

4.8 LAND USE

4.8.1 Issues

Adoption and implementation of the DSP has the potential to conflict with existing land uses, land use designations and land use policies. Land use decisions in a city must be consistent with the General Plan.

4.8.2 Setting

The Cotati Downtown is currently developed with urban land uses. Figure 4.8-1 is an aerial photograph showing existing land uses. Figure 3.0-A-4 in Chapter 3, Project Description, shows the existing zoning land use designations. Figure 3.0-A-5 in Chapter 3 shows the City's Redevelopment Project Area, within which portions of the DSP are located. Figure 4.8-1 is an aerial photo showing existing land uses.

The 59.5-acre planning area is dominated by commercial uses, followed by vacant land, streets and surface parking areas, and residences. Downtown Cotati is characterized by one to two-story buildings in a village-scale environment organized around Old Redwood Highway and La Plaza Park which date from 1892. The Downtown has a variety of buildings ranging from the simple, false-front commercial buildings to one-story commercial shop front buildings and two-story office/housing over commercial buildings. The Downtown landscape is characterized by informal plantings of oaks, sycamores, and several types of conifers. Cotati's rustic and agricultural roots are very present and visible throughout Downtown and the adjacent neighborhoods.

4.8.3 Regulatory Setting

Cotati General Plan

The City of Cotati's General Plan was most recently adopted October 14, 1998. It was amended in July 1998 relative to the Urban Growth Boundary, in July 2002 with an update of the Housing Element, and again in August 2003 with another update of the Housing Element. In addition to the statutorily mandated seven elements, the General Plan contains two optional elements, Scenic Highway and Urban Design. General Plan policies particularly relevant to the DSP include (see Section 1.1 of the Draft DSP):

Community Development

Policy 2.2.1 – Establish and maintain continuous clearly identifiable bicycle routes and facilities on Old Redwood Highway, East Cotati Avenue, Gravenstein Highway, and West Sierra Avenue.

Policy 2.2.2 – Maintain and Develop a network of walkways and sidewalks along arterial and collector streets to provide for safe and efficient travel.

Policy 2.2.9 – Enhance the safety of pedestrian crossings in the Hub area while ensuring a delightful downtown experience.

