

# Public Health and Equity Policy Framework

## Introduction

The City of Palmdale has embarked on a comprehensive update to its General Plan, called “Envision Palmdale 2045: A Complete Community,” to create a forward-looking document that will serve as the blueprint for the City’s vision through the year 2045. The goals, policies, and actions in the 2045 General Plan will serve as a compass for decision-makers and will shape future City plans and actions. This revised document will replace the 1993 General Plan.

This public health and equity policy framework is an interim step in the General Plan Update process prior to drafting the elements. This framework highlights key outcomes and performance metrics and includes a draft policy framework that includes goals, policies, and implementation activities. This policy framework was developed by compiling feedback from community members, General Plan Advisory Committee members, Planning Commission, and City Council. This framework synthesizes critical issues and policy approaches by describing key strengths, and opportunities, challenges, and threats.

## Where We Are Now

The following section highlights strengths, opportunities, challenges, and threats that have been identified by the planning team throughout the course of the General Plan update process, as well as input heard from community members, that have shaped the public health and equity policy framework.

- **Strengths.** Community members exude pride and appreciation for the open space, mountain views, and relatively good air quality in Palmdale. Compared to the rest of California, Palmdale has relatively less exposure to environmental pollution such as lower levels of particulate matter and less toxic releases from polluting facilities. Moreover, Palmdale’s comparatively affordable housing provide residents with housing security and allows residents a chance to achieve homeownership. Palmdale is also home to some of the most innovative research and development in the Aerospace industry with Air Force Plant 42, which provides economic opportunity and supplies high quality STEM jobs for the region.

- **Opportunities.** Palmdale is experiencing a unique point in its history; several long-range major transportation improvements are planned, which will make travel to Palmdale faster and more efficient. This General Plan provides the opportunity to promote an inclusive economic, educational, and housing strategy that focuses on expanding access to jobs with prevailing wages, strengthening trade schools and job training programs, and providing more affordable housing opportunities for residents of all ages in the City.
- **Challenges.** While the City has many strengths and opportunities, several public health and equity challenges exist.
  - While various food stores exist in Palmdale, access to fresh produce and healthy food is limited in certain neighborhoods, especially along the southern and eastern boundaries of the City.
  - In Palmdale, many low-income families and households of color face significant housing cost-burden, which forces families to choose between housing and other important expenses, such as healthcare, prescription medicines, and healthy food.
  - Moreover, multiple indices indicate there are disproportionately higher health impacts in low-income communities and communities of color within Palmdale.
  - Palmdale residents identified an ongoing division between East and West Palmdale and an inequitable distribution of public services, including quality schools, parks, and recreational programs that influence health and quality of life.
  - Palmdale has an average life expectancy that is approximately four years less than the countywide average, and nearly half of the City's population (48 percent) is under 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level, which is a significantly higher poverty rate than the countywide average (38 percent).
- **Threats.** While Palmdale's geographic location provides many opportunities, it also comes with inherent threats.
  - The entire Antelope Valley has high levels of ozone pollution, which is a contributing factor to the high rates of respiratory diseases found among Palmdale residents, especially vulnerable populations such as children and older adults. For example, asthma is a chronic respiratory condition that impacts all areas of the City, and Palmdale has significantly higher rates of asthma diagnosis and asthma-related emergency room visits than the respective countywide and statewide rates.
  - There are also several state and federal high-volume roadways that present localized air quality threats for nearby residents, especially vulnerable populations.
  - Furthermore, large swaths of the City do not have existing infrastructure, which contributes to affordable housing development constraints. The City's discontinuous circulation pattern also creates unsafe conditions for pedestrians and non-motorized forms of travel, limits walkability, and it has led to high rates of pedestrian and vehicle collisions.

