

6 Alternatives

Section 15126.6 of the *CEQA Guidelines* provides guidance for the identification and evaluation of project alternatives in an EIR. The *CEQA Guidelines* state that an “EIR shall describe a range of reasonable alternatives to the project, or to the location of the project, which would feasibly attain most of the basic objectives of the project but would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the project and evaluate the comparative merits of the alternatives.” This EIR examines a range of reasonable alternatives to the 2045 General Plan Update that would attain most of the basic plan objectives but may avoid or substantially lessen significant adverse impacts.

6.1 Alternatives Development and Screening Process

As stated in Chapter 2, *Project Description*, the 2045 General Plan Update presents a vision for the future of the City and a set of objectives for how the City would achieve that vision. This vision and its objectives capture the City’s key aspirations for the future. As discussed in Chapter 2, *Project Description*, the objectives for the plan, are as follows:

- **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.
- **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 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 percent 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 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, (e.g., 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 pace 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.

Included in this analysis are three alternatives, including the CEQA-required “no project” alternative, that involve changes to the project that may reduce the project-related environmental impacts as identified in this EIR. Alternatives have been developed to provide a reasonable range of options to consider that would help decision makers and the public understand the general implications of revising or eliminating certain components of the 2045 General Plan Update.

The following alternatives are evaluated in this EIR:

- Alternative 1: No Project Alternative
- Alternative 2: Infill Only Alternative
- Alternative 3: Greater Annexation Alternative

Detailed descriptions of the alternatives are included in the impact evaluation for each alternative. The potential environmental impacts of each alternative are discussed in Section 6.2 through Section 6.4. As required by CEQA, this section also includes a discussion of the “environmentally superior alternative” among those studied, included as Section 6.5 and summarized in Table 6-1.

6.2 Alternative 1: No Project Alternative

6.2.1 Description

Under the No Project Alternative, the City of Santa Maria would not adopt the 2045 General Plan Update. Instead, development would continue in accordance with the existing General Plan. This alternative assumes that current land use designations, policies, and growth projections would remain in effect, guiding future development and infrastructure decisions. For the purpose of this analysis, the No Project Alternative is assumed to result in reduced overall buildout potential compared to the 2045 General Plan Update, as it reflects continuation of existing land use designations and policies without the proposed changes that would facilitate additional growth.

While some development would still occur under existing entitlements and zoning regulations, the City would not implement the new land use strategies, environmental protections, or housing and mobility policies in the plan. As a result, the No Project Alternative would not fulfill the objectives of the 2045 General Plan Update because it would not fully address evolving community needs, state housing requirements (future RHNA cycles), or infrastructure demands anticipated through 2045. However, as discussed in detail in Section 6.2.2, this alternative would avoid the potential environmental impacts associated with the increased development intensity and expanded planning strategies in the plan.

6.2.2 Impact Analysis

a. Agricultural Resources

With reduced buildout potential compared to the 2045 General Plan Update, the No Project Alternative would place less development pressure on agricultural lands, resulting in reduced impacts to agricultural resources. The No Project Alternative would continue growth in accordance with the existing General Plan and as such, would not extend growth into tracts of Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, or Unique Farmland in the annexation area. In addition, the No Project Alternative would not result in new land use changes on agricultural plans within the city or the annexation area, which includes Prime Farmland and Williamson Act lands. Therefore, the No Project Alternative would have reduced impacts compared to the 2045 General Plan Update. Overall, the No Project Alternative would reduce impacts to agricultural resources to a less than significant level.

b. Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Air Quality: The lower level of development anticipated under the No Project Alternative would generate reduced vehicle trips and less energy use, resulting in reduced impacts on air quality and GHG emissions. However, the No Project Alternative would not implement the policies from the plan that aim to maintain air quality and protect public health in Santa Maria. Furthermore, this alternative would not be required to implement Mitigation Measures AQGHG-1 and AQGHG-2, which aim to reduce construction-related air pollutant emissions by requiring future development in

Santa Maria to implement best management practices consistent with Santa Barbara County Air Pollution Control District (SBCAPCD) guidelines and require construction projects to utilize Tier 3 equipment of higher to reduce construction related TAC exposure. Similar to the 2045 General Plan Update, construction facilitated by the No Project Alternative has the potential to emit fugitive dust and criteria air pollutants that exceed SBCAPCD's standards. As such, impacts related to air quality would be reduced compared to the 2045 General Plan Update but would remain significant and unavoidable as fugitive dust and criteria air pollutant emissions from the No Project Alternative may still exceed SBCAPCD's standards.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions: The No Project Alternative would be generally consistent with the goals of the 2045 General Plan Update since future development would be required to comply with the latest Title 24 Green Building Code and Building Efficiency Energy Standards and applicable State law. However, the No Project Alternative would not include new policies aimed at reducing GHG emissions within the city. While development would be reduced in comparison to the 2045 General Plan Update, there is no assurance that the No Project Alternative would be consistent with the State-wide target of net-zero GHG emissions by 2045. While impacts would be reduced compared to the 2045 General Plan Update, impacts related to GHG emissions would remain significant and unavoidable due to potential inconsistencies with the State-wide target.

