route for pedestrians and cyclists, seamlessly threading its way through the City. The City's General Plan has always prioritized public health and energy conservation by encouraging infill development within the City and employing policy and programs to reduce single-occupancy vehicle trips. The City seeks to enhance the connection between public health, land use planning, and community development by expanding access to public gathering areas, encouraging local production of and access to healthy foods.



GOAL LU-... achieve a community design that promotes neighborhood vitality, health, energy efficiency, and conservation.

Policies

- LU-3.1 COMPLETE STREETS
- LU-3.2 CITY GATEWAYS AND CORRIDORS
- LU-3.3 MIXED USE AREAS
- LU-3.4 IMPROVE NORTH-SOUTH CONNECTIVITY
- LU-3.5 SPECIFIC PLANNING
- LU-3.6 PROMOTE A HEALTHY COMMUNITY
- LU-3.7 CONSIDER PUBLIC HEALTH IN LAND USE
- LU-3.8 FARMERS MARKET
- LU-3.9 ENERGY CONSERVATION AND REDUCTION
- LU-3.10 PLAN FOR CLIMATE CHANGE
- LU-3.11 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSION REDUCTIONS
- LU-3.12 PARKS AND RECREATION

Implementation Measures

- LU-3A WILLITS GATEWAY ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM
- LU-3B ENERGY CONSERVATION AND GREENHOUSE GAS REDUCTIONS.
- LU-3C PARK ENHANCEMENT.

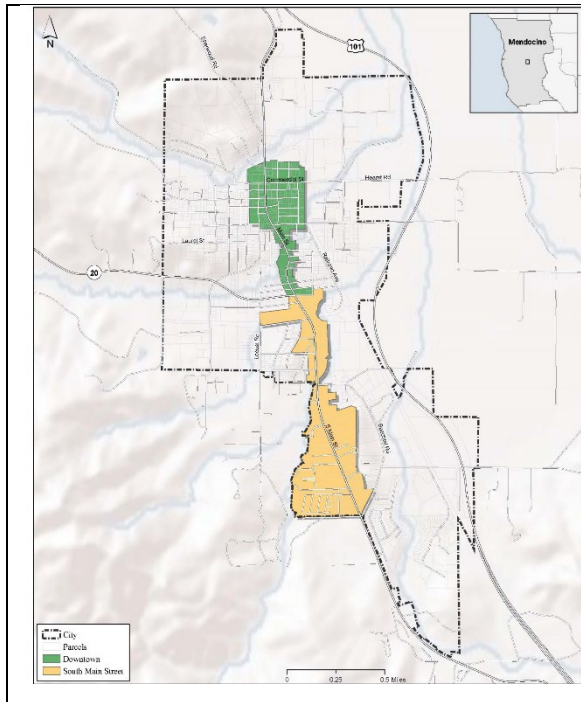
The Land Use Element, consistent with the Circulation Element, seeks to create welcoming and comfortable streets and improved connectivity by improving north/south connectivity for all modes of travel through the Willits Rail with Trail Project and a potential new street alignment connecting Baechtel Road and Railroad Avenue (LU-3.4, Improve North-South Connectivity). The City also seeks to apply a Complete Streets framework in all applicable and feasible transportation projects to allow the safe, comfortable, convenient and accessible use of streets for all street users (LU3.1, Complete Streets). U.S. Highway 101, State Route 20, and County streets serve as important gateways and welcome travelers to the City and downtown and the Land Use Element prioritizes the construction and maintenance of well-designed and landscaped City Gateways as identified in the Willits Main Street Corridor Enhancement Plan (LU-3.2, City Gateways and Corridors).

The Land Use Element emphasizes access for spaces, events, such as the Farmers Market (LU-3.8, Farmers Market) and programs that support physical activity, and encourage businesses and service providers to create a healthy food system, including local organic food production and community gardens, which supports all residents (LU-3.6, Promote a Healthy Community). In addition, public health will be considered in all land use actions (LU-3.7, Consider Public Health in Land Use), especially for disadvantaged communities.

This policy group also incorporated climate and sustainability policies. Policies LU-3.1, Energy Conservation and Reduction, LU-3.2, Plan for Climate Change, and LU-3.3, Greenhouse Gas Emission Reductions align the City's General Plan with state law relating to greenhouse gas emissions, encourage energy conservation, and highlight the need to incorporate climate change into future planning.

Downtown. The Willits Downtown area is shown in Figure 3-2 and centers around Main Street, the City's primary north-south arterial, and is the historic focal point of the City. Main Street is a traditional mixed-use area located within Downtown Willits and contains two distinct design character areas: the commercial area between Commercial Street and California Street that is defined by single and multi-story shop-front buildings, the most prominent of which is the Van Hotel; and the area between California and Oak Streets that contains single-family homes and businesses in former residential structures.

The City has undertaken a number of planning efforts relating to the Downtown area and the Land Use Element identifies the need for a Main Street Mixed Use Land Use Designation to be applied within a portion of Downtown, that incorporates elements of each of these planning efforts and adds policies that will build flexibility in the Zoning standards to allow the adaptive reuse and revitalization of existing buildings and encourage creative Main Street redevelopment. Effective management of vehicle parking remains a significant consideration within Willits' Downtown area, mirroring its importance in numerous commercial districts. The architectural layout of traditional downtowns, characterized by shop-front buildings, was purposefully designed to allure and engage pedestrians, inviting them to explore each store as they stroll by. The need for each business to satisfy its off-street parking requirements makes the adaptive reuse and revitalization of existing commercial structures challenging.



GOAL LU-4...activate Main Street as the vibrant commercial and cultural core of the City.

Policies

- LU-4.1 MAIN STREET MIXED USE LAND USE DESIGNATION
- LU-4.2 ADAPTIVE REUSE OF COMMERCIAL STRUCTURES
- LU-4.3 OFF-STREET PARKING
- LU-4.4 DOWNTOWN GATHERING AND STREET ACTIVITIES
- LU-4.5 SLOWING TRAFFIC
- LU-4.6 MAIN STREET SHOP FRONTS

Implementation Measures

- LU-4A MAIN STREET MIXED-USE ZONE.
- LU-4B DOWNTOWN ACTION PROGRAM.

Proposed downtown policies are intended to maintain the traditional downtown core of the City of Willits (LU-4.1, Downtown Gathering and Street Activities, LU-4.2, Slowing Traffic, LU-4.3, Main Street Shop Fronts). In order to accomplish this, a new land use designation is proposed to provide flexibility to allow for the adaptive reuse and revitalization of existing commercial structures on Main Street by establishing flexible and appropriate lot standards, including reducing or eliminating on-site parking requirements (LU-4.1, Main Street Mixed Use Land Use Designation, LU-4.2, Adaptive Reuse of Commercial Structures, and LU-4.3, Off-Street Parking).

South Main Street. The South Main Street area between South Street and Muir Mill Road serves as the City’s southern gateway, contains important businesses and residential areas, and represents substantial infill development and employment potential. South Main Street buildings have been erected around a state highway, CA-Hwy 20, formerly U.S. Highway 101. This region could be strengthened by improving the connectivity between businesses and the surrounding residential areas and by evaluating and implementing a range of design options for the street and streetscape for South Main Street to improve visual quality and to ensure the comfort, safety, and experience of people walking and biking to shops and services.



GOAL LU-5... maintain South Main Street as the City’s southern gateway and important employment center for the City.

Policies


- LU-5.1 FOCUSED SOUTH MAIN STREET PLANNING
- LU-5.2 SOUTH MAIN STREET IMPROVEMENTS

Implementation Measures

- L LU-5A SOUTH MAIN STREET STRATEGIC PLAN.

Focused planning, such as a strategic plan, is likely needed to enhance the South Main Street area, in partnership with businesses, property owners, Caltrans and other appropriate organizations, to identify programs to facilitate ongoing commercial vitality and as a means of implementing desired improvements and Land Use policy specific to this area (LU-5.1, Focused South Main Street Planning). Street design is likely key to the future of this area. The Land Use Element encourages that street design standards be developed and implemented, in cooperation with property owners and Caltrans, including reviewing ideas related to lane configuration, coordinated landscaping, signage, street lighting, benches, wider sidewalks, safe crossings, and bike lanes, to enhance and beautify the streetscape and building frontages to support businesses and to provide a safer, and more enjoyable atmosphere for shopping, walking, biking, outdoor seating and gathering, consistent with any City Complete Streets policies (LU-5.2, South Main Street Improvements).

Coordinate with Local Communities. The ongoing relationship between the City of Willits, the County, and its neighbors, in particular the Sherwood Valley Rancheria and the Brooktrails Township Community Services District, is important for long range land use and service planning. The four entities share utility systems, transportation networks, and recreation facilities, and rely on the health of Willits' businesses and services. The City also recognizes Tribal Sovereignty and takes seriously its obligation to carry out meaningful Tribal consultation to identify and protect tribal cultural resources.


	<p>GOAL LU-7... establish enduring partnerships and consider the needs of all communities in City decision making.</p> <p>Policies</p> <p>LU-7.1 SHERWOOD VALLEY RANCHERIA LU-7.2 TRIBAL CONSULTATION LU-7.3 BROOKTRAILS TOWNSHIP COMMUNITY SERVICES DISTRICT LU-7.4 ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE LU-7.5 NEIGHBORHOOD INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION-MAKING</p> <p>Implementation Measures</p> <p>LU-7A TRIBAL CONSULTATION.</p>
--	--

The Land Use Element highlights the Sherwood Valley Band of Pomo Indians is a valuable partner and important neighbor to the City of Willits. The City seeks to coordinate with representatives of the Sherwood Valley Rancheria and Brooktrails Township Community Services District on land use, municipal, infrastructure, and services planning and coordinate and consult with the Sherwood Valley Rancheria and local Native American tribes in City land use and service planning to mitigate adverse impacts to significant cultural resources. (LU-7.1, Sherwood Valley Rancheria, LU-7.2, Tribal Consultation, LU-7.3, Brooktrails Township Community Services District).

This policy group also highlights the importance of considering health impacts associated with land use decisions on residents regardless of age, culture, ethnicity, gender, race, socioeconomic status, or geographic location. The City shall provide for the fair treatment and meaningful involvement in land use decisions and policies for all people regardless of income, gender, age, race, color, or national origin and shall evaluate and avoid, reduce, or mitigate disproportionate adverse health and safety impacts of land use decisions on disadvantaged communities. (LU-7.1, Environmental Justice, LU-7.2, Neighborhood Involvement in Decision-Making).

Protect Natural Resources Within Areas Planned for Development. This policy area is a focus of the Conservation and Open Space Element but is closely related to planning and approving new development within the City. The City's oak trees and urban forests, streams, riparian areas, and wetlands are important to the City, and provide for a healthy and attractive environment, as well as valuable habitat and ecological function. These natural areas are interspersed throughout the developed and undeveloped portions of the City and require additional protection to ensure that the design of new development sustains these resources.

The General Plan includes overlay land use designations and general policies to protect natural resources in the review of proposed development projects by identifying and mitigating potential adverse impacts prior to project approval to assure no net loss of wetlands and their associated habitats. However, the City seeks to streamline future development by establishing objective standards that will assure resource protection and disclose the presence of habitat constraints to property owners. To support the Conservation and Open Space Element, the Land Use Element includes definitive General Plan policies and programs that seek to demonstrate that future ministerial projects within the City and annexations will not result in significant environmental impacts.

	<p>GOAL LU-8...ensure that land use decisions protect and sustain important natural resources and limit exposure to hazards.</p> <p>Policies</p> <p>LU-8.1 RIPARIAN BUFFER AREAS LU-8.2 NOT NET LOSS OF WETLANDS RESULTING FROM DEVELOPMENT LU-8.3 RIPARIAN AREA LAND USE OVERLAY LU-8.4 PROTECT OAK TREES AND WOODLANDS LU-8.5 PRESERVE AGRICULTURAL LANDS</p> <p>Implementation Measures</p> <p>LU-8A STREAM AND RIPARIAN COMBINING ZONE. LU-8B OAK TREE PROTECTIONS.</p>
---	--

Riparian buffer areas contain important habitat for plants, animals, and fish. The Conservation and Open Space Element requires protections for these areas and the Land Use Element seeks to provide clear policies and standards for the public and City to follow in considering and approving development (LU-8.1, Riparian Buffer Areas, LU-8.2, Not Net Loss of Wetlands Resulting From Development, LU-8.3, Riparian Area Land Use Overlay) that comply with the

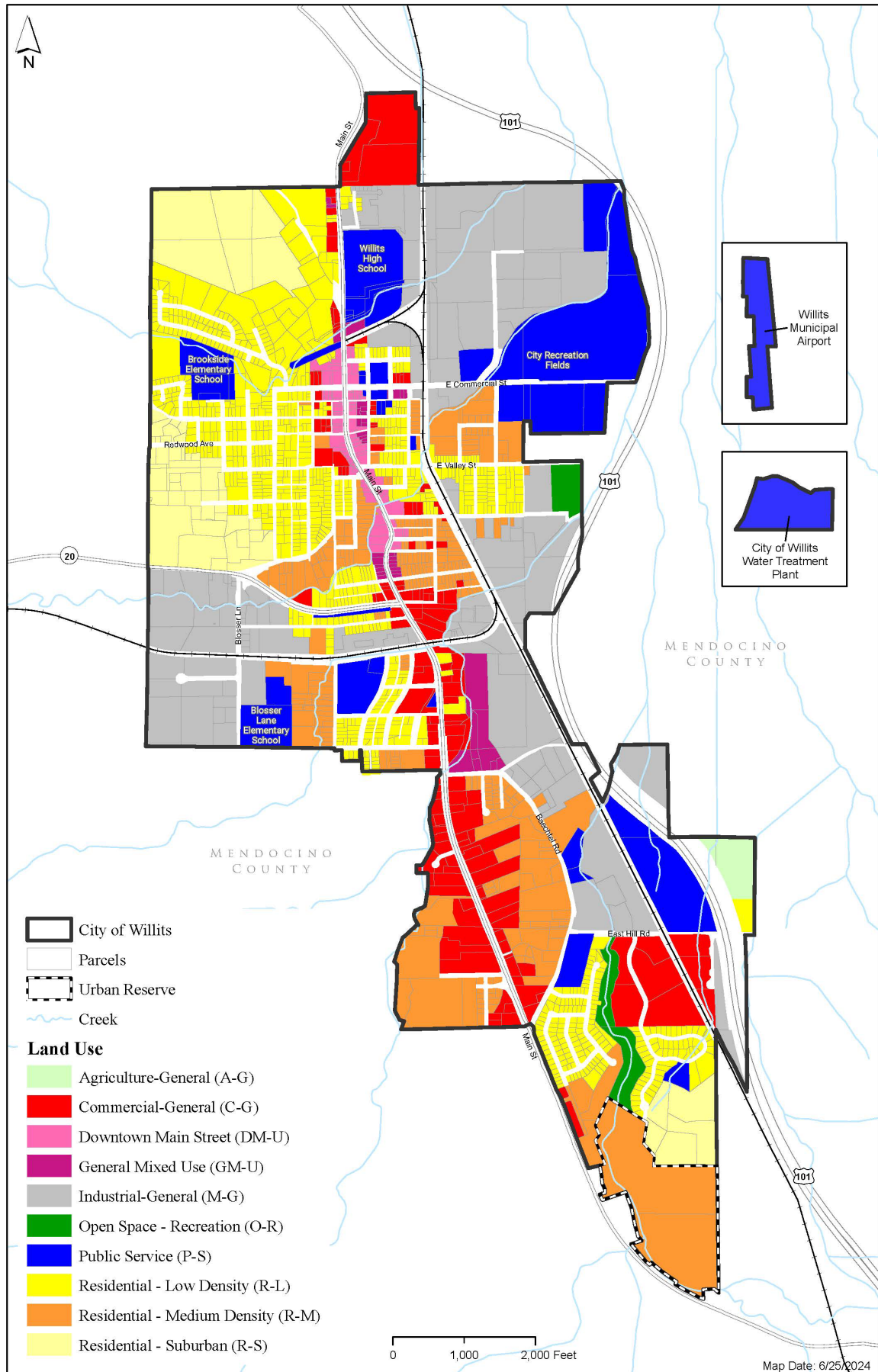
requirements of regulatory agencies. These policies also incorporate the objectives of the City's Urban Forest Management Plan and direct that they be incorporated into the City Zoning Regulations and call for the establishment of an oak tree and oak woodland retention and protection program for new development that emphasizes the avoidance, minimization, or mitigation of oak tree and oak woodlands removal (LU-8.4, Protect Oak Trees and Woodlands) and, consistent with LAFCo requirements for future annexations, seek to preserve agricultural lands (LU-8.5, Preserve Agricultural Lands).