## What We Heard About This Topic

The General Plan Update (GPU) incorporates stakeholder input and feedback from the residents and property owners of Palmdale. At various points, comments were made regarding public health and equity, including:

- Community members expressed a desire for a more diverse employment base with prevailing wages that supports residents working in Palmdale and decreases commuting.
- Employers, community members, elected officials, and local organizations expressed interest in attracting a new four-year university to educate and retain Palmdale youth, particularly for higher paying jobs in the aerospace industry.
- Residents emphasized the need to promote housing diversity, especially mixed-use development and affordable housing, as well as programs that establish pathways for existing residents to exit homelessness, to achieve homeownership, or to age in place depending on their individual needs.
- Healthcare workers and community members declared a need for additional hospital/medical facilities and care providers, particularly mental healthcare providers, across the City to support existing residents, particularly as they age.
- Residents shared interest in an expanded and improved open space trail system with connections to existing and planned residential neighborhoods.
- Residents highlighted the need for better dispersed retail and services throughout Palmdale, noting some travel over 15 minutes to reach retail and services.
- Community members expressed a need for expanded transportation options across Palmdale that provide safe routes for all residents, especially safe routes to school for children and youth, and safe routes for seniors.
- Residents expressed a desire for an expanded tree canopy, particularly allergy-friendly vegetation, to improve citywide air quality and decrease asthma rates.
- Community members expressed a desire for a robust and healthy food system that promotes food access and addresses food insecurity through farmers markets, community gardens, supermarkets, and food assistance programs.

# Where We Want To Be in the Future

## Vision Themes and Guiding Principles

Through the first phase of community engagement, the General Plan team explored how individuals envision the future of Palmdale, what makes it unique and special, and what things residents and businesses would like to change. Summarized into a stand-alone document, the General Plan Vision and Guiding Principles illustrate the future of Palmdale, capturing key values and aspirations, and providing a framework for future decision-making.

The list below represents vision themes and guiding principles that are most relevant to the topics of public health and equity. Visit the Palmdale 2045 website at <https://www.palmdale2045.org/resources> for the complete vision and guiding principles document.

### ***Safe, healthy place to live and work***

- Improve neighborhood safety
- Address crime and safety concerns
- Improve access to parks and open space
- Support local foster youth and those experiencing homelessness
- Foster active living with improvements to the pedestrian environment
- Prioritize walking, biking, and access to local and regional transit
- Promote living and working in Palmdale and reducing commute times

### ***High quality medical and mental healthcare***

- Improve access to and promote quality healthcare services and facilities in Palmdale
- Attract physicians to Palmdale
- Maintain Palmdale Regional Hospital and continue expansion of services and facilities

### ***A unified and welcoming community that we are proud to live in***

- Promote Palmdale's positive reputation in the region
- Boost community beautification
- Offer opportunities for youth to stay in Palmdale – jobs, housing, education
- Respect and promote diversity within Palmdale
- Enhance partnerships with surrounding communities in the Antelope Valley

### ***Housing options for residents at different stages of life and ability***

- Create and preserve affordable housing for residents of Palmdale
- Increase supply and diversity of housing to support different types of households including seniors, young adults, families, empty nesters, individuals or families with special needs, and multigenerational families

- Maintain the City’s quiet and safe neighborhoods
- Maintain rural and semi-rural neighborhoods in Palmdale
- Connect new development to public transit and open space, trails, or public parks

***High quality and accessible educational opportunities***

- Promote and expand higher educational opportunities in Palmdale
- Develop additional trade school training and apprentice programs
- Promote opportunities for high-quality childcare and early education
- Expand partnerships and programs with public schools, local government, and major employers within Palmdale

***Palmdale’s beautiful natural setting***

- Maintain safe and convenient access to open space and trails
- Improve connectivity and beautify trails and open space
- Expand and improve public parks to meet the needs of current and future residents
- Preserve existing mountain views
- Preserve access to a dark night sky
- Maintain high air quality

