



Santa Maria
General Plan

imagine



Health and Environmental Justice Element

Final Draft | May 5, 2026



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Introduction

Pursuant to Government Code Section 65302, the Health and Environmental Justice Element is included in the General Plan to reduce the unique or compounded health risks in disadvantaged communities, promote civic engagement in the public decision-making process, and prioritize improvements and programs that address the needs of disadvantaged communities. The law requires jurisdictions that contain disadvantaged communities to develop environmental justice policies on the following topic areas: pollution exposure, food access, physical activity, safe and sanitary homes, public facilities, civic engagement, and other issue areas that can address unique or compounded health risks impacting certain neighborhoods. Across all topic areas, the City must prioritize improvements and programs that address the environmental justice needs and priorities of disadvantaged communities.

This Element consists of three main sections: Background, Issues and Opportunities, and Health and Environmental Justice Policies. The *Background* section introduces existing conditions and trends related to priorities addressed in this Element. The *Issues and Opportunities* section describes the key issues and opportunities that shaped the Element. Finally, the *Health and Environmental Justice Policies* section outlines the City's Health and Environmental Justice goals, policies, and implementation actions.

The goals, policies, and implementation actions provide a roadmap for elevating the quality of life in Santa Maria by reducing pollution; promoting safe and affordable housing; enhancing opportunities to lead healthy lives through access to healthy food, active transportation, public facilities, and healthcare facilities; and fostering greater civic engagement opportunities.



Painted mural located on South McClelland Street in Santa Maria.



Top and bottom: Access to parks and other greenspaces, like Machado Plaza in Santa Maria's Downtown on Chapel Street, is essential to community health.

Background

This section introduces existing conditions and trends related to priorities addressed in the Health and Environmental Justice Policies.

Citywide Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics

Research has found that the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of residents impact their potential health and life outcomes. This section summarizes the results of the Population Demographics and Vulnerabilities Assessment as well as the Health Assessment conducted as part of the HEJ Existing Conditions Report.

- **Low income.** Residents in low-income areas face higher rates of heart disease, cancer, lung disease (including asthma), diabetes, and obesity.
- **Youth and children.** Children and youth under 19 make up 35 percent of Santa Maria’s population, of which 25 percent live in poverty. Areas with the highest concentration of youth are also more likely to have high rates of single-parent and low-income households.
- **Older adults.** The area with the largest share of older adults (65 and older) living alone is in the northeastern corner of the city in census tract 22.11, which also experiences high pollution exposure.
- **Chronic disease.** Some population groups in Santa Maria are disproportionately impacted by a chronic disease:
 - African Americans tend to have higher rates of heart disease, cancer, and lung disease.
 - Men have higher rates of heart disease, cancer, and diabetes than women.
 - Women, Latinos, and African Americans are more impacted by Alzheimer’s Disease.
- **High death rates.** Zip code 93454 in Santa Maria, which includes various low-income census tracts east of Broadway and north of Betteravia Road, has the highest age-adjusted death rate in the county.
- **Health insurance.** About 16 percent of adults aged 18-64 in Santa Maria are uninsured, higher than the county average of 12 percent.
- **Mental health.** Poor mental health is reported more frequently in areas where people have reported limited physical activity.

Santa Maria’s Disadvantaged Communities

“Disadvantaged communities” (DACs) are areas identified by the California Environmental Protection Agency or low-income areas that are disproportionately affected by environmental pollution and other hazards identified in CalEnviroScreen 4.0 that can lead to negative health effects, exposure, or environmental degradation. A multistep process, including extensive community engagement, was used to identify Santa Maria’s disadvantaged communities (see Appendix D). The methodology identified 19 census tracts and an additional 3 block groups that are distributed across the city (see Figure HEJ-1).

Pollution

Below are summaries of environmental health factors that affect DACs in Santa Maria. Appendix D summarizes the factors that contributed to identifying each census tract or block group as a disadvantaged community.

Air Quality

Relative to other communities in California, Santa Maria residents face lower air quality impacts. For example, ozone and fine particulate matter (also known as “PM 2.5”) are not major issues of concern in Santa Maria. However, census tracts near US-101 and E. Main Street indicate greater potential for exposure to diesel particulate matter (also known as “Diesel PM”). Community members also shared concerns regarding proximity to specific land uses that impact air quality and the lack of buffers to limit air pollution exposure. Incompatible land uses and high traffic volumes may contribute to increased exposure and health risks.

Pesticide Use

Relative to other communities in California, Santa Maria experiences higher rates of pesticide exposure, as the majority of census tracts in the city are above the 80th percentile for pesticide use in CalEnviroScreen 4.0. Exposure to certain pesticides is linked to serious illnesses such as cancers, pregnancy complications, and developmental issues—especially for children, pregnant women, older adults, and agricultural workers. DACs that are located near agricultural fields, including farmworker communities in and around Santa Maria, could face heightened exposure risks.



