



# Sphere of Influence (SOI) Urban Study Area Project

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### *—About the Sphere of Influence and Urban Study Area—*

Since the start of the City's planning and visioning process in 2003, the City Council envisioned the eventual need for planning beyond its original borders. As part of the designation for the planning area outside the City limits, the General Plan established two "Urban Study Areas" – one south of Kammerer Road and the other south of Grant Line Road. The General Plan does not specify the type or intensity of development in either area, suggesting only that "urbanization to some extent could occur."

#### **What is a Sphere of Influence (SOI) and why do we need it?**

A Sphere of Influence (SOI) is typically the planning boundary outside of an agency's legal boundary (such as the city limit line) that designates the agency's probable future boundary and service area. The establishment of a SOI area does not authorize development or expansion. Alternatively, a SOI area allows an agency (such as City of Elk Grove) to perform studies and initiate long term planning through a Master Planning process to ensure proper and orderly future growth.

The City's current SOI boundary is coterminous with the City limits. As such, the current boundary precludes any future planning beyond the City limit line. In order to initiate the comprehensive planning for the Urban Study

Areas, the City's SOI needs to be established beyond the current City's boundary. Therefore, an application to expand the SOI boundary was submitted to the Sacramento Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) for processing in May 2008. The proposed SOI boundary is shown in Figure 1, which will also serve as the Master Planning area for the Urban Study Areas.

#### **What is the Master Plan?**

The Master Plan is a conceptual land use plan that will be established for the SOI amendment area. The creation of the Master Plan is anticipated to be a multi-year planning effort that involves extensive outreach that will include the public, property owners, service agencies, affected agencies, and interest groups. The initial step of the Master Planning process begins with the approval of the SOI amendment application by LAFCo.

#### **What is LAFCo and how are they involved?**

The Sacramento Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) is the agency that has the approval authority over the City's Sphere of Influence amendment request. LAFCo is an independent agency, with jurisdiction over cities and special districts within the County, but remains independent from County

government. LAFCo's purpose is to promote orderly growth, discourage urban sprawl, preserve open space and prime farmlands, and promote the efficient extension of government services. LAFCo accomplishes these goals by defining a city's SOI, approving or denying annexations, and approving or denying extensions of municipal infrastructure and services to other areas.

**Why is the City undertaking the expansion of the Sphere of Influence now?**

Since 2003, the City Council envisioned the eventual need for planning beyond its original borders. As a number of long range planning efforts were underway (i.e. South Sacramento Habitat Conservation Plan, Sacramento Regional County Sanitations District's Water Recycling Opportunities Study, South County Regional Corridor project, Sacramento Area Council of Government Blueprint), the City Council opted to take a proactive approach by initiating steps to start planning for the future expansion in the Urban Study Areas to assure that future growth opportunities for the City can be included in the various long range planning efforts. Thus, the City Council directed staff to start the master planning of the Urban Study Areas and amend the City's Sphere of Influence as the very first step in a multi-year planning process.

The Master Planning process is an exceptional opportunity for the future planning of open space, passive recreation, habitat conservation, and cooperative farming.

The Master Planning process also presents an opportunity for the City to achieve a stronger jobs/housing balance. Historically, the City has a low jobs-to-housing ratio as residential growth quickly outpaced employment growth. The City's General Plan sets out a goal of having one job for every resident in the workforce, yet employment projections for the City indicate that the City does not have capacity within its

current City limits to accommodate this goal. As the processing of new development applications have significantly decreased, this presents the City with an opportunity to initiate the planning process for achieving a job/housing balance.

**Why should the City consider growth in the proposed Sphere of Influence amendment area?**

The proposed SOI amendment area is based on the Urban Study Areas, which the City's General Plan identifies as areas where the next logical expansion of the City would occur. As the City's residential, industrial, office, and commercial land base is building out, it is expected that additional lands outside of the City boundaries is necessary to accommodate future growth. As a result, the City Council is looking at the ultimate buildout of the City and has proactively initiated the planning process that will allow the City to be prepared to expand in the future. The Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) 2035 projects that the number of employees in the City would more than double and the number of housing units could almost double by the year 2035. Furthermore, the expansion of the City boundaries is also supported by SACOG's Blueprint, which specifically identifies future growth occurring south of Kammerer Road.