General Plan Implementation and Maintenance. A General Plan is a long-term policy document that should have at least a 20-year planning vision and provide the needed flexibility to allow for policy modifications to respond to unique situations while maintaining a consistent and predictable framework to achieve the City's long-term vision. To achieve this there should be regular and comprehensive reviews of the entire Plan that are scheduled to coincide with state mandated review of the Housing Element or other regular intervals. In addition, the Zoning Code should be regularly reviewed to ensure that development regulations are consistent with the General Plan and are clear and understandable to decision makers, developers, and the general public.

	<p>GOAL LU-9...ensure the effective use and implementation of Land Use Element Policy and the Land Use Map.</p>
	<p>Policies</p>
	<p>LU-9.1 LAND USE MAP LU-9.2 ZONING MAP AND REGULATIONS LU-9.3 PERIODIC GENERAL PLAN REVIEW LU-9.4 WEB-BASED LAND USE MAPPING LU-9.5 PLANNING COMMISSION LU-9.6 STREAMLINING DEVELOPMENT APPROVAL LU-9.7 EMERGENCY EVACUATION LU-9.8 MILITARY OPERATING AREAS</p>
	<p>Implementation Measures</p>
	<p>LU-9A COMPREHENSIVE GENERAL PLAN UPDATE. LU-9B ZONING CONSISTENCY. LU-9C GENERAL PLAN ANNUAL REPORT. LU-9D GENERAL PLAN CONFORMANCE.</p>

This policy grouping sets forth a comprehensive program of General Plan maintenance that identifies the role of the Land Use Map and the requirement for Zoning Map and Regulations consistency (LU-9.1, Land Use Map, LU-9.2, Zoning Map and Regulations). This grouping also adds requirements for current General Plan law relating to emergency evacuation and military operating areas to the City's planning process (LU-9.1, Emergency Evacuation, LU-9.2, Military Operating Areas)

Proposed Land Use Map



Land Use Designations. This policy grouping is the most critical part of a Land Use Element and describes the land use designations, the range of allowable uses, and intensity and density of allowed development. Land Use Element Goal LU-10 defines the residential, mixed-use, commercial, industrial, and other Land Use Designations of the City of Willits General Plan and the Land Use Map applies the Land Use Designations to achieve the objectives of the General Plan.

Land Use Designation		Density Range (units/acre)	Floor Area Ratio (FAR)
R-S	Residential-Suburban	0 – 0.5	N/A
R-L	Residential-low Density	0 - 15	N/A
R-M	Residential-Medium Density	15 - 30	N/A
DM-U	Main Street Mixed Use	15 - 30	3.0
GM-U	General Mixed Use	15 - 30	2.0
C-G	Commercial-General	N/A	2.0
M-G	Industrial-General	N/A	1.0
A-G	Agricultural - General	0 – 0.05	N/A
O-S	Open Space - Recreation	N/A	N/A
P-S	Public Service	N/A	N/A

The proposed Mixed Use Land Use Designations are the most significant addition to the Land Use Element:

Main Street Mixed Use (DM-U). This designation is intended to be applied to Willits’ core downtown area to stimulate the adaptive reuse of existing buildings and the development of new pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use buildings.

General Mixed Use (GM-U). This designation is intended to be applied to specific areas within neighborhood and commercial centers where the existing or planned transportation alternatives, utilities, and services allow for mixed-use development that encourages walking, biking, and transit use. Allowable uses include retail, administrative office, general commercial, and a variety of housing types.

This grouping also lists the proposed overlay Land Use Designations, which include Natural Hazard Area (-G); Conservation - Floodway (-FW); Historical Resources (-H); Riparian Areas (-R); and Urban Reserve (-UR).

Land Use Element Table 3-1, General Plan Land Use Designations, lists each Land Use Designation and defines the allowable uses, maximum allowable density (dwelling units per acre), minimum density -if applicable - (dwelling units per acre), and maximum floor area ratio (building area ÷ lot area). This table also lists the Zoning Districts that are consistent with each Land Use Designation.

Attachment 1 – Public Draft Land Use Element Update



General Plan Land Use Element Update





Willits isn't just a place to live. It's a place of memories and shared stories, and the heartbeat of our enduring hometown pride."

- Willits Resident

Public Draft

June 2024

Prepared for



City of Willits

111 E Commercial Street

Willits, California 95490

www.cityofwillits.org

Prepared by



670 9th Street, Suite 201

Arcata, CA 95521

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City Council

Saprina Rodriguez, Mayor
Gerardo Gonzalez, Vice Mayor
Greta Kanne, Councilmember
Larry Stranske, Councilmember
Madge Strong, Councilmember

City Staff

Brian Bender, City Manager
Dusty Duley, Community Development Director
Taylor Perry, Senior City Planner
Davey Bowles, Building Official
Amber Ojeda, Office Assistant III
Walter Kolon, Services & Facilities Director
Scott Herman, Utilities Superintendent
Kenan O'Shea, Streets Superintendent
Fabian Lizarraga, Former Police Chief

Advisory Group

Susan Mahoney, Willits Chamber of Commerce
Josh Gravier, Sherwood Valley Band of Pomo Indians
Jessica Johnson, RCHDC
Henry Moss, METALfx
Emily Heitman, LEEF Organics
Jay Fraser, Fraser Construction
Linda Givens, Adventist Health Howard Memorial Hospital
Alan Falleri, Retired Willits Community Development Director
Eric Alvarez, LLFPD Fire Chief
Tony Madrigal, LLFPD Board Chairman

Consultant Team

Planwest Partners, Inc

George Williamson AICP, Senior Advisor
Colette Santsche AICP, Principal Planner
John Miller, Project Manager
Krystle Heaney AICP, Senior Planner
Jason Barnes, GIS Analyst

LACO Associates

Michael Nelson AICP, Principal Planner
Kevin Doble, Senior Project Manager
Rodney Wilburn, Principal Engineer

Fehr & Peers

Ronald Milam AICP, Principal
Rodney Brown AICP, Associate

J.B Lovelace and Associates

J. Brett Lovelace, Principal Environmental Scientist

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INTRODUCTION

A. PURPOSE AND USE OF THE GENERAL PLAN

What is a Land Use Element?

A General Plan is made up of “elements” that cover mandatory topics as well as topics important to the community. Eight elements are required to be included in the General Plan by the State. These are: land use, circulation, housing, conservation, open space, noise, safety, and environmental justice. Though the required topics must be addressed in the General Plan, communities can organize their General Plan anyway they choose. Typically, a General Plan is designed to address the issues facing the jurisdiction for the next 20 years. The City of Willits’ General Plan was last comprehensively updated and adopted in 1992 and the planning timeframe was identified as 30 years. Since then, the City’s land use needs have changed to some degree due to demographic and economic conditions and updates to the Land Use Element are also required to comply with state law.

Relationship to Zoning

The General Plan Land Use Element is not to be confused with zoning. Although both the Land Use Element and the zoning code control how land may be developed, they do so in different ways. The General Plan has a long-term outlook. It identifies the types of land uses that will be allowed and the density and intensity of uses, the spatial relationships among land uses, and the general pattern of future development. Zoning regulates development, consistent with the General Plan, through specific development standards such as lot size, building setbacks, and permitted uses. Land uses shown on the General Plan Map must be reflected on the local zoning maps to assure consistency per State law. Development must not only meet the specific requirements of the zoning code, but also the broader policies set forth in the General Plan. Put simply, the General Plan guides the zoning code, but the zoning code does not guide the General Plan.

B. USING THE LAND USE ELEMENT

The Land Use Element is used by decision makers and City staff to make recommendations and decisions with direct or indirect land use implications. It also provides a framework for inter-jurisdictional coordination of planning efforts among officials and staff of the City and other Federal, State, and local agencies. City residents, property owners, and businesses use the General Plan for guidance on City policies for particular geographic areas or for particular subjects of interest.

The General Plan, in particular the Land Use Element, is the basis for a variety of regulatory measures and administrative procedures. California planning law requires consistency between the General Plan and its implementing programs, such as zoning and subdivision regulations, capital improvement programs, specific plans, environmental impact procedures, and building and residential codes. The specific roles of the City Council, Planning Commission, and City Departments with respect to the approval and use of the General Plan are described below.

City Council

The City Council is the political body which formulates and implements policies in Willits. It is the City Council, through its decision-making authority, that affirms the policy direction and priorities contained within this General Plan. The City Council is responsible for adoption of the General Plan, as well as the regulations, capital improvement programs, and financing mechanisms that implement the General Plan.

Planning Commission

State law provides for the establishment of a planning agency, typically referred to as a Planning Commission, which is appointed by a city council to review and act on certain matters related to planning and development. Planning Commissions are responsible for conducting public hearings on matters relating to planning and development, such as amendments to the General Plan and Zoning Code, considering the public input, and taking action on matters within its authority and making recommendations to the City Council. The City of Willits has created a Planning Commission in its municipal code, but at the time of the adoption of this Land Use Element the City Council has chosen to carry out all duties of the Planning Commission.

City Departments

All City Departments use the General Plan for policy guidance as it pertains to their operations, service delivery, and planning for future capital improvement projects and potential service level changes. The City's Community Development Department, responsible for building permit review, code enforcement, and land use planning, and Services and Facilities Department, responsible for roads, utilities, and parks, are the two departments that interact most with the General Plan and Land Use Element. The Community Development Department is responsible to ensure that the General Plan Land Use Element is implemented on a day-to-day basis so that appropriate land uses are proposed in the proper locations, appropriate levels of service are provided, proposed land uses conform to development regulations, and the environment has been adequately protected.

C. MAINTAINING THE LAND USE ELEMENT

Over time, the City's population will fluctuate, its goals will evolve, and the physical environment in which its residents live and work will change. For the General Plan and Land Use Element to be useful, it must be monitored and periodically revised to respond to and reflect changing conditions and needs over time. State law permits the General Plan to be amended up to four times in any calendar year unless special conditions apply as defined by Government Code Sections 65358(c) and (d). Each amendment may contain more than one change to the General Plan. General Plan Amendments can be initiated by the City or at the request of a property owner. Each General Plan Amendment goes through a public review process, including hearings with the City Council acting as the Planning Commission. Each Amendment is also subject to review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Existing Willits General Plan Elements



D. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Land Use Element was shaped through a robust public engagement program that provided an opportunity for all community members to be involved in the update process. The City gathered community input through the following methods:

1. Advisory Committee Meetings
2. Online Community Survey
3. Community Open House Event
4. Land Use Element Update Website
5. City Council Meetings, Study Sessions, And Public Hearings



City asks residents to weigh in on land use update

Submitted by
City of Willits

The City of Willits is currently working on an update to the General Plan Land Use Element. This element has not been comprehensively updated since 1982. State law has established the General Plan as the "constitution" for developing land within a city for a planning period of 20 years or more.

As part of this update, the City of Willits will also be looking closely at development potential outside of the City that could be added to its "Sphere of Influence." Together

Read the rest of
Update
Over on Page 13

The rest of
Update From page 1

with zoning amendments, the Land Use Element will establish policies and programs to regulate development within the City and will serve to streamline the development approval process.

"The Land Use Element Update will identify available land inside and outside the existing City boundary to accommodate housing, business and employment growth over the next 20 years and beyond," explains Dusty Duley, the City's community development director. "We want to engage landowners to learn about their goals for the development of their property and evaluate whether their desired Land Use and Zoning changes are consistent with our overall project objectives and should be included in this process or be taken up separately by the landowner."

The Land Use Element is one of the most important components of a General Plan and contains policies and maps to identify land for housing, commerce, industry, and public services, as well as for the protection of natural resources, the identification of hazards, and the provision of municipal services for the Planning Area, which may contain land beyond the City boundary.

Advisory Committee Meetings

An advisory committee was established to help guide the process of updating the Land Use Element. The advisory committee was made up of technical experts from City departments and partner agencies that provided feedback on the project to ensure the plan concepts could be achieved. The advisory committee met a total of four times during the update process and provided feedback on the public engagement program, possible land use revisions, sphere amendment options, and draft policy.

Online Community Survey

A community survey was released to gather feedback from residents of all ages on key land use and development issues in the City. The web-based survey was available in English and Spanish and was used to provide essential guidance on policy and mapping recommendations.

**GENERAL PLAN
LAND USE
ELEMENT UPDATE**

The Land Use Element has not been updated since 1992!

The LUE identifies how land can be used (allowable uses and intensity of development) and distribution of the uses within the City.

WHAT can go WHERE

Learn more about the project, sign up for updates, and find the online survey at willitslanduseupdate.com

WHAT SHOULD THE FUTURE OF WILLITS LOOK LIKE?

We're talking Mixed-Use Zoning, Parking Requirements, New Housing, Environmental Protections, Development Standards, expanding the City Sphere of Influence... - just to name a few.

Scan the QR code with your phone to fill out our online survey and share your input.

WE WANT YOUR FEEDBACK

SCAN ME

SURVEY CLOSES MAY 1ST

Community Open House Event

The City hosted a community open house for residents and stakeholders to share their ideas on how to shape the future of Willits. The open house was held at the Willits Community Center and included afternoon and evening sessions. Members of the public were encouraged to write comments on post-it notes and place them on various posters that displayed maps and land use concepts. Staff and consultants were on hand to answer questions.



Land Use Element Update Website

To help expand outreach efforts, a dedicated project website (www.willitslanduseupdate.com) provided information on the Land Use Element update process, meeting dates and locations, and related documents. There people could sign up for project updates by email, take the online community survey, submit a property owner zone change request, and learn more about Willits land use and zoning.



City Council Meetings

The City held multiple City Council study sessions throughout the update process to inform decision-makers and the public, discuss key milestones, and provide policy direction for the Land Use Element.

E. ANALYSES INFORMING THE LAND USE ELEMENT

As part of the City of Willits Land Use Element update process, the City prepared the following supporting documents:

Existing Conditions

To ensure that the Land Use Element update considered the availability of current and the identified need for additional infrastructure and services, an Existing Conditions Report was prepared by LACO Associates in April 2023. This report provides a comprehensive review of the current water, wastewater, stormwater, recycling, and solid waste services provided by the City of Willits and serves to guide the Land Use Element Update and any potential future City Sphere of Influence (SOI) amendment. Drawing from readily accessible public data, reports, and conversations with City staff, the report establishes a foundation of reliable information for these purposes.

Land Use Changes and Sphere of Influence Additions Screening

The Advisory Committee devoted considerable time to the evaluation of land use changes within the City and potential areas for the City to consider expanding outside the current boundary. The City Council received a screening level review of land use designation changes and sphere of influence amendments on June 21, 2023. This included proposed changes to the Land Use Map to create opportunities for new residential or mixed-use development, make changes prompted by property owner land use requests, and incorporate land use “clean ups” where the long-established land uses are inconsistent with the Land Use Designation applied in 1992 or earlier. In addition, the screening included potential additions to the City’s Sphere of Influence to be submitted to the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) for consideration of approval.

Program Environmental Impact Report

The Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) responds to the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) as set forth in Sections 15126, 15175, and 15176 of the CEQA Guidelines. The City Council will use the PEIR during the Land Use Element update process to consider potential environmental implications associated with implementing the Land Use Element and to identify feasible mitigation measures for significant impacts. The PEIR may also be used in the environmental evaluation of future projects. Future projects may be able to build (or tier) their environmental review on the General Plan Land Use Element PEIR if they are consistent with the Element.

Did You Know?

The City's wastewater collection system consists of 22 miles of gravity-fed sewer mains ranging in diameter from 4 to 24 inches, one (1) lift station, and 450 manholes. The WWTP was constructed in 1975 as a secondary aeration treatment plant and has since gone through several upgrades. Currently, the WWTP utilizes grit removal, two (2) extended aeration basins, a circular clarifier, ultraviolet (UV) disinfection, and an enhanced effluent polishing in a 30-acre treatment wetland.