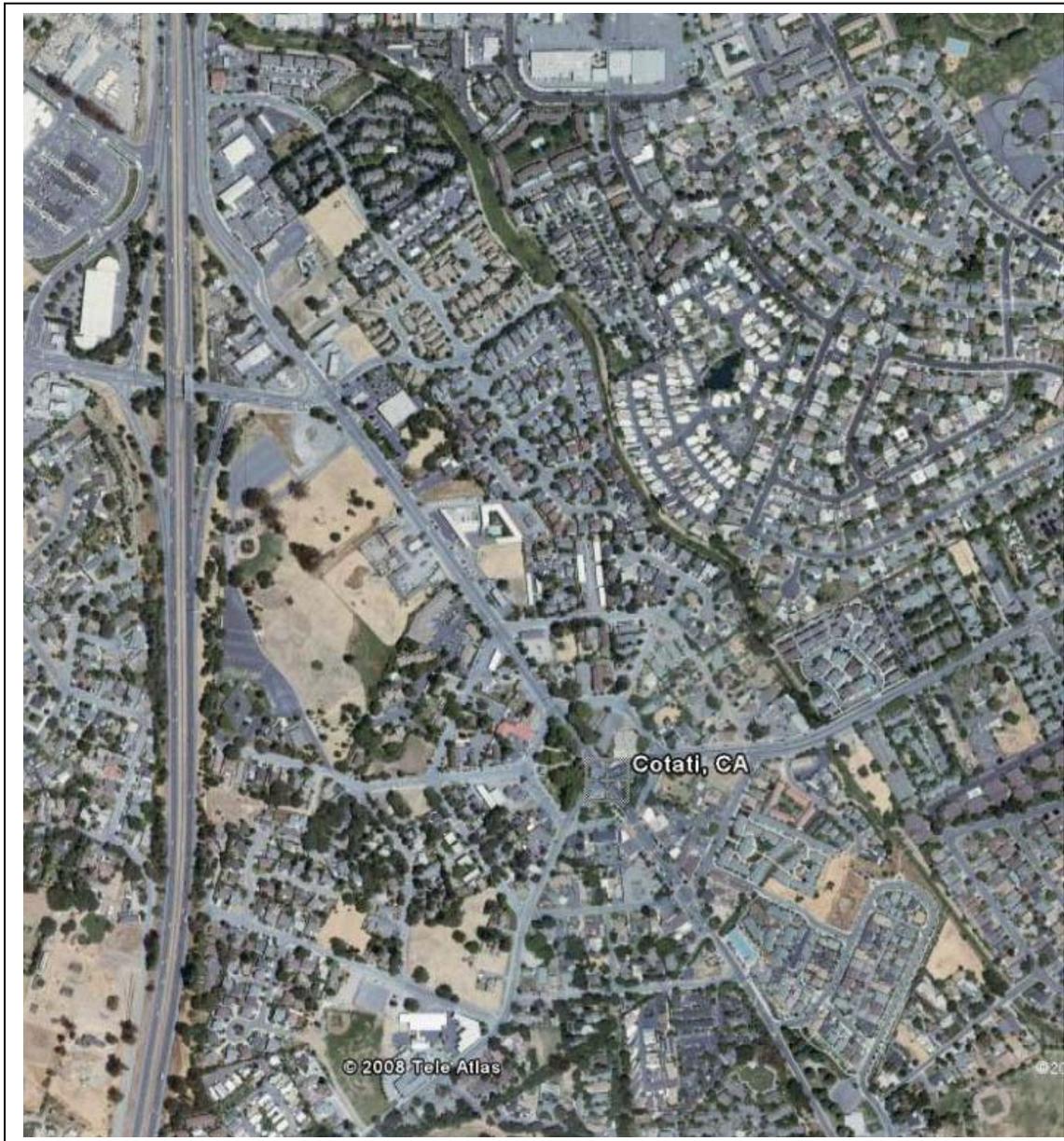


Figure 4.8-1 Planning Area Land Uses

Policy 2.3.3 – Encourage the use of multi-purpose parking lots that serve both multi-family residential and commercial uses.

Quality of Life

Policy IP 2.2.2 – Increase the amount of developable, high density residential land.

Policy 11.1.1b – Mixed uses shall be encouraged in the Hub area.

Policy 11.1.4 – Provide safe walking areas for pedestrians, allow safe on-street parking and provide adequate street width for fire safety vehicles in the Hub.

Policy 11.2 – Ensure that adequate parking in the Hub area is available.

Policy 11.3 – Establish a downtown character which preserves the historic “Old Town” feeling of the Hub and promotes new development which is compatible in scale with existing structures.

Policy 11.3.5 – Preserve existing structures with designated historic value.

Community Identity

Policy 14 – Maintain the Hub as the principal social and cultural center of the community.

Cotati Redevelopment Project Area

The Redevelopment Area and Redevelopment Agency were established in 1986. The purpose of establishing the Redevelopment Area was to create a mechanism by which the City could leverage public funds to remedy blight. Many projects and improvements have been accomplished in the Redevelopment Area since 1986 (see Chapter 3, Project Description). The Specific Plan seeks to revitalize the downtown area by improving circulation, streetscapes, building designs, land use, housing, parking, landscaping, pedestrian and bicycle circulation, and by renovating existing buildings. These proposed improvements are expected to increase the visual attractiveness and functionality of the downtown area.

La Plaza Specific Plan

The La Plaza Specific Plan was adopted in 1991, and is the planning policy currently in effect for the La Plaza area. Portions of the La Plaza Specific Plan (relating to the park’s history and design recommendations) have been incorporated into the DSP; the La Plaza Specific Plan would be repealed as part of the DSP project and replaced by the DSP.

Draft DSP Policies Related to Land Use

One of the overall purposes of the DSP is to provide “replacement” regulations for the development and land uses within the DSP area. The DSP will add a Regulating Plan and Land Use Standards which will define the zones within the DSP area, identify the parcels included within each district, and describe, district-by-district, the standards for building placement, design, and land use consistent with the allowable uses identified in the City of Cotati Municipal Code, Chapter 17, Land Use Code. The 2007 DSP proposes to replace the existing designations and zoning with mixed residential, civic, commercial and retail categories (La Plaza, Historic Core, Open Space, Northern Gateway, and Commerce Avenue). According to Chapter 3 – Implementation – Standards for Development of the DSP, the “Downtown Plan is intended to provide for the continuing evolution of Downtown Cotati into a place where:

- A. A mixture of land uses place shops, workplaces, residences, and civic buildings within walking distance of one another;
- B. Streets are attractive to pedestrians and also conveniently and efficiently accommodate the needs of cyclists and the automobile; and
- C. New and remodeled buildings work together to define the pedestrian-oriented space of the public streets within the downtown, and are harmonious with each other and the desired character of the downtown, as described in this specific plan.”

The reader is referred to the Draft Downtown Specific Plan, on file at the City of Cotati, for more details on the proposed plan.

