



## City of Laguna Beach

Community Development  
Department

## INFORMATIONAL GUIDE FOR A

# GENERAL PLAN AMENDMENT

### Purpose

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California State Law requires all cities and counties to have comprehensive general plans which provide a policy foundation and guide for the development of the community. All general plans are required to consist of the following elements: land use, circulation, housing, conservation, open space, noise, and seismic and public safety. Laguna Beach's General Plan has the additional elements of Historic Resources and Human Needs, and Scenic Highways. In accordance with State Law, Laguna Beach can change each mandatory element of its General Plan only four times during each calendar year. Proposed changes to the General Plan are reviewed very carefully by the Planning Commission and City Council. Applications for amendments should only be made when there are compelling reasons for a change in the plan.

### Process

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**Step 1 – Applicant Consideration of Project:** Early in the consideration of a potential project, the applicant should evaluate the present General Plan and Zoning Ordinance provisions for the site. If the proposed General Plan Amendment will change the existing zoning, an application for a “zone change” must also be filed. A proposed land use change should be compatible with surrounding uses and provide a logical progression for the City's development. In addition, the applicant is advised to review the proposed amendment with surrounding residents and property owners prior to a formal application.

**Step 2 – Pre-Application Conference:** Prior to submitting a formal application, the applicant is advised to make an appointment with a member of the Planning staff to discuss the feasibility of the request. This will allow staff to review the relationship of the request with the City's General Plan, Zoning Ordinance, and other applicable City standards. In addition, the planner will review the history of similar proposals, address possible environmental concerns and review the required data and procedures.

**Step 3 – Filing of Application:** The applicant should submit a letter describing the requested General Plan Amendment, complete a Development Review Application, pay the filing fee, and submit other required information to the Planning staff. A staff planner will review the material to make sure all the required information is provided. The applicant will be notified within 30 days after filing as to whether the application is complete or what additional information is required.

**Step 4 – Environmental Review:** All General Plan Amendment requests are required to have an environmental assessment to determine whether it is necessary to prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR). If an EIR is required, the applicant should request a meeting with a staff planner to determine the procedure for EIR processing.

**Step 5 – Staff Review for Planning Commission:** Following the receipt of the required information, the planning staff will study the request by reviewing the General Plan's current policy or land use designation, conducting an investigation of the site and assessing the impact or need for the proposed change. A written staff report will be prepared for the Planning Commission which will include a description of the project and staff recommendations. A copy of this report is available to the applicant on the Friday before the scheduled Planning Commission hearing.

**Step 6 – Planning Commission Review:** The Planning Commission is required to hold at least one public hearing on the proposed General Plan Amendment. At least ten (10) days prior to the meeting, owners of property within 300 feet of the subject site will be notified by mail of the forthcoming hearing, and a notice of the public hearing will be posted at City Hall and in the local newspaper.

At the hearing, staff will present an oral report and recommendation. This presentation will be followed by testimony from the applicant and any other interested persons who may wish to comment on the application. A report of the findings and recommendation will be made by the Planning Commission after evaluating the public testimony, the staff report, and the environmental information. The Planning Commission will recommend approval or disapproval of the proposed amendment. The recommendation of the Planning Commission will then be forwarded to the City Council.

**Step 7 – City Council Review:** After the Planning Commission review and recommendation, a public hearing will be scheduled for the City Council. The same legal notifications provided for the Planning Commission consideration are also required for the City Council hearing. At the hearing, City Council will consider the public testimony, staff report, environmental information, and the Planning Commission recommendation. Following the receipt of public testimony, the City Council may: (1) refer the matter back to the Planning Commission for further evaluation; (2) continue the hearing to a specific time and place; or, (3) close the public hearing and make their final decision then, or at a later date. The decision of the City Council is final.

**For more information contact:  
Department of Community Development  
505 Forest Avenue  
Laguna Beach, California 92651  
(949) 497-0713  
[www.lagunabeachcity.net](http://www.lagunabeachcity.net)**