



City of Dana Point General Plan Introduction

Adopted October 2025

Introduction to the General Plan

Dana Point became an incorporated city on January 1, 1989. The City includes the original "Dana Point" named after Richard Henry Dana, and the surrounding coastal area, a total area of 6.5 square miles. From its beginnings as a resort community by the sea, the City has always prided itself on its coastal lifestyle, quality neighborhoods, expansive views and natural spaces. It is blessed with multiple legacies to draw from –boating; oceanography and fishing; historic preservation and early California history; and surf culture and maritime heritage.

Development in the Dana Point area began in the early 1900's with the original "Lantern" neighborhoods, but substantial development did not occur until the decades following World War II. Over time, that boom created the three pre-incorporated communities of Dana Point, Capistrano Beach, and Monarch Beach. The Harbor and its many water-related facilities, along with the regionally popular Doheny State Park, have made the City a destination for many visitors. Although rapid growth and extensive annexations after incorporation added more diversity to the City, the picturesque Pacific coastline remained the overarching theme.

As Dana Point positions itself for continued success and prosperity, the community looks for ways to honor its vibrant past, acknowledge and address present realities, and plan for exciting opportunities in the future.

The Future of Dana Point

Dana Point's future will be shaped not only by broad economic, social, and environmental trends, but also by the decisions the community and its leadership make in response to these challenges and opportunities. The purpose of the General Plan is to guide these decision-makers with the best possible goals, policies and programs – planning tools which represent the collective ideals of the community. The City's long-term plans are directed by a Vision Statement and set of Guiding Principles developed through extensive collaboration with the community.

Vision Statement

Dana Point is a unique coastal community with a small-town feel. This family-oriented, close-knit community celebrates and builds upon its heritage and connection to the ocean while striving to adapt, innovate, and continue to evolve in a sustainable way for current and future generations.

Guiding Principles

Land Use and Context – Ensure context-sensitive development and a balanced mix of land uses that respond over time with appropriate intensities and scale.

Mobility and Connectivity – Promote a safe, efficient, and coordinated multimodal network that improves community connectivity to meet the needs of all users.

Natural Resources and Conservation – Protect, manage, and enhance open spaces, beaches, and natural assets balancing human needs and environmental considerations.

Economic Vitality – Foster a resilient local business economy that adapts to market trends and caters to the needs of both locals and visitors.

Innovation – Embrace advanced technology solutions that support sustainability, economic development, public services efficiency, and community goals.

Recreation – Expand recreational opportunities that take advantage of the unique natural setting and address a range of community interests and needs.

Arts and Culture – Integrate a mix of cultural events, music, and art that celebrates Dana Point’s heritage and strengthens community identity.

Public Spaces – Create inviting and safe streetscapes and public spaces that bring people together and build community.

Public Safety – Establish and maintain services that ensure a safe, healthy, and comfortable environment for residents.

Tourism – Leverage tourism in a way that supports the local economy, values connections with the community, and respects Dana Point’s natural assets.

Civic Engagement – Provide a forum for healthy and transparent community conversations to inform policy decisions.

Purpose of the General Plan

California State law requires each city and county to adopt a comprehensive, long-term General Plan for its own physical development. In essence, a jurisdiction’s General Plan serves as the blueprint for future growth and development. As such, the General Plan must contain policies and programs designed to provide decision makers with a solid basis for their decision making.

The General Plan addresses issues through a set of individual chapters or elements. State law requires that the General Plan address land use, circulation, housing, the conservation of natural resources, the preservation of open space, noise, and public safety. The General Plan may also include elements or topics of special or unique interest to the local community. Recognizing the importance of guiding quality development and planning for a sustainable fiscal future, the City of Dana Point has chosen to include elements to address community design, economic development, and public facilities and growth management. The topic of air quality is only required for jurisdictions in the San Joaquin Valley, and the

topic of environmental justice is only required for jurisdictions with environmental justice communities (there are none in Dana Point).

