

COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

TO: Mayor and City Council

FROM: Chenin Dow, Community Development Director

DATE: May 5, 2026

SUBJECT: Adoption of a Resolution Approving the City of Santa Maria 2045 General Plan

Description:

The City Council will consider adopting a Resolution approving the certification of the Final Environmental Impact Report, adoption of the Santa Maria 2045 General Plan including initiation of proceedings to amend the City's Sphere of Influence and annex the territory designated "Planned Annexation," and approval of a Zoning Map Amendment repealing and reenacting the City of Santa Maria Official Zoning Map for consistency with the General Plan.

Environmental Notice: Environmental review for this project was completed through the preparation of an Environmental Impact Report (SCH# 2025020584) pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and State Guidelines.

RECOMMENDATION:

Take the following actions:

1. Adopt a Resolution certifying an Environmental Impact Report, making California Environmental Quality Act findings, adopting a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program, and adopting a Statement of Overriding Considerations for the City of Santa Maria 2045 General Plan Update; and
2. Adopt a Resolution adopting the City of Santa Maria 2045 General Plan Update, replacing the existing adopted General Plan, and making certain findings; and
3. Waive first reading and introduce an Ordinance approving a Zoning Map Amendment (Z2026-0001) repealing and reenacting the City of Santa Maria Official Zoning Map; and
4. Set said adoption of Ordinance at the next regular City Council meeting.

BACKGROUND:

The City of Santa Maria's General Plan is a comprehensive document that establishes the community's vision and provides a framework that will guide decisions on topics such as growth, economic development, and land use through the planning horizon year of 2045. The plan includes goals, policies, and implementation actions in chapters called Elements. The Santa Maria 2045 General Plan supersedes and replaces the City's

current General Plan and has been substantially updated to address local conditions, community priorities and goals, and State law.

The Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) evaluates the potential environmental effects associated with the General Plan and is intended to be a program-level document. The adoption of the Santa Maria 2045 General Plan does not include the Housing Element, which has been previously adopted and certified by the State Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD).

The General Plan and associated EIR reflect the input of hundreds of Santa Maria residents, business owners, local organizations, community stakeholders, and developers gathered over the course of six years since the General Plan Update effort was initiated. It seeks to capture and facilitate the community's vision for the future of Santa Maria: a close-knit, family-oriented community that epitomizes cultural vibrancy and economic prosperity for all.

Planning Commission Review

The Santa Maria Planning Commission reviewed the General Plan Update project at a noticed public hearing on February 18, 2026. At this hearing the item was continued to March 4, 2026, with direction to staff to respond to the items raised in public comment letters submitted by the Grower Shipper Association, Urban Planning Concepts, Inc., and Marian Regional Medical Center. All of the comments raised in these letters have been addressed in the Planning Commission Staff Report dated March 4, 2026 (Attachment J). The Planning Commission considered the information in the staff report and staff presentation, and with a vote of 3-0-2 (Absent: Mohajer, Lopez), recommended that the City Council adopt the 2045 General Plan and related actions.

DISCUSSION:

General Plan Overview

In California, all cities and counties are required to adopt a general plan. The general plan is a comprehensive policy document that shapes the long-term physical development of a jurisdiction's planning area. The general plan must include at least the following state-mandated elements: land use; circulation; housing; conservation; open space; noise; environmental justice, and safety, as specified in Government Code section 65302, to the extent that the issues identified by State law exist in the City's planning area. The General Plan may also contain optional elements. The Santa Maria General Plan Update has been prepared to be consistent with the requirements of State law and addresses the relevant items in Government Code section 65300, et seq. In addition to the mandatory elements, the Santa Maria 2045 General Plan also includes the following optional elements: Economic Development, Public Facilities and Services, and Recreation and Parks.

Since the adoption of Santa Maria's existing General Plan in the early 1990s, substantial changes to the planning context of the City have occurred, including accelerated growth in the region and shifts in the community's demographics, as well as new ways of thinking about sustainability, public health, and placemaking. In light of these changes, the City

undertook this comprehensive update of the General Plan as an opportunity to reassess and refine its long-term vision and identify the new challenges it will face, opportunities it will follow, and approaches it will use to make that vision a reality. The General Plan is more than just the legal basis for all local land use decisions; it is the vision for how the City will evolve, reflecting the community's objectives.

