



# CHAPTER 7 ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE



## 7 ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

This chapter addresses environmental justice in the City of San Marcos. The chapter provides an overview of existing environmental conditions for the general population in San Marcos and describes components of the built-environment that may impact human health disproportionately. Environmental justice is related to a number of environmental categories and topics. Therefore, this section of the San Marcos General Plan Existing Conditions Report contains numerous references to other sections in this report. For example, conditions regarding transit options, bicycle facilities, and pedestrian facilities are addressed in greater detail in Section 2 (Transportation and Circulation). Parks and recreational facilities are discussed in Section 3 (Utilities and Community Services). Hazards and hazardous materials and applicable regulations are addressed in Section 4 (Hazards and Safety). Air quality and air quality regulations, as well as water quality and water quality regulations, are addressed in Section 5 (Conservation and Natural Resources). This chapter is organized into in two sections:

- 7.1 Background and Overview
- 7.2 Environmental Justice Determinants in San Marcos

### 7.1 BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

The negative effects of environmental degradation and pollution are well-documented and include severe impacts to human health and longevity, depending on the level of exposure. Within the United States, certain communities have historically been disproportionately disadvantaged by environmental threats and the negative health impacts of environmental degradation. These disproportionately disadvantaged communities include, but are not limited to, communities of color, low-income communities, members of tribal nations, and immigrant communities within the country. Increased exposure to environmental pollutants, unsafe drinking water, and contaminated facilities/structures have contributed to poorer health outcomes for these identified communities. Local and regional policies, intersectional structural inequalities, land use planning, enforcement deficiencies, and lack of community engagement and advocacy are all critical facets of the disproportionate layout of negative environmental externalities. The field of environmental justice is focused on addressing these disproportionate impacts and improving the wellness of all communities by bolstering community planning efforts and promoting the fair treatment of all people regardless of their race, color, national origin, or income.

Environmental justice practices across the United States have worked to improve the status of numerous communities and have led to landmark policy decisions. These policy decisions have effectively restricted new sources of pollution, removed existing harmful sources of pollution, and have created safer spaces for all members of the community to engage with. Effective planning and policy decisions can help ensure that equal protection from environmental hazards is prioritized for all people.

### 7.1.1 Senate Bill 1000

Senate Bill (SB) 1000, also known as the *Planning for Healthy Communities Act*, is a comprehensive State legislation that requires California cities and counties to include an Environmental Justice element or a set of environmental justice policies into their General Plans. The bill was established as a State regulation on September 24, 2016, with the goal of improving the health of California cities and counties and addressing pertinent issues of environmental justice related to community wellness. SB 1000 outlines strategies to promote the protection of sensitive land uses within the state, and simultaneously mandates that cities and counties address the needs of disadvantaged communities. Through this bill, environmental justice is a mandated consideration in all local land use planning. SB 1000 was authored by Senator Connie Leyva and co-sponsored by the California Environmental Justice Alliance (CEJA) and the Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice (CCA EJ).

To aid city and county governments and planners in meeting the requirements of SB 1000, the California Environmental Justice Alliance collaborated with planning professionals to create a strategic toolkit. The SB 1000 Implementation Toolkit serves as a guide for key stakeholders by clarifying legislation requirements and providing tools, best practices, and resources to support stakeholders as they begin to incorporate the law into local practice. To effectively meet the mandates of the bill, cities and counties must determine if their jurisdiction includes “disadvantaged communities” and/or low-income communities that are disproportionately burdened by environmental issues, and work to reduce health risks specific to these communities (these types of communities are described in detail below). If these special types of communities exist within a jurisdiction’s Planning Area, the General Plan must address the following topics in order to meet the requirements of SB 1000:

- Pollution Exposure and Air Quality
- Public Facilities
- Food Access
- Safe and Sanitary Homes
- Physical Activity
- Civil or Community Engagement
- Improvements and Programs (that Address the Needs of Disadvantaged Communities)

### 7.1.2 Determining Communities Subject to SB 1000 Requirements

The term “Disadvantaged Community” is a broad designation that may include any community that lacks appropriate resources or is confronted with any exceptional economic, health, or environmental burden. In relation to environmental justice, disadvantaged communities are typically those communities that disproportionately face the burdens of environmental hazards. California’s *Planning for Healthy Communities Act* (Senate Bill 1000) establishes a set criterion for identifying a Disadvantaged Community (DAC). The definition of a DAC for the purposes of the bill is as follows:

“An area identified by the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA) pursuant to Section 39711 of the Health and Safety Code or an area that is a low-income area that is disproportionately affected by environmental pollution and other hazards that can lead to negative health effects, exposure, or environmental degradation.”

Localities must prepare an Environmental Justice element of their General Plan (or address the topic within the context of other elements) when one or more DAC is identified within their Planning Area and/or if the City is home to a low-income area that is also disproportionately affected by certain environmental issues, as described in the excerpt from SB 1000 above. Senate Bill 535 (SB 535) provides direction on how to identify DACs and Assembly Bill 1550 (AB 1550) provides direction on how to identify low-income communities; low-income communities as identified by AB 1550 that are within ½-mile of a SB 535 DAC are low-income communities that are disproportionately affected by environmental issues, and warrant the same policy direction as a DAC within the context of a jurisdiction’s General Plan.

The California Air Resources Board (CARB) has mapped DACs (per SB 535 and in accordance with CalEPA definitions), low-income communities (per AB 1550), and low-income communities within ½ mile of a SB 535 DAC, thereby providing the most complete resource to determine whether or not the environmental justice element component of SB 1000 is relevant to a specific jurisdiction. CARB uses the CalEnviroScreen 3.0 mapping tool to identify SB 535 disadvantaged communities. CalEnviroScreen 3.0 is a science-based tool developed by the Office of Environmental Health Hazards Assessment on behalf of CalEPA that uses existing environmental, health, and socioeconomic data to rank all census tracts in California with a CalEnviroScreen score designating disadvantaged communities as the highest 25 percent scoring census tracts. Based on this score, the map identifies where DACs are located within each city. CARB has prepared its own methodology to map low-income communities in accordance with AB 1550 using data from the American Community Survey, American Fact Finder, and the California Department of Housing and Community Development.

