

Safety 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 policy framework is an interim step in the General Plan Update process prior to drafting the Safety Element (or chapter). This framework highlights key outcomes and performance metrics related to safety and includes a draft policy framework that includes goals and policies. 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.

What is the Safety Element?

The purpose of a general plan safety element is to protect the community from any unreasonable risks associated with the effects of a broad range of hazards including:

- Seismic hazards, including liquefaction, subsidence, and seismically induced surface rupture, ground shaking, ground failure, seiche, and dam failure;
- Slope instability, including mudslides and landslides;
- Other geologic hazards;
- Wildland and urban fires; and,
- Flooding, including dam, levee, and floodwall failure.

Safety elements should also address evacuation routes, military installations, peak load water supply requirements, and minimum road widths and clearances around structures, as those items relate to identified fire and geologic hazards. Additional issues indirectly related to public safety

are addressed in other general plan elements, including stormwater (Conservation), solid waste (Sustainability and Climate Change), and public health (Equitable, Resilient and Healthy Communities).

Senate Bill 379 also requires the safety element to include a set of goals, policies, and objectives to address climate adaptation in light of potential vulnerabilities in the community (note: climate and resilience topics are included as separate policy framework reports).

Key Safety Terms

Key terms used in this document related to safety/hazards include:

- **Hazard:** something that is potentially dangerous or harmful
- **Vulnerability:** qualitative or quantitative expression of the level to which an entity is susceptible to harm when it experiences a hazard
- **Risk:** the potential for an adverse outcome assessed as a function of hazards/threats, assets and their vulnerabilities, and consequences
- **Hazard mitigation:** any action taken to reduce or eliminate the long-term risk to human life and property from hazards
- **Disaster:** a natural, technological, or human-caused event that results in deaths, injuries, property damage/loss, and/or destruction resulting in serious disruptions and/or that exceeds the ability of local authorities to cope without outside assistance
- **Resilience:** ability to adapt to changing conditions and withstand and rapidly recover from disruption

Where We Are Now

Previous steps in the planning process have identified community strengths, opportunities, challenges and threats related to safety. These are summarized below.

Strengths and Opportunities

- **Emergency facilities are generally adequate.** The Palmdale Sheriff's Station is a state-of-the-art facility constructed in 2006 to replace the previous neighborhood sub-station. The City also has five Los Angeles County Fire Department stations. Continued coordination with the Sheriff's Department and Fire Department will be necessary to maintain adequate emergency response times as development expands in the community.
- **Palmdale Public Security Officers, Park Watch, Community Service Officers, and Code Enforcement officials provide public safety services.** In addition to law enforcement services through the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Office, Public Security Officers and Park

Watch serve Palmdale through preventative safety measures. Palmdale Public Security Officers are frontline ambassadors who monitor the City's parks and facilities, including the Palmdale Transportation Center and Park & Ride lots, to proactively deter unacceptable behavior by maintaining high visibility. The Park Watch program prevents crime and vandalism through community involvement by asking park users to report suspicious or illegal activity, allowing law enforcement and the City to be proactive in addressing concerns. Both programs are operated by the City's Neighborhood Services Department. Community Service Officers, meanwhile, are non-sworn City employees who work in coordination with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, and Code Enforcement officials take nonactionable calls from the Sheriff's Department.

- **Crime rates are declining.** Crime rates fell steadily between 2015 and 2018, consistent with a long-term downward trend in crime. Nevertheless, the community has expressed concerns about perceived safety, and it is not known whether the pandemic may have long-term implications with respect to crime. Therefore, the City will need to continue to track crime, provide community education about crime and City programs, and adjust programs as necessary as conditions change.