The General Plan is the jurisdiction's primary legal document governing growth, development, and resource management issues. The General Plan Elements are required to be internally consistent and development regulations (e.g., zoning and subdivision standards) are required by law to be consistent with the General Plan. The General Plan expresses the community's development goals and embodies public policy relative to the distribution of future land uses, both public and private.

It is essential to note that while the General Plan is a crucial document in shaping the future of Santa Maria, it is not the sole document staff will rely upon to determine Santa Maria's needs. By its nature, the General Plan is broad in scope. It does not intend to pre-establish the many day-to-day decisions made across departments as the City grows; in particular, it cannot establish set timelines for certain actions such as infrastructure upgrades to support future growth, as it is currently unknown when that growth will occur. However, it establishes the framework the City will follow to accommodate this growth and is supported by dozens of additional documents and studies that are updated much more frequently and/or performed in real time to determine the specific needs for a given development at the time of its construction.

Housing Element Update

In late 2021, the City received direction from the Santa Barbara County Association of Governments (SBCAG) regarding the City's 2023-2031 (6th Cycle) Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA). This required the City to temporarily redirect City Staff and the Consultant Team to focus on preparing an update to the City's Housing Element and receiving certification of the Housing Element from HCD as expeditiously as possible to meet the required deadline. As required by State Housing Law, the City is obligated to update its Housing Element on a set eight-year schedule. Failure to complete an update to the Housing Element in a timely manner could have put the City at risk of financial penalties and loss of local land use control. Therefore, from late 2021 through 2023, the City prioritized preparation of its Housing Element in accordance with State Housing Law. The City Council adopted its 2023-2031 Housing Element on December 5, 2023, and it was subsequently certified by HCD.

Public Outreach

This public hearing follows multiple years of General Plan public outreach including pop-up events, online surveys, communitywide workshops, stakeholder interviews, Technical Planning Advisory Committee (TAC) meetings, Planning Commission and City Council presentations, joint Planning Commission and City Council Study Sessions, and circulation of the Draft Policy Document and Environmental Impact Report for public comments. Input from the Santa Maria community has been collected through a multipronged public outreach effort spanning the entire planning process (from late 2019

through 2026). Below is a summary of some of the public outreach activities completed as part of the General Plan Update project:

- Updates and notifications on the City of Santa Maria website from project kickoff through completion
- Dedicated project website (www.imaginesantamaria.com)
- Communitywide Visioning Workshops focusing on the topics of Vision and Values, Mobility, and Land Use
- Environmental Justice and Equity Workshops
- Pop-up events early in the project to advertise the project
- Online Visioning Survey
- Online Housing Element Survey
- Preferred Land Use Alternative Survey and workshops
- Online Community Cafés
- In-person and online office hours with City staff
- Scoping Meeting for the Environmental Impact Report
- Regular Planning Commission and City Council briefings on various topics including Project Kickoff, Draft Vision Statement, Preferred Land Use Alternative, and Housing Element Planning Commission/City Council Study Sessions
- Public community meetings focused on the Housing Element and Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH)
- Public Hearings on the Housing Element with the Planning Commission and City Council, including direct notifications to interested parties, people who commented on the draft documents, and other local and regional stakeholders
- Dozens of follow-up meetings with those who provided comments on the Draft General Plan and Draft EIR

In addition to the public outreach activities identified above, preparation of the General Plan Vision Statement, Preferred Land Use Alternative Map, and policy frameworks were reviewed by the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). The TAC members are community stakeholders, residents, land use professionals, educators, and other local representatives. The TAC met on 13 separate occasions from the kickoff of the General Plan Update in 2019 to most recently in 2025. The input from the TAC was instrumental in ensuring that the plan met the needs of the community and stakeholders and their participation throughout the process was highly beneficial.