Using the CARB mapping tool, which integrated CalEnviroScreen 3.0, it is evident that San Marcos does not have any SB 535 communities (DACs) but it does have some low-income communities, as defined by AB 1550. However, since none of the AB 1550 low-income communities are located within ½-mile of a DAC, there are no communities within the Planning Area which trigger the need for San Marcos to prepare an Environmental Justice element. For reference, the census tracts in the Planning Area that are identified as low-income communities according to AB 1550 are shown on Figure 7-1.

## 7.2 ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE DETERMINANTS IN SAN MARCOS

The CalEnviroScreen 3.0 mapping tool is the standard metric for determining the location and presence of designated disadvantaged communities within an area. CalEnviroScreen utilizes environmental justice indicators for all census tracts in California that encompass topics like health, the environment, and population characteristics. These indicators are utilized to determine which communities should be designated as disadvantaged communities under SB 1000. Based on a screening of existing census tracts within the Planning Area, **there are no census tracts that are considered CalEnviroScreen-designated Disadvantaged Communities (DAC)**. As described previously, there are seven primary environmental justice focus areas defined within the *Planning for Healthy Communities Act* that must be used in addressing the unique or compounded health risks for disadvantaged communities (Pollution Exposure and Air Quality, Public Facilities, Food Access, Safe and Sanitary Homes, Physical Activity, Community Engagement, and Improvements and Programs). The existing conditions for these focus areas within San Marcos are assessed below.

### 7.2.1 Pollution Exposure and Air Quality

Pollution exposure and air quality is an aspect of environmental quality that may disproportionately impact disadvantaged communities. This is often due to the existence and maintenance of pollution-emitting sources within close proximity to DACs. If disadvantaged communities have unequal or excessive exposure to sources of pollution including air pollution, water contamination, and hazardous waste exposure, this exposure must be addressed using appropriate planning measures. Disproportionate exposure to pollutants is linked to negative health impacts including asthma, cardiovascular illness, and other fatal conditions.

Pollution Exposure and Air Quality is a mandated environmental justice focus area under SB 1000. As mentioned, no census tract within the boundaries of San Marcos is defined as a CalEnviroScreen-designated Disadvantaged Community. This section serves to assess pollution exposure and air quality in the City. More detailed assessments of existing air quality and air quality regulations as well as water quality and water quality regulations within the City of San Marcos are addressed in Section 5 (Conservation and Natural Resources) and Section 3 (Utilities and Community Services).

#### Air Quality

As described in Section 5 of this document, existing air quality concerns within the Planning Area are related to increases of regional criteria air pollutants (e.g., ozone and particulate matter), exposure to toxic air contaminants, odors, and increases in greenhouse gas emissions contributing to climate change. The primary source of ozone (smog) pollution is motor vehicles and other mobile sources, which account for 81 percent of the ozone in the region.<sup>1</sup> Particulate matter is caused by dust, primarily dust generated from construction and grading activities, and smoke which is emitted from fireplaces, wood-burning stoves, and agricultural burning.

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<sup>1</sup> San Diego County Air Pollution Control District. 2007. Eight-Hour Ozone Attainment Plan for San Diego County.

Table 7-1 depicts the State and national attainment status for San Diego County. As evident in the table, San Diego County has a State designation of Nonattainment for O<sub>3</sub>, PM<sub>2.5</sub>, and PM<sub>10</sub> and is either Attainment or Unclassified for all other criteria pollutants. In accordance with the California Clean Air Act (CCAA), areas of the state are designated as attainment, nonattainment, or unclassified with respect to applicable standards dependent upon the status of pollutant concentrations. “Attainment” refers to instances where pollutant concentrations did not violate the applicable standard in that area. A “Nonattainment” designation indicates that a pollutant concentration violated the applicable standard at least once, excluding those occasions when a violation was caused by an exceptional event, as defined in the criteria. A detailed analysis of criteria pollutants within San Diego County is available in Section 5 (Conservation).

**Table 7-1: State and National Attainment Status**

Pollutant	State Designation	National Designation
Ozone (O <sub>3</sub> )	Nonattainment	Nonattainment (Part)
Fine Particulate Matter (PM <sub>2.5</sub> )	Nonattainment	Attainment
Respirable Particulate Matter (PM <sub>10</sub> )	Nonattainment	Attainment
Carbon Monoxide (CO)	Attainment	Maintenance (Part)
Nitrogen Dioxide (NO <sub>2</sub> )	Attainment	Attainment
Sulfur Dioxide (SO <sub>2</sub> )	Attainment	Attainment
Sulfates	Attainment	--
Lead (Pb)	Attainment	Attainment
Hydrogen Sulfide	Unclassified	--
Visibility Reducing Particles	Unclassified	--

Sources: California Air Resources Board, 2018. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

### Asthma Rates

Table 7-2 includes data from the California Health Interview Survey (CHIS) administered by the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research for asthma rates for San Marcos, San Diego County, and the state.

**Table 7-2: Asthma Rates and Hospitalizations**

Region	Ever Diagnosed with Asthma (1-17)	Ever Diagnosed with Asthma (18+)
San Marcos	11.0%	13.2%
San Diego County	12.1%	14.4%
California	14.6%	15.0%

Source: California Health Interview Survey (CHIS), 2016. AskCHIS.

As shown in Table 7-2 above, 13.2 percent of San Marcos residents 18 years of age and older have been diagnosed with asthma at some point in their lives, and 11.0 percent of residents between one and 17 years of age have been diagnosed (from the time the 2016 CHIS survey was conducted). The percentage of people diagnosed with asthma in San Marcos is slightly lower than both the countywide and statewide averages.

