



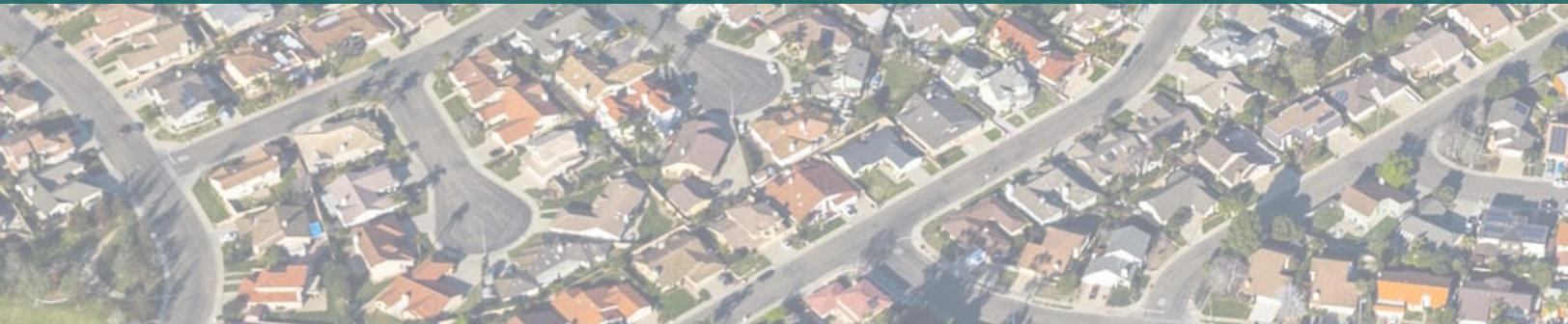
Santa Maria  
General Plan

**imagine**



# SB 1000 Housing Café

Summary Report | Prepared June 2021 | Held March 2021



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## Overview

This summary report presents themes identified during a Housing Café on March 26, 2021. The Café is one piece of an extensive community engagement effort for the City of Santa Maria's General Plan Update (GPU) process. Four total Cafés were held during February and March of 2021 on the following topics: Environmental Justice, Farmworker Community, Community Safety, and Housing.

Through existing conditions research in the first phase of the GPU process, several areas of Santa Maria were identified that do not fare as well as others. These areas, called “disadvantaged communities,” are lower-income and may face disproportionate exposures to health hazards. Because these communities exist in Santa Maria, the City is required to complete an environmental justice planning process through implementation of Senate Bill 1000 (SB 1000 or “The Planning for Healthy Communities Act”). This bill requires the City to directly engage and solicit input on key issues from residents and stakeholders in disadvantaged communities.

The Café was designed to broadly engage in identification of health issues and priorities as well as to refine existing conditions findings across the following topic areas, as required by SB 1000: Housing, Public Facilities, Pollution Exposures, Food Access, Physical Activity and Health. The icons below represent each of these topics and are used throughout the report.



## Participants and Format

There were 25 participants in the Café. Participants were community members and farmworkers that live in the City of Santa Maria. All participants spoke Mixteco and the Café was held in Spanish with Mixteco interpretation so participants could participate in their language of choice.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the Café was held via Zoom in the format of an online focus group. The Café was led by Raimi + Associates with facilitation and interpretation support from the Mixteco Indigenous Community Organizing Project (MICOP), a community organization working with residents and stakeholders from disadvantaged communities, including monolingual Mixteco farmworkers and their families. MICOP is a partner of the City of Santa Maria in the General Plan Update, ensuring that traditionally underrepresented groups, such as Mixteco residents, are proactively sought for input in shaping the future of Santa Maria. The following questions were used as discussion prompts:

- What housing topics are most important to you?
- What recommendations do you have for the City to address issues related to housing?
- Is there anything else you would like to share?

## Key Themes

The following key themes emerged from discussion (specific comments are included in the Appendix):



### Housing

**Affordability, quality of housing, and health are all connected.** Participants shared their stories regarding different issues related to housing and the following topics were recurring throughout the discussion:

- Many people living in one housing unit
- High costs regardless of quality
- Old housing structures
- Low supply of affordable housing
- Code Violations
- Lack of housing for resident (non-visiting) agricultural workers
- Landlords are not fixing housing issues and when they do, rent goes up
- Language barriers between tenants and landlords or managers
- Tenants are paying for repairs of housing structure issues
- Application fees are very high

## Appendix: Detailed Notes from Discussion

The following list provides detailed notes from the discussion and is organized by question and by themes within each question.