c. Biological Resources

Less growth and development outside of the existing ~~urban footprint~~ city boundary under the No Project Alternative would reduce the potential for habitat disturbance, leading to reduced impacts to biological resources. However, the No Project Alternative would not implement the policies from the 2045 General Plan Update that aim to enhance the protection of biological resources, such as development review and critical habitat protection. Specifically, the No Project Alternative would not implement Mitigation Measures BIO-1(a) through BIO-1(k), which require future development to avoid, minimize, or offset impacts to sensitive species and habitats through surveys, construction buffers, habitat restoration, and compliance with agency regulations. As a result, development facilitated by the No Project Alternative has the potential to disturb special status plant species, endangered/threatened animal species, and important habitat. As a result, development facilitated by the No Project Alternative would have a greater potential to adversely affect biological resources compared to the 2045 General Plan Update, and overall impacts to biological resources would be significant and unavoidable.

d. Cultural and Tribal Cultural Resources

Cultural Resources: Given its lower buildout potential, the No Project Alternative would involve less ground disturbance overall and therefore reduce the likelihood of impacting cultural and tribal cultural resources. However, the No Project Alternative would not implement the policies from the 2045 General Plan Update that aim to protect historical and culturally significant resources. In the absence of new policies to protect historical and culturally significant resources or the plan-level mitigation measures associated with the 2045 General Plan Update, the No Project Alternative would be required to implement mitigation on a project-by-project basis. As a result, potential impacts to historical and culturally significant resources would be greater than under the 2045 General Plan Update, and would be significant and unavoidable.

Archaeological Resources: The No Project Alternative would result in reduced buildout potential compared to the 2045 General Plan Update and therefore have less potential to disturb subsurface archaeological resources. However, this alternative would not implement the policies from the 2045

General Plan Update that would require archaeological resources assessments or implement unanticipated discovery procedures for development involving ground-disturbing activities. In the absence of new policies to prevent the disturbance of subsurface archaeological resources, the potential for the No Project Alternative to substantially disturb archaeological resources is higher than the 2045 General Plan Update and would need to implement mitigation in order to reduce impacts to a less than significant level. In addition, the No Project Alternative would not implement Mitigation Measures CUL-1 through CUL-4(b), which aim to protect archaeological and historical resources by requiring pre-construction surveys, construction monitoring, and procedures for the treatment of any discovered resources, necessary for reducing impacts. Therefore, potential impacts to cultural impacts under this alternative would be greater than under the 2045 General Plan Update .

Tribal Cultural Resources: Similar to the 2045 General Plan Update, development facilitated by the No Project Alternative would be subject to the requirements of AB 52 and if required, SB 18. However, the No Project Alternative would not implement Mitigation Measures CUL-4(a) and CUL-4(b), which ensure tribal consultation and protection of tribal cultural resources through construction monitoring by tribal representatives and protocols for the discovery and treatment of tribal resources, and thus would not ensure project-specific tribal cultural resource identification and consultation, and the appropriate avoidance, minimization, or mitigation. In the absence of new policies to protect tribal cultural resources or the plan-level mitigation measures associated with the 2045 General Plan Update, the No Project Alternative would have greater impact on tribal cultural resources as the 2045 General Plan Update. Future development under the No Project Alternative would be required to implement mitigation measures to avoid or minimize impacts to tribal cultural resources. Therefore, potential impact to tribal cultural resources would be greater than under the 2045 General Plan Update, and would be significant and unavoidable.

e. Hydrology and Water Quality

Compared to the 2045 General Plan Update, the No Project Alternative would introduce reduced impervious surfaces and require reduced infrastructure extensions, reducing potential impacts on hydrology and water quality. Under the No Project Alternative, fewer residential units would be developed compared to the 2045 General Plan Update, consistent with existing land use designations and zoning. Ground-disturbing construction activities that could potentially affect water quality from sedimentation or accidental spills would occur following current adopted zoning. Any changes related to hydrology, water quality, watersheds and drainage patterns, flood and inundation hazards, and ground water resource management caused by changes in existing development would follow the currently adopted standards. Therefore, the No Project Alternative impacts related to hydrology and water quality would be less than significant, similar to the 2045 General Plan Update.