## **Water Quality**

There are multiple facets of a city's water quality that can impact the health of residents who rely on their water resources for sustenance and recreation. The CalEnviroScreen 3.0 mapping tool uses numerous indicators to assess water quality within an area. Adequate water quality for drinking water is critical for the safety and well-being of city residents. Most drinking water in California meets requirements for health and safety; however, natural and human sources can contaminate drinking water and often in poorer communities, residents are more likely to be exposed to contaminants in their drinking water. The CalEnviroScreen 3.0 indicator for drinking water measures the concentration of contaminants and assesses water quality violations to establish a single score. For the census tracts within the Planning Area, the indicator that assesses contaminants in drinking water was measured at low levels. Nonetheless, improvements to water systems to address contaminants in drinking water can proactively ensure the health and safety of residents of San Marcos.

Hazardous chemicals stored underground can leak into soil and pollute the nearby groundwater. In some cases, contaminated groundwater may become drinking water. In addition, people who live near contaminated groundwater may be exposed to chemicals moving from the soil into the air, which then exposes them to airborne chemicals within and near their homes. The CalEnviroScreen 3.0 data also measures groundwater threats for individual census tracts within San Marcos. The groundwater threats from CalEnviroScreen 3.0 are measured using a weighted system that assigns a numerical value to leaking underground storage tank sites within buffered distances to populated blocks of census tracts. Leaking storage tanks can contaminate the soil, air, and water. Based on this data, scores for groundwater threats in San Marcos census tracts are relatively low; however, four census tracts within the Planning Area (CT 6073020018, CT 6073020029, CT 6073019208, and CT 6073020027) are at higher risk for groundwater threats. As mentioned, contaminated groundwater sites can pollute the surrounding environment and be detrimental to surrounding neighborhoods. Identified cleanup sites may still contain groundwater threats and therefore may still negatively impact communities.

According to the CalEnviroScreen 3.0 mapping tool, there are areas within San Marcos designated as Section 303(d) impaired waterbodies. The impaired water bodies include San Marcos Lake, San Marcos Creek, and Escondido Creek. These hydrologic areas extend beyond the Planning Area boundary so not all impaired water body segments are located entirely within San Marcos and/or its SOI. The pollution sources are not currently known.

Section 5 (Conservation and Natural Resources) and Section 3 (Utilities and Community Services) include additional information related to water quality and water quality facilities.



## 7.2.2 Public Facilities

Access and availability of public facilities is an aspect of the built-environment that may disproportionately limit the opportunities of disadvantaged communities. If disadvantaged communities have unequal access to public facilities, or if a city does not contain adequate facilities for public use, DACs may be limited in their ability to access necessary key resources. Adequate planning of parks and transportation infrastructure can ensure that all communities within a city have equal access to resources. Limited access to resources as a result of inadequate public facilities can lead to reduced lifespan, poorer health outcomes, and diminished mental well-being.

Public Facilities is a mandated environmental justice focus area under SB 1000. As mentioned, no census tract within the boundaries of San Marcos is defined as a CalEnviroScreen-designated Disadvantaged Community. Regardless of the absence of DACs throughout the City, this section serves to assess the adequacy of public facilities in the City of San Marcos.

### **Parks and Cultural Centers**

Equitable access to public parks, schools, and cultural centers within a community is critical to the promotion of public health and well-being. Lack of recreational and open spaces is a significant driver of poor physical and mental health. Parks and public facilities provide opportunities for exercise, recreation, and community engagement, which are necessary to bolster resident health. Parkland within San Marcos is detailed in Section 3 Utilities and Community Services and Section 6 Community Health and Wellness.

The California Statewide Park Program (Public Resources Code § 5642) defines underserved communities as having a ratio of less than three acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. This measure identifies areas where surrounding population density may overwhelm limited park space. As described in Section 3 (Utilities and Community Services), the City has approximately 340.05 acres of existing parkland, trails, and recreational facilities. Therefore, with a 2018 population of approximately 96,834 the current distribution of park acreage per 1,000 residents is 3.51, which is slightly above the Statewide Park Program standard.

The General Plan's Parks, Recreation, and Community Health Element includes Policy PR-1.1, which reads:

*Develop and maintain a complete system of public parks and recreational amenities that provide opportunities for passive and active recreation at a minimum standard of 5 acres per 1,000 residents. Parks, trails and recreational facilities will enhance community livability, public health, and safety; should be equitably distributed throughout the City; and be responsive to the needs and interests of residents, employees, and visitors.*

With the City's park acreage at approximately 3.51 acres per 1,000 residents, the existing levels are below the adopted City goal of 5 acres per 1,000 residents.

An additional factor that determines the equitability and accessibility of parks and public facilities within an area is the distance between these public facilities and the home. If this distance to public facilities is perceived as “walkable”, residents may be more likely and willing to walk to those amenities. A distance of 1/4 mile is a commonly cited threshold for how far most people are willing to walk for neighborhood services. Conversely, a national survey of bicyclist and pedestrian attitudes and behavior by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and the Bureau of Transportation Statistics surveyed almost 10,000 people over the age of 16 and found that the average trip length was 1.3 miles. Only 5 percent of walking trips were for getting to work while 38 percent were for personal errands, 28 percent were for exercise, and 21 percent were for recreation or leisure. The validity of both the 1/4 mile, and or longer distances, may be dependent on perceptions of the built-environment, safety, time constraints, distance, as well as connectivity. According to the California State Parks’ Park Access Tool, 17 percent of residents of San Marcos live further than a half mile from a park and 32 percent of residents of San Marcos live in areas with less than 3 acres of park or open space per 1,000 residents.<sup>2</sup>

### **Public Transit**

Public transit within a city increases accessibility to resources for disadvantaged communities and ensures that those without automobile access or without the ability to operate an automobile can maintain mobility. In this way, public transit provides a way of promoting equity within the built-environment.

