

# **Planning Forward: Strengthening the City of Lancaster's General Plan Through Strategic Evaluation and Recommendations**

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## **Abstract**

This work evaluates the City of Lancaster's (City or City's) current General Plan to identify its strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement. The objective is to develop strategic recommendations for amendments that align with the city's environmental sustainability, economic resilience, and equitable growth goals.

The scope of work includes a detailed qualitative evaluation of the General Plan, focusing on policy clarity, alignment with strategic objectives, and the presence of accountability mechanisms. The intended outcomes are actionable recommendations supporting long-term sustainability, inclusive development, and economic viability.

This project is relevant to the City of Lancaster as it aligns with the city's priorities to update the General Plan in response to evolving community needs and environmental challenges. It provides an opportunity to modernize planning policies to reflect current best practices while ensuring that growth and development are equitable and environmentally responsible.

Given Lancaster's leadership in renewable energy and its unique environmental conditions, this study has broader implications for cities seeking to balance growth with sustainability. The recommendations provided in this project could inform state-level planning guidelines and contribute to the best practices in urban planning.

## **Introduction**

Located in the high desert region of Southern California, Lancaster lies within Los Angeles County, approximately 70 miles north of downtown Los Angeles in the Antelope Valley. This unique desert environment presents challenges and opportunities. Known for its commitment to renewable energy and environmental stewardship, Lancaster has become a notable leader in

promoting solar energy and carbon-neutral policies. The city's recent growth necessitates careful planning to balance expanding infrastructure needs while preserving the natural desert landscape and enhancing community identity.

Lancaster boasts a diverse demographic profile, with a population of approximately 178,000. The population includes 46% Hispanic, 24% White, and 20% Black residents, alongside smaller percentages of other racial groups (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). The city has a significant youth population, with 27% under the age of 18, while seniors aged 65 and older comprise about 12% of the population, resulting in a relatively young median age. Education levels vary, with around 30.5% of residents holding a high school diploma, 12% holding a bachelor's degree, and 7.5% possessing graduate degrees. Although Lancaster's median household income stands at approximately \$71,000, poverty rates are notably higher among Native American and Black residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023).

Lancaster's current strength lies in its proactive approach to renewable energy, climate resilience, and environmental stewardship. The city was recognized as the first in the nation to become "net zero" for energy usage in 2019, largely due to its strong commitment to solar energy initiatives and sustainable infrastructure (City of Lancaster, 2019). Lancaster has successfully reduced its carbon footprint while simultaneously creating local job opportunities. Additionally, the adoption of the Environmental Justice Element in 2022 demonstrates the city's commitment to addressing disparities in exposure to environmental hazards and improving the overall quality of life for historically underserved communities. The updated Safety Element, which includes policies focused on adaptation to climate change, shows Lancaster's growing awareness of the need to enhance resilience to extreme heat, drought, and wildfires, critical concerns for a desert city experiencing more frequent climate-related events.

However, significant challenges persist, particularly in climate resiliency, urban design, affordable housing, homelessness, and access to recreational spaces. Despite strong strides in renewable energy, Lancaster's desert environment remains highly vulnerable to rising temperatures and prolonged droughts. While the Safety Element outlines broad goals for adaptation, there is a gap in specific, actionable urban design solutions, such as shade structures, cool pavements, and green corridors, that could better protect residents from extreme heat. Affordable housing remains another pressing issue; the city's 2022–2023 Housing Element notes that more than 40% of Lancaster's renters are cost-burdened, spending over 30% of their income on housing (City of Lancaster Housing Element, 2023). Compounding this issue, homelessness in the Antelope Valley region has increased by approximately 9% from 2022 to 2023, according to the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA, 2023), underscoring the need for expanded shelter options, transitional housing, and permanent supportive housing initiatives.

Moreover, there are notable gaps in the provision of recreational areas and green spaces, which are essential for promoting public health, climate resilience, and community well-being. Currently, Lancaster offers approximately 3.5 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents below the national recommendation of 10 acres per 1,000 residents (National Recreation and Park Association, 2020). The city's rapid population growth, coupled with a young demographic profile, heightens the urgency to expand access to parks, playgrounds, and open spaces. Enhancing green infrastructure would not only provide critical recreational opportunities but also contribute to cooling urban temperatures, improving air quality, and mitigating the heat island effect, particularly in the city's more densely developed areas.

The City of Lancaster's current General Plan functions as a blueprint for long-term development, guiding land use decisions to safeguard and enhance the well-being of its residents.

Originally adopted in 2009, the plan has undergone periodic updates to key sections, including the Circulation Element (adopted in 2020), Safety Element (adopted in 2022), Environmental Justice Element (adopted in 2022), and Housing Element (adopted in 2022, revised in 2023). While these updates reflect the city's efforts to address evolving priorities, a comprehensive reevaluation of the entire General Plan must ensure alignment with Lancaster's current goals, recent growth, emerging challenges.

General Plans are enacted and put into law by local governments, such as city councils or boards of supervisors, through a formal adoption process. This process typically involves drafting the plan, conducting public hearings, and ensuring compliance with state-mandated requirements. Once adopted, the General Plan becomes a legally binding document that guides future land use decisions, zoning, and development approvals. In California, General Plans are regulated by the Governor's Office of Planning and Research (OPR) and must comply with the California General Plan Guidelines. Additionally, cities and counties are required to periodically update specific elements, such as housing, to remain consistent with state laws. The enforcement of General Plans is overseen by local planning departments, which ensure that development projects and land use changes adhere to the policies outlined in the plan.

The development of a General Plan typically involves collaboration among multiple stakeholders, including local government agencies (such as planning departments and city councils), private planning consultants, and community stakeholders like residents, business owners, and advocacy groups (Governor's Office of Planning and Research [OPR], 2017). The planning process is often designed to be participatory, incorporating public workshops, community surveys, and stakeholder meetings to gather input and ensure the plan reflects a broad range of community needs and values. Consultants are frequently hired to assist with technical analyses,

environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and facilitation of public outreach efforts (Fulton & Shigley, 2018). State agencies may also provide input, especially for elements related to housing, transportation, and environmental justice.