**I am concerned about what will be developed in the proposed Sphere of Influence amendment area. How does land use planning figure into the project?**

The proposed SOI amendment area is in the initial planning stages and all properties within the area will remain under the jurisdiction of Sacramento County. Once the SOI amendment area is formalized through the approval of a Sphere of Influence amendment by LAFCo,

there will be a dedicated phase (the Master Plan process) for land planning. This process will involve extensive outreach that will include the public, property owners, service agencies, affected agencies, and interest group involvement over a period of several years.

The anticipated land uses could include residential housing, as well as commercial and industrial uses. In addition, the City's General Plan requires the implementation of a comprehensive strategy for the preservation of open space, habitat, and agriculture, both inside and outside of the existing City limits. Therefore, the SOI amendment area would also include open space, habitat, and agricultural land uses. As the City has not conducted any land planning for the SOI amendment area, it is premature to speculate what, where, and the extent of what may occur within the SOI at this time. Establishing the SOI amendment area will define the areas that the City will plan.

**Why is land planning not occurring before the SOI is finalized?**

The purpose of establishing a Sphere of Influence is to define the boundaries of the area that will be studied or planned. Thus, once the SOI amendment area is approved by LAFCo, the City will have a defined study area and will start the actual Master Planning process, which will involve extensive public participation, infrastructure planning, finance plans, etc. The identification of a revised SOI does not change development rights or activities on the ground.

**What is the plan for the Cosumnes River floodplain corridor?**

There will be no development in the 100-year floodplain. This is consistent with the adopted City General Plan and the City Council's direction that the floodplain area remain in open space/agriculture. It is not the City's intent

to jeopardize any lives or property by placing development in the 100-year floodplain. Any potential development would be limited to outside of the 100-year floodplain boundary.

Furthermore, the City and County are currently preparing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that will address the protection of the Cosumnes River corridor. Once a draft MOU has been established, the draft MOU will be presented to the public prior to LAFCo submittal.

**The City is planning on pumping water from the Cosumnes River basin for future development.**

The City has no plans for building water pumps or wells. The City and its residents currently receive water from the Sacramento County Water Agency (SCWA) and the Elk Grove Water Service (EGWS), as the City does not supply water to its residents. Therefore, the City relies on other agencies to supply water to the City. These agencies have not identified a need to use Cosumnes River water for future development in the Elk Grove area.

**The Sphere of Influence amendment is the same thing as "Annexation".**

Annexation and a Sphere of Influence are different. Placing an area within the City's SOI indicates that the area could be considered appropriate for future urban uses, could meet future growth demands, and promotes efficient public services and utilities. The area within the SOI would still remain under the County's rules and regulations. An annexation means that the area would be under the City's rules and regulations. The process for annexing land to a city is different than a Sphere of Influence amendment.