Agricultural fields in Santa Maria. Credit: George Rose / Getty Images

Groundwater Threats

Santa Maria's 2023 Water Quality Report indicates the City met both State and federal drinking water standards. The Santa Maria Groundwater Basin is vulnerable to impacts from fertilizer-related runoff and leaching, sewage, and natural deposits,² all of which could pose health risks even at low levels.^{3, 4, 5} DAC neighborhoods may also be impacted by industrial sources that could compromise local groundwater, including leaking underground storage tanks, active or inactive oil and gas wells, and land disposal areas. These potential sources of contamination are subject to State and local regulatory requirements, monitoring, and mitigation measures intended to protect groundwater quality and reduce public health risks.

South of Stowell Road, abandoned oil and gas wells are concentrated within the Santa Maria Groundwater Basin, potentially impacting local farms and communities. Oil companies have engaged in some remediation efforts in southeast Santa Maria through strategies such as soil replacement to manage contamination. The Department of Conservation and other State and regional agencies continue to make progress in plugging and permanently sealing the wells across Santa Barbara County.⁶

Hazardous and Solid Waste Sites

Hazardous waste facilities pose environmental and health risks if they lack proper oversight and timely mitigation measures. Solid waste sites (such as landfills, recycling centers, and composting facilities) are essential infrastructure for processing household and industrial waste and directing it away from our communities and ecosystems. They also hold the potential to negatively impact nearby communities through unpleasant odors, pests, and truck traffic, and, if improperly managed, can harm the surrounding ecosystems and community health through soil, water, and air contamination.⁷

Housing

Older Housing Stock

Over one half (53 percent) of Santa Maria's housing stock was built before 1979, with most of the older housing concentrated in DACs, especially near the downtown area. Older housing stock poses health risks due to the potential presence of harmful construction materials such as asbestos, synthetic chemicals, and lead, which can lead to a range of acute and chronic conditions, including asthma, lead poisoning, and respiratory infections.

² City of Santa Maria 2023 Water Quality Report. Retrieved from:

www.cityofsantamaria.org/home/showpublisheddocument/15039/638520810338830000

³ California Water Resources Board. (2018). Groundwater Basics. Retrieved from:

https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/groundwater/gw_basics.html

⁴ For additional information, see: <https://geotracker.waterboards.ca.gov/map/>

⁵ Ward, M., and et. al. (2018). "Drinking Water Nitrate and Human Health: An Updated Review." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 15(7): 1557.

⁶ California Department of Conservation. (2025). "Project Plug." Retrieved from:

<https://www.conservation.ca.gov/projectplug#cat-canyon>

⁷ Zeise, L. and J. Blumenfeld. (2021). CalEnviroScreen 4.0. California Environmental Protection Agency and OEHHA. Retrieved from: <https://oehha.ca.gov/media/downloads/calenviroscreen/report/calenviroscreen40reportf2021.pdf#page=139>

Crowding and Cost Burden

Santa Maria has a higher-than-average household size compared to the rest of Santa Barbara County. Overcrowded housing—defined by the US Census as units with more than 1.5 persons per room—can cause mental health challenges, increase the spread of infectious diseases, and exacerbate other health and well-being issues, particularly affecting those with social vulnerabilities. Many low-income households are housing-cost burdened, particularly in the northwest and central areas of the city, meaning that they spend over half (50 percent) of their income on housing.

Code Violations

Santa Maria's Fire and Community Development (Building and Code Enforcement) Departments have identified numerous housing code violations during their investigations of substandard housing that suggest potential issues with housing quality and safety in select housing units, though more data are needed to confirm these issues. When these types of issues are identified, the City's Code Enforcement Division coordinates with the Building and Planning Divisions of the Community Development Department and the Fire Department to ensure that the code violations are corrected in a timely manner.



Examples of building code violations and substandard housing conditions include unpermitted construction of a shed used as a dwelling unit and extensive mold in a bathroom.

Worker Housing

The associated requirements for employers to supply worker housing have heightened the need for increasing the amount of safe and affordable housing in the city. Accessory Dwelling Units and new housing developments (particularly multi-family housing) will continue to assist in providing additional housing opportunities in the city.



Workers employed in agriculture in Santa Maria. Credit: Wood Environment & Infrastructure Solutions, Inc.

Mobility and Public Facilities

A vast majority (90 percent) of Santa Maria residents live within a 10-minute walk to transit stops, and nearly half (46 percent) are close to parks. However, communities in the northernmost and southernmost parts of the city face limited walk access to parks compared to other parts of the city. During engagement activities, community members highlighted the need for improved sidewalk and public facilities maintenance (e.g., parks), more equitable access to physical activity opportunities, beautification, dependable public transit, affordable childcare, and inclusive recreational programming.