The OPR establishes the framework for General Plans, ensuring that they meet state standards and reflect best practices in planning. According to the OPR, a General Plan must include seven mandatory elements: Land Use, Circulation, Housing, Conservation, Open Space, Noise, and Safety (OPR, 2017). Each element addresses a specific aspect of community development, ensuring a comprehensive approach to growth, sustainability, and public welfare. Additionally, cities and counties may choose to include optional elements, such as Environmental Justice, Climate Adaptation, or Economic Development, depending on their unique needs. The General Plan must maintain internal consistency across all elements, meaning that policies in one section cannot conflict with those in another.

The goals established within a General Plan are intended to guide both immediate actions and long-term community development. Some goals align with broader statewide objectives, such as promoting affordable housing, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and enhancing climate resilience, consistent with state mandates like the Housing Element Law and Senate Bill 375 (California Department of Housing and Community Development [HCD], 2023; California Air Resources Board [CARB], 2018). Other goals are tailored specifically to local contexts, addressing unique challenges such as wildfire risk, water conservation, or economic revitalization. General Plans typically distinguish between long-term goals such as achieving carbon neutrality by 2045 and short-term goals, such as updating zoning codes within a two-year timeframe to comply with new housing regulations. By balancing these statewide and local priorities, General Plans serve as dynamic roadmaps for present-day decision-making and future community resilience.



The OPR provides the General Plan Guidelines to assist local governments in developing, updating, and implementing General Plans that meet state requirements and reflect contemporary planning practices. These guidelines serve as a comprehensive resource, offering both legal mandates and best practices for ensuring that General Plans address communities' evolving needs while promoting sustainable growth, climate resilience, and equitable development.

### **Lancaster Today**

Lancaster, California, is undergoing a transformative phase marked by a series of developments that reflect its commitment to sustainability, equity, and community enrichment. These initiatives, guided by Mayor R. Rex Parris and the City Council, signify a departure from the city's 2008 General Plan, which no longer encapsulates Lancaster's ambitious trajectory. Several recent and approved developments exemplify the city's progress beyond the expectations of its current plan.

The projects undertaken in Lancaster represent a significant and deliberate effort to revitalize and strengthen the city's position as a sustainable, forward-thinking community. Each development has been carefully located and designed to complement the city's ongoing progress, focusing on enhancing quality of life, fostering economic growth, and promoting environmental stewardship. These developments exemplify Lancaster's commitment to achieving sustainable, equitable, and innovative urban planning, aligning with both local and state environmental goals. The following sections provide a detailed examination of the 4 selected sites, the rationale behind their location, and their anticipated impacts.

*Residential and mixed-use developments***Imagine Village II**

Imagine Village II is a newly constructed 100% affordable housing development that will deliver 80 residential units across seven buildings, located at the northeast corner of Avenue I and Sierra Highway. This project specifically targets households earning between 30% and 60% of the area's median income, directly addressing the critical shortage of affordable housing in the region. The site's location was strategically chosen for its proximity to essential transportation corridors, ensuring future residents will have access to key services, employment opportunities, and transit options. The natural environment at this location, with its semi-arid desert landscape and minimal vegetation, offers few environmental constraints, making it an ideal place for development. Given the limited ecological value of the land, the project can move forward with minimal disruption to natural habitats. The developers have paid careful attention to the surrounding environment by incorporating water-efficient landscaping and shade coverage in the design to align with California's sustainability goals and CEQA guidelines. The socio-economic conditions of the area highlight a significant need for affordable housing, and this project will offer crucial living spaces for low-income families who may otherwise struggle to find suitable housing in Lancaster. The development's emphasis on pedestrian connectivity and the inclusion of amenities like a community room, playground, and laundry facilities will enhance the quality of life for residents, making this site a valuable addition to Lancaster's urban landscape. Furthermore, by locating this development in a central area with access to key resources, the city is advancing its long-term goals of providing sustainable and equitable housing solutions for its residents (California Office of Planning and Research [OPR], 2024b).

### 30th Street West and Avenue K Projects

At the intersection of 30th Street West and Avenue K, Lancaster has approved a project comprising approximately 36,300 square feet of commercial space and 50 townhomes. This site was selected for its strategic location at a major intersection, offering high visibility and accessibility, which is key for commercial and residential development. The area, currently vacant, has been identified as underutilized land, making it an ideal candidate for revitalization. The natural environment in this location is typical of the region's semi-arid landscape, with little significant vegetation or sensitive habitats. This allows for development with minimal impact on the local ecosystem. From a socio-economic perspective, the project addresses the need for commercial and residential spaces, enhancing the city's commercial base while offering new housing options. Lancaster's vision for revitalizing vacant land while expanding residential and commercial opportunities aligns with the city's growth strategy and broader state goals. Townhomes will provide affordable housing in a highly accessible area, reducing the need for long commutes and contributing to the city's goal of reducing urban sprawl. The commercial component of the project will create jobs and offer new retail and service options for residents, fostering economic growth and increasing the city's tax base. This mixed-use development supports Lancaster's goal of promoting higher-density development in key locations, making efficient use of available land while creating a balanced, thriving community (OPR, 2007).

### *Sustainable Energy Initiatives*

#### SGH2 Renewable Hydrogen Facility

The SGH2 Renewable Hydrogen Facility, approved for a 15-acre site at the northwest corner of Sixth Street East and Columbia Way, embodies Lancaster's strategic commitment to clean energy innovation and aligns directly with the city's environmental goals outlined in its

General Plan, particularly Objective 15.2, which seeks to minimize the negative impacts of solid waste disposal. The facility will convert unrecyclable mixed wastepaper into hydrogen, producing approximately 4,570 metric tons of hydrogen annually. This clean hydrogen will then be distributed to hydrogen stations across California, helping to reduce the state's reliance on fossil fuels and further positioning Lancaster as a leader in sustainable energy.

The project is in direct response to Policy 15.2.1, which encourages the use of conversion technologies at appropriate facilities to manage waste. By utilizing waste-to-energy conversion methods, this facility will help Lancaster address the growing need for sustainable waste management solutions. The SGH2 facility's waste-to-hydrogen conversion process offers a clean, green alternative to traditional landfill disposal, reducing the environmental impact of waste and supporting the city's broader climate resilience and sustainability goals. This aligns with the Specific Action 15.2.1(a), which focuses on collaborating with disposal franchises to explore the feasibility of waste-to-energy conversion technologies. The SGH2 facility represents a significant step forward in this initiative, demonstrating the potential for waste-to-hydrogen technology to mitigate the disposal of waste from outside the Antelope Valley, contributing to waste reduction efforts and reducing the overall environmental burden of waste disposal.

