



CITY OF FULLERTON

Community and Economic Development Department

Item No. 2
April 22, 2026
6:30 p.m.
Public Hearing

**TO: Chair Valadez and
Members of the Planning Commission**

APPLICATION

LRP-2026-0004

APPLICANT

City of Fullerton

LOCATION

Citywide

SUMMARY OF REQUEST

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission approve the following actions related to adoption of the Open Space and Conservation Element:

Recommendation to City Council to approve an amendment to The Fullerton Plan (General Plan) by adopting Appendix M "Open Space and Conservation Element" and replacing Chapter 19 in its entirety.

CEQA DETERMINATION

This General Plan Amendment is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15061(b)(3), Common Sense Exemption. The proposed amendments are consistent with the purpose of enhancing the quality of life identified in the original chapter in the General Plan and do not approve any new development or construction.

AUTHORIZATION

Pursuant to Fullerton Municipal Code (FMC) Sections 15.72.040 and 15.72.050, the Planning Commission has the authority to conduct a public hearing to consider proposed amendments to The Fullerton Plan (the City's General Plan). Following the hearing, the Planning Commission must issue a recommendation to the City Council, supported by findings that the proposed amendments satisfy applicable state requirements. The proposed project would amend The Fullerton Plan to update the goals, policies and implementation framework of the Open Space and Conservation Element.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

Notice was published in the Fullerton News Tribune on April 2, 2026.

The City launched a dedicated project webpage introducing the Open Space Element and Environmental Justice Elements (Attachment 7). The webpage features summaries of engagement activities, major milestones and deliverables, and status updates on both elements. In addition, the City utilized multiple media channels, including a website banner, several email blasts to residents, Instagram posts, and digital display boards at the Transit Center.

The planning process for the two elements began in September 2025, following the hiring of Michael Baker International (MBI) as the consultant team for the project. The public engagement process included an online survey conducted from October 27 to November 30, 2025, which garnered 642 responses. In-person outreach at the OktoBOOfest event on October 30, 2025, at the Downtown Plaza engaged over 100 residents directly. The results of the online survey and pop-up event are summarized in the Supplemental Materials (Attachment 3 – Appendix M Supplement – Online Public Survey Responses).

In February 2026, a draft for public review was published on the City's dedicated webpage and made available for download. The draft version was also distributed via an email blast during the 30-day public comment period. The Planning Division received several public comment letters and feedback. A summary of the response letters and public comment letters is attached (Attachment 5).

All public comments received from the community survey, in-person outreach event, and 30-day public review period were incorporated into the document to the greatest degree possible in the attached Open Space and Conservation Element draft for adoption (Attachment 2 – Appendix M: Open Space and Conservation Element dated April 2026).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION / BACKGROUND

The Open Space and Conservation Element (also referred to as the Open Space Element or the Element) is a mandatory element of The Fullerton Plan (i.e., the General Plan), providing policy guidance for the planning, preservation, and maintenance of parks, recreational facilities, natural open spaces, and biological habitat within the City. The current element was adopted in 2012 as part of The Fullerton Plan and has not been comprehensively updated since that time.

Since adoption of The Fullerton Plan, the City has experienced notable changes in the community requiring a relook at its elements. This included substantial new development, demographic shifts, evolving state mandates, and growing community interest in equitable access to open space, climate resilience, and habitat conservation.

The proposed update seeks to modernize the Element to reflect current community needs, best practices in open space planning, and new state requirements. This includes Senate Bill 1425, which mandates an updated Open Space Element by January 1, 2026, addressing equitable access, climate resilience, and rewilding opportunities.

Additionally, the update incorporates Assembly Bill 1889 and environmental justice mandates. The updated Element is internally consistent with the Land Use, Conservation, Safety, and

Environmental Justice Elements of the General Plan and is intended to ensure that all Fullerton residents have equitable access to high-quality open space and recreational opportunities.

The draft document, titled “Appendix M: Open Space and Conservation Element” and dated April 2026, represents the working document for Planning Commission review. It includes an introduction and statutory basis, a summary of the planning process and community engagement, an existing conditions analysis covering inventory, access mapping, habitat, and climate vulnerability, and the proposed Goals and Policies organized under seven key goals.

As described in the Public Outreach section above, community engagement was a cornerstone of this update that included an online survey, in-person events, and staff review and input from various City departments. All comments were incorporated into the draft to the greatest degree possible. While the document is based on both technical analysis (inventory and mapping) and robust community engagement, the feedback received was directly reflected in the draft policies.

The draft goals and policies provide a modern, actionable framework to manage existing open spaces, plan for future acquisitions, enhance ecological health, and ensure equitable access for all residents. An Action Plan (Attachment 4) has also been developed as an implementation framework, with short-term, mid-term, and long-term items for various City departments to implement the community vision.