Within the City of San Marcos, the North County Transit District (NCTD) is the primary provider of public transit. NCTD is the consolidated transportation service agency for North San Diego County and is responsible for coordinating transit services throughout the approximate 1,020 square mile service area. NCTD provides both its BREEZE bus system and its SPRINTER light-rail system to the City of San Marcos. BREEZE Lines 304, 305, 347, 353, and 445 serve the San Marcos area while SPRINTER modern light-rail system runs from Escondido to Oceanside with stops in the City.<sup>3</sup> The North County Transit District offers programs to increase accessibility for disabled and disadvantaged community members. NCTD provides paratransit (LIFT service) for people who are unable to independently use the transit system due to a physical or mental disability. NCTD also provides a discounted BREEZE fare of \$1.25 for specific sub-groups of residents within the area, including seniors (age 65+), Medicare cardholders, and persons with disabilities.<sup>4</sup> Standard priced bus fare within the City of San Marcos as provided by NCTD is shown in Table 7-3 below.

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<sup>2</sup> California Department of Parks and Recreation. Neighborhood-Level Park Access Tool. Accessed on March 18, 2020. Available at: <http://www.parksforcalifornia.org/parkaccess>

<sup>3</sup> North County Transit District. System Map. 2020. Available at: <https://gonctd.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/NCTDSystemMap.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> North County Transit District. Accessed on March 18, 2020. Available at: <https://www.gonctd.com/fares/fares-passes/>

**Table 7-3: North County Transit District Bus Fare**

<b>BREEZE Fare</b>	<b>Adult</b>	<b>Youth</b>	<b>Senior/Disabled/Medicare</b>
<b>Base Fare</b>	\$2.50	\$2.50	\$1.25
<b>Day Pass (Regional)</b>	\$6.00	\$3.00	\$3.00
<b>30-Day Pass (Regional)</b>	\$72.00	\$23.00	\$23.00

Source: North County Transit District, 2020.

The affordability and competency of the public transit network within a city is critical for ensuring equitable resource access. Ensuring that public transit is a feasible mode of transportation within the City of San Marcos is critical for increasing accessibility for not just disadvantaged residents but for all community members. Expanding the network of bus routes to improve connectivity and maintaining discounted fare rates will promote equitable mobility within San Marcos. Additional information on public transportation within the City is available in Section 2 (Transportation and Circulation).

### **Bike Lanes**

Bike access is a facet of transportation that offers a mobility option for those residents who do not have access to a car and/or those who prefer active transportation. Increased accessibility of bike lanes may help reduce congestion, contribute to community physical health, and improve air quality. Communities that do not have available bike lanes may be disadvantaged by limited resource access and diminished opportunity for physical exercise. Maintaining facilities that allow for bicycle mobility is important for community vitality. This is especially true in disadvantaged communities where transportation via car may be less accessible.

The City's Mobility Element describes an extensive network of Class I, II, and III bike lanes that are proposed for the City to supplement existing bike lanes. The outline for proposed bike paths within the Mobility Element offers a bicycle circulation network that provides access to bike paths for the entire City of San Marcos. These improvements include increased connectivity to the residential areas throughout the City. More detailed information on the existing bike lanes and proposed improvements can be found in Section 2 (Transportation and Circulation).

### **7.2.3 Food Access**

Ensuring adequate food access is challenging in many communities in California. Some communities within California cities and counties have reduced access to adequate and/or healthy food. Often, low-income areas may lack healthy food options or adequate supermarkets. An inability to access nutritious foods can lead to poor health outcomes in disadvantaged communities. Food insecurity, or the uncertainty of having adequate food, is especially harmful for children and pregnant women who are most in need of nutrient-rich foods. Communities that are most often impacted by food insecurity include low-income communities and communities of color.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Elsheikh, E. and N. Barhoum. 2013. Structural Racialization and Food Insecurity in the United States. U.N. Human Rights Committee on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Food Access is a mandated environmental justice focus area under SB 1000. As mentioned, no census tract within the boundaries of San Marcos is defined as a CalEnviroScreen-designated Disadvantaged Community. Regardless of the absence of DACs within the City, this section serves to assess the existing conditions of food accessibility in San Marcos.

### **Food Insecurity**

Food insecurity is the uncertainty about the availability or adequacy of nutritional and safe foods. Based on the available USDA food security data and data from the American Community Survey, Feeding America estimates the number of food insecure people within a given county. These estimates are presented in the Feeding America *Map the Meal Gap* report. Feeding America estimated that the number of food insecure individuals in San Diego County was 360,530, with a food insecurity rate of 11.0% for the year 2017. The state estimate for these same measures was 11.0%. Therefore, the rate of food insecurity within San Diego County is equal to the rate of food insecurity within California as a whole.

Of the food insecure population within San Diego County, 75% were from households which were below the federal poverty threshold used for nutrition assistance programs and were therefore eligible for food assistance from the federal government<sup>6</sup>. These residents who qualify for federal nutrition assistance programs can utilize assistance at any store that accepts WIC and SNAP purchases. Furthermore, the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research and the California Health Interview Survey (CHIS) reported that 8.7% of adults in San Marcos are food insecure due to low income. In comparison, the same measure for the county is 6.1% and for the state, 7.0%<sup>7</sup>. Based on the data from CHIS, it is evident that the San Marcos food insecurity rate is slightly above the average for the county and for cities in California.

Living in poverty increases the likelihood of food insecurity as a lack of funds can make food unaffordable and therefore inaccessible. The UCLA Center for Health Policy Research and CHIS reported that within California the percentage of adults (age 18+) living in poverty was 13.7% in 2016. For the City of San Marcos, the percentage of adults (age 18+) living in poverty was 14.6%, and for San Diego County, 12.5 percent.<sup>8</sup> The poverty rate in San Marcos is higher than both the county and the State, which contributes directly to the number of food insecure residents in San Marcos.

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6 Feeding America, Map the Meal Gap 2017. Available at:

<https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2017/overall/california/county/san-diego>

7 California Health Interview Survey (CHIS). 2016. AskCHIS. Available at: [http://askchisne.ucla.edu/ask/\\_layouts/ne/dashboard.aspx#/](http://askchisne.ucla.edu/ask/_layouts/ne/dashboard.aspx#/). Accessed March 19, 2020.