f. Noise

Although the No Project Alternative would involve less overall development than the 2045 General Plan Update, resulting in reduced construction activity and traffic volumes, its lack of policies and mitigation to address noise and vibration would ultimately lead to greater noise impacts. The No Project Alternative would not implement the policies from the 2045 General Plan Update that aim to promote land uses compatible with future noise levels or minimize transportation noise and other intermittent noise. In addition, the No Project Alternative would not implement Mitigation Measures NOI-1(a), NOI-1(b), or NOI-2, which require construction activities to follow noise-

reduction practices to minimize noise impacts on nearby sensitive receptors. Without implementation of these mitigation measures, potential construction and operation noise impacts would remain significant and unavoidable, and potential impacts from construction groundborne vibration would change from less than significant to significant and unavoidable. Therefore, overall noise impacts induced by the No Project Alternative would have slightly greater impacts than the 2045 General Plan Update related to construction noise, operational noise, and construction groundborne vibration. These impacts would be significant and unavoidable.

g. Transportation and Traffic

Lower buildout under the No Project Alternative would result in reduced daily trips and reduced roadway congestion compared to the 2045 General Plan Update. The No Project Alternative would not implement the goals and policies included in the 2045 General Plan Update to reduce VMT, including the promotion of different modes of transportation including transit and active transportation. Unlike the 2045 General Plan Update, the No Project Alternative would not place an emphasis on mixed-use and infill development in Santa Maria. Without policies to guide mixed-use and infill development, it is anticipated that regional VMT would increase as residents and employees commute longer distances. Therefore, the No Project Alternative would have slightly greater impacts on VMT, and impacts would remain significant and unavoidable

h. Utilities and Service Systems

As a result of the reduced development intensity, the No Project Alternative would generate lower demand on water, wastewater, energy, and solid waste systems. However, the No Project Alternative would not implement the policies included in the 2045 General Plan Update that aim to ensure citywide utility infrastructure supports development. As a result, overall demand would be lower, the absence of utilities planning and infrastructure policies could limit the City's ability to manage utility impacts efficiently. In addition, the No Project Alternative would not include the annexation area, unlike the 2045 General Plan Update. Therefore, the No Project Alternative would not require the establishment of new or expanded utilities infrastructure in order to service the city's expansion. Similar to the 2045 General Plan Update, development facilitated by the No Project Alternative would be required to comply with all applicable federal, State, and local regulations regarding water, wastewater, and waste disposal. Therefore, impacts would be slightly reduced overall due to lower development levels when compared to the 2045 General Plan and would remain less than significant.

6.3 Alternative 2: Infill Only Alternative

6.3.1 Description

Under the Infill Only Alternative, the City of Santa Maria would adopt the 2045 General Plan Update, including all goals and policies. However, the Infill Only Alternative would exclude the annexation of areas located east of the current City limits and direct development to areas within existing urban or suburban areas as infill, redevelopment, or increased densities. For the purpose of this analysis, the Infill Only Alternative is assumed to result in a similar overall level of buildout and population growth compared to the 2045 General Plan Update, despite the exclusion of future development in the eastern annexation area. Therefore, this analysis assumes that the Infill Only Alternative would result in the addition of approximately 16,000 new residential units and up to 23,750 new jobs associated with new commercial development within city limits.

While this alternative would reduce the geographic footprint of development, it would result in increased development pressure on existing neighborhoods and infrastructure. As a result, the Infill Only Alternative may not fulfill the primary objectives of the 2045 General Plan Update because it would not fully address evolving community health needs, state housing requirements, or opportunities for connected growth anticipated through 2045. However, as discussed in detail in Section 6.3.2, this alternative would avoid environmental impacts in the annexation area, such as conversion of agricultural land, fragmentation of open space, or potential effects on biological resources, while potentially exacerbating environmental impacts associated with the increased development density in existing neighborhoods.

