

WHAT IS A GENERAL PLAN?

PREPARED BY

**INYO COUNTY
PLANNING
DEPARTMENT**

168 N. Edwards St., Independence
Annex Building
(760) 878-0263

www.inyocounty.us
<https://inyopplanning.org>



SUMMARY OF TOPICS

MAIN POINTS COVERED

- General Plan - Defined
- General Plan Visioning
- Elements of a General Plan
- Consistency
- Use of the General Plan
- General Plan Implementation
- Specific Plan - Defined
- Contents of a Specific Plan
- Specific Plan's Relationship to General Plan

“A VISION WITHOUT A STRATEGY REMAINS AN ILLUSION.”

Lee Bowlman

THE GENERAL PLAN

What is it?

A general plan is the principal long-range policy and planning document guiding the physical development, conservation, and enhancement of California cities and counties.

California law requires each local government to adopt a general plan to represent the jurisdiction's view of its future. It contains a vision for the community within a specified time, as well as, defines the goals, policies and implementation programs that achieve the community's vision.





What goes into the General Plan?

The general plan is both geographically and topically comprehensive. The general plan covers the territory within the boundaries of the County. The general plan addresses a wide variety of issues that characterize the County, and state law requires all general plans to include a vision statement and seven mandatory elements.



THE SEVEN ELEMENTS ...



Housing

Analyzes housing needs for all income groups and demonstrates how to meet those needs. State law requires that this element be revised, at a minimum, every eight or five years (Inyo County is eight).



Conservation

The general plan is both geographically and topically comprehensive. The general plan covers the territory within the boundaries of the County. The general plan addresses a wide variety of issues that characterize the County, and state law requires all general plans to include a vision statement and seven mandatory elements.



Open Space

Intends to provide a plan for the long-term preservation of open space. It must specify plans and measures for preserving open space for natural resources, for managing the production of resources, for outdoor recreation, and for public health and safety.



Noise

Identifies and analyzes projected noise conditions in the community and must include measures to abate or mitigate potential noise levels.



Safety

Identifies seismic, geologic, flood, and wildfire hazards, evacuation routes, and establishes policies to protect the community from them.

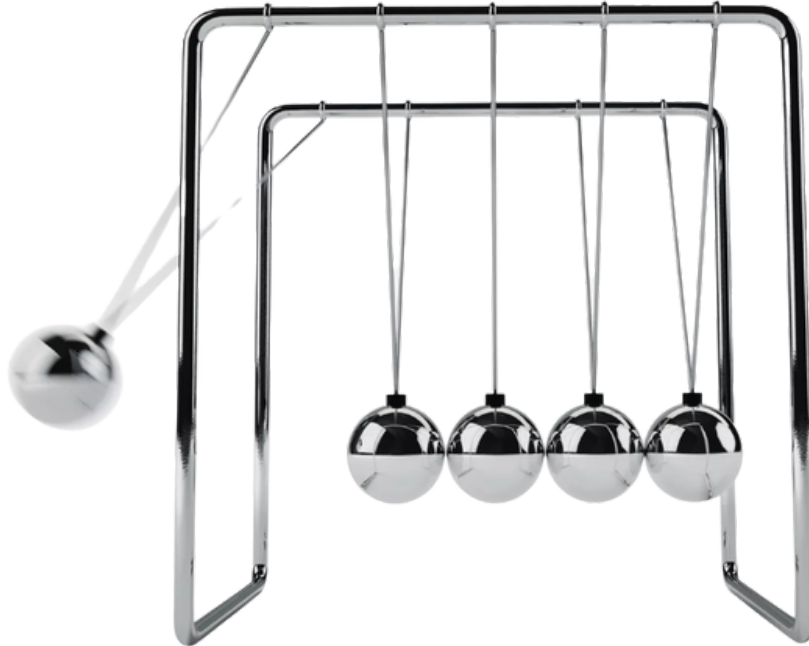


Optional Elements

In addition to the elements required by state law, a city or county may adopt other elements that relate to its growth over time. Optional elements have the same force and effect as the statutory elements. Inyo County has the extra Elements of Government and Economic Development.

