

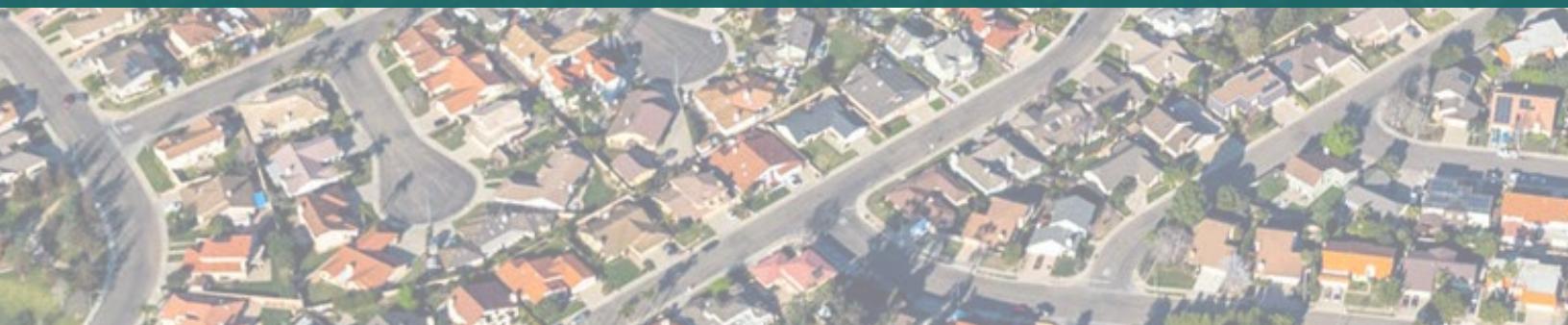


Santa Maria
General Plan

imagine

Introduction

Final Draft | February 12, 2026



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Santa Maria City Hall

Introduction

This Introduction to the Santa Maria General Plan provides the foundation needed to understand and implement the General Plan. The *About the General Plan* section summarizes State requirements and the community outreach and policy development that shaped the Plan. The *Planning Context* section describes the regional and local setting, the Planning Area, Santa Maria's planning history, and growth projections through the planning horizon of 2045. Finally, the *Guide to Using the General Plan* section defines key terms, introduces key aspects of Plan implementation and maintenance, and provides an overview of the Plan. The General Plan Introduction concludes with the Vision Statement and Guiding Principles that serve as the foundation of the General Plan.



City of Santa Maria gateway sign



Strawberries, a major agricultural export for the Santa Maria Valley.



Historic photo of the Broadway and Main Street intersection.

About the General Plan

General Plan Requirements

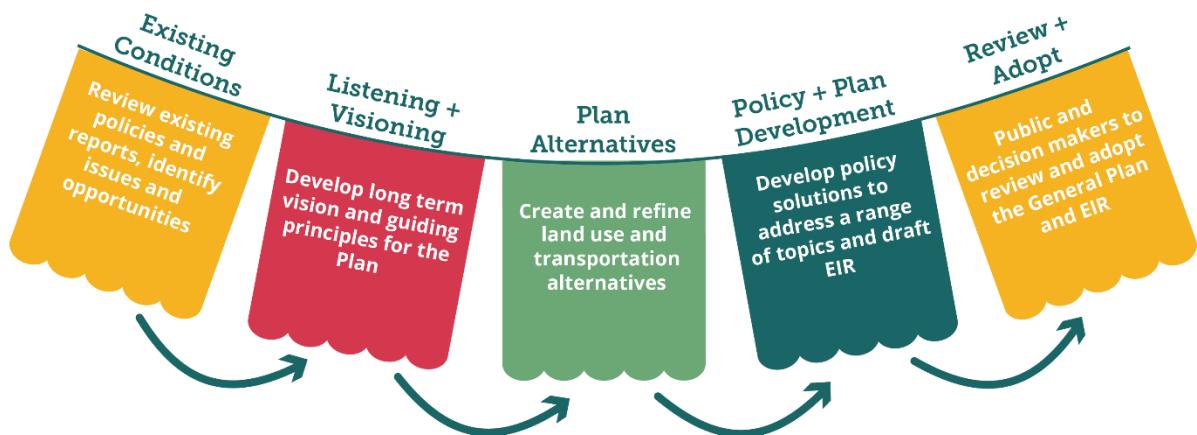
A General Plan is a policy document required by State law (Government Code Section 65300-65303.4) that provides a “long term, comprehensive, integrated, internally consistent and compatible statement of policies” that reflect local conditions and community vision. State law requires that the general plan address the following eight mandatory elements: land use, housing, circulation, conservation, open space, environmental justice, safety, and noise. State law also allows for the inclusion of optional “elements” and organization of the elements to “accommodate local conditions and circumstances” (Government Code § 65300.7), subject to the City’s discretion.

