



Santa Maria
General Plan

imagine



Noise Policy Framework

Public Draft | January 28, 2025



Table of Contents

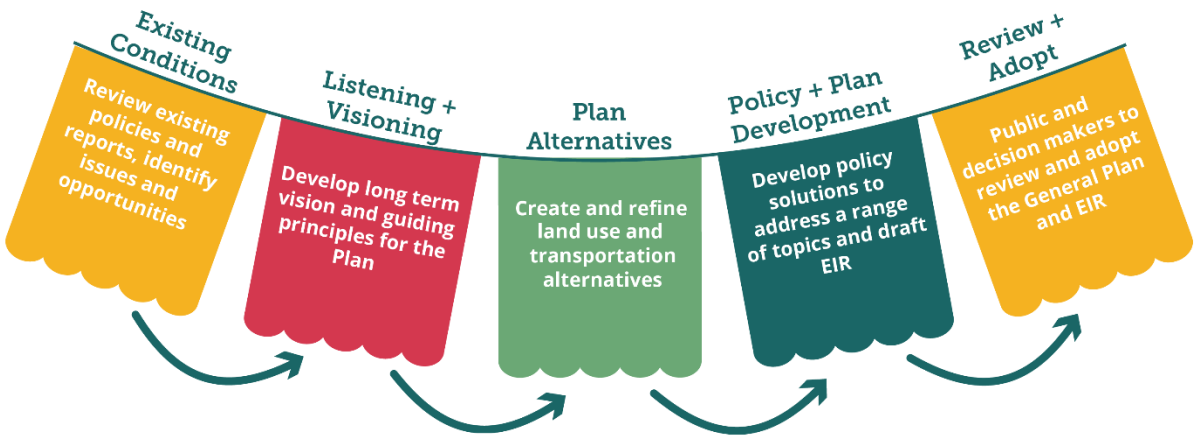
I. Introduction	1
II. Statutory Requirements.....	2
General Plan Requirements.....	2
Regulatory Setting	2
III. Related Vision and Guiding Principles.....	4
IV. Setting the Scene: Issues and Opportunities.....	5
Opportunities and Strengths	5
Issues and Challenges	5
V. Goals, Policies, and Implementation Actions	7

Noise Policy Framework

I. Introduction

The City of Santa Maria has embarked on its first comprehensive update to the General Plan, called “Imagine Santa Maria,” to create a forward-looking document that will serve as the blueprint for the city through the year 2045. A General Plan is a policy document required by State law that provides long-range guidance for land use, development and other issues such as economic growth, open space, conservation, affordable housing, and employment. The goals, policies, and implementation actions in the General Plan will serve as a compass for decision-makers and will shape future plans and actions of the City. This revised policy document will replace the existing General Plan.

The General Plan Update has five major phases, which are designed as step-by-step building blocks (see the image below). The project is currently in the “Policy and Plan Development” phase.



During the Existing Conditions phase, City staff worked closely with the consultant team to identify trends, issues, opportunities, and priorities, which are summarized in seven existing conditions reports that are available on the project website, www.ImagineSantaMaria.com. Throughout the Listening + Visioning Stage, community members shared their vision for the future, qualities of Santa Maria to preserve, and issues to address. This feedback was incorporated in the [Vision, Guiding Principles, and Areas of Change and Stability](#). From there, City staff and the consultant team developed [Plan Alternatives](#) to identify different land use, mobility, and urban design options the City has to achieve the community’s Vision and implement the Guiding Principles. City Council approved a [Preferred Land Use Alternative](#) in 2023.

This Noise policy framework is a step in the General Plan Update process prior to drafting General Plan Elements. This framework highlights the key direction for the Noise Element and includes goals, policies, and implementation activities to achieve that direction. This policy framework was developed by incorporating findings from previous project phases, including technical analysis, relevant content from the existing General Plan, current planning best practices and requirements from State law, and feedback from community members, Technical Advisory Committee members, Planning Commission, City Council, and

City staff. Nine policy frameworks have been prepared covering the following topics: Conservation and Open Space, Safety, Land Use and Community Design, Circulation and Mobility, Public Facilities and Services, Recreation and Parks, Economic Development, Noise, and Health and Environmental Justice. Community feedback on the frameworks will shape goals, policies, and implementation actions in the General Plan.

II. Statutory Requirements

General Plan Requirements

California Government Code Section 65302(f) requires that a jurisdiction's General Plan must include a Noise Element to identify and evaluate current and projected noise levels for highways and freeways, primary arterials and major local streets, passenger, freight, and ground rapid transit systems, airport operations, industrial plants, and other ground stationary noise sources such as military installations. The City of Santa Maria General Plan Noise Element is a set of strategies aimed at maintaining an environment that is free from excessive noise that could create health and wellbeing impacts.

