

2 Land Use and Growth Management

Land use and growth management represent the prime planning concerns of most Rohnert Park residents. Based on input from public workshops, most residents want the City to ensure that any new development is in keeping with the community character and minimizes urbanization of open space outside the city. With only about 190 acres of vacant land within City limits in 1999, none of it designated for residential use, and limited reuse opportunities as the city is still fairly young, the location, intensity, character, and management of growth at the city's edges is perhaps the most significant General Plan concern.

The text and policies of the Land Use and Growth Management Element, and the General Plan Diagram constitute the physical framework of the General Plan. The chapter begins with a discussion of community form and population growth and their implications for regional growth management. This is followed by definitions of the land use classifications, information on population and projected buildout, and land use policies. Last, growth management policies are presented. Issues specifically related to urban design and development character are addressed in Chapter 3: Community Design.



2.1 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

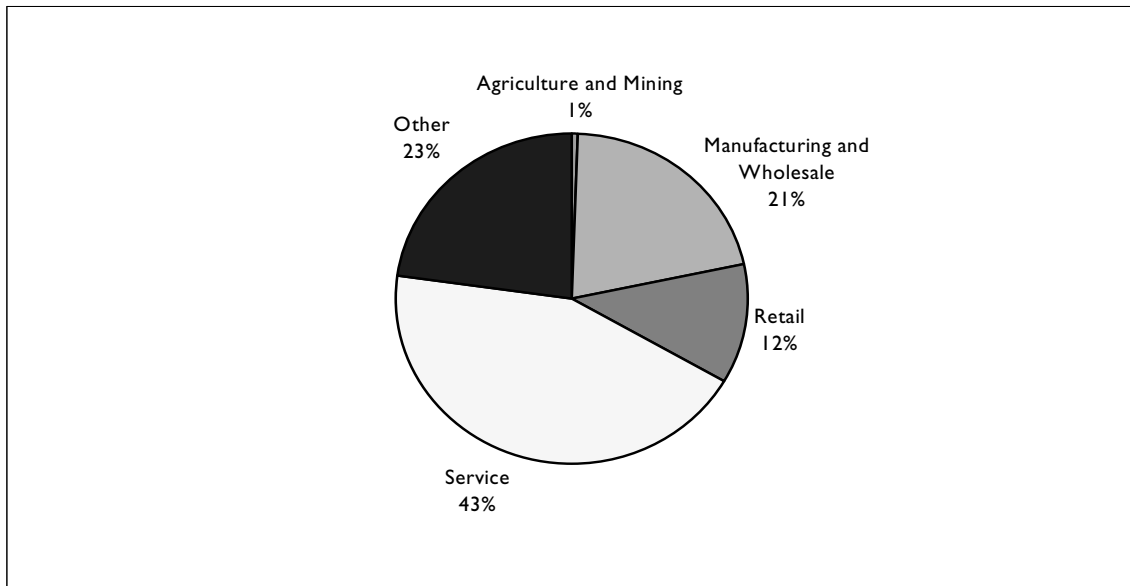
Rohnert Park was established as a master planned community in the late 1950s. The first two neighborhoods were built in 1956, and the city continued to expand over subsequent decades. However, the city's growth over the last few years has been limited; the current City limits were essentially reached in 1990.

PACE OF GROWTH

Historically, Rohnert Park has experienced decreasing rates of population growth. Between 1965 and 1980, the city had an annual average population growth rate of 4.9 percent, and between 1980 and 1999, the average annual growth rate dropped to 3.1 percent. Extensive development in the 1980s at much higher rates of growth was counteracted by minimal residential development during the 1990s.

Most job growth in Rohnert Park has occurred since 1980. Between that year and 1999, the number of jobs in Rohnert Park increased from 5,280 to 21,900, representing an average annual growth rate of 7.8 percent. Figure 2.1-1 shows that most jobs in Rohnert Park were in the service sector in 1999.

