



Santa Maria
General Plan

imagine



Economic Development Policy Framework

Public Draft | January 28, 2025

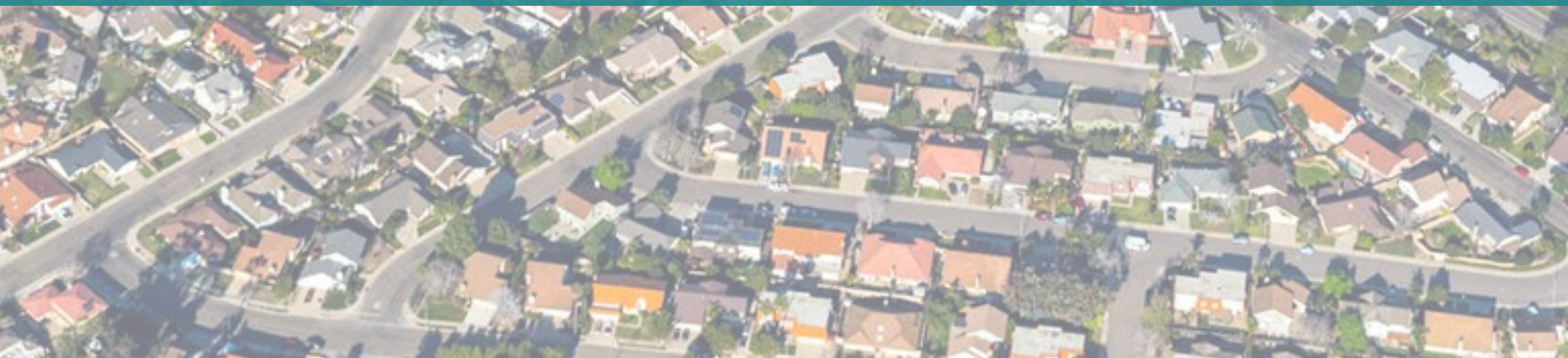


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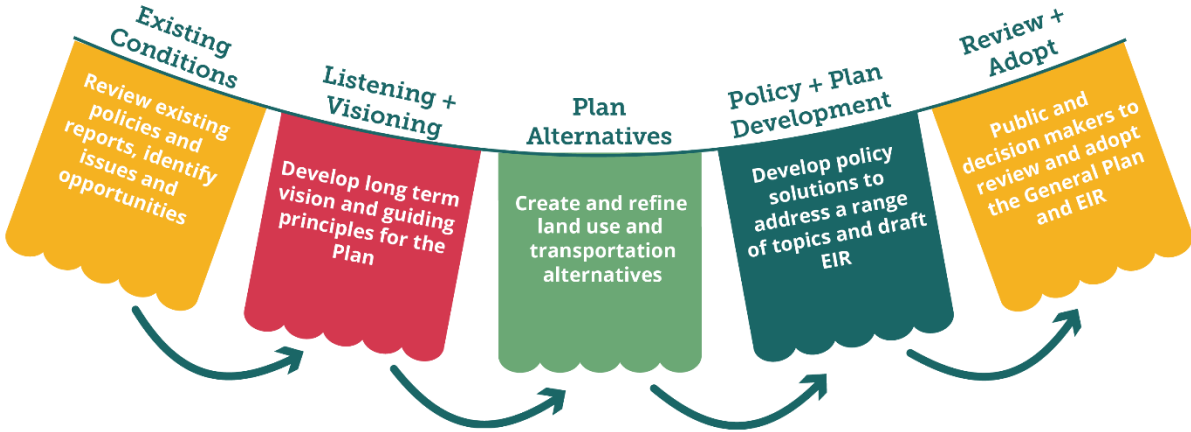
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Economic Development Policy Framework

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 economic development policy framework is a step in the General Plan Update process prior to drafting General Plan Elements. This framework highlights the key direction for economic development goals, policies, and implementation activities that would be included in an Economic Development Element or integrated into the Land Use Element. 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

While an Economic Development Element is not mandated by State General Plan law, California Government Code Section 65303 allows the adoption of additional elements that relate to the physical development of the city.

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

Guiding Principles

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

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.

Resilient Economy

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

IV. Setting the Scene: Issues and Opportunities

The sections below outline opportunities, strengths, issues, and challenges that drove the direction of the economic development 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's economic strengths are rooted in its robust agriculture and manufacturing industries, relatively affordable cost of living, and strategic location on California's Central Coast. The city's affordability, combined with its proximity to Vandenberg Space Force Base and the area's natural beauty, makes it attractive to new residents and businesses. The City and community also generally foster a more development-friendly environment within the region based on affordability and the typical entitlement processes.