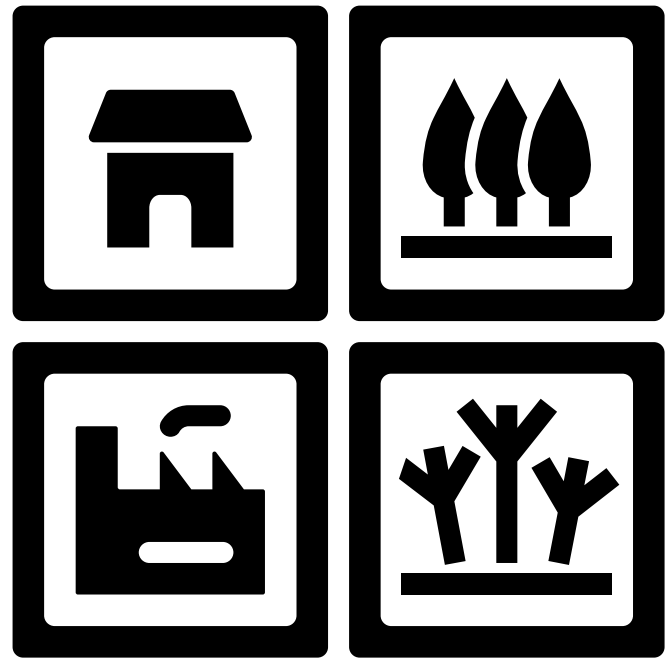
CONSISTENCY

One of the key legal requirements concerning General Plans deals with consistency. “Consistency” is one of the factors used in determining the legal adequacy of a General Plan. As stated in the General Plan Guidelines prepared by the California Office of Planning and Research: “In general terms, an action, program or project is consistent with the General Plan if, considering all its aspects, it will further the objectives and policies of the General Plan and not obstruct their attainment.”



INTERNAL CONSISTENCY

State law requires that no textual or diagrammatic policies conflict between the components of a General Plan. That is, a General Plan must be internally consistent. Internal consistency has five dimensions:



1. All elements of the General Plan, including adopted optional elements, have equal legal status. No element legally takes priority over another.
2. All elements must be consistent with one another. For instance, if land use element policies are likely to result in an increase in population and traffic, the circulation element must provide feasible mitigation to address those impacts.
3. Each element's data, goals, objectives, policies, and implementation programs must be consistent with one another. For instance, if one section of the housing element indicates that current housing supplies will meet future demand and another section describes a shortage of affordable housing, the element is not internally consistent.