Figure 2.1-1: 1999 Jobs by Sector



Source: ABAG Projections '98

LAND USE PATTERN, 1999

As a master planned community, Rohnert Park has a well-structured pattern of land uses. Most neighborhoods are centered around an elementary school and/or a local park. The neighborhoods are separated by major streets, the railroad tracks, and open space and parks, such as the city’s two golf courses. Neighborhood shopping centers are located at the intersections of major roads, serving several adjacent neighborhoods. Connections between different neighborhoods are generally limited to the major streets.

Land Use Distribution

The 1999 City limits encompass an area of approximately 4,400 acres (6.9 square miles). Table 2.1-1 shows the distribution of this total area by land use. Residential is the predominant land use, occupying about 44 percent of the area. About a quarter of the remaining developed land has industrial, commercial, or office use, with the balance in public and institutional uses or rights-of-way. Only 192 acres of land are currently vacant.

**Table 2.1-1:
Land Uses Inside City limits, 1999**

	<i>Gross Acres</i>
Residential	1,971
Professional/Office	47
Commercial	332
Industrial	515
Parks/Recreation	467
Public	223
Streets	643
Vacant	192
Total	4,390

Source: Dyett & Bhatia.

Sphere of Influence and Adjacent Jurisdictions

There was a limited amount of land outside the City limits in the 1999 Rohnert Park Sphere of Influence (SOI). The Sphere of Influence included Canon Manor and 24 commercial acres near Wilfred Avenue west of Redwood Drive. The SOI does not include Creekside Middle School or the Sonoma State University (SSU) campus, which are located adjacent to the eastern City limits. To the southwest, the city shares its boundaries with Cotati. Open space and agricultural lands are adjacent to the city’s other boundaries.

To the north and northwest of the city are two County-designated Community Separators – open spaces that separate Rohnert Park and Santa Rosa. Santa Rosa’s Urban Boundary at its closest point comes to within 1,000 feet of Rohnert Park.

Residential Areas

The city’s neighborhood design concept was utilized in the development of new neighborhoods. Single family, townhouse, and garden apartment housing were constructed in each neighborhood. As illustrated in Table 2.1-2, the city, excluding Canon Manor, had 15,426 housing units, the majority of which were single-family detached homes. In addition to standard housing constructed on foundations, the city has five mobile home parks and approximately 1,466 mobile homes.¹ Three of the mobile home parks are reserved for adults.

**Table 2.1-2:
Rohnert Park Housing Inside City Limits, 1999**

	<i>Number of Units</i>	<i>As % of total</i>
Single-family Detached	7,221	47%
Single-family Attached	1,719	11%
Multifamily Residences		
2-4 units	1,048	
5 units or more	3,972	
Multifamily sub-total	5,020	33%
Mobile Homes	1,466	9%
Total	15,426	100%

Source: California Department of Finance, Official State Estimates, January 1999

Commercial and Industrial Areas

Rohnert Park does not have a historic central business district. Commercial and industrial development is typically setback from the street, with on-site parking and landscaping. Three shopping centers, anchored by supermarkets, are located near the US 101 and Rohnert Park Expressway interchange, with surrounding restaurants, office buildings, and small commercial complexes. In addition, regional commercial development located west of US 101 includes stores such as Target, Home Depot, Wal-Mart, and Home Express.

¹ State of California, Department of Finance, *Official State Estimates*, (January 1, 1999); Table 2. City/County Population and Housing Estimates.

The city's industrial center is located north of the Rohnert Park Expressway, west of the Northwestern Pacific railroad right-of-way. State Farm Insurance, a major employer, is located in this area. Hewlett Packard, another major employer, is located at the southeastern corner of Rohnert Park.

Hospitality and Visitor Services

The Double Tree Hotel, Mountain Shadows Golf Resort, and Sonoma County Wineries Association (California Welcome Center) are the key hospitality sites in Rohnert Park. They are located at the northern end of the community on Golf Course Drive. The Rohnert Park Stadium, located on Business Park Drive, provides a venue for sporting and other events.