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) also requires both programmatic and project-level documents to evaluate potential noise and ground-borne vibration impacts. This analysis must determine if the proposed activities could result in substantial temporary or permanent increases in noise levels, or if they exceed local noise standards. For ground-borne vibration, the assessment must consider effects on sensitive receptors, such as residential areas, schools, or hospitals, and evaluate whether construction or operational activities could cause significant disturbance or structural damage. Programmatic analyses provide a broad overview, setting thresholds for individual projects, while project-specific CEQA documents require detailed studies to identify direct impacts, propose mitigation measures, and ensure compliance with regulatory standards.

Regulatory Setting

Regulations that affect policy direction of this Element include:

California Code of Regulations

California Code of Regulations Interior noise levels for habitable rooms and non-residential space are regulated by Title 24 of the California Code of Regulations (CCR). A habitable room is a space in a building for living, sleeping, eating or cooking. Bathrooms, toilet rooms, closets, halls, storage or utility spaces and similar areas are not considered habitable spaces.

- Title 24, Part 2 (2019 California Building Code), Chapter 12, Section 1206.4 requires that interior noise levels attributable to exterior sources not exceed 45 Community Noise Equivalent Level (CNEL) in any habitable room within a residential structure.
- Title 24, Part 11 (2019 California Green Building Standards Code), Chapter 5, Section 5.507.4.2 requires that interior noise levels attributable to exterior sources not exceed 50 dBA Leq[1h] in occupied (actively in use) areas of non-residential spaces during any hour of operation, when

- o exposed to noise levels of 65 dBA Leq[1h] during any hour of operation; OR
- o located within the 65 CNEL noise contour of an airport, freeway or expressway, railroad, industrial source or fixed-guideway source as determined by the Noise Element of the General Plan.

City of Santa Maria Municipal Code (SMMC)

Chapter 5-5 Noise Regulations contains overall parameters to reduce or eliminate unnecessary, excessive, and annoying noise. Section 5-5.04 prohibits noise levels from exceeding the existing ambient noise level or the ambient base noise level as shown in Table 5, whichever is higher, as follows:

- By any amount for 30 cumulative minutes in an hour
- By 5 dba for 15 minutes in an hour
- By 10 dBA for 5 minutes in an hour
- By 20 dBA at anytime If noise generated by outside construction activities within 500 feet of a residential zone exceeds the noise

If noise generated by outside construction activities within 500 feet of a residential zone exceeds the noise standards in Table 5, SMMC Section 5-5.09 requires that a permit be obtained from the Noise Control Officer to cover short-term operations.

Table 5: Ambient Base Noise Level

Zones	DURATION							
	Ambient Base		15 Minutes		5 Minutes		1 Minute	
	Day	Night	Day	Night	Day	Night	Day	Night
Residential/Noise-Sensitive Uses	55	45	60	50	65	55	70	60
Commercial	65	60	70	65	75	70	80	75
Industrial	75	70	80	75	85	80	90	85

Note: Units are dBA Leq. Daytime hours are generally considered to be 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., and nighttime hours are generally considered to be 10:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.
 Source: Santa Maria Municipal Code Section 5-5.05

Chapter 12 Zoning contains additional regulations pertaining to noise exposure for residential structures adjacent to arterial and collector streets in residential zones and exceptions to noise level standards for outdoor living areas in multifamily developments.

Santa Maria Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan (ALUCP)

The Airport Land Use Commission (ALUC) for Santa Barbara County adopted the most recent Santa Maria ALUCP in 2023. The ALUCP serves as a tool for the Airport Land Use Commission to review land use plans and development proposals within Airport Influence Areas and promote compatibility between airports and their surrounding land uses. The ALUCP also provides land use compatibility policies and criteria to promote the orderly growth of the airport without significant impacts to the welfare of the community.

More specifically, the ALUCP includes noise contours of the airport, noise compatibility criteria for adjacent land uses, and policies for measuring, evaluating, and mitigating impacts to airport related noise.

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

CEQA requires the identification of noise-sensitive land uses, the evaluation of project-related noise, and mitigation measures when impacts exceed state or local thresholds. Guidelines have been established to determine whether noise from a proposed project is significant. For the City of Santa Maria, CEQA review ensures that new development projects comply with noise standards and that appropriate mitigation measures are implemented.

