



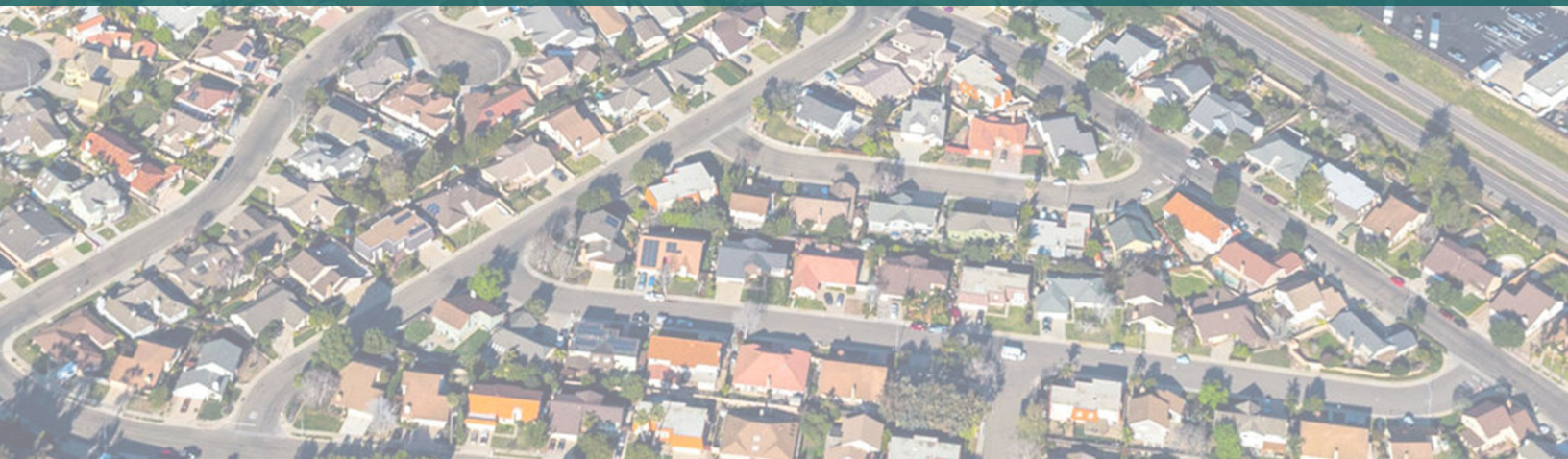
Santa Maria
General Plan

imagine



Vision, Guiding Principles, and Areas of Change and Stability

Approved by the City Council on April 6, 2021



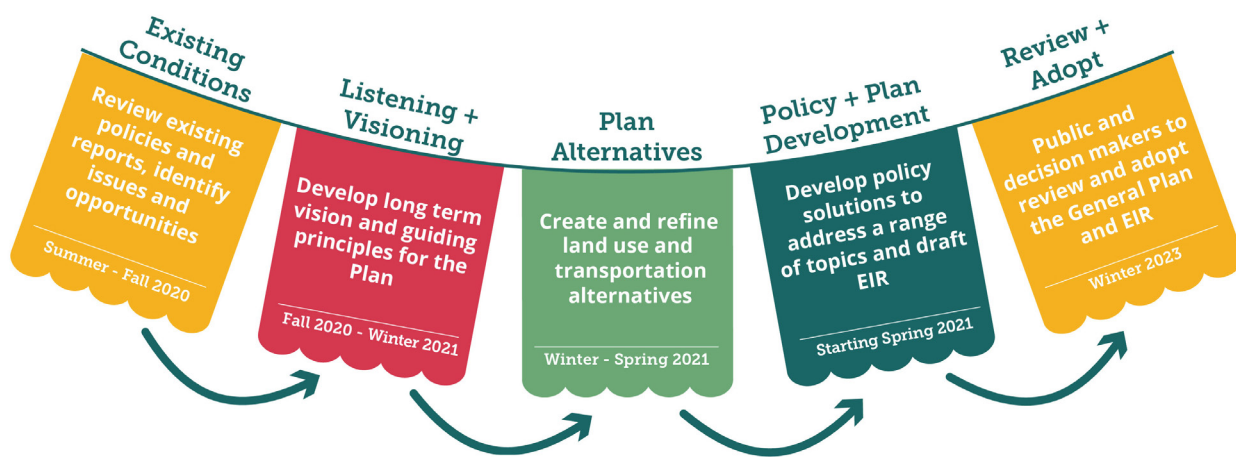
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Vision, Guiding Principles, and Areas of Change and Stability