SMRT Electric Bus

Health Care Access

Most of the city is designated as a Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) despite the presence of locally available health care services, including those provided at Marian Regional Medical Center, a full-service acute care hospital offering emergency care, maternity services, cardiac care, cancer care, orthopedics, neurological care, imaging and laboratory services, and other specialty treatments that serve Santa Maria and the surrounding region. The HPSA designation reflects a lack of primary medical care for the Medicaid-eligible population and a lack of mental health care for the low-income migrant farmworker population, indicating a shortage of health providers in these fields. In Santa Maria, there are four census tracts (24.04, 24.03, 23.04, 23.05) where less than 20 percent of older adult men and women (65+ years) are up to date on a core set of clinical preventive services. During engagement activities, community members shared the barriers they face in accessing health and mental health care services.



Marian Regional Medical Center. Credit: Dignity Health

Access to Healthy Food

The rate of food insecurity among adults in Santa Maria (16 percent) is twice the rate for Santa Barbara County (8 percent). Food insecurity can lead to undernutrition, fatigue, stunted development, and related health issues. Access to food is most limited in the city's northeast and northwest areas, in addition to a large area southwest of Downtown. In some of these areas, 33 percent of the population lives more than one mile from a supermarket, supercenter, or large grocery store. During engagement activities, community members identified the need for more equitable access to nutritious food (e.g., gardens, corner stores selling healthier food), a greater variety of healthy food choices, and more affordable food.



Farmers' Market in Santa Maria's Downtown

Civic Engagement

Throughout the engagement process, many community members shared that they faced barriers that limit their ability to participate in City activities and decision-making, such as a lack of awareness, inconvenient meeting times, and language access. These barriers often impact low-income residents, youth, people with disabilities, and those with limited English proficiency. Specifically, youth members shared an interest in participating in the civic process but some lacked the knowledge or awareness of how and when they could participate.



Santa Maria Public Library



Santa Maria City Hall

Issues and Opportunities

This section describes the issues and opportunities that informed the policy direction of the Health and Environmental Justice Policies.

Pollution concerns. Throughout the Health and Environmental Justice (HEJ) pollution burden analysis and engagement process, community members and organizational partners raised several issues of concern, including pesticide exposure, diesel emissions, and groundwater quality. Strengthening collaborations between the City and Santa Barbara County and other relevant decision-making agencies could help to address these community health concerns. In addition, encouraging stronger practices through the development of additional policies and implementation actions may also help to promote greater improvements in the city's environmental health.

Housing. Housing quality and affordability are foundational to an individual's quality of life and sense of well-being. As the city grows, it will have the opportunity to address housing costs, overcrowding, housing stock quality, and farmworker housing, especially for moderate to low-income residents. By implementing the established programs and actions in the City's Housing Element and addressing housing quality concerns, the City can expand access to housing, reduce the potential for displacement, and strengthen access to safe and affordable housing for all residents.

Healthcare access. Fair access to affordable and high-quality healthcare is crucial to a community's growth and prosperity. Santa Maria residents shared (and data further validates) that they face barriers to accessing healthcare due to location, income, and/or languages spoken. Coordination with the County, healthcare providers, and other community partners can aid in expanding access to critical services and information that can support healthy lifestyles in the community.

Mobility and public facilities. Santa Maria's active transportation networks and public facilities play a critical role in increasing community health and connectivity. Given the disparities in access to parks and public facilities, along with community feedback on sidewalk conditions, park maintenance, and recreational programming, there are clear opportunities for targeted improvements. Continued and strategic improvements to sidewalks, parks, and public transit infrastructure can improve public safety, community connectivity and access, and opportunities for physical activity.

Food access and insecurity. Access to high-quality, healthy, and affordable food is essential to supporting community well-being and the prevention of chronic diseases. Many residents in Santa Maria face food insecurity and barriers to accessing nutritious food, such as poor access to grocery stores, and rising costs. Addressing these challenges through targeted strategies can improve nutritional outcomes and long-term health of individuals and families.

Civic engagement. Expanding inclusive and equitable engagement practices and building leadership development opportunities for diverse members of the community can increase involvement in City decision-making and processes, especially for those not typically engaged.



Public meeting held in Shepard Hall in the Santa Maria Library.

Health and Environmental Justice Policies

The Health and Environmental Justice Policies address the key issues and opportunities identified above through an iterative process of analysis and community engagement, and create a comprehensive roadmap for safeguarding public health and uplifting communities, particularly DACs. The *Policy Framework* section outlines Health and Environmental Justice goals, policies, and implementation actions. A goal describes the community's desired future. A policy is a specific statement of intent that guides decision-making. An action is an activity, procedure, program, or project that carries out a policy.

