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May 1, 2026

Via Electronic Mail

The Honorable Alice Patino, Mayor
& Members of the City Council
110 South Pine Street, Suite 101
Santa Maria, CA 93458
apatino@cityofsantamaria.org
citycouncil@cityofsantamaria.org

Re: May 5, 2026 Agenda Item 13.1: Santa Maria 2045 General Plan

Dear Mayor Patino and Members of the City Council:

On behalf of the Grower-Shipper Association of Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo Counties (Grower-Shipper), we provide these comments on the City of Santa Maria's (City) proposed adoption of its 2045 General Plan Update and certification of the General Plan Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) (SCH# 2025020584).

Grower-Shipper represents 150 growers, shippers, farm labor contractors, and supporting agribusinesses on matters related to agriculture within Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo Counties, including within and around Santa Maria. Grower-Shipper members grow important crops that are consumed locally, such as broccoli, strawberries, lettuce, vegetable transplants, flowers, tree fruit, and wine grapes, and statewide. Grower-Shipper's mission is to maintain a vibrant agricultural industry in the region by assisting members to address challenges and capitalize on strengths and opportunities.

Grower-Shipper has been an active participant in the City's General Plan Update process.¹ Grower-Shipper appreciates the City's engagement with agriculture as a leading source of income and employment for the City, and that the City has made many revisions to the Update that better capture the balance of multiple and sometimes conflicting needs.

While Grower-Shipper supports the majority of the Staff's recommended revisions to the General Plan, it respectfully urges the City Council to reconsider two specific policy positions, consistent with Grower-Shipper's prior comments:

¹ See Grower-Shipper's comments submitting comments on the General Plan Policy Framework and EIR of February 28, 2025, September 28, 2025, September 29, 2025, October 28, 2025, February 18, 2026, and March 3, 2026.

1. Area 9 Rezone

Grower-Shipper opposes the proposed conversion of Area 9 from commercial to unrelated residential use, especially given the industrial zoning of the surrounding areas. Grower-Shipper remains concerned that encroachment of low-density housing unrelated to nearby industrial and agricultural operations will result in predictable land use conflicts for both future residents and neighboring operations and runs contrary to many of the policies outlined in the Plan.

2. Annexation of Lands Parallel to Highway 101

Grower-Shipper does not necessarily oppose the annexation of a limited portion of land north of Main Street, and the block immediately east of Marian Regional Medical Center, despite that these areas contain prime farmlands of exceptional quality, in recognition of the need to balance multiple priorities. However, the proposed Specific Plans for these annexed areas must include policies and requirements to minimize conflicts between the new urban uses and existing agricultural operations, in large part by locating sensitive uses—especially schools and childcare facilities—and active recreation and residential uses as far as possible from existing agricultural operations.

However, Grower-Shipper continues to strongly oppose the annexation of the lands parallel to Highway 101 from East Jones Street to Prell Road (west of S. Suey Road). The majority of this proposed annexation land is prime agricultural land; if the annexation were to move forward, it would have major negative consequences both from the immediate conversion of agricultural land and through additional regulatory requirements and conflicts from farming near unrelated urban uses, especially if residential and sensitive sites like schools or daycares are introduced near agricultural production areas.

Grower-Shipper maintains that the environmental impacts and land use conflicts of the Area 9 and Highway 101-adjacent annexations have not been adequately analyzed or mitigated under the California Environmental Quality Act, and that current and proposed General Plan policies are insufficient to prevent significant impacts to agriculture and the agricultural economy. As included in the letter dated September 29, 2025:

The Draft EIR further fails to adequately analyze the effects of the General Plan’s annexation policies on agricultural resources. The EIR summarizes previous environmental review of annexation areas located west of Highway 101 but does not analyze impacts to areas located east of the highway, despite that these areas contain important and prime farmland that will be threatened by urban encroachment resulting from annexation.” These concerns have not been adequately addressed in the subsequent documents or response to comments. As such, the City has failed to prepare the analysis required under CEQA to adequately inform decisionmakers and the public about these impacts and mitigate them to the extent feasible.

Further, Grower-Shipper specifically objects to and disagrees with the finding in the proposed Statement of Overriding Considerations that “The Project provides a Land Use

Hon. Alice Patino, Mayor

Re: Comments on Santa Maria 2045 General Plan Update and EIR

May 1, 2026

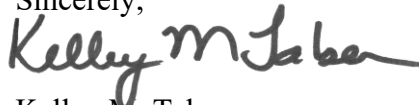
Page 3

Policy Map that accounts for existing development, physical constraints, future growth areas including proposed annexation areas, economic development, hazards, and incompatible uses, and assigns densities and use types accordingly to enhance the safety, livability, and economic vitality of Santa Maria,” due to the numerous impacts, land use conflicts and incompatible uses, identified in its comments to the City.

In the Council’s consideration of the proposed Update, Grower-Shipper urges it to strike the appropriate balance between its growth objectives and resource protection, including appropriate protections to maintain harmony between future residents and the agricultural economy. Grower-Shipper urges the Council maintain the current CPO zoning in Area 9. Grower-Shipper also requests the Council adopt a modified hybrid that avoids the serious conflicts from the proposed annexation of lands parallel to Highway 101 south of East Jones Street or the infill alternative.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments. Please feel free to contact me at ktaber@somachlaw.com should you have any questions about Grower-Shipper’s concerns. Finally, pursuant to Pub. Resources Code, section 21092.2(a), please provide me with a copy of all notices regarding the EIR and General Plan, including any Notice of Determination, when it is posted.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kelley M. Taber". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Kelley M. Taber

cc: Clerk of the City Council
Dana Eady, Planning Division Manager
City of Santa Maria, Community Development Department, Planning Division
deady@cityofsantamaria.org