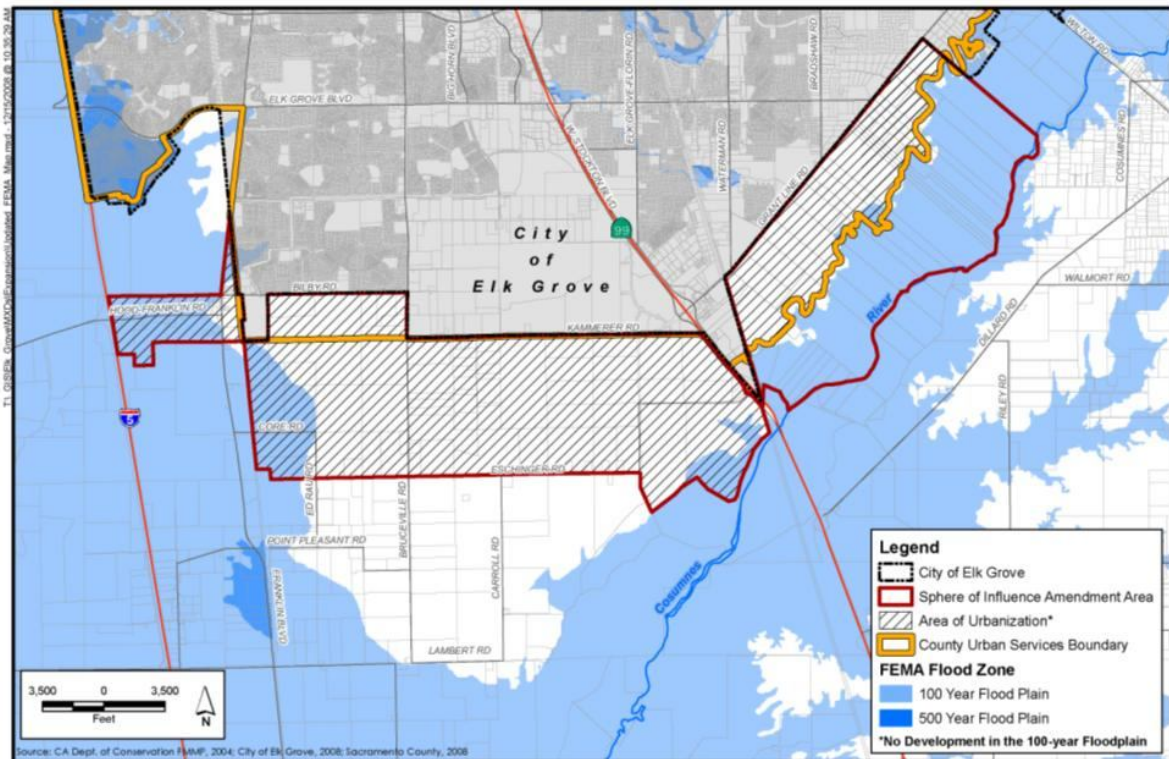
**The SOI and the City will alter the rural lifestyle of nearby communities.**

Approval of the SOI Amendment area will not alter the rural lifestyle of nearby rural communities, but instead allows the City to begin looking at what might be appropriate for the area. The existing communities and properties within the SOI amendment area will remain the same, under the County's jurisdiction. However, the future annexation and development of lands within the SOI area can potentially affect the rural lifestyle. To maintain the preservation of the rural lifestyle, any land use planning associated for the SOI area will be conducted through a public outreach process.

**The City already has enough vacant land within the City for growth.**

The City's available residential, industrial, office, and commercial land is gradually building out, with decreasing vacant land available. Although current economic conditions indicate that the City is not expected to grow much in the short-

term, the City is looking in planning for the long-term, beyond the capacity of the its General Plan. SACOG's Blueprint recognizes that beyond 2035, development south of Kammerer Road will be necessary to accommodate regional growth. The City cannot increase land use densities within its existing city limits to accommodate future growth as the increased density would negatively impact existing utilities and services (i.e. roads, sewer, water, electric), thus reducing the level of services. The cost for upsizing the existing infrastructure would be a significant financial burden to the City, service providers, and taxpayers. The City also needs additional vacant land in order to provide a jobs/housing balance that will provide more jobs in the City and decreasing the amount of travel for City residents that commute outside of the City for employment. Having a strong jobs/housing ratio is important for the long-term economic sustainability of the City.



**Figure 1. Sphere of Influence Amendment Area**

## —Property Values—

### **Does the SOI amendment area include the community of Wilton?**

The SOI amendment area does not include the Wilton community and is limited to the west of the Cosumnes River. The City considers the Wilton community as a separate and unique community that is part of Sacramento County. Specifically, the City is requesting an exemption from LAFCo standards and policies of not splitting parcels to ensure that the area south of the Cosumnes River is not included in the SOI.

### **How will the Sphere of Influence amendment area impact my development rights and property value?**

Given that property value is based on numerous factors other than land use, it is impossible to predict the effect of the SOI amendment area on property values. Amending the City's Sphere of Influence will not change the current development rights. Sacramento County will maintain land use authority over the area.

However, the future annexation of lands within the SOI amendment area will have a direct

impact to development rights and land values as the designation of land uses would change from the exiting County designations to a proposed City designation that would be formulated as part of the Master Planning process. Currently, the City has no land use designations for any parcels within the SOI amendment area.