8 California Health Interview Survey (CHIS). 2016. AskCHIS. Available at: [http://askchisne.ucla.edu/ask/\\_layouts/ne/dashboard.aspx#/](http://askchisne.ucla.edu/ask/_layouts/ne/dashboard.aspx#/). Accessed March 19, 2020.

## Food Access

In addition to the ability to afford food, the ability to access healthy and nutritious food in the surrounding environment is also critical to resident well-being. The USDA developed a *Food Access Research Atlas* that identifies “food deserts” in the United States at the census tract level. The 2008 U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Bill defined a food desert as an “*area in the United States with limited access to affordable and nutritious food, particularly such an area composed of predominantly lower income neighborhoods and communities.*” Based on this definition, the USDA data shows that there are no census tracts located within or partially within the Planning Area that are flagged as food deserts and all residents residing within the Planning Area have adequate access to grocery stores. A food desert designation is based on consideration that a census tract is simultaneously low-income and has a significant number of the population more than 1 mile (urban areas) or more than 10 miles (rural areas) from the nearest supermarket, supercenter, or large grocery store.<sup>9</sup>

As well as the proximity of grocery and food sources within an area, the types of food sources available are important for determining adequacy of food access. The USDA *Food Access Research Atlas* data shows that there were 623 (2014) grocery stores and 47 farmers’ markets across San Diego County (2016). In addition, the same data set shows that the County had 2,632 fast-food restaurants as of 2014.<sup>10</sup>

### 7.2.4 Safe and Sanitary Homes

The condition of the housing stock in a community may have negative impacts on the well-being of the community residents. These health impacts stem from issues such as poor indoor air quality, toxic building materials, exposure to climate variation such as excessive heat or cold, improper ventilation, and structural insecurity. Unsafe housing conditions can be a result of the age of the dwelling structure, which increases the likelihood of incorporation of dangerous materials like lead and asbestos, that have significant negative health impacts.<sup>11</sup> Disadvantaged communities often have a larger amount of older units within their housing stock, and therefore, residents of these communities are more likely to be exposed to the harmful health impacts that are associated with older housing. Other factors that can contribute to unsafe housing conditions include improper regulation and overcrowding. Ensuring the safety and sanitation of housing stock within a community ensures that there are proper living conditions for all residents.

Safe and Sanitary Homes is a mandated environmental justice focus area under SB 1000. As mentioned, no census tract within the boundaries of the City of San Marcos is defined as a CalEnviroScreen-designated Disadvantaged Community. Regardless of the absence of DACs

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<sup>9</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. Food Access Research Atlas. Accessed on March 18, 2020. Available at: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/go-to-the-atlas/>

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. Food Access Research Atlas. Accessed on March 18, 2020. Available at: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/go-to-the-atlas/>

<sup>11</sup> California Environmental Justice Alliance. SB 1000 Implementation Toolkit. October 2017.

throughout the City, this section serves to assess the existing conditions of home safety and home sanitation in San Marcos.

### **Housing Burden**

Housing affordability is an important determinant of health and well-being. Residents of low-income households with high housing costs may suffer adverse health impacts. Although not considered a disadvantaged community, Census Tract 6073020018 has a high poverty percentile (77 percent) and a moderate housing burden percentile of 61 percent.<sup>12</sup> This indicates that within CT 6073020018 many of the households are both low-income households and are simultaneously burdened by high housing costs. The CalEnviroScreen measure for poverty is elevated slightly above the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile for this census tract and may indicate a need for City officials to address poverty concerns within its boundaries.

### **Age of Housing Stock**

The age of a housing unit is a primary factor in the building conditions of the dwelling unit; therefore, the age of a community's housing stock is a good indicator of the condition of the housing stock. Data from the 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) indicates that a majority (68.0 percent) of units within the City of San Marcos were built between 1980 and 2019, with the highest percentage of units being built between 2000 and 2009 (29.5 percent).<sup>13</sup> According to the CDC, a substantial amount of existing U.S. housing regulations and bans related to the use of toxic materials were developed in the 1970s, including regulations on the use of lead paint and asbestos.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, older housing units are more likely to have structural and material damage. The relatively young age of San Marcos's housing stock indicates that overall housing conditions are good.

### **2020 Housing Conditions**

In preparing the 2021-2029 Housing Element, City staff assessed the then existing housing conditions for San Marcos. **According to the 2020 Department of Finance (DOF) E-5 Report**, the majority (18,964 units or 58.4 percent) of the existing housing stock in the City consisted of single-family homes. Multi-family developments of two or more units represented the next largest segment (10,167 units or 31.3 percent), and with several mobile home parks dispersed throughout the City, mobile homes comprised the remainder (3,329 units or 10.3 percent).<sup>15</sup>

According to the existing Housing Element, the housing stock in San Marcos is relatively new. The US Census 2015-2019 American Community Service data indicates that most of the housing in the City is less than 30 years old; 55.2 percent of the housing units have been built since 1990 (meaning they are no more than 30 years old), and nearly all the City's housing stock has been

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12 California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA). 2020. CalEnviroScreen 3.0. Available at: <https://oehha.ca.gov/calenviroscreen/report/calenviroscreen-30>

13 U.S. Census Bureau. 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates

14 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Environmental Health. 2020. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/nceh>

15 City of San Marcos, 2021-2029 Housing Element; U.S. Census 2015-2019 ACS.

built since 1970 (93.4 percent of units). Due to the relatively young age of the City’s housing stock, overall housing conditions are good. Although the U.S. Census does not include statistics on housing condition based upon observations, it includes statistics that correlate closely with substandard housing conditions such as lack of plumbing or kitchen facilities (79 units or 0.3% of all units).<sup>16</sup>

As part of the 2021-2029 Housing Element Update, the City conducted a community survey regarding the quality of the City’s housing stock. When asked to rate the physical condition of the residence they lived in, the majority (59 percent) responded that their home was in excellent condition while 35 percent indicated that their home is showing signs of minor deferred maintenance. Additionally, the City’s Planning Division and Code Compliance Division have identified four areas of the City which appear to have a significant amount of housing that is in need of major repair. These areas include: the Richmar neighborhood, Rancho Santa Fe Road West in the vicinity of 9th and Grandon, around Hollencrest near DeLeon, and Mission Road around El Tigre.

