



The Planning Commissioner Handbook

Glossary

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A

Abandonment

A cessation of the use of the property by the owner without intent to transfer the property to another or resume the use of the property.

Abatement

Reducing or eliminating the degree or intensity of a nuisance or other property-related problem, usually used in connection with zoning code or environmental program enforcement.

Abutting

Having property or zone district boundaries in common; for example, two lots are abutting if they have property lines in common.

Acceptable Risk

A hazard that is deemed to be a tolerable exposure to danger given the expected benefits to be obtained. Different levels of acceptable risk may be assigned according to the potential danger and the criticalness of the threatened structure. The levels may range from “near zero” for nuclear plants and natural gas transmission lines to “moderate” for open-space, ranches and low intensity warehouse uses.

Access

A way of approaching or entering a property. Access includes ingress, the right to enter, and egress, the right to leave. In zoning and subdivision regulations, recorded lots are required to have direct access to a public street or highway or to a private street meeting public standards. This guarantees entry by owners and emergency vehicles.

Accessibility/Assessable

A term that describes the usability of a product or service by people with disabilities.

Accessory Building or Use

An activity or structure on a property that is incidental and subordinate to the main use of a site.

Accessory Dwelling Unit

A unit with complete independent living facilities for one or more persons with one of the following variations: (1) Detached: The unit is separated from the primary structure. (2) Attached: The unit is attached to the primary structure. (3) Converted Existing Space: Space (e.g., master bedroom, attached garage, storage area, or similar use, or an accessory structure) on the lot of the primary residence that is converted into an independent living unit. See also [JUNIOR ACCESSORY DWELLING UNIT](#).

Accessory Use

An activity or structure that is incidental to the main use of a site. For example, a small business office within a store might be considered an accessory use, and might not be counted in the calculation of the size of the store for zoning purposes.

Acre Foot

A volume of water one foot deep covering one acre; approximately 326,000 gallons. One acre-foot of water is enough to meet the needs of two typical families for a year.

Acres, Gross

The entire acreage of a site. Most communities calculate gross acreage to the centerline of proposed bounding streets and to the edge of the right-of-way of existing or dedicated streets.

Acres, Net

The portion of a site that can actually be built upon. The following generally are not included in the net acreage of a site: public or private road rights-of-way, public open-space and flood ways.

Active Living Community

A community designed to provide opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to incorporate physical activity into their daily routines. By encouraging people to be more active, active living communities may improve health by lowering people's risk for health conditions such as obesity, diabetes and heart disease.

Ad Valorem Tax

A tax assessed based on the dollar value of an item or activity. Typical examples are property and sales taxes. Ad valorem taxes contrast with per-unit taxes, such as alcoholic beverage and cigarette taxes, which are assessed at a fixed dollar per unit purchased. See [EXCISE TAX](#), [PARCEL TAX](#), [TAX](#).

Adaptation

See [CLIMATE ADAPTATION](#).

Adaptive Reuse

Converting obsolete or historic buildings from their original or most recent use to a new use. For example, the conversion of former hospital or school buildings to residential use, or the conversion of an historic single-family home to office use.

Administrative Decision

See [QUASI-JUDICIAL DECISION](#).

Adverse Impact

A negative consequence for the physical, social or economic environment resulting from an action or project.

Aerosol

Particulate matter, solid or liquid, larger than a molecule but small enough to remain suspended in the atmosphere. Natural sources include salt particles from sea spray, dust and clay particles as a result of weathering of rocks, both of which are carried upward by the wind. Aerosols can also originate as a result of human activities and are often considered pollutants.

Afforestation

Planting of new forests on lands that historically have not contained forests, or have not been recently forested.

Affordable Housing

Housing capable of being purchased or rented by persons whose income level is categorized as very low, low, or moderate within standards set by the California Department of Housing and Community Development or the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH)

A legal requirement that federal agencies and federal grantees actively address and work to eliminate housing discrimination and segregation.

Agenda

A document that specifies what will be discussed at a local agency meeting. Agendas contain a brief, general description of each item the governing body will be addressing. Members of the public may request that an agenda be mailed to them. Local agencies generally cannot discuss and make decisions on items that are not on the agenda. See California Government Code section 54950.

Aging in Place

The ability to live in one's own home and community safely, independently and comfortably, regardless of age, income or ability level.

Agricultural Preserve

Land designated for agricultural use. See [WILLIAMSON ACT](#).

Agricultural Urbanism

An approach to integrating growth and development with preserving agricultural resources and enhancing elements of the food system.

Agriculture

Use of land for the production of food and fiber, including the growing of crops and/or the grazing of animals on natural prime or improved pasture land.

Air Pollution

One or more chemicals, substances or physical conditions (such as excess heat or noise) in high enough concentrations in the air to harm humans, other animals, vegetation or materials.

Air Rights

The right granted by a property owner to a buyer to use space above an existing right-of-way or other site, usually for development.

Airport-Related Use

A use that supports airport operations including, but not limited to, aircraft repair and maintenance, flight instruction and aircraft chartering.

Albedo

The fraction of solar radiation reflected by a surface or object, often expressed as a percentage. Snow covered surfaces have a high albedo; the albedo of soils ranges from high to low; vegetation covered surfaces and oceans have a low albedo.

Alternative Fuels

Fuels such as methanol, ethanol, natural gas and liquid petroleum gas that are cleaner burning and help to meet the California Air Resources Board's mobile and stationary emission standards. These fuels may be used in place of less clean fuels for powering motor vehicles.

Ambient

Surrounding on all sides; used to describe measurements of existing conditions with respect to traffic, noise, air and other environments.

Ambient Air

Air occurring at a particular time and place outside of structures. Often used interchangeably with “outdoor air.”

Ambient Air Quality Standards (AAQS)

Health- and welfare-based standards for outdoor air which identify the maximum acceptable average concentrations of air pollutants during a specified period of time. See [NAAQS](#).

Amortization

The process by which nonconforming uses and structures must be discontinued or made to conform to requirements of the current zoning ordinance at the end of a specified period of time.

Anchor Tenant

The major store or stores within a shopping center.

Ancillary Benefits

Complementary benefits of a given policy. For example, ancillary benefits of a climate policy could include improvements in local air quality and reduced reliance of imported fossil fuels. See [CO-BENEFITS](#).

Annex/Annexation

To incorporate a land area into an existing district or municipality, with a resulting change in the boundaries of the annexing jurisdiction. See [DETACHMENT](#).

Anthropogenic

Made by people or resulting from human activities. Usually used in the context of emissions that are produced as a result of human activities.

Appeal

When a person believes a decision was made in error, an appeal may be filed so that a higher decision-making body can review the case.

Approach Zone

The air space at each end of a landing strip that defines the glide path or approach path of aircraft as they land. The approach zone should be free from obstruction. See [CLEAR ZONE](#), [OUTER APPROACH ZONE](#), [TRANSITION ZONE](#).

Appropriation

A legal authorization granted by the governing body to expend monies and incur obligations for specific purposes. See [EXPENDITURE](#).

Aquifer

An underground, water-bearing layer of earth, porous rock, sand, or gravel, through which water can seep or be held in natural storage. Aquifers generally hold sufficient water to be used as a water supply. See [GROUNDWATER](#).

Arable

Land capable of being cultivated for farming.

Architectural Control; Architectural Review

Regulations and procedures requiring the exterior design of structures to be suitable, harmonious, and in keeping with the general appearance, historic character and/or style of surrounding areas. A process used to exercise control over the design of buildings and their settings. See [DESIGN REVIEW](#).

Arterial

A roadway that provides intra-community travel and access to the countywide highway system, characterized by medium-speed (30-40 mph) and medium-capacity (10,000-35,000 average daily trips). Access to community arterials should be provided at collector roads and local streets, but direct access from parcels to existing arterials is common. See [COLLECTOR](#), [STREETS, MAJOR](#), [TRIP](#).

Articulation

Variation in the depth of the building plane, roof line or height of a structure that breaks up plain, monotonous areas and creates patterns of light and shadow.

Assessed Valuation

The value at which property is appraised for tax purposes. See [PROPERTY TAX](#).

Assessment District

See [BENEFIT ASSESSMENT DISTRICT](#).

Assisted Housing

Generally multifamily rental housing, but sometimes single-family ownership units, whose construction, financing, sales prices or rents have been subsidized by federal, state or local housing programs.

Atmosphere

The mixture of gases surrounding the Earth. The Earth's atmosphere consists of about 79.1 percent nitrogen (by volume), 20.9 percent oxygen, 0.93 percent argon, 0.036 percent carbon dioxide and trace amounts of other gases. In addition the atmosphere contains water vapor, whose amount is highly variable but typically 1%.

Attainment

Compliance with state and federal ambient air quality standards within an air basin. See [NON-ATTAINMENT](#).

Automobile-Intensive Use

A use of a retail area that depends on exposure to continuous auto traffic.

B

BANANA

Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere Near Anything. See also [NIMBY](#), [NIABY](#), and [NIMTOO](#).

Base Flood

In any given year, a 100-year flood that has a one percent likelihood of occurring, and is recognized as a standard for acceptable risk. See [FLOOD, 100-YEAR](#).

Below-Market Rate (BMR)

(1) Any housing unit specifically priced to be sold or rented to low-or moderate-income households for an amount less than the fair-market value of the unit. Both the State of California and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development set standards for determining which households qualify as “low-income” or “moderate-income.” (2) The financing of housing at less than prevailing interest rates.

Benefit Assessment Bonds

Bonds levied by cities, counties and special districts to acquire or construct public improvements that convey a special benefit to a defined group of properties.

Benefit Assessment District

A defined area that receives a special benefit from the construction of one or more public facilities. A Benefit Assessment District is a financing mechanism for providing public infrastructure as allowed under various statutes. Bonds may be issued to finance the improvements, subject to repayment by assessments charged against the benefiting properties. Creation of a Benefit Assessment District enables property owners in a specific area to cause the construction of public facilities or to maintain them (for example, a downtown, or the grounds and landscaping of a specific area) by contributing their fair share of the construction or installation and operating costs.

Benefit Assessment

Charges levied on parcels to pay for public improvements or services provided within a pre-determined district or area according to the benefit the parcel receives from the improvement or services.

Berm

A mound of earth usually two to six feet high designed to shield and buffer uses like parking areas. Also used to minimize water run-off.

Bicycle Friendly

Possessing urban design factors that help make an area that caters to the needs of bicyclists. Factors include public facilities such as bicycle racks on streets or by public buildings. Regulations that allow riders to take bicycles on board buses, trains, etc. Accessibility such as the position of bicycle paths relative to roads, quality of the terrain, presence of curb cuts, etc. Safety features such as lighting, security measures and protection from on-road vehicles.

Bicycle Paths, Lanes and Routes

A path is a paved route not on a street or roadway and expressly reserved for bicycles traversing an otherwise unpaved area. Bicycle paths may parallel roads but typically are separated from them by landscaping. A bicycle lane is a corridor expressly reserved for bicycles, existing on a street or roadway in addition to any lanes for use by motorized vehicles. A bicycle route is a facility shared with motorists and identified only by signs; it has no pavement markings or lane stripes. See [BIKEWAYS](#).

Bikeways

The term bikeways encompasses bicycle lanes, bicycle paths, and bicycle routes. Bikeways are divided into three classes. Class I bikeways are paved routes, not on a street or roadway, expressly reserved for bicycles traversing an otherwise unpaved area. Class II bikeways are corridors expressly reserved for bicycles, existing on a street or roadway in addition to any lanes for use by motorized vehicles. Class III bikeways are shared with motorists and identified only by signs. See [BICYCLE LANES, PATHS AND ROUTES](#).

Biological Productivity

The amount of plants and animals that grow and thrive in a defined region.

Biosphere

The part of the Earth system comprising all ecosystems and living organisms, in the atmosphere, on land (terrestrial biosphere) or in the oceans (marine biosphere), including derived dead organic matter, such as litter, soil organic matter and oceanic detritus.

Biotic Community

A group of living organisms characterized by a distinctive combination of both animal and plant species in a particular habitat.

Black Carbon Aerosols

Particles of carbon in the atmosphere produced by inefficient combustion of fossil fuels or biomass. Black carbon aerosols absorb light from the sun, shading and cooling the Earth's surface, but contribute to significant warming of the atmosphere.

Blight

A condition of a site, structure or area that may cause nearby buildings and/or areas to decline in attractiveness and/or utility. The Community Redevelopment Law contains a definition of blight used to determine eligibility of proposed redevelopment project areas. See California Health and Safety Code sections 33031 and 33032.

Blueline Stream

A watercourse shown as a blue line on a U.S. Geological Service topographic quadrangle map.

Board of Appeals

An appointed board that hears appeals on variances and exceptions.

Board of Supervisors

A county's legislative body. Board members are elected by popular vote and are responsible for enacting ordinances, imposing taxes, making appropriations and establishing county policy. The board adopts the general plan, zoning and subdivision regulations that apply to unincorporated areas. The board also adopts a budget that guides and directs regional services provided to incorporated and unincorporated areas such as public health and human services.

Bond

A certificate of debt issued by an entity, guaranteeing payment of the original investment, plus interest, by a specified future date. Funds raised through the sale of bonds can be used for various public purposes.

Brown Act

The California's open meeting law for local agencies. The Brown Act imposes certain requirements for agendas, public comments and other aspects of public meetings. See California Government Code sections 54950.

Brownfield

An area with abandoned, idle or under-used industrial and commercial facilities where expansion, redevelopment or reuse is complicated by real or perceived environmental contamination.

Buffer Zone

An area of land separating two distinct land uses that acts to soften or mitigate the effects of one land use on the other. Where a commercial district abuts a residential district, for example, additional use, yard or height restrictions may be imposed to protect residential properties. The term may also be used to describe any zone that separates two unlike zones like a multifamily housing zone between single-family housing and commercial uses.

Building Code

Standards adopted by the state governing the construction, alteration, demolition, occupancy or other use of buildings used for human habitation. The state regulations are substantially the same as those contained in the most recent editions of the Uniform Building Code, Uniform Housing Code, Uniform Plumbing Code, Uniform Mechanical Code and the National Electric Code. Local governments may have stricter standards under certain circumstances. See California Health and Safety Code sections 17921-17922. See also [UNIFORM BUILDING CODE](#), [UNIFORM HOUSING CODE](#).

Building Coverage

The amount of a lot that is covered by buildings, usually expressed as a percentage.

Building Envelope

The space remaining on a site for structures after all building setback, height limit and bulk requirements have been met.

Building Official

The person responsible for the administration and enforcement of the building, housing, plumbing, electrical and related codes.

Build-Out

Development of land to its full potential (100 percent build-out) or as permitted under current or proposed planning or zoning designations. See [CARRYING CAPACITY](#). For a general plan or specific plan, the term may also refer to a figure that is less than the absolute maximum (100 percent) and is instead a projected level of total residential units and/or nonresidential development envisioned to exist after 20 or 30 years of growth.

Built Environment

All aspects of our surroundings that are constructed by people. buildings, roads, parks and all other improvements that form the physical character of a community.

Bulk Regulations

Zoning or other regulations that control the height, mass, density and location of buildings. The purpose of bulk regulations is to provide proper light, air and open space. Some bulk regulations also are intended to reflect context-sensitive design.

Business Improvement Districts

Public-private partnerships among property owners and commercial tenants who collectively contribute to the maintenance, development and promotion of their commercial district.

Busway

A vehicular right-of-way reserved exclusively for buses. Getting public transit out of traffic speeds it up, making it a more attractive option.

By Right

A use of land that is permitted as a principal use in a zoning district.

C

California Ambient Air Quality Standard (CAAQS)

Legal limit that specifies the maximum level and time of exposure in the outdoor air for a given air pollutant and which is protective of human health and public welfare. CAAQSs are recommended by the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) and adopted into regulation by the California Air Resources Board. CAAQSs are the standards which must be met per the requirements of the California Clean Air Act (CCAA).

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

A state law requiring state and local agencies to regulate activities with consideration for environmental protection. If a proposed activity has the potential for a significant adverse environmental impact, an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) must be prepared and certified as to its adequacy before taking action on the proposed project. See [ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT](#).

California Housing Finance Agency (CHFA)

A state agency established by the Housing and Home Finance Act of 1975 that is authorized to sell revenue bonds and generate funds for the development, rehabilitation and conservation of low- and moderate-income housing.

Caltrans

California Department of Transportation.

Capital Improvements Program (CIP)

A program established by a city or county government and reviewed by its planning commission, which schedules permanent improvements, usually for a minimum of five years in the future, to fit the projected fiscal capability of the local jurisdiction. The program generally is reviewed annually, for conformance to and consistency with the general plan.

Capital Outlay

Expenditures which result in the acquisition of or addition to fixed assets. See [DEBT FINANCING](#), [PAY AS YOU GO](#), [PAY AS YOU USE](#).

Carbon Dioxide (CO₂)

A naturally occurring gas, and also a by-product of burning fossil fuels and biomass, as well as land-use changes and other industrial processes. It is the reference gas against which other greenhouse gases are measured and therefore has a Global Warming Potential of 1. Carbon dioxide represents about three quarters of total U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. See [GLOBAL WARMING POTENTIAL](#).

Carbon Sequestration

The process of removing carbon from the atmosphere and storing it in a “carbon sink,” a fixed molecule in soil, oceans or plants. Because of the amounts of carbon that are stored in soils, small changes in soil carbon content can have major impacts on carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere. Soils contain inorganic carbon (calcium carbonate) and organic carbon (humus), and can be either a source or a sink for atmospheric carbon dioxide depending on how landscapes are managed. See [CARBON SINK](#).

Carbon Sink

Carbon reservoirs and conditions that take-in and store more carbon (i.e., carbon sequestration) than they release. Carbon sinks can serve to partially offset greenhouse gas emissions. Forests and oceans are large carbon sinks. See [CARBON SEQUESTRATION](#).

Carrying Capacity

Used in determining the potential of an area to absorb development. (1) The level of land use, human activity or development for a specific area that can be accommodated permanently without an irreversible change in the quality of air, water, land or plant and animal habitats. (2) The upper limits of development beyond which the quality of human life, health, welfare, safety or community character within an area will be impaired. (3) The maximum level of development allowable under current zoning. See [BUILD-OUT](#).

Census Tract

Small portions of populated areas in which data is collected for statistical purposes during a census.

Census

The nationwide population count conducted every 10 years by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Central Business District (CBD)

The major commercial downtown center of a community. General guidelines for delineating a downtown area are defined by the U.S. Census of Retail Trade, with specific boundaries being set by the local municipality.

Certificate of Compliance

(1) Sometimes used synonymously with Certificate of Occupancy. (2) Also refers to a certificate issued under the Subdivision Map Act when a division of property is in compliance with the Map Act and local subdivision ordinances. (3) Less commonly, may also refer to an enforcement device used to inform others (like a potential purchaser) that a property does not comply with local codes and details what must be changed to bring the property back into compliance.

