

INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION

The City of San Marcos General Plan identifies the community's vision for the future and provides a framework to guide decisions on growth, development, and conservation of open space and resources in a manner consistent with the quality of life desired by residents and businesses – the people that live, work, and play in the City.

This General Plan Existing Conditions Report provides an overview of San Marcos' physical, environmental, economic, and demographic setting, as of early-2020.

City staff, the General Plan Update consultant (De Novo Planning Group), and its team of subconsultants have worked together to ensure that this is an accurate and reliable source of information. This document is intended to serve as a comprehensive reference for community members, policymakers, City staff, and the consultant team throughout the General Plan Update process.

The City's General Plan was last comprehensively updated in 2012 and the Housing Element was adopted in 2013 (in accordance with State housing law). The City of San Marcos' General Plan Update is a multi-year process that will include a comprehensive review and revision of the City's existing General Plan, which establishes a vision for the future of the City. This process also includes the preparation of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR), which investigates the possible impacts of the General Plan Update policy changes to the surrounding physical environment. This Existing Conditions Report document represents a key initial step in the multi-year process of updating the San Marcos General Plan.

This chapter provides a brief background of the City of San Marcos, summarizes the contents of this Existing Conditions Report, and provides an overview of the General Plan Update process.

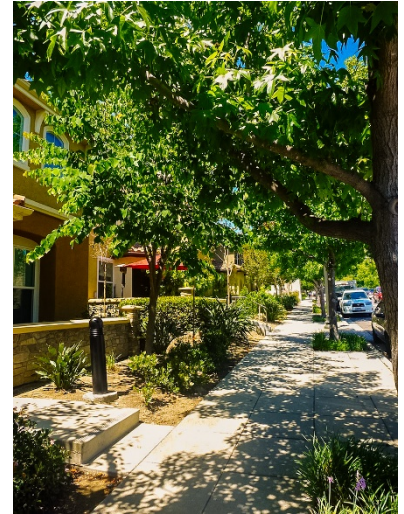


BACKGROUND

The City of San Marcos has a population of approximately 98,400, with an area of roughly 24.38 square miles (California Department of Finance, 2019). San Marcos is located in the central portion of northern San Diego County (North County), approximately 40 miles north of downtown San Diego. The City is bounded by the cities of Vista and Carlsbad to the west, the City of Escondido to the east, and unincorporated areas within the County of San Diego to the north and south. Regional access to the City is provided by State Route 78, an east/west highway that links Interstate 5 with Interstate 15, which provide north/south access to San Marcos and the greater San Diego region.

From its rural and agricultural origins, San Marcos has become one of the fastest growing cities in San Diego County with existing and future residents finding themselves drawn to the excellent quality of life and the unique character the City. The City of San Marcos was incorporated in 1963, although its settlement history dates back to the 1850s and even earlier as Rancho Vallecitos de San Marcos, a Mexican land grant given in 1840. San Marcos began experiencing meaningful growth in 1956, when the first water from the Colorado River arrived, facilitating robust development of the area. By the 1970s, San Marcos was flourishing, and had a population of approximately 17,500 by 1980. The population continued to boom over the next two decades, nearing 85,000 by 2010.

Today, San Marcos offers an interface between urban and rural living. Surrounded by foothills, it is a midsize suburban city with a family-friendly atmosphere that has become an education hub in North County, home to two places of higher learning – Palomar College and California State University San Marcos. Included in a larger trade area along the 78 Corridor, San Marcos is part of a diverse and dynamic economy priding itself on innovation. Residents of San Marcos enjoy a high quality of life with an abundance of open space and amenities.



EXISTING CONDITIONS REPORT CONTENTS

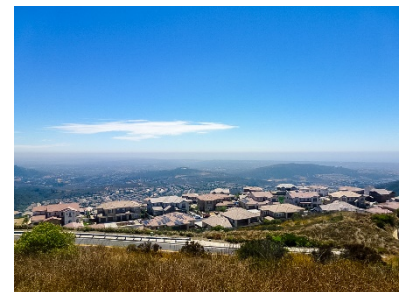
To prepare a meaningful General Plan, existing conditions must be understood and documented. The Existing Conditions Report identifies development patterns, natural resources, socioeconomic conditions, and environmental constraints in the City and identifies the regulatory environment for each topic. This report will be a resource for the City Council, Planning Commission, General Plan Advisory Committee, City staff, and the consultant team throughout the process of preparing the General Plan Update and Environmental Impact Report. The Existing Conditions Report makes extensive use of maps, graphics, and user-friendly non-technical terms to help make it accessible to the general public.