III. Related Vision and Guiding Principles

The General Plan Vision Statement describes Santa Maria as the community would like to see it in 2045. The Guiding Principles establish the direction the community should follow and the major ideas that the General Plan Update will put forward to achieve the community's shared Vision for 2045. The full [Vision, Guiding Principles, and Areas of Change and Stability](#), approved by the City Council in 2021, are available on the Imagine Santa Maria project website. The following full-sentence excerpts from the Vision and Guiding Principles informed the preparation of this policy framework:

Vision

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

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

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

Guiding Principles

The following Guiding Principles establish the direction to follow to achieve the community's shared Vision for 2045.

Community Health

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

IV. Setting the Scene: Issues and Opportunities

The sections below outline opportunities, strengths, issues, and challenges that drove the direction of the Noise policy framework. This policy framework builds on the opportunities and strengths and identifies strategies to remedy the issues and challenges.

Opportunities, strengths, issues, and challenges were identified based on existing conditions, the Vision and Guiding Principles, technical studies, community engagement results, and conversations with City staff. Links to past project work may be found on the project website:

<https://www.imaginesantamaria.com/resources>.

Opportunities and Strengths

Santa Maria Public Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan. While the Santa Maria Airport is a major source of noise for the surrounding area, ALUCP is a valuable asset for incorporating policies that mitigate airport-related noise for sensitive land uses into the General Plan. It provides guidelines for the orderly growth of the Airport and areas surrounding the Airport and safeguards the general welfare of the inhabitants within the Airport Influence Area. Policies and strategies from the ALUCP can be integrated into the updated General Plan to ensure consistent standards and practices for existing and future land use decisions. *(Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan)*

Land Use Compatibility Planning. Acceptable noise levels vary for different land uses. As shown in Figure N-1, residential uses are some of the most noise sensitive land uses, requiring greater protection to ensure these uses are not exposed to excessive noise levels. The City of Santa Maria has proactively addressed noise-related land use compatibility by integrating noise considerations into its planning processes. By establishing clear noise standards and ensuring that new developments adhere to these guidelines, the City has minimized potential conflicts between residential areas and sources of noise. This forward-thinking approach has helped reduce community noise complaints and improved the quality of life for residents. As a result, Santa Maria is well-positioned to continue to grow in a relatively harmonious manner. *(Input received from Department meetings)*

Santa Maria Municipal Code. The SMMC contains requirements on noise mitigation that can be built upon in Chapter 5 and Chapter 12. For instance, several chapters of Title 12 of the SMMC include regulations of noise within residential zones that can provide a baseline framework for actions developers must take to mitigate anticipated noise concerns. *(Santa Maria Municipal Code)*

Issues and Challenges

Vehicle Traffic. In Santa Maria, roadway traffic is one of the major sources of noise. Major travel corridors, including U.S. 101, Broadway (S.R. 135), and Main Street (S.R. 166) serve private vehicles and large trucks, which generate substantial noise in areas of Santa Maria. Other major roadways that generate substantial noise in the city include Miller Street, Blosser Road, Skyway Drive, Donovan Road, Stowell Road, and Betteravia Road. Improving existing mitigation policies and noise regulations within the General Plan and Municipal Code could be beneficial to those impacted along the corridor. *(Input received from Department meetings)*

Airport Expansion and Air Traffic. The Santa Maria Public Airport, located in the southern portion of the city, is a major source of noise in the area. While many of the directly adjacent land uses include agricultural, open space, and industrial land uses that are less sensitive to noise, there are residential areas to the southeast of the airport that may be impacted by noise during plane takeoff and landing. Future potential development must consider the impact of noise from the airport if located within the projected noise exposure range of 60 dB or above. *(Environmental Background Report, input received from Department meetings)*

Santa Maria Valley Railroad. Railway operations generate a localized source of noise along the railway corridor. The Santa Maria Valley Railroad operates infrequent freight trains in close proximity to residential uses. Although trains are restricted to a speed of 10 miles per hour through the city, which mitigates noise levels, it may pose a constraint to future residential or other noise sensitive use developments in the vicinity. *(Environmental Background Report)*

Construction Activity. Construction activity has the potential to generate noise, especially if activities occur during the nighttime hours. For example, public projects on busy streets tend to be at night to avoid daytime traffic disruption and must adhere to Chapter 5-5 of the City of Santa Maria Municipal Code, Noise Regulations. Private development construction requires approval to work at night in accordance with the Noise Ordinance Section. Clarity on when to approve such nighttime construction noise and on possible measures for reducing construction noise levels during the nighttime near noise-sensitive land uses would be beneficial. *(City of Santa Maria Municipal Code, Input received through Department meetings)*

V. Goals, Policies, and Implementation Actions

This section outlines the City's strategy for managing and mitigating noise exposure to ensure a safe and healthy environment for all community members. The following goals, policies, and implementation actions focus on establishing guidelines for ensuring noise compatible land uses, addressing noise from transportation and construction activities, and limiting impacts of ground-borne vibration caused by temporary and construction operations.