Public Facilities

School Districts

As discussed in Chapter 5: Open Space, Parks, and Public Facilities, three school districts serve Rohnert Park:

- *Cotati-Rohnert Park Unified School District.* This school district serves most of Rohnert Park, portions of neighboring Cotati, and limited surrounding areas. The school district operates one high school, two continuation high schools, three middle schools, and nine elementary schools.
- *Bellevue Union School District and Santa Rosa High School District.* These two school districts serve areas north of Rohnert Park, including most areas on the westside and eastside, outside the 1999 City limits. None of Rohnert Park's residential areas in 1999 were within these districts.

Parks and Recreation

In 1999, the City operated 32 recreational facilities and parks, including 14 neighborhood parks and nine mini-parks that total 116 acres. In addition, there are nine playgrounds on school sites. A more detailed description of City parks, as well as park policies, appear in Chapter 5: Open Space, Parks, and Public Facilities.

City Buildings and Land

The City owns and/or operates several other significant facilities. There are 84 City buildings which include offices, public safety facilities, and recreation buildings. The City also entered into partnerships to provide facilities such as the Wine and Visitors Center, the Library, and the Rohnert Park Municipal Golf Course. The City owns three significant parcels of land:

- *500 City Hall Drive (8.4 Acres)*. In 1990, the City Council approved plans for a civic center complex at this location. Three buildings were planned – the public safety headquarters, a City office building, and a City Council chambers building. The public safety headquarters was completed and occupied in the mid-1990s.
- *Near Rohnert Park Stadium (14 Acres)*. South of the Rohnert Park Stadium between Redwood Drive and Labath Ave.
- *Near Rohnert Park Expressway (10 Acres)*. North of the Expressway and east of Snyder Lane.

Vacant Land

As shown in Table 2.1-1, only about 190 acres of land within the 1999 City limits, none of it zoned for residential uses, was vacant. Some stores and office spaces were also vacant in the Southwest Boulevard Shopping Center and the Padre Town Station center.

Intensity of Development

Rohnert Park is more densely developed than any other suburban jurisdiction in Sonoma County. Average citywide housing density for land occupied by residential uses, excluding Canon Manor, is approximately 8.0 housing units per gross acre. This is the highest residential density of all cities in Sonoma County. Density varies by neighborhood. Chapter 3: Community Design presents more detail on neighborhood form and character.

Most non-residential uses in Rohnert Park occupy detached, single-story structures and have been subject to maximum lot coverage requirements of 30 to 35 percent. Non-residential sites also typically have large parking lots and landscaping.

PLANS AND PROGRAMS, 1999

While planning in Rohnert Park is controlled by the City, it is influenced by actions of the surrounding jurisdictions as well. This section provides an overview of the major plans and programs in place in the City and adjacent jurisdictions.

Rohnert Park Plans and Programs

In addition to the General Plan, the City had specific area plans, special area plans, and redevelopment plans in place in 1999.

Specific Area Plans and Special Area Plans

The City's specific area plans and special area plans include:

- *Wilfred-Dowdell Specific Plan.* Consisting of 24 acres between the 1999 City limits and Dowdell Avenue, this area is planned for more than 170,000 square feet of regional commercial development. The Plan has not been adopted by the City Council.
- *City Center Concept Plan.* The City completed a Draft Concept Plan for the City Center, located near the intersection of Rohnert Park Expressway and State Farm Drive, in May 1999. The Concept Plan is not a specific plan but would be used to guide the development of land purchased by the City for new offices and Council chambers. The Plan outlines a vision for the City Center that features a pedestrian-oriented main street, and establishes direction for land use, urban design, and circulation.

Community Development Area

The Community Development Area is the City's redevelopment area. It includes all sites that were vacant within the Rohnert Park City limits in 1999, except for a five-acre commercial site near the intersection of East Cotati Avenue and Bodway Parkway. The property tax increment from new development in the redevelopment area is reinvested into the area through public improvement or other strategies. The City has been adhering to the State requirement of setting aside 20 percent of available tax increment for low/moderate income housing, which are available to meet the City's housing obligations.

Plans and Programs of Surrounding Jurisdictions

Sonoma County

In response to strong growth pressures, the Sonoma County General Plan establishes a framework for protecting open space and agricultural uses, and uses a variety of strategies for limiting new development.