The site's location in an industrial zone makes it an ideal candidate for such a facility, as it has the necessary infrastructure to support large-scale energy production while minimizing conflict with residential areas. Moreover, the natural environment surrounding the site is relatively undeveloped, meaning the project can proceed with minimal ecological impact. As part of the facility's commitment to sustainable energy and waste management, SGH2 is also collaborating with local waste disposal franchises to study the feasibility of integrating waste-to-energy technologies at regional landfills. This effort aligns with the ongoing Public Works Department

program aimed at investigating potential funding sources for the installation and operation of such systems, ensuring that waste is managed in a way that not only minimizes environmental harm but also generates clean energy that benefits the community.

The socio-economic rationale for choosing this site is rooted in Lancaster's goals of fostering innovation, creating green jobs, and advancing the renewable energy sector. The facility will generate new employment opportunities and contribute to economic growth by supplying clean hydrogen fuel to the growing network of hydrogen stations across California. Additionally, the project will enhance Lancaster's reputation as a hub for clean energy and sustainable development, reinforcing the city's upward trajectory in addressing climate change through cutting-edge technologies.

By integrating the principles of waste-to-energy conversion and aligning with Objective 15.2 and Policy 15.2.1, the SGH2 Renewable Hydrogen Facility not only provides an innovative solution to the growing issue of waste disposal but also positions Lancaster as a model for other cities aiming to adopt sustainable energy solutions and reduce their carbon footprint. The continued collaboration with local waste management entities will be key in achieving the long-term goals outlined in the city's General Plan, ensuring that Lancaster continues to grow responsibly while promoting environmental stewardship and economic resilience (OPR, 2022; Valdivia, 2022).

### *Community Identity*

#### **AV ALTA FC**

Lancaster's iconic Municipal Stadium, formerly home to the Lancaster JetHawks minor league baseball team, is being reimagined as a soccer-specific venue for the city's new professional team, AV ALTA FC. With the JetHawks having ceased operations in 2020, the

stadium found new life with AV ALTA FC joining the USL League One. The city has transformed the stadium into a 5,300-seat venue featuring FIFA-quality synthetic turf, improved seating, and community-oriented upgrades. The revitalized stadium hosted its inaugural professional soccer match in April 2025, marking a new era of sports in the Antelope Valley. AV ALTA FC secured a thrilling victory in their opening game, energizing local fans and signaling Lancaster's growing reputation as a destination for sports, youth engagement, and economic revitalization (United Soccer League, 2023; AV ALTA FC, 2024).

### **Research Question**

The City of Lancaster aims to update its General Plan to better align with the community's evolving needs, address sustainability challenges, and promote a vision of resilient, equitable urban growth. As part of this effort, this project conducts a comprehensive analysis of the existing General Plan to evaluate the effectiveness of its currently established goals and policies. The primary objective is to identify gaps, inconsistencies, and outdated approaches, and to provide targeted recommendations for amendments that strengthen long-term environmental, social, and economic sustainability within the city.

Although planners frequently engage with city plans, detailed interpretations and critical evaluations of these documents are often rare. As Mandelbaum (1990) notes, many practitioners focus on the surface-level content of plans without uncovering the deeper intellectual, political, and social contexts that shaped them. This analysis adopts a more systematic, comprehensive, and multi-dimensional approach to evaluation. Rather than simply verifying compliance with state requirements, the analysis will integrate the best practices in sustainability, climate resilience, equity, and community engagement, while examining how the existing plan reflects or fails to reflect the lived realities of Lancaster's residents.

This evaluation approach emphasizes the importance of the local context. While anchored in state-mandated standards and contemporary planning frameworks, the analysis remains sensitive to Lancaster's unique environmental conditions, socio-economic profile, and future growth pressures. By adopting a layered reading of the General Plan, the analysis goes beyond technical review and strives to uncover how local histories, political decisions, and demographic shifts have influenced planning choices. This method allows for more meaningful and actionable recommendations that are not only legally sound but also culturally and socially responsive to the needs of the Lancaster community.

Ultimately, this analysis positions itself as both a critical assessment and a forward-thinking contribution to Lancaster's ongoing urban evolution, ensuring that future General Plan updates are strategic, resilient, and reflective of the community's aspirations.

## **Literature Review**

Evaluating municipal general plans is essential for aligning urban development with goals of sustainability, economic resilience, and equity. However, several gaps persist in both academic literature and practical application. One major issue is the lack of integrated evaluation frameworks. Rudolf and Grădinaru (2019) emphasize that most evaluations fail to combine plan quality, implementation effectiveness, and measurable outcomes in a cohesive manner. Additionally, Baer (1997) identifies the absence of standardized criteria for assessing comprehensive plans, resulting in inconsistent evaluations across jurisdictions. Another common gap involves the lack of robust monitoring and accountability mechanisms. Laurian et al. (2004) argue that without clear tools for tracking progress and enforcing policy, even well-written plans may fall short in execution. Furthermore, stakeholder engagement remains underdeveloped in many planning processes. Arnstein's (1969) seminal "Ladder of Citizen Participation" reveals that

public involvement is often tokenistic, weakening the legitimacy and responsiveness of general plans.

The importance of evaluating general plans cannot be overstated, as they serve as blueprints for a city's long-term development. Despite this, local governments face several challenges in conducting thorough evaluations. Resource constraints, including limited staffing and funding, frequently impede comprehensive review efforts. Political and organizational resistance can also prevent effective evaluations, particularly when there is a lack of institutional support or political will. Moreover, insufficient data collection and analytic capacity compromise the quality of assessments. The inherent complexity of urban systems adds another layer of difficulty, as it is often hard to isolate the specific impacts of individual plan elements on broader development outcomes.