Challenges and Threats

- **Some areas of potential land use change are subject to flood hazards.** Portions of the area between SR 14 and Sierra Highway where substantial new development is anticipated are in the 100-year flood zone. Current City regulations limit the potential for exposure to flooding and for new development to substantially increase flooding; nevertheless, coordination with FEMA and measures to reduce flood potential will be needed.
- **The foothills in the western portion of the City are subject to wildfire hazards.** The interface of wildlands west of the City with urban development increase potential exposure to wildfires. Although the General Plan update would not increase development potential in this area, any new development would be subject to applicable wildfire prevention and protection standards and coordination with the Los Angeles County Fire Department and CalFire. Wildfire risks are also expected to increase as a result of climate change. The Climate Action Plan (or chapter) will assess climate vulnerability and adaptation policies, in accordance with SB 379.
- **Palmdale is subject to a variety of geologic hazards.** The San Andreas Fault runs through the western portion of Palmdale. Although the San Andreas Fault zone does not run through a potential land use change area, the presence of this and other regional faults subjects the City to risk from substantial groundshaking. Portions of the City are also subject to such hazards as liquefaction and landsliding, though proposed growth areas are generally outside these types of hazard zones. The City will continue to implement State standards, including updates that may be adopted in the future.

- **The State has adopted new requirements pertaining to climate adaptation, wildfire risk, and emergency evacuation.** New California State laws require incorporation of climate adaptation strategies, update of wildfire hazard maps, identification of emergency evacuation routes and capacity, and incorporation of findings and policies contained in the local hazard mitigation plan. The safety element will need to incorporate these new requirements as appropriate (note: climate and resilience topics are included as separate policy framework reports).

What We Heard About This Topic

Below is a list of community input related to safety element topics in Palmdale.

- Palmdale is an attractive place to raise a family because of low crime.
- Community members envision Palmdale as a safe and tranquil place to live.
- Addressing crime and safety concerns is a top community priority.
- People feel unsafe in the area around the Palmdale Transit Station.
- Palmdale is negatively perceived as a place with high crime.
- Palmdale is perceived as unsafe, which may be preventing a more vibrant nightlife.
- There is a desire to develop an earthquake plan.
- There is a need for increased law enforcement capacity to address safety concerns.

Where we want to be in the future

Applicable Vision themes and Guiding Principles

Safe, healthy place to live and work

- a) Improve neighborhood safety
- b) Address crime and safety concerns
- c) Improve access to parks and open space
- d) Support local foster youth and those experiencing homelessness
- e) Foster active living with improvements to the pedestrian environment
- f) Prioritize walking, biking, and access to local and regional transit

Housing options for residents at different stages of life and ability

- a) Maintain the City's quiet and safe neighborhoods

Palmdale's beautiful natural setting

- a) Maintain safe and convenient access to open space and trails

Top key outcomes (related to topic)

- **Geologic Hazards – fault ruptures, ground shaking, liquefaction:** Reference and implement existing and future standards of the Palmdale Municipal Code to meet seismic safety standards established by the California Building Code and Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zoning Act.
- **Wildfire Hazards:** Address increased risk related to climate change in accordance with State requirements, particularly along the wildland urban interface at the western edge of the City.
- **Flooding:** Address localized flooding east of State Route 14, particularly near Amargosa Creek, Anaverde Creek, Little Rock Wash, and Big Rock Wash.
- **Emergency Evacuation:** Address new State requirements related to emergency evacuation, including evacuation capacity and identification of areas lacking multiple evacuation routes.
- **Crime:** Educate the community about crime in the City and establish programs to address changing crime patterns over time.

Key performance indicators

- **Key Performance Indicators:** Adequacy of emergency evacuation.
 - **Target:** Adequate evacuation capacity for all reasonably foreseeable hazard scenarios.
 - **Target:** Two evacuation routes for all new development.
- **Key Performance Indicators:** Wildfire hazard protection.
 - **Target:** Update wildfire hazard severity zones based on CalFire recommendations.
- **Key Performance Indicators:** Presence of soil/groundwater contamination.
 - **Target:** Clean-up of identified contamination prior to development/redevelopment of individual properties.
- **Key Performance Indicators:** Emergency response times and crime rates.
 - **Target:** Fire emergency response time under 6 minutes, based on National Fire Protection Association recommendations.
 - **Target:** Police emergency response time under 6 minutes.
 - **Target:** Rates of violent and non-violent crime below State averages

Draft Goals and Policies

The following section includes draft goals and policies under consideration for the Palmdale General Plan Safety Element Update. Pursuant to AB 2140, *the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP) will be incorporated by reference into the General Plan*. The LHMP is being concurrently updated and will be adopted by the end of 2021. Many of the goals and policies from the existing Safety 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. Generally, proposed revisions to goals and policies are minor, though a new goal and related policies regarding emergency evacuation have been added, as have proposed new policies related to crime tracking and prevention, climate change/wildfire, and flooding. Goals and policies related to prison safety “other man-made hazards” such as electromagnetic fields and citizen band radios are proposed for removal as they no longer appear relevant. Entirely new policies are **highlighted**.

