



## Agenda Report

25-1109

Agenda Date: 11/12/2025

### REPORT TO PLANNING COMMISSION

#### **SUBJECT**

Public Hearing: Recommendation on a General Plan Amendment to the City's Open Space Element to Add Policies to Address Climate Resilience and Other Co-benefits of Open Space; to Help to Increase Access to Open Space for Everyone; and to Preserve, Enhance, and Expand a Network of Open Spaces.

#### **BACKGROUND**

Adopted in 2010, the City's General Plan (2010-2035) represents the long-term goals for the City's future and guides decisions during its timeframe. State law requires that General Plans include seven mandated "elements," including Land Use, Circulation, Housing, Safety, Noise, Conservation and Open Space; an Environmental Justice element will be required in the future. The 2010-2035 Santa Clara General Plan is an "integrated" document, meaning it does not have independent elements, except for the Housing Element. Instead, the General Plan includes a matrix, set forth in Appendix 8.4, listing where each of the state-mandated elements are contained.

From time to time, the elements are updated to be consistent with changes in State Law. In 2022, the State adopted Senate Bill (SB) 1425, which requires cities and counties to review and update their Open Space elements by January 2026. The Open Space element is meant to catalog the existing unimproved sites within a jurisdiction and the likely disposition of those parcels within the timeframe of the General Plan.

SB 1425 requires cities and counties to update their open space programs to include policies addressing climate resilience and other co-benefits of Open Space, consistent with the jurisdiction's Safety element. This law also requires that jurisdictions address the issue of access to open space for everyone and to preserve, enhance, and expand a network of open spaces.

#### **DISCUSSION**

The City's Open Space element goals and policies are primarily contained in Chapter 5.9 of the General Plan. The State's General Plan Guidelines define open space as unimproved land devoted to:

- The preservation of natural resources
- Managed production of resources, meaning farmland (not applicable in the City of Santa Clara)
- Outdoor recreation, including linkages
- Open Space for public safety (for example, earthquake easements)
- Military installations (not applicable in Santa Clara)
- Tribal Resources

The fact that open space lands are defined as unimproved puts them in contrast to developed and actively managed park facilities.

Geographically, the City is constrained by other cities at its boundaries and is fully developed. Consequently, it has a very limited portfolio of open spaces called out in the General Plan. Section 8.8.4 lists Agnews Park, Civic Center Park (the City Hall grounds) and Ulistac Open Space as the only General Plan designated open spaces in the City.

The City has two planning efforts underway related to parks, trails and public open spaces. First, the City's Department of Public Works is currently drafting a creek trail network expansion master plan, and is a foundational element of a network of connected open spaces, consistent with SB 1425. Secondly, the City's Parks and Recreation Department is currently drafting a Parks and Recreation Master Plan, which describes priorities for parks facilities and programs over the short and medium term.

Both documents have been reviewed, and locations of potential facilities have been incorporated into an updated Figure 5.9-1, the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Diagram, which is included as Attachment 1.

As part of the update, text language in the Open Space Element relating to open space access and the creation of a linked network of open spaces has been strengthened. In addition, resilience policies from the City's adopted Climate Action Plan (2022) have been added to the Open Space policies. New and updated open space policies are included as Attachment 2, with changes shown in strikethrough and underline.

The text amendment is presented to the Planning Commission for a recommendation to the City Council for their consideration and action. The following specific actions are required.

1. Find that the Addendum to the 2010-2035 General Plan Environmental Impact Report (EIR) prepared for the project complies with CEQA, and that the adoption of the Open Space Element Update would not result in environmental impacts beyond those described in the General Plan EIR and no further analysis is required.
2. Find that the General Plan Text Amendment satisfies the SB 1425 requirements to update open space programs to include policies addressing climate resilience and other co-benefits of Open Space; and that the necessary text edits are consistent with the Parks, Open Space, and Recreation Goals and Policies in the General Plan.

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission recommend to the City Council approval of the General Plan Amendment by approving all the above-described actions because the amendment will bring the City's General Plan into compliance with the requirements of SB 1425, by helping to create a comprehensive network of open spaces that are accessible to everyone and that help to reinforce the City's resilience goals.

Alternatively, the Planning Commission has the option to recommend denial of the amendment, or to request modifications.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

The City prepared an Addendum to the 2010-2035 General Plan Environmental Impact Report (EIR) to cover adoption of this General Plan Amendment.

The Open Space element update consists of three primary components:

1. New trail alignments incorporated into the Parks, Recreation and Open Space diagram (Figure 5.9-1 of the General Plan)
2. Addition of policies related to carbon farming on open space land from the City's adopted Climate Action Plan.
3. Strengthening of policy language to emphasize access to open space for everyone, and towards the creation of a network of open spaces with trail linkages.

New trail alignments will allow the City to apply for grants that will help to fund the development of the Creek Trail network. Individual improvements will be analyzed for CEQA compliance at the planning stages prior to construction.

Regarding the addition of Climate Action Plan policies to the Open Space chapter, the Climate Action Plan is

already an appendix to the General Plan and its policies are being put in a more prominent location to help inform discussion about the potential uses of open space. Since the Climate Action Plan is already adopted, these policies have been previously analyzed for CEQA compliance.

The strengthening of policy language to emphasize a network for all connected open spaces does not change the development potential of the General Plan, nor does it create a program of activities.

The Addendum indicates that the adoption of the Open Space Element Update would not result in environmental impacts beyond those described in the General Plan Update EIR.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

Adoption of the Open Space element update would bring the City's General Plan into compliance with state law, specifically SB 1425. These actions would involve no additional resources beyond those needed to update the General Plan.

### **COORDINATION**

This item was coordinated with the City Attorney's Office, the Department of Parks and Recreation, and the Department of Public Works.

### **PUBLIC CONTACT**

A newspaper notice was published in the October 22, 2025, issue of the Santa Clara Weekly describing the proposed adoption of the General Plan Amendment to the Open Space element.

Public contact was also made by posting the Planning Commission agenda on the City's official-notice bulletin board outside City Hall Council Chambers. A complete agenda packet is available on the City's website and in the City Clerk's Office at least 72 hours prior to a Regular Meeting and 24 hours prior to a Special Meeting. A hard copy of any agenda report may be requested by contacting the City Clerk's Office at (408) 615-2220, email [clerk@santaclaraca.gov](mailto:clerk@santaclaraca.gov) <<mailto:clerk@santaclaraca.gov>> or at the public information desk at any City of Santa Clara public library.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends based on Senate Bill 1425, that the Planning Commission recommend the City Council:

1. Find that the Addendum to the 2010-2035 General Plan Environmental Impact Report (EIR) prepared for the project complies with CEQA, and that the adoption of the Open Space Element Update would not result in environmental impacts beyond those described in the General Plan EIR and no further analysis is required.
2. Adopt the General Plan Text Amendment and find that it satisfies the SB 1425 requirements to update open space programs to include policies addressing climate resilience and other co-benefits of Open Space; and that the necessary text edits are consistent with the Parks, Open Space, and Recreation Goals and Policies in the General Plan.

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Reviewed by: Alexander Abbe, Assistant City Attorney

Approved by: Afshan Hamid, Director of Community Development

### **ATTACHMENTS**

1. Parks, Recreation and Open Space Diagram, General Plan Figure 5.9-1
2. General Plan Open Space Element Text Changes
3. Resolution to Recommend Approval
4. Addendum to the General Plan 2010-2035 EIR for changes to the Open Space Element relating to SB1425