To overcome these challenges, scholars have proposed a range of evaluation criteria. Baer (1997) recommends assessing the comprehensiveness of plans by examining the range of issues addressed and the clarity of policy direction. Laurian et al. (2004) stress the importance of identifying strong implementation strategies and accountability structures. In terms of participatory governance, Arnstein (1969) underscores the value of authentic stakeholder engagement in both plan development and revision. Finally, Rudolf and Grădinaru (2019) advocate for plans that include built-in mechanisms for monitoring progress and adapting to emerging conditions. Applying these criteria to the City of Lancaster's General Plan can help identify strategic amendments that not only align with best practices but also advance the city's goals for sustainable, equitable, and resilient development.



## General Plan Evaluation Methodology

This qualitative evaluation uses document analysis as the primary method to assess the effectiveness of general plans. By focusing exclusively on the content and structure within each plan, this methodology aims to understand how well each plan is crafted to meet its objectives and provide clear, actionable steps for implementation.

In addition, the 2017 General Plan Guidelines published by the California Governor's OPR will serve as a benchmark for evaluating the quality of each general plan. These guidelines offer best practices and recommendations for creating effective, legally compliant, and forward-looking plans. By incorporating the OPR guidelines, this evaluation ensures that the analysis remains aligned with state-recommended standards for comprehensive planning.

The first component, Policy Clarity and Specificity, involves examining the language and structure of each policy within the general plan. This analysis assesses whether policies are written in a clear, specific, and measurable way, providing a roadmap that is understandable and actionable for stakeholders. This step evaluates each policy's capacity to provide guidance that can be practically implemented, identifying if the plan lays out achievable, well-defined goals and actions.

The second area, Alignment with Strategic Objectives, examines the internal coherence of the general plan. This part of the analysis focuses on how effectively each policy aligns with the overarching objectives of the plan, such as environmental sustainability, economic growth, or public health. It assesses whether policies are consistently designed to contribute to these strategic goals, ensuring that individual actions support the broader vision and goals outlined in the general plan. This alignment check provides insight into the plan's ability to maintain focus on its stated priorities.

The third component, Implementation and Accountability Mechanisms, reviews each plan's provisions for implementation, including timelines, responsible parties, and evaluation metrics. This part of the analysis assesses whether the plan includes sufficient detail to enable effective execution and accountability, making sure that specific agencies or departments are assigned to each action item. By incorporating timelines and metrics, the evaluation considers the plan's readiness for tracking progress, fostering accountability, and adapting policies as necessary over time.

Lastly, the methodology incorporates an Outcome-Oriented Review that examines references to anticipated outcomes or qualitative indicators embedded within each policy. Although actual outcome data is not analyzed, this review focuses on the projected impacts that each policy envisions, such as community well-being, environmental resilience, or economic stability. By exploring how each plan frames its intended impacts, this component provides a sense of the plan's forward-looking vision and its potential to address long-term challenges.

Together, these methodologies create a comprehensive framework for evaluating the content and structure of general plans. The analysis highlights each plan's strengths and areas for improvement, offering insights into the effectiveness of policy clarity, alignment, and accountability mechanisms in contributing to a cohesive and actionable planning document. This qualitative approach aims to reveal essential characteristics that make general plans effective tools for achieving strategic goals and adapting to evolving community needs.

### Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this research is grounded in policy analysis and evaluation theory, drawing from established methodologies in urban planning. A key component of this

framework is policy clarity and specificity, which assesses whether the language and structure of policies within a general plan are clear, specific, and measurable. Effective urban planning frameworks emphasize the importance of well-defined policy goals that provide a practical roadmap for stakeholders (Ngha, 1998). Clarity ensures that policies are actionable and not left open to broad interpretation, which can hinder implementation.

Another essential component is alignment with strategic objectives, which examines how well individual policies contribute to the overarching goals of the general plan, such as environmental sustainability, economic growth, or public health. Emphasizes that urban planning documents should maintain internal coherence, ensuring that policies are designed to reinforce broader strategic priorities rather than operating in isolation (Goodspeed, 2017). This alignment is crucial in creating a plan focused on its stated mission and not fragmented by conflicting directives.

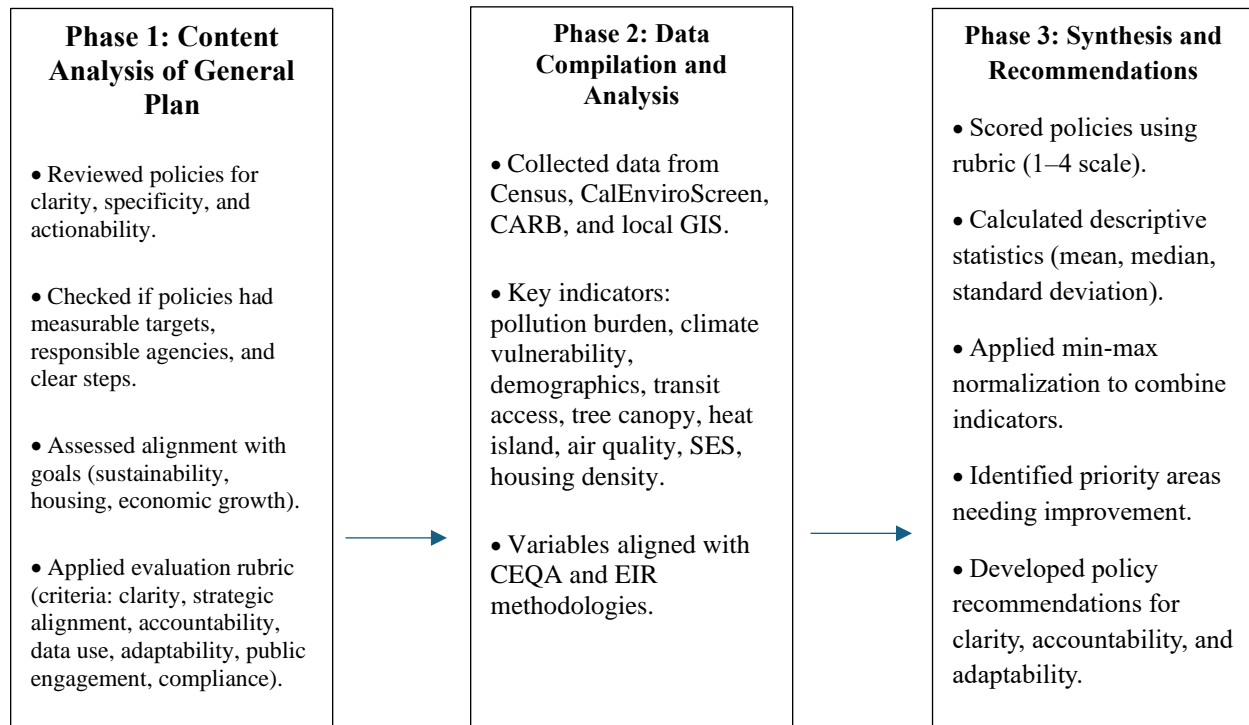
In addition to policy alignment, the framework incorporates an assessment of implementation and accountability mechanisms, focusing on clear timelines, responsible parties, and evaluation metrics. Blair highlights that urban and regional planning evaluations should include measurable benchmarks that allow for systematic tracking of progress (Blair, 1984). A lack of accountability mechanisms can render even well-crafted policies ineffective, as there would be no structured process to ensure their execution. This component ensures that general plans contain provisions for enforcement, adaptation, and long-term monitoring.