6.3.2 Impact Analysis

a. Agricultural Resources

By accommodating a similar amount of development entirely within existing City limits, the Infill Only Alternative would avoid the annexation area's agricultural lands and result in reduced impacts to farmland. While the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program still designates areas within the city as Important Farmland, the conversion of these areas and associated land use changes have been previously evaluated in earlier environmental documents which are listed in Section 4.1, *Agricultural Resources*. Under this alternative, future growth would rely on redevelopment and increased densities within existing urbanized areas and locations already designated for urban development rather than expansion into agricultural lands. The Infill Only Alternative would not convert agricultural lands within city limits because lands within city limits currently used for agricultural purposes have been previously designated for planned urban redevelopment in specific plans or earlier iterations of the General Plan. As discussed in Section 4.1, *Agricultural Resources*, environmental documents such as the Sphere of Influence Expansion Environmental Impact Report (SCH #90010930), the Area 9 Specific Plan Environmental Impact Report (SCH #2008071018), the Blosser-Southeast Specific Plan Amendment Supplemental Environmental Impact Report (SCH #1994107909), and the Betteravia Plaza General Plan Amendment, Land Use and Zone Change and Development Agreement Environmental Impact Report (SCH #2015011029) have evaluated impacts to agricultural resources from the conversion of agricultural lands within the city. As a result, these lands have land use and zoning designations intended for urban redevelopment and would not be considered a conversion of existing agricultural uses. The exclusion of future development in the eastern annexation area would reduce impacts to agricultural resources in comparison to the 2045 General Plan Update. However, because this alternative limits development to infill sites, it would constrain opportunities for housing diversity and connected growth compared to the proposed plan. As the Infill Only Alternative would not result in the conversion of agricultural lands within City limits nor would it include the annexation area, this impact would be reduced to less than significant.

b. Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Air Quality: The Infill Only Alternative assumes a similar level of buildout and a more compact development pattern, which together would help lower GHG emissions and vehicle-related air pollutants. This infill-oriented growth pattern would be more compact, reducing VMT per capita and enhancing opportunities for walking, biking, and transit use, potentially reducing criteria air pollutant and GHG emissions on a per capita basis. However, similar to the 2045 General Plan Update, the Infill Only Alternative would still have the potential to exceed SBCAPCD standards related to fugitive dust and criteria air pollutants. Therefore, implementation of Mitigation Measures AQGHG-1 and AQGHG-2, which aim to reduce construction-related air pollutant

emissions by requiring future development in Santa Maria to implement best management practices consistent with SBCAPCD standards and use of Tier 3 or higher construction equipment, would be required. As such, impacts related to air quality would be reduced compared to the 2045 General Plan Update but would remain significant and unavoidable as fugitive dust and criteria air pollutant emissions from the Infill Only Alternative may still exceed SBCAPCD's standards.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions: While a more compact development pattern may support GHG reduction strategies, the City may still not achieve consistency with the statewide target of net-zero GHG emissions by 2045, and no feasible mitigation is available to reduce this impact to a less than significant level. Therefore, impacts associated with GHG emissions would be reduced compared to the 2045 General Plan Update, but would remain significant and unavoidable.

c. Biological Resources

Although total development would be similar to the proposed plan, growth under this alternative would be focused in previously urbanized or disturbed areas, resulting in less impact to natural habitats and biological resources overall. This could result in reduced impacts to biological resources, including habitat for special-status species potentially present in the eastern annexation area. Similar to the 2045 General Plan Update, the Infill Only Alternative would implement policies to enhance protection of biological resources, including development review and habitat conservation strategies. In addition, the Infill Only Alternative would implement Mitigation Measures BIO-1(a) through BIO-1(k), which require future development to avoid, minimize, or offset impacts to sensitive species and habitats through surveys, construction buffers, habitat restoration, and compliance with agency regulations. This would reduce potentially significant impacts to a less than significant level. As a result, impacts to biological resources would be reduced compared to the 2045 General Plan Update, and would be less than significant with mitigation incorporated.

d. Cultural and Tribal Cultural Resources

While overall buildout would be similar to the proposed plan, the infill-focused growth pattern would focus development within existing City limits, where land is already disturbed. Development of previously disturbed lands would reduce the potential for disturbing previously unidentified cultural and tribal cultural resources, particularly in comparison to development of the annexation area identified in the 2045 General Plan Update. Similar to the 2045 General Plan Update, the Infill Only Alternative would implement General Plan policies that aim to protect cultural and archaeological resources and would incorporate Mitigation Measures CUL-1 through CUL-4(b) as deemed necessary by the City, which aim to protect archaeological and historical resources by requiring pre-construction surveys, construction monitoring, and procedures for the treatment of any discovered resources. Implementation of these mitigation measures would reduce potential impacts to cultural resources to a less than significant level. The Infill Only Alternative would also comply with AB 52 and SB 18, and would implement Mitigation Measures CUL-4(a) and CUL-4(b), which ensure tribal consultation and protection of tribal cultural resources through construction monitoring by tribal representatives and protocols for the discovery and treatment of tribal resources. This would reduce potential impacts to tribal cultural resources to a less than significant level. Consequently, impacts to cultural and tribal cultural resources would be reduced compared to the 2045 General Plan Update and would remain less than significant with mitigation.