Certificate of Occupancy

An official certification that a building or place conforms to the provisions of the zoning and building codes, and therefore may be used or occupied. Permits are necessary for new construction and alterations to existing structures. A structure cannot be occupied without a certificate of occupancy.

Channelization

(1) The straightening and/or deepening of a watercourse for purposes of storm-runoff control or ease of navigation. Channelization often includes lining of stream banks with a retaining material like concrete. (2) At the intersection of roadways, the directional separation of traffic lanes through the use of curbs or raised islands that limit the paths that vehicles may take through the intersection.

Charrette

An intensive planning session where citizens, designers, and others collaborate on a vision for development. The charrette workshop is designed to stimulate ideas and involve the public in the community planning/design process.

Charter City

A city that is incorporated under its own charter rather than the general laws of the state. Charter cities have broader powers than do general law cities in matters that are “municipal affairs” (as opposed to matters of “statewide concern”).

Circulation Element

One of the eight state-mandated elements of a local general plan, it contains adopted goals, policies and implementation programs for the planning and management of existing and proposed thoroughfares, transportation routes and terminals, as well as local public utilities and facilities, all correlated with the land use element of the general plan.

City Council

A city's legislative body. The popularly elected city council is responsible for enacting ordinances, imposing taxes, making appropriations, establishing city policy and hiring some city officials. The council adopts the general plan, zoning and subdivision ordinance.

Clear Zone

That section of an approach zone of an airport where the plane defining the glide path is 50 feet or less above the centerline of the runway. The clear zone ends where the height of the glide path above ground level is above 50 feet. Land use under the clear zone is restricted. See [APPROACH ZONE](#), [OUTER APPROACH ZONE](#), [TRANSITION ZONE](#).

Climate

Climate is generally defined as the "average weather" over a period of time ranging from months to thousands of years. The classical period is three decades, as defined by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). Statistical measurements of climate most often focus on surface variables such as temperature, precipitation and wind. See [WEATHER](#)

Climate Adaptation

Adjustment in natural or human systems to a new or changing environment. Adaptation to climate change refers to adjustment in natural or human systems in response to actual or expected climatic stimuli or their effects, which moderates harm or exploits beneficial opportunities. Various types of adaptation can be distinguished, including anticipatory and reactive adaptation, private and public adaptation and autonomous and planned adaptation.

Climate Change

Climate change refers to any significant change in measures of climate (such as temperature, precipitation or wind) lasting for an extended period (decades or longer). Climate change may result from natural factors, such as changes in the sun's intensity or slow changes in the Earth's orbit around the sun; natural processes within the climate system (e.g. changes in ocean circulation); human activities that change the atmosphere's composition (e.g. through burning fossil fuels); and the land surface (e.g. deforestation, reforestation, urbanization, desertification, etc.).

Climate Mitigation

A human intervention to reduce the human impact on the climate system; it includes strategies to reduce greenhouse gas sources and emissions and enhancing greenhouse gas sinks.

Climate Resilience

The ability of a social or ecological system to absorb disturbances while retaining the same basic structure and ways of functioning, the capacity for self-organization and the capacity to adapt to stress and change.

Clustered Development

Development in which a number of dwelling units are placed closer together than usual, or are attached, with the purpose of retaining an open-space area.

Co-Benefit

The benefits of policies that are implemented for various reasons at the same time acknowledging that most policies

designed to address one issue also have other, often at least equally important, rationales (e.g., related to objectives of development, sustainability, and equity). The term co-impact is also used in a more generic sense to cover both the positive and negative side of the benefits. See [ANCILLARY BENEFIT](#)

Collector

A street that provides circulation within and between neighborhoods, characterized by relatively low speed (25-30 mph) and low volume (5,000-20,000 average daily trips). Collectors usually serve short trips and are intended for collecting trips from local streets and distributing them to the arterial network. See [ARTERIAL](#).

Commercial

A land use classification that permits facilities for the buying and selling of commodities and services.

Common Open Space

Land within or related to a development, not individually owned or dedicated for public use, that is designed and intended for the common use of the residents of the development.

Community

A specific group of people, often living in a defined geographic area, who share a common culture, values and norms and who are arranged in a social structure according to relationships the community has developed over a period of time. The term “community” encompasses worksites, schools and health care sites.

Community Benefits

In planning and land use, this refers to developer exactions that are required as a condition of development. The benefits contained in a community benefits agreement (CBA) may be provided by the developer or by other parties benefiting from the development subsidies, such as the stores that rent space in a subsidized retail development. Some benefits can be built into the project itself, such as the inclusion of a childcare center in the project or the use of environmentally sensitive design elements, such as white roofs that help avoid the “heat island” effect. Some benefits will affect project operations, such as wage requirements or traffic management rules. Other benefits will be completely separate from the project, such as money devoted to a public art fund or support for existing job-training centers.

Community Care Facility

Housing for the elderly licensed by the California Department of Social Services, typically for residents who are frail and need supervision. Services normally include three meals daily, housekeeping, security and emergency response, a full activities program, supervision in the dispensing of medicine, personal services like assistance in grooming and bathing, but no nursing care. Sometimes referred to as residential care or personal care.

Community Character

The image of a community or area as defined by such factors as its built environment, natural features and open space elements, type of housing, architectural style, infrastructure and the type and quality of public facilities and services.

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)

A grant program administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development on a formula basis for entitlement communities and by the California Department of Housing and Community Development for non-entitlement jurisdictions. This grant allots money to cities and counties for housing rehabilitation and community development, including public facilities and economic development.

Community Facilities District

Under the Mello-Roos Community Facilities Act of 1982 (California Government Code sections 53311 and following), a legislative body may create within its jurisdiction a special tax district that can finance tax-exempt bonds for the planning, design, acquisition, construction and/or operation of public facilities, as well as public services for district residents. Special taxes levied solely within the district are used to repay the bonds. See [MELLO-ROOS BONDS](#).

Community Food System

A community food system, also known as a local food system, is a collaborative effort to integrate agricultural production with food distribution to enhance the economic, environmental and social well-being of a particular place. Foods produced, processed and distributed as locally as possible supports a food system that preserves local farmland and fosters community economic viability, requires less energy for transportation and offers consumers the freshest foods.

Community Noise Equivalent Level (CNEL)

A 24-hour energy equivalent level derived from a variety of single-noise events, with weighting factors of 5 and 10 dBA applied to the evening (7 p.m. to 10 p.m.) and nighttime (10 p.m. to 7 a.m.) periods to allow for greater sensitivity to noise during these hours. See [DAY-NIGHT AVERAGE SOUND LEVEL](#), [DBA](#), [DECIBEL](#).

Community Park

Land with full public access intended to provide recreation opportunities beyond those supplied by neighborhood parks. Community parks are larger in scale than neighborhood parks but smaller than regional parks. See [NEIGHBORHOOD PARK](#), [REGIONAL PARK](#).

Community Plan

A planning document that focuses on a particular area or community within the city or county. A community plan can also serve as an extension of a general plan or as a separate document that supplements a general plan.

Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA)

A local agency that was created under California Redevelopment Law (California Health and Safety Code sections 33000 and following), or a local legislative body that was elected to exercise the powers granted to such an agency, for the purpose of planning, developing, re-planning, redesigning, clearing, reconstructing, and/or rehabilitating all or part of a specified area with residential, commercial, industrial, and/or public (including recreational) structures and facilities. On June 28, 2011, Governor Jerry Brown signed into law two bills that effectively dissolved all California Redevelopment Agencies (RDAs). As a result, effective February 1, 2012, all RDAs and community development agencies were dissolved, and successor agencies, as defined by the law, were required to be appointed to oversee the distribution of tax proceeds that would have been paid to the RDAs.

Community Service Area

A geographic sub-area of a city or county used for the planning and delivery of parks, recreation and other human services based on an assessment of the service needs of the population in that sub-area.

Community Service District (CSD)

A geographic sub-area of a city or county used for the planning and delivery of parks, recreation, and other human services based on an assessment of the service needs of the population in that sub-area. A CSD is a taxation district with independent administration.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

A community of individuals who pledge support to a farm operation so that the farmland becomes the community's farm,

with the growers and consumers providing mutual support and sharing the risks and benefits of food production. Shareholders pledge in advance to cover the anticipated costs of the farm operation and farmer's salary. In return, they receive shares in the farm's bounty throughout the growing season.

Commute Shed

The area from which people do or might commute from their homes to a specific workplace destination, given specific assumptions about maximum travel time or distance.

Compatibility

The characteristics of different uses or activities that permit them to be located near each other in harmony and without conflict. The designation of permitted and conditionally permitted uses in a zoning district is intended to achieve compatibility. Some elements affecting compatibility include intensity of occupancy as measured by dwelling units per acre; pedestrian or vehicular traffic generated; volume of goods handled; and environmental effects like noise, vibration, glare, air pollution or radiation.

Complete Streets

An approach that enhances mobility through a comprehensive transportation network consisting of streets and off-street pathways designed to accommodate all modes of travel and enable safe access for all users. Pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and bus riders of all ages and abilities are able to safely move within and through a jurisdiction or place, particularly to key public assets, job centers and shopping areas. Individual streets can also be complete streets, though every street need not accommodate every user for a jurisdiction to implement a complete streets system.

Concurrency

Installation and operation of facilities and services needed to meet the demands of new development simultaneous with the development.

Condemnation

The exercise by a public agency of the right of eminent domain. See [EMINENT DOMAIN, TAKING](#).

Conditional Use Permit (CUP)

A discretionary permit issued by a hearing body to allow a conditional use that may or may not be allowable under the zoning code. If approval is granted, the developer must meet certain conditions to harmonize the project with its surroundings. Each application is considered on its individual merits. CUPs require a public hearing and, if approval is granted, are usually subject to the fulfillment of certain conditions by the developer. Approval of a CUP is not a change in zoning.

Conditional Use

A use that may locate within a zone only upon taking measures to address issues that may make the use detrimental to the public health, safety and welfare and will not impair the integrity and character of the zoned district. See [CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT, PERMITTED USE](#).

Condominium

A structure of two or more units, the interior spaces of which are individually owned; the balance of the property (both land and building) is owned in common by the owners of the individual units.

Congestion Management Plan (CMP)

A mechanism employing growth management techniques, including traffic level of service (LOS) requirements, standards for public transit, trip reduction programs and capital improvement programs for the purpose of controlling and/or reducing the

cumulative regional traffic impacts of development. See [CONCURRENCY](#), [GROWTH MANAGEMENT](#), [LEVEL OF SERVICE \(TRAFFIC\)](#).

Connectivity

The ease of travel between two points. The degree to which streets or areas are interconnected and easily accessible to one another. An example of high connectivity would be a dense grid pattern in a downtown area.

Conservation Easement

A partial interest in land that severs the right to develop the land from its basic use, like low-density uses, open space or agriculture. The right to develop the land is usually held by a land trust or other entity that monitors the land and enforces the terms of the easement. The underlying owner of the land can continue to use the land according to the terms of the easement. See [EASEMENT](#).

Conservation Element

One of the eight state-mandated elements of a local general plan, it contains adopted goals, policies and implementation programs for the conservation, development and use of natural resources, including water and its hydraulic force, forests, soils, rivers and other waters, harbors, fisheries, wildlife, minerals and other natural resources.

Consistency; Consistent with

Free from significant variation or contradiction. The various diagrams, text, goals, policies, and programs in the general plan must be consistent with each other, not contradictory or preferential. The term “consistent with” is used interchangeably with “conformity with.”

Consumer Price Index (CPI)

A statistical description of price levels provided by the U. S. Department of Labor. The change in this index from year to year is used to measure the cost of living and economic inflation.

Cooperative

A group of dwellings or an apartment building that is jointly owned by the residents, the common ownership including the open space and all other parts of the property. The purchase of stock entitles the buyer to sole occupancy but not the individual ownership of a specified unit.

Cordon Count

A measurement of all travel (usually vehicle trips, but sometimes person trips) in and out of a defined area (around which a cordon is drawn).

Council of Governments (COG)

California’s 25 Councils of Governments are regional planning agencies concerned primarily with transportation planning and housing; they do not directly regulate land use. Elected officials from each of the cities and counties belonging to the Council of Governments make up its governing board.

County

A political subdivision of the state.

Covenant

A private legal restriction that places a burden on a parcel of land in favor of another parcel. The restriction is recorded in the deed. Covenants are most commonly used in the establishment of a subdivision to restrict the use of all individual lots in the development to a certain type of use (like single-family units), but may also be used to guarantee views and solar access.

Covenants, Conditions and Restrictions (CC&Rs)

A term used to describe restrictive limitations—usually recorded as covenants—that may be placed on property and its use, and which usually are made a condition of holding title or lease. They are intended to preserve the physical nature and character of the development.

Criterion

A standard upon which a judgment or decision may be based. See [STANDARDS](#).

Critical Facility

Facilities housing or serving many people, that are necessary in the event of an earthquake or flood, like hospitals, fire, police and emergency service facilities, utility “lifeline” facilities, like water, electricity and gas supply, sewage disposal and communications and transportation facilities.

Cross-Acceptance

The review by two or more jurisdictions of each other’s plans. Each jurisdiction determines whether the plans submitted are consistent or can be made compatible with its own. The process provides for communication and negotiation between the affected jurisdictions.

Cul-de-sac

A short street or alley with only a single means of ingress and egress at one end and with a large turnaround at its other end.

Cumulative Impact

As used in the California Environmental Quality Act, the total impact resulting from the accumulated impacts of individual projects or programs over time. See [CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT](#).

Curb Cut

A ramp opening in a curb where vehicles or wheelchairs may enter or leave the roadway.

D

Day-Night Average Sound Level (Ldn)

The A-weighted average sound level for a given area (measured in decibels) during a 24-hour period with a 10 dB weighting applied to night-time sound levels. The Ldn is approximately numerically equal to the Community Noise Equivalent Level for most environmental settings. See [COMMUNITY NOISE EQUIVALENT LEVEL](#).

dBA

The “A-weighted” scale for measuring sound in decibels; weighs or reduces the effects of low and high frequencies in order to simulate human hearing. Every increase of 10 dBA doubles the perceived loudness though the noise is actually ten times more intense.

Debt Financing

Issuance of bonds and other debt instruments to finance municipal improvements and services.

Debt Instrument

Written pledge to repay debt such as bills, notes and bonds. See [BOND](#).

Debt Service

Payment of principal and interest on long-term indebtedness.

Decibel (dB)

A unit of sound pressure (abbreviated as dB) that is used to express noise level. The reference level is a sound pressure of 20 micro newtons per square meter. Zero decibels, the starting point of the scale, is about the level of the weakest sound that can be heard by someone with very good hearing in an extremely quiet location. Typical examples of noise levels would be 50 decibels in an average residence; 90 decibels for someone standing 20 feet from a subway train; and 120 decibels if standing 200 feet from a jet.

Dedication, In Lieu Of

Cash payments that may be required of an owner or developer as a substitute for a dedication of land, usually calculated in dollars per lot, and referred to as in lieu fees or in lieu contributions.

Dedication

A grant of private land to a public agency for public use. Dedications are often used to obtain roads and parkland needed to serve a project. Dedication requirements are often imposed as a condition of a tentative map, parcel map or as a condition of development. See [CONDITIONAL USE](#), [IN-LIEU FEE](#), [PARCEL MAP](#), [TENTATIVE SUBDIVISION MAP](#).

Deed Restriction

A private legal restriction on the use of land recorded in the deed. The restriction burdens or limits the use of the property in some way. See [COVENANT](#), [EASEMENT](#).

Defensible Space

(1) In firefighting and prevention, an area of non-combustible surfaces separating urban and wild land areas. (2) In urban areas, open-spaces, entry points and pathways configured to provide maximum opportunities to rightful users and/or residents to defend themselves against intruders and criminal activity.

Deficiency Plan

An action program for improving or preventing the deterioration of level of service on the Congestion Management Agency street and highway network. See [CONGESTION MANAGEMENT PLAN, LEVEL OF SERVICE \(TRAFFIC\)](#).

Deforestation

Those practices or processes that result in the conversion of forested lands for non-forest uses.

Density Bonus

An increase in the allowable number of residences granted by the city or county in return for the project's providing low- or moderate-income housing. A housing development that provides 20 percent of its units for lower-income households, ten percent of its units for very-low income households, or 50 percent of its units for seniors is entitled to a density bonus and other concessions. See California Government Code section 65915. The density bonus is the most common form of incentive used by inclusionary housing programs. A density bonus provides an increase in allowed dwelling units per acre (DU/A), Floor Area Ratio (FAR) or height which generally means that more housing units can be built on any given site.

Density

The amount of development per acre permitted on a parcel under the applicable zoning. Common measures of density include population per acre or square mile and dwelling units per acre. Gross density includes the area necessary for streets, schools and parks. Net density does not include land area for public facilities.

Density Transfer

A way of retaining open space by concentrating densities—usually in compact areas adjacent to existing urbanization and utilities—while leaving unchanged historic, sensitive, or hazardous areas. In some jurisdictions, for example, developers can buy development rights of properties targeted for public open space and transfer the additional density to the base number of units permitted in the zone in which they propose to develop. See [TRANSFER OF DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS](#).

Density, Employment

A measure of the number of employed persons per specific area (for example, employees per acre).

Density, Residential

The number of permanent residential dwelling units per acre of land. Densities specified in the general plan may be expressed in units per gross acre or per net developable acre. See [ACRES, GROSS](#), and [DEVELOPABLE ACRES, NET](#).

Design Review; Design Control

The comprehensive evaluation of a development and its impact on neighboring properties and the community as a whole, from the standpoint of site and landscape design, architecture, materials, colors, lighting and signs, in accordance with a set of adopted criteria and standards. "Design Control" requires that certain specific things be done and that other things not be done. Design Control language is most often found within a zoning ordinance. "Design Review" usually refers to a system set up outside of the zoning ordinance, whereby projects are reviewed against certain standards and criteria by a specially established design review board or committee. See [ARCHITECTURAL CONTROL](#).

Design Review Board

A group appointed by the governing body to consider the design and aesthetics of development within all or a portion of the community.

Detachment

Withdrawal of territory from a special district or city; the reverse of annexation. See [ANNEXATION](#).

Detention Dam

Detention dams are constructed to retard flood runoff and minimize the effect of sudden floods. Detention dams fall into two main types. In one type, the water is temporarily stored and released through an outlet structure at a rate that will not exceed the carrying capacity of the channel downstream. Often, the basins are planted with grass and used for open space or recreation in periods of dry weather. The other type, most often called a retention pond, allows for water to be held as long as possible and may or may not allow for the controlled release of water. In some cases, the water is allowed to seep into the permeable banks or gravel strata in the foundation. This latter type is sometimes called a water-spreading dam or dike because its main purpose is to recharge the underground water supply. Detention dams are also constructed to trap sediment. These are often called debris dams. See [STORMWATER DETENTION](#).