- **Goal:** Minimization of impacts to public health, safety, and welfare resulting from seismic hazards.
 - Review development within or adjacent to geologic hazard zones and provide copies of geotechnical reports and studies to be reviewed by a qualified geologist and implement recommendations to ensure adequate provisions for public safety.
 - Require appropriate structural setbacks from active fault rupture traces in accordance with Alquist-Priolo standards and continue to follow California Building Code.
 - Design utility lines crossing active fault traces to withstand the expected movement of the earth in these locations. Utility lines as defined here include, but are not to be limited to, electricity, water, internet, natural gas and sewer.
 - **As feasible, ensure that essential services buildings are not located in geologic hazard zones.**
- **Goal:** Minimization of impacts to public health, safety, and welfare resulting from wildfire hazards.
 - Prohibit new public or critical facilities in Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones, except when other options do not exist.
 - Ensure that re-development after a large fire complies with fire safety requirements for construction in the High and Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones, **accounting for any increased risk related to climate change.**
 - Require that developments located in wildland interface areas incorporate and enforce standards for construction, including a fuel modification program (i.e., brush clearance, planting of fire-retardant vegetation) to reduce the threat of

wildfires, accounting for any increased risk related to climate change. Fuel modification areas shall be located within the project site and shall be clearly delineated on grading plans.

- Provide fire-resistant landscaped buffer zones between high risk fire hazard areas and urban development. Necessary fire clearance shall be on private (not public) land.
- Require property owners to clear brush and high fuel vegetation and maintain firesafe zones (a minimum distance of 30 feet from the structure or to the property line, whichever is closer) to reduce the risk of fires. For structures located within a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone, the required brush clearance distance is 200 feet from structures to the property line.
- Evaluate soils and waterways for risks from flooding, water quality, and erosion to ensure that they are suitable to support redevelopment following a large fire.
- Require all new development in or near designated wildfire hazard zones to identify multiple evacuation/emergency access routes.
- Continue to coordinate with the Los Angeles County Fire Department to provide emergency evacuation and address fire hazards.
- Ensure that the requirements of the Los Angeles County Fire Department are incorporated into new development through the development review process.
- Require all new development to be served by a water system that meets applicable fire flow requirements.
- **Goal:** Minimization of the effects of flooding on public safety and property.
 - Require development in designated flood hazard areas to meet standards outlined in the City's Floodplain Management Ordinance and related criteria in the City's Engineering Design Standards.
 - Implement the City's drainage management plan through the capital improvement program and development review process.
 - Ensure that new development meets National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) and associated Low Impact Development (LID) standards that limit peak runoff to pre-development rates.
 - As appropriate, use open space and recreational areas to serve as floodplains that reduce downgradient flooding and aid in groundwater recharge.
 - Preserve and restore the natural and beneficial values served by floodplains to the extent feasible, consistent with public health, safety, and welfare.
- **Goal:** Minimization of damage from catastrophic failure of infrastructure.
 - As appropriate, evaluate inundation hazards related to the potential rupture of the California Aqueduct or failure of the Palmdale or Littlerock dams or location of proposed basins when reviewing development proposals.