Planning Process



In 2020, the City of Santa Maria embarked on a comprehensive update to its General Plan, called “Imagine Santa Maria,” to create a forward-looking document that will serve as the blueprint for the city through the year 2045. The update kicked off in January 2020 and concluded in March 2026. The General Plan update process included five phases: (1) existing conditions, (2) listening and visioning, (3) plan alternatives, (4) policy and plan development, and (5) review and adoption of the Plan, described in Figure INT-1: General Plan Update Process. Community input informed each of the five phases.

Figure INT-1: General Plan Update Process



The following is a summary of each phase. Work products prepared for each phase are included in the General Plan appendix.

- **Existing Conditions.** During the existing conditions phase, the City identified trends, issues, opportunities, and priorities, which were summarized in seven existing conditions reports: Environmental, Health and Environmental Justice, Infrastructure, Land Use and Community Design, Socioeconomics, Subareas, and Transportation and Mobility.
- **Listening and Visioning.** In this phase, community members shared their vision for the future, the qualities of Santa Maria to preserve, and the issues to address. Community engagement activities in this phase included community workshops, online surveys, and social media outreach. The listening and visioning phase resulted in a brief vision statement and a list of the community's guiding principles, which were approved by the City Council in April 2021.
- **Plan Alternatives.** The purpose of the Plan alternatives phase was to develop different land use, mobility, and urban design options that addressed the ideas expressed in the vision. This phase involved developing conceptual ideas for growth and development with the public, creating three discrete land use alternatives, and extensive community engagement to select and refine the preferred land use direction. The preferred land use designation map was endorsed by the City Council in November 2023.
- **Policy and Plan Development.** After the selection of the preferred land use designation map, City staff began work on the Policy Frameworks to highlight the key direction for each Element. Each Policy Framework was developed by incorporating findings from previous project phases, including technical analyses, relevant content from the existing General Plan, current planning best practices, requirements from State law, and feedback from community members, Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) members, Planning Commission, City Council, and City staff. This phase involved meetings between various City departments and the consultant team and a review of the goals, policies, and implementation actions for multiple elements by the TAC. During this phase, the Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) was completed pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Both documents—the Draft General Plan and the Draft EIR—were released for public review and comment from August 14 to September 28, 2025.

- **Review and Adopt.** The final phase of work was the review and adoption of the General Plan. This phase involved community workshops on the Draft General Plan and Draft EIR, City Council and Planning Commission Study Sessions, public hearings, and formal adoption of the General Plan and certification of the EIR in March 2026.