F. RELATED CITY PLANS

There are a number of documents other than the City of Willits General Plan that bear a relationship to the Land Use Element and were closely considered during its preparation. For the most part these plans were developed to address transportation and mobility issues, economic growth and regional development, and placemaking along the Main Street corridor and the surrounding area. In addition, the City of Willits has prepared a draft Safety Element Update which was developed to reflect the Mendocino County Multi-Jurisdiction Hazard Mitigation Plan and is likely to be adopted prior to or shortly after the Land Use Element Update. A brief description of related City planning documents are as follows:

Willits Downtown Specific Plan (2000)

The Willits Downtown Specific Plan provides an overall strategy for expansion, reuse, and revitalization of Downtown Willits. The plan comprehensively tackles challenges pertaining to downtown Main Street by encompassing vital elements such as parking strategies, placemaking endeavors, and innovative design concepts. Concerning parking strategies, the plan advocates for the enhancement of parking lot signage visibility and explores the prospect of repurposing parking areas situated alongside Main Street. Moreover, the plan underscores the imperative need for public gathering spaces within the downtown Main Street area, identifying them as potential sites for future development. In terms of design innovation, the plan introduces ideas such as bulb-outs and intersection enhancements, gateway improvements, and the refinement of crosswalk infrastructure to further enhance the vibrancy and functionality of Main Street.

Willits Circulation and Parking Improvement Study (2002)

The Willits Circulation and Parking Improvement Study focuses on several specific issues concerning Main Street and outlines safety issues south of Highway 20 including pedestrian access near the railroad tracks at the Willits arch and bicycle, pedestrian and vehicular coordination at the Main/Baechtel Road Intersection. The plan suggests a roundabout at Highway 20. North of Highway 20, the study outlines pedestrian safety issues at Main/Mendocino and Main/Valley. The study concluded that occupancy tends to be higher during the week, however there is no demonstrated need for added parking spaces.

Baechtel Road-Railroad Avenue Corridor Community Design Study (2003)

While this study focused on Baechtel Road, it also described interventions that create a stronger relationship to South Main Street entry points. This project shows how a bicycle and pedestrian trail system connects through Main Street at intersections including Baechtel Road and Commercial Street. At North Baechtel Road, the plan shows a new crossing at Main Street including a pedestrian crosswalk and planted median. At South Baechtel Road, this plan proposes a “Gateway to Willits Roundabout,” in order to mitigate circulation issues at this intersection and provide a gateway for the city.

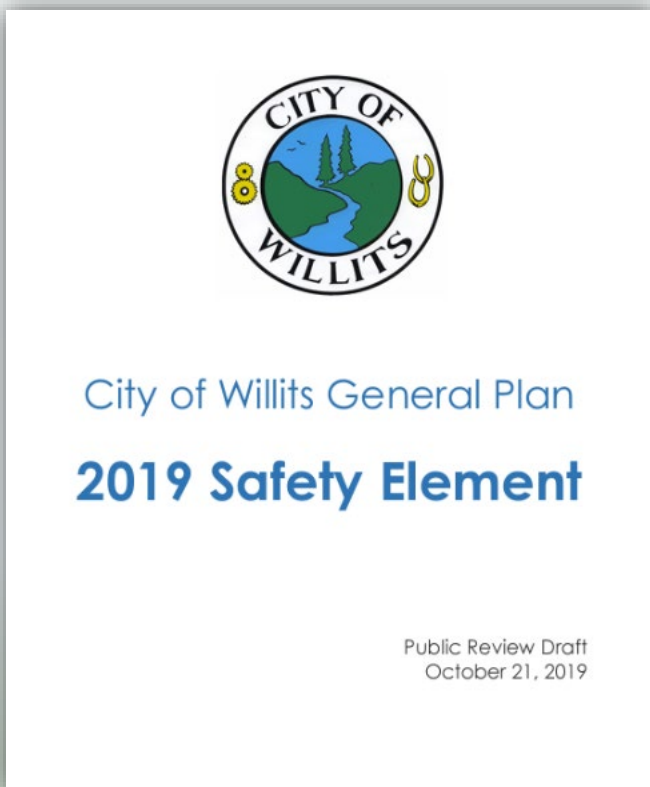
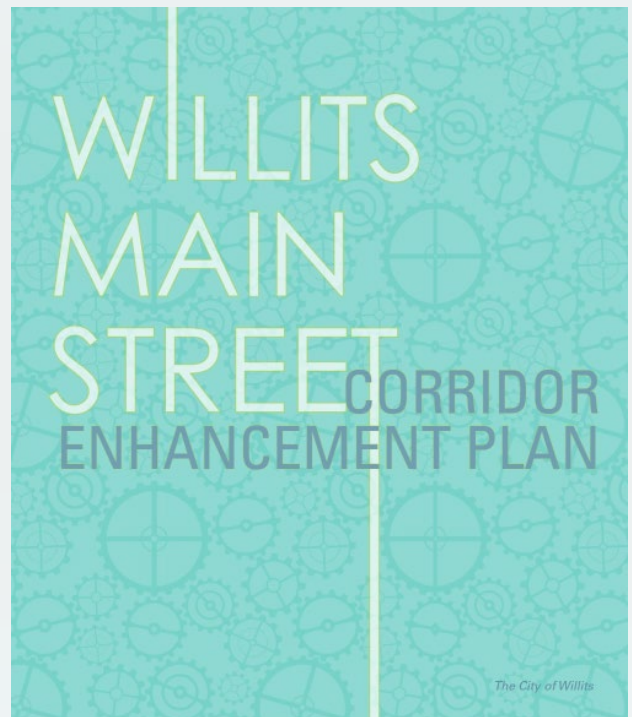


Willits Bicycle and Pedestrian Specific Plan (2009)

The Willits Bicycle and Pedestrian Specific Plan offers detailed insights into the conditions prevailing on Main Street. It highlights a significant trend wherein less experienced bicyclists tend to navigate away from Main Street due to its fractured grid and various safety hazards. The plan effectively demonstrates that an overwhelming majority—ranging from 80% to 90%—of incidents involving bicycles and pedestrians in collision with vehicles occur on Main Street. As a remedy, the plan proposes a set of recommendations, notably advocating for the construction of wider 8-foot sidewalks along Main Street, a proposal supported by the reduced necessity for on-street parking.

Willits Main Street Corridor Enhancement Plan (2016)

The Willits Main Street Corridor Enhancement Plan provides a framework of plan concepts for both short and long-term changes to the Main Street corridor. The plan encompasses motorized and non-motorized safety improvements, pedestrian and bicycle enhancements, landscaping, and other hardscaping recommendations. Further, the plan prescribes phases in which the recommendations can be implemented, identifies alternatives based upon level of cost, and provides resources for possible funding.



Willits Draft Safety Element (2019)

The City of Willits prepared a draft Safety Element Update in October 2019 to address changes in California planning law and to incorporate the Mendocino County Multi-Jurisdiction Hazard Mitigation Plan into the City's General Plan. The City anticipates adopting the Safety Element prior to or shortly after the adoption of the Land Use Element Update. The Safety Element directly relates to the Land Use Element and the City will take care to ensure that proposed land uses are planned in a manner that minimizes the impacts of known hazards and reflects the climate adaptation and resiliency strategies contained in the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan.

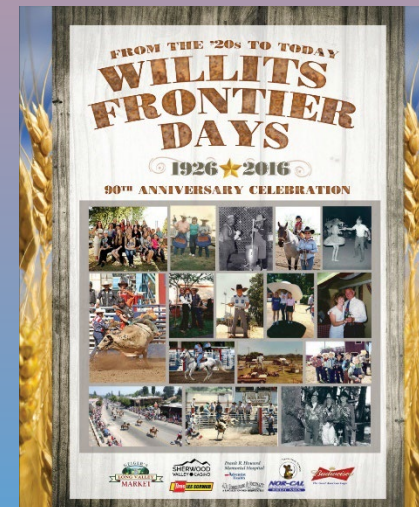
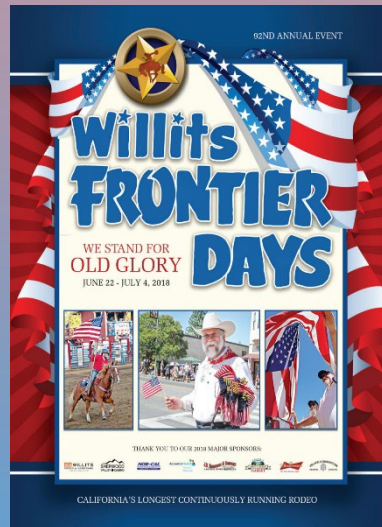
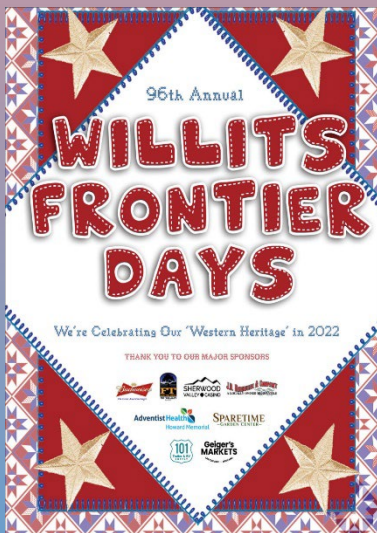
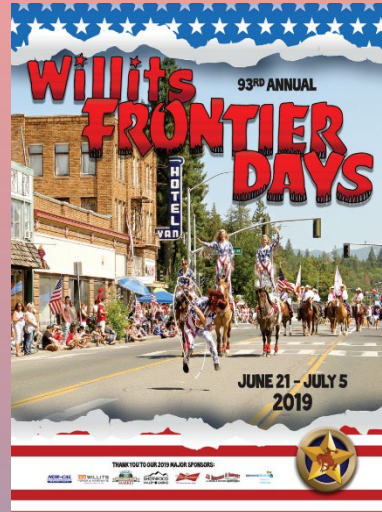
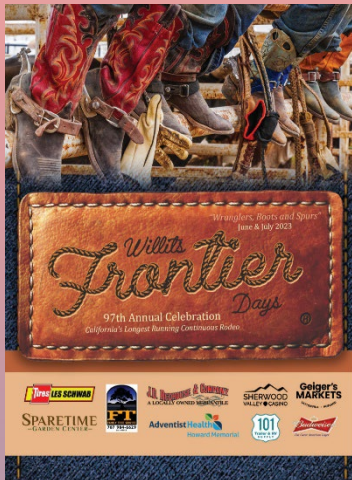
G. LAND USE ELEMENT OBJECTIVES

Following community discussions, which were facilitated through a community survey, an open house event, and advisory committee meetings, the Willits City Council assessed various potential land use policy focus areas for the Land Use Element on May 10, 2023. These policy focus areas were intended to guide the City's planning to update the General Plan Land Use Element to accommodate desired growth, address community needs, protect natural resources, and meet changes in State law – especially relating to housing – and to update the City's Sphere of Influence to provide new housing opportunities, streamline the approval process, and accelerate housing development. The policy focus areas contributed to the development of the City's objectives for the Land Use Element, listed as follows:

1. Plan for a range of potential population growth levels within the City.
2. Facilitate infill development and commercial vitality.
3. Define an expanded Sphere of Influence that includes appropriate areas around the City for potential future residential development to help ensure an adequate City supply of developable land.
4. Ensure adequate public utilities, services, infrastructure, and a street network that supports all users and plan for phased improvements to support existing, and new land planned for residential and commercial development.
5. Plan new and sustain existing parks and recreation facilities for the entire community, especially underserved areas.
6. Facilitate the vitality of Downtown and South Main Street by improving important City gateways and by defining flexible land use regulations to encourage adaptive re-use of existing structures and design standards that improve the streetscape and create a comfortable atmosphere for walking, biking, outdoor seating and gathering.
7. Define a Land Use Map and policy that minimizes the number of non-conforming uses and protects existing communities from incompatible uses, reduces energy consumption, and vehicle miles travelled.
8. Streamline the permitting process and maximize opportunities for housing development to address the local, regional and statewide housing shortage, especially infill development within current city limits.
9. Protect and conserve natural resources and avoid hazards.

H. THE WILLITS COMMUNITY

Before arrival of the Europeans, the Little Lake Valley was home to a rich history of Native American heritage. Originally inhabited by the Pomo tribe of Native Americans, the Valley was settled in the 1850's by pioneering ranchers who found prosperity through ranching and timber harvesting. In 1888, as the tanbark industry flourished, the town embraced the name "Willits" in honor of its visionary founder, Hiram Willits. The year 1914 marked a pivotal juncture with the establishment of the Northwestern Railroad, positioning Willits as the strategic midpoint between San Francisco and Eureka. As the 20th century dawned, the town burgeoned from a modest population of 153 in 1880 to an impressive 3,000 by 1970. Throughout this evolution, Main Street witnessed the blossoming of numerous businesses, epitomizing the town's spirit of entrepreneurship. Notably, the Willits Frontier Days celebration, inaugurated in 1927, continues to capture the community's vibrant essence, inviting thousands to partake in the annual 4th of July festivities, complete with a cherished rodeo and parade. With its timeless traditions, Frontier Days stands resolute as "California's Oldest Continuous Rodeo," emblematic of Willits' enduring legacy of unity and celebration.



Regional Setting

The City of Willits is located in the heart of Mendocino County at the intersection of the county’s main north-south transportation corridor, US Highway 101, and east-west corridor, State Route 20. The City lies within the Little Lake Valley and is known as the Gateway to the Redwoods. The core city boundary area is approximately 2.65-square miles (1,696 acres) in size and has two incorporated islands comprised of city-owned property, including the Ells Field/Willits Municipal Airport (73-acres) located in Brooktrails northwest of the city and the Morris Reservoir/Willits Municipal Water Treatment Plant (34-acres) located southeast of the city. The Morris and Centennial Reservoir and their watersheds comprise approximately 3,136-acres.



Population

The City of Willits has not experienced substantial population or housing growth over the last 20 years. Between Census 2000 and 2010, Willits total population fell by 3.7 percent, resulting in a loss of 185 persons from 5,073 to 4,888. Between 2010 and 2020, City population increased from 4,888 to 4,947, an increase of 59 persons or a total change of 1.2 percent and the average annual growth rate was approximately 0.13 percent, or about six additional persons per year. While the City of Willits population declined between Census 2000 and 2010, the total number of housing units increased by 60 units or a total change of three percent, increasing from 2,013 to 2,073 units. The average annual housing growth rate during this period was 0.29 percent per year. Between 2010 and 2020, housing units within the city increased from 2,073 to 2,147 units, an increase of 74 units or a total change of 3.6 percent. The average annual housing growth rate during this period was 0.35 percent per year. Between 2020 and 2022, an additional ten housing units were added at an annual average rate of 0.23 percent, or a total change of about ½ of a percent. Although past growth in the City and surrounding area has been limited and future projections for Mendocino County indicate a population decline, various emerging local and regional factors indicate a need to identify land that can support a range of housing types in Willits and that can be readily developed. This Land Use Element will continue to plan for a buildout population of approximately 7,500 residents and establish programs that can effectively respond to a range of potential growth rates that could occur during the General Plan planning period.

Planning for Growth

This Land Use Element will continue to plan for a buildout population of approximately 7,500 residents and establish programs that can effectively respond to a range of potential growth rates that could occur during the General Plan planning period.

Did You Know?

Willits City boundary is about 2.8 square miles in area in total and includes Ells Field Airport near Brooktrails Township and the Morris Dam south of the City.

The City provides water service outside the city boundaries to over 400 homes and businesses.