Developable Acres, Net

The portion of a site that can be used for density calculations. Some communities calculate density based on gross acreage. Public or private road rights-of-way are not included in the net developable acreage of a site.

Developable Land

Land that is suitable as a location for structures and that can be developed free of significant impact on natural resource areas.

Development Agreement

A legislatively approved contract between a jurisdiction and a person having legal or equitable interest in real property within the jurisdiction that “freezes” certain rules, regulations and policies applicable to development of a property for a specified period of time, usually in exchange for certain concessions by the owner. See California Government Code section 65865.

Development Fees

This is a fee or charge imposed on developers to pay for the costs to the community of providing services to a new development. It is a means of providing a fund for financing new public improvements without resorting to deficit financing.

Development Rights

The right to develop land by a landowner who maintains fee-simple ownership over the land or by a party other than the owner who has obtained the rights to develop. Such rights usually are expressed in terms of density allowed under existing zoning. See [INTEREST, FEE](#); [INTEREST, LESS THAN-FEE](#); and [DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS, TRANSFER OF \(TDR\)](#).

Development Rights, Transfer of (TDR)

A program that can relocate potential development from areas where proposed land use or environmental impacts are considered undesirable (the “donor” site) to another (“receiver”) site chosen on the basis of its ability to accommodate additional units of development beyond that for which it was zoned, with minimal environmental, social and aesthetic impacts. Also known as transfer of development credits. See [DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS](#).

Disadvantaged Communities

Communities designated by the California Environmental Protection Agency to be over-burdened by pollution, socio-

economic and health impacts. Disadvantaged communities are specifically targeted for investment of proceeds from the state's cap-and-trade program. These investments are aimed at improving public health, quality of life and economic opportunity in California's most burdened communities at the same time reducing pollution that causes climate change.

Discretionary Decision

As used in CEQA, an action taken by a governmental agency that calls for the exercise of judgment in deciding whether to approve and/or how to carry out a project.

Discretionary Project

Under the California Environmental Quality Act and generally, an activity which requires the public agency to exercise judgment in deciding whether or not to approve or deny a project, as opposed to an administrative action. See [CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT](#).

Discretionary Review

A special power of a planning commission, outside the normal building permit application approval process, through which the commission can modify or disallow a proposed, zoning-compliant project when exceptional and extraordinary circumstances associated with a proposed project exist. These exceptional and extraordinary circumstances often involve conflicts with a jurisdiction's general plan or other policies. For example, if zoning permits a four-story building on a parcel but every building in the neighborhood is two stories tall, the planning commission may exercise its power and deny a permit for a larger building because of general plan language requiring that new buildings reflect the existing character of a neighborhood.

Displacement

Occurs when residents can no longer afford to remain in their homes due to rising housing costs. Residents may also be forced out by lease non-renewals, evictions, eminent domain or physical conditions that render homes uninhabitable as investors await redevelopment opportunities. Indirect displacement refers to changes in who is moving into a neighborhood as low-income residents move out. In a gentrifying neighborhood, when homes are vacated by low-income residents, other low-income residents cannot afford to move in because rents and sales prices have increased. Low-income residents can also be excluded as a result of discriminatory policies or changes in land use or zoning that foster a change in the character of residential development.

District

(1) An area of a city or county that has a unique character identifiable as different from surrounding areas because of distinctive architecture, streets, geographic features, culture, landmarks, activities or land uses. (2) A portion of the territory of a city or county within which uniform zoning regulations and requirements apply; a zone. See also [SPECIAL DISTRICT](#).

Documentary Transfer Tax

Also called Real Property Transfer Tax, this tax is imposed on the transfer of ownership in real estate at a rate of \$0.55 per \$500.00 of property value.

Down-Zoning

A change in the zoning classifications of land to a classification permitting development that is less intensive or dense, like from multifamily residential to single-family residential or from commercial to residential. A change of zoning in the opposite direction is referred to as up-zoning. See [ZONING](#).

Due Process (of Law)

A requirement that legal proceedings be conducted fairly. Such protections may include, depending on the proceeding, the right to be heard, the right to rebut evidence, that sufficient evidence is presented to reach an informed option and that

conflicts of interest have been avoided.

Dwelling Unit

A room or group of rooms (including sleeping, eating, cooking and sanitation facilities, but not more than one kitchen), which constitutes an independent housekeeping unit, occupied or intended for occupancy by one household on a long-term basis.

E

Earmarked Funds

Funds that have been tagged or “earmarked” for a specific purpose. See [GENERAL FUND](#).

Easement, Conservation

A tool for acquiring open space with less than full-fee purchase, whereby a public agency buys only certain specific rights from the landowner. These may be positive rights (providing the public with the opportunity to hunt, fish, hike or ride over the land) or they may be restrictive rights (limiting the uses to which the land owner may devote the land in the future.)

Easement, Scenic

A tool that allows a public agency to use an owner’s land for scenic enhancement such as roadside landscaping or vista preservation.

Easement

The right to use property owned by another for specific purposes or to gain access to another property. For example, utility companies often have easements on the private property of individuals to be able to install and maintain utility facilities.

Economic Development Commission (EDC)

An agency charged with seeking economic development projects and economic expansion at higher employment densities. A possible ally for bringing in businesses such as grocery stores to underserved areas.

Ecosystem

The complex system of plant, animal, fungal and microorganism communities and their associated non-living environment interacting as an ecological unit. Ecosystems have no fixed boundaries; instead their parameters are set to the scientific, management or policy question being examined. Depending upon the purpose of analysis, a single lake, a watershed or an entire region could be considered an ecosystem.

Effluent

A discharge of pollutants, with or without treatment, into the environment.

EIR

Environmental Impact Report. A detailed review of a proposed project, its potential adverse impacts upon the environment, measures that may avoid or reduce those impacts, and alternatives to the project.

Elderly Housing

See [SENIOR HOUSING](#).

Elderly

See [SENIORS](#).

Electric Vehicle (EV)

A motor vehicle that uses an electric motor as the basis of its operation. Such vehicles do not directly emit air pollutants and generate a lower impact on the environment throughout the lifecycle of the vehicle compared to vehicles powered by internal combustion engines.

Embodied Energy

How much energy was required to extract, process, package, transport, install and recycle or dispose of materials that make up a building's construction.

Emergency Shelter

A facility that provides immediate short-term housing and supplemental services for the homeless. Shelters come in many sizes, but an optimum size is considered to be 20 to 40 beds. Supplemental services may include food, counseling and access to other social programs. See [LOW BARRIER NAVIGATION CENTER](#), [TRANSITIONAL HOUSING](#).

Eminent Domain

The right of a public entity to acquire private property for public use upon the payment of just compensation. See [TAKING](#).

Emissions

The release of a substance into the atmosphere, including particulate matter and gasses.

Emission Factor

For stationary sources, the relationship between the amount of pollution produced and the amount of raw material processed or burned. For mobile sources, the relationship between the amount of pollution produced and the number of vehicle miles traveled. By using the emission factor of a pollutant and specific data regarding quantities of materials used by a given source, it is possible to compute emissions for the source.

Emission Inventory

An estimate of the amount of pollutants emitted into the atmosphere from major mobile, stationary, area-wide and natural source categories over a specific period of time such as a day or a year.

Emission Standard

The maximum amount of pollutant that can legally discharged from a single source, either mobile or stationary.

Empowerment Zones

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development designations for urban communities. Businesses that locate in these areas are eligible for tax credits and other financial incentives for hiring local residents.

Encroachment

Any obstruction or protrusion into a right of way or adjacent property, whether on the land or above it.

Encumbrance

An anticipated expenditure committed for the payment of goods and services not yet received or paid for.

Endangered Species

Animal or plant species designated as endangered under federal or state law, whose prospects for survival and reproduction are in immediate jeopardy from one or more causes. See [HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN](#).

Energy Intensity

The ratio of energy consumption to a measure of the demand for services (e.g., number of buildings, total floorspace, floorspace-hours, number of employees or constant dollar value of Gross Domestic Product for services).

Energy-efficiency

The ratio of the useful output of services from an article of industrial equipment to the energy use by such an article; for example, vehicle miles traveled per gallon of fuel (mpg).

Energy Smart

Meeting your energy needs cost effectively and with the least impact on the environment.

Envelope

The skin of a building-including the windows, doors, walls, foundation, basement slab, ceilings, roof and insulation – that separates the interior of a building from the outdoor environment.

Environment

Under the California Environmental Quality Act, “the physical conditions which exist within the area which will be affected by a proposed project, including land, air, water, minerals, flora, fauna, noise, objects of historic or aesthetic significance.” See [CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT](#).

Environmental Impact Report (EIR)

A report required pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act that assesses all the environmental characteristics of an area, determines what effects or impacts will result if the area is altered or disturbed by a proposed action, and identifies alternatives or other measures to avoid or reduce those impacts. See [CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT](#), [INITIAL STUDY](#).

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

Under the National Environmental Policy Act, a statement on the effect of development proposals and other major actions that significantly affect the environment. See [NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT](#).

Environmental Justice

The fair treatment of people of all races, cultures, and incomes with respect to the development, adoption, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies. See California Government Code section 65040.12.

Environmental Justice Element

One of the eight state-mandated elements of a local general plan. Only jurisdictions with disadvantaged communities are required to incorporate environmental goals, policies and programs to promote equity and protect human health from environmental hazards.

Equity

The state, quality or ideal of being just, impartial and fair; creating a situation where all groups have access to the resources and opportunities necessary to improve the quality of their lives and differences in life outcomes cannot be predicted on the basis of race, class, or other dimensions of identity.

Erosion

(1) The loosening and transportation of rock and soil debris by wind, rain, or running water. (2) The gradual wearing away of

the upper layers of earth.

Exaction

A contribution or payment required as an authorized precondition for receiving a development permit; usually refers to mandatory dedication (or fee in lieu of dedication) requirements found in many subdivision regulations.

Excise Tax

Tax placed on a person for a voluntary act, making the tax avoidable. Includes sales and use tax, business license tax, transient occupancy tax, utility user tax, etc. Phrase “excise tax” is most commonly used to refer to a parcel tax. See [AD VALOREM TAX](#), [PARCEL TAX](#), [TRANSIENT OCCUPANCY TAX](#), [UTILITY USERS TAX](#).

Expansive Soils

Soils that swell when they absorb water and shrink as they dry.

Expenditure

The actual payment for goods and services. See [APPROPRIATION](#).

Expressway

A divided multi-lane major arterial street for through traffic with partial control of access and with grade separations at major intersections. See [ARTERIAL](#), [FREEWAY](#), [PARKWAY](#).

Extreme Weather Event

In most cases, extreme weather events are defined as lying in the outermost (“most unusual”) ten percent of a place’s history.

Exurban Area

The region that lies beyond a city and its suburbs.

F

Fair Market Rent

Amount of rent, including utility allowances, determined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for purposes of administering the Section 8 Existing Housing Program. See [SECTION 8 RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM](#).

Family

(1) Two or more persons related by birth, marriage or adoption (U.S. Bureau of the Census). (2) An individual or a group of persons living together who constitute a bona fide single-family housekeeping unit in a dwelling unit, not including a fraternity, sorority, club or other group of persons occupying a hotel, lodging house or institution of any kind (California). See [HOUSEHOLD](#).

Farmers Home Administration (FmHA)

A federal agency that provides loans and grants for improvement projects and low-income housing.

Fast Food Restaurant

Any retail establishment intended primarily to provide short-order food services for on-site dining and/or take-out, including self-serve restaurants (excluding cafeterias where food is consumed on the premises), drive-in restaurants and formula restaurants required by contract or other arrangement to offer standardized menus, ingredients and fast food preparation.

Fault

A fracture in the Earth's crust forming a boundary between rock masses that have shifted.

Feasible

Capable of being accomplished in a successful manner within a reasonable time taking into account economic, environmental, social and technological factors.

Fee Interest

Entitles a landowner to exercise complete control over use of land, subject only to government land use regulations.

Feeder Roads

Smaller roadways that "feed" or connect traffic to larger roadways.

Fees

Also known as monetary exactions, fees require project proponents to pay certain amounts in order to have their applications processed (the fees reimburse the agency for the expenses of processing the application). Fees also may be assessed to mitigate the impact of a proposed development on the community (for example, school facilities fees to help expand the schools to assure they have enough capacity for the demand created by a new housing development). State law closely regulates the adoption, levy, collection and challenge to development fees imposed by a local public agency. It applies to both fees imposed on a broad class of projects by legislation of general applicability and fees imposed on a project-specific basis. See [EXACTION](#), [IMPACT FEE](#).

Field Act

Legislation passed after a 1933 Long Beach earthquake that collapsed a school, that established more stringent structural requirements and standards for construction of schools than for other buildings. See California Education Code sections 17280; 81130 and following.

Final Subdivision Map

A map of an approved subdivision filed in the county recorder's office. It usually shows surveyed lot lines, street right-of-ways, easements, monuments, distances, angles and bearings, pertaining to the exact dimensions of all parcels, street lines and so forth. See [TENTATIVE SUBDIVISION MAP](#), [PARCEL MAP](#).

Finding

A determination or conclusion based on the evidence presented to a hearing body in support of its decision. When it presents its decision, the body is often required to demonstrate in writing that the facts presented in evidence support its decision in conformance with the law.

Fire Hazard Zone

An area where, due to slope, fuel, weather or other fire-related conditions, the potential loss of life and property from a fire necessitates special fire protection measures and planning before development occurs.

Fiscal Impact Analysis

A projection of the direct public costs and revenues resulting from population or employment change to the local jurisdiction(s) in which the change is taking place. Enables local governments to evaluate relative fiscal merits of general plans, specific plans or projects. See [GENERAL PLAN](#), [SPECIFIC PLAN](#).

Fiscal Impact Report (FIR)

A report projecting the public costs and revenues that will result from a proposed program or development. See [FISCAL IMPACT ANALYSIS](#).

Fiscal Year

The period designated for the beginning and ending of financial transactions. Nearly all agency fiscal years begin on July 1 and end June 30 of the following year.

Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM)

For each community, the official map on which the Federal Insurance Administration has delineated areas of special flood hazard and the risk premium zones applicable to that community.

Flood, 100-Year

The magnitude of a flood expected to occur on the average every 100 years, based on historical data. The 100-year flood has a one percent chance of occurring in any given year. See [BASE FLOOD](#).

Floodplain Fringe

All land between the floodway and the upper elevation of the 100-year flood. See [FLOOD, 100-YEAR](#).

Floodplain

The relatively level land area on either side of the banks of a stream regularly subject to flooding. That part of the floodplain subject to a one percent chance of flooding in any given year is designated as an "area of special flood hazard" by the Federal Insurance Administration.

Floodway

The channel of a river or other watercourse and the adjacent land areas that must be reserved in order to discharge the “base flood” without cumulatively increasing the water surface elevation more than one foot. No development is allowed in floodways. See [BASE FLOOD](#).

Floor Area Ratio (FAR)

The gross floor area permitted on a site divided by the total net area of the site, expressed in decimals to one or two places. For example, on a site with 10,000 net square feet of land area, a floor area ratio of 1.0 will allow a maximum of 10,000 gross square feet of building floor area to be built. On the same site, an FAR of 1.5 would allow 15,000 square feet of floor area; an FAR of 2.0 would allow 20,000 square feet; and an FAR of 0.5 would allow only 5,000 square feet. Also commonly used in zoning, FARs typically are applied on a parcel-by-parcel basis as opposed to an average FAR for an entire land use or zoning district. See [ZONING](#).

Floor Area, Gross

The sum of the horizontal areas of the several floors of a building measured from the exterior face of exterior walls, or from the centerline of a wall separating two buildings, but not including any space where the floor-to-ceiling height is less than six feet. Some agencies exclude specific kinds of space (for example, elevator shafts, parking decks) from the calculation of gross floor area.

Food Desert

Areas characterized by poor access to healthy and affordable food that may contribute to social and spatial disparities in diet and diet-related health outcomes. The term “food desert” can mean a literal absence of retail food in a defined area, with studies of food deserts more commonly assessing differential accessibility to healthy and affordable food between socioeconomically advantaged and disadvantaged areas.

Food Insecurity

Limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.

Food Miles

The distance food travels from where it is grown or raised to where it is ultimately purchased by the consumer or end-user.

Food Security

Access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. Food security includes at a minimum the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods and an assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.

Footcandle

The unit of illumination when the foot is the unit of length.

Footprint

Land area taken up by a building.

Footprint; Building Footprint

The outline of a building at all of the points where it meets the ground.

Form-Based Codes

A method of regulating development to achieve a specific urban form by controlling physical form primarily, with a lesser focus on land use, through city or county regulations. Form-based codes address the relationship between building facades and the public realm, the form and mass of buildings in relation to one another, and the scale and types of streets and blocks.

Fossil Fuels

Fuels such as coal, oil and natural gas; so-called because they are the remains of ancient plant and animal life.

Franchise

Fee paid to a municipality from a franchisee for “rental” or “toll” for the use of streets and rights-of-way.

Freeway

A high-speed, high-capacity, limited-access road serving regional and countywide travel. Such roads are free of tolls, as contrasted with turnpikes or other toll roads. Freeways generally are used for long trips between major land use generators. At Level of Service E, they carry approximately 1,875 vehicles per lane per hour in both directions. Major streets cross at a different grade level. See [EXPRESSWAY](#), [LEVEL OF SERVICE \(TRAFFIC\)](#).

Friction Factor

Constraint applied in a traffic model to introduce an approximation of conditions that exist on streets in a city or county. These conditions reduce the speed of traffic and the desirability of specific links in the network upon which the traffic model distributes trips. Examples are frequency of low-speed curves, frequency of driveways, narrowness of lanes and lack of turning lanes at intersections.

Frontage

The frontage, or front, of a lot is usually defined as the side nearest the street.

Fund Balance

Difference between the assets (revenues and other resources) and liabilities (expenditures incurred or committed to) of a particular fund.

Fund

Accounting entity with a set of self-balancing revenue and expenditure accounts used to record the financial affairs of a governmental organization. See [EXPENDITURE](#).

G

Gann Initiative.

See [PROPOSITION 4](#).

Gateway

A point along a roadway entering a city or county at which a motorist gains a sense of having left the environs and of having entered the city or county.

General Fund

Fund used to account for all financial resources except those required to be accounted for in another fund (like enterprise or grant funds). Usually, the General Fund is the largest fund in an agency. See [EARMARKED FUNDS](#).

General Law City

A city incorporated under and subject to the general laws of the state.