Finally, the framework includes an outcome-oriented review, which examines references to anticipated policy impacts, qualitative indicators, and long-term community benefits. Rajkovich argues that effective climate action plans incorporate resilience and environmental justice indicators, providing a structured way to evaluate whether planning documents are designed to produce meaningful outcomes (Rajkovich, 2023). While this research does not analyze actual

policy outcomes, it considers how well each plan articulates its intended effects and whether it provides a vision for addressing long-term challenges. By integrating these components: policy clarity, strategic alignment, implementation mechanisms, and an outcome-oriented approach, this framework offers a comprehensive method for evaluating the content and structure of general plans. It ensures that plans are not only well-formulated but also actionable, enforceable, and capable of guiding urban development in alignment with strategic priorities. This methodology, rooted in document analysis, provides an objective and systematic approach to assessing the effectiveness of urban planning policies.

## Methods

This research employed a three-phase methodology to evaluate the City of Lancaster's General Plan, focusing on policy clarity, strategic alignment, implementation mechanisms, data utilization, adaptability, and compliance with California state regulations.



### *Phase 1*

The initial phase involved a thorough content analysis of the City of Lancaster's General Plan. Policies were assessed for clarity, specificity, and actionability, examining whether they included measurable targets, designated responsible agencies, and clear implementation steps. This approach aligns with best practices that emphasize the importance of precise and enforceable policy language in urban planning (Berke et al., 2024).

The analysis also evaluated the plan's coherence with overarching goals such as sustainability, housing, and economic growth. By examining the interconnections among policies,

the study assessed the plan's alignment with strategic objectives, a critical factor in effective urban planning (Berke et al., 2024).

To ensure a structured and transparent evaluation, the following rubric was applied:

Criteria	Excellent (4)	Good (3)	Adequate (2)	Needs Improvement (1)
<b>Policy Clarity &amp; Specificity (Are policies written, specific, and actionable?)</b>	Policies are precise, measurable, and clearly define implementation steps with responsible parties. Strong use of regulatory and performance-based language.	Policies are mostly clear and specific, but some lack detailed implementation steps or accountability measures.	Policies provide general direction but lack measurable targets, making implementation unclear.	Policies are vague, ambiguous, or aspirational, with no actionable steps.
<b>Alignment with Strategic Objectives (Does the plan demonstrate coherence with overarching goals like sustainability, housing, or economic growth?)</b>	Strong alignment with statewide and local strategic goals. Policies are interconnected and reinforce one another.	Moderate alignment with strategic goals; some sections are well-integrated, but others are disconnected.	Partial alignment, but some policies conflict with or fail to contribute to overarching goals.	Poor alignment; policies seem disjointed or contradictory, failing to support strategic objectives.
<b>Implementation &amp; Accountability Mechanisms (Does the plan assign responsibility, set timelines, and provide measurable metrics?)</b>	Clearly outlines responsible agencies, timelines, and performance indicators for all major policies. Provides mechanisms for monitoring and updates.	Assigns responsibilities and includes timelines, but lacks robust tracking or evaluation metrics.	Mentions responsible agencies but does not include specific implementation steps or metrics.	No clear accountability or implementation framework. Lacks monitoring mechanisms.

<b>Use of Data &amp; Best Practices (Is the plan based on sound data, including climate science, housing needs, or transportation trends?)</b>	Policies are data-driven and cite relevant research, climate projections, or demographic analysis. Adopts best practices recommended by OPR.	Some data integration is present, but not all policies are evidence-based or supported by research.	Limited use of data; some policies seem informed by trends, but others lack a clear evidence base	Policies lack supporting data and appear arbitrary or outdated. No integration of best practices.
<b>Adaptability &amp; Future-Proofing (Does the plan account for changing conditions such as climate resilience, population shifts, or economic fluctuations?)</b>	The plan incorporates adaptive strategies, scenario planning, and resilience-focused policies that allow for long-term sustainability.	Some adaptive measures are included, but flexibility in responding to changing conditions is limited.	Acknowledges the need for adaptation but provides no clear mechanism for updates or revisions.	Fails to account for future challenges or long-term planning needs.
<b>Stakeholder &amp; Public Engagement (Does the plan reflect meaningful public input and community priorities?)</b>	Extensive engagement with diverse stakeholders, including underrepresented communities. The plan reflects public input.	Some public participation is evident, but certain communities or perspectives are underrepresented.	Limited engagement, with only basic public hearings or surveys conducted.	Minimal or no evidence of public or stakeholder involvement in the planning process
<b>Compliance with State Regulations (Does the plan comply with California's General Plan Guidelines and relevant policies like SB 379 or AB 32?)</b>	Fully compliant with OPR guidelines and key regulations (SB 1000, SB 379, AB 32, etc.), ensuring legal robustness.	Generally compliant but missing minor elements of state-mandated requirements.	Compliance is inconsistent; some required elements are underdeveloped or missing.	Non-compliant with major state regulations, potentially subject to legal challenges.