Opportunities for economic development include leveraging local educational institutions like Allan Hancock College and A.T. Still University to expand and enhance workforce development programs and building on partnerships to support existing businesses and attract new businesses. With a strong base in agriculture, there are opportunities to expand agribusiness, agricultural technology, and related industries. The City can also support target businesses that provide significant local employment, reinvestment in desired areas, and/or increase revenues to the City. Target businesses could include aerospace, high-technology research and development, renewable energy, health care, education, and others.

Lastly, the City has opportunities to promote tourism by capitalizing on the community's diverse cultural offerings, including its renowned barbecue and vibrant arts scene, and nearby attractions like the Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes.

Issues and Challenges

Despite its economic strengths, Santa Maria faces challenges related to the limited availability of higher-paying jobs and competition from regional tourist destinations. To attract and retain higher-income jobs, Santa Maria must appeal to skilled professionals and their families; this includes offering a diversity of housing choices and enhancing quality of life features, such as recreational, cultural, and lifestyle offerings,

which will not only draw talent to the area, but also position Santa Maria as a more attractive destination for visitors.

In addition to focusing on job creation and workforce development, improving infrastructure to support business growth and diversifying the local economy are essential steps toward sustainable economic development. By expanding its economic base and enhancing its appeal as both a place to live and visit, Santa Maria can better compete with neighboring cities in the region and foster long-term growth.

V. Goals, Policies, and Implementation Actions

The purpose of the Goals, Policies, and Implementation Actions is to implement the City's Vision and Guiding Principles for economic development. These goals, policies, and actions capitalize on Santa Maria's opportunities and strengths while addressing challenges within the community. The four goals cover high-quality economic opportunities, business growth support, partnership-driven economic development, and strengthening tourism. These goals are designed to complement and reinforce one another, collectively advancing the community's overarching vision for economic development.

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 ED-1: High-quality economic opportunities. A growing economy that provides high-quality educational and expanded workforce opportunities for all residents. (Adapted from Goal 1)

Policy ED-1.1: Workforce development. Continue to support local workforce development programs (e.g., Build Your Workforce Program) and career services (e.g., America's Job Center of California) to connect businesses and individuals with funding, job training, and work experience, ensuring residents are prepared for high-quality jobs. (Best Practice)

Policy ED-1.2: Coordinate support for job training. Coordinate with local higher education institutions to support job training and workforce development programs. (Adapted from existing General Plan Goal 12)

Policy ED-1.3: Local strategic planning. Plan for and participate in local strategic economic development efforts. (Best Practice)

Action ED-1.3.1: Lead or partner to prepare a local economic development strategic plan (EDSP). An EDSP would identify key target industries, detailed strategies, and an action matrix with roles and responsibilities, potential partnerships, funding sources, and near-term implementation timeframes (typically over a five-year period). (Best Practice)

Policy ED-1.4: Post-secondary program expansion. Encourage expanding post-secondary programs in Santa Maria's target industries, including expanded offerings through Allan Hancock College and A.T. Still University. (Adapted from regional strategy REACH CEDS)

Policy ED-1.5: Local job connections. Support local events and programs that connect job seekers with high-growth and target industries. (Best Practice)

Goal ED-2: Business growth support. A community that supports the growth and prosperity of existing businesses and attracts new business and investment. (Adapted from Goal 2)

Policy ED-2.1: Business-friendly regulation. Maintain a regulatory environment that is business friendly and appropriately aligned with attracting or supporting target industries. (Adapted from Goal 9)

Action ED-2.1.1: Regularly review and update City permit procedures and fee schedules to enhance clarity and streamline the permitting process. (Adapted from Goal 9)

Action ED-2.1.2: Evaluate establishing regulatory or other incentives for target businesses that may provide significant employment, reinvestment in desired areas, and/or revenues to the City (e.g., health care, aerospace, education, agricultural technology, clean technology and renewable energy, etc.). (Best Practice)

Policy ED-2.2: Downtown and corridors vitality. Strengthen the vitality and development of Downtown and mixed-use and commercial corridors and centers throughout Santa Maria by allowing a range of uses, amenities, and spaces to accommodate retail uses, along with housing, coworking spaces and offices. (Adapted from regional strategy REACH CEDS)

