

**COUNCIL POLICY**

SUBJECT: MAINTENANCE OF FUTURE URBANIZING AREA AS AN URBAN RESERVE  
POLICY NO.: 600-29  
EFFECTIVE DATE: October 26, 1993

**BACKGROUND:**

The Progress Guide and General Plan for the City of San Diego incorporates “Guidelines for Future Development” which specify the residential growth management goals and objectives of the City and recommendations for implementation of those objectives. The residential growth management program is premised upon the division of the City into three planning areas: Urbanized; Planned Urbanizing; and Future Urbanizing.

The Future Urbanizing area generally includes that land which is presently vacant and is zoned A-1 primarily for agricultural uses, which is generally farthest removed from the City’s central business district and from existing developed areas of the City, and which is farthest removed from the service areas of most existing City facilities and services. There typically are no community, specific, or precise plans either adopted, in preparation or programmed for this area. Servicing this area would represent an expensive and inefficient use of City resources. This area is not expected nor is it needed to meet the demand for projected urban development since there is an ample supply of land available for development in the Urbanized and Planned Urbanizing areas. During the planning period, however, some land in this area may need to be shifted to the Planned Urbanizing area in order to meet presently unanticipated demands to enable the land market to operate more freely.

The City’s objectives in this area, therefore, are to avoid premature urbanization, to conserve open space and natural environmental features, and to protect the fiscal resources of the City by precluding costly sprawl and/or leapfrog urban development. The Future Urbanizing area, or at least a substantial part thereof, is to be maintained for the planning period as an “urban reserve,” a concept embodied in the State’s “Urban Strategy for California” (State Office of Planning and Research, February 1978) as well as the City’s Progress Guide and General Plan (Approved, February 26, 1979).

The delineation of the Future Urbanizing area is not intended to be permanent; rather, it is an interim designation designed, as part of the overall growth management program, to prevent premature urban development and, therefore, to guide urbanization into more appropriate areas in accordance with a balanced and efficient growth pattern. Future general plan updates may indicate either expansion or contraction of this area. Expansion may occur via annexation; contraction may occur via a shift of land to the Planned Urbanizing area.

Permitting the premature urban development of this area would, even if capital facilities were developer financed as in the Planned Urbanizing area, strain City fiscal resources in terms of operation, maintenance and servicing due to the distances involved. It would direct development attention from the Urbanized and Planned Urbanizing areas where the City’s strategy is to encourage efficient, contiguous development patterns; and it would tend to produce lengthier travel patterns consuming more energy and increasing air pollution without any realistic prospect for mass transit service. It would also infringe upon the few remaining viable agricultural areas with the City limits. With ample land for development in the Urbanized and Planned Urbanizing areas, this “urban

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reserve” is necessary to maintain the balance between the three planning areas during the planning period and to achieve the goals and objectives set forth in the Progress Guide and General Plan.

In the early 1990’s it became evident that existing zoning used to implement the Future Urbanizing area designation was not effective in preventing premature urbanization in these areas. Market conditions changed, making low density estate housing more viable, and incremental development threatened to foreclose future land use options and opportunities for locating and financing future public facilities. In October 1991, the City Council initiated preparation of a Framework Plan for the North City Future Urbanizing Area bounded by the Carmel Valley and Rancho Penasquitos communities, Penasquitos Canyon and the County of San Diego. The plan, as approved by the Coastal Commission on May 14, 1993, is intended to guide development of the area before and after a phase shift to the Planned Urbanizing designation which requires voter approval. This plan also makes specific recommendations regarding how the development alternatives outlined below are implemented.

**PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this Council Policy is to specify the guidelines and necessary actions for implementation of the Progress Guide and General Plan for the Future Urbanizing area of the City in order to insure that an “urban reserve” area is maintained for the current planning period and to insure that land is shifted from the Future Urbanizing area to the Planned Urbanizing area only when needed and justified in accordance with the City’s growth management strategy.

**POLICY:**

- A. It shall be the policy of the City Council that lands within the Future Urbanizing area be maintained as an “urban reserve” in part through the application or continuation of agricultural zoning which prohibits development at urban intensities.