In summary, the Open Space and Conservation Element is a policy-level general plan document intended to provide an overview as well as general goals for conservation, management, and enhancement of open space and natural resources. Its purpose is to inventory broad resource categories, identify conservation priorities, and establish goals, policies, and implementation actions. For clarification, this document will not include site-specific environmental investigations or project-level technical studies. These particular studies will be completed as a separate project or as a long-term action item.

DRAFT ELEMENT OVERVIEW

Attachment 2 (Appendix M: Draft Open Space and Conservation Element dated April 2026) represents the working document for the Commission’s review and recommendation. It contains the following:

- Introduction and Statutory Requirements (Sections 1.1-1.2)
- Planning Process and Community Engagement Overview Summary (Section 1.3)
- Relationship to Other Documents (Section 1.4)
- Existing Conditions Analysis (Section 2) including Inventory, Access Mapping, Vegetation Types, Habitat Connectivity, and Urban Canopy Cover data.
- Proposed Goals and Policies (Section 3), organized under seven key goals.

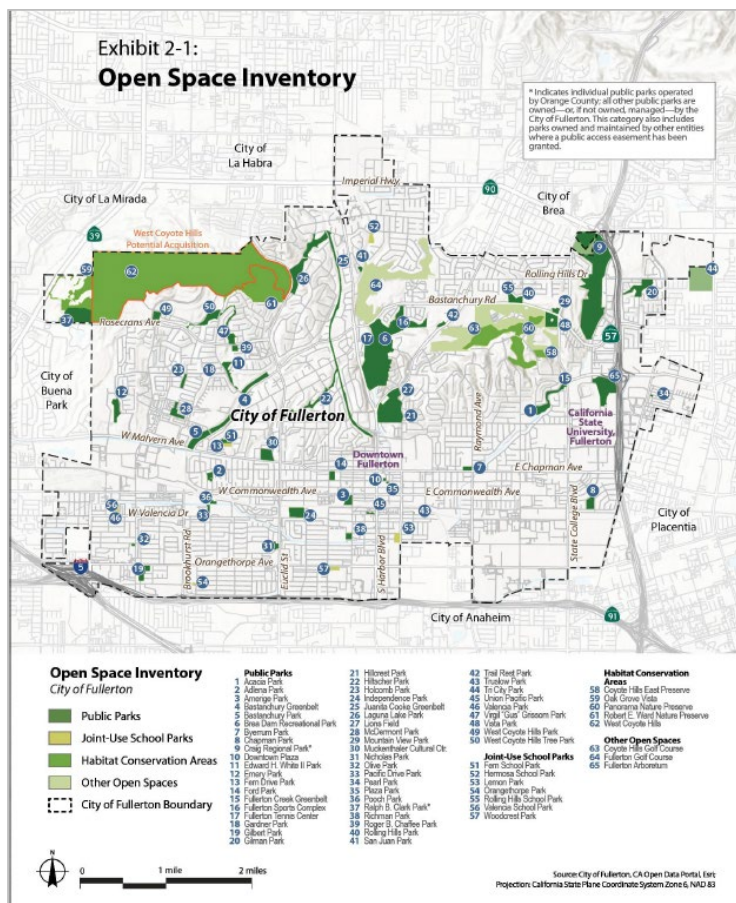


Exhibit 2-1: Open Space Inventory

The Draft Open Space and Conservation Element is organized around seven overarching goals that collectively guide the City’s approach to open space management, conservation, accessibility, and community stewardship. They are summarized as follows:

Goal 1 promotes the responsible management of existing open spaces by balancing public use with ecological health, including coordination with regional partners, watershed management, and high-quality maintenance of parks and sensitive areas.

Goal 2 provides forward-thinking planning to guide the development and preservation of future open spaces, with an emphasis on funding strategies, priority acquisition of high-value ecological areas such as Coyote Hills, and neighborhood greening in underserved districts.

Goals 3 through 5 address the protection and enhancement of Fullerton’s natural systems.

Goal 3 focuses on habitat conservation, watershed preservation, native vegetation restoration, and mitigation of project-level impacts on sensitive areas.

Goal 4 aims to increase accessibility and inclusivity of open space resources by expanding the City’s connected trail network, improving ADA accessibility, and promoting multi-modal access to parks and open spaces.

Goal 5 strengthens ecological function and climate resilience through urban rewilding, habitat linkage, wildlife corridor protection, and nature-based solutions including drought-tolerant landscaping and pollinator gardens.

Goals 6 and 7 address the City’s long-term climate adaptation and community engagement strategies.

Goal 6 promotes green infrastructure, cooling corridors, stormwater management features, urban canopy expansion, and air quality improvements.

Goal 7 emphasizes community participation and transparency by fostering partnerships with regional agencies, academic institutions, and community organizations, and by providing multilingual outreach and engagement opportunities for youth, seniors, and underserved residents.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The Draft Open Space and Conservation Element was prepared in accordance with several laws, Senate Bills (SBs), Assembly Bills (ABs), and other requirements. Each of these is outlined below.

1. Consistency with State Law

The draft Element is specifically structured to meet all requirements of recent State mandates.

