

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## YOLO COUNTY ZONING CODE UPDATE

The following three-page Executive Summary briefly describes the Zoning Code Update program and some of the most important changes that are proposed to the County's existing zoning regulations. A more detailed discussion of the Zoning Code revisions, and lists of properties that are to be rezoned can be found in the lengthier "Project Description" for the program, which can be downloaded and printed from the County's Zoning Code Update Web page at <http://www.yolocounty.org/Index.aspx?page=2424>.

### **Background**

Zoning and subdivision regulations primarily govern the development and use of property in unincorporated Yolo County, and also establish the procedures by which the County reviews and makes decisions on planning applications, such as use permits, subdivision and parcel maps, variances, etc. While there have been incremental changes and updates in recent decades, the majority of the Yolo County Zoning Code has not been comprehensively updated since 1965. So when the updated Yolo Countywide 2030 General Plan was approved by the Board of Supervisors in November, 2009, it included nearly 200 action items which require changes to the County Code.

As a result, in early 2010, staff began the process of comprehensively updating the County's zoning and subdivision regulations. Under State law, all development regulations must be amended to be in conformance with General Plan policies. The existing zoning regulations have been revised to incorporate specific policies and implementation actions in the new General Plan. This comprehensive update also deletes obscure, obsolete, and/or confusing references, and simplifies the entire code to make it easier for the public to understand the County's land use regulations.

The major changes to the Zoning Code are summarized below:

### **More Efficient Regulations**

The existing Title 8 zoning regulations have been redesigned and streamlined to ensure that more benign uses are allowed or permitted without the need for extensive review. More individual uses in all of the zones will be allowed through the issuance by staff of a non-discretionary (no public hearing) Site Plan Review or issuance of a Minor Use Permit after a public hearing before the Zoning Administrator (not the Planning Commission). The intention is to focus limited staff resources on only those uses that may require additional review because of potential impacts on neighbors and/or the environment.

### **Formatting Changes and "Use Type" Tables**

Although some of the new zoning sections look longer than the sections of the current zoning ordinance they are replacing, the added text and tables will result in a format that is easier to use and will streamline the permit process. The updated zoning regulations define and regulate

activities in the agricultural, residential, commercial, industrial, and other zones within broad categories of uses. Each of the zoning articles or sections share a similar format, relying on a series of tables, instead of lengthy lists of allowed, accessory, and conditionally allowed uses. The tables include categories that are common to all of the zones, followed by a listing of specific uses within each category particular to that zone. It is important to note that the list of uses are not intended to be comprehensive, but serve as examples that can be used for further reference. The new format also includes development or performance standards for specified uses.

## **Proposed New Zoning Districts and Regulations**

The new zoning and related regulations affect all of the approximately 10,000 individual properties within the unincorporated Yolo County area, including 600,000 acres of productive agricultural lands and more than 25 small unincorporated communities. All of Yolo County's current zoning districts are proposed to be replaced with new zones, most of which have new names that correspond with the applicable land use designations in the 2030 Countywide General Plan.

## **Uncoupling the Williamson Act from Zoning**

As already noted, one of the goals of the Zoning Code Update is to implement key policies of the 2030 Countywide General Plan. The General Plan contains an implementation action that specifically requires the County to "Amend the County Code to remove the Williamson Act as a basis for the Agricultural Preserve Zone."

Yolo County is unique among any of the other agricultural counties in the state in its historical reliance on the Williamson Act as the basis for the County's agricultural zoning. Sixty-seven percent of the unincorporated area of the County is protected under Williamson Act contracts. A major emphasis of the updated agricultural zoning is to create new zoning districts that are not directly tied to the requirements of the Williamson Act. The Zoning Update program also includes new *Williamson Act Guidelines*, a stand-alone document (i.e., not a formal part of the Zoning Code), which includes all of the local procedural rules and process for implementing Williamson Act land use contracts.

## **New Agricultural Zones**

The County's existing A-1 (General Agricultural) and A-P (Agricultural Preserve) zones are proposed to be replaced with two new zones called A-N (Agricultural Intensive) and A-X (Agricultural Extensive). The new zones are more consistent with how other counties zone ag land, which is based on factors such as soil type, surface water availability, and crop characteristics, rather than simply segregating parcels by whether owners have chosen to participate in the Williamson Act or not.

The new A-N zone would be applied to parcels having characteristics of intensive farmland (typically, prime farmland lying on the valley floor that is cultivated and irrigated). The minimum parcel sizes for newly created A-N lots is proposed to be 40 acres for irrigated parcels primarily planted in permanent crops; 80 acres for irrigated parcels that are cultivated; and 160 acres for parcels that are uncultivated. Thus, the new A-N zone would retain most of the requirements of the existing A-P zoning, including the predominant 80-acre minimum parcel size (except for

orchards and vineyards). As with the current zoning, existing parcels that do not meet these minimum parcel sizes would be “grandfathered in” as legal, non-conforming lots with all the rights allowed to larger parcels.

The new A-X zone would be applied to non-prime soils that are generally not irrigated and are used for grazing, rangeland, dry farming, or open space uses. The minimum parcel sizes for newly created A-X lots is proposed to be 160 acres for dry land farming, and 320 acres for rangeland (soils not capable of cultivation), which are the same minimum parcel sizes for dry land farming and rangeland as the existing A-P zoning.

There are three additional agricultural zones that are proposed: the Agricultural Commercial (A-C) zone, Agricultural Industrial (A-I) zone (similar to the existing AGI zone), and the Agricultural Residential (A-R) zone (only applicable to lots created through a subdivision approved under the Clustered Agricultural Housing Ordinance).

### **Residential, Commercial, and Industrial Zones**

As with the agricultural zones, the County’s existing residential, commercial, and Industrial zones have been changed to correspond with the 2030 General Plan land use designations and policies. The Code emphasizes making greater use of land within existing communities, to improve service efficiency and to reduce the pressure to develop surrounding agricultural land.

The existing residential communities in the unincorporated area are now zoned either R-S (Residential Suburban), R-1 (One Family), R-2 (One Family or Duplex), or R-3 (Multiple Family). These existing zones will be replaced with the following zoning categories, which match the similar General Plan land use designations they implement: Rural Residential (R-R), Low Density Residential (R-L), Medium Density Residential (R-M), and High Density Residential (R-H).

The main changes that have been incorporated in the updated residential zoning are to increase the minimum and maximum densities of housing in the R-L, R-M and R-H zones to match the General Plan densities; to emphasize and allow more mixed uses in residential areas; and to allow more types of housing to be built with less discretionary review. The revised Zoning Code also allows for a greater range of tourism and recreational uses.

The main changes in the updated commercial zones include an emphasis on allowing more mixed use residential uses in the commercial zones, and allowing more types of retail and service activities to be permitted with less discretionary review, assuming the uses meet required performance standards.

The existing industrial zoning has also been updated by deleting numerous outdated uses that are no longer common or relevant (e.g., tanneries and ice manufacturing) and collapsing the previous long list of permitted uses into more easily understandable categories.