## Outcomes

- **Key Performance Indicators:** Expanding economic opportunities for existing residents
  - **Rationale:** To promote Palmdale as an equitable and desirable place to live for existing residents, the City needs to develop career pathways that connect local youth to employment opportunities in local industries. The GPU calls for strengthening trade schools, creating new apprenticeship and job training programs, and for the establishment of a local four-year college.
  - **Target:** 5,000 youth participate in job training programs and are connected to employment opportunities in local industries by 2045
- **Key Performance Indicators:** Diversify the housing stock in Palmdale
  - **Rationale:** To diversify the City’s housing stock, provide more housing options, particularly mixed-use and affordable options, and explicitly address the previous gap in allowed housing densities (between 16.1 and 30 dwelling units per acre), which functionally limited development of rental housing/apartments.
  - **Target:** 5,000 new multifamily housing units by 2045, 20% of which are affordable to families earning less than 80% of the area median income
- **Key Performance Indicators:** Improving opportunities for physical activity
  - **Rationale:** To improve the health and quality of life of all residents, the City must improve access to parks and build safe pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure in all of Palmdale’s neighborhoods. Improving open spaces and establishing seamless trail connections between parks will encourage residents to exercise more frequently and to adopt healthier lifestyles.

- **Target:** 90% of residents live within a 20-minute walking distance from a dedicated public park, school, or multi-use trail
- **Key Performance Indicators:** Improved air quality
  - **Rationale:** To improve air quality and reduce the urban heat island effect, the City must expand its urban tree canopy and reduce local sources of emissions, such as ozone pollution from high-volume roadways. By planting thousands of new trees throughout Palmdale, particularly in disadvantaged communities, the City will help to reduce local rates of respiratory and cardiovascular diseases.
  - **Target:** 600 new trees are planted annually for a total of 15,000 new trees by 2045
- **Key Performance Indicators:** Strengthening access to healthy food
  - **Rationale:** To reduce rates of obesity and other chronic diseases among Palmdale residents, the City needs to improve physical access to stores that sell affordable and high-quality fruits and vegetables. Incentivizing healthy food retailers to locate in disadvantaged communities will encourage residents to adopt healthier diets.
  - **Target:** 90% of residents live within a 20-minute walking distance of a grocery store, farmers' market, produce market, community garden, or other healthy food retailer.

## Draft Goals and Policies

### Economic Opportunity / Education Parity

- **Goal 1: A City that promotes equitable access to education and economic opportunity for all residents.**
  - Prioritize public investments in disadvantaged communities.
  - Develop incentives to promote private investments in disadvantaged communities.
  - Develop a community benefits agreement for major private development projects, which may include affordable housing, job training funds, housing assistance, and/or local hiring.
  - Regularly evaluate impact of public investments, ensuring equitable distribution of benefits and burdens across all communities.
  - Foster small business development with educational resources, permitting information, and services that can promote long term success in the City.
  - Partner with the America's Job Center of California (Antelope Valley) and University Center (Lancaster) to develop apprenticeship utilization requirements for public infrastructure projects in Palmdale, focusing efforts on hiring apprentices who both live in the City and experience significant barriers to employment (e.g., criminal record, disadvantaged background, foster care youth).

- **Goal 2: A City with high-quality educational services and facilities in all neighborhoods, especially disadvantaged communities.**
  - Create two education districts in locations that are well-served by transit:
    - Near Antelope Valley Community College and Palmdale High School (Palmdale Boulevard and 25th Street East); and,
    - In the vacant area on the northern side of Palmdale Boulevard and 47th Street East.
  - Attract a mix of educational type uses like public and private higher education facilities, satellite campuses, trade schools, along with supporting uses in the Educational Flex land use designation.
  - Seek to attract a new major higher education institution.
  - Maintain and expand access to education-related public facilities and services, including schools, libraries, and recreational spaces, to better support communities.
  - Promote opportunities for new childcare and pre-K facilities in Village Centers, and by encouraging these supporting uses in the Educational Flex designation.
- **Goal 3: A City that promotes meaningful and equitable engagement with all City residents.**
  - Encourage continuous participation in City planning processes, especially targeting hard-to-reach populations, including developing partnerships with local community organizations to help facilitate conversations.
  - Explore public-private partnerships to implement projects and ensure that they provide long-term sustainability and benefits to the community, such as employment, job training, and educational opportunities.
  - Regularly monitor key milestones of investments in disadvantaged communities, providing regular updates via City communication channels and networks.
  - Create a Palmdale Youth Council to participate in City governance and share in decision-making around issues impacting youth.
  - Address barriers to participation at all public meetings, including providing transportation options, childcare services, translation, and variety of food.