Policy Summary

The goals, policies, and implementation actions of the Health and Environmental Justice Element focus on building a foundation of community health and environmental justice to ensure that Santa Maria, especially those most vulnerable, can prosper. They are organized into four principal goals. First, reduce environmental health risks with strategic infrastructure and land use planning (Goal HEJ-1). Second, provide safe, sanitary, and affordable housing, with a focus on implementing the Housing Element (Goal HEJ-2). Third, enhance opportunities for residents to lead healthy lives through access to healthy food (Goal HEJ-7), active transportation (Goals HEJ-3 and 4), public facilities (Goal HEJ-5), and healthcare facilities (Goal HEJ-6). And finally, advance each of these goals with meaningful and equitable community engagement that enhances community participation and results in community-informed decisions (Goal HEJ-8).

Policy Framework

Goal HEJ-1: Healthy and pollution-free neighborhoods. All residents have access to clean air, water, and soil.⁸

Policy HEJ-1.1: Protect against potential exposure to industrial pollution. Avoid siting new sensitive land uses (e.g., schools, senior centers, and daycare centers) near existing industrial, commercial, and agricultural uses which have the potential result in exposure to harmful air pollution and toxic chemicals, especially in DACs that have experienced disproportionate pollution burdens, by carefully analyzing proposed development.⁹

Action HEJ-1.1.1: When separation from pollution sources is not feasible, encourage and support indoor air quality improvements for sensitive land uses—particularly in DACs—through measures such as:

- Locating HVAC air intakes away from pollution sources
- Installing HEPA filters and ensuring regular maintenance
- Options to replace gas appliances with electric alternatives
- Limiting operable windows near pollution sources in non-residential buildings

⁸ Please see the Safety, Noise, Circulation, and Public Facilities Frameworks for additional policies and actions focused on oil and gas wells, water quality, noise, vehicle dependence, hazardous waste generators, and food waste diversion.

⁹ Please see the Recreation and Parks, Circulation, Noise, and Land Use Elements for policies and actions related to land use conflicts.

- Use green (e.g., drought-tolerant trees) and gray (e.g., sound walls) infrastructure buffers to reduce freeway-related air and noise pollution near homes and businesses
- Develop health-protective standards that also support local business continuity
- Collaborate with residents to identify and address odor sources that impact health and well-being

Policy HEJ-1.2: Enforce truck routes. Ensure local adherence to the City’s most recent truck routes map and regulations that aim to reduce significant traffic and pollution impacts on homes, schools, childcare centers, senior centers, and other sensitive land uses.¹⁰

Policy HEJ-1.3: Expand electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure. Encourage the installation of additional EV charging infrastructure.

Action HEJ-1.3.1: Seek funding opportunities such as the California Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Project (CALeVIP) to offset costs for businesses and property owners in DACs who install EV chargers, while also educating residents and businesses on EV battery safety.

Policy HEJ-1.4: Promote healthy farming techniques. Support sustainable agricultural practices in and around the City of Santa Maria.

Action HEJ-1.4.1: Support the Santa Barbara County Agriculture/Weights & Measures Department’s efforts to identify communities that should be prioritized for education and interventions to reduce farms’ pesticide use, limit pesticide drift onto communities, protect farm workers against pesticide exposure, ensure compliance with pesticide spraying time blocks, and support the use of Integrated Pest Management practices.

Action HEJ-1.4.2: Work collaboratively with Santa Barbara County’s Agricultural Commissioner’s Office and the California Department of Pesticide Regulation to enforce the County’s agricultural buffer zones and the installation of vegetative barriers to minimize land use conflicts; determine buffers for proposed projects; limit pesticide drift; and protect farmers, workers, and residents from harms related to agricultural uses.¹¹

Policy HEJ-1.5: Facilitate oil and gas well remediation. Reduce potential pollution exposure from inactive oil and gas wells and associated infrastructure through proper abandonment and remediation.¹²

Policy HEJ-1.6: Ensure proper site remediation. Work with developers and the responsible State and federal agencies to ensure the use of established best practices for investigating and fully remediating contaminated sites.

¹⁰ Please see the Circulation Element for policies and actions to mitigate the impacts of heavy vehicle traffic.

¹¹ Please see the Land Use Framework for additional agricultural buffer policies.

¹² Please see the Safety Element for additional policies and actions related to oil wells and other hazardous materials.

Action HEJ-1.6.1: Direct developers to engage in standard brownfield cleanup practices, such as carrying out Phase I and Phase II Environmental Site Analyses for assessing soil and groundwater contamination before any redevelopment can occur.