e. Hydrology and Water Quality

Because it directs growth to areas with existing drainage infrastructure, the Infill Only Alternative would reduce impacts to hydrology and water quality. As a result, impacts to hydrology and water quality would remain similar overall, but would be more focused within already urbanized areas. Unlike the 2045 General Plan Update, the Infill Only Alternative would not develop open space or agricultural lands to the east of the City, thereby avoiding new impervious surfaces in greenfield areas and reducing potential impacts on undeveloped drainage systems and natural waterways. Similar to the 2045 General Plan Update, development under the Infill Only Alternative would be required to adhere to existing NPDES permits and municipal code requirements. In addition, the Infill Only Alternative would implement policies that aim to protect groundwater supplies, groundwater recharge, and reduce impacts due to the release of pollutants from inundation. Because this alternative would focus on redevelopment and infill, stormwater improvements would be focused on upgrades to existing drainage infrastructure rather than extending new systems. Development under the Infill Only Alternative would comply with all federal, State, and local regulations to minimize water quality impacts and would not conflict with the Basin Plan. Therefore, impacts related to hydrology and water quality would be similar to those of the 2045 General Plan Update and would remain less than significant.

f. Noise

Although the scale of development would be similar to the proposed plan, infill development would occur in areas already exposed to urban activity, resulting in similar or slightly lower noise impacts overall. Construction-related noise could affect adjacent residences, schools, or care facilities located near infill sites. The Infill Only Alternative would implement policies aimed at reducing construction and operational noise, as well as groundborne vibration. Development facilitated by the Infill Only Alternative is expected to result in similar stationary noise and groundborne vibration levels as the 2045 General Plan Update. The Infill Only Alternative would include Mitigation Measures NOI-1(a) and NOI-1(b), which set conditions of approval for all development within 500 feet of a sensitive receptor and implementing roadway vehicle noise reduction measures. Focusing growth in already developed areas may also increase the likelihood of cumulative noise impacts along major corridors, such as Broadway and Main Street, due to traffic increases. However, similar to the 2045 General Plan Update, there would be no feasible mitigation that could avoid or fully mitigate the increase in construction and traffic noise in the plan area. As a result, potential construction noise impacts and operational traffic noise impacts would remain significant and unavoidable. Implementation of Mitigation Measure NOI-2, which requires construction vibration control measures to be incorporated, would reduce construction vibration impacts to a less than significant level. Overall, noise impacts would be similar to those of the 2045 General Plan Update and would remain significant and unavoidable.

g. Transportation and Traffic

Due to a more centralized pattern of growth, even with similar development levels, the Infill Only Alternative would result in reduced vehicle miles traveled and reduced congestion. This compact development pattern could reduce average trip lengths and improve access to services and jobs, particularly in areas already served by Santa Maria Area Transit (SMAT) and the city's active transportation network. Similar to the 2045 General Plan Update, the Infill Only Alternative would not conflict with the Connected 2050 RTP/SCS, the Santa Maria Active Transportation Plan, or any other applicable transportation plan or policy. Development facilitated by the Infill Only Alternative

would comply with State, Santa Maria Fire Department, and City requirements related to transportation design safety and emergency access. While the more compact pattern could slightly improve per capita VMT compared to the 2045 General Plan Update, the City as a whole would still not meet the 17 percent VMT reduction threshold required by SBCAG. Therefore, this impact would be slightly reduced over the 2045 General Plan Update but would still remain significant and unavoidable.

h. Utilities and Service Systems

While utility demand would be similar to the proposed plan, the Infill Only Alternative would allow for more efficient use of existing infrastructure within the City. Concentrating growth within City limits has the potential to improve service efficiency and reduce the need for new infrastructure extensions into greenfield areas. However, existing facilities may still require upgrades or capacity expansions to serve new development in the City limit. Like the 2045 General Plan Update, the Infill Only Alternative would be subject to applicable State and local requirements, and would be required to implement policies to ensure adequate public services. Therefore, impacts to utilities and service systems would be similar to those of the 2045 General Plan Update and would be less than significant with implementation of policies and mitigation measures.

6.4 Alternative 3: Greater Annexation Alternative

6.4.1 Description

Under the Greater Annexation Alternative, the City of Santa Maria would adopt the 2045 General Plan Update, including all goals, policies, and land use changes. However, the Greater Annexation Alternative would include a larger annexation area east of the current City limits. This alternative assumes a similar level of development density would occur in the larger annexation area, resulting in increased total development and an increased population compared to the 2045 General Plan Update. For the purpose of this analysis, the Greater Annexation Alternative is assumed to result in increased overall buildout potential and population growth compared to the 2045 General Plan Update, due to the inclusion of a larger annexation area and expanded Sphere of Influence.