- *Large-lot Zoning.* Land adjacent to Rohnert Park is designated for very low-density residential uses (typically 10-acre or 20-acre lots) and a range of small-scale and commercial farming activities.
- *Community Separators.* Community separators are established adjacent to existing cities to limit development and provide distinct physical and visual spaces between cities. Community separators are located between Rohnert Park and Santa Rosa, and between Cotati and Petaluma, southwest of Rohnert Park. The amount and intensity of development are limited, and additional requirements are imposed for screening, clustering, and preservation of trees and landforms.

- *Urban Service Boundaries.* Policies limit the extension of urban services to land capable of supporting agriculture.
- *Scenic and Riparian Corridors.* US 101 and Petaluma Hill Road are designated as scenic corridors. As such, adjacent development is required to have setbacks of 30 percent or 200 feet, whichever is smaller, and a 20-foot setback in urban service areas. Copeland Creek and Crane Creek are classified riparian corridors and are subject to a 100-foot streamside conservation area setback.

Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District

Sonoma County voters approved a ¼-cent sales tax for the preservation of agricultural lands and open space. The Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District was formed for administration of these funds and has identified a process for determining lands to be preserved. Preservation of community separator lands is a primary goal, and the new acquisition plan calls for an emphasis on “greenbelt” conservation and easements and fee purchases. Several sites or easements in the Rohnert Park area have already been purchased for preservation purposes; these sites are shown on Figure 5.1-1.

Williamson Act Lands

Several sites around Rohnert Park have Williamson Act contracts. The Williamson Act of 1965 (California Land Conservation Act, Government Code § 51200 et seq.) is intended to discourage the unnecessary and premature conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural uses by taxing land according to income-producing value, rather than its “highest and best use.” Under contract, farmers agree not to develop their land for 10 years in exchange for the lower tax rate; contracts are automatically renewed each year.

Land under a Williamson Act is designated as an agricultural preserve, which can be used for agricultural, recreational use, or open space use. Recreational uses include walking, hiking, picnicking, camping, swimming, boating, fishing, hunting, or other outdoor games or sports; open space uses include wildlife habitat and managed wetland areas. Lands within a scenic highway corridor may be included in an agricultural preserve.

Santa Rosa

The Santa Rosa General Plan establishes an Urban Boundary, and policies encourage preservation of community separators and agricultural lands outside the Urban Boundary. Major boundary changes can only be made during the five-year General Plan update process.

According to the Santa Rosa General Plan, the Urban Boundary contained about 149,600 persons in 1995 and can ultimately accommodate a population of 201,000. The City

maintains a growth management program that limits residential building permits to 1,000 per year until 2000, 900 per year between 2001 and 2005, and 850 per year from 2006 to 2010.

Cotati

Cotati's General Plan expresses the City's desire to maintain a small-town feeling and promote compact development. The 1998 Cotati General Plan reduced the western extent of the City's Urban Growth Boundary, while expanding it along the edges of Rohnert Park. Commercial Industrial and Rural Residential (1.0 unit/acre) uses are planned for areas adjacent to Rohnert Park. The Commercial Industrial area, while it does not border on Rohnert Park, could cause off-site impacts like traffic and noise.

Cotati's growth management program limits the City to issuing 75 residential building permits per year, plus an additional 25 for affordable units. Average annual growth has been closer to 50 units.² The 1999 population of about 7,200 is estimated to increase to more than 7,500 by 2005 and more than 8,000 by 2010.

Sonoma State University

While SSU contributes strongly to the city's identity, it actually lies outside the city's eastern boundary and the City's 1999 SOI. The 214-acre campus supports 7,000 full time equivalent (FTE) students and 1,200 employees, making it one of the largest employers in the area. University students, faculty and staff are a part of the Rohnert Park community.

The 1992 SSU Master Plan featured 880,000 square feet of new classrooms, facilities, and parking, and enhanced campus entryways. At buildout, the Master Plan was designed to increase the number of FTE students to 10,000. As of 1999, SSU is preparing an updated Master Plan that plans for additional classrooms and facilities, as well as new student housing. The updated plan is still expected to have 10,000 FTE students at buildout. The University is considering acquisition of the site west of the concert hall for long-term expansion.