Policy ED-2.3: Infill development. Prioritize infill development opportunities to revitalize Downtown and bolster the unique identities of other neighborhoods throughout Santa Maria. (Best Practice)

Policy ED-2.4: Diverse residential products. Encourage the development of a full spectrum of residential products at all affordability levels to ensure a diverse and talented workforce can remain and grow locally. (Adapted from regional strategy REACH CEDS)

Policy ED-2.5: Sustainable infrastructure investment. Invest in resilient and sustainable infrastructure systems that serve the existing and future businesses and residents in Santa Maria. (Adapted from regional strategy REACH CEDS)

Policy ED-2.6: Business assistance efforts. Support efforts and organizations that assist with business planning and modernization assistance (e.g., scaling, technology adoption, site selection and development, continuity planning, etc.). (Adapted from regional strategy REACH CEDS)

Policy ED-2.7: Santa Maria Airport Business Park Development and Partnership. Support and promote the development of the Santa Maria Public Airport by working closely with the Airport District on updating the Airport Business Park Specific Plan, with a renewed focus on attracting light industrial, high-tech, and other target businesses. (Best Practice)

Goal ED-3: Partnership-driven economic development. A collaborative community that advances economic development goals through partnerships. (Adapted from Goal 15)

Policy ED-3.1: Public-private partnerships. Develop public-private partnerships with high-growth and target industry partners to support educational and workforce training opportunities. (Best Practice)

Action ED-3.1.1: Regularly convene local leaders in the private sector, philanthropic organizations, and higher education institutions to ensure workforce development alignment. (Adapted from regional strategy REACH CEDS)

Action ED-3.1.2: Coordinate with partners to identify companies in target industries and engage target industry representatives to identify actions the City could take to support them in establishing or expanding their presence. (Adapted from Policy 1)

Policy ED-3.2: Startup support. Explore partnerships with higher education institutions and organizations to support the creation of incubators and business accelerator programs. (Adapted from Goal 12)

Policy ED-3.3: Regional efforts. Support and participate in regional economic development efforts (e.g., Regional Economic Action Coalition (REACH) Central Coast). (Best Practice)

Policy ED-3.4: Aerospace and Aviation Regional Collaboration. Develop strategic public-private partnerships with Vandenberg Space Force Base, the Santa Maria Airport District, private aerospace companies, and regional partners to advance economic development and to support educational and workforce initiatives in high-tech, aerospace, and defense industries. (Best Practice)

Policy ED-3.5: Tourism-economic partnerships. Support and enhance the synergy between tourism promotion and economic development. (Adapted from Goal 3)

Goal ED-4: Strengthening tourism. A unique destination that celebrates Santa Maria's location, history, and community. (Adapted from Goal 3)

Policy ED-4.1: Santa Maria as a destination. Support efforts to promote Santa Maria as a destination for tourism. Leverage Santa Maria's access to natural amenities (e.g., the Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes), aerospace launches (Vandenberg Space Force Base), revitalization of the Downtown, agricultural tourism, wineries, and farm-to-table restaurants. (Adapted from Goal 3)

Action ED-4.1.1: Expand the offering of community events and opportunities that enable community members, businesses, and visitors to engage with local businesses. (Adapted from Goal 3)

Action ED-4.1.2: Amplify Santa Maria's agricultural tourism industry through continued support of community events (e.g., farmers' markets, barbeque festivals, etc.) and partnerships. (Adapted from Goal 3)

Policy ED-4.2: High-quality amenities. Encourage the development of quality lodging, restaurants, and meeting facilities to meet the needs of businesses, residents and their guests, and to bring visitors to the community. (Adapted from Goal 3)

Action ED-4.2.1: Amend the zoning code to ensure that lodging and similar uses that serve short-term visitors are appropriately allowed. (Best Practice)

Policy ED-4.3: Placemaking support. Support a variety of revitalization and improvement programs focused on placemaking and beautification, such as façade improvements, public gathering places, public art, enhanced streetscapes and redesign of streets into pedestrian-friendly environments, and community events. (Adapted from Goal 3)

Action ED-4.3.1: Continue to pursue and secure grants and other funding to develop, improve, and invest in cultural amenities and public spaces. (Adapted from regional strategy REACH CEDS)

Action ED-4.3.2: Continue to implement, and update as needed, the City's Public Art Master Plan. (Adapted from Goal 3)