General Obligation (G.O.) Bonds

Bonds issued through a governmental entity which have the legal authority to levy a tax on real and personal property located within the governmental boundaries at any rate necessary to collect enough money each year to pay for principal and interest due. See [BOND](#), [LIMITED OBLIGATION BONDS](#).

General Plan

The general plan is the foundation for local land use planning. The plan provides a vision for the foreseeable planning horizon—usually 10 to 20 years—and translates it into goals and policies for the physical development of the community. All other land use ordinances and policies flow from the general plan. The general plan covers all of the land within the jurisdiction and any additional land that, in the agency’s judgment, bears relation to its planning. See California Government Code section 65300. See also [SPECIFIC PLAN](#).

General Revenue

Those revenues that cannot be associated with a specific expenditure, such as property taxes (other than voter-approved indebtedness), sales tax and business license tax. See [EARMARKED FUNDS](#), [EXPENDITURE](#).

General Tax

Tax used for general agency purposes which is deposited into the general fund. See [GENERAL FUND](#).

G.O. Bonds

See [GENERAL OBLIGATION \(G.O.\) BONDS](#).

Gentrification

A process of neighborhood change where higher-income residents move into a historically marginalized neighborhood, housing costs rise and the neighborhood is physically transformed through new higher-end construction and building upgrades, resulting in the displacement of vulnerable residents and changes to the neighborhood’s cultural character.

Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

Computer-based systems capable of integrating and displaying different types of geological and demographic information. By creating maps, one may depict an area's natural and human-made resources, including soil types, population densities, land uses, transportation corridors, waterways, street patterns, mass-transit patterns, sewer lines, water sources and utility lines.

Geothermal Energy

Heat that comes from the Earth's interior.

Global Warming

An increase in the temperature of the Earth's atmosphere. Global warming has occurred in the past as a result of natural influences, but the term is most often used to refer to the warming predicted by computer models to occur as a result of increased emissions of greenhouse gases.

Goal

A statement of desired future conditions regarding a particular topic; a goal paints a picture of how something will be in the future. A goal in and of itself is not sufficient to understand its intent, extent, or context. A goal itself should be kept simple, with policies, objectives and implementation actions providing further definition.

Grade

(1) Leveling or smoothing the contours of a property. (2) The rate of rise or descent of a sloping surface, usually expressed in degrees or a percentage calculated by the number of feet of rise per 100 feet of horizontal distance. (A 10 percent grade would mean a 10-foot vertical rise over 100 feet of horizontal distance.)

Granny Flat

An accessory dwelling for one or more elderly persons that is attached to or separate from a main residence. Cities and counties may approve such units in single-family neighborhoods. See Government Code section 65852. See [ACCESSORY DWELLING UNIT](#).

Grants

Contributions of cash or other assets from another governmental agency to be used or expended for a specified purpose, activity or facility. See [EARMARKED FUNDS](#).

Green Design

Using natural products and safer procedures to protect people's health and well-being.

Green Infrastructure

The range of measures that use plant or soil systems, permeable pavement or other permeable surfaces or substrates, stormwater harvest and reuse, or landscaping to store, infiltrate, or evapotranspire stormwater and reduce flows to sewer systems or to surface waters.

Green Space

Open, undeveloped land with natural vegetation.

Greenbelt

A band of countryside surrounding a city or urbanized area on which building is generally prohibited.

Greenfield

Farmland and open areas where there has been no prior industrial or commercial activity, and therefore where the threat of contamination is lower than in urbanized areas. See [BROWNFIELD](#).

Greenhouse Effect

The warming effect of the Earth's atmosphere. Light energy from the sun which passes through the Earth's atmosphere is absorbed by the Earth's surface and re-radiated into the atmosphere as heat energy. The heat energy is then trapped by the atmosphere, creating a situation similar to that which occurs in a car with its windows rolled up. A number of scientists believe that the emission of CO₂ and other gases into the atmosphere may increase the greenhouse effect and contribute to global warming.

Greenhouse Gas (GHG)

Any gas that absorbs infrared radiation (i.e. heat) in the atmosphere. Greenhouse gases include, but are not limited to, water vapor, carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), nitrous oxide (N₂O), chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs), ozone (O₃), hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), perfluorocarbons (PFCs) and sulfur hexafluoride (SF₆). Atmospheric gases such as carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), nitrous oxide (N₂O), chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs), ozone (O₃), hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), perfluorocarbons (PFCs) and sulfur hexafluoride (SF₆) and water vapor that slow the passage of re-radiated heat through the Earth's atmosphere.

Greenways

Linear open spaces that link parks and communities, such as paths or trails. They provide public access to green spaces and opportunities for residents of all ages and abilities to be physically active.

Greyfield

A blighted area, often a failed shopping center, that is ripe for redevelopment.

Gross Acreage

The entire acreage of a site. Most communities calculate gross acreage to the centerline of proposed bounding streets and to the edge of the right-of-way of existing or dedicated streets. See [NET ACREAGE](#).

Ground Failure

Ground movement or rupture caused by strong shaking during an earthquake. Includes landslide, lateral spreading, liquefaction and subsidence.

Ground Shaking

Ground movement resulting from the transmission of seismic waves during an earthquake.

Groundwater Recharge

The natural process of infiltration and percolation of rainwater from land areas or streams through permeable soils into water-holding rocks that provide underground storage (aquifers). See [AQUIFER](#).

Groundwater

Water under the earth's surface, often confined to aquifers capable of supplying wells and springs. See [AQUIFER](#).

Group Home; Group Care Facility

Any facility used to provide non-medical residential care, day treatment, adult day care or foster family agency services.

Typically used to assist abused or neglected children or people who are physically disabled or mentally impaired.

Growth Management Plan

A plan for a given geographical region containing demographic projections (i.e., housing units, employment and population) through some specified point in time and which provides recommendations for local governments to better manage growth and reduce projected environmental impacts. See [CONCURRENCY](#), [CONGESTION MANAGEMENT PLAN](#).

Guidelines

General statements of policy or design direction. Guidelines established by a jurisdiction do not contain absolutes or standards, but may be presented alongside standards.

Guideway

A roadway system that guides the vehicles using it as well as supporting them. Examples include a streetcar and monorail system, with the railroad being the most familiar and common guideway. Most guideway transit systems make use of wayside electrical power for propulsion.

H

Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP)

A process established under Section 10 of the Endangered Species Act which allows the incidental taking of a listed, threatened, or endangered species upon the approval of a “single” or “multi” species plan. The development of such plans requires extensive studies, research and coordination between federal, state and local agencies and with citizen groups. The HCP must show how the impacts of the taking have been minimized and mitigated to the maximum extent practicable, that adequate funding for the plan will be provided, and that the taking will not appreciably reduce the likelihood of the survival and recovery of the species in the wild.

Habitat

The physical location or type of environment in which an organism or biological population lives or occurs.

Hazard Mitigation

Sustained action taken to reduce or eliminate long-term risk to people and their property from hazards and their effects.

Hazardous Material

Any substance that, because of its quantity, concentration or physical or chemical characteristics, poses a significant present or potential hazard to human health and safety or to the environment if released into the workplace or the environment. The term includes, but is not limited to, hazardous substances and hazardous wastes.

Health

A state of physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity.

Health Impact Assessment (HIA)

A combination of procedures, methods and tools by which a policy, program or project may be judged as to its potential effects on the health of a population, and the distribution of those effects within the population. HIAs can be used to evaluate the potential health effects of a project or policy before it is built or implemented. It can provide recommendations to increase positive health outcomes and minimize adverse health outcomes. The HIA process brings public health issues to the attention of persons who make decisions about areas that fall outside of traditional public health arenas, such as transportation or land use.

Healthy Community/Healthy Places

Communities that are developed, designed and built to promote good health.

Highest and Best Use

The use of a property that will bring the greatest profit to its owners. In theory, the economics of the real estate market establish a maximum value for each parcel of land at any given time. However, owners are not necessarily entitled to that use, particularly when that use may have negative effects on the use and enjoyment of neighboring properties.

High-Occupancy Structure

All pre-1935 buildings with over 25 occupants and all pre-1976 buildings with over 100 occupants.

High-Occupancy Vehicle (HOV)

Any vehicle other than a driver-only automobile (for example, a vanpool, a bus or a car carrying two or more persons).

Highway

High-speed, high-capacity, limited-access transportation facility serving regional and county-wide travel. Highways may cross at a different grade level.

Historic Preservation

The preservation of historically significant structures and neighborhoods in order to facilitate restoration and rehabilitation of the building(s) to a former condition.

Home Owner's Association (HOA)

A non-profit organization operating under recorded legal agreements running with the land. Generally, each lot owner in a condominium or similar planned development becomes a member upon purchase and each lot is subject to a charge for a proportionate share of the expenses for the organization's activities, like maintaining common areas, landscaping, recreation facilities and parking areas.

Household

All those persons, related or unrelated, who occupy a single housing unit. The concept of household is important because the formation of new households generates the demand for housing. Each new household formed creates the need for one additional housing unit or requires that one existing housing unit be shared by two households. Thus, household formation can continue to take place even without an increase in population, thereby increasing the demand for housing. See [FAMILY](#).

Housing and Community Development, Department of (HCD)

The state agency responsible for assessing, planning for, and assisting communities to meet the needs of low- and moderate-income households. HCD also certifies housing elements of general plans for local jurisdictions.

Housing and Urban Development, U.S. Department of (HUD)

A cabinet-level department of the federal government that administers housing and community development programs.

Housing Authority, Local (LHA)

A local housing agency established in state law, subject to local activation and operation. Originally intended to manage certain federal subsidies, but vested with broad powers to develop and manage other forms of affordable housing.

Housing Element

One of the eight state-mandated elements of a local general plan, it assesses the existing and projected housing needs of all economic segments of the community; identifies potential sites adequate to provide the amount and kind of housing needed; and contains adopted goals, policies and implementation programs for the preservation, improvement and development of housing. Under state law, housing elements must be updated periodically, usually every five to eight years (typically in connection with transportation planning efforts).

Housing Unit

A house, an apartment, a mobile home or trailer, a group of rooms or a single room that is occupied as a separate living quarters, or, if vacant, is intended for occupancy as a separate living quarters (U.S. Census definition).

Hybrid Electric Vehicle (HEV)

A vehicle that combines an internal combustion engine with a battery and electric motor. This combination offers the range and refueling capabilities of a conventional vehicle, while providing improved fuel economy and lower emissions.

Impact Fee

A fee, also called a development fee, levied on the developer of a project by a city, county or other public agency as compensation for otherwise-unmitigated impacts the project will produce. Development fees must not exceed the estimated reasonable cost of providing the service for which the fee is charged. The most common are: (1) impact fees (such as parkland acquisition fees, school facilities fees or street construction fees) related to funding public improvements which are necessitated in part or in whole by the development; (2) connection fees (such as water line fees) to cover the cost of installing public services to the development; (3) permit fees (such as building permits, grading permits, sign permits) for the administrative costs of processing development plans; and (4) application fees (rezoning, CUP variance, etc.) for the administrative costs of reviewing and hearing development proposals. See California Government Code sections 66000 and following. See also [DEVELOPMENT FEES](#).

Impact

The effect of any direct human actions or the indirect repercussions of human actions on existing physical, social or economic conditions.

Impacted Areas

Census tracts where more than 50 percent of the dwelling units house low- and very low-income households. Often correlated to food and park deserts, so can be helpful for researching food and park access.

Impermeable

Incapable of permeating, absorbing, or diffusing water, thereby creating runoff.

Impervious Surface

A surface through which water cannot penetrate, like a roof, road, sidewalk or paved parking lot. The amount of impervious surface increases with development and establishes the need for drainage facilities to carry the increased runoff.

Improved Land

Raw land to which has been added basic utilities such as roads, sewers, water lines and other public infrastructure facilities. Can also mean structures/buildings have been erected on the land.

In Lieu Fee

See [DEDICATION, IN LIEU OF](#).

Inclusionary Zoning

Provisions established by a public agency to require that a specific percentage of housing units in a project or development remain affordable to very low- and low-income households for a specified period. Often such regulations require a minimum percentage of housing for low- and moderate-income households in new housing developments and in conversions of apartments to condominiums.

Incorporation

Creation of a new city.

Incubator Space

Retail or industrial space that is affordable to new, low-margin businesses.

Indoor Air Pollution

Air pollutants that occur within buildings or other enclosed spaces, as opposed to those occurring in outdoor, or ambient air. Some examples of indoor air pollutants are nitrogen oxides, smoke, asbestos, formaldehyde and carbon monoxide.

Industrial

A land use classification often divided into “heavy industrial” uses, like construction yards, quarrying and factories; and “light industrial” uses, like research and development and less intensive warehousing and manufacturing.

Infill Development

Development of vacant or underutilized land (usually individual lots or leftover properties) within areas that are already largely developed and are served by an established system of roads and infrastructure.

Infrastructure

Public services and facilities like sewage-disposal systems, water-supply systems, other utility systems, schools and roads.

Initial Study

Under the California Environmental Quality Act, a preliminary analysis of the potential environmental impacts of a proposed project prepared by the lead agency. This process is used to determine whether an Environmental Impact Report must be prepared, or a Negative Declaration will be sufficient. See [CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT](#).

Initiative

A ballot measure used to enact new legislation. In California, city and county initiative measures may be placed on the ballot by petition of the voters or action of the governing body.

In-Lieu Fee

Cash payments that may be required of an owner or developer as a substitute for a dedication of land, usually calculated in dollars per lot, and referred to as in lieu fees or in lieu contributions. See [DEDICATION](#), [EXACTION](#).

Institutional Uses

(1) Publicly or privately owned and operated activities like hospitals, convalescent hospitals, intermediate care facilities, nursing homes, museums, and schools and colleges; (2) churches and other religious organizations; and (3) other non-profit activities of a welfare, educational, or philanthropic nature that cannot be considered residential, commercial or industrial.

Intensity, Building

For residential uses, the actual number or the allowable range of dwelling units per net or gross acre. For non-residential uses, the actual or the maximum permitted floor area ratios (FARs). See [FLOOR AREA RATIO](#).

Interagency

Indicates cooperation between or among two or more discrete agencies in regard to a specific program.

Interest, Fee

Entitles a landowner to exercise complete control over use of land, subject only to government land use regulations.

Interest, Less-than-fee

The purchase of interest in land rather than outright ownership; includes the purchase of development rights via conservation, open-space or scenic easements. (See [EASEMENT CONSERVATION](#), [EASEMENT SCENIC](#), [LEASE](#) and [LEASHOLD INTEREST](#))

Interim Zoning

See [MORATORIUM](#).

Intermittent Stream

A stream that normally flows for at least 30 days after the last major rain of the season and is dry a large part of the year.

Inverse Condemnation

The illegal removal of property value through excessive government regulation. Legal advice should be sought before proceeding in cases of potential inverse condemnation. As a result, the owner claims entitlement to payment for the property loss under the constitutional right to compensation for property that was condemned under the government's right of eminent domain. For example, a city widens a street, taking the entire parking lot of a local store. The city offers to pay for the lot, but the store claims the market has lost all its business since no one can park, and wants the value of the entire parcel, including the market building.

Investment Earnings

Revenue earned from the investment of idle public funds.

Investor Owned Utilities (IOUs)

Private companies that provide a utility, such as water, natural gas or electricity, to a specific service area.

Issues

Important unsettled community matters or problems that are identified in a community's general plan and dealt with by the plan's objectives, policies, plan proposals and implementation programs.

J

Jobs to Housing Balance/Fit/Ratio

One of many measures or variables used by planners to examine the proportions of residents, jobs, and services in urban areas and to guide development planning for efficient city land use and transportation networks. A jobs to housing ratio in the range of 0.75 to 1.5 is considered beneficial for reducing vehicle miles traveled, traffic congestion and air pollution. Ratios higher than 1.5 (jobs rich) indicate that there may be more workers commuting into the area because of a surplus of jobs, while ratios below 0.75 (housing rich) indicate that an area primarily serves to provide lower cost or exclusive housing. A jobs to housing ratio is most appropriately applied at sub-regional and regional levels in urbanized areas.

Joint Powers Authority (JPA)

A legal arrangement that enables two or more units of government to share authority in order to plan and carry out a specific program or set of programs that serves both units.

Joint-Use Agreements

are agreements between a school district and another entity, such as a city, county, nonprofit or private organization, regarding the sharing of capital, operating costs and responsibilities for a facility.

Junior Accessory Dwelling Unit (JADU)

A specific type of conversion of existing space that is contained entirely within an existing or proposed single-family residence. See [ACCESSORY DWELLING UNIT](#).

L

L10

A statistical descriptor indicating peak noise levels—the sound level exceeded ten percent of the time. It is a commonly used descriptor of community noise and has been used in Federal Highway Administration standards and the standards of some cities and counties.

Land Banking

The purchase of land by a local government for use or resale at a later date. Banked lands have been used for development of low- and moderate-income housing, expansion of parks, and development of industrial and commercial centers. Federal rail-banking law allows railroads to bank unused rail corridors for future rail use while allowing interim use as trails.

Land Use Classification

A system for classifying and designating the appropriate use of properties.

Land Use Element

A required element of the general plan that uses text and maps to designate the future use or reuse of land within a given jurisdiction's planning area. The land use element serves as a guide to the structuring of zoning and subdivision controls, urban renewal and capital improvements programs, and official decisions regarding the distribution and intensity of development and the location of public facilities and open space. See [MANDATORY ELEMENT](#).

Land Use Regulation

A term encompassing the regulation of land in general and often used to mean those regulations incorporated in the general plan, as distinct from zoning regulations (which are more specific).

Land Use

The occupation or utilization of land or water area for any human activity or any purpose defined in the general plan.

Landmark

(1) A building, site, object, structure, or significant tree having historical, architectural, social or cultural significance and marked for preservation by the local, state or federal government. (2) A visually prominent or outstanding structure or natural feature that functions as a point of orientation or identification.

Landscaping and Lighting Act of 1972

The 1972 Act lets cities, counties and special districts levy assessments for land purchase and the construction, operation and maintenance of parks, landscaping, lighting, traffic signals and graffiti abatement.

Landslide

Downslope movement of soil and/or rock, which typically occurs during an earthquake or following heavy rainfall.

Lateral Spreading

Lateral movement of soil, often as a result of liquefaction during an earthquake. See [LIQUEFACTION](#).

Leapfrog Development

New development separated from existing development by substantial vacant land.

Lease

A contractual agreement by which an owner of real property (the lessor) gives the right of possession to another (a lessee) for a specified period of time (term) and for a specified consideration (rent).

Leasehold Interest

(1) The interest that the lessee has in the value of the lease itself in condemnation award determination. (2) The difference between the total remaining rent under the lease and the rent the lessee would currently pay for similar space for the same time period.