The rubric helps address key issues by breaking down the essential components of effective policy design. It focuses on policy clarity and specificity, ensuring that the policies are clear, measurable, and actionable, which prevents ambiguity that could hinder successful implementation. It also looks at how well policies align with strategic goals like sustainability, housing, and economic growth, ensuring policies work together to support broader objectives.

The rubric evaluates implementation and accountability mechanisms, checking if the plan assigns responsibilities, sets timelines, and establishes measurable metrics to track progress. This ensures that policies are not just well-intentioned but can be put into practice. The use of data and best practices criteria ensures that policies are based on sound, up-to-date evidence, making them more effective and reliable.

Additionally, the rubric addresses adaptability and future-proofing, which are critical for planning in a world of a changing climate, population growth, and economic shifts. By including stakeholders and public engagement, the rubric ensures that the plan reflects the needs and input of the community, particularly those who may be underrepresented. Finally, the rubric's compliance with state regulations ensures that the plan meets all required legal standards, safeguarding it against potential challenges.

In summary, the rubric provides a structured way to assess whether the general plan is clear, actionable, and aligned with key goals, while also ensuring it is responsive to future needs and complies with legal requirements.

## *Phase 2*

The second phase involved compiling a comprehensive data set encompassing demographic, environmental, and infrastructure indicators, sourced from reliable government and



environmental databases. These included the U.S. Census Bureau, CalEnviroScreen 4.0, the California Air Resources Board, and local GIS data. Key variables considered in this analysis were pollution burden scores, climate vulnerability, population demographics, access to resources, tree canopy coverage, urban heat island effect, air quality, socioeconomic status (SES), and housing density. The pollution burden scores, sourced from CalEnviroScreen 4.0, measure community exposure to pollution, considering factors such as air quality, water contamination, and hazardous waste proximity, with a scale from 0 to 100. The climate vulnerability index, using data from Cal-Adapt, evaluates a community's vulnerability to climate-related impacts, such as heatwaves and extreme weather, on a scale from 1 to 5. Population demographics, obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau, include variables like age, income, race/ethnicity, and other characteristics that may affect exposure to environmental hazards and access to resources. Access to public transportation was measured in terms of proximity to transit options using local GIS data, which is critical for mobility and equity, especially for underserved populations. The tree canopy coverage, analyzed through U.S. Forest Service tools like i-Tree Canopy, measures the percentage of urban area covered by tree canopy, influencing urban heat islands and local air quality. The urban heat island effect was assessed using local GIS data, measuring temperature differences between urban and rural areas, providing insight into heat-related health risks. Air quality, based on data from the California Air Resources Board and the U.S. EPA, was evaluated using the Air Quality Index (AQI), with higher values indicating worse air quality and greater health impacts. Socioeconomic status (SES), derived from the U.S. Census Bureau, was analyzed using metrics like median household income and poverty rates to highlight vulnerable populations. Housing density, obtained from local zoning maps and Census data, was used to assess the concentration of housing units, which can influence environmental quality and access to resources.

These variables were selected because they are commonly used in Environmental Impact Report (EIR) methodologies and align with CEQA guidelines. They are standard tools for evaluating significant impacts that relate directly to general plan goals, ensuring that the evaluation meaningfully addresses both regulatory requirements and practical urban planning outcomes (Walker et al., 2023).

### *Phase 3*

In the final phase, findings from the policy analysis and data compilation were synthesized to develop policy recommendations aimed at enhancing the General Plan's effectiveness. Recommendations focused on improving policy clarity, ensuring alignment with strategic objectives, and incorporating robust implementation and accountability mechanisms.

To synthesize the results, each policy area was evaluated using a scoring rubric based on criteria such as clarity, actionability, strategic alignment, and use of data. Scores were assigned on a scale from 1 to 4, consistent with the evaluation of rubric criteria. For the environmental and demographic indicators, descriptive statistics such as means, medians, and standard deviations were calculated to understand the distribution of conditions across Lancaster.

To integrate different indicators into a single assessment, a min-max normalization method was applied, rescaling variables to a common scale from 0 to 1. This allowed for consistent comparison across different data types and ensured that no single variable dominated the analysis due to differences in units or magnitudes. Final composite scores for environmental vulnerability and socioeconomic disadvantage were developed by averaging normalized indicator values. Areas needing improvement were identified by comparing the lowest-performing policy scores and data indicators against strategic plan objectives, particularly where significant disparities or

environmental burdens were present. Priority was given to areas showing both policy weaknesses and data-driven evidence of vulnerability.

The recommendations also emphasized the importance of adaptability, proposing strategies to future-proof the plan against changing conditions such as climate change and demographic shifts. This approach aligns with best practices for ensuring that urban plans are dynamic and responsive to emerging challenges (Berke et al., 2024).

## Results

### *Cumulative Dataset*

The dataset analysis yielded several key findings regarding the performance of the policies and measures under review. A total of 139 scores were collected across various policies to assess their effectiveness in addressing key environmental and sustainability concerns.

The average policy score was 34.60, suggesting a generally positive assessment, though with noticeable room for improvement. The median score was 35, and the mode (most frequently occurring score) was also 35, indicating a strong central tendency and a relatively symmetric distribution. This consistency suggests that most policies were rated around a mid-range value, neither excelling nor failing.

The standard deviation of 2.87 and variance of 8.26 reflect moderate variability, meaning that while many policies were evaluated similarly, some stood out as notably better or worse. The range of scores spanned 19 points, from a minimum of 20 to a maximum of 39, highlighting that a few policies significantly underperformed or overperformed.

Importantly, the kurtosis value of 4.00 indicates a relatively sharp peak in the distribution, with most scores clustering near the mean. This suggests that the city has generally maintained a

consistent policy approach, avoiding major failures or standout successes. Meanwhile, the negative skewness value of -1.30 implies a slight leftward skew in the data. This means that more policies received higher scores, but a few low-scoring policies pulled the average down slightly.

The relatively tight clustering of scores suggests the city's general plan adheres consistently to broad planning objectives. However, the noticeable range and negative skew reveal a small number of policies that underperform, hinting at areas where local challenges may not be adequately addressed or where general guidelines have not been effectively localized. Cumulative Policy grades are located in **Appendix A**.