- Require buffers for development in areas near high-pressure natural gas lines and that such development be provided with alternative access/evacuation routes.
- **Goal:** Minimization of impacts to public safety and property resulting from aircraft accidents.
 - Require all development to be consistent with Department of Defense regulations as outlined in the Air Force Plant 42 Air Installation Compatibility Use Zone (AICUZ) Report and to comply with applicable FAA regulations that affect development in the Accident Potential Zones.
 - Through the design review process, ensure that new buildings are located in a manner that will promote clear linear corridors through the developed area in any Accident Potential Zones, to create potential pilot landing options in the event of an aircraft emergency.
 - Review and evaluate currently existing developed areas in the low altitude overflight areas that are occupied by incompatible uses, and determine the potential for the redevelopment process to convert those land uses to airport compatible uses.
- **Goal:** Protection of the public from risks associated with the transport, storage, use, and disposal of hazardous materials.
 - Coordinate with the Los Angeles County Fire Department to maintain a list of hazardous waste generators that could affect City residents.
 - Continue to support and encourage state and county efforts to identify and remediate contaminated sites.
 - Require clean-up of soil and/or groundwater containing hazardous materials exceeding regulatory action levels to the satisfaction of the agency having jurisdiction prior to granting permits for new development.
 - Require transport of hazardous materials along designated routes that minimize risks to the public and sensitive environmental areas. Cooperate with regional agencies in developing and maintaining such routes.
 - Review proposed development in proximity to any existing or proposed facility that uses, stores, or transports large amounts of hazardous materials to ensure adequate mitigation of impacts related to hazardous materials (e.g., appropriate site design, setbacks, and buffering).
 - Require all proposed hazardous waste facilities to comply with the City's hazardous waste management plan and Section 17.96 of the Palmdale Municipal Code.
- **Goal:** Safe evacuation of residents in the event of an emergency requiring evacuation.

- Maintain and, as necessary, update a map of designated emergency evacuation routes for various types of disasters (e.g., earthquake, wildfire, hazardous material release, dam failure) and various disaster scenarios.
- Make information regarding emergency evacuation routes readily available to all City residents.
- Review all new development for consistency with applicable evacuation plans and ensure access to at least two evacuation routes.
- **Goal:** A community that is self-sufficient in the event of an emergency.
 - Maintain and, as necessary, update the City’s Emergency Operations Plan.
 - Periodically, but not less than annually, review emergency service equipment and shelters to ensure that they are adequate to meet the needs of changing land uses and development types.
 - Require City staff to undergo regular disaster preparedness training.
 - Require all residences and businesses to maintain visible and clearly legible signs and/or street numbers to shorten the response times of emergency personnel.
 - Promote the use of emergency water supplies or water filtration systems at point-of-delivery for acceptable water quality in emergency situations.
- **Goal:** Protection of public safety through the implementation and enforcement of City Ordinances and educating the community.
 - Implement and enforce the Palmdale Municipal Code to ensure safe and sanitary living and working conditions throughout the City. Coordinate with other agencies, including but not limited to Los Angeles County Department of Health, Los Angeles County Fire Department, and Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department to maintain resources for enforcement.
 - Implement and as appropriate update a public education program regarding response to hazards such as earthquakes, floods, hazardous material spills, and wildfire for residents, businesses, and schools.
- **Goal:** Minimization of crime and associated community concerns through appropriate allocation of resources, development review, and on-going public education.
 - Track the types of rates of crime in the community on an ongoing basis and reallocate resources as necessary to address crime-related issues of concern.
 - Make up-to-date crime statistics readily available to the community via the City’s website or other media.
 - Through the development review process, ensure that sites are designed in order to maximize safety and security, considering such factors as visibility, lighting, emergency access, legibility of street numbers, and fencing.

- Require all commercial and industrial developments to provide adequate lighting for buildings and parking areas as well as visibility for patrol vehicles to assist in law enforcement surveillance.
- Encourage the formation and continued education of neighborhood and business watch groups to assist in crime prevention and detection.
- Coordinate with local partners to encourage community-based crime prevention efforts.
- Promote after school, volunteer, and Business and Neighborhood Watch programs, and other innovative programs to help maintain a safe environment.
- Expand opportunities for positive law enforcement and youth interaction.

What topics do we want more feedback on?

- Thoughts on why the community feels the City is perceived to be unsafe? Are there any current issues or programs in place that would help us develop more tailored policies to address perceptions of lack of safety?