

Noise 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 Palmdale 2045 will serve as a compass for decision-makers and will shape future plans and actions of the City. This revised policy document will replace the 1993 General Plan.

This noise policy framework is an interim step in the General Plan Update process prior to drafting the elements (or chapters). This framework highlights key outcomes and performance metrics related to health 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, and what we heard from the community.

Where We Are Now

Strengths and Opportunities

- **Enhanced Noise Guidelines and Standards for New Development:** The update presents an opportunity to clarify noise standards and guidelines, particularly with respect to mixed-use development. Possible new approaches to be incorporated include site planning strategies, use of sound dampening techniques in new construction, use of landscaping and/or berms, and use of quieter paving technologies.
- **Compatible Land Uses Near Palmdale Airport.** Noise generated by Palmdale Airport operations is not currently a substantial concern because the airport is surrounded by uses not sensitive to noise, including industrial uses and open space. Additionally, the Palmdale Airport is not currently operating any commercial flights. Palmdale Airport was identified by stakeholders as an opportunity for expansion and the City’s Noise Element promotes compatible land uses in the area. Continuation of the industrial land use pattern in this area, as proposed in the Preferred Land Use Scenario, would maintain noise compatibility.

Challenges and Threats

- **Traffic is currently the most prevalent noise source.** Traffic along State Route-14 and major arterials, such as Highway 138 and Sierra Highway and major streets such as 10th Street West, Avenue S, 47th Street East, Palmdale Boulevard, and Rancho Vista Boulevard, are the most substantial source of noise in Palmdale. In particular, State Route-14 divides the City and abuts multiple noise sensitive land uses. Existing noise sensitive land uses along State Route-14 consist of schools, hospitals, churches, and residential development. The Noise Element can address potential noise conflicts between traffic and noise-sensitive uses through land use planning and use of tiered site planning strategies that involve use of building construction standards, setbacks, sound barriers, vegetation, building orientation, and noise insulation.
- **Noise compatibility of increased housing and mixed-use development.** The preferred land use plan prioritizes housing, which would expand the noise-sensitive residential land use. New residences may be exposed to unacceptable noise levels due to proximity to the freeway, arterial roadways, the airport, existing rail lines with trains operated by Amtrak and Metrolink, or commercial uses. Also increased mixed-use development will need to consider the conflict of developing noise generating commercial development and noise-sensitive residences in the same area. However, land use compatibility planning and noise reduction guidelines, such as landscaping and soundproof walls, can reduce noise impacts on sensitive noise receptors, such as residences.
- **High Speed Rail may involve additional noise considerations.** Over the General Plan horizon, portions of the City may be exposed to additional railway noise associated with the proposed High-Speed Rail. The environmental impact analysis for the portion of the rail to be located in Palmdale was approved on August 19, 2021. The environmental impact analysis indicates moderate to severe noise impacts in locations where train speeds and operations are high near sensitive land uses such as residential areas, churches, and schools (California High Speed Rail Authority and the Federal Railroad Administration 2021). Though development of High-Speed Rail is currently paused, environmental review of the project continues, and state officials will continue seeking federal dollars to fund more of the rail line in the future.

What We Heard About This Topic

Though noise concerns were not directly identified, stakeholders voiced needs that could have implications with respect to local noise conditions. Below is a list of community suggestions that may affect noise in Palmdale.

- Expansion of the Palmdale Airport

- United States Air Force Plant 42
- Increased alternative transportation options, such as High-Speed Rail, public transit in Palmdale, and creation of rail connections to Los Angeles Union Station
- Pursue strategic infill development on Palmdale Boulevard
- Increased vertical mixed-use, attached multi-family residential and transit-oriented development
- Increased industrial buildings to meet industry needs and attract more manufacturers to Palmdale

Where we want to be in the future

Applicable 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 noise. Visit the Palmdale 2045 website at <https://www.palmdale2045.org/resources> for the complete vision and guiding principles document.

Diverse and resilient local economy

- Leverage economic opportunities from expanded transportation center and potential passenger air service at Palmdale Airport

Housing options for residents at different stages of life and ability

- Maintain city's quiet and safe neighborhoods

Forefront of transportation innovations

- Bring air service to Palmdale Airport

Key outcomes (related to topic)

- **Traffic Noise:** Prioritize land use compatibility and site planning techniques to minimize noise exposure as well as traffic calming measures to reduce noise generation along roads, especially along State Route-14.