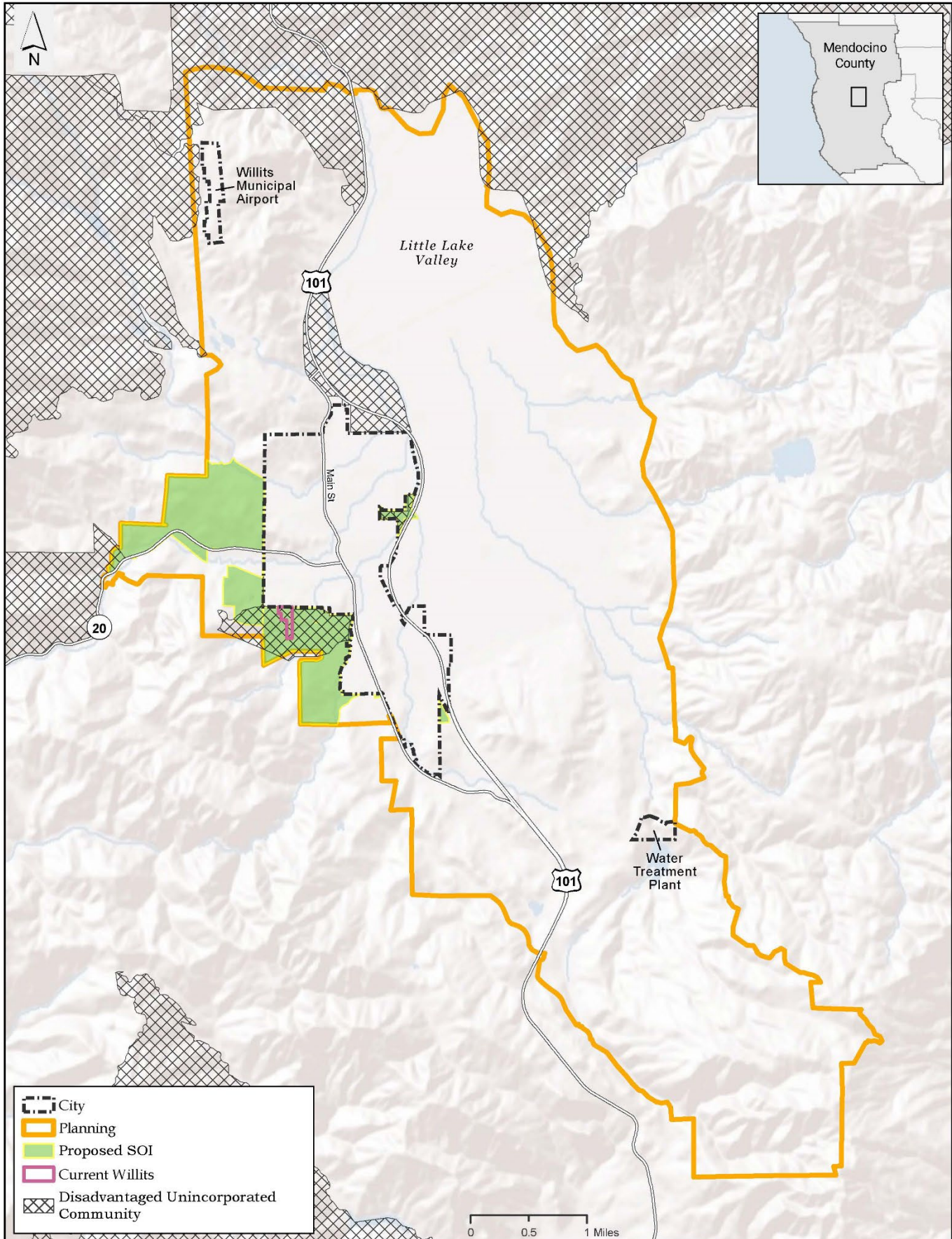
Willits Planning Boundaries

California planning law requires the City to adopt a General Plan for lands within its limits and any land outside of its boundaries which bears relation to its planning. Defining a Planning Area that includes land outside of its boundaries is a means by which a City can communicate its desires to annex land to the City or its objectives and concerns for the future of surrounding lands under the jurisdiction of the County.

- ❖ **Planning Area.** A General Plan, pursuant to State law, must address all areas within the jurisdiction's Planning Area. The Planning Area (See Figure 1-1) encompasses all incorporated and unincorporated territory that bears a physical relationship to the long-term planning of the city. For Willits, the Planning Area is defined as the area that includes both the city limits and SOI, as well as the watersheds and groundwater recharge areas that are so essential to the City's water supply (See Figure 1-3, Little Lake Groundwater Basin).
- ❖ **City Limits.** The City has land use authority over all land within its limits, which encompasses approximately 2.82-square miles (1,804-acres), including two island areas away from the main City boundary that include the Ells Field-Willits Municipal Airport and the city water treatment plant adjacent to the Morris Reservoir.
- ❖ **Sphere of Influence.** The Mendocino Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) establishes Spheres of Influence (SOI), which are intended to define the probable physical boundary and service area of a local agency. The City's existing SOI includes approximately twelve acres, as adopted by LAFCo in May 2019. As part of the Land Use Element update, the City intends to update its SOI to the proposed SOI shown on Figure 1-2.
- ❖ **Areas of Interest.** An Area of Interest is a LAFCo policy relating to geographic areas beyond the sphere of influence in which land use or development actions of the County or a special district could impact directly or indirectly upon the City. The City' proposed Area of Interest includes areas beyond the City's proposed SOI containing the Little Lake Valley groundwater basin (See Figure 1-3, Little Lake Groundwater Basin) and City watershed, the City's Airport Influence Area, and other areas where the City provides water service.

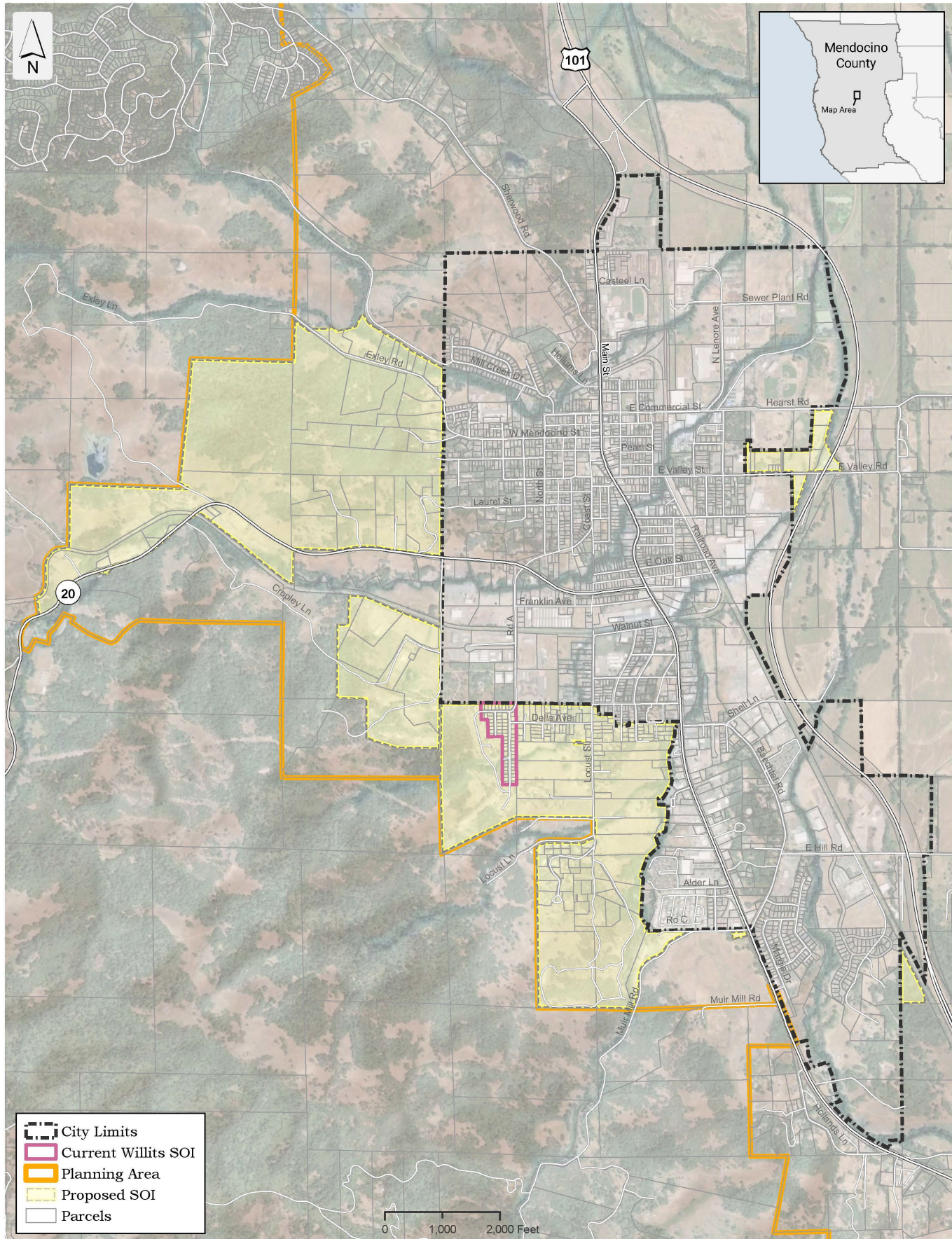


Figure 1-1 Planning Area



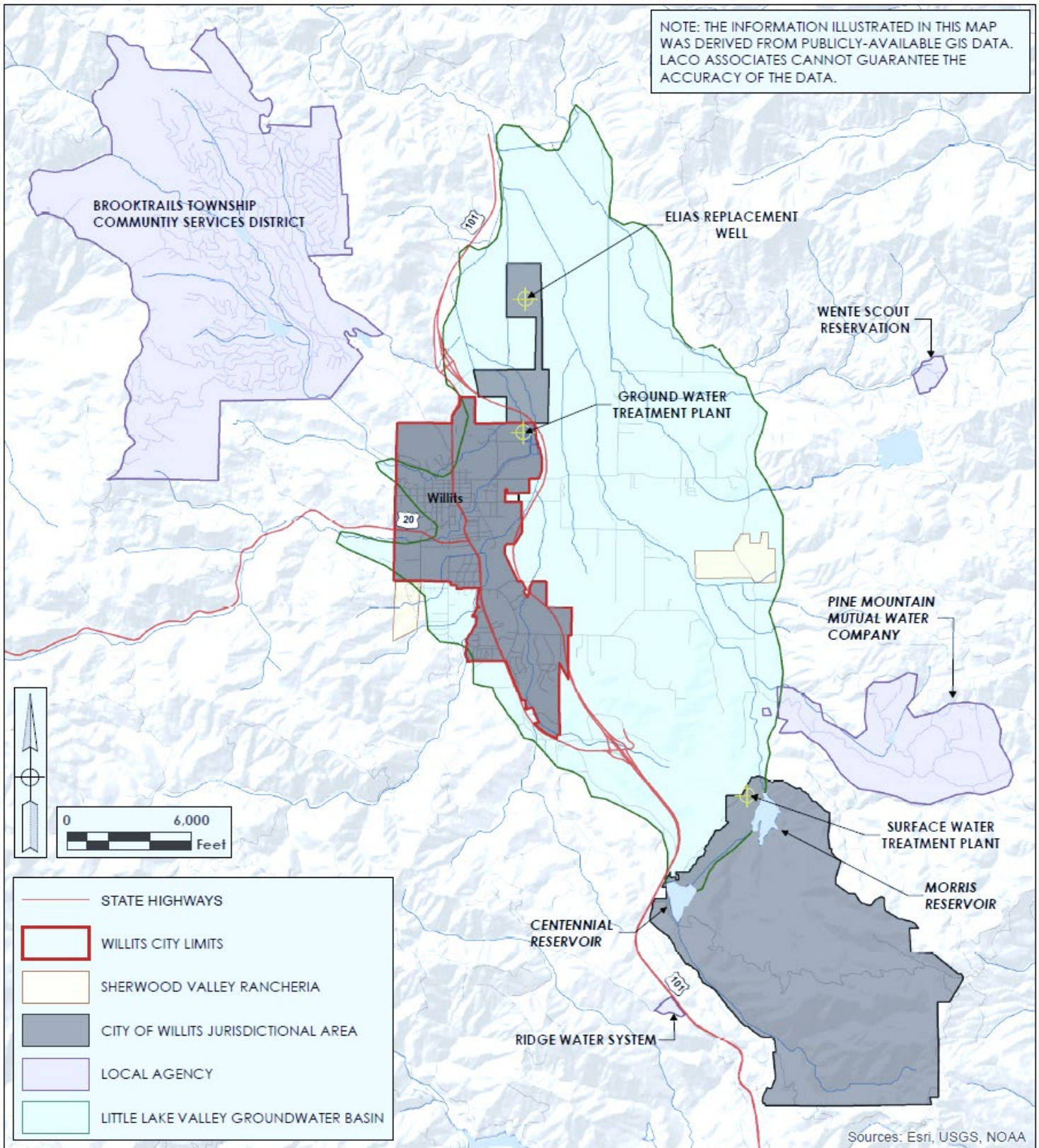
Sources: Boundaries, Roads, Parcels: Mendocino County GIS.

Figure 1-2 Proposed Sphere of Influence



Sources: Boundaries, Roads, Parcels: Mendocino County GIS.

Figure 1-3 Little Lake Groundwater Basin



H. ORGANIZATION OF THE LAND USE ELEMENT

The Land Use Element provides a framework to guide and shape the future physical development of Willits. The element includes policies establishing land use designations that identify the type and intensity of uses permissible in the Planning Area. This element includes goals and policies identifying the City’s philosophy for future change and development. This element addresses a broad range of topics related to the physical structure and appearance of the City’s built environment and to establish the image and character of the city. This serves as the primary policy guidance for ensuring that new land uses are logically organized and developed in a way that is sustainable and enhances Willits’s unique identity.

Goals and Policies

The Land Use Element contains goals and policies that will guide future decisions within the City. Implementation programs are also identified to ensure that the goals and policies in the General Plan are carried out. The goals and policies in the General Plan are presented in a standard format.

- **Goal.** A goal is a statement that describes, in general terms, a desired future condition or “end” state. Goals describe ideal future conditions for a topic and are intentionally general and broad.
- **Policy.** A policy is a statement that guides a specific course of action for decision-makers to achieve a desired goal.



Implementation Programs

While many policies can be implemented as part of standard City operations, some policies require specific implementation programs to ensure they are carried out. The last section of the element includes a table of implementation programs. While the City intends to pursue the implementation programs included in the Land Use Element, the City will need to evaluate each program in light of City resources. This includes resources such as financial, staffing, and technology. Over the 20+ year planning period, the City Council and staff will need to prioritize various implementation programs based on the resources available, and some implementation programs may not be completed as planned.



Crystal Schiffbauer-Bowles Photography

LAND USE MAP & DESIGNATIONS

This section provides an overview of the General Plan Land Use Designations and Land Use Map. The Land Use Element defines the location and extent of future development in Willits and identifies standards for that development. The geographic locations of land uses are presented in the Land Use Map, or Map, which is a part of this Element. The Land Use Element, through the Land Use Map, is focused on the following specific characteristics of the City: the long-term maintenance and preservation of existing development; the revitalization or redevelopment of areas within the City where rehabilitation is necessary and/or desired; and vacant parcels available for new development.

Through the use of policies and Maps, the Land Use Element establishes clear and logical patterns of land use as well as standards for future development. An important feature of this Element is the Land Use Map (see Figure 2-1 and 2-2). This map indicates the location, density, and intensity of development for all land uses Citywide. The goals and policies of the Land Use Element combined with the Land Use Map establish a constitutional framework for future land use planning and decision making in Willits.

Land Use Designations

The Land Use Element in Goal LU-10 defines the residential, mixed-use, commercial, industrial, and other Land Use Designations of the City of Willits General Plan and the Land Use Map applies the Land Use Designations to achieve the focus characteristics described above.

Table 2-1 identifies each designation with their corresponding density/intensity standards using the following columns:

Designation. This column provides the name of each designation and the acronym used when referring to the designation.

Color. To the right of each designation name is the color that is assigned to this designation on the Land Use Map (Figure 2-1).

Density (Dwelling Units Per Acre). This column describes allowable development density or intensity. Designations allowing residential uses include a minimum and maximum density, expressed as dwelling units per acre (du/ac). Residential designations also include maximum lot coverage.

Intensity Standards (Floor Area Ratio). Non-residential uses include maximum building intensity standards, expressed as Floor Area Ratio (FAR), which is defined below. Most non-residential land use designations also allow residential uses and include density standards as well.