### What housing topics are most important to you?

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#### Affordability

- I am paying \$1,150 for a room. My landlord sometimes comes and wants to raise the price. However, the room is not in good conditions. It's a room with just a living room space.
  - We want them to lower the price because during times we do not have work, it is hard to pay for rent.
  - We pay \$2,500 a month. They expect to receive the rent exactly the day it is due with no delay.
  - Even when we don't have work, we still turn in the rent from our savings. Another thing, when they do fix something, she [the landlord] will raise the rent price. One time, she fixed the front door and added a metal screen door to keep flies away and she raised our price. She raised it by \$150. The landlord owns 3 houses nearby and she also raised the rent by \$150 for them. She has not lowered it since.
  - The rent is \$2000. They do not allow for the rent to come in late and are delayed in fixing things.
  - I live in a small studio with my family and it is very small for us. It is costly. If we try to look for other places, they want 3 months of rent and credit. That is a very big obstacle. Although I would like to live in a better place, it is hard. The costs are very expensive.
  - If an apartment costs \$3500, you have to earn three times that in order to qualify and apply for that location.
  - The rent is abuse. When I first moved into my apartment, the rent was \$1600 and now it is \$2100. Every year it goes up. They charge us a lot just for an application, which can be \$35. We don't know where else to go. Every month we just work to pay for their (the landlords) cost of living because everything we earn in the field is what we give them. They charge for parking and trash.
  - My check goes mainly to housing. Is there something we can do so the rent is not being increased as much? There is a lot of abuse, they don't tell us they will help us. They [landlords] just abuse us and use our money to live. Even though we do not speak the language, the money is just as valuable to us as it is to them.
  - The number one concern for me is that rent should be lowered. Right now, I see that apartments are being created but they are very expensive. The landlords will not live there but we will and the landlords will once again get our money.
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- Reinforcing what was said by others, the rent is very expensive. They are asking for credit scores. They do not want kids in the rooms. If you want to rent a two-bedroom apartment, they don't want kids. I am renting a house and paying \$3450. I feel it is very expensive.
- Rent is very high. They take a long time to fix anything around the house. If we delay by one day to pay rent, we receive a fine/fee. But if we need something fixed, they take a long time. I feel we face discrimination and abuse.

### Habitability

- They [the landlords] don't want to fix the stove or change it even though it is very old. That is not okay because we are paying a high price. We also don't have a refrigerator and we had to buy one ourselves. We wanted the landlord to buy one.
  - I am renting an apartment and it has rats and bed bugs. We told the landlord but he always says he will come and never does.
  - I live in a house and when something needs fixing, I have to pay for it. I am punctual with the rent. I have asked them to fix a faucet in the bathroom and they told me they would pay for it but it has been a year and they have yet to fix it. The fridge is also very old. The house is very old, especially when it is cold, the whole house gets very cold. When it is hot, the entire house gets very hot. When we ask for them to fix something, they will do it but we get reprimanded. They claim everything is our fault and that we ruin the house.
  - I live in apartments and the front door is deteriorating. There is a hole in the lower part and the cold air enters through there. I asked the landlord and she said she would not fix it. The lock no longer works and I am unable to lock my door. It has been a month since she said she would fix it and it has not been fixed. The windows also have wood that is starting to deteriorate. Sometimes it seems like they are going to fall off. The carpet is very old and it has a very strong odor. I have tried to wash it but the odor is still there. I am worried for my kids.
  - I live in an apartment, similar to a studio. I have a large family. The fan and AC do not work. The shower door does not work and one time it fell when my children were near. I asked my landlord to fix it but he said no. Other tenants in the apartment complex say there are bigger apartments but the owner says there is not.
  - My apartments do not get fixed when they need to. If they do, they take a long time to fix it. The rent is always raised when something is fixed. One time a pipe broke and it took a month to get fixed.
  - I previously lived in an apartment where they would fumigate and they would post a notice about the fumigation telling tenants to leave their space for the day. They did give us enough time to move our things.
  - I live in apartments and specifically near the apartment trash can. During the times of wind, trash is sometimes not properly disposed of and it flies into our front door or front of the house. I have a special needs daughter and sometimes
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she requires a nurse to come and watch over her when conditions are bad. Mosquitoes are really bad. Windows and doors have to be shut. I always have to ask for them [my landlords] to clean up the mess and they take a long time to fix anything. What they do take care of is smoke and carbon monoxide alarms. They are afraid the city will fine them if there is an issue.