Background Documents

Existing Conditions Reports

The Existing Conditions Reports prepared in 2020 established a baseline of existing conditions in the City. Specifically, the reports identify development patterns, natural resources, socioeconomic conditions, and environmental constraints, and identify the regulatory environment for each topic. The Reports served as a resource for the City Council, the Planning Commission, the TAC, members of the public, City staff, and the consultant team through the General Plan Update process, ensuring that the updated General Plan addresses Santa Maria's unique circumstances and local issues.

Vision Statement

The Community Vision Statement was written based on the feedback collected through the Public Engagement and Visioning program, including Visioning Workshops, online surveys, and pop-up events, as well as input provided by the TAC. The City Council reviewed and accepted the Vision Statement in April 2021. The approved vision statement is included below and provides direction and a foundation for the focus of the Santa Maria 2045 General Plan:

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.

Santa Maria 2045 General Plan Outline

The Santa Maria 2045 General Plan included as Attachment D to this staff report, is organized into the following Elements (or "Chapters"): Introduction, Land Use, Circulation, Conservation and Open Space, Noise, Safety, Health and Environmental Justice, Public Facilities and Services, Recreation and Parks, Economic Development, and Housing (adopted separately and provided under separate cover).

Within each Element are the Goals, Policies, and Actions, organized by topic area, to support achieving the City's Vision Statement. A Goal is a description of the general desired condition that the community seeks to create. A Policy is a specific statement that guides decision-making as the City works to achieve the various goals. Once adopted, policies represent statements of City regulations. Finally, an Action is an action, procedure, implementation technique, or specific program to be undertaken by the City

to help achieve a specified goal or implement an adopted policy. These goals, policies, and actions are specific to Santa Maria and reflect public feedback, compliance with State requirements, and consideration of existing conditions.

The Public Draft General Plan was released for public review from August 14, 2025, through September 28, 2025. The city has reviewed all comments received on the Public Draft General Plan and the Final Santa Maria 2045 General Plan includes red-lined and clean versions for comparison between the Draft and Final documents. These documents are also available on the project webpage at www.imaginesantamaria.com.

Land Use Policy Map and Zoning Map Amendments

The Land Use Element includes the Land Use Policy Map, which defines where different types of land uses are expected to be developed over time. The Land Use Map was prepared in response to input from the City Council in 2023 through selection of the Preferred Land Use Alternative. Community input, including feedback from the TAC, which reviewed and provided comments on the proposed Land Use Policy Map at one of its regularly scheduled meetings, was also taken into consideration. The new Land Use Policy Map is based on the following principles:

- Introduce two new land use designations (Main Street Mixed Use and Broadway Mixed Use) allowing for higher density mixed-use redevelopment along Main Street and Broadway.
- The High Density Residential (HDR-22) land use designation density has increased from 22 dwelling units per acre to 30 dwelling units per acre.
- Introduction of a single-family residential land use designation to replace the area designated as Commercial and Professional Office in the Area 9 Specific Plan.
- Identification of a potential future Santa Maria Joint Union High School District school site located on the west side of North Broadway, South of Preisker Road.
- Planned Annexation area for the future Sphere of Influence boundary adjustment and Annexation of approximately 985-acres east of Highway 101 in an area that is currently within the unincorporated area of Santa Barbara County. This will require future applications approved by the Santa Barbara County Local Area Formation Commission (LAFCO).
- Reflect other minor administrative edits to ensure accuracy of the Plan.

The City's existing Zoning Map is also proposed to be amended to be consistent with the proposed Land Use Policy Map (Attachment I).

Planned Annexation Area

To plan for the anticipated future growth of 16,140 net new residential units (including three RHNA Housing Cycles) and 23,750 jobs by 2045, the Santa Maria 2045 General Plan Update includes a Planned Annexation (PA) designated area for a future Sphere of Influence (SOI) boundary adjustment and Annexation of approximately 985 acres east of Highway 101. This area is currently within the unincorporated area of Santa Barbara

County and is outside the City's SOI. For lands to be considered for annexation into a city, the land must be within the City's designated SOI. SOI boundary changes and Annexations are formal municipal reorganization actions that require approval by the Santa Barbara County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO).