The Existing Conditions Report provides background data and will serve as a technical framework, while the General Plan will focus on goals, policies, and implementation programs. The information collected for the Existing Conditions Report will also be used as the basis for the “existing setting” sections of the General Plan EIR. The following topic areas are addressed in the Existing Conditions Report:

Chapter 1 Demographics, Land Use, and Community Character

The Demographics, Land Use, and Community Character chapter addresses the community’s demographic patterns, land use context, including issues related to the current General Plan, existing land use patterns, local planning context, and special community character and is intended to assist the General Plan Update process by providing a baseline of existing demographic and land use information. The information in this chapter provides both an historical and current perspective on land use and is intended to assist the General Plan Update process by establishing a baseline of existing land use information. This information will be used when formulating and considering amendments to the City’s current land use pattern, or when considering alternate growth and land use scenarios for the City.

For the purposes of the San Marcos General Plan Update, the “Planning Area” studied is defined as the area within the City’s jurisdictional boundary and also within its Sphere of Influence (SOI), which is the City’s probable ultimate physical boundary and service area. It is Planning Area that is included in the analysis and planning for the approximate 20-year horizon of the City’s General Plan Update. This is discussed further in Chapter 1.



Chapter 2 Transportation and Circulation

The Transportation and Circulation chapter describes the circulation network serving the City. Existing conditions are described for roadway operations, pedestrian-bicycle facilities, transit service, and multimodal operations. This chapter includes a review of relevant transportation planning documents describing the San Marcos area including the current Mobility Element. Federal, State, regional, and local regulations pertaining to traffic and circulation in San Marcos are also described.

Chapter 3 Utilities and Community Services

The Utilities and Community Services chapter describes the existing conditions and regulatory context regarding community services and utilities, including water, wastewater, drainage and flood control, education, public safety services, schools, and parks and recreational resources within the City. These facilities and services provide a framework that supports growth and development in the City. This chapter describes existing service levels, available resources, and planned expansion of services and infrastructure.

Chapter 4 Hazards, Safety, and Noise

The Hazards chapter includes a listing of key significant issues that will ultimately guide the preparation of the Safety Element of the General Plan. This chapter provides a summary of the existing setting and conditions associated with natural and man-made hazards that may pose a danger to City residents, employees, and visitors including: dangers from hazardous materials sites (i.e. landfills, superfund sites, pipelines, and sites with the potential for chemical explosion); fire hazards; aircraft hazards; flood hazards; and emergency response. Known hazardous conditions listed in available State and County databases are also described.

Additionally, this chapter includes descriptions of the characteristics of sound and noise and a description of transportation, stationary, and construction noise sources within the City's Planning Area. A description of the noise monitoring survey results, tabularized noise exposure contours, and an existing conditions noise contour map that reflects traffic and stationary noise sources are included. This section also summarizes current information on ground vibration thresholds and summarizes the existing vibration environment.



Chapter 5 Conservation and Natural Resources

The Conservation and Natural Resources chapter discusses conservation issues related to cultural and historic preservation, air quality, greenhouse gases, biological resources, geologic and mineral resources, hydrology and water quality, and visual resources in and around the City. This chapter also discusses open space as it relates to the preservation of natural resources as part of the biological resources discussion, open space associated with managed production of surface water and groundwater resources as part of the hydrology discussion, and open space associated with public health related to geologic and hydrologic hazards as part of the geologic resources and hydrology discussions, respectively. Federal, State, and local regulations that pertain to each of these topics are also described.



Chapter 6 Community Health and Wellness

The Community Health and Wellness chapter addresses a wide range of topics related to the health and well-being of City residents and workers. A community's overall health depends on many factors, including the environment in which people live and work. A healthy living environment reduces risks and facilitates healthy lifestyles. Critical indicators of healthy living environments, which will be used to develop a community health baseline, include:



- Public health indicators – vulnerable populations, asthma, obesity, diabetes, and chronic disease;
- Active lifestyle opportunities – walking and bicycling to services, and availability of recreational facilities;
- Community design – safe neighborhoods and public spaces, affordable housing, and sustainable development;
- Healthy lifestyle determinants – local foods, healthy shopping options, number of fast food restaurants, medical and mental health services; and
- Environmental quality – clean air and water.

The context of each indicator in promoting healthy communities is described and supporting information that evaluates existing conditions in San Marcos is provided. This section also includes a summary description of current efforts that the City is undertaking to promote sustainability and healthy community strategies.

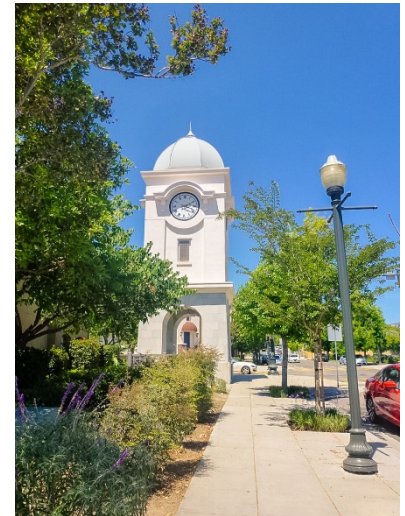
Chapter 7 Environmental Justice

The Environmental Justice chapter addresses the presence of Disadvantaged Communities (DACs) in San Marcos, in accordance with SB 1000 regulations. The chapter identifies the multiple facets of the environmental justice setting within San Marcos and provides an assessment of numerous factors that can impact environmental justice within the City.