LEED

An acronym for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design. LEED is a voluntary, consensus-based green building rating system developed and maintained by the U.S. Green Building Council to support and certify successful green building design, construction and operations.

Leq

The energy equivalent level, defined as the average sound level on the basis of sound energy (or sound pressure squared). The Leq is a “dosage” type measure and is the basis for the descriptors used in current standards, such as the 24-hour CNEL used by the State of California.

Level of Service (LOS) Standard

A standard used by government agencies to measure the quality or effectiveness of a municipal service like police, fire or library, or the performance of a facility, like a street or highway.

Level of Service (Traffic)

A scale that measures the amount of traffic that a roadway or intersection can accommodate, based on such factors as maneuverability, driver dissatisfaction and delay.

Level of Service A

Indicates a relatively free flow of traffic, with little or no limitation on vehicle movement or speed.

Level of Service B

Describes a steady flow of traffic, with only slight delays in vehicle movement and speed. All queues clear in a single signal cycle.

Level of Service C

Denotes a reasonably steady, high volume flow of traffic, with some limitations on movement and speed, and occasional backups on critical approaches.

Level of Service D

Designates the level where traffic nears an unstable flow. Intersections still function, but short queues develop and cars may have to wait through one cycle during short peaks.

Level of Service E

Represents traffic characterized by slow movement and frequent (although momentary) stoppages. This type of congestion is considered severe but is not uncommon at peak traffic hours, with frequent stopping, long-standing queues and blocked intersections.

Level of Service F

Describes unsatisfactory stop-and go traffic characterized by traffic jams and stoppages of long duration. Vehicles at signalized intersections usually have to wait through one or more signal change and “upstream” intersections may be blocked by the long queues.

Levy

To impose taxes, special assessments or service charges for the support of governmental activities; the total amount of taxes, special assessments or service charges imposed by a governmental agency. See [SERVICE CHARGES](#).

Licenses and Permits

Charge designed to reimburse agency for costs of regulating activities being licensed, like the licensing of animals, bicycles, etc.

Lien

A claim on assets, especially property, for the payment of taxes or utility service charges. See [SERVICE CHARGES](#).

Life-Cycle Costing

A method of evaluating a capital investment that takes into account the sum total of all costs associated with the investment over the lifetime of the project.

Light-Duty Rail Transit (LRT)

Streetcars or trolley cars that typically operate entirely or substantially in mixed traffic and in non-exclusive, at-grade rights-of-way. Passengers typically board vehicles from the street level (as opposed to a platform that is level with the train) and the driver may collect fares. Vehicles are each electrically self-propelled and usually operate in one or two-car trains.

Limited Obligation Bonds

Similar to general obligation bonds except that security for the issuance is limited exactly to the revenues pledged in the bond statement and not to the full faith and credit of the jurisdiction. See [BOND](#), [GENERAL OBLIGATION BONDS](#).

Linkage

With respect to jobs/housing balance, a program designed to offset the impact of employment on housing need within a community, whereby project approval is conditioned on the provision of housing units or the payment of an equivalent in-lieu fee. The linkage program must establish the cause-and-effect relationship between a new commercial or industrial development and the increased demand for housing.

Liquefaction

The transformation of loose, wet soil from a solid to a liquid state, often as a result of ground shaking during an earthquake.

Liquidity

The ability to convert a security into cash promptly with minimum risk of principal.

Live-Work Quarters

Buildings or spaces within buildings that are used jointly for commercial and residential purposes where the residential use of the space is secondary or accessory to the primary use as a place of work.

Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO)

The Cortese/Knox Act (see Government Code section 56000) establishes a Local Agency Formation Commission in each county. Commissions within each county that review and evaluate all proposals for formation of special districts, incorporation of cities, annexation to special districts or cities, consolidation of districts and merger of districts with cities. The LAFCO members generally include two county supervisors, two city council members, and one member representing the general public. Some LAFCOs include two representatives of special districts.

Local Coastal Program (LCP)

A combination of a local government's land use plans, zoning ordinances, zoning district maps and (within sensitive coastal resources areas) other implementing actions that together meet the local requirements of, and implement the provisions and policies of, the California Coastal Act of 1976.

Local Coastal Program Land Use Plan

The relevant portion of a local government general plan or coastal element that details type, location and intensity of land use, applicable resource protection and development policies, and, where necessary, implementation actions.

Location-Efficient Mortgages

Competitive rates and low down payments to those who want to live in "location-efficient communities" that are convenient to resources and reduce the need to drive.

Lot

The basic development unit – an area with fixed boundaries, used or intended to be used by one or more uses within one building and its accessory building(s). A lot must meet the requirements of the zoning district in which it is located and must front on a public street or an approved private street.

Lot Line Adjustment

The adjustment of a lot line between two or more existing parcels where land taken from one parcel is added to an adjacent parcel and where a greater number of parcels than originally existed are not thereby created.

Lot of Record

A lot that is part of a recorded subdivision or a parcel of land that has been recorded at the county recorder's office containing property tax records.

Low Barrier Navigation Center

A service-enriched shelter focused on moving people into permanent housing. A low barrier navigation center provides temporary living facilities while case managers connect residents to supportive services, such as employment training, public benefits, health services, substance abuse and mental health services and connections to permanent housing opportunities. Traditional shelters often have rules requiring people to show up at a certain time and leave at a certain time the next day; they prohibit pets, separate by sex, and limit the items people can bring in. All these barriers keep some homeless people from going to traditional shelters.

Low-Income Household

A household with an annual income usually no greater than 80 percent of the area median family income adjusted by

household size, as determined by a survey of incomes conducted by a city or a county, or in the absence of such a survey, based on the latest available eligibility limits established by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for the Section 8 housing program. See [SECTION 8 RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM](#).

Low-Income Housing Tax Credits

Tax reductions provided by the federal and state governments for investors in housing for low-income households.

M

Maladaptation

Any changes in natural or human systems that inadvertently increase vulnerability to climatic stimuli; an adaptation that does not succeed in reducing vulnerability but increases it instead.

Mandatory Element

A component of the general plan mandated by state law. California state law requires that a general plan include elements dealing with eight subjects – circulation, conservation, housing, land use, noise, open space, safety and environmental justice – and specifies to various degrees the information to be incorporated in each element.

Manufactured Housing

Residential structures that are constructed entirely in a factory and that, since June 15, 1976, have been regulated by the federal Manufactured Home Construction and Safety Standards Act of 1974 under the administration of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. See [MOBILE HOME](#), [MODULAR UNIT](#).

Marks-Roos Bonds

Bonds authorized by the Marks-Roos Local Bond Pooling Act of 1985 which provide local agencies with extremely flexible financing powers through participation in joint powers authorities. See [BOND](#), [JOINT POWERS AUTHORITY](#).

Master EIR (MEIR)

Section 21156 et seq. of the Public Resources Code authorizes preparation of a “master environmental impact report” for specific kinds of projects involving broad policy decisions, specifically including general plans. The MEIR is designed to allow an agency to eliminate or reduce the scope of the environmental review of subsequent discretionary activities or projects that follow the expected course of action whose environmental effects are addressed in the MEIR. A MEIR can streamline development in the short term but have a shorter shelf-life compared to a program environmental impact report or PEIR.

Master Environmental Assessment

An inventory or database for use with later environmental impact reports, a master environmental assessment (MEA) can assist a city or county in formulating a general plan or any element thereof by identifying environmental characteristics and constraints required to be addressed in the general plan. Relevant portions of the MEA can be referenced and summarized in preparing later EIRs and negative declarations.

Mean

The average of a number of figures computed by adding up all the figures and dividing by the number of figures. Compare [MEDIAN](#) and [MODE](#).

Mean High Tide Line

The average high tide line in coastal zones. The state of California owns all lands located below the mean high tide line.

Mean Sea Level

The average altitude of the sea surface for all tidal stages.

Median

The middle number in a series of items in which fifty percent of all figures are above and fifty percent are below. Compare with [MEAN](#) and [MODE](#).

Median Strip

The dividing area, either paved or landscaped, between opposing lanes of traffic on a roadway.

Mello-Roos Bonds

Locally issued bonds that are repaid by a special tax imposed on property owners within a community facilities district established by a governmental entity. The bond proceeds can be used for public improvements and for a limited number of services. Named after the program's legislative authors.

Mello-Roos Community Facilities Tax

Special non ad valorem tax imposed to finance public capital facilities and services in connection with new development.

Mello-Roos District

A distinct entity of government for the purpose of imposing and collecting the Mello-Roos Community Facilities Tax.

Mercalli Intensity Scale

A subjective measure of the observed effects (human reactions, structural damage, geologic effects) of an earthquake. Expressed in Roman numerals from I to XII.

Metes and Bounds

A system of describing or identifying land using measures (metes) and direction (bounds) from an identifiable point of reference like a monument or other marker, the corner of intersecting streets or some other permanent fixture.

Microclimate

The climate of a small, distinct area, such as a city street or a building's courtyard; can be favorably altered through functional landscaping, architecture or other design features.

Mineral Resource

Land on which known deposits of commercially viable mineral or aggregate deposits exist. This designation is applied to sites determined by the California Geological Survey as being a resource of regional significance and is intended to help maintain the quarrying operations and protect them from encroachment of incompatible land uses.

Minipark

A small neighborhood park of approximately one acre or less. See [NEIGHBORHOOD PARK](#).

Ministerial Decision

These actions are mandatory, nondiscretionary activities that must be approved so long as certain standards are met. A final subdivision map, for example, must be granted when all of the conditions of the tentative map are met. Likewise, certain applications for second unit or "granny flat" approvals in single-family neighborhoods are ministerial.

Minor Land Division

Contiguous property which is partitioned into four or fewer lots usually qualifies as a minor land division.

Mitigated Negative Declaration

A written statement by the lead agency that revisions to a project, agreed to by the applicant, would avoid potential significant adverse impacts, and there is no substantial evidence that the project, as revised, will have a significant effect on the environment. See [CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT](#), [NEGATIVE DECLARATION](#).

Mitigation Measures

In the context of the California Environmental Quality Act, measures that modify a project to reduce or eliminate a significant environmental impact. See [CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT](#).

Mitigation Monitoring Program

A program which is adopted as part of the Mitigated Negative Declaration or Environmental Impact Report process that establishes a reporting system designed to ensure compliance to and implementation of the adopted mitigation measures. See [CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT](#), [ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT](#), [MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION](#).

Mixed-Use

Properties on which various uses like office, commercial, institutional and residential are combined in a single building or on a single site in an integrated development project with significant functional interrelationships and a coherent physical design. A “single site” may include contiguous properties.

Mobile home

A structure, transportable in one or more sections, built on a permanent chassis and designed for use as a single-family dwelling unit that (1) has a minimum of 400 square feet of living space; (2) has a minimum width in excess of 102 inches; (3) is connected to all available permanent utilities; and (4) is tied down (a) to a permanent foundation on a lot either owned or leased by the homeowner or (b) is set on piers, with wheels removed and skirted, in a mobile home park. See [MANUFACTURED HOUSING](#), [MODULAR UNIT](#).

Modal Choices

Transportation options; one’s preferred method of transportation, such as walking, bicycling, using an automobile, riding a bus or rail, etc.

Mode

(1) In statistics, the number that occurs most frequently in a given series. Compare with [MEAN](#), [MEDIAN](#). (2) A method of transportation.

Moderate-Income Household

A household with an annual income between the lower income eligibility limits and 120 percent of the area median family income adjusted by household size, usually as established by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for the Section 8 housing program. See [LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLD](#), [SECTION 8 RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM](#).

Modular Unit

A factory-fabricated, transportable building or major component designed for use by itself or for incorporation with similar units on site into a structure for residential, commercial, educational or industrial use. Differs from mobile homes and manufactured housing by (in addition to lacking an integral chassis or permanent hitch to allow future movement) being subject to California housing law design standards. California standards are more restrictive than federal standards in some respects (for example, plumbing and energy conservation). Also called factory-built housing and regulated by state law of that title. See [MOBILE HOME](#), [MANUFACTURED HOUSING](#).

Moratorium

A zoning designation that temporarily reduces or freezes allowable development in an area until a permanent classification can be fixed; generally assigned during general plan preparation to provide a basis for permanent zoning. See Government Code section 65858.

Motor Vehicle License Fee (VLF)

VLF is fee for privilege of operating vehicle on public streets. VLF is levied annually at two percent of the market value of motor vehicles and is imposed by the state “in lieu” of local property taxes. VLF is also called Motor Vehicle in-Lieu Tax.

Multi-Family Units

Freestanding buildings composed of two or more separate living units, with each unit having its own bedroom, kitchen and bathroom facilities.

Multiple Family Residential

A type of housing that has several residential units on a parcel or parcels of land. Examples of multiple family residential housing include condominiums and apartments.

Multiplier Effect

Refers to the impact the recirculation of money through the economy has on job and wealth creation. For example, money paid as salaries to industrial and office workers is spent on housing, food, clothing, and other locally available goods and services. This spending creates jobs in housing construction, retail stores and professional offices. The wages paid to workers in those industries is again re-spent, creating still more jobs. Overall, one job in basic industry is estimated to create approximately one more job in non-basic industry.

Municipal Improvement Act of 1913

Legislation allowing cities, counties and special districts to fund everything included in the 1911 Act plus power and public transit facilities; assessments can be levied before construction begins.

Municipal Services

Services traditionally provided by local government, including water and sewer, roads, parks, schools, police and fire protection.

N

National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS)

The prescribed level of pollutants in the outside air that cannot be exceeded legally during a specified time in a specified geographical area.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

An act passed in 1974 establishing federal legislation for national environmental policy, a council on environmental quality, and the requirements for environmental impact statements.

National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP)

A federal program that authorizes the sale of federally subsidized flood insurance in communities where such flood insurance is not available privately.

National Historic Preservation Act

A 1966 federal law that established a National Register of Historic Places and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and that authorized grants-in-aid for preserving historic properties.

National Register of Historic Places

The official list, established by the National Historic Preservation Act, of sites, districts, buildings, structures and objects significant in the nation's history or whose artistic or architectural value is unique.

Natural Infrastructure

The preservation or restoration of ecological systems, or utilization of engineered systems that use ecological processes, to increase resiliency to climate change, manage other environmental hazards, or both. This may include, but is not limited to, floodplain and wetlands restoration or preservation, combining levees with restored natural systems to reduce flood risk, and urban tree planting to mitigate high heat days.

Natural State

The condition existing prior to development.

Need

A condition requiring supply or relief. The city or county may act upon findings of need within or on behalf of the community. A lack of access to healthy food could be identified as a need.

Negative Declaration

In the context of the California Environmental Quality Act, a written statement briefly describing the reasons why a proposed project will not have a significant effect on the environment and does not require an Environmental Impact Report. See [CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT, MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION](#).

Neighborhood Completeness

A land use indicator that attempts to define how well a neighborhood is served by specific land uses (e.g., affordable housing, fire/police station, grocery store, parks, library, school, post office).

Neighborhood Park

City- or county-owned land intended to serve the recreation needs of people living or working within one-half mile radius of the park.

Neighborhood Unit

According to one widely accepted concept of planning, the neighborhood unit should be the basic building block of the city. It is based on the elementary school, with other community facilities located at its center and arterial streets at its perimeter. The distance from the school to the perimeter should be a comfortable walking distance for a school-age child; there would be no through traffic uses. Limited industrial or commercial would occur on the perimeter where arterials intersect. This was a model for American suburban development after World War II.

Neighborhood

A planning area commonly identified as such in a community's planning documents, and by the individuals residing and working within the neighborhood. Documentation may include a map prepared for planning purposes showing the names and boundaries neighborhoods. Though neighborhoods are not legal designations, they are among the most commonly recognized and understood land use designations.

Neotraditional Development

Typical of pre-World War II communities, neotraditional development is characterized by urban regions comprising many cohesive neighborhoods, each with their own commercial core and linked to one another by some form of transit. While a metropolitan area has a central downtown, the many neighborhood centers provide a secondary service area that can be reached on foot from people's homes. The neighborhood centers may include retail establishments, offices, service providers, cinemas, health clubs, dense housing and a transit hub.

Net Acreage

The portion of a site that can actually be built upon. The following generally are not included in the net acreage of a site: public or private road rights-of-way, public open-space and flood ways. See [GROSS ACREAGE](#).

New Urbanism

A design philosophy intended to create a strong sense of community by incorporating features of traditional small towns. Compact, walkable neighborhoods with active streets, housing and shopping in close proximity and accessible public spaces are a few of the hallmarks of new urbanism.

Nexus

In general, a minimum threshold of connection necessary within a taxing jurisdiction to allow taxing authority over out-of-state individuals or businesses. There must be a reasonable connection ("nexus") between required development impact fees and a development project subject to the fees. See California Government Code sections 66000 and following.

NIABY

(See also [BANANA](#), [NIMBY](#), and [NIMTOO](#)) Not In Anyone's Back Yard.

NIMBY

An acronym for "Not-In-My-Backyard." This is a somewhat unflattering characterization for opponents of development

projects, with the implication being that the opponents are advocating strictly based on personal self-interest as opposed to the larger community interests. Local agencies' alleged responsiveness to "NIMBY-ism" is one of the reasons some advocate that state law preempt local agencies' authority over certain kinds of land use decisions (see for example, [AFFORDABLE HOUSING](#)).

NIMTOO

(See also [BANANA](#), [NIMBY](#) and [NIABY](#)) Not In My Term Of Office.

Noise Attenuation

Reduction of the level of a noise source using a substance, material, or surface, like earth berms and/or solid concrete walls.

Noise Contour

A line connecting points of equal noise level as measured on the same scale. Noise levels greater than the 60 Ldn contour (measured in dBA) require noise attenuation in residential development. See [DAY-NIGHT AVERAGE SOUND LEVEL, DBA](#).

Noise Element

One of the eight state-mandated elements of a local general plan, it assesses noise levels of highways and freeways, local arterials, railroads, airports, local industrial plants and other ground stationary sources, and adopts goals, policies and implementation programs to reduce the community's exposure to noise.

Noise

Any sound that is undesirable because it interferes with speech and hearing, or is intense enough to damage hearing, or is otherwise annoying. Noise, simply, is "unwanted sound."

Non-Attainment

The condition of not achieving a desired or required level of performance. Frequently used in reference to air quality.

Nonconforming Use

A use that was valid when brought into existence, but by subsequent regulation becomes no longer conforming. "Non-conforming use" is a generic term and includes (1) non-conforming structures (by virtue of size, type of construction, location on land or proximity to other structures), (2) non-conforming use of a conforming building, (3) non-conforming use of a non-conforming building and (4) non-conforming use of land. Thus, any use lawfully existing on any piece of property that is inconsistent with a new or amended general plan, and that in turn is a violation of a zoning ordinance amendment subsequently adopted in conformance with the general plan, will be a non-conforming use. Typically, non-conforming uses are permitted to continue for a designated period of time, subject to certain restrictions.