Action HEJ-1.6.2: Encourage developers to collaborate with State regulatory agencies (such as the Department of Toxic Substances Control, the State Water Resources Control Board, and/or the California Geologic Energy Management Division) to leverage their support and expertise towards cleanup efforts.

Action HEJ-1.6.3: Advise developers to conduct additional site testing and provide greater safeguards if new sensitive uses are being proposed in DACs or areas previously zoned as industrial or commercial.

Policy HEJ-1.7: Promote safe waste disposal. Raise awareness about the proper disposal of hazardous waste.

Action HEJ-1.7.1: Continue to educate residents on the City's programs and available resources for safely disposing of bulky items and hazardous household waste (such as chemicals, batteries, and expired medications), while continuing to enforce the City's illegal dumping and hazardous waste disposal laws.

Policy HEJ-1.8: Preserve water quality. Continue to ensure that Santa Maria residents have access to clean, safe, affordable, and accessible water for drinking, cooking, and sanitation¹³ by working with the County, State, and Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board to guard against potential contamination.¹⁴

Goal HEJ-2: Safe and affordable housing. All residents have access to safe, sanitary, accessible, and affordable housing.¹⁵

Policy HEJ-2.1: Implement the Housing Element. Prioritize the implementation of the goals, policies, and programs in Santa Maria's Housing Element.

Action HEJ-2.1.1: Focus on City-led efforts to increase the diversity, quality, quantity, and affordability of housing in Santa Maria, including:

- Affordable housing production, protection, preservation, and options; especially for extremely low, very low, and low-income households
- Code enforcement, with a focus on neighborhoods with older and/or substandard housing stock (e.g., elimination of lead, asbestos, mold, and pests)
- Energy conservation and assistance programs, especially for low-income households
- Safe and healthy farmworker housing
- Anti-displacement protections (e.g., first right of refusal policy)
- Housing for older adults and seniors

¹³ For more information, please refer to the Human Right to Water Portal, State Water Resources Control Board. Retrieved from: https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/hr2w/

¹⁴ Please see the Conservation and Open Space and Public Facilities and Services Elements for additional water quality policies and actions.

¹⁵ Please see the Housing and Land Use Elements for additional policies and actions focused on housing.

- Housing for people with disabilities
- Housing and support systems for homeless or unhoused families and individuals
- Fair housing program (e.g., legal services, tenant protections, rental assistance, anti-discrimination)
- Environmental issues identification and action (e.g., efficient permit system for oil well closures and hazardous waste cleanups, addressing environmental risks to farm workers at home)
- Environmental justice (e.g., avoiding the concentration of high-impact or hazardous uses and facilities in communities; and an equitable distribution of services, public facilities, and improvements).

Policy HEJ-2.2: Advance housing rehabilitation. Expand housing rehabilitation, hazard mitigation, and minor home repair programs, with a strong prioritization for low-income residents in disadvantaged communities and households with children. ¹⁶

Action HEJ-2.2.1: Collaborate with community-based organizations (CBOs) and housing advocates to support rehabilitation, repair, and hazard mitigation efforts for housing in low-income neighborhoods.

Action HEJ-2.2.2: Spread awareness of housing rehabilitation financial resources for low-income households, such as Community Development Block Grants, tax incentives, and other State and federal financial assistance programs.

Action HEJ-2.2.3: Identify long-term funding sources to continue the Minor Home Repair Programs.

Action HEJ-2.2.4: Seek funding to assist households living in units built before 1978 to identify and, if needed, remediate lead-based paint in their homes.

Policy HEJ-2.3: Bolster housing diversity. Promote a diversity of housing types in Santa Maria to support healthy, safe, and supportive living for people of all ages, abilities, incomes, stages of life, and circumstances, including options that allow residents to age in their homes.

Policy HEJ-2.4: Support multi-generational housing. Encourage the creation of new and rehabilitated multi-generational housing developments to support long-term livability.

Action HEJ-2.4.1: Continue to update the City's Zoning Code as necessary to accommodate a wider variety of housing types, densities, and layouts, including multi-generational housing (e.g., ADUs, duplexes, triplexes, built-in suites), that allow multiple families to live together in healthy and appropriate areas.

¹⁶ Please see the Safety Element for additional policies and actions related to hazard mitigation and housing resilience.

Goal HEJ-3: Mobility and safe streets. All residents have access to safe and affordable public transportation and active transportation infrastructure, focusing on equitable access and a Complete Streets approach to designing neighborhoods.¹⁷

Policy HEJ-3.1: Ensure safe active transportation. Improve public safety and increase healthy walking and biking Complete Streets networks for Santa Maria’s diverse community members (including young children, families, people with disabilities, and older adults) by ensuring safe and clean sidewalks and streets, spacious and distinct bike lanes, and accessible and affordable public transit systems for moving people around town.