The expanded geographic footprint of the Greater Annexation Alternative would fulfill many of the primary objectives of the 2045 General Plan Update because it would have the capacity to meet state housing requirements and address some community needs; however, the distributed development that may occur under this alternative would not fully address evolving community health needs or opportunities for connected growth anticipated through 2045. However, as discussed in detail in Section 6.4.2, this alternative would result in greater environmental impacts across many resource areas as the increased footprint would reduce available agricultural land and increase VMT and associated criteria pollutant and GHG emissions.

6.4.2 Impact Analysis

a. Agricultural Resources

The Greater Annexation Alternative would allow for greater overall buildout than the proposed plan by expanding the annexation area, leading to increased impacts from the conversion of agricultural land. As a result, additional agricultural lands would potentially be converted to non-agricultural uses, including additional Prime Farmland outside City limits. Similar to the 2045 General Plan

Update, the Greater Annexation Alternative would require the implementation of policies and actions of the 2045 General Plan Update which aim to reduce potential impacts related to the conversion of agricultural lands and conflicts with agricultural zoning. However, due to increased conversion of agricultural lands within the greater annexation area, impacts to agricultural resources would be greater and would remain significant and unavoidable.

b. Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Air Quality: Under the Greater Annexation Alternative, higher levels of growth and a more dispersed development pattern would increase vehicle miles traveled and emissions, resulting in greater impacts to air quality and greenhouse gases. Under this alternative, growth would be more widespread, thereby increasing VMT per capita and reducing potential active transportation and transit uses. As such, mobile emissions of criteria air pollutants and GHGs would increase relative to the 2045 General Plan Update. Similar to the 2045 General Plan Update, the Greater Annexation Alternative would have the potential to exceed SBCAPCD standards related to fugitive dust and criteria air pollutants. Therefore, implementation of Mitigation Measures AQGHG-1 and AQGHG-2, which aim to reduce construction-related air pollutant emissions, would be required. Although implementation would serve to reduce construction-related air pollutant emissions, air pollutant emissions under this alternative would be greater than the 2045 General Plan Update and impacts would remain significant and unavoidable.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions: The increased development potential would also increase GHG emissions and as such, the City may not achieve consistency with the statewide target of net-zero GHG emissions by 2045, and no feasible mitigation is available to reduce this impact to a less than significant level. Therefore, impacts regarding GHG emissions would be greater than the 2045 General Plan Update, and would remain significant and unavoidable.

c. Biological Resources

With additional development in new areas outside the existing City limits, the Greater Annexation Alternative would increase the likelihood of disturbing sensitive biological resources. This alternative would increase the potential for impacts to biological resources, particularly in areas that support sensitive natural communities, wetlands, and habitat for special-status species within agricultural and open space areas of the larger annexation area. However, similar to the 2045 General Plan Update, the Greater Annexation Alternative would implement policies to protect biological resources, including habitat conservation strategies and development review procedures. Additionally, this alternative would implement Mitigation Measures BIO-1(a) through BIO-1(k), which require future development to avoid, minimize, or offset impacts to sensitive species and habitats through surveys, construction buffers, habitat restoration, and compliance with agency regulations. This would reduce potentially significant impacts to a less than significant level. As such, while the Greater Annexation Alternative could result in greater biological resource impacts compared to the 2045 General Plan Update, impacts to biological resources would remain less than significant with mitigation incorporated.

d. Cultural and Tribal Cultural Resources

The expansion into previously undeveloped areas, combined with higher buildout potential, would increase the potential to affect previously undisturbed cultural and tribal resources under the Greater Annexation Alternative. As this alternative would have the potential to disturb a larger footprint and an increased area of previously undeveloped land, this alternative would result in a

greater potential to disturb previously unidentified cultural and tribal cultural resources. Similar to the 2045 General Plan Update, the Greater Annexation Alternative would implement General Plan policies to protect cultural and archaeological resources and would incorporate Mitigation Measures CUL-1 through CUL-4(b), which aim to protect archaeological and historical resources by requiring pre-construction surveys, construction monitoring, and procedures for the treatment of any resources discovered. These measures would reduce impacts to a less than significant level. The Greater Annexation Alternative would also comply with AB 52 and SB 18, and implement Mitigation Measures CUL-4(a) and CUL-4(b), which ensure tribal consultation and protection of tribal cultural resources through construction monitoring by tribal representatives and protocols for the discovery and treatment of tribal resources. As such, impacts to cultural and tribal cultural resources would be greater than the 2045 General Plan Update, but impacts to cultural resources and tribal cultural resources would remain less than significant with mitigation.