Introduction

General Plan Update

The City of Santa Maria is undertaking a multi-year effort to update its General Plan. The Plan will establish visionary policies that support economic development, sustainability, and improved quality of life through the year 2045. The project has five major phases, which are designed as step-by-step building blocks (see the image below).



In 2020, during the Existing Conditions phase and to initiate the Listening + Visioning phase, City staff worked closely with the consultant team to systematically collect input and identify trends, issues, opportunities, and priorities. They completed seven existing conditions reports (ECRs), conducted three online community surveys, interviewed key stakeholders, hosted two community workshops, held six meetings of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), and discussed priorities with City department heads, the Planning Commission, and the City Council (the ECRs and engagement reports are available at <https://www.imaginesantamaria.com/resources>). The ECRs and the data collected from public outreach are the foundation for drafting this Vision, Guiding Principles, and Areas of Change and Stability.

Purpose of the Vision, Guiding Principles, and Areas of Change and Stability

This document includes a Vision Statement, Guiding Principles, and Areas of Change and Stability. Together, they were approved by City Council on April 6, 2021 to confirm the General Plan direction prior to moving forward in the planning process into more detailed analysis and policy development.

The Vision Statement describes Santa Maria as the community would like to see it in 2045. The Vision summarizes the qualities and characteristics that are important to people. It supplements and clarifies the vision and direction in the existing General Plan Land Use Element.

The Guiding Principles establish the direction the community should follow and the major ideas that the revised General Plan will put forward to achieve the community's shared Vision for 2045. If the Vision Statement describes "what" people would like, the Guiding Principles provide guidance for "how."

Likewise, in preparation for considering alternatives for future growth, the Areas of Change and Stability distinguish relatively stable parts of the city, where limited physical changes are anticipated, from places where transformational change is planned or should be considered.

Future Steps in the Planning Process

The Vision, Guiding Principles, and Areas of Change and Stability are purposefully high-level and conceptual. They focus on the destination, the pathways, and general areas within the city. They are not intended to identify specific strategies or changes, which are the focus on future steps in the planning process.

During the next phase of the planning process, Plan Alternatives, the community will use objective metrics to compare alternative options for specific physical development and improvement that are based on the Areas of Change and Stability. Likewise, during the following phase, Policy and Plan Development, the community will consider specific policies and action steps that are consistent with the Guiding Principles and achieve the Vision.

Comprehensive Scope

Though the revised general plan will ultimately be adopted by the City Council and guide future physical development in the city, General Plans in California are comprehensive in

scope, address a wide range of community priorities, and can include a larger planning area beyond city boundaries. Therefore, the Vision, Guiding Principles, and Areas of Change and Stability are not limited to topics and areas within the City's jurisdiction. The final General Plan and its implementation components will clearly identify City responsibilities.

Overview

A summary of the vision and goals in the existing General Plan is immediately below, followed by a brief explanation of how the Vision Statement, Guiding Principles, and Areas of Change and Stability were developed. These introductory sections are followed by the Vision Statement, Guiding Principles, and Areas of Change and Stability, as well as a conceptual map of those areas. There is not a clear, shared vision and direction for every aspect of Santa Maria's future, so the final section summarizes Unanswered Questions that can be addressed during subsequent phases of the General Plan Update. Exploration of these questions will begin during the next project phase, Plan Alternatives.