The factors that LAFCO must consider in reviewing proposals include, but are not limited to, population density, the need for organized community services, the effect of the proposed action on adjacent areas, conformity with LAFCO policies on providing planned, orderly, efficient patterns of urban development, consistency with the General Plan, and the ability to provide services, including water supply.

Annexation serves as an opportunity for Santa Maria to grow responsibly, expanding needed jobs, housing, entertainment, public facilities, and services beyond the City's current limits. The planned annexation area offers a defined area of land to further design and develop through Specific Plans or Master Plans that would provide an appropriate mix of land uses and intensities. More information regarding the LAFCO process can be found on the LAFCO website at www.sblafco.org.

Housing Growth Distribution

It is important to note that much of future growth will still be accommodated through existing pipeline projects on land within city limits, and through infill development, especially within Downtown and along the City's major transportation corridors. However, there is recognition that additional land is needed for all other uses that sustain and support future population growth, including land for parks, schools, and employment sectors, that cannot be built merely through intensification.

The Planned Annexation area reflects the Preferred Alternative selected and is a balanced approach, allowing for both infill growth and necessary expansion to accommodate the full range of community uses. Of the approximately 16,200 housing units to be built, only 24 percent (3,880 units) are planned to be built in the annexation area. The remainder of the housing units, 76 percent, will be built all within existing City limits, through existing pipeline projects, unbuilt Specific Plans, anticipated development of accessory dwelling units, and infill development, including the city's Downtown.

Environmental

An Environmental Impact Report (EIR) (SCH# 2025020584) has been prepared in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The Draft EIR was circulated for the required 45-day public review from August 14, 2025, to September 28, 2025. Comments received on the Draft EIR have been reviewed and responded to in the Response to Comments Section of the Final EIR. Mitigation Measures were developed to address potential project impacts in the topic areas of Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Biological Resources, Cultural and Tribal Cultural Resources, and Noise. The Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program is provided as Attachment F to this staff report.

The EIR identifies significant and unavoidable (Class I) impacts to Agricultural Resources, Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Noise, and Transportation and Traffic. CEQA requires the decision-making agency to balance the benefits of a project against its significant unavoidable impacts when determining whether to approve a project. If the benefits of the project outweigh its unavoidable adverse environmental effects, those effects may be considered acceptable (CEQA Guidelines Section 15093(a)). CEQA requires the agency to state in writing the specific reasons for considering a project acceptable when significant impacts are not avoided or substantially lessened. Those reasons must be based on substantial evidence in the Final EIR or elsewhere in the administrative record (CEQA Guidelines Section 15093(b)). A Statement of Overriding Considerations addressing the benefits of the Project, which constitutes the specific economic, legal, social, technological and other considerations that justify the approval of the project, is included as Attachment H.

Alternative(s)

If the City Council decided not to adopt the 2045 General Plan and related actions at this hearing, the item could be continued to a future City Council hearing with direction to staff to make amendments to the plan prior to final adoption. If the City Council were to decide not to adopt the 2045 General Plan, and keep the current plan in place, significant work on the existing General Plan would still be required for the existing plan to comply with State law. There have been many changes in State law requirements that are not reflected in the City's current General Plan that would still need to be addressed, such as the Environmental Health and Justice Element required under Senate Bill 1000.

Fiscal Considerations

The costs of the General Plan Update are covered under the approved budget for the General Plan Update, which is \$1.8 million from the City's general fund as well as the Regional Early Action Planning (REAP) and the Local Early Action Planning (LEAP) grants that were awarded to the City in 2020 and 2021.

Impact on the Community

The updated General Plan will supersede and replace Santa Maria's existing General Plan, which has become outdated and is not in compliance with State law. The new plan was developed based on the community's vision and provides a framework that will guide decisions on topics such as growth, economic development, and land use through the planning horizon year of 2045.

ATTACHMENT(S)

- A. Resolution - Environmental
- B. Resolution - General Plan Adoption
- C. Ordinance
- D. Santa Maria 2045 General Plan
- E. Final Environmental Impact Report
- F. Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program
- G. CEQA Findings
- H. Statement of Overriding Considerations
- I. Official Zoning Map
- J. Planning Commission Staff Report dated March 4, 2026