- **Railway Operation Noise:** Coordinate with the Metrolink and Amtrak regarding extensions of the commuter rail system to maintain acceptable noise levels for surrounding noise sensitive resources.
- **Airport Noise:** Coordinate land use plans with airport expansions to maintain acceptable noise level for nearby uses.

Key performance indicators

- **Key Performance Indicator:** Maintenance of acceptable noise levels for all land uses
 - Ensure that noise levels for all new development are within the “normally acceptable” range or the “conditionally acceptable” range by ensuring design features can achieve an interior noise level of 45 dBA CNEL or less, as well as minimizing exterior noise levels for private or common open spaces.
- **Key Performance Indicator:** Avoidance of noise sensitive uses near major noise generators such as State Route-14, High-Speed Rail, and Palmdale Airport.
 - **Target:** Avoid placement of noise sensitive uses (e.g., residences, schools, hospitals) in areas where noise from freeways, rail activity, or the airport exceeds 65 dBA CNEL.

Policy framework

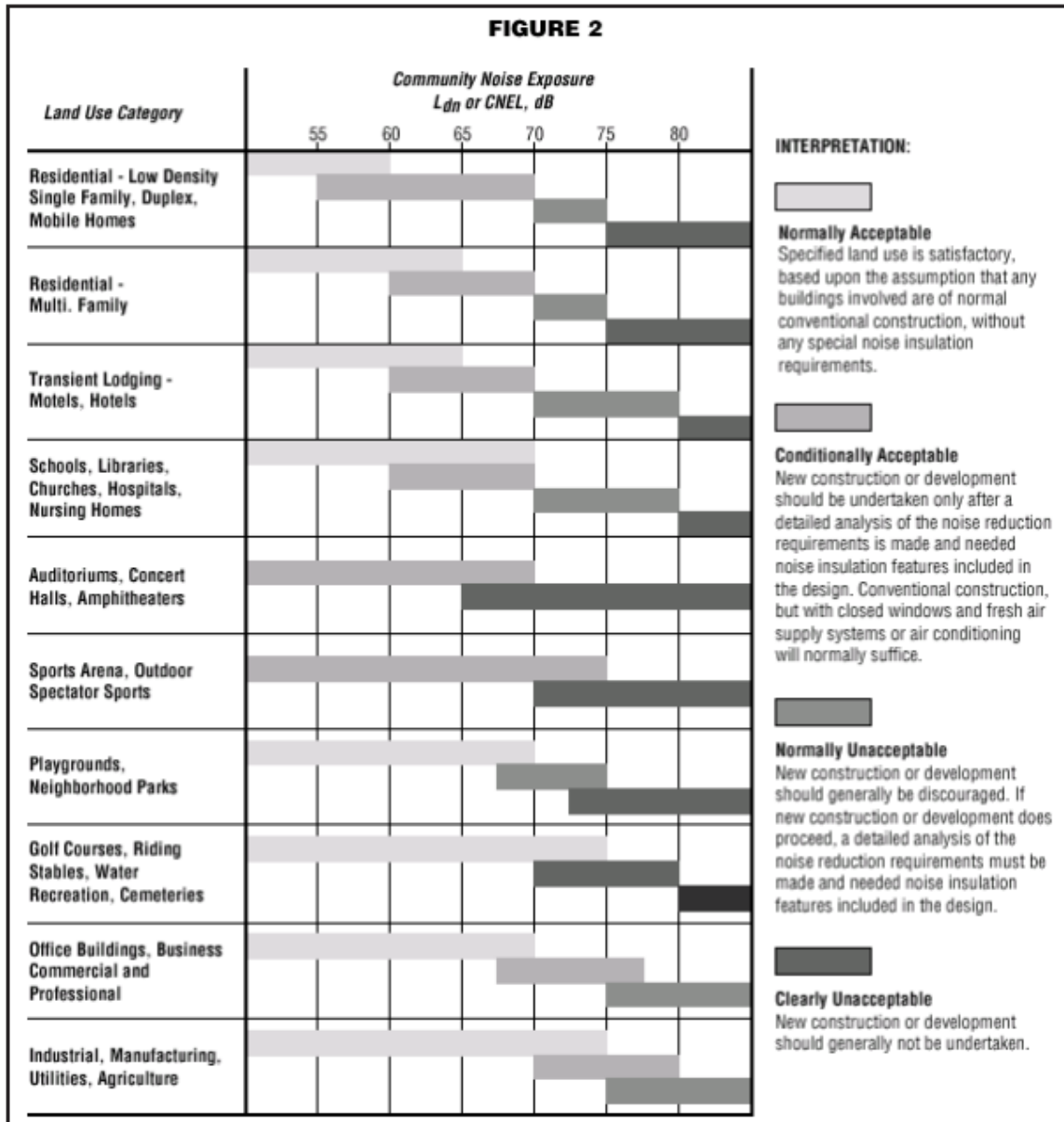
The following section includes draft goals and policies under consideration for the Palmdale General Plan Noise Element Update. Many of the goals and policies from the existing Noise Element have been retained, but in certain cases goals and policies have been reorganized, rephrased, and or simplified while the objectives from the current element have been reframed as either goals or policies.