Existing General Plan Vision and Direction

As a point of reference, the existing General Plan Land Use Element, which was originally adopted in 1991, establishes the following vision and goals:

- Promote quality urban design enhancing Santa Maria's character
- Promote an adequate supply of quality residential development through a diversity of housing types, sizes, and density
- Achieve a balance between increased development and the preservation of local resources
 - Accommodate new development, balancing social, environmental, and economic considerations
 - Accommodate growth while making every effort to preserve agricultural resources
 - Reduce existing and potential land use conflicts
 - Discourage sprawl and "leapfrog" development
- Maintain and improve the existing character of the community as the industrial, commercial, retail, educational, and healthcare center for the region
 - Address the present imbalance between the land area designated for residential development and for those areas designated industrial and commercial development

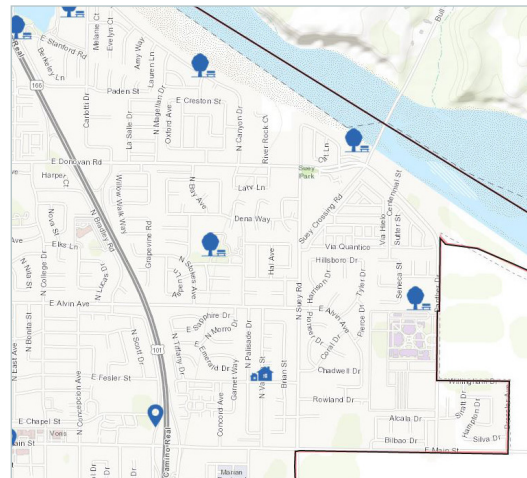
- Encourage new employment generating clean and low water demand industry and commercial uses
- Promote quality commercial and industrial development
- Provide all necessary urban services and facilities for present and future city residents.

Methodology

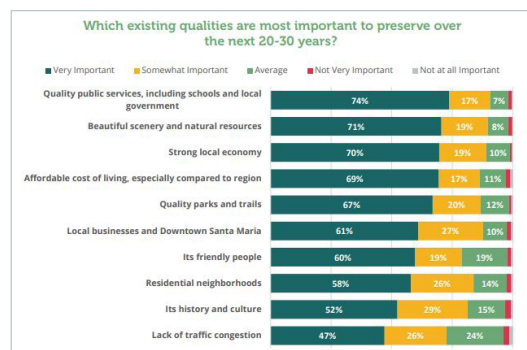
As noted above, the Vision, Guiding Principles, and Areas of Change and Stability summarize the major ideas and areas of development that the revised General Plan will focus on. Those were identified using a systematic process of reviewing all the information collected so far (Existing Conditions Reports and community input through surveys, interviews, workshops, and meetings, see below) and organizing it thematically. Specifically, for each General Plan topic (e.g., land use, mobility, hazards, environmental justice, etc.) and for each area of the city, qualities to preserve, opportunities to capitalize on, challenges to address, and changes to advance were organized. From there, key themes were summarized to prepare a concise Vision Statement, to develop topic-specific Guiding Principles, and to identify possible future changes by neighborhood and corridor.



Existing Conditions Reports



Issues + Assets Mapping Survey



Qualities and Changes Survey

Vision Statement

This Vision Statement describes Santa Maria as the community would like to see it in 2045:



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.

This is also 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.

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.

Residents have convenient access on foot and by car, bus, and bicycle to jobs, schools, community amenities like parks and sports fields, and the region's natural environment.

Public services are reliable, inclusive, and efficient, and the community is well-served by equitable, modern, and sustainable infrastructure, facilities, and utilities.



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.

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.