Government Code Section 65450

All specific plans in the State of California must comply with Sections 65450-65457 of the Government Code.¹ These provisions require that a specific plan be consistent with the adopted general plan of the jurisdiction in which it is located. In turn, all subsequent subdivision and development, all public works projects, and zoning regulations must be consistent with the specific plan. Section 65451(b) of the Government Code requires that each specific plan include a statement of the relationship of the specific plan to the general plan. Section 1.3 of the Draft DSP includes the following statement of this relationship:

“The Downtown Specific Plan implements a variety of goals and policies in the Cotati General Plan by providing a renewed vision, and standards for the continuing enhancement of the Downtown, and adjacent areas extending north to Gravenstein Highway. Of course, no specific plan can implement every policy in a General Plan because General Plan policies cover many aspects of community life and its future that a specific plan would not appropriately address. Therefore, the key General Plan policies that are implemented by this Specific Plan are in the Land Use and Urban Design Elements of the General Plan. A discussion of the relevant General Plan goals and policies in relation to the provisions of this Specific Plan is provided as applicable.”

4.8.4 Methodology

The City of Cotati adopted General Plan and Land Use Code were used as the basis for evaluation of impacts. Existing land uses were determined from aerial photographs, supplemented by field reconnaissance. The proposed General Plan and Land Use Code amendments necessary for adoption of the DSP are included in Appendix 3.0-A.

4.8.5 Thresholds of Significance

A project would create a significant land use impact if it would:

- a. Physically divide an established community; or
- b. Conflict with any applicable land use plan, policy, or regulation of an agency with jurisdiction over the project (including, but not limited to the general plan, specific plan, or zoning ordinance) adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect; or
- c. Conflict with any applicable habitat conservation plan or natural community conservation plan.

¹ Governor’s Office of Planning and Research. January 2001 Edition. *The Planner’s Guide to Specific Plans*.

4.8.6 Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Less than Significant Impacts

Implementation of the DSP represents the redevelopment of an existing land use pattern and will not result in the physical division of an established community (threshold a). With the exception of a few vacant parcels, downtown Cotati is developed. Streets, utilities, buildings and parks are in place. The DSP will modify some of the street configurations, but will not add or remove streets. Pedestrian access, especially surrounding La Plaza Park, will be enhanced. Implementation of the DSP would not add any further physical structures or features that would further divide an established community. On the contrary, many benefits to the community would come from the development proposed under the DSP. As mentioned, pedestrian improvements would enhance the ability of residents and visitors to walk in the downtown. Parking will be enhanced with the goal of a “park once” strategy, reducing the number of vehicle trips. By concentrating mixed use development in the downtown area, the DSP enhance the sense of community especially by integrating land uses in the hub and along the northern portion of Old Redwood Highway. Thus, the DSP would have a less than significant impact in regard to physically dividing an established community.

Implementation of the DSP would affect land uses within the DSP area by requiring amendments to both the General Plan and Land Use Code, as described in Chapter 3, Project Description and included in Appendix 3.0-A. The City would need to adopt these amendments to ensure consistency between the DSP and the existing General Plan, as is required by State planning law. While the DSP would require some General Plan amendments to bring it into full compliance, overall the DSP is consistent with the intent of the City’s General Plan (threshold b). The table contained in Appendix 4.8 includes a conformity analysis of the DSP with regard to the Cotati General Plan. Where the DSP has been described as being “in conflict” with a policy, that policy is discussed more fully in the relevant impact section of this document. For example, a conflict with an air quality policy is discussed in Section 4.2 Air Quality. Note that the table in Appendix 4.8 does not contain every policy in the General Plan, only those determined to be relevant to the discussion of environmental impacts. The General Plan’s intent would be executed by the DSP with the collaboration of existing policies and regulations along with new ones included within the DSP. As a result, the DSP would result in a less than significant impact related to consistency with adopted plans.

The City of Cotati does not currently have an adopted Habitat Conservation Plan or Natural Community Conservation Plan in place; therefore, the project is not included in nor would it conflict with such plans. Plan to protect biological resources do apply with the DSP and are discussed in Section 4.3, Biological Resources, of this EIR.

4.8.7 Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative impacts from adjacent or regional land uses have been evaluated in the Cotati General Plan, the Rohnert Park General Plan, or the County General Plan. None of the EIRs prepared for these plans have identified significant unavoidable impacts. Therefore, the contribution of the DSP to cumulative land uses impacts is found to be less than considerable.

4.8.8 References

City of Cotati. *Land Use Code*. June 2005.

City of Cotati. *1998 General Plan Update*. Amended through November 10, 2004.

City of Cotati. Draft and Final EIR for the *Cotati General Plan*. 1989.

City of Rohnert Park. *Our Place... Rohnert Park 2020, a Plan for the Future, General Plan and EIR*. July 2000.

Governor's Office of Planning and Research. January 2001 Edition. *The Planner's Guide to Specific Plans*.

County of Sonoma. *General Plan and EIR*. 1989.

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