Nonpoint Source Pollution

Sources for pollution that are less definable and usually cover broad areas of land, like agricultural land with fertilizers that are carried from the land by runoff or automobiles. See [POINT SOURCE POLLUTION](#).

Notice (of Hearing)

A legal document announcing the opportunity for the public to present their views to an official representative or board of a public agency concerning an official action pending before the agency.

Notice of Completion (NOC)

Under the California Environmental Quality Act, a notice issued and properly filed by the lead agency upon completion

of the Draft Environmental Impact Report. The NOC contains a description of the proposed project. See [CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT](#).

Notice of Determination (NOD)

Under the California Environmental Quality Act, a notice issued and properly filed by the lead agency upon its approval of a project subject to the California Environmental Quality Act, and stating whether or not the project will have a significant effect on the environment. The notice must be filed within five working days of the action approving a project. See [CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT](#).

Notice of Preparation (NOP)

Under the California Environmental Quality Act, a brief notice issued by the lead agency stating it plans to prepare an Environmental Impact Report for a proposed project. The notice is sent to responsible and trustee agencies and other interested agencies. These parties are asked to comment on the scope of the Environmental Impact Report and potential impacts of the proposed project. These comments are then use to further define the scope of the Environmental Impact Report. See [CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT](#), [ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT](#).

O

Objective

A specific statement of desired future condition toward which the city or county will expend effort in the context of striving to achieve a broader goal. An objective should be achievable and, where possible, should be measurable and time-specific. The State Government Code section 65302 requires that general plans spell out the “objectives,” principles, standards and proposals of the general plan. “The addition of 100 units of affordable housing by 1995” is an example of an objective.

Off-Gassing

The release of gas into the air from products treated with chemicals during their manufacture.

Official County Scenic Highway

A segment of state highway identified in the Master Plan of State Highways Eligible for Official Scenic Highway Designation and designated by the Director of the Department of Transportation (Caltrans).

Off-Site Improvements

Conditions that can be required of a project that involves the installation of streets, curbs, gutters, sidewalks, street trees and other improvements that are located adjacent to the project on publicly-owned property.

Off-the-Grid

A term used to describe a system that runs on renewable energy sources independent of a conventional public utility grid.

Open Space Element

One of the eight state-mandated elements of a local general plan, it contains an inventory of privately and publicly owned open-space lands, and adopted goals, policies, and implementation programs for the preservation, protection and management of open space lands.

Open-Space Land

Any parcel or area of land or water that is essentially unimproved and devoted to an open-space use for the purposes of (1) the preservation of natural resources, (2) the managed production of resources, (3) outdoor recreation or (4) public health and safety.

Ordinance

A law or regulation adopted by a governmental authority, usually a city or county.

Outdoor Advertising Structure

Any device used or intended to direct attention to a business, profession, commodity, service or entertainment conducted, sold or offered elsewhere than upon the lot where such device is located. See [SIGN](#).

Outdoor Recreation Use

A privately or publicly owned or operated use providing facilities for outdoor recreation activities.

Outer Approach Zone

Airspace in which an air-traffic controller initiates radar monitoring for incoming flights approaching an airport. See [APPROACH ZONE](#), [CLEAR ZONE](#), [TRANSITION ZONE](#).

Overlay

A land use designation on the general plan land use map, or a zoning designation on a zoning map, that modifies the basic underlying designation in some specific manner. For example, overlay zones are often used to deal with areas with special characteristics, like flood zones or historical areas. Development of land subject to an overlay must comply with the regulations of both zones. See [GENERAL PLAN](#), [ZONING](#).

Overlay Zoning

Additional or stricter standards to existing zoning that can be used to protect particular natural or cultural features.

Ozone Layer

The protective layer of the Earth's atmosphere, about 15 miles above the ground, that absorbs some of the sun's ultraviolet rays, thereby reducing the amount of potentially harmful radiation that reaches the Earth's surface. It may be contrasted with the ozone component of photochemical smog near the Earth's surface, which is harmful.

P

Parcel Map (lot split)

A subdivision map that divides a parcel up into four or fewer lots. The city or county can place conditions on the approval of parcel maps. See [FINAL SUBDIVISION MAP](#), [SUBDIVISION MAP ACT](#), [TENTATIVE SUBDIVISION MAP](#).

Parcel Tax

Special non-ad valorem tax on parcels of property generally based on either a flat per-parcel rate or a variable rate depending on the size, use or number of units on the parcel. See [AD VALOREM TAX](#), [EXCISE TAX](#).

Parcel

A lot in single ownership or under single control, usually considered a unit for purposes of development.

Park Land; Parkland

Land that is publicly owned or controlled for the purpose of providing parks, recreation or open-space for public use. See [COMMUNITY PARK](#), [NEIGHBORHOOD PARK](#), [REGIONAL PARK](#).

Parking Area, Public

An open area, excluding a street or other public way, used for the parking of automobiles and available to the public, whether for free or for compensation.

Parking Management

An evolving Transportation Demand Management technique designed to obtain maximum use from limited parking spaces. Can involve pricing and preferential treatment for High-Occupancy Vehicles, non-peak period users and short-term users. See [HIGH-OCCUPANCY VEHICLE](#), [TRANSPORTATION DEMAND MANAGEMENT](#).

Parking Ratio

The number of parking spaces provided per 1,000 square feet of floor area, for example, 2.1 or “two per thousand.”

Parking Space, Compact

A parking space (usually 7.5 feet wide by 16 feet long when perpendicular to a driveway or aisle) permitted in some localities on the assumption that many modern cars are significantly smaller, and require less room, than a standard automobile. A standard parking space, when perpendicular to a driveway or aisle, is usually 8.5 feet wide by 18 feet long.

Parking, Shared

A public or private parking area used jointly by two or more uses.

Parks

Open space lands whose primary purpose is recreation. See [OPEN-SPACE LAND](#), [COMMUNITY PARK](#), [NEIGHBORHOOD PARK](#), [REGIONAL PARK](#).

Parkway Strip

A piece of land located between the rear of a curb and the front of a sidewalk, usually used for planting low ground cover and/or street trees, also known as “planter strip.” See [STREET TREE PLAN](#).

Parkway

An expressway or freeway designed for non-commercial traffic only; usually located within a strip of landscaped park or natural vegetation. See [EXPRESSWAY](#).

Particulate Matter (PM)

Very small pieces of solid or liquid matter such as particles of soot, dust, fumes, mists or aerosols. The physical characteristics of particles, and how they combine with other particles, are part of the feedback mechanisms of the atmosphere. See [AEROSOL](#).

Pay As You Go

Concept of paying for capital projects when the initial cost is incurred, rather than over time through the use of debt financing. See [CAPITAL OUTLAY](#), [DEBT FINANCING](#).

Pay As You Use

Concept that debt financing enables the public entity to spread the cost of a capital project over time, as the project is being used. See [CAPITAL OUTLAY](#), [DEBT FINANCING](#).

Peak Hour/Peak Period

For any given roadway, a daily period during which traffic volume is highest, usually occurring in the morning and evening commute periods. Where “F” levels of service are encountered, the “peak hour” may stretch into a “peak period” of several hours’ duration.

Pedestrian Friendly

In basic terms, a street or area that has sidewalks on both sides of the roadway and safe street crossings. In broader terms, it denotes a street, neighborhood, or city that supports, through planning and zoning, the location of stores, offices, residences, schools, recreational areas and other public facilities within walking distance of each other. Such areas also often feature narrow streets, street trees, awnings, covered transit shelters, benches, brick paving or other less conventional paving types, among other elements.

Performance Standards

Zoning regulations that permit uses based on a particular set of standards of operation rather than on particular type of use. Performance standards provide specific criteria limiting noise, air pollution, emissions, odors, vibration, dust, dirt, glare, heat, fire hazards, wastes, traffic impacts and visual impact of a use.

Permeable

Description of any surface that allows another substance (for example, water) to pass through it.

Permit

A specific authorization from a planning body to engage in a particular type of development or activity.

Permitted Use

An authorized use within a zoning district. See [CONDITIONAL USE](#).

Pervious

Permeable; allows something to pass through it.

Photovoltaic Cell

A device that converts sunlight into electricity.

Physical Diversity

A quality of a site, city or region in which a variety of architectural styles, natural landscapes and/or land uses are found.

Plan Line

A precise line that establishes future rights-of-way along any portion of an existing or proposed street or highway and which is depicted on a map showing the streets and lot line or lines and the proposed right-of-way lines, and the distance thereof from the established centerline of the street or highway, or from existing or established property lines.

Planned Community

A large-scale development whose essential features are a definable boundary; a consistent, but not necessarily uniform, character; overall control during the development process by a single development entity; private ownership of recreation amenities; and enforcement of covenants, conditions and restrictions by a master community association. See [COVENANTS, CONDITIONS, AND RESTRICTIONS](#).

Planned Unit Development (PUD)

Land use zoning which allows the adoption of a set of development standards that are specific to a particular project. PUD zones usually do not contain detailed development standards; those are established during the process of considering proposals and adopted by ordinance upon project approval.

Planning and Research, Office of (OPR)

A governmental division of the state of California that has among its responsibilities the preparation of a set of guidelines for use by local jurisdictions in drafting general plans.

Planning Area

The area directly addressed by the general plan. A city's planning area typically encompasses the city limits and potentially annexable land within its sphere of influence.

Planning Commission

A body, usually having five or seven members, created by a city or county in compliance with California law which requires the assignment of the planning functions of the city or county to a planning department, planning commission, hearing officers, and/or the legislative body itself, as deemed appropriate by the legislative body. See California Government Code section 65100.

Plat Map

A map of a lot, parcel, subdivision or development area where the lines of each land division are shown by accurate distances and bearings.

Plug-In Hybrid Electric Vehicle (PHEV)

A vehicle that is similar to traditional hybrids but is also equipped with a larger, more advanced battery that allows the vehicle to be plugged in and recharged in addition to refueling with gasoline. This larger battery allows you to drive on a combination of electric and gasoline fuels.

Point Source

A single identifiable source that discharges pollutants into the environment. Examples are smokestacks, sewers, ditches or pipes. Any pollution with a definable, specific source of origin is referred to as “point-source pollution.”

Police and Fire Special Tax

Special tax on parcels of property in support of police, fire protection or both.

Police Power

Broad power held by government to legislate for the purpose of preserving the public’s health, safety, morals and general welfare. The authority that localities have to adopt zoning and land use regulations and general plans is derived from the police power.

Policy

A statement of a public body that forms the basis for enacting legislation, making decisions and achieving stated objectives and goals. The policies under which zoning ordinances are enacted and administered should be found in a community’s general plan.

Pollution

A change in the physical, chemical or biologic characteristics of the air, water or soil that can affect the health, survival or activities of all forms of life in an unwanted way.

Pollution, Non-Point

Sources for pollution that are less definable and usually cover broad areas of land, such as agricultural land with fertilizers that are carried from the land by runoff, or automobiles.

Pollution, Point

In reference to water quality, a discrete source from which pollution is generated before it enters receiving waters, such as a sewer outfall, a smokestack or an industrial waste pipe.

Poverty Level

As used by the U.S. Census, families and unrelated individuals are classified as being above or below the poverty level based on a poverty index that provides a range of income cutoffs or “poverty thresholds” varying by size of family, number of children and age of householder. The income cutoffs are updated each year to reflect the change in the Consumer Price Index.

Preemption

The principle of law through which federal or state regulations supersede those of a city or county. A local agency may not take actions that conflict with state or federal law.

Prefabricated

Standardized building sections that are created in a factory to be shipped and assembled in another location.

Prime Agricultural Land

(1) Land used actively in the production of food, fiber or livestock. (2) All land that qualifies for rating as Class I or Class II in the Natural Resources Conservation Service land use compatibility classifications. (3) Land that qualifies for rating 80 through 100 in the Storie Index Rating. See [STORIE INDEX](#).

Prime Farmland

Land which has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for the production of crops. Prime Farmland must have been used for the production of irrigated crops within the last three years. Prime Farmland does not include publicly owned lands for which there is an adopted policy preventing agricultural use.

Principal

“Face” or “par value” of an instrument. It does not include accrued interest.

Principle

An assumption, fundamental rule or doctrine that guides policies, proposals, standards and implementation measures.

Private Road/Private Street

Privately owned (and usually privately maintained) motor vehicle access that is not dedicated as a public street. Typically the owner posts a sign indicating that the street is private property and limits traffic in some fashion. For density calculation purposes, some jurisdictions exclude private roads when establishing the total acreage of the site; however, aisles within and driveways serving private parking lots are not considered private roads.

Pro Rata

Refers to the proportionate distribution of something to something else or to some group, like the cost of infrastructure improvements associated with new development apportioned to the users of the infrastructure on the basis of projected use.

Prohousing Designation

The Prohousing Designation Program was authorized by the 2019-20 Budget Act and tasks the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) with designating jurisdictions as “Prohousing,” when they demonstrate policies and strategies to accelerate housing production. Prohousing jurisdictions will then be awarded additional points or preference funding and grant programs.

Program

An action, activity or strategy carried out in response to adopted policy to achieve a specific goal or objective. Policies and programs establish the who, how and when for carrying out the what and where of goals and objectives.

Property Tax

An ad valorem tax imposed on real property (land and permanently attached improvements) and tangible personal property (movable property). See [AD VALOREM TAX](#), [ASSESSED VALUATION](#), [GENERAL REVENUE](#), [MOTOR VEHICLE LICENSE FEE, TAX](#).

Proposition 4

Also called the Gann Initiative, this initiative, now Article XIIIB of the state constitution was drafted to be a companion measure to Proposition 13, Article XIII A of the constitution. Article XIIIB limits growth in government spending to changes in population and inflation.

Proposition 13

Article XIII A of the California Constitution, commonly known as Proposition 13, which limits the maximum annual increase of any ad valorem tax on real property to 1 percent of the full cash value of such property.

Proposition 62

A 1986 proposition that, among other things, implemented a majority vote requirement for general taxes. This portion of Proposition 62 was later ruled unconstitutional.

Proposition 98

Passed in 1988, this measure establishes a minimum level of funding for public schools and community colleges. This measure also provides that any state revenues in excess of the appropriations limit be spent on schools.

Proposition 172

A 1993 measure which places a one-half cent sales tax for local public safety in the constitution. The tax is imposed by the state and distributed to cities and counties.

Proximity

The distance between different land uses such as residential and commercial.

Public Owned Utilities (POUs)

Non-profit utility providers owned by a community and operated by municipalities, counties, states, public power districts or other public organizations. Within POUs, residents have a say in decisions and policies about rates, services, generating fuels and the environment.

Public and Quasi-Public Facilities

Institutional, academic, governmental and community service uses, either owned publicly or operated by non-profit organizations, including private hospitals and cemeteries.

Public Records

Most public agency documents are public records that must be made available for public inspection upon request. For example, agendas and other documents distributed by any person to a majority of the legislative body in connection with any matter subject to discussion at a public meeting item are public records, which must be made available to the public "without delay." If the agency distributes material prepared by it (including consultants) or a member of the legislative body during a meeting, copies of the material must be available for public inspection at the meeting. Materials prepared by some other person and distributed during a meeting must be made available after the meeting. See California Government Code sections 54957.5 and 6250 (open meetings law materials availability requirements). See also [BROWN ACT](#).

Public Services

See [MUNICIPAL SERVICES](#).

Q

Quality of Life

The degree to which individuals perceive themselves as able to function physically, emotionally and socially. On a larger scale, quality of life can be viewed as including all aspects of community life that have a direct and quantifiable influence on the physical and mental health of its members.

Quasi-Judicial Decisions

Involve individual projects that are being considered for approval, conditional approval or denial based on criteria previously established by some legislative action. Examples include zoning permits or other entitlements, such as variances.

R

Radiant Heating

An efficient heating system that warms cold objects, which then radiate heat into the surrounding space evenly.

Rail Banking

The practice of leaving the tracks, bridges and other infrastructure intact for potential use as trails or to preserve railroad rights-of-way.

Ranchette

A single dwelling unit occupied by a non-farming household on a parcel of 2.5 to 20 acres that has been subdivided from agricultural land.

Reach Code

A local ordinance that “reaches” beyond the state minimum requirements, intended to support meeting local and/or statewide energy and greenhouse gas reduction goals.

Real Property Transfer Tax

See [DOCUMENTARY TRANSFER TAX](#).

Reclamation

The reuse of resources, usually those present in solid wastes or sewage.

Reconstruction

As used in historic preservation, the process of reproducing by new construction the exact form and detail of a vanished structure as it appeared during a specific period of time. Reconstruction is often undertaken when the property to be reconstructed is essential for understanding and interpreting the value of a historic district and sufficient documentation exists to insure an exact reproduction of the original.

Recreation, Active

A type of recreation or activity that requires the use of organized play areas including, but not limited to, softball, baseball, football and soccer fields, tennis and basketball courts and various forms of children’s play equipment.

Recreation, Passive

Type of recreation or activity that does not require the use of organized play areas. Examples include open fields, trails and camping areas.

Redevelop

To demolish existing buildings; or to increase the overall floor area existing on a property; or both; irrespective of whether a change occurs in land use.

Referendum

A voter challenge to legislative action taken by a city council or county board of supervisors. If enough signatures are filed, the governing body must either rescind its decision or place the issue on the ballot for a vote.

Reforestation

Planting of forests on lands that have previously contained forests but that have been converted to some other use.

Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA)

Mandated by the state as part of the periodic process of updating local housing elements of the general plan. RHNA quantifies the need for housing, by household income group, within each region during specified planning periods. Communities use RHNA in land use planning, prioritizing local resource allocation, and in deciding how to address identified existing and future housing needs resulting from population, employment and household growth. See [COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS, HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT](#)

Regional Park

A park typically 150-500 acres in size focusing on activities and natural features not included in most other types of parks and often based on a specific scenic or recreational opportunity. See [COMMUNITY PARK](#), [NEIGHBORHOOD PARK](#), [PARKS](#).

Regional

Pertaining to activities or economies at a scale greater than that of a single jurisdiction and affecting a broad geographic area.

Regulation

A rule or order prescribed for managing government.

Regulatory Taking

A taking of private property for a public purpose that results from extensive regulation of land.

Rehabilitation

The repair, preservation and/or improvement of substandard housing.

Reimbursement for State Mandated Costs

Requirement that the state must reimburse local agencies for the cost of state-imposed programs. Process is commonly called "SB 90" after its original 1972 legislation. See California Constitution article XIII B, section 6.

Relocation Permit

Needed if a building is to be moved to a lot within the city and if the building is to cross a public street, alley or easement.

Renewability

Natural materials that are rapidly renewable, such as fast-growing trees and agricultural products.