**Overcrowding**

Overcrowding within a housing unit is a primary cause of unsafe housing conditions. The World Health Organization notes that overcrowding is a potential health risk as it contributes to the transmission of disease by creating unsanitary conditions. A housing unit is considered overcrowded if there is more than one person per habitable room (excluding bathrooms, kitchens, hallways, and porches) and severely overcrowded if there are more than 1.5 persons per room. Overcrowding contributes to increases in traffic within a neighborhood, accelerates deterioration of homes and infrastructure, can overburden utilities and services such as sewers, and results in a shortage of onsite parking. Table 7-4, taken from the City’s Housing Element, shows overcrowding data for San Marcos. This data was pulled from the U.S. Census 2015-2019 ACS.

**Table 7-4: Overcrowding by Tenure (2011)**

Persons per room	Owner		Renter		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<b>1.00 or less</b>	18,059	97.4%	9,753	86.8%	27,812	93.4%
<b>1.01 to 1.50</b>	347	1.9%	1,116	9.9%	1,463	4.9%
<b>1.51 or more</b>	131	0.7%	365	3.2%	496	1.7%
<b>Total</b>	18,537	100.0%	11,234	100.0%	29,771	100.0%
<b>Overcrowded</b>	478	2.6%	1,481	13.2%	1,959	6.6%

Source: City of San Marcos 2013-2021 Housing Element; U.S. Census, 2015-2019 ACS.

The extent of overcrowding varies significantly by income, type, and size of household. Generally, very low- and low-income households and large families are disproportionately affected by overcrowding.<sup>17</sup> Overcrowding is typically more prevalent among renters than among owners. 13

<sup>16</sup> City of San Marcos 2021-2029 Housing Element; U.S. Census 2015-2019 ACS.

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. Overpayment and Overcrowding. Available at <https://www.hcd.ca.gov/community-development/building-blocks/housing-needs/overpayment-overcrowding.shtml>

percent of renter households experienced overcrowding in 2019, compared to three percent for owner households.

## **Policies**

The existing San Marcos Housing Element was adopted in 2021 and contains policies that are focused on improvements, maintenance, and development of housing within San Marcos utilizing numerous factors to determine housing need and adequacy.<sup>18</sup> The Housing Element also includes policies to promote the construction of housing that is affordable to all income levels and policies to ensure healthy and safe housing, such as addressing the presence of toxic building materials. The City has taken a proactive approach within the Housing Element to ensure the safety and sanitation of housing for all residents.

### **7.2.5 Physical Activity and Fitness**

Residents of disadvantaged communities are often more likely to have negative health outcomes. Increased physical activity levels are associated with a decreased risk for numerous health conditions and chronic illnesses. The built-environment in DACs can often be limited by land use planning and lack of investment, leaving less opportunities for formal and informal physical activity. Increasing the opportunity for physical activity within a community can work to positively impact the health of residents.

Physical Activity is a mandated environmental justice focus area under SB 1000. As mentioned, no census tract within the boundaries of the City of San Marcos is defined as a CalEnviroScreen-designated Disadvantaged Community. Regardless of the absence of DACs throughout the City, this section serves to assess the existing conditions of physical activity and fitness in San Marcos. More detailed information on physical activity and fitness can be found in Section 6 (Community Health and Wellness).

### **Physical Fitness and Health Demographics**

Lack of physical activity is a major risk factor for many diseases and causes of death, including heart disease, obesity, mental health conditions, diabetes, stroke, and Alzheimer's. The California Health Interview Survey (CHIS) identifies health-related indicators for the City. According to the report, the obesity rate for adults (age 18+) in the City of San Marcos was 24.3 percent in 2016, which was slightly lower than the San Diego County rate of 25.0 percent. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) maintain that obesity is a major risk factor for additional illnesses and chronic disease. The physical activity levels within the City of San Marcos, measured by the number of adult residents (age 18+) who walk a minimum of 150 minutes per week, was lower than the same measure for San Diego County at 38.4 percent and 41.2 percent, respectively, in 2016.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> City of San Marcos. 2021-2029 Housing Element. City of San Marcos General Plan.

<sup>19</sup> California Health Interview Survey (CHIS). 2016. AskCHIS. Available at: [http://askchisne.ucla.edu/ask/\\_layouts/ne/dashboard.aspx#/](http://askchisne.ucla.edu/ask/_layouts/ne/dashboard.aspx#/). Accessed March 19, 2020.



Presence and prevalence of chronic disease within a community may be a result of the physical environment in which that community lives. As shown in Table 7-5 below, for two chronic disease indicators (diabetes prevalence and obesity rates) the City of San Marcos had statistically lower percentages of residents with health problems compared to the same indicators for San Diego County.

**Table 7-5: Health Indicators for San Marcos and San Diego County**

Indicator	San Marcos	San Diego County
Asthma prevalence (18+)	13.2%	14.4%
Diabetes prevalence (18+)	6.9%	8.2%
Heart disease prevalence (18+)	5.9%	6.2%
Obesity prevalence (bmi > 30)(18+)	24.3%	25.0%

Source: California Health Interview Survey (CHIS), 2016. AskCHIS.

### Physical Fitness Testing

Another indicator of physical activity and fitness for children and teens is the California Department of Education's Physical Fitness Testing (PFT) Program, which is administered by local school districts to all fifth, seventh, and ninth graders annually.<sup>20</sup> The test assesses six major fitness areas, including aerobic capacity (cardiovascular endurance), body composition (percentage of body fat), abdominal strength and endurance, trunk strength and flexibility, upper body strength and endurance, and overall flexibility. The PFT Program provides a statewide snapshot of physical fitness. As a caveat, the data is collected at the local school district level by people who are not health professionals and tests for each of the fitness areas are difficult to administer consistently. Consequently, the PFT results are prone to some margin of error over time and from place to place.