Chapter 8 Market Conditions

The economic development discussion provides information about the City's economic trends and conditions. The purpose of this information is to describe the City, its residents, and business activity from an economic market perspective. This section discusses the current economic base of the City, business in industrial and commercial core areas, and local employment conditions. This section identifies the employment and industry sectors present in the City, jobs by employment and industry sector, and employment trends. It also addresses fiscal considerations in the City, especially as they relate to the City's current General Plan expenditures and revenues.



Chapter 9 Framework

The vast range of topics addressed in the General Plan are informed by – and respond to – existing regulatory structures at the federal, state, and local levels. This Chapter presents an overview of the myriad of programs and policies that impact the way San Marcos addresses its General Plan topics.

Chapter 10 Glossary

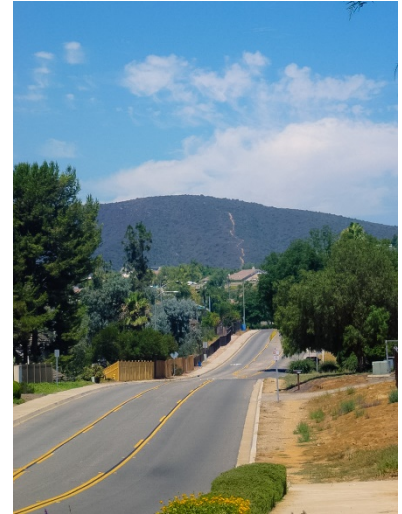
A glossary of key words and acronyms to support the Existing Conditions Report is included as Chapter 10.

GENERAL PLAN OVERVIEW

State law requires every city and county in California to prepare and maintain a planning document called a general plan. A general plan is a “constitution” or “blueprint” for the future physical and economic development of a city or county. All future planning decisions and project approvals must be consistent with the general plan, including, but not limited to: Area Plans, Master Plans, subdivisions, public works projects, public services, and zoning decisions.

A general plan has four defining features:

- **General.** As the name implies, a general plan provides general guidance for future land use, transportation, infrastructure, environmental, and resource decisions.
- **Comprehensive.** A general plan covers a wide range of social, economic, infrastructure, and natural resource issues. There are seven State mandated topics that general plans must cover, including: land use, circulation, housing, conservation, open space, safety, and noise. The San Marcos General Plan Update will include goals, policies, and implementation programs to address the seven State mandated topics.
- **Long-Range.** A general plan provides guidance on achieving a long-range vision of the future for a city or county. To reach this envisioned future, the general plan includes goals, policies, and implementation programs that address both near-term and long-term needs. The City of San Marcos General Plan Update will look ahead approximately 20 years.
- **Integrated and Coherent.** The goals, policies, and implementation programs in a general plan must present a comprehensive, unified program for development and resource conservation. A general plan uses a consistent set of assumptions and projections to assess future demands for housing, employment, public services, and infrastructure. A general plan has a coherent set of policies and implementation programs that enables citizens to understand the vision of the general plan, and enables landowners, businesses, and industry to be more certain about how future planning decisions will be made and implemented.



USING THE GENERAL PLAN

The General Plan is used by the City Council, appointed Boards, Commissions, and Committees, and City staff on a regular basis to make decisions with direct and indirect land use implications. It also provides a framework for inter-jurisdictional coordination of planning efforts among officials and staff of the City and other government agencies such as the County, State, and Federal agencies.

The General Plan is the basis for a variety of regulatory mechanisms and administrative procedures. California planning law requires consistency between the General Plan and its implementation programs. Implementation programs and regulatory systems of the General Plan include zoning and subdivision ordinances, capital improvement programs, specific plans, environmental impact procedures, and building and housing codes.

Over time, the City's population will change, its goals will be redefined, and the physical environment in which its residents live and work will be altered. In order for the General Plan to be a useful document, it must be monitored and periodically revised to respond to and reflect changing conditions and needs. As such, a general plan should be comprehensively updated approximately every 15-20 years to reflect current conditions and emerging trends.

The City's General Plan should also be user-friendly. To this end, the San Marcos General Plan Update will be divided into two primary documents: the Existing Conditions Report and the General Plan Policy Document. The Policy Document is the essence of the General Plan. It contains the goals and policies that will guide future decisions within the City. It also identifies a full set of implementation programs that will ensure the goals and policies in the General Plan are carried out.