Renewable Energy

Energy derived from sources that do not deplete natural resources. Examples include solar, wind and geothermal energy from the Earth's core.

Rents

Revenues received through the rental of public properties to private parties like convention space and library facilities.

Residential

Land designated in the city or county general plan and zoning ordinance for buildings consisting only of dwelling units. May be improved, vacant or unimproved. See [DWELLING UNIT](#).

Responsible Agency

In the California Environmental Quality Act, all public agencies other than the lead agency that have discretionary approval over a project. Responsible agencies send comments to the lead agency regarding the environmental impacts about which they have expertise. See [CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT](#).

Retrofit

To add materials and/or devices to an existing building or system to improve its operation, safety or efficiency. Buildings have been retrofitted to use solar energy and to strengthen their ability to withstand earthquakes, for example.

Reusability

Products that are long-lasting and require little maintenance.

Rezoning

An amendment to the map and/or text of a zoning ordinance to effect a change in the nature, density or intensity of uses allowed in a zoning district and/or on a designated parcel or land area. See [ZONING](#).

Richter Scale

A measure of the size or energy release of an earthquake at its source. The scale is logarithmic; the wave amplitude of each number on the scale is 10 times greater than that of the previous whole number.

Ridgeline

A line connecting the highest points along a ridge and separating drainage basins or small-scale drainage systems from one another.

Right-Of-Way

A strip of land occupied or intended to be occupied by certain transportation and public use facilities, like roads, railroads and utility lines.

Riparian Lands

Plant and wildlife areas adjacent to perennial and intermittent streams. Riparian areas are delineated by the existence of plant species normally found near freshwater.

Riparian Rights

The right of a landowner to make use of the water in a river or stream on or bordering a property.

Runoff

Water from rain or snow that is not absorbed into the ground but instead flows over less permeable surfaces into streams and rivers.

S

Safety Element

One of the eight state-mandated elements of a local general plan, it contains adopted goals, policies and implementation programs for the protection of the community from any unreasonable risks associated with seismic and geologic hazards, flooding, and wildland and urban fires. Many safety elements also incorporate a review of police needs, objectives, facilities and services.

Sales Tax

The sales tax is imposed on retailers for the privilege of selling tangible personal property in California. Tax base is the total retail price. See [TAX BASE](#).

Sanitary Landfill

The controlled placement of refuse within a limited area, followed by compaction and covering with a suitable thickness of earth and other containment material.

Sanitary Sewer

A system of subterranean conduits that carries refuse liquids or waste matter to a plant where the sewage is treated, as contrasted with storm drainage systems (that carry surface water) and septic tanks or leech fields (that hold refuse liquids and waste matter on-site). See [SEPTIC SYSTEM](#).

Scenic Highway Corridor

The area outside a highway right-of-way that is generally visible to persons traveling on the highway.

Scenic Highway/Scenic Route

A highway, road, drive or street that, in addition to its transportation function, provides opportunities for the enjoyment of natural and man-made scenic resources and access or direct views to areas or scenes of exceptional beauty or historic or cultural interest. The aesthetic values of scenic routes often are protected and enhanced by regulations governing the development of property or the placement of outdoor advertising. Until the mid-1980's, general plans in California were required to include a scenic highways element.

School Impact Fees

Fees imposed on new developments to offset their impacts on area schools.

Second Unit

A self-contained living unit, either attached to or detached from, and in addition to, the primary residential unit on a single lot. See [ACCESORY DWELLING UNIT](#), [GRANNY FLAT](#).

Section 8 Rental Assistance Program

A federal (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development) rent-subsidy program that is one of the main sources of federal housing assistance for low-income households. The program operates by providing "housing assistance payments" to owners, developers and public housing agencies to make up the difference between the "Fair Market Rent" of a unit (set

by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development) and the household's contribution toward the rent, which is calculated at 30 percent of the household's adjusted gross monthly income (GMI). "Section 8" includes programs for new construction, existing housing and substantial or moderate housing rehabilitation.

Seiche

A standing wave in an enclosed or partially enclosed body of water such as a lake, reservoir or bay. Seiches may be caused by wind, seismic activity or tsunamis and are often imperceptible to the naked eye.

Seismic

Caused by or subject to earthquakes or earth vibrations.

Senior Housing

A broad term that is used to describe any type of living facilities that are maintained for the use of people who have reached the age of retirement. There are different types of senior housing designed to meet the needs of seniors in various states of health and with different levels of activity.

Seniors

Persons age 62 and older.

Septic System

A sewage-treatment system that includes a settling tank through which liquid sewage flows and in which solid sewage settles and is decomposed by bacteria in the absence of oxygen. Septic systems are often used for individual-home waste disposal where an urban sewer system is not available. See [SANITARY SEWER](#).

Service Charges

Charges imposed to support services to individuals or to cover the cost of providing such services. The fees charged are limited to the cost of providing the service or regulation required (plus overhead).

Setback Regulations

The requirements that a building be set back a certain distance from the street (front), side or rear lot line. The frontage or front of a lot is usually defined as the side nearest the street. On a corner lot, the narrowest side is usually determined to be the front lot line. In triangular or other odd-shaped lots, rear lot lines may need to be defined more precisely in the code or judged by the planning commission or other hearing body with appropriate jurisdiction on a case-by-case basis.

Setback

The minimum distance required by zoning to be maintained between two structures or between a structure and a property line.

Settlement

(1) The drop in elevation of a ground surface caused by settling or compacting. (2) The gradual downward movement of an engineered structure due to compaction. Differential settlement is uneven settlement, where one part of a structure settles more or at a different rate than another part.

Short-Term Financing Methods

Techniques used for many purposes, such as meeting anticipated cash flow deficits, interim financing of a project and project implementation. Using these techniques involves issuance of short-term notes. Voter approval is not required.

Sign Permit

This permit allows for a sign to be erected in compliance with stated policies or conditions.

Sign

Any outdoor or indoor object, device, display or structure that is used to advertise, identify, display, direct or attract attention to a person, organization, business, product, service, event or location by any means, including words, letters, figures, design, symbols, fixtures, colors, illumination or projected images. See [OUTDOOR ADVERTISING STRUCTURE](#).

Significant Effect

A beneficial or detrimental impact on the environment. May include but is not limited to significant changes in an area's air, water and land resources.

Siltation

(1) The accumulating deposition of eroded material. (2) The gradual filling in of streams and other bodies of water with sand, silt and clay.

Single Room Occupancy (SRO)

A single room, typically 80-250 square feet, with a sink and closet, but which requires the occupant to share a communal bathroom, shower, and kitchen. See [AFFORDABLE HOUSING](#).

Site

A parcel of land used or intended for one use or a group of uses and having frontage on a public or an approved private street. See [LOT](#).

Site Plan Review

The process whereby local officials, usually the planning commission and staff, review the site plans of a developer to assure that they meet the purposes and standards of the zone, provide for necessary public facilities like streets, parks and schools, and protect adjacent properties through appropriate siting of structures and landscaping.

Site Plan

A plan, to scale, showing uses and structures proposed for a parcel of land. It includes lot lines, streets, building sites, public open space, buildings, major landscape features – both natural and man-made – and, depending on requirements, the locations of proposed utility lines.

Smart Growth

A broad concept that describes a series of principles that encourage development that better serves the economic, environmental and social needs of communities than do many of the principles that have guided development in the post-World War II period. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency identified the following ten principles of smart growth. (1) Mix land uses (2) Take advantage of compact building design (3) Create a range of housing opportunities and choices (4) Create walkable neighborhoods (5) Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place (6) Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas (7) Strengthen and direct development toward existing communities (8) Provide a variety of transportation choices (9) Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost effective (10) Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions.

Smart Code

A comprehensive form-based zoning and planning approach that incorporates smart growth and New Urbanism principles to help organize the human habitat. It is based on the idea of the Transect, which defines a continuum of urbanized conditions

ranging from the permanently rural and undeveloped, to the dense, intensely urbanized city centers.

Social Capital

The individual and communal time and energy that is available for such things as community improvement, social networking, civic engagement, personal recreation and other activities that create social bonds between individuals and groups. Circumstances that prevent or limit the availability of social capital for a community and its members can have a negative effect on the health and well-being of the members of that community. These negative effects on health and well-being can in turn have negative effects on the community as a whole.

Solar Access

The provision of direct sunlight to an area specified for solar energy collection when the sun's azimuth is within 45 degrees of true south.

Solar System, Active

A system using a mechanical device, like a pump or a fan, and energy in addition to solar energy to transport a conductive medium (air or water) between a solar collector and the interior of a building for the purpose of heating or cooling.

Solar System, Passive

A system that uses direct heat transfer from thermal mass instead of mechanical power to distribute collected heat. Passive systems rely on building design and materials to collect and store heat and to create natural ventilation for cooling.

Solid Waste

Any unwanted or discarded material that is not a liquid or gas. Includes organic wastes, paper products, metals, glass, plastics, cloth, brick, rock, soil, leather, rubber, yard wastes and wood, but does not include sewage and hazardous materials. Organic wastes and paper products comprise about 75 percent of typical urban solid waste.

Special District

A governmental entity formed to deliver a specific service, like fire protection, water service or the maintenance of open space.

Special Populations

Certain classifications used to identify target groups including the poor, women, children, the elderly and members of racial/ethnic minority groups.

Special Tax

Tax earmarked for a specific purpose or governmental program. Special taxes require a two-thirds vote of the electorate voting in an election in order to be implemented. See [COMMUNITY FACILITIES DISTRICT](#), [EARMARKED FUNDS](#), [MELLO-ROOS BONDS](#), [MELLO-ROOS COMMUNITY FACILITIES TAX](#), [POLICE AND FIRE SPECIAL TAX](#), [TAX](#).

Specific Plan

A plan that an agency may adopt to implement the general plan in all or part of the area covered by the general plan. See California Government Code section 65450. A specific plan must specify in detail the land uses, public and private facilities needed to support the land uses, phasing of development, standards for the conservation, development and use of natural resources, and a program of implementation measures, including financing measures. A specific plan is most often adopted by ordinance, but can also be adopted by resolution. See [GENERAL PLAN](#).

Speed, Average

The sum of the speeds of the cars observed divided by the number of cars observed.

Speed, Critical

The speed that is not exceeded by 85 percent of the cars observed.

Sphere of Influence

The probable physical boundaries and service area of a local agency, as determined by the Local Agency Formation Commission of the county. See [LOCAL AGENCY FORMATION COMMISSION](#).

Spot Zoning

The awarding of a use classification to an isolated parcel of land that is detrimental or incompatible with the uses of the surrounding area, particularly when such an act favors a particular owner. A special circumstance like historical value, environmental importance, or scenic value would justify special zoning for a small area. The application of a use classification to an isolated parcel, when done in the context of a comprehensive zoning or general plan update, is not necessarily considered spot zoning. See [ZONING](#).

Sprawl

The process in which the spread of development across the landscape far outpaces population growth. The landscape sprawl creates has four characteristics. a population that is widely dispersed in low-density development; rigid separation of uses, so that homes, commerce and workplaces are segregated from one another; a network of roads laid out to separate land into huge blocks and offering poor access; and a lack of well-defined, thriving activity centers, such as downtowns and town centers. Most of the other features usually associated with sprawl – a lack of transportation choices, relative uniformity of housing options and difficulty walking from place to place – result from these conditions.

Standards

(1) A rule or measure establishing a level of quality or quantity that must be complied with or satisfied. Government Code §65302 requires that general plans spell out the objectives, principles, “standards,” and proposals of the general plan. Examples of standards might include the number of acres of park land per 1,000 population that the community will attempt to acquire and improve, or the “traffic Level of Service” (LOS) that the plan hopes to attain. (2) Requirements in a zoning ordinance that govern building and development as distinguished from use restrictions. For example, site-design regulations such as lot area, height limit, frontage, landscaping, and floor area ratio.

State Clearinghouse

In California, the State Clearinghouse is part of the Governor’s Office of Planning and Research and is responsible for distributing environmental documents to state agencies. Lead agencies are required to submit their draft Environmental Impact Reports or negative declarations if a state agency is the lead agency, a state agency is a responsible agency or trustee agency or the project is of statewide, regional or area importance. See [CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT](#), [ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT](#), [NEGATIVE DECLARATION](#).

State Responsibility Areas

Areas of the state in which the financial responsibility for preventing and suppressing fires has been determined by the State Board of Forestry (pursuant to Public Resources Code 4125) to be primarily the responsibility of the state.

Stock Cooperative Housing

Multiple-family ownership housing in which the occupant of a unit holds a share of stock in a corporation that owns the structure in which the unit is located.

Storie Index

A numerical system (0-100) rating the degree to which a particular soil can grow plants or produce crops, based on four factors: soil profile, surface texture, slope and soil limitations. See [PRIME AGRICULTURAL LAND](#).

Storm Surge

An abnormal rise of water generated by a storm, over and above the predicted astronomical tides.

Stormwater Detention

Any storm drainage technique that retards or detains runoff, like detention or retention basins, parking lot storage, rooftop storage, porous pavement or dry wells. See [DETENTION DAM](#).

Street Furniture

Features associated with a street that are intended to enhance its physical character and use by pedestrians, such as benches, trash receptacles, kiosks, lights and newspaper racks.

Street Network or Grid

The patterns formed by roadways and the extent to which they are connected to each other (i.e., “connectivity”). For example, the traditional urban block-like grid involves a dense matrix of interconnected streets typically seen in older urban areas. The hierarchical grid, common in most suburban areas, consists of sets of dead-end streets and cul-de-sacs that feed into secondary roadways that ultimately feed into major roadways; traffic collects on main arteries.

Street Tree Plan

A comprehensive plan for all trees on public streets that sets goals for solar access, and standards for species selection, maintenance and replacement criteria, and for planting trees in patterns that will define neighborhood character while avoiding monotony or maintenance problems.

Street-Right-Of-Way

is publicly owned land that contains both the street and a strip of land on either side of the street that holds appurtenant facilities (i.e., sidewalks, sewers and storm drains).

Streets, Local

See [STREETS, MINOR](#).

Streets, Major

The transportation network that includes a hierarchy of freeways, arterials, and collectors to service through traffic. See [ARTERIAL](#), [COLLECTOR](#), [EXPRESSWAY](#), [FREEWAY](#).

Streets, Minor

Local streets not shown on the circulation plan, map or diagram, whose primary intended purpose is to provide access to fronting properties.

Streets, Through

Streets that extend continuously between other major streets in the community.

Streetscaping

Includes improving traffic management, adding landscaping, sidewalks, building fronts and street amenities, such as garbage cans and benches.

Strip Development

Commercial and high-density residential development located adjacent to major streets. This type of development is characterized by its shallow depth, street-oriented layout, lack of unified design theme, and numerous points of street access. It impedes smooth traffic flow.

Strip Zoning

A zone normally consisting of a ribbon of uses fronting both sides of a major street and extending inward for approximately half a block. Strip commercial development is the most common form. It usually is characterized by an assortment of gas stations, drive-in and fast-food restaurants, motels, tourist shops and some automobile sales and service operations.

Structure

Anything constructed or erected that requires location on the ground (excluding swimming pools, fences and walls used as fences).

Subdivision Map Act

California law that this act vests in local legislative bodies the regulation and control of the design and improvement of subdivisions, including the requirement for tentative and final maps. See California Government Code sections 66410 and following.

Subdivision

The division of a tract of land into defined lots, either improved or unimproved, which can be separately conveyed by sale or lease, and which can be altered or developed. The process often includes setting aside land for streets, sidewalks, parks, public areas and other infrastructure needs—including the designation of the location of utilities.

Subregional

Pertaining to a portion of a region.

Subsidence

The sudden sinking or gradual downward settling and compaction of soil and other surface material with little or no horizontal motion. Subsidence may be caused by a variety of human and natural activity, including earthquakes. See [SETTLEMENT](#).

Subsidize

To assist by payment of a sum of money or by the granting of terms or favors that reduce the need for monetary expenditures. Housing subsidies may take the form of mortgage interest deductions or tax credits from federal and/or state income taxes, sale or lease at less than market value of land to be used for the construction of housing, payments to supplement a minimum affordable rent, and the like.

Substandard Housing

Residential dwellings that, because of their physical condition, do not provide safe and sanitary housing.

Substantial Evidence

Under some circumstances, a local agency's land use decision must be supported by what is called "substantial evidence" in light of the whole record. The public can assist the agency in gathering and putting information into the record that may provide the basis for the agency's decision. The agency's findings must be supported by substantial evidence and then the findings must support the agency's decision.

Subvention

Subsidy or financial support received from county, state or federal government. The state and counties levy certain taxes that are “subvened” to cities, including motor vehicle license fees, state mandated costs and motor vehicle fuel tax. See [MOTOR VEHICLE LICENSE FEE](#), [REIMBURSEMENT FOR STATE MANDATED COSTS](#).

Supplemental Property Tax

In the event a property changes ownership, the county collects a supplemental property tax assessment in the current tax year by determining a supplemental value. In future tax periods, the property carries the full cash value. See [PROPERTY TAX, PROPOSITION 13](#).

Sustainability

Community use of natural resources in a way that does not jeopardize the ability of future generations to live and prosper. Sustainability presumes that resources are finite, and should be used conservatively and wisely with a view to long-term priorities and consequences of the ways in which resources are used.

Sustainable Development

Development that maintains or enhances equity, economic opportunity and community well-being while protecting and restoring the natural environment upon which people and economies depend. Sustainable development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

T

Taking

The appropriation by government of private land for which just compensation must be paid. Another term for Eminent Domain. Often used when the claim is made that a government regulation is akin to eminent domain, though the legal standard requires the denial of all economically viable use of the land. See [CONDEMNATION](#).

Target Areas

Specifically designated sections of the community where loans and grants are made to bring about a specific outcome, such as the rehabilitation of housing affordable by very low-and low-income households.

Tax Allocation Bonds

Former redevelopment agencies could not receive or spend tax increment funds until they established debt. For this reason, redevelopment agencies established debt by issuing Tax Allocation Bonds secured by the available tax increment that grew since the Redevelopment Agency was first established. Health and Safety Code (H&SC) section 34171 (d)(1)(A) defines the obligations of bond documents as enforceable obligations of Successor Agencies and all payments due are to be included in the Recognized Obligation Payment Schedule (ROPS). See [BLIGHT](#), [BOND](#), [COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY](#).

Tax Allocation Districts (TAD)

Defined areas where real estate property tax money gathered above a certain threshold for a certain period of time (typically 25 years) is used for a specified improvement. The funds raised from a tax allocation district are placed in a tax-free bond where the money can continue to grow. These improvements are typically for revitalization and especially to complete redevelopment efforts. TAD is a geographic area in which TIF can be used.