The following development alternatives are permitted on property that is located within the Future Urbanizing area and zoned A-1:

1. Development pursuant to the A-1 zoning regulations, at the density and minimum lot size permitted in the applicable zone.
2. Development pursuant to the Rural Cluster Development regulations, at the density permitted in the applicable zone, but clustered in order to promote more efficient land utilization and land conservation; to allow development in patterns more consistent with that occurring in adjacent areas; to avoid fragmentation of land ownership patterns which would mitigate against future development opportunities; to allow for reasonable development opportunities during the planning period without foreclosing future development choices; and to make annexation of unincorporated lands more attractive where such lands will be brought into the Future Urbanizing area. Clustering will allow the owner a reasonable present development opportunity, while retaining the undeveloped portions of the property for future development at higher densities, if appropriate, when the property is shifted from the Future Urbanizing to the Planned Urbanizing area in accordance with Council Policy No. 600-30, General Plan Amendments to Shift Land From Future Urbanizing to Planned Urbanizing Area.

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3. Development pursuant to the Planned Residential Development regulations, at a density not to exceed one dwelling unit per four acres, in order to promote the permanent preservation of lands designated in the General Plan as part of the Environmental Tier through the provision of public and private open space easements and/or dedications; provided, however, that in return for the density increase granted by the City Council no future development rights shall remain on the property. As a condition for obtaining the increased density, the property owner shall also be required to locate public facilities in the vicinity and roads necessary to access them, and to provide a financing mechanism for these facilities pursuant to the Progress Guide and General Plan. This development option may not be appropriate in areas where lot pattern precludes clustering of development outside of the Environmental Tier.
  4. Development pursuant to the Conditional Use Permit regulations, provided that the conditional uses are natural resource dependent, non-urban in character and scale, or are of an interim nature which would not result in an irrevocable commitment of the land precluding future uses.
- B. It shall further be the policy of the City Council that property in the Future Urbanizing area shall be considered for placement in an “agricultural preserve” for the purpose of making available tax relief under the Williamson Act (Cal. Gov’t Code Section No. 51070 et seq.).
- C. It shall further be the policy of the City Council that development in the City shall be monitored, at least on an annual basis, in order to determine the amount of development that has occurred in the Urbanizing and Planned Urbanizing areas; the amount and capacity of the land in these areas remaining for development; the rate of growth and development in these areas; and the projected demand for land for development purposes and how the City is meeting that demand. This data and information shall be used to document the need for City-initiated shifts in land from the Future Urbanizing to the Planned Urbanizing area; to establish whether required findings for approval of development or for owner initiated requests have been met; and to support the necessary General Plan amendments associated with such shifts.
- D. It shall further be the policy of the City Council that re-zonings to zoning district categories which would permit urban density development shall occur in the Future Urbanizing area only if preceded by the following actions: first, the boundary between the Future Urbanizing and Planned Urbanizing areas is changed by General Plan Amendment and a supporting community, specific or precise plan is adopted for the area, in accordance with procedures established by the City, so that the subject property has been shifted to the Planned Urbanizing area; and second, that the rezoning is accomplished in accordance with the procedures and complies with the requirements of Council Policy No. 600-28 — Requirements for Development Approval in Planned Urbanizing areas.
- E. Expenditures or plans for future urbanization of these areas should not be made until the need for urbanization of these lands has been evaluated based on the extent of utilization and redevelopment of existing Urbanized and Planned Urbanizing areas, and findings have been made that:

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1. The capacity of lands identified as appropriate for development within the Urbanized and Planned Urbanizing areas is approaching full utilization in accordance with adopted community plans;
  2. A need exists for additional developable lands; and
  3. A process has been developed to identify where the next phase of urban development should occur.
- F. Before development of urban facilities is approved to traverse the Future Urbanizing area, a thorough survey of all lands that might be categorized as environmentally sensitive lands, open space lands, and/or lands to be held in a permanent rural, resource-based use will be conducted.

Transit and transportation corridors and other public facility and infrastructure improvements may be identified which do not impact these resources, or which fully mitigate impacts to these resources prior to implementation of the projects.

HISTORY:

Adopted by Resolution R-254647 07/20/1981  
Amended by Resolution R-276170 07/17/1990  
Amended by Resolution R-276735 10/16/1990  
Amended by Resolution R-276883 11/19/1990  
Amended by Resolution R-280785 10/01/1992  
Amended by Resolution R-282899 10/26/1993