Planning Context

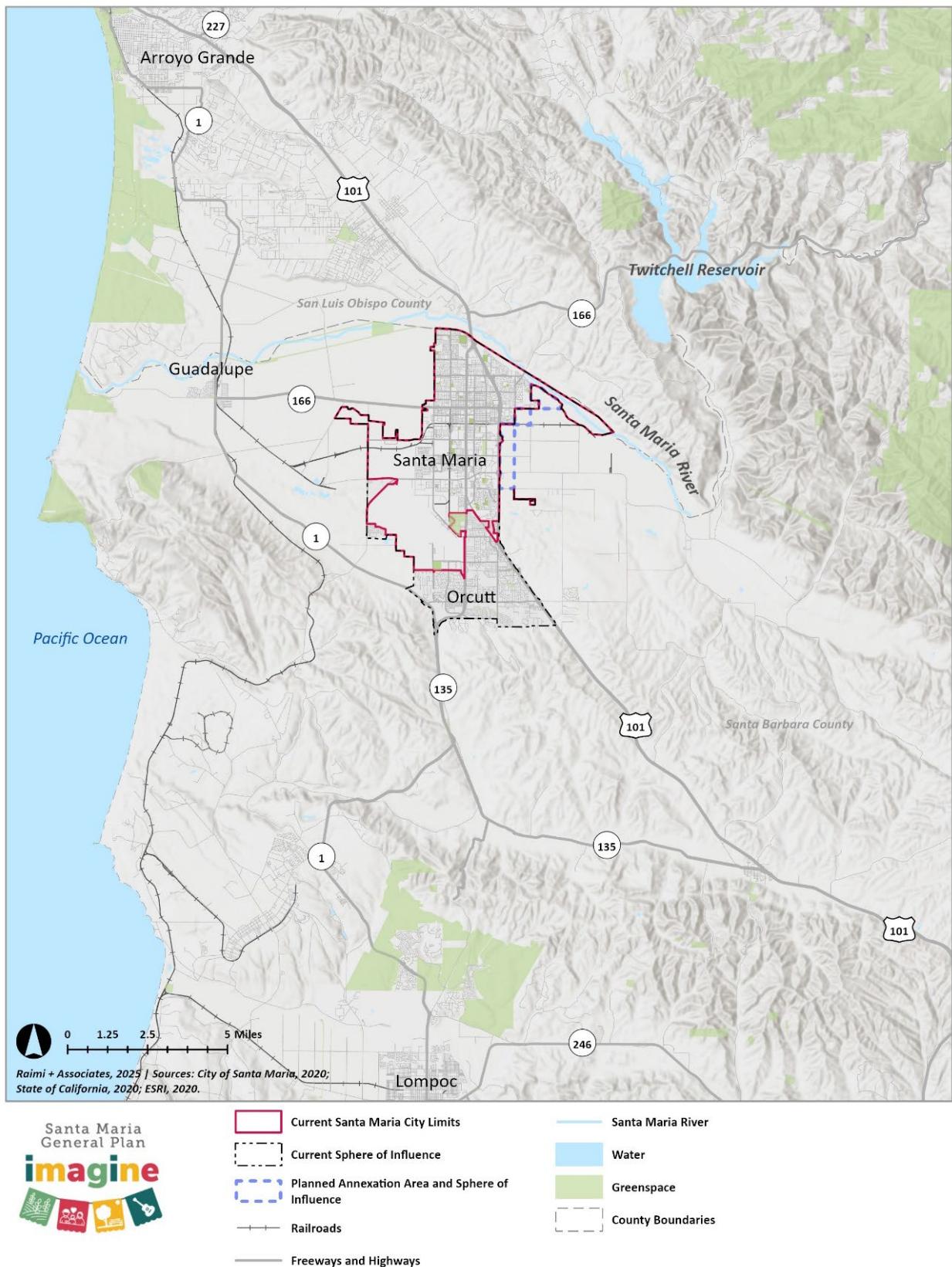
Regional and Local Setting

The City of Santa Maria is located along the Central Coast of California, in the northwest part of Santa Barbara County, as shown in Figure INT-2: Regional Location. Santa Maria is in the Santa Maria Valley, a valley renowned for its viticulture and agriculture. The city is immediately surrounded by the Santa Maria River to the north, unincorporated agricultural land to the east and west, and the unincorporated Community of Orcutt to the south. The Santa Maria River forms the Santa Barbara County and San Luis Obispo County line. Santa Maria is about 10 miles east of the Pacific Ocean, 13 miles west of Los Padres National Forest in the San Rafael Mountains, 25 miles south of San Luis Obispo, and 50 miles northwest of Santa Barbara. Santa Maria is connected regionally via US-101, State Route (SR)-1, and Main Street (SR-166), which run through or near Santa Maria. The Santa Maria Airport provides public and private aviation services.



Mural located on Broadway in Santa Maria's Downtown.

Figure INT-2: Regional Location



Planning Area

State law requires that a general plan must cover the territory within the boundaries of the adopting city or county as well as "any land outside its boundaries which in the planning agency's judgment bears relation to its planning" (Government Code Section 65300). The City of Santa Maria's General Plan Planning Area¹ includes the following areas, as shown in Figure INT-3: Planning Area:

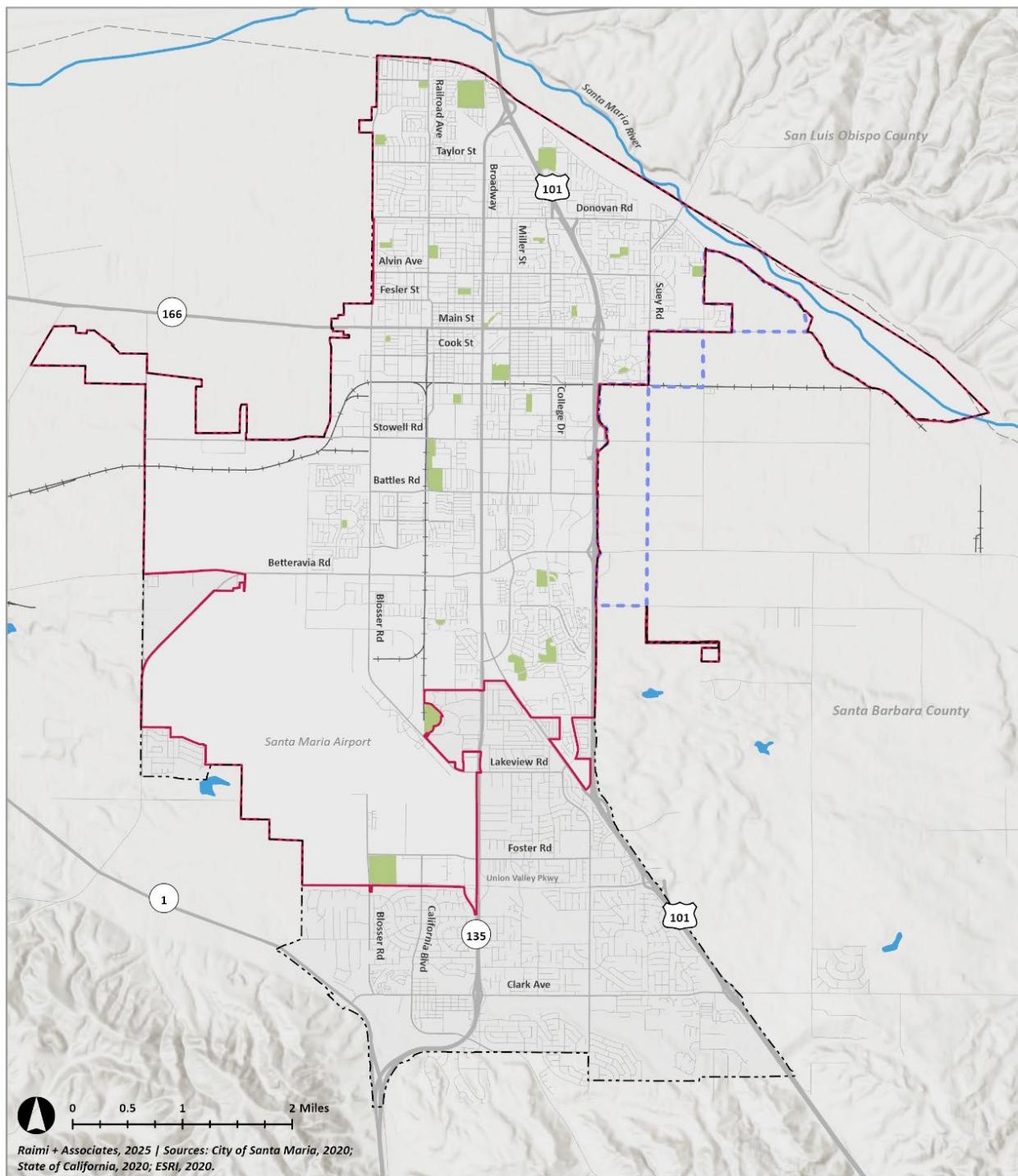
- **City limits.** City limits include the area within the current (as of 2025) boundaries of the City of Santa Maria.
- **Sphere of Influence (SOI).** As defined by the State General Plan Guidelines, the SOI is the "probable physical boundaries and service area" of the City. There are three main areas in the SOI: a triangular area of land along Betteravia Road on the western side of the City, the Tanglewood area to the west of Santa Maria Airport, and the unincorporated community of Orcutt.
- **The Planned Annexation Area.** There are three areas of unincorporated Santa Barbara County that are proposed for annexation into the City, totaling 985 acres. The first area proposed for annexation is generally bound by Panther Drive to the west, E. Main Street to the south, and the City limits to the north and east. The second area proposed for annexation is generally bound by S. Suey Road to the west, E. Main Street to the north, E. Jones Street to the south, and Rosemary Road to the east. The third area proposed for annexation is generally bound by E. Jones Street to the north, US-101 to the west, Prell Road to the south, and S. Suey Road to the east. As described in more detail in the Land Use Element, the Santa Barbara County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) will determine whether the SOI boundaries will be revised to include the Planned Annexation Area and whether portions will be annexed into the City.