### *Low-Scoring Criteria*

To better understand where improvement is needed, the following criteria consistently received significantly lower scores:

- Equity in Environmental Outcomes – Some policies lacked attention to how vulnerable or underserved populations are affected or protected.
- Monitoring and Evaluation Measures – Many policies lacked clear mechanisms for measuring progress or enforcing accountability.
- Community Engagement Specificity – Several policies scored poorly for vague or minimal commitments to public participation in planning decisions.
- Alignment with Local Hazard Vulnerabilities – In some cases, policies did not sufficiently respond to known local risks such as wildfire, drought, or air quality concerns.

### *Plan For the Natural Environment*

When analyzing the evaluation scores, it is important to clarify which variables received the lowest and highest ratings. This helps prioritize focus areas and guide future policy development.

#### ***Lowest Scoring Policies (Score: 28)***

The lowest score of 28 was recorded for three variables, each tied to air quality and active transportation:

- Minimize air pollutant emissions generated by new and existing development
- Protect sensitive uses such as homes, schools, and medical facilities from the impacts of air pollution
- Facilitate the development and use of public transportation and travel modes such as bicycle riding and This variable supports infrastructure and policies that increase the use of sustainable and active transportation methods.

These policies received lower scores due to a lack of detailed implementation strategies, funding plans, or measurable outcomes. While these goals are important for public health and sustainability, their current form relies on broad aspirational language rather than actionable frameworks.

#### ***Highest Scoring Policies (Score: 38)***

- Encourage the use of recycled tertiary treated wastewater when possible
- Promote the use of water conservation measures in the landscape plans of new developments.

These high-scoring policies reflect strong alignment with sustainable water use and are supported by actionable approaches like promoting drought-tolerant landscapes and water reuse systems. Their practical nature and potential for immediate environmental impact likely contributed to their high evaluation.

The Natural Environment policy section of the City of Lancaster's General Plan includes 34 distinct policy statements, each scored on a scale of 0 to 40. The total cumulative score for these policies is 1,169 out of 1,360 points. The mean score across all policies is 34.38, with a median score of 35 and a mode of 35, indicating a consistent scoring distribution. This consistency means most environmental policies are performing similarly, pointing to a uniform implementation of sustainable environmental practices. The minimum score observed was 28, while the maximum score reached was 38, resulting in a range of 10. The standard deviation for the dataset is 2.76, reflecting a moderate variation in the individual scores. This level of variation implies that while the majority of the environmental policies are strong, a few may be underdeveloped or less effectively implemented. The sample variance is 7.64. The standard error is 0.47, and the confidence level at 95% is 0.96, supporting the reliability of the mean score. This means if the city were to measure a different but similar set of policies, the average would likely remain close to this value, showing consistency in environmental planning. The distribution skewness is -0.90, suggesting a slight skew toward higher scores, and the kurtosis is 0.61, indicating a relatively normal distribution with a modest peak. This indicates that Lancaster has done well in maintaining a generally strong environmental policy framework, though additional attention could still be needed to address underperforming areas. Thirty-four policy statements were evaluated in this section, focusing on water conservation, air quality, biological resources, energy use, erosion control, mineral extraction, and visual resource protection.

### *Plan For Public Health*

All policies in this section cover a comprehensive range of health and safety topics, including seismic safety, emergency services, hazardous materials, medical infrastructure, and crime prevention. The narrow score range, only 5 points wide, suggests a robust and balanced approach across all policy areas.

#### ***Highest Scoring Policies (Score: 39)***

- Ensure that the design of new development discourages opportunities for criminal activities to the maximum extent possible.
- Promote programs and partnerships that encourage citizens to take a proactive role in community safety and the welfare of their neighborhoods
- Ensure that an adequate number of fire stations and adequate firefighting equipment, and personnel are provided to protect the citizens and businesses of the City of Lancaster
- Promote community involvement in fire prevention activities.
- Expand access to resources through coordination and cooperation in planning and operations along multi-agency and jurisdictional lines to ensure adequate public services during major emergencies

These policies excel due to their proactive and collaborative approaches, offering specific strategies and encouraging citizen participation alongside interagency coordination. Their strong scores reflect both strategic intent and practical applicability.

#### ***Lowest Scoring Policy (Score: 34)***

- Implement the provisions of State regulations addressing the airport land use issue

Though this policy still received a relatively high score, its lower rating stems from a reliance on general state guidance without clear local adaptation. Enhancing this policy with more targeted language specific to Lancaster's land use context could strengthen its impact.

The Public Health and Safety section of the City of Lancaster's General Plan includes 20 policy statements, each evaluated on a scale of 0 to 40. The cumulative score for this section is 743 out of a possible 800 points. The mean score is 37.15, with a median of 37 and a mode of 37, reflecting a high level of consistency across policy evaluations. This high mean suggests that public health and safety are priority areas with consistently strong policy language and implementation. The minimum score recorded is 34, while the maximum score is 39, resulting in a range of 5. The standard deviation is 1.57, with a sample variance of 2.45, indicating relatively low dispersion among scores. This minimal spread suggests that all health-related policies are performing at a similarly high level, which is a positive signal for community well-being. The standard error is 0.35, and the confidence level at 95% is 0.73, suggesting a precise estimate of the mean. Such precision confirms that the high performance is reliable and not due to random chance. The skewness of -0.46 implies a slight leftward tilt in the distribution, while the kurtosis of -0.81 points to a flatter distribution than a normal curve. This implies there are fewer very high or very low scores, meaning the policies tend to cluster around the high end. In total, 20 policy items were assessed in this section, covering seismic safety, noise standards, hazardous material management, emergency response, public safety services, and medical infrastructure.

### *Plan For Active Living*

This section covers a broad set of objectives aimed at fostering physical activity, cultural engagement, access to childcare, and equitable social services.

### ***Lowest Scoring Policy (Score: 20)***



- Facilitate the establishment of a four-year university within the City of Lancaster

This policy likely scored low due to its aspirational nature without clear implementation steps, funding mechanisms, or short-term objectives. While long-term educational infrastructure is important, this goal may lack actionable detail in the current plan.

