



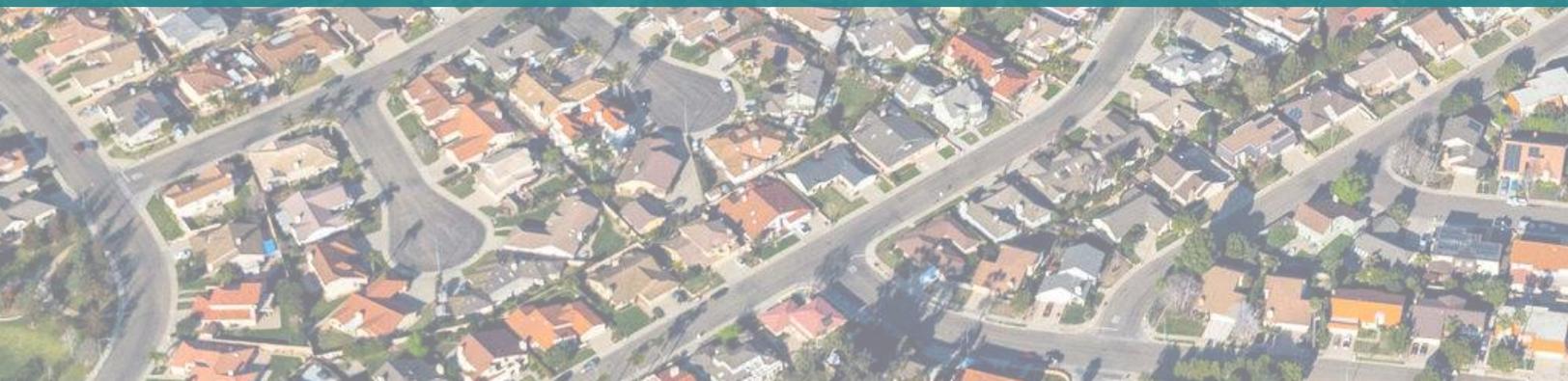
Santa Maria  
General Plan

**imagine**



# Stakeholder Interview Summary

August 2020



# Stakeholder Interview Summary

## Introduction

On January 24th and 25th, 2020, members of the General Plan update consulting team (Raimi + Associates, SERA Architects, Lisa Wise Consulting, and GHD) conducted 17 stakeholder interviews with Santa Maria industry leaders and community-based organizations. The purpose of the interviews was to provide the Team with background information and various perspectives on the issues and opportunities in the Santa Maria. Members of the following organizations were interviewed:

- Babé Farms
- Bethel Lutheran Church
- Bici Centro
- CalPortland Trucking
- CAUSE
- Certified Freight Logistics
- City of Santa Maria
- Commercial real estate industry
- Disability Community
- Halsell Builders
- Home Builders Association
- Housing Authority of the County of Santa Barbara
- Interfaith Community
- McCarty Davis Commercial Real Estate
- Santa Barbara County Association of Governments
- Planning Commission
- Santa Maria Airport
- Santa Maria Area Transit
- Santa Maria-Bonita School District
- Urban Planning Concepts

The Stakeholder Interview Summary includes two sections: 1) a “summary of findings” with high level insights from the interviews, and 2) consolidated feedback organized by the project team into four major categories:

1. Unique and Special Attributes
2. Enhance and Change Opportunities
3. Barriers to Change
4. Engagement and Outreach Ideas

## Next Steps

The comprehensive summary can serve as a baseline for broader engagement with the residents, businesses, workers, and other stakeholders who will participate in the Santa Maria General Plan Update. In addition to the stakeholder interviews, City staff and the General Plan Update consulting team will gather feedback from the community via community workshops, General Plan Technical Advisory Committee meetings, “pop-up” workshops, community surveys, and more. Input gathered during the stakeholder interviews and other community engagement activities will be synthesized in the General Plan’s Vision and Guiding Principles and will inform the creation of General Plan Update goals and policies, ensuring that the General Plan reflects the voices of the Santa Maria community.

# Summary of Findings

Santa Maria's "small town feel," natural resources, regional location, young population, and position as the backbone of the regional economy were noted as characteristics that make the City feel like a unique and special place. These are important characteristics that can be preserved or enhanced as part of the General Plan Update by promoting land use, housing, and growth policies that balance the needs of various groups in the City. Stakeholders also identified clear opportunities for change in Santa Maria including:

- Developing a shared aspirational vision for the future of Santa Maria
- Establishing "Old Downtown" as a destination and gathering place for all
- Increasing the availability and quality of housing for residents across all income levels
- Improving transit and transportation systems and connectivity throughout the City
- Strategically managing growth and annexation to safeguard agricultural land uses, while considering the potential impacts of new residents and economic industries
- Identifying or strengthening financing mechanisms to sustain growth and its related impacts on infrastructure and the social fabric of Santa Maria
- Addressing unique health and environmental justice issues in the city, including the presence of incompatible land uses
- Capitalizing on the City's regional location and increasing entertainment and dining options to increase tourism
- Increasing access to parks and gathering places and creating opportunities for the community to come together
- Transforming the Broadway corridor into a walkable and bikeable thoroughfare lined with housing, local-serving businesses, and attractive buildings and sidewalks
- Diversifying the economy by attracting high-skill jobs and providing job training opportunities for residents

While there is a lot of excitement from the community and many ideas for the future of the city, there is also a nuanced understanding of some of the barriers to achieving these changes. Cited challenges include: limited authority and ability to be proactive in implementing new policies and plans; perception of Santa Maria as a "one industry town;" lack of clarity around how to prioritize City funds available for infrastructure or other improvements; and limited capacity to keep up with State mandates and related legislative updates.