Each goal, policy, and implementation action includes a source in parentheses. Sources include: the City's existing General Plan, State law, existing conditions reports, community input, guidance from City staff, industry or regional best practices, or related materials.

Goal N-1: Compatible Land Uses. Land uses are planned to provide a harmonious environment by considering the compatibility of adjacent uses. (Adapted from Goal N.2)

Policy N-1.1 Construction noise. Regulate the placement and construction of new noise generating uses to avoid excessive noise impacts on adjacent noise-sensitive properties (such as housing and schools), consistent with noise sensitivity levels illustrated in Figure N-1. (Adapted from Policy N.1.b)

Action N-1.1.1. Define and map noise sensitive uses to reference when reviewing development applications. If possible, do not locate known noise-generating sources adjacent to noise sensitive uses, or if unavoidable, require appropriate mitigation if adjacent location is unavoidable. (New action, best practice)

Action N-1.1.2. Establish land use compatibility guidelines for community noise to determine which types of land use categories are generally considered compatible with the ambient decibel levels by most communities. Reference or incorporate the suggested Community Noise and Land Use Compatibility table provided in the General Plan Guidelines (Table N-1) and Figure N-1. (New action, best practice and Environmental Background Report)

Policy N-1.2 Interior and exterior noise standards. Require development proposals to meet the interior and exterior noise standards specified in the Noise Ordinance (Chapter 5-5 of the Santa Maria Municipal Code). (Adapted from Objective N.1.d)

Action N-1.2.1. Require applicants to provide an evaluation for any intensification of an existing activity subject to discretionary review to determine if it can reasonably be expected to generate noise that would exceed the allowable noise levels for compatibility with adjacent noise sensitive land uses in the Noise Ordinance. Appropriate mitigation measures shall be imposed to result in the activity meeting acceptable noise levels in the Noise Ordinance. (Adapted from Implementation Program 1.5)

Action N-1.2.2. Promote federal, state, and regional financial incentives and funding programs for retrofits of existing buildings that are located in areas of high traffic noise or incompatible adjacent land uses. (New action, best practice and meeting with City staff)

Policy N-1.3 Noise compatible land uses. Identify current and planned noise-generating commercial manufacturing and industrial businesses within the city and the Santa Maria Valley. Consider these future plans when making land use planning decisions to prevent potential future noise conflicts. *(Adapted from implementation program 2.2)*

Action N-1.3.1. Establish bi-annual meetings with the Santa Maria Public Airport, and the Santa Maria Valley Railroad to collaboratively discuss upcoming planning, projects, and expansions that may impact overall operations or community wellbeing. *(New action, best practice)*

Action N-1.3.2. Incorporate potential noise conflicts or synergies with short- and long-term plans for the Santa Maria Public Airport and Santa Maria Valley Railroad, as well as identified noise-producing development and business trends, when reviewing development applications. *(New action, best practice, Environmental Background Report, and meeting with City staff)*

Policy N-1.4 Stationary Noise Sources. Ensure outdoor machinery, appliances, and other noise generating devices are located away from noise sensitive uses and mitigated to reduce exposure to intrusive noise. *(New action, best practice, Environmental Background Report, and meeting with City Staff)*

Action N-1.4.1. Require mixed-use and commercial development applicants to locate noise-generating components such as loading areas, parking lots, driveways, trash enclosures, mechanical equipment, and other similar facilities away from residential units as possible. *(New action, best practice)*

Action N-1.4.2. Where necessary, require additional noise buffering of machinery to reduce intrusive noise. Such buffering may include, but is not limited to, acoustic paneling, sound-absorbing materials, and enclosures. *(New action, best practice)*

Goal N-2: Transportation Noise. Noise impacts from traffic and other transportation-related activities are to be minimized or mitigated. *(New goal, best practice and meeting with City staff)*

Policy N-2.1 Major thoroughfare noise mitigation. Require future development to implement feasible noise mitigation measures along major thoroughfares like Main Street, Broadway, and U.S. Highway 101. *(New policy, best practice)*