Table 2-1: General Plan Land Use Designation Summary Table

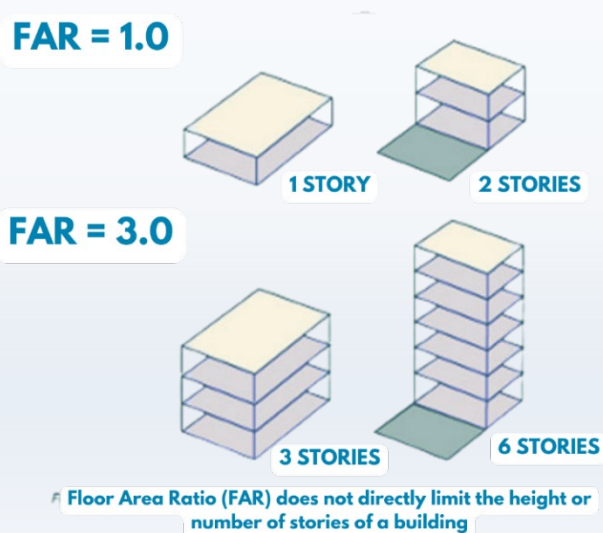
Land Use Designation		Density Range (units/acre)	Floor Area Ratio (FAR)
R-S	Residential-Suburban	0 – 0.5	N/A
R-L	Residential-low Density	0 - 15	N/A
R-M	Residential-Medium Density	15 - 30	N/A
DM-U	Main Street Mixed Use	15 - 30	3.0
GM-U	General Mixed Use	15 - 30	2.0
C-G	Commercial-General	N/A	2.0
M-G	Industrial-General	N/A	1.0
A-G	Agricultural - General	0 – 0.05	N/A
O-S	Open Space - Recreation	N/A	N/A
P-S	Public Service	N/A	N/A

Residential Density

Residential development is typically categorized by allowed density ranges (minimum and maximum) measured in dwelling units per acre (du/ac). Residential density is calculated by dividing the number of dwelling units allowed on a site by the gross acreage of the site. Consistent with the housing type and density standards in the Land Use Element, the Zoning Code establishes building height and lot regulations, parking requirements, allowed uses, and other standards. Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) are allowed in addition to densities otherwise permitted, in accordance with State regulations. Density bonuses may be approved for projects with affordable housing and housing for elderly residents with specific amenities designated for residents, provided the design and development standards are in conformance with those specified in the Zoning Code. The City also encourages the development of Missing Middle Housing per California Senate Bill 9, which generally allows any residential lot larger than 2,400 square feet to be divided into two lots if both can meet City standards. In Willits, Missing Middle Housing is compatible within areas appropriately zoned for single family residential uses and located within an Urban Cluster as defined by the U.S. Census.

Missing Middle Housing refers to housing types that fall somewhere in between a single-family home and mid-rise apartment buildings such as townhomes, duplexes, triplexes, and courtyard clusters. Missing middle housing can help localities increase the availability of less expensive housing types and support vibrant, walkable neighborhoods, while gently increasing density. These housing types are an important component of a diverse housing stock that can be used to expand the affordability of housing in neighborhoods dominated by single-family homes.

Non-Residential Building Intensity (FAR)



The intensity of non-residential development, which can be regulated by total building size and lot coverage, is measured by Floor Area Ratio (FAR). FAR means the gross floor area of a building or buildings on a parcel divided by the area of the parcel. The maximum FAR standard limits the overall size of development on a parcel. As an example, a maximum FAR of 0.75 would allow 75,000 square feet of building floor area on a 100,000-square foot lot. The 75,000 square feet could be developed in one building, or more buildings, and include one of more stories. Maximum building size based on FAR can be used in combination with estimates of typical employees per square foot of building area based on industry type to determine the potential future number of employees.

Overlay Designations

Land Use Element Overlay Designations are used, in combination with the primary land use designation, to notify landowners of the presence of important resources or hazards, including streamside and historic areas, and hazards, such as floodways and floodplains. There are five overlay land use designations that may be applied on the Land Use Map:

Natural Hazard Area (-G); Conservation - Floodway (-FW);

Historical Resources (-H); Riparian Areas (-R); and Urban Reserve (-UR).

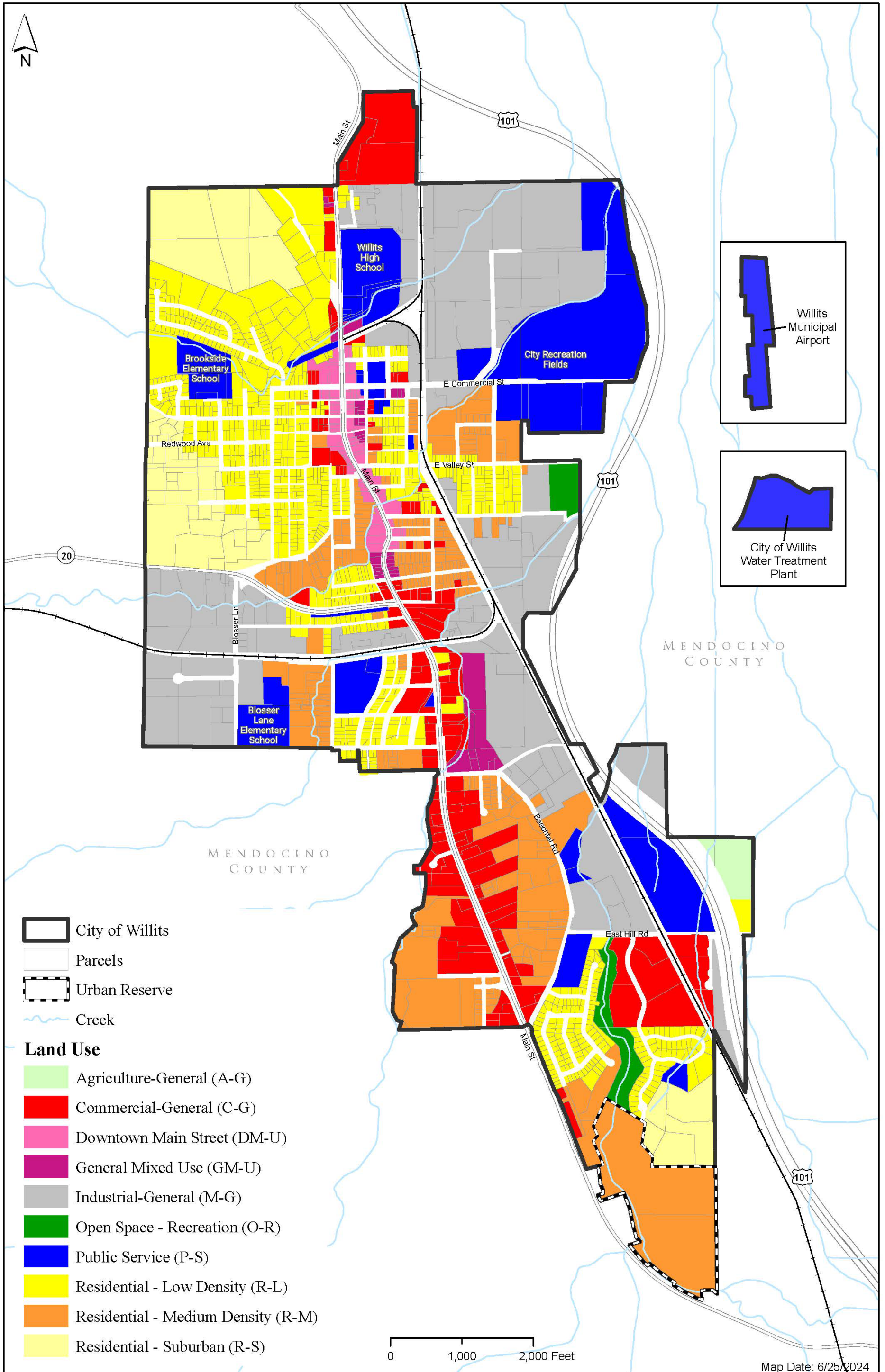
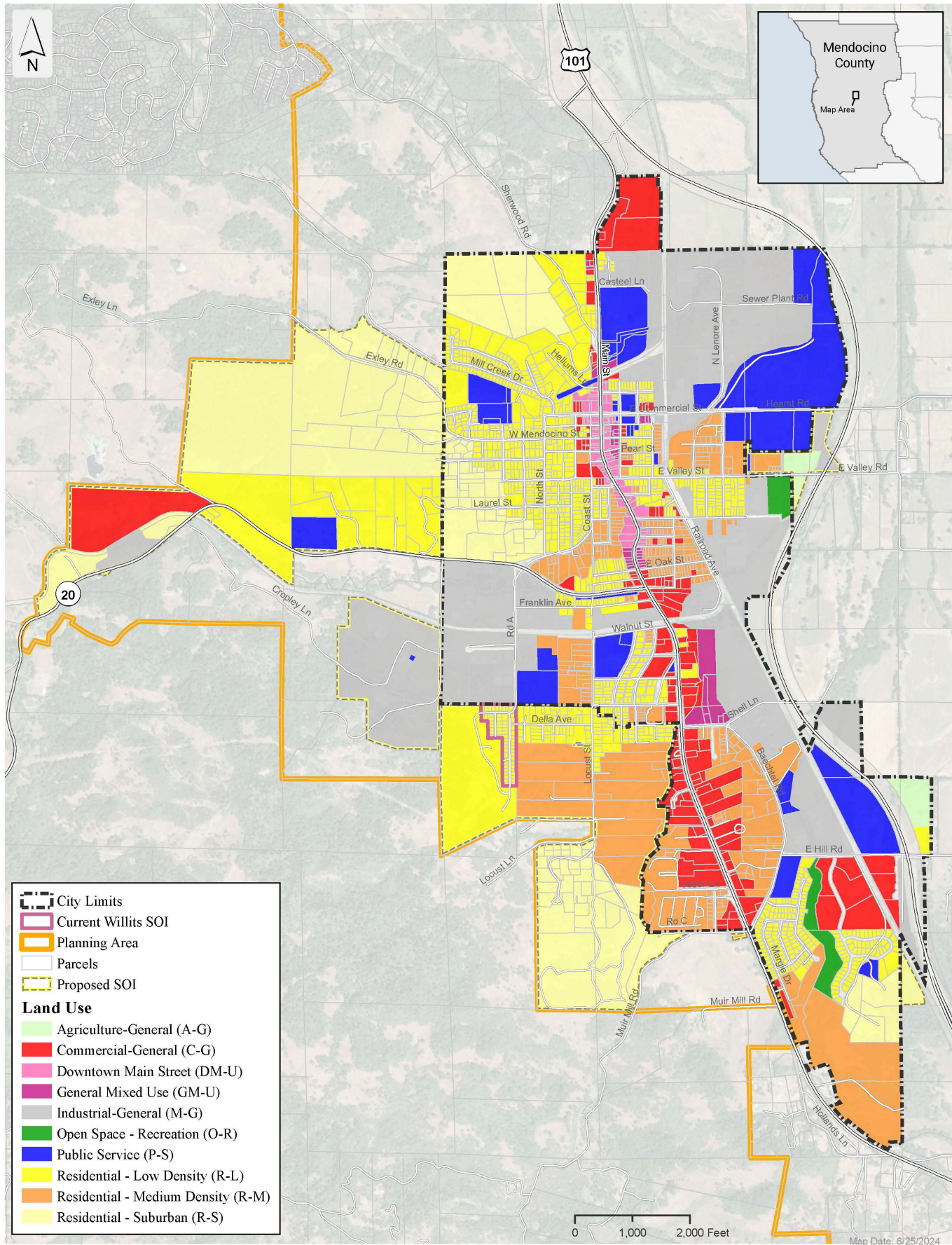


Figure 2-2 Land Use Map - SOI Areas



Sources: Boundaries, Roads, Parcels: Mendocino County GIS.

Map Date: 6/25/2024



Goals and Policies

Planning Area

California planning law requires Cities to adopt a general plan for lands within its limits and any land outside of its boundaries which bears relation to its planning. Defining a Planning Area that includes land outside of its boundaries is a means by which a City can communicate its desires to annex land to the City or its objectives and concerns for the future of surrounding lands under the jurisdiction of the County.

The City of Willits Planning Area (Figure 3-1) includes lands to which the City provides utility services, such as water service (a substantial number of housing units in the Planning Area receive City water service) and to a lesser degree wastewater service; areas where the City has utility infrastructure, such as the City's wastewater treatment plant or that its infrastructure is dependent upon, such as the watersheds for the City's reservoirs or the hazard areas around the City's airport; and areas where development could have an impact on the City, such as the Little Lake Groundwater Basin that is so essential to the City's water supply. Within the Planning Area, the City may apply Land Use Designations and pre-zoning and adopt specific policies that relate to the City's future interest and that could be used to guide County planning but would not apply unless such lands were within the City.

Why Establish a Sphere of Influence?

Designating lands as part of the SOI allows the City to plan for the eventual annexation and extension of services as part of community growth; and allows the City to designate uses compatible with adjacent City lands.

State law sets forth procedures under which the City of Willits may apply to the Mendocino Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) to annex land into its City boundary and requires that any annexation area must be within the LAFCo approved Sphere of Influence (SOI). The intention is to encourage orderly growth and development and the protection of agricultural and open space land. An SOI defines the City’s probable physical boundaries and service area as determined by LAFCo. State law also requires that the Land Use Element identify Disadvantaged Unincorporated Communities, which are communities with an annual median household income that is less than 80 percent of the statewide annual household income, which must also be considered when defining SOIs. An analysis of Disadvantaged Unincorporated Communities within the Planning Area has been prepared and is included as an Appendix to this Element.

Designating lands as part of the SOI allows the City to plan for the eventual annexation and extension of services as part of community growth; and allows the City to designate uses compatible with adjacent City lands. The City’s SOI is adopted, as required by State law, by the Mendocino LAFCo. The Sphere of Influence (SOI) shown in Figure 3-1 represents the potential boundaries of the City and its service areas, defines land eligible for annexation to the City in the future, and includes adequate land to accommodate potential future growth.

Within the Planning Area, Areas of Interest may be designated consistent with Mendocino LAFCo policy contained in Resolution No. 2018-19-01. An Area of Interest is a geographic area beyond the sphere of influence in which land use decisions or other governmental actions of the County or a special district, defined as the “Acting Agency,” impact directly or indirectly upon the City, defined as the “Interested Agency”. For example, approval of a housing project developed to city-like densities on septic tanks outside the city limits may result in the city being forced subsequently to extend sewer services to the area to deal with septic failures. The city in such a situation would be the Interested Agency with appropriate reason to request special consideration from the Acting Agency in considering projects adjacent to the city.

An Area of Interest may include areas beyond the City’s SOI that are important to the City and contain characteristics such as entrances to the City along important travel routes, areas where highway related commercial development could impact business vitality within the City, or areas where the City of Willits provides out of area water or wastewater services.



GOAL LU-1

To ensure logical and appropriate annexations that maintain a compact City boundary as well as surrounding open space, working lands and natural resources and support disadvantaged communities.

LU-1.1 PLANNING AREA

Request that applications for development or changes in organization within the Planning Area boundary received by Mendocino County and the Local Agency Formation Commission be referred to the City for review and comment and encourage the County to implement measures to protect areas within the Planning Area not planned for development, including the City watersheds and groundwater recharge areas. *(Source: New Policy)*

LU-1.2 SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Annexations to the City may only be approved when such lands are within the approved Sphere of Influence and the annexation is consistent with the goals and policies of this plan. *(Source: New Policy)*

LU-1.3 COUNTY GENERAL PLAN LAND USE WITHIN SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Seek agreement with Mendocino County on appropriate interim land use designations and zoning classifications for Sphere of Influence areas, including development standards, that may include the application of an urban reserve designation to ensure that any development prior to annexation is consistent with the City of Willits General Plan and does not prevent attainment of planned densities. *(Source: New Policy)*

LU-1.4 AREAS OF INTEREST

The City of Willits defines its Area of Interest to be the portions of the Planning Area outside the SOI, where existing land use and future development within Areas of Interest could have a direct impact on health, safety, and welfare of City residents, and the City shall request that responsible agencies, including Mendocino County, the Mendocino Local Agency Formation Commission, and Caltrans give special consideration to the recommendations and comments of the City of Willits. *(Source: New Policy)*

LU-1.5 DISADVANTAGED UNINCORPORATED COMMUNITIES

Consider Disadvantaged Unincorporated Communities (DUCs) within the City's SOI during infrastructure and services planning and, as appropriate, ensure that identified DUCs are included in annexation proposals. *(Source: New Policy)*

Implementation Measures

LU-1A NOTIFY AGENCIES OF PLANNING AREA BOUNDARY.

Provide copies of the City of Willits Planning Area showing City Land Use Designations to the Mendocino County Planning and Building Services and Transportation Departments, the Mendocino County Local Agency Formation Commission, and Caltrans, and request that proposals to intensify land uses, such as general plan and zoning amendments or subdivisions and roadway improvements or water service extensions that would expand capacity or that could affect the Planning Area's resources be referred to the City of Willits for review and communicate the City's position on these matters to the applicable decision-making body.

LU-1B SEEK APPROVAL OF THE EXPANDED SPHERE OF INFLUENCE.

Submit an application to the Mendocino Local Agency Formation Commission to expand the City of Willits Sphere of Influence to add the areas shown in Figure 3-1 consistent with Mendocino Local Agency Formation Commission policy and State law. Seek approval to add possible Areas of Interest for Mendocino Local Agency Formation Commission designation so that notice is provided of other governmental actions that may impact the City of Willits.