Agricultural land in Santa Maria.

¹ For information on growth projections, see the Land Use Element.

Figure INT-3: Planning Area

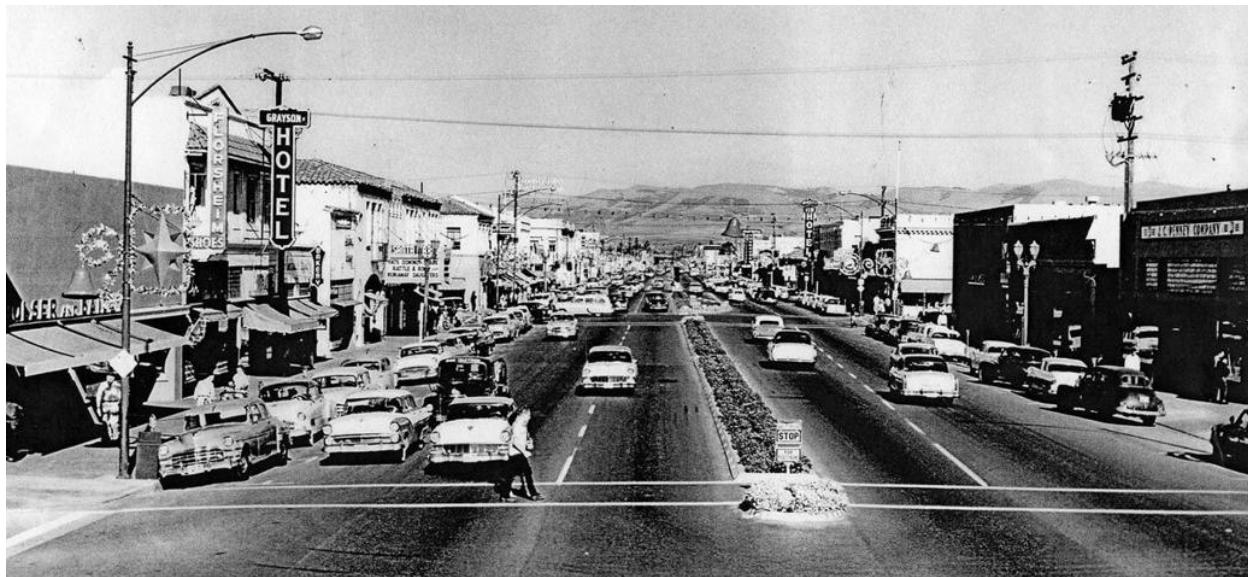


Brief Planning History of Santa Maria²

The first known inhabitants of the area now known as Santa Maria were the Chumash Native Americans. The Spanish were the first Europeans to settle in the area in the late 18th century to establish missions. Following Mexican independence in 1821, the Mexican government granted individual citizens land ownership, and the first town, called La Graciosa, was established near the present-day site of Orcutt in 1868. Four early settlers—Rudolph Cook, John Thornburg, Isaac Miller, and Isaac Fesler—settled on four quadrants of land that met at the intersection of Broadway (SR-35) and Main Street (SR-166) in the 1860s and 1870s.

Officials surveyed a grid pattern expanding from the intersection of Broadway and Main Street, and settlers eventually incorporated as Santa Maria in 1905. The early residential and commercial growth of the city occurred in Downtown Santa Maria, and today there is still a mix of residential, civic, and commercial uses in the gridded Downtown area.

The City of Santa Maria primarily grew by annexing surrounding land used primarily for farming or ranching. Creation of regional job centers, including the Vandenberg Space Force Base, played a significant role in mid-century (1950s – 1970s) residential growth of the city and future annexations. Most residential development from the mid-20th century onward has been in the form of single-family residential subdivisions developed at a lower density than the Downtown area. Today, the City of Santa Maria is home to a population of over 100,000 people, and though much has changed since its founding, it still boasts a mix of agriculture, residential, and employment uses centered around the historic Downtown. The 2045 General Plan builds upon the City's long-range planning framework, including prior annexation efforts.³



Historic photo of Broadway, looking north. Credit: Santa Maria Valley Historical Society.