California Physical Fitness Test (PFT) results for the San Marcos Unified District and statewide for the 2018-19 academic year are shown in Table 7-6.

**Table 7-6: Student Physical Fitness Testing (PFT) Results (2018-2019)**

Physical Fitness Area	San Marcos Unified District % within Healthy Fitness Zone			Statewide % within Healthy Fitness Zone		
	Gr. 5	Gr. 7	Gr. 9	Gr. 5	Gr. 7	Gr. 9
Aerobic Capacity	74.1%	71.2%	69.2%	60.2%	61.0%	60.0%
Body Composition	65.3%	65.4%	65.6%	58.7%	60.0%	62.2%
Abdominal Strength	76.2%	76.6%	71.8%	69.1%	77.1%	81.2%
Trunk Extension Strength	83.1%	82.4%	88.5%	83.8%	86.0%	89.3%
Upper Body Strength	72.1%	66.1%	69.7%	60.8%	62.9%	68.5%
Flexibility	70.3%	78.0%	87.4%	70.4%	78.5%	83.1%

<sup>20</sup> California Department of Education. Physical Fitness Testing. Accessed March 19, 2020. Accessible at: <https://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/PhysFitness/PFTDN/Summary2011.aspx?r=0&t=2&y=2018-19&c=37737910000000&n=0000>

*Source: California Department of Education, Physical Fitness Testing (PFT) Results (2018-2019).*

As shown in Table 7-6 above, the PFT results for 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> graders in the San Marcos Unified District for the 2018-19 academic year show that for more than half of the fitness indicators, local children surpass the statewide averages. The percentages for Abdominal Strength, Trunk Extension Strength, and Flexibility for San Marcos Unified District are slightly lower than the same statewide measures. This may indicate a need for targeted improvement of programs and/or environmental factors to facilitate a healthier community for school-age children.

### **Active Transportation Use**

Active transportation is any form of transportation that is non-motorized. The use of active transportation during a daily commute increases physical activity levels. Increased physical activity has positive health benefits, including mortality risk reduction, disease prevention, cardiorespiratory fitness, and metabolic health. Disadvantaged communities often have disproportionately poorer health outcomes; therefore, increasing opportunities for active transportation within a city can improve the overall health outcomes of disadvantaged residents.

The 2017 American Community Survey (ACS) reports that the majority of workers living in San Marcos (79.7%) drive to work, 8.2% carpool, 1.6% take public transit, and 10.5% use some other mode of getting to work. Other modes of transportation include walking, bicycling, or working from home. Of those who utilize other modes of transportation to get to work, 2.4% walk and only 0.3% use a bicycle.<sup>21</sup> Based on this data, it is clear that active transportation use within San Marcos is not very prevalent. Utilizing active transportation is an effective way of engaging in physical exercise and can be a factor in improving community health outcomes in general. More details on active transportation use and bicycle facilities can be found in Section 2 (Transportation and Circulation).

### **Community Engagement**

An important aspect of planning for environmental justice is the development of effective policies and programs that enable all residents to participate in local decision-making. Disadvantaged communities can often be excluded from decision-making when officials and policies do not focus on involving these communities in a strategic manner. SB 1000 emphasizes that community engagement must be promoted in a local jurisdiction through the development of objectives and policies that seek to involve members of DACs specifically. By involving and engaging DACs in decision-making processes, policymakers can more effectively meet the needs of these community members. Disadvantaged communities often have culturally-specific needs that should be made a priority within local policy to ensure community success. These needs are often distinct from those of the general population. The U.S. EPA Environmental Justice Policy requires the “... *meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies.*” The presentation of appropriate opportunities for those who are low-income, minorities, and linguistically isolated to engage in local decision-making will help ensure that environmental justice issues are identified and resolved. In addition, community programs that address the needs of

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<sup>21</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates. Available at: <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF>

disadvantaged communities are critical to ensuring environmental justice is achieved for these communities within a city.

Promoting community engagement and programs for DACs is a mandated environmental justice focus area under SB 1000. As mentioned, no census tract within the City of San Marcos is defined as a CalEnviroScreen-designated Disadvantaged Community. Regardless of the absence of DACs, this section serves to assess the levels of civil or community engagement in San Marcos.

### **Levels of Civil or Community Engagement**

At the local level, there were 1,825,237 total registered voters in San Diego County 15 days before the presidential primary election on March 3, 2020, and 833,638 total votes cast. This puts the voter turnout rate in San Diego County for the 2020 election at 45.7 percent. Of the voters registered within San Diego County, 47,266 of the registered voters were from the City of San Marcos.<sup>22</sup>

In 2017, there were 57,606 people of voting age living within the City of San Marcos according to the U.S. Census Bureau.<sup>23</sup> This indicates that approximately 82 percent of people of voting age in San Marcos registered to vote in the 2020 election. It should be noted that not all residents of voting age are eligible to vote in the state of California. Furthermore, voter turnout rates typically rise significantly on years when there is a presidential election.

Voter registration and participation are important for ensuring that all residents within a city can effectively play a role in local and regional decision-making. Lack of voter participation can occur for numerous reasons, including accessibility-based reasons. Some accessibility-based reasons for lower voter participation include lack of transportation, inability to vote due to work schedule, or lack of information. These causes of lower voter participation can often disproportionately impact minorities such as low-income residents, disabled residents, and ethnic minorities with language barriers. City programs can be established by policymakers that increase accessibility for residents within a city. The City of San Marcos may choose to explore opportunities and programs to increase voter participation and thereby ensure that all residents are equally represented in policy decisions.

### **Community Programs**

A critical aspect of planning to achieve environmental justice is prioritizing projects and policies that directly benefit disadvantaged communities. As stated previously, in San Marcos there are no areas within the General Plan Planning Area designated as DACs; however, cities and counties should nonetheless incorporate programs and policies into their planning efforts to promote environmentally just planning.