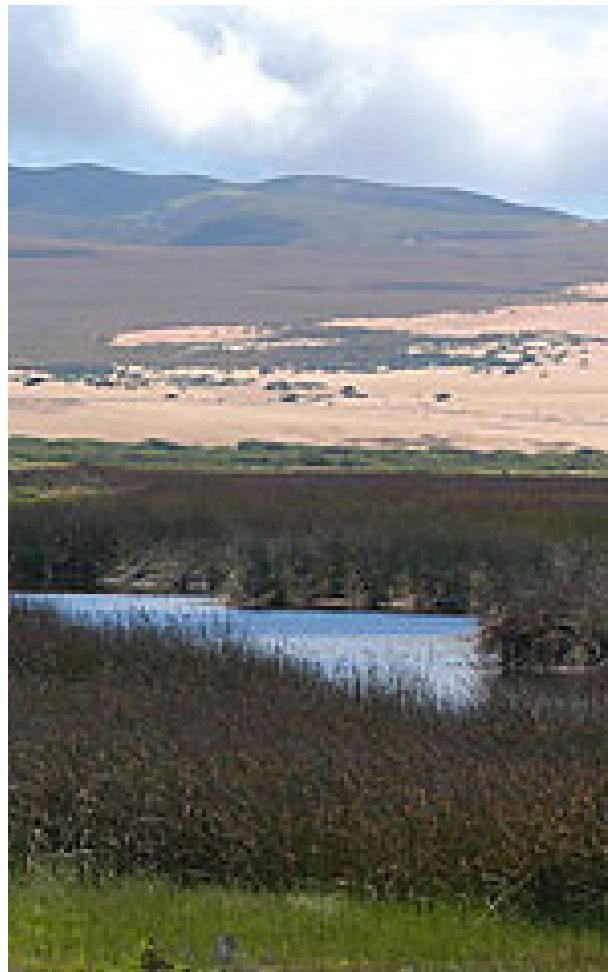
Community Health

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% 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.



Areas of Change and Stability

In preparation for considering alternatives for future growth during the third phase of the General Plan Update, Plan Alternatives, it is helpful to identify anticipated areas of change and stability. Specifically, it is useful to distinguish:

- **Areas of Stability and Enhancement:** where limited physical changes are anticipated but improvements continue to be made.
- **Areas of Potential Transformation:** where transformational change is planned or should be considered

The alternatives phase of the planning process will focus primarily on Areas of Potential Transformation. For Areas of Stability and Enhancement, the updated General Plan will incorporate strategies to preserve and enhance existing assets and address needed improvements. In all cases, General Plan policies and strategies will be crafted to achieve the Vision and to remain consistent with the Guiding Principles.

Conceptual Map

The conceptual map on the next page corresponds with the areas described on the following pages. In addition to distinguishing Areas of Change and Stability, it identifies the location of Specific Plans that have yet to be fully implemented, significant development projects that are in the “pipeline” (i.e., whose permitting or construction are underway), and vacant parcels.