Planning for Growth

The City of Willits population is estimated by the California Department of Finance (DOF) to be 4,830 in 2024 and has not changed appreciably since the adoption of the prior City of Willits General Plan, Vision 2020, in 1992 (the population of Willits was 5,027 in 1990 based on the U.S. Census). Although the City population was generally stable between 1990 and 2024, over 200 new units were added to the City housing stock.

In 1992, the prior General Plan, City of Willits Vision 2020, projected a future City population of 7,500 residents based on countywide growth rates at that time. City infrastructure, most notably the wastewater treatment system, and planning for the City's street network were based on this population projection. The City and the local business community have identified that the lack of available housing is directly related to lack of population growth. The business community has indicated a need to hire more workers and feel that the lack of new housing is the primary issue limiting recruitment efforts.

The high Mendocino County growth rates that were anticipated in the 1990's and early 2000's did not occur. Between 1990 and 2020, the total county-wide population grew by about seven percent, rather than the projected 50 percent. The DOF estimates that the population of Mendocino County has been declining over the last few years and projects further decline for the next five or so years and then slow growth back to approximately the County's 2020 population level over the next 20 to 30 years.



State population growth projections rely on trends and relationships observed in the past (previous population + births - deaths + net migration) and may not accurately project the future population of the county when future events do not follow past trends. The current regional and statewide demographic factors suggest that the future population growth rate for the City may be very low or zero. However, future demographic factors, such as global climate conditions and losses and recovery from disaster, such as from wildfire, or the COVID-19 global pandemic, may contribute to increased rates of in-migration. These factors suggest that using the past conservative buildout population projection, 7,500 persons, may be prudent for the current General Plan planning period.

As a result, the City is seeking to create a supply of land that is responsive to the levels of demand that may occur during the planning period. The City is adding a mixed-use land use designation to accommodate demand for housing and commercial development and to accommodate growth in areas served by existing infrastructure and services. Because City General Plan Land Use Designations alone cannot determine the preferences of individual property owners or their desired timing to develop their land, the City is proposing to expand its Sphere of Influence to plan additional land for potential future annexation. The City's intent is to plan this additional land for residential, industrial, and public facility development, increasing the available supply of residential lands in particular to increase the likelihood that interested developers can find willing landowners to build housing units to accommodate growth. The General Plan includes programs to limit the potential for leapfrog development and to ensure that growth occurs in a logical manner.

Why Expand the Sphere of Influence?

The City's intent is to plan this additional land for residential, industrial, and public facility development, increasing the available supply of residential lands in particular, to increase the likelihood that interested developers can find willing landowners to build housing units to accommodate growth.

GOAL LU-2

To promote growth within infill and redevelopment sites near neighborhood commercial areas.

LU-2.1 PLANNED GROWTH

Continue to plan for a buildout population of approximately 7,500 residents and establish programs that can effectively respond to a range of potential growth rates that could occur during the General Plan planning period. *(Source: Existing Policy 1.210, modified)*

LU-2.2 INFILL DEVELOPMENT

Land within areas of the City served by utilities, transportation infrastructure, and municipal services represent the best opportunity to support affordable housing and employment development, and to reduce greenhouse emissions. Encourage incremental development of vacant and underutilized infill areas that are appropriately scaled and enhance existing neighborhoods within the City. *(Source: Existing Policy 1.230, modified)*

LU-2.3 LAND USE CHANGES

During the consideration of proposals for changes in land use, priority shall be given to projects that result in the greatest public benefit, which may include opportunities for employment growth, providing for the community's housing needs, or addressing unmet needs for parks and recreation facilities. *(Source: Existing Policy 1.260, modified)*

LU-2.4 ANNEXATIONS

Monitor the supply of land within the City that is planned for residential, commercial, industrial, and public service uses and, as appropriate, encourage annexations of land adjacent to the City that support the preservation of open space lands, promote orderly development in a manner consistent with the General Plan and contribute to the City's fiscal stability, and that create a logical City boundary; result in the efficient use of City services and utilities; and support a transportation network that, in combination with an appropriate mix of land uses, minimizes vehicle trips by promoting walking, bicycling, and transit. *(Source: Existing Policy 1.240, modified)*

Implementation Measures

LU-2A POPULATION AND GROWTH.

As part of the annual General Plan progress report, provide the City Council with a report on the estimated City population in comparison to the buildout population contained in this General Plan using data such as City estimates based on approved permits, the Department of Finance annual population estimates, the Census Bureau decennial census counts and American Community Survey estimates. Where the Director of Community Development determines that actual rates of growth could result in a total City population level that exceeds that included in this General Plan during the planning period, the City Council shall be informed of the need to update the Land Use Element.

LU-2B RESIDENTIAL LAND SUPPLY.

Maintain an inventory of vacant and underutilized land planned and zoned for residential use within the City and apply priority weighting based on the proximity of the land to utilities, services, schools, streets, and transit, and relative ease of development (topography and constraints relating to hazards and natural resources). For higher priority infill lands, periodically reach out to landowners and seek their:

- (1) level of interest in development,
- (2) concerns regarding development; and
- (3) potential constraints affecting development or landowner needs to proceed with development.

As needed, during the annual General Plan progress report, provide the City Council with a report on the inventory of vacant and underutilized land planned and zoned for residential use and the potential need for changes to General Plan policy or Zoning standards, annexations, or other City programs that may be needed to facilitate development consistent with the General Plan.

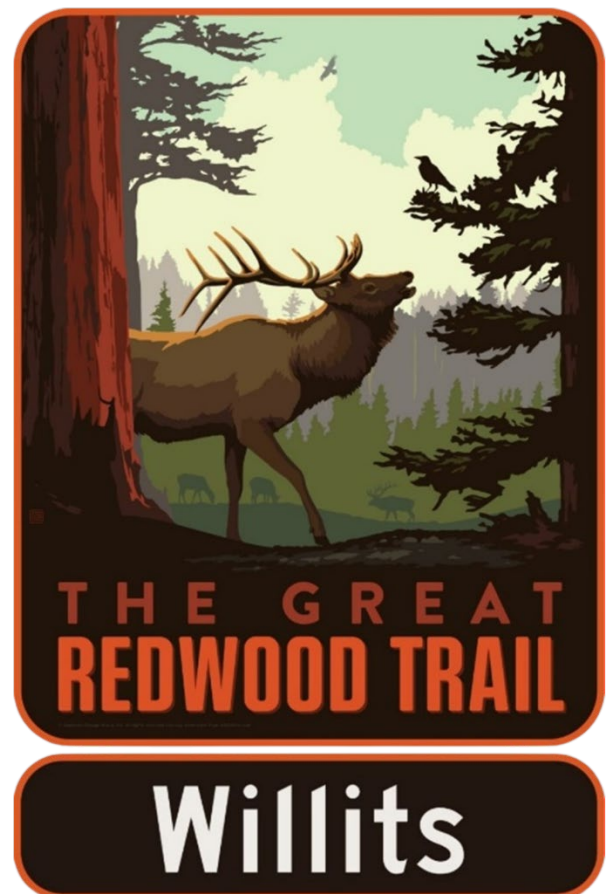


Willits Character, Vitality, and Sustainability

The City of Willits is located at the intersection of U.S. 101, State Route 20, the Great Redwood Trail Agency right of way (formerly the North Coast Railroad Authority), and the Mendocino Railway or Skunk Train. City residents and businesses rely on these transportation routes for employment and commerce, and many current and future travelers along these routes stop in Willits, the “Gateway to the Redwoods,” to visit or for an overnight stay. Gateway monuments and signage can reflect the history of Willits and inform travelers that they have arrived at an important place that is valued by its residents; welcome and encourage travelers to visit notable locations or commercial areas; and can identify and acknowledge connectivity to the larger City street and trail network. The Willits Main Street Corridor Enhancement Plan contains strategies for gateway improvements to welcome travelers from the north and south that are closely coordinated with other relevant City planning documents.

City residents and businesses rely on these transportation routes for employment and commerce, and many current and future travelers along these routes stop in Willits, the “Gateway to the Redwoods...”

To foster a healthier community, the City has placed a strong emphasis on providing accessible parks and top-notch recreational facilities and services. These Willits parks cater not only to city residents but also extend their benefits to the neighboring areas, underscoring the City's aspiration to amplify its influence as a provider of regional park services. Furthermore, as a part of its endeavors, the City is actively engaged in the development of a segment of the Great Redwood Trail, a project that assumes vital significance as a pivotal north-south route for pedestrians and cyclists, seamlessly threading its way through the City. The City's General Plan has always prioritized public health and energy conservation by encouraging infill development within the City and employing policy and programs to reduce single-occupancy vehicle trips. The City seeks to enhance the connection between public health, land use planning, and community development by expanding access to public gathering areas, encouraging local production of and access to healthy foods.



GOAL LU-3

To achieve a community design that promotes neighborhood vitality, health, energy efficiency, and conservation.

LU-3.1 COMPLETE STREETS

Consistent with Circulation Element Policies 2.230 and 2.260 that seek to enhance the street network for walking and biking and reduce single occupancy vehicle trips, the design, construction, reconstruction, repair and maintenance efforts on the City's streets, bridges, pathways, and sidewalks, shall create a comprehensive, integrated transportation network that is safe, accessible, comfortable Complete streets accommodate and welcome users of all ages, races, ethnicities, incomes, and physical abilities, and all modes of transportation, particularly those walking, biking, and using transit. The City shall apply a Complete Streets framework in all applicable and feasible transportation projects to allow the safe, comfortable, convenient and accessible use of streets for all street users. *(Source: New Policy)*

LU-3.2 CITY GATEWAYS AND CORRIDORS

Highway 101, State Route 20, and County streets serve as important gateways and welcome travelers to the City and its downtown. Designate, construct, and maintain well-designed and landscaped City Gateways as identified in the Willits Main Street Corridor Enhancement Plan. The City should partner with businesses and the residents in the gateway neighborhoods and Caltrans and the County to establish attractive and welcoming entries to the City that encourage visitors to Willits, support the neighborhoods in which they are located, and can be efficiently and practically maintained. *(Source: Existing Policy 1.250, modified)*

LU-3.3 MIXED USE AREAS

Encourage development that creates vibrant and walkable areas, reduces greenhouse gas emissions, and promotes economic development within downtown and neighborhood areas by implementing mixed use land use designations that support a range of commercial, office and residential uses; enable the flexible use of existing structures and vacant land; and ensure compatibility with adjacent land uses, particularly residential uses, through site, landscape, and building design features. *(Source: New Policy)*

LU-3.4 IMPROVE NORTH-SOUTH CONNECTIVITY

Encourage the establishment of new north-south transportation connections between central and southern Willits, such as the conceptual Baechtel Road – Railroad avenue corridor. New north-south transportation corridors should be planned to support all modes of transportation, enhance City utilities and infrastructure, improve emergency evacuation, and accommodate future residential, commercial, and industrial development.

LU-3.5 SPECIFIC PLANNING

Consider using specific plans, as defined in California Planning and Land Use Law, as a tool in implementing the objectives of the General Plan and to refine the City’s vision for specific areas, as well as to serve as a policy and regulatory document that may either provide greater flexibility in development or enforce stricter regulations, and for providing certainty to property owners and the residents of the City. *(Source: New Policy)*

LU-3.6 PROMOTE A HEALTHY COMMUNITY

Ensure that all residents have access to spaces, events, and programs that support physical activity, and encourage businesses and service providers to create a healthy food system, including local organic food production and community gardens, which supports all residents. *(Source: New Policy)*

LU-3.7 CONSIDER PUBLIC HEALTH IN LAND USE

When reviewing proposals for changes in land use and development, public health, welfare, and safety must be considered. *(Source: New Policy)*

LU-3.8 FARMERS MARKET

Support the expansion of the Willits Farmers Market and facilitate its location at Bud Snider Park or other appropriate locations in close proximity to downtown and neighborhood areas. *(Source: New Policy)*

LU-3.9 ENERGY CONSERVATION AND REDUCTION

Encourage the installation of renewable energy systems and community-wide reductions in energy consumption. *(Source: New Policy)*

LU-3.10 PLAN FOR CLIMATE CHANGE

Plan for the public health implications of climate change, including potential disease and temperature effects, and work with state and county public health agencies to identify necessary programs to reduce, adapt to, and increase resiliency to potential impacts and implement programs to achieve City-wide reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. *(Source: New Policy)*

LU-3.11 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSION REDUCTIONS

Evaluate new larger-scale residential, commercial, and industrial projects for compliance with state regulations and require feasible mitigation measures to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. *(Source: New Policy)*

LU-3.12 PARKS AND RECREATION

Consistent with the Public Services and Facilities, Parks and Recreation Element Policies 6.230 and 6.350, equitably expand opportunities for trails, parks, and recreational facilities throughout Willits and support the role of the City of Willits as a regional parks provider and consider evaluating the feasibility of establishing a recreation and parks district that extends beyond City boundaries to finance facilities that support the region that may be provided by the City. *(Source: New Policy)*

Implementation Measures

LU-3A WILLITS GATEWAY ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM.

Review and revise the gateway strategies identified in the Willits Main Street Corridor Enhancement Plan and seek grant funding and local public-private partnerships to implement a comprehensive program of gateways to celebrate Willits history and character, welcome visitors, and highlight local businesses and attractions.

LU-3B ENERGY CONSERVATION AND GREENHOUSE GAS REDUCTIONS.

Modify the Zoning, Subdivision, and Building regulations and other land use policy to implement:

- An assessment of GHG emissions for large scale discretionary residential, commercial and industrial projects, and require feasible mitigation;
- A GHG Emissions threshold of significance for discretionary projects for use in future GHG emissions analyses;
- Programs to facilitate the installation of renewable energy systems, such as solar arrays, and the development of battery storage and micro grid capacity for storing renewable power through amendments to the Zoning Regulations; and
- A city-wide program such as a greenhouse gas reduction plan that will meet the State's 2030 objective of 40 percent below 1990 emissions levels and 2045 goal of carbon neutrality.

LU-3C PARK ENHANCEMENT.

Prepare and implement a public spaces, parks, and recreation strategic plan that:

- Addresses gaps in the geographic distribution of pocket, neighborhood, in community parks in the City, especially within disadvantaged communities;
- Identifies and implements needed public gathering areas within the downtown area and commercial areas;
- Includes master planning for important park properties;
- Defines and sets forth a program to implement a complete, convenient, and safe network of walking and biking pathways throughout the City; and
- Incorporates a funding strategy that may include approaches for public-private partnerships; priorities and linkages for state and federal grants; City development and use fees; and the creation of a regional district with an ongoing revenue source that includes all users who benefit from City parks.