- **Goal 1: Minimize resident exposure to excessive noise.**
 - Use the state-recommended noise level guidelines shown on Figure 1 to determine the compatibility of proposed land uses with the existing and future noise environment of each proposed development site.
 - Restrict noise sensitive land uses near existing or future air, rail or highway transportation noise sources unless mitigation measures have been incorporated into the design of the project to reduce the noise levels at the noise sensitive land use to less than 65 dBA CNEL at all exterior living spaces including but not limited to, single-family yards and multi-family patios, balconies, pool areas, cook-out areas and related private recreation areas.
 - When proposed stationary noise sources could exceed an exterior noise level of 65 dBA CNEL at the property line or could impact future noise sensitive land uses,

require preparation of an acoustical analysis and mitigation measures to reduce exterior noise levels to no more than 65 dBA CNEL at the property line.

- Explore the use of noise abatement strategies such as natural barriers, sound walls, and other buffers to mitigate excessive noise.

Figure 1: State Recommended Noise Level Guidance



- **Goal 2: Maintain acceptable noise environments throughout the City.**
 - Avoid locating new extreme noise sources adjacent to noise sensitive land uses unless mitigation measures prove feasible.

- Restrict construction activities in the vicinity of sensitive receptors during the evening, early morning, and weekends.
- Utilize any or all of the following measures to maintain acceptable noise environments throughout the City:
 - Control of noise at its source, including noise barriers and other muffling devices built into the noise source.
 - Provision of buffer areas and/or wide setbacks between the noise source and other development.
 - Reduction of densities, where practical, adjacent to the noise source (freeway, airport, railroad).
 - Use of sound insulation, blank walls, double paned windows and other design or architectural techniques to reduce interior noise levels.
 - Designation of appropriate land uses adjacent to known noise sources.
- Where deemed appropriate based upon available information, require acoustical analysis and appropriate mitigation for noise-sensitive land uses proposed in areas that may be adversely impacted by significant intermittent noise sources. Such noise sources may include but not be limited to railroads, racetracks, stadiums, aircraft overflights and similar uses.
- As necessary, participate in future planning for the High-Speed Rail and the Palmdale Airport expansion to ensure that neither facility creates noise conditions that adversely affect local residents, businesses, or visitors.
- **Goal 3: Promote noise compatible land uses within the 65 dBA CNEL contour and the Frequent Overflight Area of Air Force Plant 42.**
 - Designate and permit employment flex, industrial, aerospace industrial, and similar uses within the 65 dBA CNEL contour and the Frequent Overflight Area.
 - Restrict noise sensitive land uses (such as residential uses, churches, schools, assisted living facility, or similar uses) within areas designated within both the 65 dBA CNEL contour and the Frequent Overflight Area, unless mitigation measures prevent adverse health impacts from high noise emissions.
 - In areas outside of the 65 dBA CNEL contours but within the Frequent Overflight Area, encourage land uses that are not noise-sensitive, to the extent feasible.
 - Through the development review process, require a disclosure statement indicating that the property is subject to frequent overflight and aircraft noise upon sale of property within the Accident Potential Zone (APZ).
 - Through conditions of approval, require that any owner of property within the 65 dBA CNEL noise contour or the low altitude overflight area of Plant 42 seeking a land use action from the City to provide an avigation easement to the Los Angeles Department of Airports, the U.S. Air Force, and the City of Palmdale.