
Appendix C

Buildout Assumptions Memo



To: City of Vista – Community Development
From: RICK Planning + Design
Date: May 20, 2025
Subject: Summary of Vista 2050 General Plan Update Buildout Assumptions

Introduction

The general plan buildout projection assesses land use designations and densities to estimate the maximum allowable potential development within the planning area. It envisions how a community may look if the general plan were fully realized by predicting total population, dwelling units, commercial space, and other community features necessary for guiding planning decisions and determining environmental impacts. While general plans seek to accommodate anticipated growth, much of this growth is anticipated to occur, regardless of the General Plan’s adoption. State Housing Laws require the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) to develop and distribute projected housing needs to individual cities (Gov. Code §65584.04). In turn, each City within the region, including the City of Vista, is required provide land use designations and zoning for this projected growth (Gov. Code §§ 65584.04, 65583, 65588).

Buildout Methodology

To assist the City in its planning and environmental review efforts, buildout projections have been prepared for the City of Vista’s proposed 2050 General Plan Update.¹ This buildout projection started by calculating maximum theoretical buildout of the General Plan land use designations (i.e. maximum residential densities (dwelling units per acre) and maximum commercial intensities (Floor Area Ratios) multiplied by land area included in the General Plan land use designations. However, this theoretical buildout calculation does not provide reasonably foreseeable projections. Growth within a City can be affected by multiple factors, including birth rates, death rates, immigration, labor force participation rates, job/economic growth (including unforeseen economic downturns), development code/planning constraints, environmental constraints (e.g. historic structures, sensitive habitat, etc.), as well as the will of individual property owners/residents (e.g. property owners may not be interested in demolishing their existing structures). Consequently, the number of projected dwelling units, non-residential

¹ As part of the initial Vista 2050 General Plan Update process, two initial land use plan alternatives were developed: an ‘Intermediate Growth’ Alternative and a ‘Sustainable Focused Growth’ Alternative. The draft 2050 Vista General Plan update released with the Draft EIR and analyzed as the “Proposed Project” is based upon the “Sustainable Focused Growth” Alternative identified during that initial planning process. However, these initial planning alternatives should not be confused with the Draft EIR’s CEQA Alternatives.

square footage, population, and employment under the maximum theoretical buildout calculations were beyond historic trends, and future market conditions and do not constitute reasonably foreseeable development.

As mentioned above, the residential or non-residential development of a site will be constrained, and not fully developed. The current Vista General Plan Update (2030) recognized that each land use category would not achieve its maximum intensity/density and reduced the levels that were assumed for build out analysis purposes, in essence assuming a “reasonably foreseeable buildout”. These reductions were specific to each land use designation, ranging from 44% of maximum buildout intensity for nonresidential uses, up to 75% for some residential land use designations. The average buildout levels studied in the previously adopted General Plan Update (2030) were 61% of maximum intensity and density for all land use designations. City staff, along with RICK, used the methodology from the 2030 General Plan as a basis and reviewed approaches from other jurisdictions to help inform the 2050 buildout assumptions.

Development Patterns

Development under the General Plan will primarily occur through infill and redevelopment along key commercial corridors in and around the Downtown area, including North Santa Fe Avenue, Vista Village Drive, and South Santa Fe Avenue. These corridors have been redesignated to support mixed-use development and include many underutilized or aging commercial properties. No significant new development is anticipated in hillside areas, established residential neighborhoods, or open space designations.

New Land Use Designations

Two new land use designations in Vista 2050 include the Mixed-Use General (MU-G) designation and the Mixed-Use Corridor (MU-C) designation. The Mixed-Use General land use designation assumes a maximum of commercial Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of 0.1 (i.e. 10% of the site accommodating retail commercial uses), with the remainder of the area assuming residential development at up to 80 dwelling units/acre. The Mixed-Use Corridor designation assumes a maximum of 0.02 FAR, or a maximum of 2% of the site accommodating retail commercial uses, with the remainder of the site assuming residential development at up to 45 dwelling units/acre. These assumptions are supported by a visual analysis of existing mixed-use projects within Vista, particularly near major intersections and transit corridors, and market input from London Moeder Advisors. They also reflect development patterns and feasibility observed in comparable jurisdictions in San Diego County, where similar land use designations prioritize residential development while accommodating limited ground-floor commercial activity. This ratio is intended to encourage economically viable projects while ensuring adequate flexibility for future development and alignment with current market trends and land availability.