Areas of Stability and Enhancement

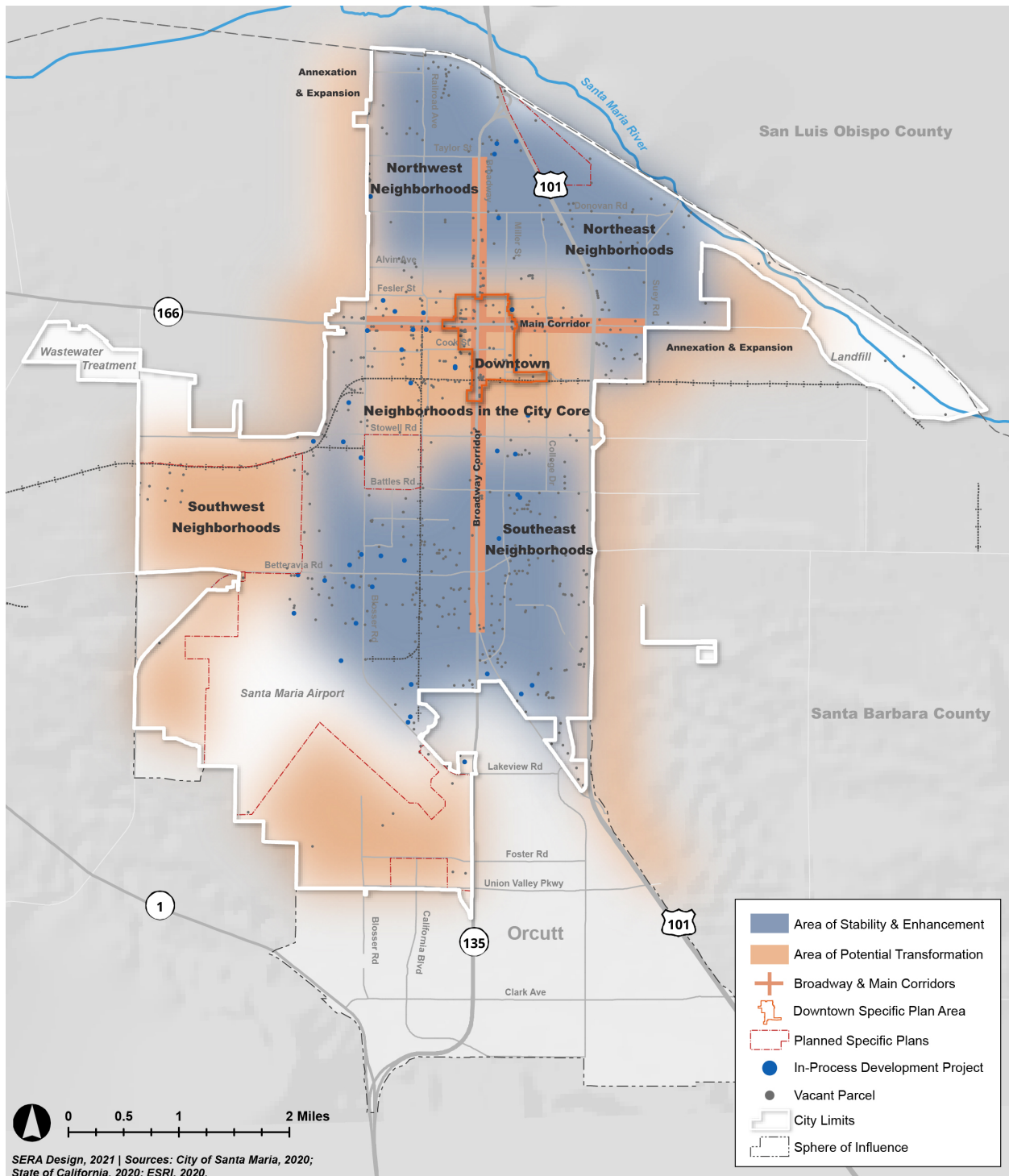
Northwest Neighborhoods

The neighborhoods in the northwest part of town (north of the city core and west of Broadway) are unlikely to see transformative change but would benefit from safety improvements (lighting and pedestrian and bicycle routes), enhanced park and river facilities, neighborhood commercial centers, and possibly a high school. As with the neighborhoods to the south in the city core, this area has a high concentration of vulnerable populations (experiencing poverty, linguistic isolation, crowding, and poor health), which should factor into initiatives to strengthen communities.

Northeast Neighborhoods

The neighborhoods in the northeast part of the city (east of Broadway and north of downtown) may see some commercial development through implementation of the

Conceptual Map: Areas of Change and Stability



Rivergate Roemer Specific Plan. Additionally, the area would benefit from increased park access and, in the area east of US-101, from a grocery store, neighborhood commercial services, congestion mitigation, traffic calming, safety improvements (lighting and pedestrian and bicycle routes), and enhanced park and river facilities.

As with other neighborhoods in central and northern Santa Maria, these areas are home to some of the city's more vulnerable residents. Households between Broadway and US-101 have above-average poverty rates, high rates of linguistic isolation, and poor health. The neighborhoods east of US-101 have the highest percentage of older adults and people with disabilities, many of whom experience poor health. These vulnerabilities should inform strategies to enhance neighborhoods in the area.

