

GPAC MEMORANDUM

TO: San Marcos General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC)

FROM: De Novo Planning Group

SUBJECT: General Plan Advisory Committee Environmental Justice

DATE: August 18, 2022

The August 18, 2022 GPAC meeting will focus on the topic of Environmental Justice (EJ). This meeting packet includes specific reading materials related to this topic. Senate Bill 1000 (SB 1000), the Planning for Healthy Communities Act, was signed into law by Governor Jerry Brown on September 24, 2016, mandating that cities and counties with disadvantaged communities (defined in a later section of this Memorandum) adopt an environmental justice (EJ) element or integrate EJ goals, objectives, and policies into other elements of their General Plans, with the intent to create healthier cities and counties by protecting sensitive land uses and prioritizing the needs of disadvantaged communities. While the City of San Marcos does not have any disadvantaged communities (as defined in California Government Code Section 65302(h)(4)(A)) within its Planning Area and is therefore not required to prepare an EJ element, the topic of environmental justice still warrants special attention. To demonstrate the City's committed to addressing issues of environmental justice at the local level, the City prepared and adopted a new EJ element in November 2021 as part of its focused General Plan Update to support the long-term needs of our community's most vulnerable populations. With the comprehensive update to its General Plan, the City can revisit this important topic and ensure that all components of the General Plan work together to support the City's EJ goals and policies.

According to the California Office of Planning and Research, "EJ provided, and continues to provide, a specific lens through which to advance equity and protect human health. While the EJ movement traditionally focused on environmental contamination and degradation, the scope has broadened over time to include additional policy topics such as food access and physical activity. The State of California has adopted several laws and programs that promote EJ and incorporate EJ into decision-making. Currently, the State defines EJ in section 65040.12(e) of California Government Code as "the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of people of all races, cultures, incomes, and national origins with respect to the development, adoption, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies."

REQUIRED READING

[Existing Conditions Report Environmental Justice](#)

[OPR General Plan Guidelines for Environmental Justice Element](#)

[Current General Plan Environmental Justice Element](#)

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE 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.

WHAT IS A “DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITY”

Per California Government Code Section 65302(h)(4)A):

A Disadvantaged Community (DAC) is “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.”

At the time of this Element’s adoption, there are no DACs within the San Marcos Planning Area. This determination will be regularly evaluated and updated, as necessary. More information is available in the Environmental Justice Element Background Report.

RELATIONSHIP TO CURRENT GENERAL PLAN ELEMENTS

The City’s Current Environmental Justice Element addresses the following priorities:

1. Reduce Pollution Exposure and Improve Air Quality
2. Promote Access to Public Facilities
3. Healthy Food Access
4. Safe and Sanitary Homes
5. Promote Physical Activity
6. Promote Civil Engagement (i.e., Community Engagement)

The Current San Marcos General Plan addresses all of these topics within the context of other Elements, especially in the Land Use and Community Design, Mobility, Conservation and Open Space, Parks, Recreation and Community Health, and Housing Elements. The City’s Current Environmental Justice Element serves to highlight those existing policies contained in other Elements of the Current General Plan as they relate to environmental justice by

duplicating within the EJ Element, within the priority areas identified above. In addition, new policies were included to supplement the City's existing policy direction.

It is expected that as part of the comprehensive General Plan Update, the EJ Element will be updated to reflect the City's new complementary policy direction by duplicating, where appropriate, goals, policies and actions from other Elements that support environmental justice objectives. Moreover, it is expected that additional goals, policies, and actions will be developed to further emphasize this topic, particularly in light of potential new growth patterns allowed under an amended Land Use Map. The six topics identified above (i.e., reduced pollution exposure, access to public facilities, etc.) are still expected to serve as the policy framework, in accordance with the spirit of SB 1000.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What types of environmental conditions impact the San Marcos community most significantly and make it difficult for residents to have good health and living conditions? Examples might include:
 - Air pollution from vehicles on streets and freeways
 - Air pollution from industrial businesses and activities
 - Water pollution in waterways or storm drainage areas
 - Access to safe and/or affordable drinking water
 - Fumes, noise, and/or chemicals from current industrial businesses or gas stations
 - Pollution at the location of past businesses
 - Illegal dumping of trash and other items
- How easy is it for San Marcos residents to access:
 - Health care services like doctors, dentists, and hospitals
 - Libraries, museums, and other cultural centers
 - Affordable childcare facilities
 - Healthy food choices
 - Areas to engage in physical activity (parks, trails, open space areas)
- Are there specific areas of the City/neighborhoods where access to the above facilities and services is more difficult?
- What housing challenges are the most prevalent in San Marcos? Examples might include:
 - Overpayment (spending 30% or more of household income on housing costs)
 - Overcrowding (more than 1 person per room in a home, excluding bathrooms and kitchens)
 - Affordability of housing
 - Lack of a range of housing choices
 - Unsafe or unhealthy conditions (things like poor ventilation, air quality, mold)
 - Deferred or delayed maintenance of critical household facilities (HVAC, electrical plumbing, etc.)
- How can the City further encourage the participation of all residents from all backgrounds to participate in the planning process and provide feedback on local issues?