Downtown

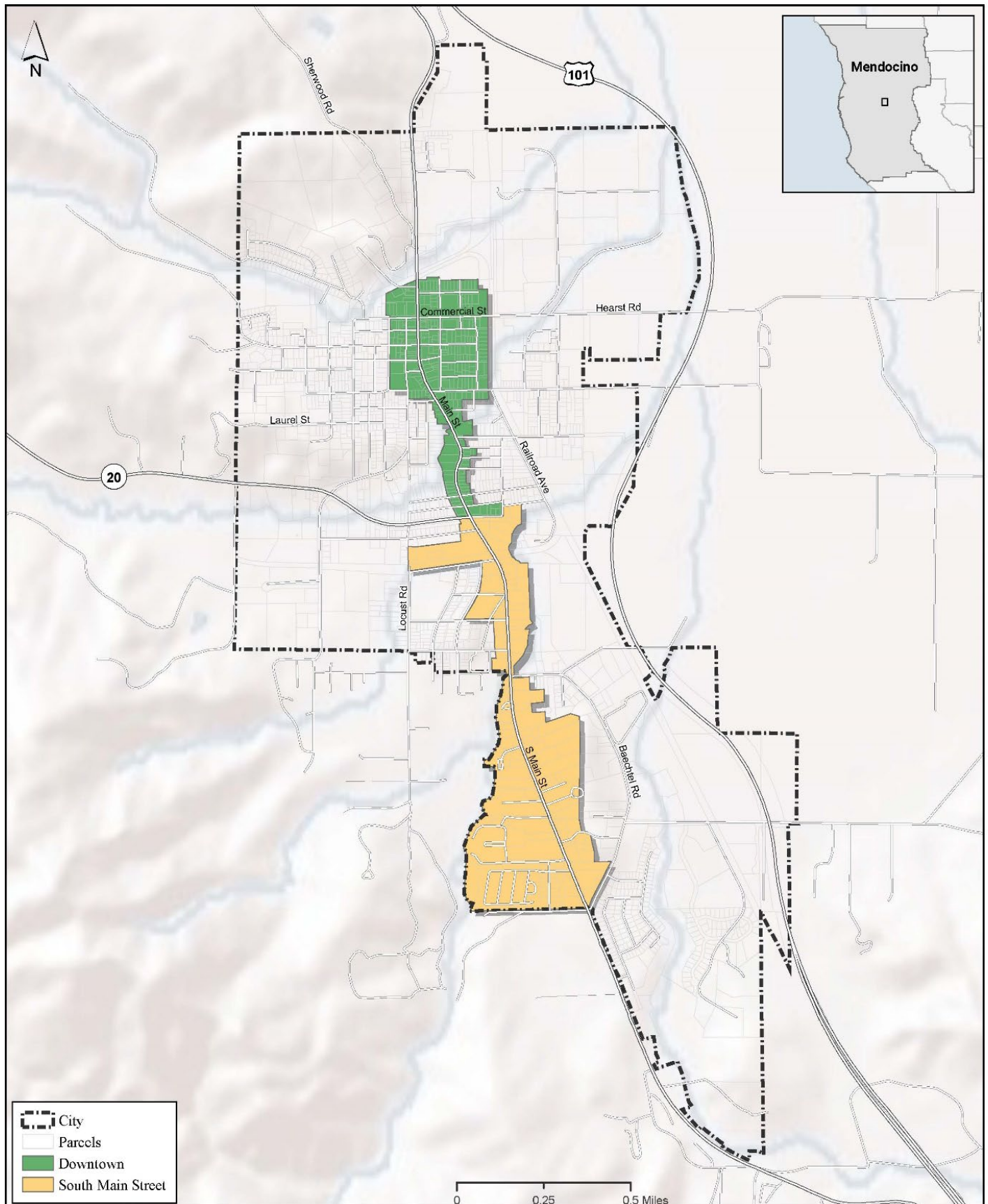
The Willits Downtown area is shown in Figure 3-2 and centers around Main Street, the City's primary north-south arterial, and is the historic focal point of the City. Main Street is a traditional mixed-use area located within Downtown Willits and contains two distinct design character areas: the commercial area between Commercial Street and California Street that is defined by single and multi-story shop-front buildings, the most prominent of which is the Van Hotel; and the area between California and Oak Streets that contains single-family homes and businesses in former residential structures. The close proximity of employment, services, and residences within the Downtown area, in particular to the Main Street corridor, reduces the need to travel by car and can serve the needs of the economy, community, public health, and the environment by transit, foot, or by bike.



The City has undertaken a number of planning efforts relating to the Downtown area including the Willits Downtown Specific Plan, Downtown Willits Streets and Alleys Connectivity Study, Willits Circulation and Parking Improvement Study, Willits Main Street Corridor Enhancement Plan, and Willits Bicycle and Pedestrian Specific Plan. Each of these plans contributes to identifying benefits, needs, and strategies upon which to revitalize and renew a vital city downtown. The Land Use Element identifies the need for a Main Street Land Use Designation to be applied within a portion of Downtown, that incorporates elements of each of these planning efforts and adds policies that will build flexibility in the Zoning standards to allow the adaptive reuse and revitalization of existing buildings and encourage creative Main Street redevelopment.

Effective management of vehicle parking remains a significant consideration within Willits' Downtown area, mirroring its importance in numerous commercial districts. The architectural layout of traditional downtowns, characterized by shop-front buildings, was purposefully designed to allure and engage pedestrians, inviting them to explore each store as they stroll by. The need for each business to satisfy its off-street parking requirements makes the adaptive reuse and revitalization of existing commercial structures challenging. With the objective of activating and energizing the Willits Main Street area, the Land Use Element seeks to reduce or eliminate the requirement to satisfy peak parking demand onsite and replace it with a park-once program that incorporates provisions for best utilizing available on-street space for parking, strategically allocates space in City-owned lots, encourages the shared use of existing private lots, and provides for ongoing monitoring and management to balance the interests of all users.

Figure 3-2 Willits Focus Areas



GOAL LU-4

To activate Main Street as the vibrant commercial and cultural core of the City.

LU-4.1 CITY OF WILLITS MAIN STREET

Maintain the traditional downtown core of the City of Willits that is located along Main Street between Commercial and Oak Street as a place for employment, goods and services, gathering, and community events. *(Source: New Policy)*

LU-4.2 MAIN STREET MIXED USE LAND USE DESIGNATION

Apply the Main Street Mixed Use Land Use Designation to property that generally fronts along the Main Street core between Commercial Street and Oak Street and allow for a range of commercial, office and residential uses; enable the flexible use of existing commercial structures; encourage building design, sidewalk, plaza area, and street designs to slow traffic to provide a comfortable atmosphere for walking, biking, outdoor seating and gathering. *(Source: New Policy)*

LU-4.3 ADAPTIVE REUSE OF COMMERCIAL STRUCTURES

Enable the adaptive reuse and revitalization of existing commercial structures on Main Street by establishing flexible and appropriate lot standards, including reducing or eliminating on-site parking requirements. *(Source: New Policy)*

LU-4.4 OFF-STREET PARKING

Consider implementing a “park once” program for Downtown, that includes provisions within the Main Street Mixed-Use area to reduce or eliminate parking mandates to lessen regulatory barriers to the reuse and revitalization of downtown buildings, and that implements the recommendations of the Downtown Specific Plan and the Willits Circulation and Parking Improvement Plan and provides for ongoing monitoring and management to balance the interests of all users. *(Source: New Policy)*

LU-4.5 DOWNTOWN GATHERING AND STREET ACTIVITIES

Implement the recommendation of the Downtown Specific Plan relating to public spaces and identify appropriate sites for downtown plaza areas and gathering spaces that enable street fairs and other outdoor activities within the downtown and consider encouraging seasonal markets and festivals to locate in a central downtown area or on a side street and implement a feasible program to establish such areas. *(Source: New Policy)*

LU-4.6 SLOWING TRAFFIC

Continue to evaluate modifications to Main Street design to slow traffic and provide a comfortable atmosphere for outdoor seating and gathering, walking, and biking, while considering the needs for parking. *(Source: New Policy)*

LU-4.7 MAIN STREET SHOP FRONTS

Protect and enhance the commercial frontages along Main Street between Commercial Street and Oak Street and encourage mixed-uses where commercial uses are typically located along the sidewalk and create a comfortable environment for shopping, gathering, and walking. *(Source: New Policy)*



Implementation Measures

LU-4A MAIN STREET MIXED-USE ZONE.

Prepare and implement a Main Street Mixed-Use Zone that includes:

- A range of allowable uses, including commercial, office, service, and residential;
- Review, update, and implement as appropriate the Willits Downtown Design Guidelines, for the Main Street Mixed Use Zone, which generally include requirements for commercial uses along building frontages that allow residential and commercial uses behind and above within the area north of California Street and allow residential uses on the ground floors between California and Oak Streets;
- Simple and clear design standards for ministerial projects that can be implemented using a checklist format; and,
- A “park once” parking monitoring and management program for vehicles that reduces or eliminates on-street parking requirements and encourages gathering, walking, and biking, and may include sidewalk and streetscape improvements; incentives for the shared use of existing private off-street parking areas; maximizing the efficiency of on-street parking; improved signage and parking information; the evaluation of a shuttle system, parking permits, restrictions, and pricing; and planning for new public parking lots.

LU-4B DOWNTOWN ACTION PROGRAM.

Implement a program that prioritizes actions and recommendations from prior City of Willits planning documents for the Downtown Area, identifies and secures needed funding, and develops a schedule for implementation, and includes:

- Identifying and forming an ad-hoc Downtown working group including City staff, business and property owners, and the Willits Chamber of Commerce.
- Reviewing identified actions and recommendations that have not been fully implemented from prior City of Willits planning documents for the Downtown Area and adjacent areas, including:
 - Willits Main Street Corridor Enhancement Plan
 - Downtown Specific Plan
 - Willits Circulation & Parking Improvement Plan
 - Willits Downtown Design Guidelines
 - Willits Bicycle & Pedestrian Specific Plan
 - Willits Downtown Streets & Alleys Connectivity Study
- Refining and prioritizing identified actions and recommendations.
- Identifying the likely cost of actions, if any, and the most feasible funding sources, including local and regional private sources, public-private partnerships, regional/state/federal grant programs.
- Preparing a schedule for implementation that includes timing, responsibility, and necessary steps.



South Main Street

The South Main Street area (Figure 3-2) between South Street and Muir Mill Road serves as the City's southern gateway, contains important businesses and residential areas, and represents substantial infill development and employment potential. South Main Street buildings have been erected around a state highway, CA-Hwy 20. This region could be strengthened by improving the connectivity between businesses and the surrounding residential areas and by evaluating and implementing a range of design options for the street and streetscape for South Main Street to improve visual quality and to ensure the comfort, safety, and experience of people walking and biking to shops and services.



GOAL LU-5

To maintain South Main Street as the City's southern gateway and important employment center for the City.

LU-5.1 FOCUSED SOUTH MAIN STREET PLANNING

Consider conducting focused planning for the South Main Street area, in partnership with businesses, property owners, Caltrans and other appropriate organizations, to identify programs to facilitate ongoing commercial vitality and as a means of implementing desired improvements and Land Use policy specific to this area. *(Source: New Policy)*

LU-5.2 SOUTH MAIN STREET IMPROVEMENTS

In cooperation with property owners and Caltrans, develop and implement street design standards, including lane configuration, coordinated landscaping, signage, street lighting, benches, wider sidewalks, safe crossings, and bike lanes, to enhance and beautify the streetscape and building frontages to support businesses and to provide a safer, and more enjoyable atmosphere for shopping, walking, biking, outdoor seating and gathering, consistent with any City Complete Streets policies. *(Source: New Policy)*

Implementation

LU-5A SOUTH MAIN STREET STRATEGIC PLAN.

In close cooperation with South Main Street businesses, property owners, neighborhoods, and Caltrans, prepare a South Main Street Strategic Plan that is sensitive to the varying contexts that exist along the street (such as heavy commercial areas, shopping centers, visitor serving uses, and residential neighborhoods), and serves as an ongoing, cooperative, and inclusive planning strategy. Form an ad-hoc working group to develop a South Main Street Strategic Plan that addresses in particular:

- Complete streets planning and network connectivity.
- Convenient access to businesses and homes.
- City gateway planning and improvements.
- Signage and streetscape improvements.



Land Use Compatibility and Flexibility

Residential and commercial development, especially in older portions of Willits, has occurred over time, and in many instances was constructed before the adoption of City Zoning Regulations resulting in non-conforming structures and uses that are part of the neighborhood fabric. Community input has highlighted the need to include flexibility in the Zoning Regulations to allow long-standing uses to continue, allow for the establishment of needed nearby limited neighborhood commercial uses within residential areas as well as the need to incorporate standards to protect vulnerable uses from excessive noise and other nuisances, while protecting businesses from the encroachment of sensitive uses that could limit their potential growth.



GOAL LU-6

To provide for compatibility between uses and greater zoning flexibility to respond to changing conditions and opportunities.

LU-6.1 LIMIT INCOMPATIBLE AND CONFLICTING USES

Minimize potential land use conflicts by applying appropriate land use designations and implementing appropriate development standards and buffers through modifications to the Zoning Regulations to limit adverse impacts from future development on surrounding properties. *(Source: Existing Policy 1.220, modified)*

LU-6.2 COMPATIBLE DEVELOPMENT

On lands designated for industrial or commercial uses, buildings and accessory structures should be sited and designed to limit potential conflicts with adjacent residential land uses. *(Source: Existing Policy 1.280, modified)*

LU-6.3 PROTECT LONG-STANDING COMPATIBLE USES IN OLDER NEIGHBORHOODS

To minimize the number of non-conforming uses and to protect the ability of owners of integral long-standing uses in older neighborhoods to finance improvements or the sale of property using conventional financing, apply appropriate Land Use Designations and Zoning Classifications and provide additional flexibility to the range of allowable uses. *(Source: New Policy)*

LU-6.4 INTERIM AGRICULTURAL USES

Encourage agricultural activities on lands designated for industrial use as well as other large vacant properties until such time as the lands are utilized for their intended purposes. *(Source: Existing Policy 1.290, modified)*

LU-6.5 MISSING MIDDLE HOUSING

Facilitate new “Missing Middle Housing” construction, defined as a mix of housing types including duplexes, triplexes, and fourplexes, in a manner consistent with Senate Bill 9 within areas appropriately zoned for single family residential uses and located within an Urban Cluster as defined by the U.S. Census. *(Source: New Policy)*

LU-6.6 ZONING FLEXIBILITY

Provide greater flexibility in the range of permitted and conditionally permitted uses in commercial and residential areas to allow residences on upper floors and behind shop fronts or consider establishing limited neighborhood commercial combining zone that may be applied to residential zones and includes a specific range of allowable uses, clear performance standards, and a variety of permitting pathways to allow needed commercial uses in close proximity within residential areas. *(Source: New Policy)*

LU-6.7 SUPPORT HOME-BASED BUSINESSES

Review and update standards for home-based businesses, or home occupations to allow greater flexibility where such uses are compatible. Allow home-based businesses as principally permitted uses where all performance standards specified in the Zoning Regulations are met and a business license is secured. Allow for an increase in the scale and range of allowable home-based business types in residential zones where potential nuisances are addressed through the permit approval process. *(Source: New Policy)*

Implementation Measures

LU-6A ZONING REGULATIONS.

Update the Zoning Regulations to:

- Add performance standards for industrial and heavy commercial development adjacent to residential areas to provide buffers, landscaping, and screening that minimize noise, light, glare, and other impacts;
- Increase the range of allowable uses and the incorporation of performance standards to limit potential impacts; and
- Update the standards for home-based businesses to increase the range of allowable home-based business types in residential zones where potential nuisances are addressed through the permit approval process.



Coordinate with Local Communities

The ongoing relationship between the City of Willits, the County, and its neighbors, in particular the Sherwood Valley Rancheria and the Brooktrails Township Community Services District, is important for long range land use and service planning. The three entities share utility systems, transportation networks, and recreation facilities, and rely on the health of Willits' businesses and services. Ongoing partnerships should seek to leverage resources to achieve the broadest outcomes. The City also recognizes Tribal Sovereignty and takes seriously its obligation to carry out meaningful Tribal consultation to identify and protect tribal cultural resources.



GOAL LU-7

To establish enduring partnerships and consider the needs of all communities in City decision making.

LU-7.1 SHERWOOD VALLEY RANCHERIA

The Sherwood Valley Band of Pomo Indians is a valuable partner and important neighbor to the City of Willits. Regularly coordinate with representatives of the Sherwood Valley Rancheria on land use, municipal, infrastructure, and services planning and seek partnerships, where appropriate, to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes on projects that promote the welfare of the City and the Sherwood Valley Rancheria. *(Source: New Policy)*

LU-7.2 TRIBAL CONSULTATION

Coordinate with local Native American tribes in City land use and service planning and ensure that consultation occurs during discretionary project review for the identification, protection, and mitigation of adverse impacts to significant cultural resources. *(Source: New Policy)*

LU-7.3 BROOKTRAILS TOWNSHIP COMMUNITY SERVICES DISTRICT

The City of Willits and the Brooktrails Township Community Services District (CSD) partner to provide wastewater services, and City businesses, streets, and other services support Brooktrails Township residents. The City should continue to coordinate closely with the Brooktrails Township CSD on infrastructure and services planning and work together on mutually beneficial projects such as regional trails and parks and recreation. *(Source: New Policy)*

LU-7.4 ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Consider environmental justice issues as they are related to potential health impacts associated with land use decisions on residents regardless of age, culture, ethnicity, gender, race, socioeconomic status, or geographic location. *(Source: New Policy)*

LU-7.5 NEIGHBORHOOD INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION-MAKING

The City shall provide for the fair treatment and meaningful involvement in land use decisions and policies for all people regardless of income, gender, age, race, color, or national origin and shall evaluate and avoid, reduce, or mitigate disproportionate adverse health and safety impacts of land use decisions on disadvantaged communities. *(Source: New Policy)*

Implementation Measures

LU-7A TRIBAL CONSULTATION.