SB 1425 (Open Space and Equity): The Element addresses equitable access through policies under Goals 1, 2, and 4 that target community-identified park and open space gaps, particularly in Districts 3, 4, and 5, aligning with the new Environmental Justice Element. For climate resilience, Goals 5 and 6 integrate climate vulnerability assessments (fire, flood, urban heat) with conservation policies, creating a comprehensive framework coordinated with the Safety Element. Regarding rewilding opportunities, Goal 5, supported by the Existing Conditions analysis (Section 2.5), identifies specific opportunities for habitat restoration and connectivity, aligning with the Land Use Element.

AB 1889 (Wildlife Connectivity): The "Essential Habitat Connectivity" map and analysis (Section 2.5) directly address this mandate. Policies P5.1 through P5.7 provide a clear framework to avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts on wildlife movement.

2. Internal Consistency with the City’s General Plan - “The Fullerton Plan”

The draft Element is designed as an integrative component of the City's broader General Plan. As detailed in Section 1.4, it reinforces goals across multiple elements, including the Built Environment (by supporting multi-modal trails), the Community (by linking parks to public health), and the Natural Environment (by setting clear conservation targets).

3. Responsiveness to Community Input

The proposed policies are a direct reflection of the "Key Themes" identified during outreach (Section 1.3.3). For example, policies related to amenities and maintenance (P1.5, P1.10, P4.8)

directly address resident requests for more restrooms, shade structures, seating, and improved park upkeep. Safety and enforcement policies (P1.10, P4.9, P4.10) respond to concerns regarding e-bike conflicts, personal security, and management of homeless encampments in open spaces. Open space equity policies (P2.4, P4.11, P5.10) prioritize green space investment in underserved areas (Districts 4 and 5) through pocket parks and urban canopy expansion. Conservation and rewilding policies (Goal 5) mirror strong public support for protecting natural resources like Coyote Hills and enhancing native habitats.

4. Environmental Review (CEQA)

The Open Space and Conservation Element itself is exempt under Categorical Exemption Section 15061(b)(3), Common Sense Exemption. The Open Space Element is a policy document that does not authorize direct physical changes to the environment. Future projects implemented under its framework will undergo their own project-level CEQA review. Based on the policy-level nature of the update, significant environmental impacts are not anticipated, and any potential concerns can be addressed through policy refinements prior to adoption.

5. Senate Bill 18 Tribal Consultation Process

Per the requirements set by SB 18, outreach was conducted to the Native American Tribes that had historically occupied the lands in and around the City of Fullerton. Notification letters were sent to the applicable 34 California Native American tribes via certified mail.

The City received replies from several tribes (Attachment 6 - SB 18 Notification Letter and responses received). While it was understood that the Open Space Element is a policy document and not a plan for development or construction, the key condition outlined in the responses is that if in the future there was ground disturbance related to implementing the Element, the City would need to consult with the tribal groups at that time. Additionally, the responses noted that while there are no federally recognized tribal reservations within City limits, the land is within the ancestral territory of the Tongva/Kizh and Acjachemen (Juaneno) peoples, who had established villages in the area thousands of years ago.

6. 30-Day Public Review Period and Comments

The City published the draft on February 20, 2026, on the City's webpage for a 30-day public review period. By March 20, 2026, the Planning Division had received several comments and letters. A record of the public comments received, and response letters are included as Attachment 5.

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS AND REGULATIONS

Based on the analysis and outreach conducted during the preparation of the draft Open Space and Conservation Element, the document satisfies state mandates (SB 1425, AB 1889, etc.), is grounded in data and meaningful public input, and provides a clear, modern, and actionable policy framework for the next 20 years and beyond. Once adopted, the previous 2012 Open Space and Conservation Element will be removed and replaced with this document, and the City's General Plan website will list the updated Open Space and Conservation Element (2026) as Appendix M: Open Space and Conservation Element. Staff recommends that the Planning Commission make a recommendation to City Council approving the draft Open Space and Conservation Element.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Adopt Planning Commission Resolution No. PC-2026-06, entitled:

A RESOLUTION OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF FULLERTON, CALIFORNIA, RECOMMENDING THAT THE CITY COUNCIL APPROVE A GENERAL PLAN AMENDMENT TO ADOPT THE UPDATED OPEN SPACE AND CONSERVATION ELEMENT OF THE FULLERTON PLAN, AS APPENDIX M AND REPLACING CHAPTER 19 IN ITS ENTIRETY

DATED: April 22, 2026

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Attachments

1. Draft Planning Commission Resolution No. PC-2026-06
2. Appendix M: Draft Open Space and Conservation Element (dated April 2026)
3. Appendix M Supplement: Online Community Survey Responses Summary
4. Draft Action Plans by Michael Baker International
5. Public Comments Received During 30-day Public Review Period and Response Letters
6. SB 18 Notification Letter and Responses Received
7. City's Webpage Dedicated to the Open Space and Environmental Justice Element