The San Marcos General Plan includes a variety of goals and policies to support disadvantaged communities and environmental justice issues through policies aimed at improving the transportation network to accommodate bicycle and pedestrian travel, supplying the City's

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22 County of San Diego Registrar of Voters. Report of Registration – State Reporting Districts. Run date: February 5, 2020. Available at: [https://www.sdvote.com/content/dam/rov/en/reports/current\\_reg\\_report.pdf](https://www.sdvote.com/content/dam/rov/en/reports/current_reg_report.pdf)

23 U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey. 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. Available at: <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF>

residents with high-quality parks, recreational opportunities, and community services and facilities, and promoting air and water quality throughout the Planning Area.

Furthermore, the San Marcos 2021-2029 Housing Element contains policies that are focused on supporting low- and moderate-income families and special needs families and individuals. The Housing Element also includes policies to promote the construction of housing that is affordable to all income levels and policies to ensure healthy and safe housing. The City has taken a proactive approach within the Housing Element to ensure the safety and sanitation of housing for all residents.

## 7.2.6 References

California Department of Education. Physical Fitness Testing. Accessible at: <https://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/PhysFitness/PFTDN/Summary2011.aspx?r=0&t=2&y=2018-19&c=37737910000000&n=0000>

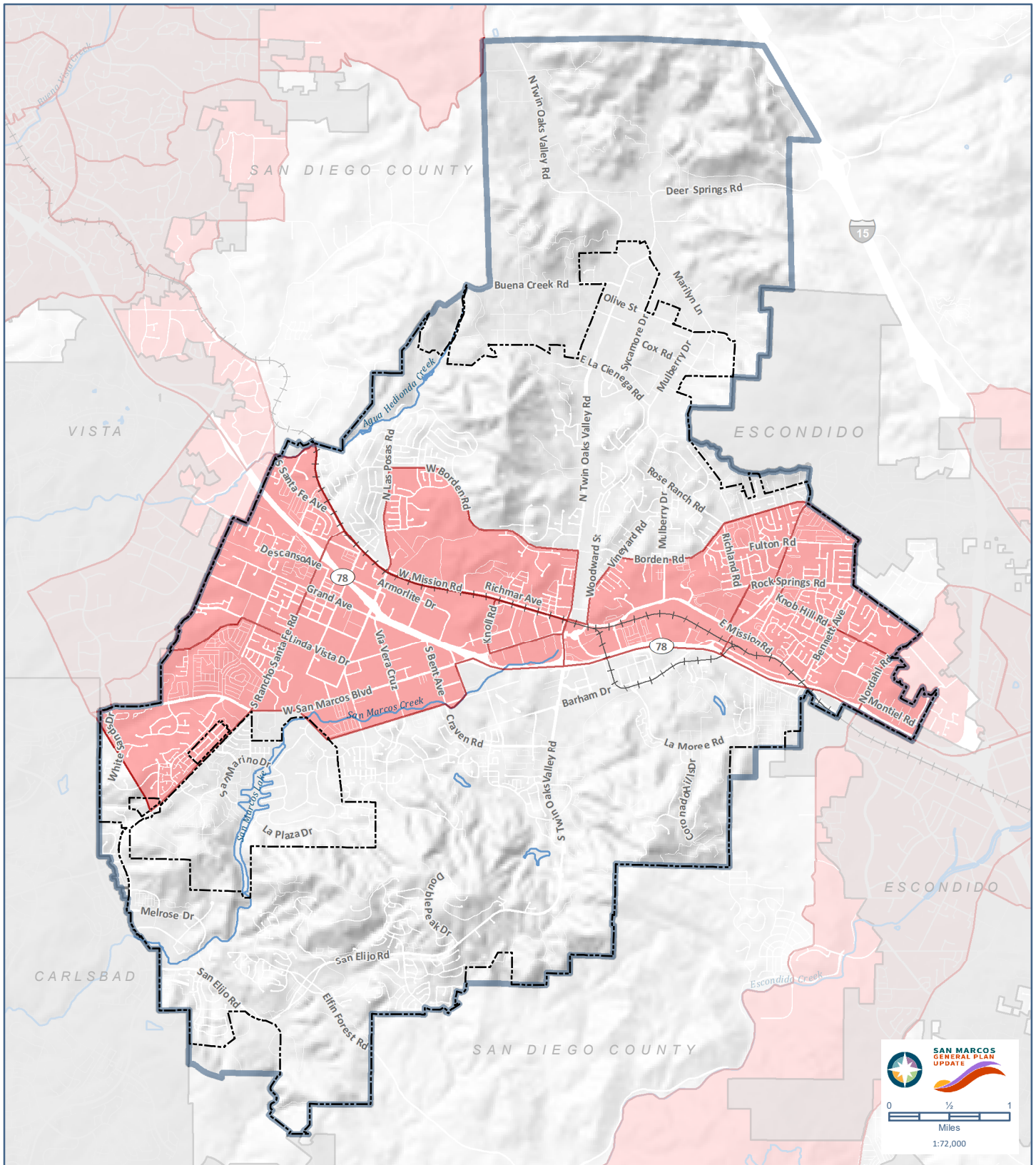
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University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) Center for Health Policy Research and the California Health Interview Survey (CHIS). Available at: <http://askchisne.ucla.edu/ask/layouts/ne/dashboard.aspx#/>



**LEGEND**

- City of San Marcos
- Planning Area/Sphere of Influence
- Neighboring City
- Unincorporated San Diego County
- Lake or Pond
- Creek
- Railroad
- AB 1550 Low Income Community

**SAN MARCOS  
GENERAL PLAN  
UPDATE**

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Miles  
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**FIGURE 7.1**

**AB 1550  
LOW-INCOME  
COMMUNITIES**

Data sources: AB 1550 Low Income Communities, TCC; City of San Marcos; SANGIS; CalAtlas. Map date: April 16, 2020.

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