² Source: City of Santa Maria Valley Historical Society, 2020.

³ For more detailed historical documentation, including the 1993 Sphere of Influence Expansion EIR (SCH #90010930), the public may contact the City of Santa Maria Planning Division to request archived planning documents.

Growth Projections

Growth projections refer to the amount of development likely to have occurred by the end of the planning horizon of the General Plan in 2045. The projections in Table INT-1: Growth Projections represent a probable amount of growth in the City of Santa Maria through the year 2045 based on the city's historic pattern of growth, current and potential land available for development, and current and future economic and social conditions in Santa Maria. The projections were informed by job and population projections through the year 2050 from the Santa Barbara County Association of Governments (SBCAG) and potential Regional Housing Needs Allocations (RHNA).

The growth projections assume new development through the year 2045 will be consistent with development regulations established in this General Plan and in the City's other regulatory documents, including the Zoning Ordinance and applicable Specific Plans. The growth projections do not assume full buildout of every parcel. Rather, they represent a realistic amount of housing and employment growth on land with potential for development based on actual densities and intensities of recent projects in Santa Maria. Actual growth in Santa Maria through the year 2045 will depend on several factors, including economic and social trends, natural hazards, economic conditions, developer interest, and the timeline of annexation.

Table INT-1: Growth Projections

	Existing (2022)	Projected (2045)	Net Change
Acreage within City Limits	15,058 acres	16,043 acres	985 acres
Population	108,600 people	141,480 people	32,880 people
Residential Units	28,200 units	44,340 units	16,140 units
Jobs	43,050 jobs	66,800 jobs	23,750 jobs

Sources: SBCAG Regional Growth Forecast 2050; City of Santa Maria, 2024

Guide to Using the General Plan

Definition of Key Terms

The following are key terms used consistently throughout this General Plan:

Goal: a general expression of community direction, expressed as future desired ends

Policy: a specific statement of intent or direction that guides decision-making and helps implement a goal

Implementation Action: a specific activity, procedure, program, or project that carries out a policy

Standard: a rule or measure establishing a level of quality or quantity that must be complied with or satisfied

Diagram: a graphic expression of the text of a particular policy

Implementation, Reporting, and Updates

Policies

Generally, future development regulations, plans, and decisions must be consistent with the policies of the adopted General Plan, including the zoning ordinance, specific plans, capital improvements, development agreements, and functional plans (e.g., for hazard mitigation, water management, and waste management). Goals are achieved through the implementation of policies.

Implementation Actions

This General Plan identifies implementation actions, referred to simply as 'actions' in the policy frameworks of each element, intended to advance General Plan policies. Implementation actions guide City staff and decision-makers. The City will need to allocate funding and staff time and may need to partner with local and regional nonprofit organizations and outside public agencies.

CEQA Tiering and Streamlining

With the adoption of the General Plan and the certification of the Program EIR, the environmental review for subsequent projects can be limited to those project-specific significant effects that either were not examined or not examined fully in the General Plan EIR (CEQA Guidelines §15168(c)).

Reporting

California Government Code requires that the planning agency "render an annual report to the legislative body (City Council) on the status of the Plan and the progress in its implementation" (Section 65400(b)).

Updates

State law also encourages annual reviews of implementation actions and recommends that the entire General Plan be thoroughly reviewed every five years to ensure it is still consistent with the community's goals. State law further requires that the Housing Element be reviewed and updated at least once every eight years.

Any part of a General Plan may be amended to accommodate changing conditions. Property owners, developers, the Planning Commission, the City Council, or City staff may propose amendments. The Planning Commission and the City Council must review any proposed changes at public hearings, and the potential of environmental impacts must be evaluated in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Plan Organization

The General Plan is organized into chapters (referred to as elements), comprised of the State-mandated elements (land use, circulation, housing, conservation and open space, noise, safety, and environmental justice) and additional optional elements (public facilities and services, recreation and parks, and economic development).

Each element of the General Plan is organized into three main sections: Background, Issues and Opportunities, and Policies. The Background section introduces existing conditions and trends related to priorities addressed in the element. The Issues and Opportunities section describes the key issues and opportunities that shaped the element. Finally, the Policies section establishes regulatory standards and diagrams and outlines goals, policies, and implementation actions.