Action HEJ-3.1.1: Prioritize street improvements and infrastructure investments (i.e., lighting, sidewalks, and crosswalks) by working with Caltrans and other agencies for relevant projects, such as US-101 overcrossings, to increase citywide connectivity and facilitate residents’ safe walking, biking, local travel, and work commutes.

Action HEJ-3.1.2: Pursue funding for alternative transportation projects such as Complete Streets, accessible Universal Design systems, bicycle lanes and bike facilities, and accessible sidewalk improvements, with a particular focus on neighborhoods that are DACs.

Action HEJ-3.1.3: Incorporate climate-resilient infrastructure. Add drought-tolerant green and climate-related infrastructure (i.e., trees, native plants, shade structures, signage, and benches) at transit stops to enhance comfort while waiting and reduce severe weather impacts, especially in under-resourced DACs.

Policy HEJ-3.2: Encourage safe routes to schools. Continue to partner with the school district to strengthen existing routes and establish new local safe routes to school initiatives and programs, with a priority to serve families and schools located in DACs.

Policy HEJ-3.3: Ensure equity in transit systems. Expand bus routes, increase headway frequencies, extend hours of operation, and provide additional programs to serve low-income and DAC residents to increase their access to jobs, schools, public services, and healthy food retailers.¹⁸

Action HEJ-3.3.1: Conduct targeted outreach to families and students regarding reduced-fee transportation passes.

¹⁷ Please see the Circulation Element for additional policies and actions focused on mobility and safety.

¹⁸ Please see the Circulation Element for additional transit policies and actions.

Goal HEJ-4: Opportunities for physical activity. People of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds have equitable access to parks, open space, and other community spaces that promote physical activity and healthy lifestyles.¹⁹

Policy HEJ-4.1: Increase access to parks and open space. Preserve and improve park and open space access throughout the city, with a clear focus on expanding park investments and resources in DAC neighborhoods that have traditionally lacked high-quality park amenities and easy access to nature.²⁰

Policy HEJ-4.2: Expand tree canopy. Preserve existing trees, replace trees that are removed, and increase tree planting in new areas to improve Santa Maria’s air quality, create more attractive and walkable public spaces, and combat climate-related extreme heat and wind effects, especially for DACs.²¹

Policy HEJ-4.3: Preserve greenbelts. Promote and maintain greenbelts in Santa Maria to promote greater public access to nature and increase opportunities for outdoor recreation.²²

Action HEJ-4.3.1: Consider community needs and feedback, particularly from DACs, when identifying greenbelt areas to be maintained, expanded, or created.

Policy HEJ-4.4: Increase infrastructure for physical activity. Promote active and healthy lifestyles for the Santa Maria community by increasing the number of bike storage units, public water stations, accessible walkways, pedestrian crosswalks, and family-friendly staircases that feature gentle slopes and landings in public spaces to encourage walking and biking around the city.

Goal HEJ-5: Accessible public facilities. All residents benefit from City services, infrastructure, and other public resources, with targeted investments and improvements for historically under-resourced DAC neighborhoods.²³

Policy HEJ-5.1: Maintain public facilities. Prioritize equitable and timely maintenance of public facilities (e.g., sidewalks, parks and playgrounds, and City-maintained infrastructure) in DACs, recognizing the role of supportive services and a clean environment in promoting both positive mental and physical health.

¹⁹ Please see the Land Use Element for additional policies and actions focused on urban design and pedestrian-focused public spaces.

²⁰ Please see the Recreation and Parks Element for policies and actions focused on park access.

²¹ Please see the Conservation and Open Space Element for additional urban forestry policies and actions.

²² Please see the Conservation and Open Space Element for additional greenbelt actions.

²³ Please see the Public Facilities and Services and Recreation and Parks Elements for additional policies and actions related to public facilities and parks.

Policy HEJ-5.2: Collaborate to improve facilities. Collaborate with public and private entities, including community-based nonprofit organizations, to continue maintaining and creating new parks, promoting cleanup efforts and City beautification programs, installing public art and murals, promoting tree planting, increasing recreational facilities, and preserving and maintaining open space areas, especially for residents living in DACs that traditionally lack access to such amenities.

Policy HEJ-5.3: Increase childcare access. Collaborate with local nonprofit organizations, childcare providers, and residents from impacted communities to assess the availability, affordability, and quality of childcare and to develop implementable strategies that address gaps, improve services, and ensure equitable access to childcare resources for all community members.

Policy HEJ-5.4: Improve community-serving programming. Enhance and maintain City-run programming for community members, particularly those who are low-income, youth, and seniors, to enhance their quality of life and strengthen physical activity opportunities.