Southeast Neighborhoods (south of Downtown, east of Broadway, and west of US-101)

This area is going to continue to see infill growth that complements existing development patterns. Many of the large vacant parcels have a development project in the pipeline. Congestion associated with the shopping centers will have to be mitigated, particularly as the area grows. The area would also benefit from streetscape improvements designed to create an attractive environment for cyclists, drivers, and pedestrians.

Areas of Potential Transformation

Downtown

Santa Maria's Downtown is valued as the cultural and civic center of the community and is home to the Town Center East mall and Town Center West shopping center. It is also a top choice for future city growth, with a focus on establishing it as an attractive, active, walkable, and inviting place to live, work, gather, have fun, and shop. Residents hope to see more businesses and restaurants, and many would consider living in an improved Downtown. The Downtown Specific Plan and the Downtown Multimodal Streetscape Plan can serve as the guide to rebrand Downtown as a community hub and destination. Consideration should also be given to supporting existing local businesses while recognizing national and regional changes in the retail industry and real estate market.

Neighborhoods in the City Core

The future of Downtown and its surrounding neighborhoods are linked. Those neighborhoods enjoy walkable street networks and access to shopping, and they feature the historic Carriage and Bungalow Districts. But some neighborhoods also

face several challenges, including proximity to industrial areas and the railroad in the west, relatively less access to parks, older housing stock (often associated with health-harming conditions), crowding, and safety concerns. Many residents are also socially and economically vulnerable, with high rates of poverty, single-parent households, youth, linguistic isolation, and poor health outcomes. A holistic approach that prevents displacement of existing residents and businesses should be taken to revitalizing the greater downtown area.

Main Street and Broadway Corridors

Main Street is valued for its historic character and mix of small, locally owned businesses. Likewise, Broadway is valued for its many shopping and dining options. Both corridors serve as important travel and truck routes, and congestion and pedestrian safety are a problem, especially for school children who must cross Broadway to get to school.

Some portion of future growth should be along corridors, particularly Main and Broadway. Growth should be complemented with improved design character, beautification, more street trees, more community gathering places, and amenities that make them more inviting, walkable, and bikeable.

Southwest Neighborhoods (northwest, west, and south of the airport)

This area will continue to be a jobs center and will experience ongoing residential, commercial, office, research, and industrial development as Specific Plans get implemented, including Area 9, Blosser Southeast Area 5B, Airport Business Park, and Mahoney Ranch. These Specific Plans include a variety of housing types, public facilities, open space, and agriculture.

Annexation and Expansion

As the population and economy grow, it may ultimately be necessary for the City to annex additional land east of US-101 and/or to the northwest of town. Considerations include the projected timing of the need relative to continued growth within existing city limits, the preservation of agricultural land, the capacity of infrastructure systems (roads, water, wastewater), the ability of the City to provide and maintain public facilities and services, and fiscal sustainability.

Unanswered Questions

Though there is strong community consensus behind the Vision and Guiding Principles for Santa Maria's future, some important questions about the city's future will have to be addressed during the next phase of the planning process, Plan Alternatives.

What is the future of Downtown?

As noted above, Downtown is both the heart of the community and the focus of significant revitalization. However, the answers to some questions remain unclear: How can existing small businesses adapt and thrive? What is the right mix of housing, retail, office, public, and other uses? When and how should the original water and wastewater systems be upgraded?

How can competing needs be balanced along Main and Broadway?

Assuming Main and Broadway remain important economic travel corridors, how can they better support walking, cycling, community building, and civic culture? How much housing should be developed in these corridors? Should the City consider assuming responsibility for these corridors from the State?

How and where should Santa Maria grow?

What are the options for accommodating the projected population, housing, and jobs growth? How much growth can be accommodated with accessory dwelling units (ADUs), along corridors, and within existing city boundaries and portions of the Sphere of Influence? When will expansion outside the city limits be necessary, and how much? What can existing and planned water and wastewater systems accommodate? What are the fiscal and other trade-offs of different growth options?