### **Will this project impact or change my Williamson Act contract and the tax benefits I receive?**

Expansion of the SOI area will not affect any Williamson Act contracts or tax benefits. Also, the SOI area will not affect current Zoning under Sacramento County. However, the future annexation of lands will require LAFCo to make a determination as to whether the City is required to succeed to the rights, duties, and powers of the County for established Williamson Act contracts. The City will encourage LAFCo to allow the City to succeed the existing contracts upon future annexation.

## —Conservation and Regional Planning—

### **What is the South County Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP)?**

The South County Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) is a regional approach to addressing issues related to urban development, habitat conservation, and agricultural protection. The County of Sacramento, Cities of Elk Grove, Galt, and Rancho Cordova, Regional Sanitation District, and Sacramento County Water Agency (group known as "Plan Participants") are all working together on the Plan. The HCP will consolidate environmental efforts to protect

and enhance wetlands and upland habitats to provide ecologically viable conservation areas. It will also minimize regulatory hurdles and streamline the permitting process for development projects. The geographic scope of the HCP covers the entire South County area (excluding the Delta), including the proposed SOI amendment area. For more information on the HCP, visit

<http://www.planning.saccounty.net/habitat-conservation/overview.html>.

**How will the SOI amendment area impact the South County Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP)?**

The proposed SOI amendment process is being carried out in close collaboration with the Plan Participants to ensure that it is complimentary with the HCP and will assist in its successful preparation and adoption. Part of the SOI process includes the identification of an area for urbanization. This will ensure that the goals of the HCP for habitat protection are not impacted by the City’s desire for future growth.

Furthermore, the proposed SOI amendment area has been included into the HCP’s species impact analysis. As a result, the impacts to covered species within the SOI amendment area has been individually calculated and included as part of the HCP’s mitigation plan. In addition, the inclusion of the SOI amendment area now would result in minimal change to the HCP upon future annexation.

**Is the City coordinating with Sacramento County on the SOI amendment area?**

City staff has met several times with County staff to coordinate the SOI amendment effort. The City and County are currently preparing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that will address the protection of the Cosumnes River corridor. The draft MOU will be presented in a public outreach process prior to LAFCo submittal. In addition, staff has also met with the City of Galt, Cosumnes CSD, Regional Sanitation District, Sacramento Area Sewer

District, Elk Grove Unified School District, SMUD, and other service providers.

**The City is not a good steward of rural and agricultural lands.**

The City has a great deal of experience protecting rural and agricultural lands and currently protects and maintains rural areas within the City. In one example, the Sheldon area is able to maintain its rural character due to the preservation efforts of the City. The City has protected the Sheldon area from development, listening to the desires of local residents to remain rural.

**The City’ has a poor track record in open space and natural resources protection.**

The City has an excellent track record in open space and natural resource protection. Elk Grove was the first jurisdiction in the region to implement an acre-for-acre mitigation program, where for every acre of hawk habitat developed the City preserved an acre of suitable hawk habitat. This action was praised by the Department of Fish and Game, Friends of the Swainson’s Hawk, and The Nature Conservancy, and was later used as a template by Sacramento County to update its Ordinance. In 2005, Elk Grove purchased a 750 acre vineyard in South Sacramento County to convert into hawk habitat. In addition, the City owns and monitors six hawk easements totaling approximately 630 acres of protected hawk habitat, and a 290 acre farmland conservation easement.

**—Public Participation—**

**As a member of the public, how can I participate in the process?**

For more information about the Urban Study Area, or to participate in future meetings, visit <http://www.egplanning.org/projects/urbanstud>

*yarea*, or contact Taro Echiburu, Project Manager, at (916) 478-3619 or [techiburu@elkgrovecity.org](mailto:techiburu@elkgrovecity.org).

**How can concerns be directed to Sacramento LAFCo?**

Residents and property owners can contact Peter Brundage, Executive Director, at 874-6458 or *Peter.Brundage@SacLafco.org*. For more information about LAFCo, visit *www.saclafco.org*.