e. Hydrology and Water Quality

Under the Greater Annexation Alternative, greater development and a larger geographic footprint would introduce more impervious surfaces and infrastructure needs, contributing to greater impacts on hydrology and water quality. As a result, impacts to hydrology and water quality would increase as new development would occur within previously undeveloped areas. Similar to the 2045 General Plan Update, the Greater Annexation Alternative would result in development of open space and agricultural lands east of the City. However, under this alternative, a larger annexation area would be included, which would also increase the amount of new impervious surfaces in greenfield areas and increase potential impacts on undeveloped drainage systems and natural waterways. Similar to the 2045 General Plan Update, the larger Annexation Alternative would be required to adhere to existing NPDES permits and municipal code requirements. Additionally, the Greater Annexation Alternative would also implement policies that aim to protect groundwater supplies, groundwater recharge, and reduce impacts due to the release of pollutants from inundation. Under this alternative, as under the 2045 General Plan Update, stormwater improvements would include the extension of new drainage infrastructure systems into the larger annexation area. However, because the annexation area would be larger under this alternative, new drainage infrastructure systems would need to be extended into a larger area. New development under the Greater Annexation Alternative would still be required to comply with all federal, State, and local regulations to minimize water quality impacts and would not conflict with the Basin Plan. Therefore, impacts related to hydrology and water quality would be greater than those of the 2045 General Plan Update but would remain less than significant.

f. Noise

The Greater Annexation Alternative would result in greater noise impacts due to increased construction activity and traffic generation in areas not previously developed. As such, some new development would occur in locations further from existing sensitive receptors. Construction-related noise would have a somewhat lower impact on residences, schools, or care facilities located near development within the larger annexation area. However, this alternative would still introduce increased daytime noise levels related to construction noise in close proximity to sensitive receptors.

The Greater Annexation Alternative would implement policies aimed at reducing construction and operational noise, as well as groundborne vibration. Development facilitated by the Greater Annexation Alternative would be expected to result in similar stationary noise and groundborne

vibration levels as the 2045 General Plan Update, albeit within a larger footprint. Under this alternative, Mitigation Measures NOI-1(a) and NOI-1(b) would still be required, setting conditions of approval for all development within 500 feet of a sensitive receptor and implementing roadway vehicle noise reduction measures.

The expanded footprint under this alternative may increase traffic noise along roadways with previously minimal traffic noise, thereby increasing ambient noise levels along affected roadways. However, as details from individual development facilitated by the plan are unknown at this time, there is no feasible mitigation that would avoid or fully mitigate the increase in construction and traffic noise. As a result, potential construction noise impacts and operational traffic noise impacts would remain significant and unavoidable, similar to the 2045 General Plan Update. As under the 2045 General Plan Update, future development facilitated by the Greater Annexation Alternative would involve construction activity that could intermittently generate groundborne vibration affecting nearby properties. Because project-level details are not currently available for future individual development facilitated by the Greater Annexation Alternative, it is not possible to determine which projects may use pile driving or vibratory rollers and their exact vibration levels, locations, or time periods for construction of such projects. As a result, construction vibration levels may exceed the FTA's vibration levels for preventing architectural building damage. Similar to the 2045 General Plan Update, the Greater Annexation Alternative would require Mitigation Measure NOI-2 to reduce construction vibration impacts to a less than significant level. Therefore, overall noise impacts would be similar to those of the 2045 General Plan Update but would remain significant and unavoidable.

g. Transportation and Traffic

The higher buildout potential and more dispersed development pattern of the Greater Annexation Alternative would generate additional vehicle trips and increase roadway congestion relative to the 2045 General Plan Update. As such, under this alternative, the use of active transportation and transit may decrease as residents would be more dependent on private vehicles. The Greater Annexation Alternative development pattern would increase average trip lengths and require construction of new transit and active transportation infrastructure. As VMT and dependency on private vehicles would increase under the Greater Annexation Alternative, this alternative may conflict with the Connected 2050 RTP/SCS, the Santa Maria Active Transportation Plan, and other applicable transportation plans or policies.