Action N-2.1.1. Coordinate with the California Department of Transportation to effectively attenuate state freeway and roadway noise through the use of 'quiet' paving materials, placement of noise barriers, berms, and landscaped open space within State right-of-way for existing residences, and incorporating design features in new development to reduce future noise level increases. *(Previously Implementation Program 1.8)*

Action N-2.1.2. Work with the California Department of Transportation to ensure adequate noise studies are prepared and noise mitigation measures are considered in State transportation projects. *(New action, best practice and meeting with City Staff)*

Action N-2.1.3. Update existing and future noise contour maps showing areas of high ambient noise from transportation sources as airport and roadway conditions and patterns within the city evolve. *(New action, best practice)*

Action N-2.1.4. As part of the development application process, require new residential and mixed-use development within the 60 dBA CNEL noise contours or higher of transportation corridors to submit an acoustical analysis and incorporate noise reduction strategies, such as vegetation buffers and physical sound barriers, as necessary to meet the requirements of the Noise Ordinance. *(Adapted from Implementation Program 1.1)*

Policy N-2.2 Industrial and agricultural traffic noise mitigation. Evaluate and identify traffic noise mitigation for industrial and agricultural truck traffic, and coordinate with local businesses to implement. *(New policy, best practice and meeting with City staff)*

Action N-2.2.1. Coordinate with businesses to identify possible limitations on local truck traffic, including loading and unloading, specific routes, times, and speeds appropriate to each zoning district. *(New action, best practice)*

Action N-2.2.2. Work with local businesses and law enforcement to ensure trucks use preferred times and routes whenever possible. *(New action, best practice)*

Policy N-2.3 Airport noise mitigation. Require aviation easements and noise mitigation measures in new residential developments near the airport in the 60+ dB CNEL contour. *(Previously implementation action 1.22)*

Action N-2.3.1. Require future Santa Maria Airport facility development or expansion to incorporate noise reduction measures to minimize stationary source noise impacts on surrounding areas where necessary. *(New action, best practice)*

Action N-2.3.2. Review, and as needed revise, land use designations to ensure consistency with the ALUCP noise contour maps. *(New action, best practice and Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan)*

Policy N-2.4 Existing excessive noise reduction. Evaluate identified areas impacted by unacceptable noise levels from existing and potential future flight paths and promote available funding for attenuation measures to improve that area's existing noise environment. *(New policy, best practice)*

Action N-2.4.1. Track available funding programs for airport noise attenuation and proactively reach out to affected homeowners and businesses to provide information and application assistance. *(New action, best practice)*

Goal N-3: Temporary and Construction Noise. Noise from temporary sources and construction activities are minimized to the greatest extent possible. *(New goal, best practice, Environmental Background Report, and meeting with City staff)*

Policy N-3.1 Construction noise mitigation. Limit construction noise in residential areas to reduce noise impacts, especially in the early morning, late evening, weekend, and during holidays. *(Adapted from implementation program 1.25)*

Action N-3.1.1. Develop criteria to clearly define conditions of approval for nighttime construction activities that will balance project requirements and minimizing community disturbance. *(New action, best practice)*

Action N-3.1.2. Require appropriate noise attenuation strategies for any approved nighttime construction to minimize disturbance to the greatest extent feasible. *(New action, best practice)*

Action N-3.1.3. Update the Noise Ordinance to incorporate nighttime construction approval criteria and thresholds for determining the need for additional noise attenuation strategies. *(New action, best practice)*

Action N-3.1.4. Control construction noise by requiring mufflers and physical separation of machinery maintenance areas from residential areas. *(Previously implementation action 1.26)*

Goal N-4: Vibration. The impacts of excessive ground-borne vibration from temporary and ongoing operations are limited. *(New goal, best practice and Environmental Background Report)*

Policy N-4.1 Ground-borne vibration mitigation. Adopt building architectural damage thresholds to prevent building damage from vibration. *(New policy, best practice)*

Policy N-4.2 Vibration reduction for sensitive receptors. Reduce vibration impacts to sensitive receptors to less than significant levels. *(New policy, best practice and Environmental Background Report)*

Action N-4.2.1. When evaluating projects with new vibration-sensitive uses near a potential vibration-causing source including the Santa Maria Airport and Santa Maria Valley Railroad, require that a vibration assessment be prepared for new vibration-sensitive uses within 200 feet of the source. The ground-borne vibration and noise assessment shall be consistent with Federal Transit Administration-recommended methodology and criteria. *(New action, best practice)*

Figure N-1. Community Noise and Land Use Compatibility



Source: General Plan Guidelines, California Office of Planning and Research 2017