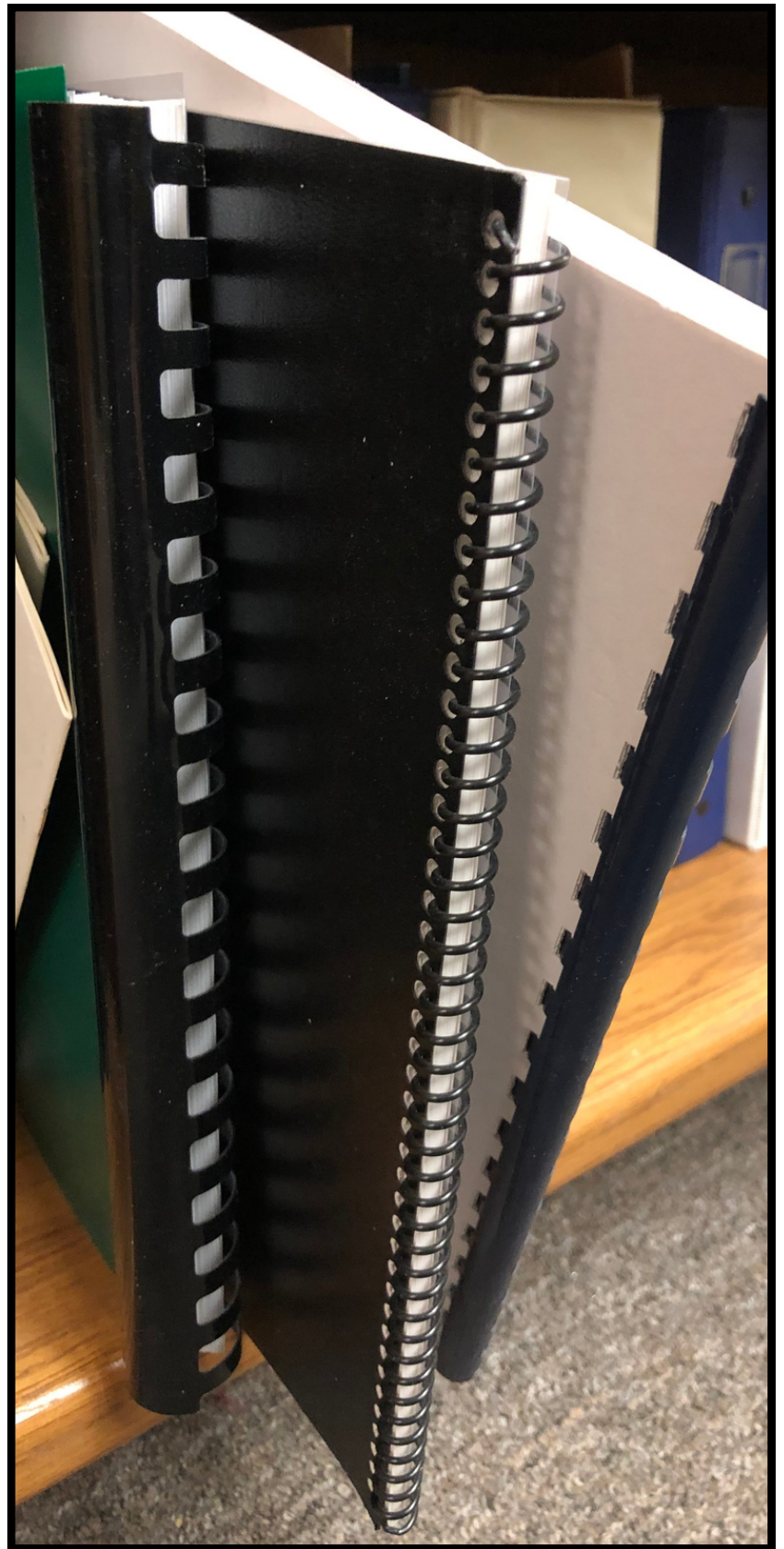


4. All goals, objectives, policies, and implementation programs identified in a special policy area must be consistent with the overall General Plan.

5. The text and diagrams within the General Plan must be consistent. In other words, the diagrams of land use distributions, circulation systems, open space and natural resource areas must reflect the written policies and programs of the General Plan elements.

CONSISTENCY WITH OTHER COUNTY DOCUMENTS AND PROJECTS

The County utilizes several other planning tools such as a zoning ordinance, subdivision ordinance, and specific plans, which must be consistent with the provisions of the General Plan. If they are determined to be inconsistent, they cannot be approved. The General Plan should also be reviewed by other departments to determine whether or not efforts such as public works projects or public land acquisition or sale are consistent with the goals and policies identified in the General Plan.



WHO USES THE GENERAL PLAN?

A LOOK AT THE PEOPLE, GROUPS, AND INSTITUTIONS



**“IT IS TODAY THAT WE
CREATE THE WORLD OF
THE FUTURE.”**

Eleanor Roosevelt



The Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission use the goals and policies of the general plan as a basis upon which to make both long-term and short-term decisions, determine long-term objectives, generate and evaluate budgets, plan capital improvements, and prioritize tasks.



County staff and all departments will also reference the general plan when considering development applications, capital improvements, service programming, and departmental budgeting.