The proportion of retail to residential uses in the mixed-use designations is supported by the findings of the Fiscal and Economic Impact Analysis of General Plan Alternatives (Fiscal Analysis) prepared by London Moeder Associates. The findings used employment data derived from the amount of non- residential square footage indicated in the buildout table and divided

that area by employee per square foot based on a land use type provided by SANDAG (see Assumptions Table for job per square foot by land use). The Fiscal Analysis used the employment data and applied a separate ratio to determine job types and the amount of total occupied building square footage in all non-residential and mixed-use categories. The ratio assumed in the mixed-use designations represents a shift from the existing General Plan that is intended to provide more realistic and economically viable estimates of the amount of retail, to maintain high occupancy rates, and to generate local employment and sales tax revenue. The proportion of retail to residential uses in the mixed-use designations directly informs the buildout projections by determining how much of each parcel is assumed to be developed with non-residential versus residential uses. These assumptions were used to calculate the amount of non-residential square footage in the buildout scenario, which in turn informed employment estimates using job density factors provided by SANDAG (see Assumptions Table). The Fiscal and Economic Impact Analysis of General Plan Alternatives (Fiscal Analysis), prepared by London Moeder Associates, supported this ratio by evaluating local market conditions and development feasibility.

Buildout Factor Selection and Assumptions

Based on these factors, the proposed Vista General Plan Update (2050) buildout calculations assume a buildout factor of 65%. This assumption builds upon the methodology used in the City's 2030 General Plan, which applied an average buildout rate of 61% across all land use categories. The 65% factor reflects updated market realities and development feasibility, particularly for mixed-use and infill sites, and aligns with industry best practices for estimating reasonably foreseeable growth. It also responds to the community's expressed vision for moderate, well-integrated growth that preserves Vista's character while supporting housing and economic opportunities. This approach balances regulatory requirements, economic viability, and community values, and provides a defensible foundation for environmental review under CEQA.

There are several assumptions that have been presumed in the "buildout" scenarios for the City of Vista General Plan Update (2050). Undeveloped areas of buildout parcels will be dedicated to required public/private right of way, easements, landscaping, and parking. Another assumption concerns the exclusion of three General Plan Land Use Types from contributing either dwelling units or building square footage to the "buildout" calculations. These land types are Civic Activity, Parks and Recreation, and Open Space.

The remaining assumptions are related to the ratios used to determine the population and employment levels associated with the proposed General Plan Update. Household sizes per dwelling unit have been provided by the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) Series 14 Model, which will perform the Circulation analysis for the Vista General Plan Update and alternatives. Similarly, employee ratios by land use were provided by the SANDAG ABM2+ model.

Demographic Forecast

As of 2022, Vista was home to approximately 97,766 persons (American Community Survey, 2022). Using the buildout projection conducted for Vista's General Plan Update (Vista 2050), the population of Vista is expected to grow to approximately 146,877 residents by 2050. Vista 2050 projections also show a trend towards larger household sizes in Vista. In 2022, the average household size was 2.86 persons (American Community Survey, 2022), and by 2050, the average household size is forecasted to rise to 3.02 persons per household. The City of Vista is largely built out, and most new developments will occur through infill and redevelopment of existing properties.

Summary Tables

Based on these assumptions, methodology, and supporting analysis from the Fiscal Impact Analysis, Tables 1 sets forth the buildout projections for the General Plan Update land use plan alternatives: "Sustainable Focused Growth". The buildout for the Existing General Plan 2030 has also been included in Table 2 for comparison. Assumptions are detailed in Table 3.