# Consolidated Feedback

## Unique and Special Attributes

- City staff and elected officials are engaged with the community and other agencies
- Young population
- Big town with a small-town feeling and great sense of community and relatively little traffic compared to bigger cities.
- Natural resources (scenery, open spaces)
- Beautiful location with great weather
- Big economic driver of the regional economy
- One of the most affordable places in Santa Barbara County
- The history and culture of Santa Maria
- Attractive low- density residential neighborhoods
- A large number of small, local businesses
- Diverse population and acceptance of diversity (minority, low income, LGBTQ)
- Strong ties with agriculture that help drive the local economy and enhance community identity.

## Enhancement and Change Opportunities

- Enhance arts and culture
  - Program community events that are inexpensive for the public to attend
  - Increase public art
- Improve quality and quantity of housing for all
  - Provide a variety of housing options (e.g., micro units, mixed use, single-family homes on large lots) at varying levels of affordability
  - Create rental assistance programs, first time homebuyer programs, and inclusionary housing policies
  - Address overcrowding
  - House H2A workers in dormitories located near services to allow workers to recreate and become integrated in the community
  - Develop housing in the following areas: Downtown, annexed land, Area 9, southwest side, near intersection of US-101/Santa Maria Way, Broadway corridor, County Fairgrounds site
- Consider annexing land, especially land on the east side of the City
  - Weigh pros and cons of annexation – annexation could be an opportunity to diffuse density away from the City, but could also detract from economic development downtown
  - Prime farmland is not located here
  - Ensure annexed land has ample parkland and schools
- Develop vacant or underutilized sites
  - Vacant “infill” parcels
  - Large parking lots
  - Underutilized retail
- Develop Downtown Santa Maria into a place for gathering, living, and entertainment
  - Consider removing Town Center shopping mall and reintroducing gridded street layout

- Locate entertainment, gathering places, museums, art centers, coffee shops, and coworking spaces downtown
- Develop housing, especially mixed use residential (ground floor retail or commercial, upper floor residential)
- Implement the Downtown Streetscape Plan
- Make Downtown pedestrian and bicycle friendly
- Divert truck traffic away from Downtown
- Allow flexible parking standards and/or reduced parking standards
- Consider developing a form-based code
- Redevelop the Broadway corridor
  - Prioritize housing and local-serving businesses along this corridor
  - Improve walkability and bikeability
  - Make streetscapes and storefronts more attractive
- Continue to allow industrial uses to thrive
  - Locate industrial uses near US-101, railways, and the airport
  - Convert underused industrial areas into other uses (e.g., affordable housing, parks, social services)
- Increase tourism in Santa Maria
  - Increase presence of entertainment, upscale retail, restaurants, and hotels
  - Build tourism based on agriculture, wineries, car shows and culture, and biking
- Improve parks and recreation facilities and access
  - Make sure schools are open for public recreational use when not in session
  - Create more soccer fields citywide
  - Create more parks and gathering spaces in the northern part of the City
  - Improve safety in parks – some parks don't feel safe due to homelessness and public drinking
- Ensure people can easily get around without a car
  - Improve bicycle connectivity, especially in the north-south direction, and improve safety by adding protected bicycle lanes
  - Provide more frequent bus service and add bus stops near commercial centers
  - Make sure public transit and trails are accessible to people with disabilities
- Improve roadway connectivity and management
  - Consider extending roads (such as Battles Road)
  - Consider transportation needs of agriculture industry and management of agricultural traffic at certain times of day
- Diversify the local economy and provide job training for high-skilled jobs
  - Provide training opportunities for high-skilled jobs (e.g., health and tech)
  - Attract high-paying jobs, including high-skilled industrial jobs and jobs in health, tech, and management fields
  - Develop coworking spaces
- Create educational opportunities for residents of all ages
  - Connect Hancock College students to the community and jobs
  - Attract higher educational institutions to Santa Maria
  - Improve quality and access to early education

- Develop after-school/community center facilities for kids within proximity to residential areas
- Improve public health and address environmental justice concerns
  - Address causes and health impacts of harmful pesticides from agriculture
  - Prepare for impacts of climate change
  - Create buffers between incompatible land uses (e.g., industrial or oil drilling next to residential) to minimize potential health hazards

## Barriers to Change

- State law keeps changing and could force Santa Maria to develop in a ways contrary to the desires of city residents
- Educated youth are leaving because they don't think there is long term opportunity
- Fear of new growth and development because it could lead to gentrification and displacement of existing, lower income residents.
- There is a misconception that Santa Maria is a “one industry town” focused on agriculture
- City has difficulty attracting new businesses with high-skilled jobs due to a lack of upscale residential areas, skilled workers, and entertainment
- Caltrans has jurisdictional authority over Broadway and Main Streets
- Santa Maria Valley Rail opposes the addition of new crossings, which can be a hindrance to new development and emergency response
- Annexation would require the development of infrastructure, which would be expensive
- There are threatened and endangered species habitats just outside of the City, which could slow down or limit future development and annexation
- It is expensive to develop affordable housing
- Developers often pay for infrastructure updates, which can very expensive
- The City has difficulty funding infrastructure operations and maintenance

## Engagement and Outreach Ideas

Stakeholders were asked how the General Plan Team could reach out to a diverse cross-section of the community. The following groups were identified during the interviews:

- Youth and students, including Hancock College students
- Faith community
- Community organizations
- Northern Santa Maria
- Orcutt residents
- People with disabilities
- Chamber of Commerce
- Businesses
- Farmworkers and local farmers
- Spanish speakers