### Discrimination

- The landlord only speaks English and it is difficult to communicate with her.
  - We do not understand Spanish very well when the landlord speaks to us.
  - It has been three years since I moved there. I have been asking to move with my family. He [the landlord] tells me he put us on the waitlist and that there are 2000 people ahead of us. Other families say they are moving to bigger spaces within the apartment complex, but we can't. Maybe it's because of the language.
  - I believe there is a discrimination faced by the Mixteco community. There are all types of discrimination. Not just in housing. Even in the color of our skin. When they see our dark skin, they discriminate against us or see us as lower.
  - Yes, there is a lot of discrimination and abuse in apartment complexes.
  - When I had my young son, the owner saw him and said, "you have to move out, you have 15 days and you have to pay for those days". I asked if my deposit could pay for that and he said no. Then he told me "You have to leave the date I told you or I will report you to immigration and you will have to go to court... They will deport you and your son." When I left, my original deposit was \$1650 and they did not return my deposit.
  - I feel I am discriminated against because I don't speak Spanish and only Mixteco.
  - The City of Santa Maria also gives preference to H-2A temporary agricultural workers. Many parts of Santa Maria have built housing for them. When their jobs are done, they simply close the housing and open it up for when they come back. They build housing for the temporary workers and not for the permanent field workers that live in Santa Maria. The fieldworkers that permanently live here are contributing money to Santa Maria and the temporary ones don't. They send their money back. We should get preference because we live here and contribute to the economy.
  - I live across the street from my landlord. There are people drinking in my street and my landlord blames it on me. I have paid \$600 each for the three times he has gotten a citation for the people in the street. My neighbor has loud music playing, drinks and has a lot of noise late at night. The manager has not told them anything because they speak English. I feel that because I don't speak the language, I am facing abuse. The manager is perhaps afraid of my neighbor.
  - I am not against the H-2A temporary workers but in the area where they live, the housing is very new and nice. Those of us that regularly work in the city are living in old apartments. This is just a business for them. Temporary workers are receiving more preference. In our housing, fixing does not happen as fast as we would like, it takes a while.
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- My boiler needed fixing and when they did fix it, the rent went up by \$85. At first, I did not realize it because they did not tell me. When I asked about my rent bill, they said it had to do with the new boiler because that is something that we use. It's a lot of abuse. It shouldn't be part of my rent.
- When I first moved in, they said the carpet was supposed to be changed every 5 years and now it's been 12 years and nothing has happened.

#### Other

- When we first arrived at the apartment, there was no refrigerator or stove. The refrigerator and stove were later bought but now they are very old and we will need to buy new ones. Yes, there are many of us living here and we asked the landlord to add a new stove or fridge but he does not want to.
- They always require credit. Sometimes they don't put a stove or refrigerator and when they do, it takes too long.
- In apartments they don't return our deposits. Application fees are \$45. If we don't qualify, they will not return our money. They keep it just for applying.
- Another thing, when we ask them to fix something in the house, they should fix it. It is their property. Money is very difficult to get for us and very simple for them.
- They are very strict. If you leave your belongings outside, they will throw them out. I feel they are discriminating.

#### Areas of Concern for Housing Issues

- Near Morrison and Thornburg (x2)
- Near Morrison and Blosser
- Near Oakley and Cooke
- Near Jones and Pine (x2)
- Near Alvin and Lincoln
- Near Russell and Morrison
- Near Broadway and Cooke

#### Responses to Question about How to Find New Housing Options

- We can go to the manager office of where we live but usually, they do not respond back to us.
  - We can't go to county services because they ask for too many requisites. We feel they are discriminating against us for not knowing our rights or knowing Spanish very well.
  - When applying for housing, they charge for applications. I think that is not just. I have applied to other housing and I have paid but I am never given a response or answer after that.
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## What recommendations do you have for the City to address issues related to community safety?

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- Apartments that were built in the 50's may have toxic chemicals. Sometimes as Hispanics we don't always dominate the language. We may be exposed to toxic chemicals without knowing. The landlords don't always pay attention to us because they know we don't know our rights or speak the language well, perhaps the city can help us with that.
  - A rent control program.
  - There should be an office for the Mixtec community or an office that can explain our rights.
  - An office where we can report and ask about code violations
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