Action HEJ-5.4.1: Support and expand free or low-cost waivers for low-income groups, especially youth and seniors, to participate in City-run physical activity programs and activities through the Leisure Needs Assessment and Action Plan.

Goal HEJ-6: Healthcare for all. All residents have access to excellent and affordable physical and mental health care resources.

Policy HEJ-6.1: Coordinate healthcare access. Partner with County Public Health and Behavioral Wellness Departments and local health care providers to improve equitable access to high-quality and culturally-relevant healthcare and mental health services, especially for communities that are more likely to face barriers such as residents that are uninsured, low-income or are on a limited or fixed income, live in a DAC, have disabilities, are farmworkers, have limited English proficiency, and/or are experiencing poor or chronic health issues.

Action HEJ-6.1.1: Work with healthcare providers, community-based organizations, and institutions to understand and address the current barriers to bringing in more healthcare services to Santa Maria, including potential land use issues.

Policy HEJ-6.2: Expand access to health information. Partner with the Santa Barbara County Public Health Department, local healthcare institutions, and nonprofit organizations to provide accessible information on important health issues (e.g., chronic health conditions, nutrition, air pollution impacts, reproductive health, and mental health), especially for residents who face higher barriers to receiving information and education such as low-income residents in DACs, residents from Indigenous and Mixteco backgrounds, people with disabilities, farmworkers, students, and older adults.

Action HEJ-6.2.1: Collaborate with the Santa Barbara County Public Health Department and other local organizations to develop and implement a targeted health, mental health, and substance abuse education and outreach campaign to reach underserved communities.

Policy HEJ-6.3: Integrate health in all policies. Promote a coordinated “Health in All Policies” approach by incorporating health equity and environmental sustainability in City programs, and by increasing cross-department collaborations and coordination to address health equity outcomes through joint initiatives and programming.²⁴

Policy HEJ-6.4: Promote emergency response alternatives. Coordinate with Mobile Crisis Teams to facilitate timely, non-law enforcement mental health emergency responses, especially in high-stress DACs, while also training the City’s Police force on how to identify appropriate support systems for individuals experiencing mental health episodes or substance abuse problems.

Policy HEJ-6.5: Prioritize violence-prevention. Support and expand City resources (such as the Mayor’s Task Force) to provide violence prevention services and education to youth and adults of all ages, while also prioritizing youth leadership programs that work to improve public safety and proactively prevent and reduce crime.

Goal HEJ-7: Access to healthy food. All residents have access to affordable, fresh, and nutritious foods, including cultural foods.

Policy HEJ-7.1: Support community food distribution. Continue to assist Santa Maria’s community-based organizations, schools, and other institutions that are working to provide free or low-cost food to low-income families and unhoused residents who experience food insecurity in high-need areas of the city.

Action HEJ-7.1.1: Work with large food generators (e.g., grocery stores, food distributors, and restaurants) to ensure edible surplus food is delivered to local food recovery organizations.

Policy HEJ-7.2: Improve grocery store access. Support the expansion of supermarkets in Santa Maria, especially in the northeast and northwest corners of the city, in food desert areas, and in other DAC neighborhoods.

Policy HEJ-7.3: Expand access to fresh, healthy, affordable food. Collaborate to ensure that residents have ready access to fresh, nutritious food at affordable prices.

Action HEJ-7.3.1: Encourage corner store owners to increase the availability of fresh, healthy foods by providing refrigerated shelving units, adjusting store layout, and prioritizing nutritious choices.

Action HEJ-7.3.2: Establish a “Healthy Corner Store” initiative in partnership with the County Public Health Department to promote access to nutritious food and beverages in corner stores, especially in DACs.

²⁴ “Health in All Policies (HiAP) is a collaborative approach to improving the health of all people by incorporating health considerations into decision-making across sectors and policy areas.” HiAP recognizes that health is influenced by a multitude of factors beyond healthcare and, in many cases, beyond the scope of traditional public health activities. For more information on the Health in All Policies approach, please visit: <https://www.apha.org/topics-and-issues/health-in-all-policies>

Action HEJ-7.3.3: Pursue funding and partnerships to enhance equitable access to nutritious food across the community through tailored incentives and resources.

Action HEJ-7.3.4: Partner with local businesses, farms, and community organizations operating farmers' markets to provide healthy, fresh, and affordable food to residents living in DACs, including cultural foods.

Action HEJ-7.3.5: Encourage farmers' market operators to shift or expand their hours of operation to be at more convenient times for working families.

Action HEJ-7.3.6: Support partnerships that encourage schools to provide student gardens on school grounds and seek funding to have local farmers and community gardeners teach students about farming and gardening practices.