Development facilitated by the Greater Annexation Alternative would be required to comply with State and City requirements related to transportation design safety and emergency access. As the Greater Annexation Alternative would increase the development footprint, per capita VMT compared to the 2045 General Plan Update may also increase, such that the City as a whole would not meet the 17 percent VMT reduction threshold required by SBCAG. Therefore, transportation impacts of the Greater Annexation Alternative would be greater than the 2045 General Plan Update and impacts would remain significant and unavoidable.

h. Utilities and Service Systems

Serving an expanded urban area and a larger population under the Greater Annexation Alternative would increase demand on utility infrastructure and require new extensions, resulting in greater impacts to service systems. New development under this alternative would result in increased demand for water supply, wastewater treatment, solid waste disposal, and other utility services. Increased demands to previously undeveloped areas and requirements to expand utility provider

service areas would also generate a need for new infrastructure extensions. Existing facilities may also still require upgrades or capacity expansions. Similar to the 2045 General Plan Update, the Greater Annexation Alternative would be subject to applicable state and local requirements and implement policies to ensure adequate public services. Therefore, while impacts would be greater than those of the 2045 General Plan Update, impacts would remain less than significant.

6.5 Environmentally Superior Alternative

CEQA requires the identification of an Environmentally Superior Alternative among the alternatives considered. When the No Project Alternative is determined to be environmentally superior, CEQA also requires identification of the Environmentally Superior Alternative among the development options. Table 6-1 indicates whether each alternative's environmental impact is greater than, less than, or similar to that of the 2045 General Plan Update for each of the issue areas studied in addition to the overall impact finding (Less than Significant, Significant and Unavoidable, etc.). Based on the alternatives evaluation in Section 6.2 through Section 6.4, Alternative 2, Infill Only Alternative would be the Environmentally Superior Alternative.

Unlike the Greater Annexation Alternative, the Infill Only Alternative would concentrate development in already developed areas of the city by increasing densities and redevelopment. As a result, the Infill Only Alternative would have reduced impacts on agricultural lands, as this alternative would not include the annexation area, thus removing the potential for development to convert agricultural lands outside of the City limits. The Infill Only Alternative would also result in reduced impacts to air quality and GHG emissions, as infill development would encourage the use of active transportation and transit uses due to the proximity of services to residential development. Additionally, compared to the Greater Annexation Alternative, the Infill Only Alternative would have reduced impacts on biological and cultural resources due to the concentration of development within previously disturbed areas that have low potential for biological resources and low potential to uncover archaeological resources. The Infill Only Alternative would have reduced per capita VMT, as development within the infill areas would reduce buildout potential to a wider area, which would reduce mobile emissions in comparison to the Greater Annexation Alternative. Due to the reduced buildout potential and reduced buildout area, impacts related to hydrology and water quality would also be reduced compared to the Greater Annexation Alternative.

Although the Infill Only Alternative would be the Environmentally Superior Alternative, this alternative would not fulfill the primary objectives of the 2045 General Plan Update, including the provision of housing quality and various housing choices or improving opportunities for connected growth. Further, the Infill Only Alternative would not enhance new and existing neighborhoods such that each neighborhood would be a Complete Neighborhood or provide innovative housing and may result in the City failing to meeting its RHNA obligations in accordance with State law as it would significantly reduce the affordable housing options and limit new housing to infill only and redevelopment.

Table 6-1 Impact Comparison of Alternatives

Issue	2045 General Plan Update Impact Classification	Alternative 1: No Project	Alternative 2: Infill Only	Alternative 3: Greater Annexation
Agricultural Resources	Significant and Unavoidable	+ Less than Significant	- Less than Significant	+ Significant and Unavoidable
Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Emissions	Significant and Unavoidable	- Significant and Unavoidable	- Significant and Unavoidable	+ Significant and Unavoidable
Biological Resources	Less than Significant with Mitigation	+ Significant and Unavoidable	- Less than Significant with Mitigation	+ Less than Significant with Mitigation
Cultural and Tribal Cultural Resources	Less than Significant with Mitigation	+ Significant and Unavoidable	- Less than Significant with Mitigation	+ Less than Significant with Mitigation
Hydrology and Water Quality	Less than Significant	= Less than Significant	= Less than Significant	+ Less than Significant
Noise	Significant and Unavoidable	+ Significant and Unavoidable	= Significant and Unavoidable	= Significant and Unavoidable
Transportation and Traffic	Significant and Unavoidable	+ Significant and Unavoidable	- Significant and Unavoidable	+ Significant and Unavoidable
Utilities and Service Systems	Less than Significant	- Less than Significant	= Less than Significant	+ Less than Significant

+ Greater impacts compared to the 2045 General Plan Update.
 - Reduced impacts compared to the 2045 General Plan Update.
 = Similar impacts compared to the 2045 General Plan Update.

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