## Access to Health Care

- **Goal 4: A City committed to supporting health equity and promoting access to high-quality health care.**
  - Create three health and wellness districts in locations that are well-served by transit:

- Around the Palmdale Regional Medical Center (Palmdale Boulevard and 10<sup>th</sup> Street West)
- Along Palmdale Boulevard and 40<sup>th</sup>/45<sup>th</sup> Streets East
- Adjacent to Kaiser Permanente (East Avenue S and 45th Street East)
- Allow and encourage a mix of public and private medical, health, and wellness uses including emergency medical facilities, medical and supportive offices, healthcare clinics and pharmacies in the Health and Wellness land use designation.
- Work with local transit agencies to ensure that bus routes provide service to health service facilities from disadvantaged communities.
- Collaborate with the County of Los Angeles to track health data and ensure the City has necessary health-related data to guide decision-making.
- Encourage programs and practices that aim to reduce health inequities. Support partnerships with local health service providers, the County Public Health Department, schools, and other community-based organizations to promote health, wellness, and preventative care.
- **Goal 5: A City committed to promoting access to high-quality mental health care and social services.**
  - Collaborate with the County of Los Angeles and regional health organizations to improve access to mental healthcare, especially in disadvantaged communities.
  - Develop programs and services that help reduce stress and mental health issues, especially for vulnerable populations such as foster youth, at-risk youth, and older adults.
  - Coordinate with the Los Angeles County Homeless Services Authority to help the homeless and those at-risk of becoming homeless access education, facilities, and health services.
  - Coordinate with the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services to support programs for at-risk youth and parents of at-risk youth, such as parent training programs, health and mental health resources, and youth transition programs.

## Housing

- **Goal 6: Neighborhoods with a range of housing opportunities that allow people of all ages, abilities, socio-economic status, and family sizes to live in Palmdale.**
  - Direct the location of senior and multi-family housing to areas accessible to public transportation, supportive commercial uses, and community facilities.



- Encourage and allow a variety of housing types developed at a range of densities to serve varying household types, including, but not limited to, single-family attached and detached, accessory dwelling units, multi-family apartments, townhomes, duplexes, triplexes, quadplexes, and condominiums.
- Evaluate the feasibility of small lots, reduced setbacks, or other modifications to reduce cost of development.
- Facilitate housing for seniors, special needs groups, including the developmentally disabled, and non-traditional family groups by allowing a diverse range of housing configurations that are Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant & flexible.
- Promote development of housing types that support multi-generational households and opportunities to age in place.
- **Goal 7: A City that preserves and expands its supply of affordable housing.**
  - Preserve or replace units with expiring affordable housing subsidies.
  - Use regulatory and financial tools to make mobile home spaces permanently affordable.
  - Identify vacant and underutilized land, including publicly owned land, that would be suitable for affordable housing.
  - Develop a package of developer incentives to promote the construction of affordable housing (e.g., height or density bonuses, reduced parking requirements, faster permit process, fee waivers, tax benefits, etc.).
  - Require that all units developed under any of the City affordable housing programs remain affordable for the longest possible time or at least 30 years.
  - Consider a fee program where new commercial developments pay a fee to fund affordable housing units.
  - Develop a strategy to promote affordable housing in areas within a mile of the proposed HSR station.
- **Goal 8: A City that encourages the construction and maintenance of safe, sanitary, and health-promoting housing.**
  - Develop a community code enforcement partnership to ensure ongoing and effective health and safety code enforcement, with priority given to rental properties in disadvantaged communities.
  - Consider a housing rehabilitation program that assists multi-family residential property owners to modernize the supply of affordable rental housing including through increasing ventilation and insulation, and eliminating common home pollutants such as lead, asbestos, mold, and pests.