Consistent with State law, Native American Tribes shall be consulted during amendments to the General Plan and CEQA review for the identification, protection and mitigation of adverse impacts to significant cultural resources. Consultation on ministerial permits shall be initiated if it has been determined the project may create a substantial adverse change to a significant cultural resource.



The background of the page is an aerial photograph of a natural landscape. It shows a wide river valley with a winding river, surrounded by dense green forests and rolling hills in the distance under a clear sky. The text is overlaid on this image.

Protect Natural Resources Within Areas Planned for Development

The City's oak trees and urban forests, streams, riparian areas, and wetlands are important to the City, and provide for a healthy and attractive environment, as well as valuable habitat and ecological function. These natural areas are interspersed throughout the developed and undeveloped portions of the City and require additional protection to ensure that the design of new development sustains these resources.

The General Plan includes overlay land use designations and general policies to protect natural resources in the review of proposed development projects by identifying and mitigating potential adverse impacts prior to project approval to assure no net loss of wetlands and their associated habitats. However, the City seeks to streamline future development by establishing objective standards that will assure resource protection and disclose the presence of habitat constraints to property owners. To support the Conservation and Open Space Element, the Land Use Element includes definitive General Plan policies and programs that seek to demonstrate that future ministerial projects within the City and annexations will not result in significant environmental impacts.

GOAL LU-8

To ensure that land use decisions protect and sustain important natural resources and limit exposure to hazards.

LU-8.1 RIPARIAN BUFFER AREAS

Streams, wetlands, and their associated riparian habitats should be conserved in areas planned for development. Require project applicants located adjacent to streams to include appropriate measures for natural occurring stream channel and native riparian vegetation preservation, appropriate measures to stabilize stream banks, and prevent erosion and the discharge of sediment. *(Source: New Policy and relates to Conservation and Open Space Policies in Section 3.200 and Mitigation Measures 4.731 and 4.733)*

LU-8.2 NOT NET LOSS OF WETLANDS RESULTING FROM DEVELOPMENT

To ensure that no net loss of wetlands result from development consistent with Conservation and Open Space Mitigation 4.736, the presence of potential wetlands in the vicinity of a proposed project shall be determined during the review process for discretionary projects and for ministerial building and grading permit applications, when the proposed building development activity involves new construction or expansion of existing structures or grading activities. Wetland delineation by a qualified professional shall be required when wetland characterization and limits cannot be easily determined based on available information or identified during a pre-site inspection. *(Source: New Policy)*

LU-8.3 RIPARIAN AREA LAND USE OVERLAY

Apply an overlay to the Land Use Map, consistent with Conservation and Open Space Element Implementation Measure 3.320 identifying streams, known wetlands, and their associated riparian habitats within the City to be protected during development. Prohibit development within a buffer area sufficient to protect resources that is established on either side of the stream and subject to the following criteria:

- (a) A combining zone for stream and riparian areas shall also be established and applied to parcels adjacent to streams and subject to the Riparian Area Land Use Overlay that specifies protective criteria consistent with this policy.
- (b) Buffers may be reduced or eliminated where the City determines, based on factual findings and in consultation with CDFW, that the reduction will not result in significant adverse effects to the water quality, dependent biological resources, or ecological functional capacity of the aquatic resource of interest.

- (c) For ministerial projects that are located on land planned R-L, C-G, GM-U, DM-U containing occupied structures or on vacant parcels that are substantially surrounded by developed parcels where improvements are located within the buffer area, exceptions to these standards may be allowed after a site evaluation has been conducted by City staff and factual findings are made that development is sited to minimize potential impacts to streams, wetlands, and associated riparian resources; does not involve the removal of native riparian vegetation; and the incorporation of performance standards relating to the revegetation of locally-appropriate riparian species and the implementation of best management practices for erosion control.
- (d) When the prescribed buffer prohibits development of the site for the primary use for which it is designated, measures shall be applied that allow development that results in the least environmentally damaging feasible project.
- (e) Road, bridge, and trail construction or replacement may be permitted that would not result in significant adverse effects to water quality, dependent biological resources, or ecological functional capacity of the aquatic resource of interest, and where vegetative clearing is kept to a minimum and where revegetated with locally-appropriate native riparian species.
- (f) The removal of vegetation for disease control or public safety purposes may be approved, in consultation with CDFW. *(Source: New Policy)*
- (g) An exception to the implementing regulations for this policy shall be included for “minor additions” to buildings or structures provided the aggregated total increase in square footage for all changes does not exceed three hundred (300) square feet of floor area.

LU-8.4 PROTECT OAK TREES AND WOODLANDS

Integrate important tree protections from the Urban Forest Management Plan into the Zoning Regulations and establish an oak tree and oak woodland retention and protection program for new development that emphasizes the avoidance, minimization, or mitigation of oak tree and oak woodlands removal. *(Source: New Policy)*

LU-8.5 PRESERVE AGRICULTURAL LANDS

The City shall discourage urban development on unincorporated land within its Sphere of Influence until annexed by the City. The City shall support County land use regulations that protect the viability of local agriculture in the Little Lake Valley. *(Source: New Policy)*

Implementation Measures

LU-8A STREAM AND RIPARIAN COMBINING ZONE.

Amend the Zoning Regulations to establish a Stream and Riparian Combining Zone with standards consistent with the Conservation and Open Space Element and the Land Use Element to protect all streams, riparian areas, and wetlands from new ministerial and discretionary development. Amend the Zoning Map to apply the Stream and Riparian Combining Zone to notify the public that specific standards apply for all development within such areas.

LU-8B OAK TREE PROTECTIONS.

Consistent with Urban Forest Management Plan, adopt Zoning Standards to protect oak trees as part of new ministerial and discretionary development.



General Plan Implementation and Maintenance

A General Plan is a long-term policy document that should have at least a 20-year planning vision and provide the needed flexibility to allow for policy modifications to respond to unique situations while maintaining a consistent and predictable framework to achieve the City’s long-term vision. To achieve this there should be regular and comprehensive reviews of the entire Plan that are scheduled to coincide with state mandated review of the Housing Element or other regular intervals. In addition, the Zoning Code should be regularly reviewed to ensure that development regulations are consistent with the General Plan and are clear and understandable to decision makers, developers, and the general public.



GOAL LU-9

Ensure the effective use and implementation of Land Use Element Policy and the Land Use Map.

LU-9.1 LAND USE MAP

Maintain and implement the General Plan Land Use Map, Figure 2-1, which applies the approved Land Use Designations and specifies the allowed land uses by geographic location and the density of allowed uses within each designation to all land within the City of Willits. *(Source: New Policy)*

LU-9.2 ZONING MAP AND REGULATIONS

Ensure that the Zoning Regulations are consistent with the policies of the General Plan and the Zoning Map is consistent with the General Plan Land Use Map. *(Source: New Policy)*

LU-9.3 PERIODIC GENERAL PLAN REVIEW

Periodically review and update the General Plan for consistency with State law and comprehensively review and update the General Plan or specific Element(s) to coincide with the state-mandated Housing Element periodic update cycle or every seven years. *(Source: New Policy)*

LU-9.4 WEB-BASED LAND USE MAPPING

Consider developing and maintaining a web-based land use mapping system to display General Plan, Zoning, administrative, service, environmental resource, and hazard maps and to enable the public to access vital land use and service information. *(Source: New Policy)*

LU-9.5 PLANNING COMMISSION

Consider appointing and maintaining a Planning Commission to actively involve Willits residents in the City planning process, to relieve City Council members from the review of more mundane planning applications, and to streamline the process of planning approval. *(Source: New Policy)*

LU-9.6 STREAMLINING DEVELOPMENT APPROVAL

Consider modifying the Zoning Regulations to add additional permit types that can be approved by the Community Development Director to streamline the process for approving minor exceptions to development standards. *(Source: New Policy)*

LU-9.7 EMERGENCY EVACUATION

Prohibit subdivisions in neighborhoods having only one access or that are vulnerable to isolation if access roads are impacted, until alternative evacuation routes are established or where the Fire Marshal has determined that access and egress are adequate. *(Source: New Policy)*

LU-9.8 MILITARY OPERATING AREAS

Provide notification to the appropriate military departments for discretionary development projects that may have the potential to affect military special use airspace areas, as required by California law. *(Source: New Policy)*

Implementation Measures

LU-9A COMPREHENSIVE GENERAL PLAN UPDATE.

The City shall actively pursue funding for the preparation of a comprehensive General Plan Update to ensure that all General Plan Elements are revised to reflect the priorities and needs of the City and are consistent with State law.

LU-9B ZONING CONSISTENCY.

Following the adoption of the Land Use Element, revise the Zoning Regulations to implement the changes to allowable uses and development standards and to re-establish consistency with the policies of the General Plan and amend the Zoning Map to achieve consistency with the General Plan Land Use Map.

LU-9C GENERAL PLAN ANNUAL REPORT.

A General Plan Annual Report shall be prepared by the Community Development Department by April 1 of each year pursuant to State law and shall be presented to the City Council in a public meeting.

LU-9D GENERAL PLAN CONFORMANCE.

The City shall review public works projects for conformity with the General plan and shall not acquire, dedicate, dispose, vacate or abandon real property unless in conformance with this Plan pursuant to State law.



Land Use Designations

GOAL LU-10

Apply appropriate Land Use Designations to areas within the City to protect resources, foster a sense of community, and to facilitate economic development.

LU-10.1 RESIDENTIAL LAND USE DESIGNATIONS

The following land use designations are applicable to land planned primarily for residential uses. Table 3-1 lists the allowable uses, densities, and other standards that may be applied within each designation.

Residential-Suburban (R-S). This designation is intended to provide a transition from rural to urban areas where soils, topography, and site conditions are more appropriate for large lot residential uses.

Residential-Low Density (R-L). This designation is for application in areas where City services are available or planned and single family residential is the dominant use.

Residential-Medium Density (R-M). This designation is used where all urban services are available and close to services, recreation, schools, and employment and is suitable for mixed density residential uses allowing a variety of housing types.

LU-10.2 MIXED USE LAND USE DESIGNATIONS

The following land use designations are applicable to land planned for a range of allowable uses, including commercial and residential. Table 3-1 lists the allowable uses, densities, floor area ratios, and other standards that may be applied within each designation.

Main Street Mixed Use (DM-U). This designation is intended to be applied to Willits' core downtown area to stimulate the adaptive reuse of existing buildings and the development of new pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use buildings.

General Mixed Use (GM-U). This designation is intended to be applied to specific areas within neighborhood and commercial centers where the existing or planned transportation alternatives, utilities, and services allow for mixed-use development that encourages walking, biking, and transit use. Allowable uses include retail, administrative office, general commercial, and a variety of housing types.

LU-10.3 COMMERCIAL LAND USE DESIGNATIONS

The following land use designations are applicable to land planned primarily for commercial uses. Table 3-1 lists the allowable uses, densities (where applicable), floor area ratios, and other standards that may be applied within each designation.

Commercial-General (C-G). This designation is intended to be applied to areas that may serve as central business districts or address the needs of the travelers and visitors as a result of the location, access, site characteristics, or proximity to neighborhoods or travel routes.

LU-10.4 INDUSTRIAL LAND USE DESIGNATIONS

The following land use designations are applicable to land planned for industrial uses. Table 3-1 lists the allowable uses, floor area ratios, and other standards that may be applied within each designation.

Industrial-General (M-G). This designation is for application to sites that are best suited for a variety of industrial operations because of access, location, availability of power, water, sewer services and transportation facilities, and where their operations will be compatible with adjacent uses. Allowable uses may include office; research and development; heavy commercial; shipping, storage, and warehousing; a range of compatible industrial and manufacturing uses; and general agriculture.

LU-10.5 RESOURCE AND PUBLIC LAND USE DESIGNATIONS

The following land use designations are applicable to land planned for agricultural, open space, and public uses. Table 3-1 lists the allowable uses, densities, floor area ratios, and other standards that may be applied within each designation.

Agricultural - General (A-G). This designation is for application to areas which are suitable for agricultural production because of historical use or future potential based on soil capability. Allowable uses include general agriculture, agriculture-related visitor serving activities, and rural residential uses that support agricultural operations.

Public - Service (P-S). This designation is for application to public sites of schools, parks, civic centers, fairgrounds, airports, museums, libraries, auditoriums, utilities and infrastructure, corporation yards, hospitals, social service centers, and similar uses, and may be applied to investor-owned utility and quasi-public sites.

Open Space - Recreation (O-S). This designation is for unimproved land in its natural state which is to be conserved for open space and/or recreation purposes. Allowable uses include natural resource protection and restoration, outdoor recreation, and general agriculture.

LU-10.6 GENERAL PLAN LAND USE MAP OVERLAY DESIGNATIONS

The following overlay land use designations are applicable, in addition to the primary land use designation, to ensure protection for important resources, including streamside and historic areas, and hazards, such as floodways and floodplains.

Natural Hazard Area (-G). This overlay designation is intended for information purposes and is applied to lands subject to hazards that may include excessive slopes, erosion, soil stability, seismic hazards, wildfire, periodic inundation and other similar natural hazards to life, property, and the natural environment. for the protection of persons and property.

Conservation - Floodway (-FW). This General Plan overlay designation is intended for information purposes and is applied to waterways and primary drainage channels to indicate the need to protect channels for the free flow of storm waters and to indicate the presence of adjacent floodplains for the protection of persons and property.

Historical Resources (-H). This General Plan overlay designation is applied, for information purposes, to historical resources within the community. The intent of the Historical Resources classification is to encourage the preservation and enhancement of unique historical resources in the City of Willits.

Riparian Areas (-R). The purpose of this designation is intended to identify important stream and riparian areas where reasonable buffers should be applied to indicate the need to protect, as part of development review, sensitive fish and wildlife habitats and to minimize the potential for erosion, runoff, and interference with surface water flows and that balance to the greatest extent feasible resource protection and property rights. *(Source: New Overlay)*

Urban Reserve (-UR). The purpose of this designation is to protect from premature subdivision and development, urban lands or land within the Sphere of Influence not now developed to urban densities or adequately provided with urban services but expected to develop to urban uses and densities when services are available. This designation is used where annexation is required for urban services and full build-out. *(Source: New Overlay)*



Table 3-1: General Plan Land Use Designations

Land Use	R-S	R-L	R-M	GM-U	DM-U	C-G	M-G	A-G	O-S	P-S
Residential										
Single Residence	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		
Attached Residences, up to Four		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				
Multiple Residences			✓	✓	✓	✓				
Manufactured Home Parks			✓							
Live/Work				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Commercial										
Neighborhood Commercial	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				
Office and Professional Offices				✓	✓	✓				
Retail Services				✓	✓	✓	✓			
Retail Sales				✓	✓	✓				
Wholesaling, Storage and Distribution						✓	✓			
Heavy Commercial						✓	✓			
Visitor Accommodation										
Hotels, Motels, Inns				✓	✓	✓				
Campgrounds and RV Parks	✓							✓		
Community Assembly	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
Industrial										
Research and Development						✓	✓			
Light Industrial							✓			
Heavy Industrial							✓			
Other										
Agriculture	✓						✓	✓	✓	✓
Health Care Services and Hospital						✓				✓
Private Institutions	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓
Public Facilities and Essential Services	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Resource-Related Recreation	✓								✓	✓
Habitat Restoration and Management	✓								✓	✓

Land Use	R-S	R-L	R-M	GM-U	DM-U	C-G	M-G	A-G	O-S	P-S
Development Density/Intensity Standards										
Maximum Density <i>(dwelling units per acre)</i>	0.5	15	30	30	30	30	N/A	0.05	N/A	N/A
Minimum Density <i>(dwelling units per acre)</i>	0	0	15	15	15	15	N/A	0	N/A	N/A
Maximum Floor Area Ratio <i>(building area ÷ lot area)</i>	N/A	N/A	N/A	2.0	3.0	2.0	1.0	N/A	N/A	N/A
Consistent Zones										
Agricultural (A)	✓							✓	✓	✓
Residential Estates (RE)	✓									
Single-Family Residence (R1)		✓								
Residential Medium-Density (R2)		✓	✓							
Multiple-Residence (R3)			✓	✓	✓					
General Mixed-Use (GU)				✓	✓					
Main Street Mixed-Use (DU)					✓					
Community Commercial (C1)				✓	✓	✓				
Heavy Commercial (C2)						✓				
Limited Industrial (ML)							✓			
Heavy Industrial (MH)							✓			
Industrial Park (I-P)						✓	✓			
Open Space (OS)										
Public Facility (PF)									✓	✓



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Implementation Action Plan

[To be completed prior to Council approval]