In September 1998, SSU completed a master plan for a new concert hall and music center to be located between the existing campus and the Rohnert Park Expressway. Approximately 97,000 square feet in size, the facility features a 1,400-seat concert hall, an outdoor theater, a recital hall, a rehearsal hall, a banquet hall, and as well as classrooms and offices.

² City of Cotati, 1998 General Plan Update (October 1998), 10.

Canon Manor

The Canon Manor subdivision is located immediately south of SSU, west of Petaluma Hill Road. Although outside of the 1999 City limits, Canon Manor is within Rohnert Park's SOI, and within the Urban Growth Limit shown in this General Plan. The County allowed large-lot development on parcels accessed on graveled roads and supported by individual water wells and septic systems. Water wells and septic systems in close proximity to each other in the heavy clay soils of Canon Manor may result in the infiltration of pollutants from septic systems into water wells. After extended periods of dry weather, the water table may drop below the level of water wells. Public improvements, commonly provided within City limits, either do not exist or were not constructed to City standards in Canon Manor. Property owners, Sonoma County, LAFCO and the City eventually will need to resolve public service issues. Topics to be addressed include:

- Facility standards;
- Costs and mechanisms to install needed facilities;
- Payment of costs by Canon Manor property owners;
- Extension of City services, specifically water and sewer; and
- Annexation.

Penngrove

Established in 1882, Penngrove is a small, unincorporated, rural town at the foothills of Sonoma Mountain. The Penngrove Specific Plan was adopted in 1984 and encompasses 2,750 acres located between Petaluma, Cotati, Rohnert Park and the Canon Manor subdivision to the north. Penngrove's core area is served by sewer system and aqueduct water, with parcels ranging from 1/4 acre to 1 acre. The outlying areas are served by private wells and septic, with parcels ranging from 2 acres to the 20-acre density established by the Sonoma Mountain Specific Plan. Based on low-density land use policies, the Penngrove Specific Plan intends to accommodate a population of 2,744 at buildout.

The Penngrove Specific Plan is committed to: a community centered concept; provisions of greenbelts surrounding and separating urban areas; retention of agricultural resources; adherence to the principle of environmental suitability; and preservation of natural resources.

Regional Agencies and Programs

Implementation of the General Plan will require coordination with several regional and other local agencies.

Sonoma County and Community Separators

Sonoma County communities strive to maintain clear physical boundaries in order to avoid corridor-style urbanization and suburban sprawl. This concept is recognized as “community separators” in the Sonoma County General Plan. Two community separators are located in the Rohnert Park-Cotati area. The Petaluma-Rohnert Park separator is located between Petaluma, Penngrove, and Rohnert Park-Cotati. The second separator is generally located north and northwest of Rohnert Park, between Rohnert Park and Santa Rosa (see Figure 5.1-1). The Sonoma County General Plan limits land uses in community separators to open space, agriculture, and rural residential development.

Santa Rosa's Urban Boundary, along the Wilfred Channel, is close to the northernmost City limits. A County-designated Community Separator is in effect in this area, providing a green space between Santa Rosa and Rohnert Park. The Sonoma County General Plan allows only very low-density residential development in the separators, in order to provide visual and physical greenbelts between communities.

For detailed discussion and policies related to separators, including the Sonoma County Measure D, see Chapter 5: Open Space, Parks, and Public Facilities.

Regulation of Uses in Unincorporated Areas

Because the General Plan does not propose annexation of all land within the Planning Area, development on unincorporated land, essentially all land east of Petaluma Hill Road in the Planning Area, will continue to be regulated by the County General Plan and the Zoning Ordinance. All land in the area is currently designated by the County for agricultural and rural residential uses.

Land outside the Santa Rosa Urban Boundary, within the southern Santa Rosa SOI adjacent to Rohnert Park, includes land designed as community separator. Very low density residential use designations are in place there and permit minimum residential lots of 0.5 to 5 acres. These designations are intended to be permanent, not to reserve land for future development.