- In cooperation with Los Angeles County and other regional agencies, establish a lead removal program for homes built before 1980.
- Support creativity in the construction of new housing by proactively developing zoning standards and healthy design guidelines.
- Review, revise, and update the municipal code (as well as other relevant plans, procedures, regulations, guidelines, programs, and design manuals) as needed, to promote healthy housing quality.
- Work with developers to prioritize health in planned housing construction, using healthy design checklists and/or other review tools (such as the [Building Design Checklist](#) by the Center for Active Design).
- Strive for and allow incentives for new and rehabilitated residential buildings to be designed and constructed to improve the health of workers and residents.  
Activities could include:
  - Using materials that are proven to avoid negative health impacts;
  - Siting buildings to encourage walking;
  - Designing internal staircases that are visually prominent and attractive; and,
  - Designing buildings to allow for high levels of natural light and air.
- **Goal 9: A City that accelerates permitting for all housing projects.**
  - Periodically lead a comprehensive review of all steps in the development approval process to identify the factors that impede new residential construction, including affordable housing.
  - Periodically update the City’s Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) ordinance to be consistent with State law. Consider providing permit ready ADU plans to residents.
  - Develop an expedited permitting program to support the creation of new affordable housing, including accessory dwelling units.
  - Create a one-stop permitting shop that streamlines review of potential projects and makes it easier for applicants to get the answers they need.
  - Encourage pre-application meetings with department staff to review potential projects, ensure consistency with the General Plan vision, and identify potential issues that can prevent unnecessary delays.

## Obesity

- **Goal 10: Neighborhoods with a range of opportunities to exercise, including parks and recreational facilities.**

- Work towards a goal of having 90 percent of residents living within a 20-minute walking distance of a dedicated park, school, or multi-use trail.
- Increase access to existing and proposed parks and open spaces in park-poor neighborhoods in Palmdale.
- Provide new trails systems, especially in disadvantaged communities, that connect to the regional trail system.
- Prioritize investments in recreational programs that focus on physical activity.
- Develop safe and regular programming that encourages physical activity.
- Partner with community-based organizations to improve access to recreational opportunities that promote physical activity across the City, particularly in park-poor neighborhoods.
- Develop an agreement with local school districts to allow City residents access to outdoor recreational areas during non-school hours.
- Consider fee waivers for low-income families, such as families with children who participate in the National School Lunch Program, so that all residents have access to the City's recreational programming.
- **Goal 11: Neighborhoods that support safe pedestrian, bicycle, and public transit access for people of all ages, income levels, and cultural backgrounds.**
  - Prioritize transportation system improvements that encourage walking, biking, and transit use in disadvantaged communities, while promoting Complete Streets objectives.
  - According to the General Plan street hierarchy, require key boulevards and neighborhood connectors to be (re)designed, constructed, and operated as multimodal boulevards, not wide, high-speed streets.
  - Strive for a high level of connectivity of residents to neighborhood services through site design, open space linkages, and bicycle facilities. Plan for 90 percent of residents (except for rural residential) to be within a 20-minute walking distance of retail and neighborhood services.
  - Enhance existing streetscapes to include greater sidewalk coverage, walkway connectivity, shade, street crossing safety features, traffic calming measures, and other design elements.
  - Develop safe routes for aging adults, particularly routes to transit and shopping centers.
  - Prioritize street improvements that promote community safety, including energy-efficient street lighting, tree maintenance, and transit shelters, near parks, transit stops, libraries, and along commercial corridors, particularly in disadvantaged communities.

- Integrate land use and transportation infrastructure to support higher-density development, balanced mix of residential and commercial uses, and a connected system of sidewalks, bikeways, greenways, and transit.
- Partner with local school districts and community-based organizations to adopt a Safe Routes to Schools plan.

