

The Ahwahnee Principles

for Resource-Efficient Communities



The Ahwahnee Principles for Resource-Efficient Communities, written in 1991 by the Local Government Commission, paved the way for the Smart Growth movement and New Urbanism.

These principles provide a blueprint for elected officials to create compact, mixed-use, walkable, transit-oriented developments in their local communities. Cities and counties across the nation have adopted them to break the cycle of sprawl.

If you like the newly emerging downtowns across the nation – full of people, activities and great public spaces – that’s the Ahwahnee Principles in action.

Since then, the Ahwahnee Principles for Economic Development in 1997 and the Ahwahnee Water Principles in 2005 have been developed to complement this pioneering vision.

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- www.lgc.org/ahwahnee/principles.html



Local
Government
Commission

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Preamble

Existing patterns of urban and suburban development seriously impair our quality of life.

The symptoms are: more congestion and air pollution resulting from our increased dependence on automobiles, the loss of precious open space, the need for costly improvements to roads and public services, the inequitable distribution of economic resources, and the loss of a sense of community.

By drawing upon the best from the past and the present, we can plan communities that will more successfully serve the needs of those who live and work within them. Such planning should adhere to certain fundamental principles.



Community Principles

- 1** All planning should be in the form of complete and integrated communities containing housing, shops, work places, schools, parks and civic facilities essential to the daily life of the residents.
- 2** Community size should be designed so that housing, jobs, daily needs and other activities are within easy walking distance of each other.
- 3** As many activities as possible should be located within easy walking distance of transit stops.
- 4** A community should contain a diversity of housing types to enable citizens from a wide range of economic levels and age groups to live within its boundaries.
- 5** Businesses within the community should provide a range of job types for the community's residents.
- 6** The location and character of the community should be consistent with a larger transit network.
- 7** The community should have a center focus that combines commercial, civic, cultural and recreational uses.

Regional Principles

- 1** The regional land use planning structure should be integrated within a larger transportation network built around transit rather than freeways.
- 2** Regions should be bounded by and provide a continuous system of greenbelt/wildlife corridors to be determined by natural conditions.
- 3** Regional institutions and services (government, stadiums, museums, etc.) should be located in the urban core.
- 4** Materials and methods of construction should be specific to the region, exhibiting continuity of history and culture and compatibility with the climate to encourage the development of local character and community identity.

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8 The community should contain an ample supply of specialized open space in the form of squares, greens and parks whose frequent use is encouraged through placement and design.

9 Public spaces should be designed to encourage the attention and presence of people at all hours of the day and night.

10 Each community or cluster of communities should have a well defined edge, such as agricultural greenbelts or wildlife corridors, permanently protected from development.

11 Streets, pedestrian paths and bike paths should contribute to a system of fully connected and interesting routes to all destinations. Their design should encourage pedestrian and bicycle use by being small and spatially defined by buildings, trees and lighting; and by discouraging high-speed traffic.



12 Wherever possible, the natural terrain, drainage, and vegetation of the community should be preserved with superior examples contained within parks or greenbelts.

13 The community design should help conserve resources and minimize waste.

14 Communities should provide for the efficient use of water through the use of natural drainage, drought tolerant landscaping and recycling.

15 The street orientation, the placement of buildings and the use of shading should contribute to the energy efficiency of the community.

Implementation Strategy

1 The general plan should be updated to incorporate the above principles.

2 Rather than allowing developer-initiated, piecemeal development, local governments should take charge of the planning process. General plans should designate where new growth, infill or redevelopment will be allowed to occur.

3 Prior to any development, a specific plan should be prepared based on the planning principles. With the adoption of specific plans, complying projects could proceed with minimal delay.

4 Plans should be developed through an open process and participants in the process should be provided visual models of all planning proposals.



The Ahwahnee Principles for Economic Development

As the smart-growth approaches to development began taking root in the early 1990s, it became clear that a companion set of principles addressing the economic development aspects of creating more livable communities was also needed. The Ahwahnee Principles for Economic Development were adopted in 1997, a half-dozen years following the establishment of the precepts for resource-efficient land use.

Prosperity in the 21st century will be based on creating and maintaining a sustainable standard of living and a high quality of life for all. To meet this challenge, a new comprehensive model is emerging which embraces economic, social and environmental responsibility and recognizes the economic value of natural and human capital.



■ www.lgc.org/ahwahnee/econ_principles.html

The Ahwahnee Water Principles

Water – how we capture it, treat it, use it, control it, manage it and release it – is vital to the 36 million people who live in California and has a tremendous impact on our quality of life, local budgets and day-to-day policy-making. And as California adds another 12 million residents by 2030, water-resource challenges will be increasingly serious.

Unless we locate new growth in the right places and develop it properly, the streams, rivers and lakes that receive runoff water will become increasingly more polluted and the natural functions of watersheds that collect and cleanse our water supplies will diminish.

Adopted in 2005, the 14 Ahwahnee Water Principles – identified by water experts at the federal, state and local levels as the most effective and politically and economically viable least-cost options to help guide communities concerned about their future water supplies – can be grouped into four different categories:

- 1 Growing in a water-wise manner.
- 2 Water-friendly neighborhood/site-scale planning and design strategies.
- 3 Water conservation approaches to make the most efficient use of our existing water supplies.
- 4 A set of corollary guidelines that can help put these nine community principles into action through strategies for implementing practical steps to make the physical changes necessary to ensure water sustainability.

The California State Water Resources Control Board now promotes the principles and is using them as a way of prioritizing grants and loans to local government. The number of cities and counties adopting these principles as policy is growing every day.

■ www.lgc.org/ahwahnee/h2o_principles.html