Elements

Land Use Element

The Land Use Element includes policies related to Santa Maria's citywide land use and development pattern, community design and public realm, land use compatibility, and regional coordination.

Circulation Element

The Circulation Element identifies the general location and extent of existing and proposed transportation networks and related policies.

Housing Element

The Housing Element addresses current and projected housing needs by establishing policies and programs for improving housing and providing adequate housing for all income levels. The Housing Element was prepared separately from the remainder of the General Plan to comply with statutory deadlines. The Housing Element was adopted on December 5, 2023.

Conservation and Open Space Element

The Conservation and Open Space Element included policies related to the city's natural, cultural, historic, tribal, and open space resources.

Noise Element

The Noise Element includes policies related to mitigating the impact of noise and vibration on adjacent uses and the community.

Safety Element

The Safety Element includes policies related to identifying and mitigating hazards that may affect the city, including seismic and geologic hazards, wildland and urban fires, flood and dam inundation, hazardous materials and solid waste, airport hazards, and climate change.

Health and Environmental Justice Element

The Health and Environmental Justice Element includes policies to reduce pollution; promote safe and affordable housing; enhance opportunities to lead healthy lives through access to healthy food, active transportation, public facilities, and healthcare facilities; and foster greater civic engagement.

Public Facilities and Services Element

The Public Facilities and Services Element includes policies related to major infrastructure (water, wastewater, and stormwater), public facilities (City-owned public buildings and libraries as well as schools), and public services (police, fire, and solid waste).

Recreation and Parks Element

The Recreation and Parks Element includes policies related to recreational facilities, trails, recreational programming, arts and culture programming, and parks.

Economic Development Element

The Economic Development Element includes policies related to workforce development, local industry, regional partnerships, and tourism.

Appendices

Appendix A: Existing Conditions Reports

During the existing conditions phase, the City identified trends, issues, opportunities, and priorities, which were summarized in seven existing conditions reports: Environmental, Health and Environmental Justice, Infrastructure, Land Use and Community Design, Socioeconomics, Subareas, and Transportation and Mobility.

Appendix B: Community Engagement Summaries

A summary report was prepared for each engagement activity. These reports include an overview of the activity, participant demographics, discussion summaries, and survey results.

Appendix C: Plan Alternatives Memoranda

The Plan Alternatives Memoranda include the Alternatives Technical Memo, Alternatives Analysis, Fiscal Impact Analysis Memo, and Preferred Alternative Memo.

Appendix D: SB 1000 Disadvantaged Communities Methodology

The SB 1000 Disadvantaged Communities Methodology details the multistep process taken to identify disadvantaged communities in the Planning Area.

Appendix E: Emergency Evacuation Analysis

The emergency evacuation analysis identifies evacuation routes and their capacity, safety, and viability under a range of emergency scenarios. The findings of the Senate Bill 99 and Assembly Bill 747 analyses have been incorporated into the Safety Element.

Appendix F: Related Laws and Legislation

This chapter identifies County, State, and federal regulations that guided the development of the General Plan.

Appendix G: Glossary

The Glossary includes definitions of terms used throughout the General Plan.

Vision and Guiding Principles

This section includes the Vision Statement and Guiding Principles approved by City Council in 2021 as a foundation for subsequent analysis and policy development.

Vision Statement

This Vision Statement describes Santa Maria as the community would like to see it in 2045:

Santa Maria in 2045 is a community where families can establish and maintain multi-generational roots. It is close-knit, culturally diverse, and economically inclusive.

This is possible, in part, because Santa Maria offers affordable, safe, attractive, and healthy homes and neighborhoods for all residents.

This is also possible because of the availability of high-quality education, jobs, and economic opportunity. Building from a strong foundation in the agricultural, retail, healthcare, and business services industries, Santa Maria has continued to diversify by expanding the training and skills of residents and by adapting to new technologies and broader economic trends.

People are proud of their history and heritage. This is reflected in the diverse, well-preserved historical resources and the attractive, inviting streets and public gathering places. Museums, art venues, a strong civic sector, and the many welcoming community events and celebrations are all evidence of a vibrant local culture.