Tax Base

The objects or transactions to which a tax is applied (like parcels of property, retail sales, etc.). State law or local ordinances define the tax base and the objects or transactions exempted from taxation.

Tax Increment Financing (TIF)

Tax increment financing (TIF) tools work by transferring the property tax revenues that flow from a designated project area to the city, county and other taxing entities. Additional tax revenue in future years (the “increment”) is diverted into a separate pool, which can be used to pay for improvements directly or to pay back bonds issued against the anticipated TIF revenue. In California, TIF has historically been used by redevelopment agencies to raise funding for infrastructure improvements, housing and other projects in redevelopment areas. However, with the dissolution of redevelopment agencies as of February 1, 2012, the traditional form of TIF is not available.

Tax Rate

The amount of tax applied to the tax base. The rate may flat, incremental or a percentage of the tax base or any other reasonable method. See [TAX](#), [TAX BASE](#).

Tax

Compulsory charge levied by a government for the purpose of financing services performed for the common benefit. See [TAX BASE](#), [TAX RATE](#).

Telecommuting

Working at home or in a location other than the primary place of work, making use of the internet, email and telephone.

Temporary Use

A use established for a fixed period of time with the intent to discontinue such use upon the expiration of the time period.

Tentative Subdivision Map or Tentative Map

The map or drawing illustrating a subdivision proposal. The city or county will conditionally approve or deny the proposed subdivision based upon the design depicted on the tentative map.

Tentative Subdivision Map

A map showing the design of a proposed subdivision of five or more lots. It includes existing conditions in and around the subdivision. This is the stage when a city or county must place all the restrictions it deems necessary on the map. The term “tentative” is misleading, because additional conditions or substantive design changes cannot be required once a tentative subdivision map is approved. See [FINAL SUBDIVISION MAP](#), [SUBDIVISION MAP ACT](#).

Tract Map

See [FINAL MAP SUBDIVISION](#).

Traditional Development

Similar to [NEOTRADITIONAL DEVELOPMENT](#).

Traffic Calming

A strategic set of physical changes to streets to reduce vehicle speeds and volumes. It refers to the use of street design techniques, such as curb extensions, traffic circles and speed humps, to slow and control the flow of automobile traffic.

Traffic Model

A mathematical representation of traffic movement within an area or region based on observed relationships between the kind and intensity of development in specific areas. Many traffic models operate on the theory that trips are produced by persons living in residential areas who are attracted by various non-residential land uses. See [TRIP](#).

Traffic Zone

In a mathematical traffic model the area to be studied is divided into zones, with each zone treated as producing and attracting trips. The production of trips by a zone is based on the number of trips to or from work or shopping or other trips produced per dwelling unit.

Transect

The characteristics of ecosystems and the transition from one ecosystem to another. Establishes a hierarchy of places/ contexts from the most natural to the most urban. The Natural-to-Urban Transect is a means for considering and organizing the human habitat in a continuum of intensity that ranges from the most rural condition to the most urban.

Transfer of Development Rights

Programs that use the market to implement and pay for development density and location decisions by allowing landowners to sever development rights from properties in government-designated low-density areas. This makes it possible for development to be sold to purchasers who want to increase the density of development in areas that local governments have selected as higher-density areas.

Transient Occupancy Tax

Local tax on persons staying 30 days or less in a hotel, inn, motel, tourist home, non-membership campground or other lodging facility. Also called Transient Lodging Tax or Bed Tax. See [AD VALOREM TAX](#), [EXCISE TAX](#), [TAX](#).

Transit, Public

A system of regularly scheduled buses and/or trains available to the public on a fee-per-ride basis. Also called mass transit.

Transit

The conveyance of persons or goods from one place to another by means of a local public transportation system.

Transit-Dependent

Refers to persons unable to operate automobiles or other motorized vehicles, or those who do not own motorized vehicles. Transit-dependent citizens must rely on transit, paratransit or owners of private vehicles for transportation. Transit-dependent citizens include the young, the disabled, the elderly, the poor and those with prior violations of motor vehicle laws.

Transition Zone

Controlled airspace extending upward from 700 or more feet above the ground wherein procedures for aircraft approach have been designated. The transition zone lies closer to an airport than the outer approach zone and outside of the inner approach zone. See [APPROACH ZONE](#), [CLEAR ZONE](#), [OUTER APPROACH ZONE](#).

Transitional Housing

Shelter provided to the homeless for an extended period, often as long as 18 months, and generally integrated with other social services and counseling programs to assist in the transition to self-sufficiency through the acquisition of a stable income and permanent housing. See [EMERGENCY SHELTER](#).

Transit-Oriented Development (TOD)

Moderate- to higher-density development, located within easy walk of a major transit stop, generally with a mix of residential, employment and shopping opportunities designed for pedestrians without excluding the auto. TOD can be new construction or redevelopment of one or more buildings whose design and orientation facilitate transit use.

Transportation Demand Management (TDM)

A strategy for reducing demand on the road system by reducing the number of vehicles using the roadways and/or increasing the number of persons per vehicle. TDM attempts to reduce the number of persons who drive alone during the commute period and to increase the number in carpools, vanpools, buses or trains, or walking or biking. TDM can be an element of TSM (see below).

Transportation Systems Management (TSM)

A comprehensive strategy to coordinate many forms of transportation (like car, bus, carpool, rapid transit, bicycle) to reduce the impact of additional development on transportation capacity. Transportation Systems Management focuses on using existing highway and transit systems more efficiently rather than expanding them. TSM measures are characterized by their low cost and quick implementation time frame, like computerized traffic signals, metered freeway ramps and one-way streets.

Transportation Tax

Special tax imposed by counties for county transportation needs. Typically collected with the sales and use tax, some cities receive a portion of the transportation tax usually in .25 percent tax rate increments. See [AD VALOREM TAX](#), [SPECIAL TAX](#), [TAX](#).

Trees, Street

Trees strategically planted-usually in parkway strips, medians, or along streets-to enhance the visual quality of a street. See [MEDIAN STRIP](#), [PARKWAY STRIP](#), [STREET TREE PLAN](#).

Trip Generation

The dynamics that account for people making trips in automobiles or by means of public transportation. Trip generation is the basis for estimating the level of use for a transportation system and the impact of additional development or transportation facilities on an existing, local transportation system. Trip generations of households are correlated with destinations that attract household members for specific purposes.

Trip

A one-way journey that proceeds from an origin to a destination via a single mode of transportation; the smallest unit of movement considered in transportation studies. Each trip has one “production end,” (or origin—often from home, but not always), and one “attraction end,” (destination). See [TRAFFIC MODEL](#).

Truck Route

A path of circulation required for all vehicles exceeding set weight or axle limits, a truck route follows major arterials through commercial or industrial areas and avoids sensitive areas.

Tsunami

A wave, or series of waves, generated when a large volume of a body of water, such as an ocean, bay or lake, is displaced rapidly. Tsunamis may be caused by earthquakes, volcanic eruptions or other underwater explosions, landslides or other disturbances.

Turbidity

A thick, hazy condition of air or water resulting from the presence of suspended particulates or other pollutants.

U

Underutilized Parcel

A parcel that is not developed but could be redeveloped in a manner that would yield substantially more development and/or value based on its current or zoning. A parcel may also be considered underutilized based on its potential to be rezoned for the purposes of meeting state requirements, such as affordable housing in the RHNA context.

Undevelopable

Specific areas where topographic, geologic and/or surficial soil conditions indicate a significant danger to future occupants and a liability to the city or county are designated as “undevelopable” by the city or county.

Undue

Improper, or more than necessary.

Uniform Building Code (UBC)

A national, standard building code that sets minimum standards for construction. See [BUILDING CODE](#).

Uniform Housing Code (UHC)

State housing regulations governing the condition of habitable structures with regard to health and safety standards and providing for the conservation and rehabilitation of housing in accordance with the code.

Universal Design

Designing for the entire lifespan of community residents and creating a community with the maximum flexibility and usability for the full spectrum of people.

Upzone

The rezoning of land to a less restrictive zone (for example, from industrial to residential). Upzoning generally increases the economic value of land.

Urban

Of, relating to, characteristic of, or constituting a city. Urban areas are generally characterized by moderate and higher density residential development, commercial development and industrial development, and the availability of public services required for that development, specifically central water and sewer, an extensive road network, public transit and other such services (for example, safety and emergency response). Development not providing such services may be “non-urban” or “rural.”

Urban Design

The attempt to give form, in terms of both beauty and function, to selected urban areas or to whole cities. Urban design is concerned with the location, mass and design of various urban components and combines elements of urban planning, architecture and landscape architecture.

Urban Growth Boundary

An officially adopted and mapped line dividing land to be developed from land to be protected for natural or rural uses. Urban growth boundaries (also called urban limit lines) are regulatory tools, often designated for long periods of time (20 or more years) to provide greater certainty for both development and conservation goals.

Urban Heat Island (UHI)

Refers to the tendency for urban areas to have warmer air temperatures than the surrounding rural landscape, due to the low albedo of streets, sidewalks, parking lots, and buildings. These surfaces absorb solar radiation during the day and release it at night, resulting in higher night temperatures.

Urban Land Use

Residential, commercial or industrial land use in areas where urban services are available.

Urban Limit Line

A boundary, sometimes parcel-specific, located to mark the outer limit beyond which urban development will not be allowed. It has the aim of discouraging urban sprawl by containing urban development during a specified period, and its location may be modified over time.

Urban Reserve

An area outside of an urban service area but within an urban growth boundary, in which future development and extension of municipal services are contemplated but not imminent.

Urban Services Area

(1) An area in which urban services will be provided and outside of which such services will not be extended. (2) Developed, undeveloped or agricultural land, either incorporated or unincorporated, within the sphere of influence of a city, which is served or will be served during the first five years of an adopted capital improvement program by urban facilities, utilities, and services. The boundary around an urban service area is called the “urban service area boundary” and is to be developed in cooperation with a city and adopted by the county’s local agency formation commission. See California Government Code section 56080.

Urban Services

Utilities (like water, gas, electricity and sewer) and public services (like police, fire, schools, parks and recreation) provided to an urbanized or urbanizing area.

Urban Sprawl

See [SPRAWL](#).

Use Permit

The discretionary and conditional review of an activity or function or operation on a site or in a building or facility.

Use Tax

The use tax is imposed on the user of a product whenever the sales tax does not apply, such as on goods purchased out-of-state and delivered for use in California and on long-term leases. Tax base is the total retail price. See [AD VALOREM TAX](#), [TAX](#), [TAX BASE](#).

Use

The purpose for which a lot or structure is or may be leased, occupied, maintained, arranged, designed, intended, constructed, erected, moved, altered and/or enlarged in accordance with the city or county zoning ordinance and general plan land use designations.

Use, Nonconforming

See [NONCONFORMING USE](#).

Utility Corridors

Rights-of-way or easements for utility lines on either publicly or privately owned property. See [EASEMENT](#), [RIGHT-OF-WAY](#).

Utility Users Tax

Tax imposed on the consumer (residential and/or commercial) of any combination of electric, gas, cable television, water, broadband and telephone services. See [EXCISE TAX](#), [TAX](#).

V

Vacant

Lands or buildings that are not actively used for any purpose.

Variance

A device which grants a property owner relief from certain provisions of a zoning ordinance when, because of the particular physical surroundings, shape or topographical condition of the property, compliance would result in a particular hardship upon the owner, as distinguished from a mere inconvenience or a desire to make more money. A variance may be granted, for example, to reduce yard or setback requirements, or the number of parking or loading spaces.

Variance

A limited waiver from the requirements of the zoning ordinance. Variance requests are subject to public hearing and may only be granted under special circumstances.

Vehicle-Miles Traveled (VMT)

The miles traveled by motor vehicles over a specified length of time (e.g., daily, monthly or yearly) or over a specified road or transportation corridor. VMT is a key measure of overall street and highway use. Reducing VMT is often a major objective in efforts to reduce vehicular congestion and achieve regional air quality goals.

Very-Low Income Household

A household with an annual income usually no greater than 50 percent of the area median family income adjusted by household size, as determined by a survey of incomes conducted by a city or a county, or in the absence of such a survey, based on the latest available eligibility limits established by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for the Section 8 housing program. See [SECTION 8 RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM](#).

Vested Right

A right that has become absolute and fixed and cannot be denied by subsequent conditions or changes in regulations, unless it is taken and paid for. There is no vested right to an existing zoning classification. Once development has been started or completed, there is a right to maintain that particular use, regardless of the classification given the property.

View Corridor

The line of sight - identified as to height, width and distance - of an observer looking toward an object of significance to the community (like ridgelines, rivers and historic buildings, for example); the route that directs the viewer's attention.

Viewshed

The area within view from a defined observation point.

VLF

See [MOTOR VEHICLE LICENSE FEE](#).

Volume-to-Capacity Ratio

A measure of the operating capacity of a roadway or intersection, in terms of the number of vehicles passing through, divided by the number of vehicles that theoretically could pass through when the roadway or intersection is operating at its designed capacity. Abbreviated as "V/C." At a V/C ratio of 1.0, the roadway or intersection is operating at capacity. If the ratio is less than 1.0, the traffic facility has additional capacity. Although ratios slightly greater than 1.0 are possible, it is more likely that the peak hour will elongate into a peak period. See [LEVEL OF SERVICE \(TRAFFIC\)](#).

W

Walkability Audit

An unbiased examination/ evaluation to identify concerns for pedestrians related to the safety, access, comfort and convenience of the walking environment. The audit also assesses potential policy, educational or enforcement alternatives or solutions.

Walkable Community

Catering to non-motorized forms of transportation. Walkable communities make pedestrian activity possible, thus expanding transportation options, and creating streetscapes that better serves pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders and automobiles. Walkable communities locate goods and services within an easy and safe walk for community residents and employees.

Water Table

The upper surface of groundwater, or that level below which the soil is seasonally saturated with water.

Watercourse

Natural or once natural flowing (perennially or intermittently) water including rivers, streams and creeks. Includes natural waterways that have been channelized, but does not include manmade channels, ditches and underground drainage and sewage systems.

Water-Efficient Landscaping

Landscaping designed to minimize water use and maximize energy efficiency.

Watershed

The total area above a given point on a watercourse that contributes water to its flow; the entire region drained by a waterway or watercourse that drains into a lake, or reservoir.

Waterway

See [WATERCOURSE](#).

Weather

Atmospheric condition at any given time or place. It is measured in terms of such things as wind, temperature, humidity, atmospheric pressure, cloudiness and precipitation. See [CLIMATE](#)

Wetlands

Transitional areas between terrestrial and aquatic systems where the water table is usually at or near the surface, or the land is covered by shallow water. Under a “unified” methodology now used by all federal agencies, wetlands are defined as “those areas meeting certain criteria for hydrology, vegetation and soils.”

Wildland Fire

A fire occurring in a suburban or rural area that contains uncultivated lands, timber, range, watershed, brush or grasslands. This includes areas where there is a mingling of developed and undeveloped lands.

Wildlife Refuge

An area maintained in a natural state for the preservation of both animal and plant life.

Williamson Act

Known formally as the California Land Conservation Act of 1965, it was designed as an incentive to retain prime agricultural land and open-space in agricultural use, thereby slowing its conversion to urban and suburban development. The program entails a ten-year contract between the city or county and an owner of land whereby the land is taxed on the basis of its agricultural use rather than its market value. The land becomes subject to certain enforceable restrictions, and certain conditions need to be met prior to approval of an agreement. See Government Code section 51200 and following.

Woodlands

Lands covered with woods or trees.

Y

Yard

The open space between a lot line and the buildable area within which no structure may be located, except as provided in the zoning ordinance.

Yield

The total amount of revenue a government expects to receive from a tax, determined by multiplying the tax rate by the tax base. Also, the annual rate of return on an investment, expressed as a percentage of the investment. See [TAX](#), [TAX BASE](#), [TAX RATE](#).

Z

Zero Emission Vehicle (ZEV)

Vehicles which produce no emissions from the on-board source of power (e.g., an electric vehicle).

Zero Lot Line

A development approach in which a building is sited on one or more lot lines. Conceivably, three of the four sides of the building could be on the lot lines. The intent is to allow more flexibility in site design and to increase the amount of usable open space on the lot.

Zone, Combining

A special purpose zone that is superimposed over the regular zoning map. Combining zones are used for a variety of purposes, such as airport compatibility, floodplain or wetlands protection, historic designation or special parking regulations. Also called “overlay zone.”

Zone, Interim

A zoning designation that temporarily reduces or freezes allowable development in an area until a permanent classification can be fixed; generally assigned during general plan preparation to provide a basis for permanent zoning.

Zone, Traffic

In a mathematical traffic model the area to be studied is divided into zones, with each zone treated as producing and attracting trips. The production of trips by a zone is based on the number of trips to or from work or shopping, or other trips produced per dwelling unit. AKA traffic analysis zone or TAZ.

Zoning

The division of a city or county by legislative regulations into areas, or zones, that specify allowable uses for real property and size restrictions for buildings within these areas; a program that implements policies of the general plan. See [GENERAL PLAN](#), [INCLUSIONARY ZONING](#), [REZONING](#), [SPECIFIC PLAN](#), [SPOT ZONING](#).

Zoning Adjustment Board

A body appointed by the local legislative body to consider minor zoning adjustments such as conditional use permits and variances. It is empowered to conduct public hearings and to impose conditions of approval. Its decision may be appealed to the local legislative body. Not all jurisdictions utilize this model.

Zoning Administrator

A planning department staff member responsible for hearing minor zoning permits. Typically, the zoning administrator considers variances and conditional use permits and may interpret the provisions of the zoning ordinance when questions arise. His/her decision may be appealed to the local legislative body.

Zoning Amendment

An amendment to or a change in the zoning ordinance. Rezoning can take three forms. (1) a comprehensive revision or modification of the zoning text and map; (2) a text change in zoning requirements; and (3) a change in the zoning designation of a particular parcel or parcels of land.

Zoning District

A designated section of a city or county for which prescribed land use requirements and building and development standards are uniform.

Zoning Map

Government Code section 65851 permits a legislative body to divide a county, a city or portions thereof into zones of the number, shape, and area it deems best suited to carry out the purposes of the zoning ordinance. These zones are delineated on a map or maps called the zoning map.

Zoning, Exclusionary

Development regulations that result in the exclusion of low- and moderate-income and/or minority families from a community.

Zoning, Incentive

The awarding of bonus credits to a development in the form of allowing more intensive use of land if public benefits such as preservation of greater than the minimum required open-space, provision for low- and moderate-income housing, or plans for public plazas and courts at ground level are included in a project.

Zoning, Inclusionary

Regulations that increase housing choice by providing the opportunity to construct more diverse and economical housing to meet the needs of low- and moderate-income families. Often such regulations require a minimum percentage of housing for low- and moderate-income households in new housing developments and in conversions of apartments to condominiums.