Organization of the General Plan

The City of Dana Point General Plan is divided into six mandatory elements and three optional elements. Each element contains goals, policies and actions that guide the City's land use and development decisions. A brief description of each element of the General Plan is provided below:

- (1) Land Use: Designates the type, intensity and general distribution of commercial, residential, industrial, open space, public buildings and other uses.
- (2) Circulation and Mobility: An infrastructure plan that addresses the general location and extent of existing and proposed thoroughfares, transportation routes, terminals and other related facilities.
- (3) Housing: A comprehensive assessment of the amount and projected housing needs for all segments of the community along with a detailed program for its provision.
- (4) Conservation and Open Space: Addresses the conservation, use and development of natural resources such as water, soil and biology, along with plans to preserve open space for recreation, public health, safety and resource management.
- (5) Noise: Identifies and evaluates noise problems within the community and outlines plans for its amelioration.
- (6) Public Safety: Creates policies and programs for protecting the community from risks associated with geologic, seismic, flood, and wildfire hazards.
- (7) Community Design (optional): Sets out the goals, policies and actions designed to improve the image, character and quality of the built environment, including architecture, urban design, and community landscaping.
- (8) Economic Development (optional): Focuses on policies and actions that improve the local economy and form a basis for sound fiscal policy.
- (9) Public Facilities and Growth Management (optional): Provides guidance for the adequate provision of police, fire, paramedic, library, and educational facilities as well as large scale capital improvements such as sewer, water, and communication lines.

Each of the nine General Plan elements contains brief narrative, goals, and policies. Many of the elements also contain tables and maps to communicate additional information, plans, and policy standards. Goals express a desired end state and general direction-setter which expresses community values and focuses planning efforts. Policies are statements that

guide decision-making and specify an intended level of public commitment on a subject in order to further progress toward the goal. Additional documents may be incorporated by reference but published under separate cover, such as the City’s Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP).

Environmental Documentation

In accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the City of Dana Point prepared an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for its 1991 General Plan, Local Coastal Program, and Zoning Ordinance. As this General Plan updates the 1991 General Plan, the City of Dana Point examined the changes made as part of the update as well as changes in the surrounding environment to determine if an additional environmental document is required.

Subsequent updates to individual elements (Housing, Public Safety, Circulation, and Economic Development) were found not to have any potential to negatively affect the physical environment and were addressed through either exemptions or an Addendum to the 1991 EIR.

Coastal Planning

Dana Point’s location along the California coast gives it additional planning responsibilities. As one of the seventy-six coastal zone cities and counties under the jurisdiction of the California Coastal Commission, the City is required by the California Coastal Act (CCA) to prepare a Local Coastal Program (LCP). Adopted in 1976, the purpose of the CCA is to protect the natural and scenic qualities of the California Coastal Zone. Approximately one-half of the City’s land area lies within the California Coastal Zone and is therefore, subject to requirements of the CCA. To meet these requirements, the City must have a California Coastal Commission certified LCP consisting of its “(a) land use plans, (b) zoning ordinances, (c) zoning district maps, and (d) within sensitive coastal resources area, other implementing actions, which, when taken together, meet the requirements of, and implement the provisions of policies of, this division at the local level.”

The certified Land Use Plan policies, land use designations, maps, and discussion of the areas of the City of Dana Point’s coastal zone are contained in the Land Use, Community Design, and Conservation/Open Space Elements of the General Plan. Additional coastal planning policies and development requirements which apply to specific geographic areas of the City, such as the Headlands and Town Center, are contained within their respective Development/Specific Plans and Local Coastal Programs. These policies, described in Chapter 3 of the California Coastal Act, are indicated by parenthetical references to the applicable section of the California Coastal Act. For example, a policy statement relating to coastal visual resources will be followed by the parenthetical reference (Coastal Act/30251) to indicate that the policy relates to or addresses scenic and visual qualities of coastal areas as required by Section 30251 of the California Coastal Act.

Therefore, the portions of the City’s General Plan, Zoning Ordinance, Zoning Map and other implementing actions effectively certified by the Coastal Commission will constitute its LCP for that portion of the Coastal Zone within its jurisdiction. California Coastal Commission certification of the City’s LCP allows the City to assume responsibility for administering coastal development permits in those areas of its coastal zone that are not on submerged lands, tide lands, public trust lands, or state universities or colleges.