Action HEJ-7.3.7: Support partnerships that educate Santa Maria grocery stores, farmers' markets, and other healthy food retailers on the importance of accepting benefit cards from low-income residents, including CalFresh Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards; Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) benefits; and Senior Farmer's Market Nutrition Program benefits.

Action HEJ-7.3.8: Partner with property owners and the County Public Health Department to support innovative food microenterprises, such as home kitchen operations and mobile food facilities.

Goal HEJ-8: Meaningful and equitable public engagement. All residents have access to a variety of equitable and meaningful opportunities to participate in City activities and decision-making.²⁵

Policy HEJ-8.1: Ensure inclusive community engagement. Implement strategies to increase participation from community members who are typically not well represented in civic affairs due to various barriers.

Action HEJ-8.1.1: Employ best practices for engagement, such as:

- Scheduling meetings and public workshops at times that are convenient for residents and locating meetings in convenient and transit-accessible locations.
- Prioritizing outreach efforts to community members who are most impacted by racial and social inequities, including youth of color and immigrant families.
- Using outreach methods, such as flyers, schools, and social media, to engage community members and share important City information and resources.
- Offering simultaneous multilingual interpretation during public workshops and community meetings, and translating all meeting materials into Spanish and other commonly spoken local languages.
- Incorporating participatory facilitation techniques during public workshops to meaningfully engage residents in feedback conversations.
- Providing virtual attendance options for meetings.

²⁵ Please see the Conservation and Open Space Element for additional policies and actions focused on community engagement.

- Partnering with community-based organizations to offer training to residents who lack access to the internet and have limited knowledge of technology.
- Expanding partnerships with local community-based organizations and faith-based institutions to help facilitate community-based conversations and encourage active participation.

Action HEJ-8.1.2: Update the City’s Language Access Plan (LAP) on an as-needed basis to continue to provide meaningful access to City programs and activities by residents who have Limited English Proficiency (LEP).

Policy HEJ-8.2: Integrate equity best practices. Prioritize resources, training, and programs to promote best practices for integrating inclusivity, fairness, social equity, and justice in all City departments to strengthen their functions and improve relationships with community members.

Action HEJ-8.2.1: Provide ongoing training and capacity building to City staff on topics such as racial equity and civil rights laws, environmental and climate justice in city planning, strategies for promoting cross-cultural awareness and cultural competence, how to use a trauma-informed approach for working with different communities, and how to lead equitable community engagement strategies.

Action HEJ-8.2.2: Continue to recruit new staff who are representative of Santa Maria’s diverse population and people who can speak multiple languages to enhance communication with City services.

Policy HEJ-8.3: Encourage diverse community leadership. Support residents from underrepresented communities and diverse backgrounds to take on leadership roles for the City, fostering leadership that reflects the full demographic diversity of Santa Maria.

Action HEJ-8.3.1: Recruit community members of diverse backgrounds, races/ethnicities, physical abilities, genders, sexual orientations, and ages of Santa Maria to serve on the City Boards and Commissions.

Policy HEJ-8.4: Promote youth leadership. Engage young people, particularly high school-aged and transition-aged youth (ages 18-24 years old), to participate in City decision-making processes and decision-making bodies.

Action HEJ-8.4.1: Consider activities including:

- Continue to implement a City-led Youth Commission that can increase youth voice and young people’s perspectives in City decision-making to improve community quality of life for all.
- Conduct targeted outreach to schools to involve students in the City’s land use and permitting decisions.
- Partner with community-based nonprofit organizations and schools to expand their civics-related programs, school clubs, and curriculum to include lessons on environmental justice, land use planning, air pollution, and how city governments work, among other topics.
- Co-host voter registration drives.
- Encourage high school-aged youth and transition-aged youth to volunteer as poll workers or become involved in City affairs.

Policy HEJ-8.5: Include residents in land use decisions. Proactively outreach to and solicit feedback from low-income residents, community-based organizations, individuals with limited English proficiency, people with disabilities, and DAC residents, among others, when making decisions on issues that impact their communities (e.g., zone changes, discretionary permit approvals, processes for brownfield cleanup, housing development, tenants’ rights policies, transportation, community benefits agreements for large development).

Policy HEJ-8.6: Develop community benefits agreements. Facilitate the creation of community benefits agreements (CBAs) for major private development projects to provide resources and mitigate pollution impacts for the benefit of local communities, especially when located in a DAC.

Action HEJ-8.6.1: Identify potential community benefits, including:

- Lower levels of environmental pollution
- Reduced car and truck traffic
- More affordable housing units
- Workforce development opportunities
- Tree and native species planting
- Shade structures for extreme heat events
- Green (e.g., trees) or gray (e.g. sound walls) barriers for noise and pollution mitigation
- Community gardens and publicly accessible green space
- Other investments as suggested by Santa Maria community members.