## Air Quality / Respiratory Health

- **Goal 12: A City designed to improve air quality and reduce disparate health impacts.**
  - Plant street trees throughout Palmdale, and especially in disadvantaged communities. Locate trees in energy conserving areas, including south and west facing sides of buildings.
  - Transition the City's vehicle fleet to lower-emission fuel technologies.
  - Designate truck routes to avoid sensitive land uses, where feasible.
  - Partner with CalTrans to study the potential to re-route Palmdale Boulevard truck traffic to Pearblossom Highway.
  - Avoid siting schools, childcare centers, senior housing, and affordable housing near land uses that produce localized air pollution (e.g., SR-14, SR-138, high traffic roads, Plant 42). For sensitive land uses that cannot be sited at least 500 feet away from sources of localized air pollution, potential design mitigation options include:
    - Provide residential units with individual heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems to allow adequate ventilation with windows closed.
    - Locate air intake systems for HVAC systems as far away from existing air pollution sources as possible.
    - Use High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) air filters in the HVAC system and develop a maintenance plan to ensure the filtering system is properly maintained.
    - Utilize only fixed windows next to any existing sources of pollution.
    - Use sound walls, berms, and vegetation as physical barriers.
    - Notify new potential home buyers of risks from air pollution.
  - Develop a citywide air quality monitoring program to identify areas with high gas and oil emissions, in addition to tracking changes over time, identifying polluters, and analyzing potential interventions.
  - Participate in air quality planning efforts with local, regional, and state agencies that improve local air quality to protect human health and minimize the disproportionate impacts on sensitive population groups.

- **Goal 13: A City that strives to be a smoke-free community.**
  - Update the municipal code to require smoke-free and vape-free municipal buildings, public housing, parks, 25-foot zone around play areas for children in apartment buildings, and other outdoor gathering places to reduce exposure to second-hand smoke.
  - Encourage multifamily landlords and employers to provide smoke-free and vape-free workplaces and multi-family housing.
  - Limit the sale of tobacco and other nicotine products near child-sensitive areas, such as schools, parks, and childcare facilities. Consider distance requirements from sensitive uses.
  - Encourage store owners to limit advertising for tobacco products.
  - Coordinate with the County Department of Public Health to continue educational campaigns regarding anti-smoking measures.

## Food Access

- **Goal 14: A City that provides safe and convenient access to affordable and high-quality fruits and vegetables.**
  - Work towards a goal of having 90 percent of residents living within a 20-minute walking distance of a grocery store, farmers market, produce market, community garden, or other healthy food retailer.
  - Work toward bringing one (or more) weekly Certified Farmers Markets to Palmdale.
  - Utilize economic development incentives to encourage stores to sell fresh, healthy foods such as produce in disadvantaged communities.
  - Limit fast food and liquor stores in neighborhoods with a significant concentration of stores (e.g., multiple stores on the same block or intersection) and child-sensitive areas, such as schools, parks, and childcare facilities. Consider distance requirements from sensitive uses.
  - Strengthen the local economy by encouraging local food production, community gardens, and farmers markets on vacant or underutilized parcels.
  - Encourage farmers markets to accept CalFresh Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards; Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) benefits; and Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program benefits.
  - Improve ready access to healthy food retailers along key transit corridors and within transit-oriented developments.
  - Work with local transit agencies to ensure that bus routes provide service from disadvantaged communities to healthy food retailers.

- **Goal 15: A City that encourages healthy eating habits for all residents of Palmdale.**
  - Work with local school districts and other educational facilities to create or implement educational programs for children about healthy eating, such as edible schoolyards and healthy cooking classes.
  - Require that City-funded events offer healthy food choices to participants.
  - Offer publicity for retailers and restaurants that sell and/or serve affordable and high-quality fruits and vegetables, including locally grown foods.
  - Partner with the Los Angeles County Department of Health to develop food education programs, including culturally tailored messages, fruit and vegetable incentives, parenting skill classes, and nutrition and physical activity.
  - Partner with community-based organizations to provide gardening and composting classes in disadvantaged communities.

## Crime and Public Safety

- **Goal 16: A City that improves public safety for all residents by reducing crime and injuries.**
  - Strive for a safe transportation system by making transportation improvements in areas with a high incidence of collisions, injuries, and death, especially for pedestrians and bicyclists. Street improvements may include marked crosswalks, bicycle lanes, and traffic calming.
  - Continue to coordinate with County’s Sheriff’s Department for improvements to public safety.
  - Use Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) strategies in new and existing development to improve public safety, including the following:
    - Active public space
    - Building design to promote “eyes on the street”
    - Maintenance of public places
    - Removal or repair of vandalism or broken property
  - Improve lighting and nighttime security across all City neighborhoods to prevent crime and increase safety.
  - Encourage the creation of a graffiti prevention team to remove graffiti from public property (including parks, street signs, sidewalks) or property adjacent to public rights-of-way.