As a component of the City’s LCP, the portions of the General Plan effectively certified by the Coastal Commission include required coastal resources planning and management policies which are in conformance with and intended to carry out the Chapter Three policies of the California Coastal Act of 1976. These policies shall be applied in a manner that is most protective of coastal resources and public access. Table I-1 correlates the major planning and issue areas of the Coastal Zone Act to each of the elements of the General Plan.

TABLE I-1 GENERAL PLAN LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM REFERENCE MATRIX									
Required Component/Issue Area (Coastal Act Section)	Land Use	Circulation & Mobility	Housing	Conservation/Open Space	Noise	Public Safety	Community Design	Public Facilities/Growth Management	Economic Development
Shoreline Access (30210-212.5)	*	*		*			*		
Visitor Serving/Recreational Facilities (30213)	*	*		*	*			*	*
Water-Oriented Recreation (30220-224)	*	*		*	*	*			*
Water and Marine Resources (30230-232)	*	*		*		*			
Diking, Filling and Dredging (30233)	*			*	*	*		*	
Commercial Fishing/Recreational Boating (30234)	*	*		*	*				*
Shoreline Structures/Flood Control (30235-236)	*			*		*		*	
Environmentally Sensitive Habitat (30240)	*			*					
Agriculture (30241-242)	*								
Soil Resources (30243)	*			*		*			
Archaeological/Paleontological Resources (30244)	*			*					
Locating and Planning New Development (30250, 252, 255)	*	*		*	*	*	*	*	*
Coastal Visual Resources (30251)	*	*		*	*		*		
Hazard Areas (30253)	*	*		*		*	*	*	
Public Works (30254)	*	*			*	*		*	
Industrial Development and Energy Facilities (30260-264)	*				*	*			
* Indicates that the Coastal Act issue is included in the General Plan Element.									

How to Use the General Plan

City Decision Makers and Staff

The City Council, Planning Commission, other advisory entities, and City staff will use the General Plan when considering land use and planning-related decisions, in administering regulations, and when considering investments of time, money, or other resources. The General Plan (all content) must be internally consistent, and all other City plans, documents, and decisions must be consistent with the General Plan.

City Residents, Businesses, and other Stakeholders

City residents, property owners, business operators, service providers, and other stakeholders in Dana Point can use the General Plan to better understand current and future conditions, decisions, and investments in the City of Dana Point.

Residents, business owners, and stakeholders can also use the General Plan as a guide to actions they can take to take part in improving their community; whether it is to simply create a better place to live and work, promote environmental health, or to protect your investment and achieve future success.

Updates to the General Plan

Historical Updates

When Dana Point adopted its inaugural General Plan in 1991, the area was well established but lacked a cohesive vision to guide the fledgling City into the new millennia. The 1991 plan sought to unify the three distinct, pre-existing communities while retaining the qualities that made each unique. As such, the City aggregated and integrated assumptions for these communities to ensure they could continue in their present form while ensuring citywide consistency moving forward.

One of the primary adjustments made during the drafting of the inaugural plan was in the creation of citywide land use densities and intensities. The three pre-existing communities were designed and built largely independent of each other, necessitating assumptions not only for the range of densities and intensities for each land use category, but also in the approach to calculating citywide development capacity that considers both gross and net acreage conditions.

The City determined that the best way to calculate citywide development capacity across a diverse set of developed and undeveloped parcels was to apply a broad, general assumption that converts gross acreage to net acreage through an 80-percent adjustment factor. The net acreage represents developable area after public dedications. While it was deemed appropriate to apply this conversion factor on a citywide scale, the City

understood that the actual adjustment factor for any given parcel would vary depending upon the amount of public dedication required. The City considered any property that had already made its public dedications to be in a net acreage condition. Accordingly, the maximum development intensities in the Land Use Element are based on a net acreage condition.