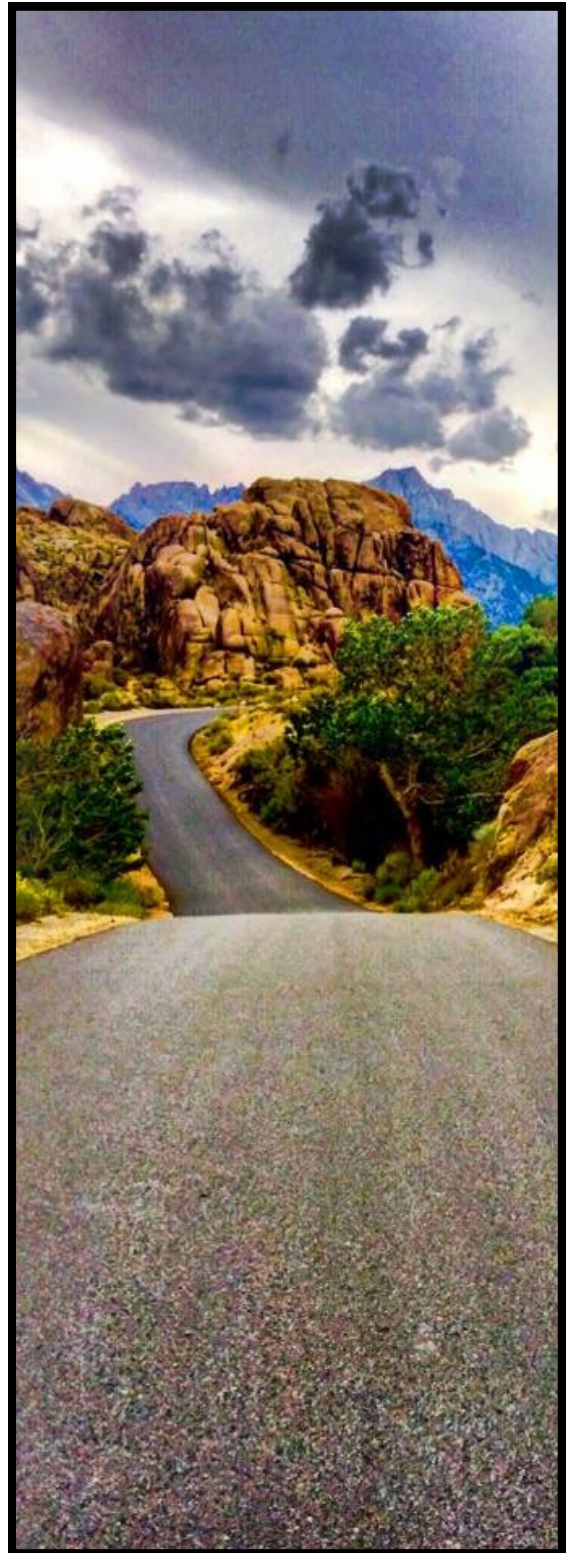
Individual residents, existing and prospective business owners, and the development community can also seek guidance for preserving and enhancing the community through the general plan.

Other local and regional agencies will refer to the general plan when projecting future needs and services. The general plan is truly the County's collective guide to the future.



HOW IS THE GENERAL PLAN IMPLEMENTED?

General plan implementation consists of shorter-term actions and programs to carry out longer-term general plan goals and policies. This includes one-time initiatives by the County (e.g., zoning code update to reflect changes in a new general plan), decisions on public and private development projects, municipal operational programs, capital improvements and partnerships with other jurisdictions or agencies.

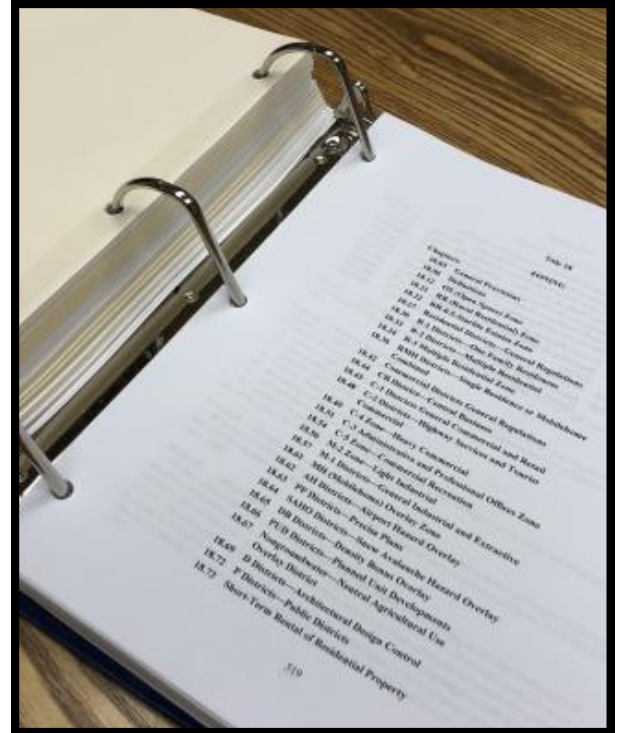


WHAT IS A ZONING ORDINANCE?