Residents have convenient access on foot and by car, bus, and bicycle to jobs, schools, community amenities like parks and sports fields, and the region's natural environment.

Public services are reliable, inclusive, and efficient, and the community is well-served by equitable, modern, and sustainable infrastructure, facilities, and utilities.

Guiding Principles

The following Guiding Principles establish the direction the community should follow and the major ideas that the General Plan should advance.

Agricultural Identity

Continue to support the agricultural industry and its workforce. Balance the protection of prime agricultural land with the development necessary to support continued population growth and the diversification of the local economy. Development in the Planned Annexation Area, despite the presence of agricultural land, has been determined to be necessary for a balanced approach to future city growth under the preferred land use alternative.

Culture, History, and Art

Celebrate and share Santa Maria's multicultural heritage and contemporary diversity. Preserve historic resources, foster the arts, maintain a strong sense of community through cultural festivals, and invite visitors to enjoy the richness of local expression and resources.

Community Design

Create public spaces that reflect the community identity, foster civic pride, and invite community members to gather, both informally and for events. Design streets, buildings, and landscaping that reflect the community's history, culture, and natural environment. Use lighting, street trees, benches, and other amenities to make sidewalks and public spaces safe and welcoming, with a focus on the Downtown and along the Main Street and Broadway corridors.

Community Health

Grow and expand physical and mental healthcare services to meet the needs of all residents. Improve community health by addressing the environmental justice priorities of disadvantaged communities, including seniors, low-income households, linguistically isolated families, the homeless, and youth, who comprise 35% of residents. Minimize residents' potential for exposure to noise, pesticides, and industrial pollution. Foster healthy lifestyles by expanding safe and attractive options for physical activity and by expanding healthy food access.

Natural Environment and Resilience

Conserve water resources in the city and support efforts to maintain access to the Santa Maria River. Expand opportunities to enjoy the area's natural resources and the region's beauty. Safeguard the community from natural hazards, including those exacerbated by climate change.

Housing Quality and Choice

Develop a high-quality and diverse housing supply at all levels of affordability that preserves Santa Maria as a place where families can establish roots and today's youth can afford to stay. Balance the growth of housing and the economy so that people can live and work in Santa Maria. As new housing types are introduced, such as accessory dwelling units (ADUs), adapt parking, transportation, and other community features. Develop workforce housing solutions that provide safe, healthy, and comfortable homes for workers and their families.

Resilient Economy

Cultivate a diverse and resilient economy in which local businesses and families thrive and job growth keeps apace with housing development. Grow the existing economic base in agriculture, retail, healthcare, and business services, and expand into new industries. Ensure access to high quality education that is aligned with local industries and entrepreneurship.

Connected Growth

To accommodate projected population, housing, and jobs growth, focus on improvements to existing neighborhoods along with infill and vacant site development. Expand beyond current City limits when needed, weighing the short and long term environmental, economic, infrastructure, public service, and fiscal trade-offs. Establish strong cultural, design, and physical connections between newly developed areas and the rest of Santa Maria.

Transportation Innovations

Develop a balanced, equitable, affordable, and reliable transportation network where pedestrians, cyclists, trucks, cars, rail, and transit can safely and efficiently navigate to destinations within Santa Maria. Focus on maintaining existing roadways, expanding walking and biking options, and reducing congestion and maintenance costs. Transform corridors and streets from points of conflict among people, cyclists, cars, and trucks into places that bring neighborhoods and families together. Prepare for and expand regional connections with enhanced bus, rail, and air service. Prepare for technological advances like autonomous vehicles and remote work, and take advantage of opportunities and incentives to reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

Infrastructure, Utilities, Facilities, and Services

Provide residents and businesses with equitable access to affordable, reliable, and sustainable infrastructure and utilities, including water, wastewater, flood control, gas, phone, cable, and broadband internet. Deliver high-quality services and facilities for all community members, including expedient emergency response, accessible health care, high-quality education and career training, and convenient and equitable access to well-maintained parks and recreational facilities.

Governance and Engagement

Continue to conduct and increase meaningful and inclusive civic engagement that empowers a diversity of perspectives in public decision-making. Provide residents and businesses with high-quality, equitable, and accessible customer service, including City communications and events in multiple languages and interpretation services. Partner with community organizations and institutions to build trust and increase participation, including among youth, who will be the city leaders in 2045.