

1 Introduction and Overview

1.1 ROHNERT PARK: A CAPSULE HISTORY

Rohnert Park was founded as a master-planned community on the former site of the Rohnert Seed Farm, located along the Northwestern Pacific railroad right-of-way. The original 1954 master plan was based on the “neighborhood unit” concept of clustering single-family homes around local schools and parks. The master plan featured eight neighborhoods, each with 200 to 250 homes, a 10-acre school, and a five-acre park.

In 1956, the Rohnert Park Community Services District was founded, and work began on digging wells, building a sewage plant, and installing water lines, sewer lines, and streets. By 1957, the first homes had been constructed. At the same time, the segment of US 101 from Petaluma north past Cotati was completed, making Rohnert Park more easily accessible from points throughout the region. Also, the California Legislature approved funds for Sonoma State University (SSU), which was located within Rohnert Park until moving to its current site in 1966, initiating the City’s long relationship with the University.

In 1962, at the time of incorporation, Rohnert Park had a population of 2,775, and the City limits encompassed 1,325 acres (approximately 2.1 square miles). The city grew quickly as the Bay Area economy continued to grow, and the demand for housing exploded. By 1980, urban uses extended from US 101 in the west to Snyder Lane in the east.

The 1980s saw growth extend west of US 101; “G” section, east of Snyder Lane, was built in this period. Growth in the 1990s was slower because of limited availability of vacant land within the City limits. In 1999, the city had a population of about 41,000 and an area of nearly 4,400 acres (6.9 square miles), with nearly half the land dedicated to residential uses. Figure 1.1-1 shows the evolution of Rohnert Park from 1965 to 1999.

In conjunction with residential growth, Rohnert Park also attracted commercial and industrial development and acquired a sizeable job base of almost 22,000 employees by 1999. Commercial and industrial uses are concentrated west of the railroad tracks and north of Copeland Creek. Major employers include Hewlett-Packard, located within an industrial campus in the southeast corner of the city, State Farm Insurance, and SSU. The Double Tree Hotel, Rohnert Park Municipal Golf Course, and the Sonoma County Wineries Association make Rohnert Park a popular hospitality center.

Rohnert Park’s limited Sphere of Influence (SOI) includes the Wilfred-Dowdell Specific Plan area (24 acres in size; plans for which were developed in 1999) and Canon Manor, where further development is hindered by the need for public facility improvements and the ongoing debate about how to fund the improvements. SSU is located outside the City’s SOI.