Since the 1991 General Plan, the City has made numerous refinements through the adoption of specific plans and other zoning tools for particular geographic sub areas and properties. The more detailed "plans" generally include maps and diagrams for land use, circulation, infrastructure, and natural resources, as well as land use regulations, development standards, and design guidelines. They also include a Local Coastal Program and Coastal Access Plan, where applicable.

Monarch Beach Resort Specific Plan (1992 / 1997)

The Monarch Beach Resort Specific Plan provides the framework for a five-star resort hotel along with single family residential units, a golf course, and other community facilities including public parks and trail networks. The area was mostly built out by 2005, with functionally all remaining development completed around 2016.

Headlands Specific Plan (2004)

The Headlands Development and Conservation Plan's purpose is to protect and preserve the unique beauty of the Headlands Conservation Area, while allowing for specific kinds of development to enhance the experience of residents and visitors. Approximately 68.5 acres of the Headlands are set aside for public parks, conservation, and open space with coastal access and scenic vistas. Also designated in the plan are a seaside inn, residential homes, and visitor commercial uses, as well as The Strand at Headlands, a luxury hotel which will boast access to Strand Beach and the surrounding open space.

Harbor Revitalization Plan (2011)

The Dana Point Harbor Revitalization Plan envisions a visitor-serving commercial core with improved restaurants, retail, and public spaces. The plan also includes enhanced marine commercial services and marine recreational amenities, including the construction and reconfiguration of all docks and slips. Pedestrian connectivity from the Harbor links the area to the Headlands and Doheny State Beach.

Town Center Plan (2015)

The Dana Point Town Center Plan focuses on the commercial area in Dana Point's geographic center, adjacent to the Pacific Coast Highway and Del Prado couplet. The Plan encourages a more diverse mix of uses in the Town Center, increased pedestrian-oriented development, public parking in central locations, and art and signage to enrich the experience of visitors and residents.

Doheny Village Plan (2021)

The Doheny Village Plan amends the City's zoning code to preserve and enhance the eclectic combination of commercial, light industrial, and residential mixed uses in the area. New districts are designed to achieve an integrated neighborhood-serving business and residential environment. Residential units in Doheny Village provide housing near sources of employment or commercial and professional services, intended to add to the City's supply of affordable housing, reduce commutes between home and work, and promote a strong, stable, and desirable pedestrian-oriented business environment.

While the Housing and Public Safety elements were updated in 2022, the City's General Plan has not been comprehensively updated since it was first adopted. In 2023, the City initiated a two-phased approach to updating the General Plan in its entirety, beginning with a robust community engagement campaign that yielded a Vision Statement and Guiding Principles (Phase 1). Phase 2 consisted of substantial updates to the Circulation and Economic Development elements and minor updates to the Public Safety Element. Other elements will be updated in subsequent phases, with the Housing and Public Safety elements being statutorily required to be updated no later than 2029.

Future Updates

While amendments can be made to the General Plan, they should be infrequent and based on significant permanent changes to the context and assumptions that served as the foundation for this General Plan. Any changes or amendments to the General Plan must be consistent with the City's Vision and Guiding Principles, as well as any relevant goals and policies contained elsewhere in the General Plan.

There is no set, explicit, or quantified timeframe for a comprehensive update. The City conducts an annual review of the General Plan to assess the level of implementation and effectiveness of the goals, policies, and actions. This annual review is formerly reviewed by City Council and submitted to the Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation. A more extensive review of the overall General Plan may be warranted as frequently as every five years, with comprehensive updates every 10 to 15 years or as deemed necessary.

The most common update is an amendment to the Land Use Map as property owners seek to develop something different from what is currently allowed. The Housing Element is updated every eight years as required by State law in connection with regional transportation planning efforts. The topic of safety must be reviewed by jurisdictions upon subsequent updates of the Housing Element. For those communities that contain environmental justice communities (none currently in Dana Point), the topic of environmental justice must be reviewed upon the subsequent and concurrent update of any two or more elements. Based on the connection between housing and safety updates, the three topics can be expected to be reviewed every eight years.