A zoning ordinance, usually part of a County's code, is a set of regulations that prescribes or restricts what landowners can do with their property. Zoning is adopted by ordinance and carries the weight of local law (Govt. Code §65850.) General Law counties, have the constitutional authority to adopt and enforce laws and regulations to promote and support the public health, safety, morals and general welfare (this is known as a jurisdiction's "police power"). Zoning provides direction regarding both land use and development standards:

USE

A major component of a zoning ordinance is that it restricts the type of development that may be built. Examples of uses include single-family residential, multifamily residential, commercial, open space, mixed use, industrial etc. Uses are typically either "permitted" in a zone district, which in most cases allows for administrative approval (Planning Director or designee has approval authority; no hearing required), "conditionally permitted," (requires a hearing at Planning Commission), or "not permitted," which prohibits a use in a zone district.



DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS

Zoning ordinances identify building setbacks within which any building must fit. These are commonly referred to as Design Standards. The design standards (which may vary from use to use) specifies setbacks, height limits, and sometimes limits on the percentage of a site that may be covered by buildings, other structures, and paving (otherwise known as “Floor Area Ratio” or “FAR”.) Development standards also regulate how a building will perform in the context of its neighborhood, and are designed to ensure the compatibility of new development with adjacent uses.



RELATIONSHIP TO THE GENERAL PLAN

The distribution of residential, commercial, industrial, and other zones in the zoning ordinance is based on the pattern of land uses established by the community’s general plan (because the zoning ordinance implements the goals and policies of the general plan, the two plans must be consistent). For example: if a general plan designates the land adjacent to a highway as Retail Commercial, the zoning ordinance must support this vision by zoning the land for retail commercial uses, not residential, or open space, or any other use that is inconsistent with commercial uses. One general plan designation may be supported by multiple zone classifications, and even though each zone classification specifies different use and development standard parameters, they all meet the intent of the goals and policies developed for the corresponding land use in the general plan.

WHAT IS A SPECIFIC PLAN?

The specific plan is one of several policy or regulatory tools used by local governments to guide community development. While the General Plan sets forth goals, objectives, policies and programs for the entire jurisdiction, the specific plan does so for a localized area and in greater detail for example a downtown, or community plan. If a specific plan essentially provides more detailed policy guidance, it is a “policy” level plan and adopted by resolution. If it establishes development regulation, it is a “regulatory” specific plan, and becomes customized zoning for the affected property, and is adopted by ordinance. The authority for preparing a specific plan is found in the California Government Code §65450 through §65457. The law allows, but does not require, the planning agency to prepare and adopt specific plans for the systematic execution of the general plan. According to State Law, all specific plans must be consistent with the adopted general plan, and all subdivision and development activity must be consistent with the specific plan.

WHAT GOES INTO A SPECIFIC PLAN?

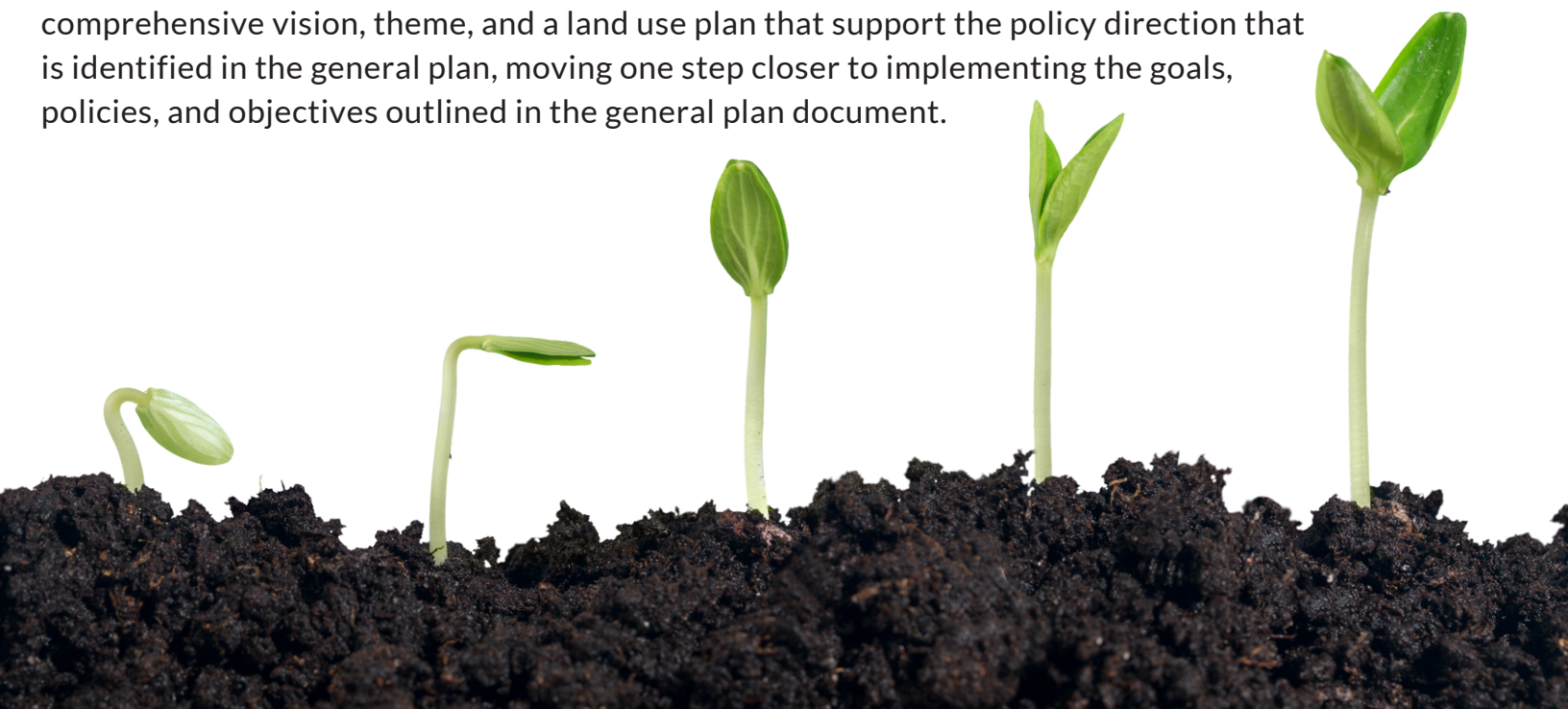
State law mandates that a specific plan includes text and diagrams which: specify the distribution, location, and extent of the uses of the land, including open space, within the area covered by the plan; the proposed distribution, location, and extent and intensity of major components of public and private transportation, sewage, water, drainage, solid waste disposal, energy, and other essential facilities proposed to be located within the area covered by the plan and needed to support the land uses described in the plan; development standards, and standards for the conservation,



development and utilization of natural resources; an implementation program; and a statement of the relationship of the specific plan to the general plan.

RELATIONSHIP TO THE GENERAL PLAN

The specific plan effectively establishes a link between the general plan and individual development proposals (at a project level), in a more area-specific manner than is possible with community-wide zoning ordinances. Specific plans create a comprehensive vision, theme, and a land use plan that support the policy direction that is identified in the general plan, moving one step closer to implementing the goals, policies, and objectives outlined in the general plan document.





“OUR GOALS CAN ONLY BE REACHED THROUGH A VEHICLE OF A PLAN, IN WHICH WE MUST FERVENTLY BELIEVE, AND UPON WHICH WE MUST VIGOROUSLY ACT. THERE IS NO OTHER ROUTE TO SUCCESS.”

Pablo Picasso



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