***Highest Scoring Policy (Score: 37)***

- Assist in establishing programs to provide a humane social service policy which addresses the needs of a diverse population, including but not limited to senior citizens, children, handicapped individuals, immigrants, the mentally ill, and other special needs groups

This policy demonstrates comprehensive and inclusive planning, targeting a broad range of community members with specific needs. Its high score reflects both its strong intent and the potential for direct community impact.

The Active Living component of the General Plan evaluates 16 policy items, which collectively scored 534 points out of a maximum of 640. The average score across these items is 33.38, with both the median and mode at 34, suggesting a consistent mid-range performance. These mid-level scores may suggest that while the policies are present, they may not be sufficiently actionable or prioritized in the city's overall agenda. Scores range from a low of 20 to a high of 37, yielding a 17-point spread, the largest among the policy areas assessed. This wide range highlights the inconsistent development or implementation of policies supporting recreation and inclusive community services. A standard deviation of 3.83 and a variance of 14.65 point to a relatively high degree of variation in the evaluations. This suggests some policies are very strong while others may be weak or vague, requiring clearer standards or funding. The standard error sits at 0.96, and the 95% confidence interval for the mean is approximately  $\pm 2.04$ , giving a reasonable

margin for generalization. The distribution shows significant left-skewness (-3.13) and a high kurtosis value of 11.29, indicating the presence of extremely low scores and a concentration of values around the peak. This suggests a few policies are severely underperforming and dragging down the overall strength of the category. This section encompasses policies supporting active recreation, cultural enrichment, childcare, and inclusive community services.

### *Plan For Physical Mobility*

The top-scoring policy supports walkability and safety, showing strong alignment with modern planning goals like accessibility and equity. In contrast, the lowest-scoring policies focus mostly on traffic flow and vehicle movement, with less attention to sustainability or community needs. Comparing these examples helps show which types of policies are more effective and where updates may be needed.

#### ***Highest Scoring Policy (Score: 37)***

- Design transportation facilities to encourage walking, provide connectivity, ADA accessibility, and safety by reducing potential auto/pedestrian conflicts

This policy reflects a comprehensive commitment to multi-modal accessibility and pedestrian safety. Its high score suggests strong alignment with equity, health, and mobility goals, likely due to its actionable scope and inclusive design principles.

#### **Lowest Scoring Policies (Score: 30)**

- Encourage the design of roads and traffic controls to optimize safe traffic flow by minimizing turning movements, curb parking, uncontrolled access, and frequent stops

- Provide adequate roadways and a support system to accommodate both automobile and truck traffic

These lower-scoring policies emphasize vehicle throughput and conventional roadway efficiency but may lack integration with multimodal or sustainability-oriented goals. Their narrower focus and lack of strong social or environmental framing likely contributed to their comparatively lower evaluations.

The Physical Mobility section of the General Plan consists of 21 policy items, totaling 708 points out of a possible 840. The mean score for this set is 33.71, with the median and mode being 34 and 36, respectively. This indicates that most policies tend to score within the mid-to-high range. This consistency reflects a focused but not fully maximized effort in transportation policy. The scores exhibit a range of 7, from a minimum of 30 to a maximum of 37, reflecting some variability but remaining concentrated near the higher end. The standard deviation is 2.03, and the variance is 4.11, signaling moderate variation between policy scores. These values indicate steady progress, with few standout successes or failures. With a standard error of 0.44 and a confidence level of 95%, the mean is estimated to be within  $\pm 0.92$ . This gives city planners confidence that policy quality will remain consistent across similar evaluations. The distribution's skewness of -0.32 and kurtosis of -0.73 indicate a slight leftward tilt in the data with fewer extremely low scores. This suggests some policies are above average, but most hover around the mean. These results underscore the City's focus on enhancing transportation infrastructure, improving roadways, supporting alternative transportation, and integrating environmental considerations into mobility planning.

### *Plan For Municipal Service and Facilities*

This section evaluates the Municipal Services and Facilities policies in the City of Lancaster's General Plan. With a total score of 296 out of 360, the policies show strong overall performance but also highlight areas for improvement. Most policies score consistently, with a few standing out for their clarity and effectiveness, while others could benefit from more specific implementation strategies.

#### ***Lowest Scoring Policy (Score: 32)***

- Consider the use of conversion technologies at appropriate facilities.

Despite its relevance, this policy likely scored lower due to general language and a lack of defined implementation mechanisms, timelines, or outcomes. Greater specificity or linkage to concrete programs would strengthen its effectiveness.

#### ***Highest Scoring Policy (Score: 39)***

- Direct growth to areas with adequate existing facilities and services, areas that have adequate facilities and services committed, or areas where public services and facilities can be economically extended.

This policy excels in its practicality and clarity. It sets a strong framework for sustainable and cost-effective urban growth by linking development to infrastructure capacity and fiscal responsibility.

The Municipal Services and Facilities section of the City of Lancaster's General Plan includes 9 policy statements, each evaluated on a scale from 0 to 40. The cumulative score for this section is 296 out of a possible 360 points, demonstrating a solid overall performance. With a mean score of 32.89, a median of 33, and a mode of 30, the results reflect a relatively consistent

evaluation across the policies. The close alignment between the mean and median suggests that the data is not skewed and that most policies are performing at a similar level, with few extreme highs or lows. The range of scores, from 28 to 38, spans 10 points, showing that while there is some variation, all policies fall within a fairly narrow band. The standard deviation of 3.22 and sample variance of 10.36 further support this observation, indicating moderate variability slightly more than in other sections, but not so large as to raise concern about inconsistent policy quality. This suggests that although some policies outperform others, no individual policy dramatically underperforms, allowing for system-wide improvements rather than targeted remediation. The standard error of 1.07 and 95% confidence interval of  $\pm 2.47$  indicate a moderately precise estimate of the mean, giving decision-makers a reliable central value around which to assess policy effectiveness. Additionally, the skewness value of 0.04 implies a nearly symmetric distribution of scores, reinforcing the idea that high and low outliers are rare and that the distribution is balanced. The kurtosis value of -0.81 suggests a flatter distribution with fewer extreme values, meaning most scores cluster around the average rather than showing sharp peaks. This flat shape implies that while the section is performing well overall, there may be fewer standout successes, highlighting an opportunity to elevate all policies to a higher standard of excellence.

#### *Plan for Economic Development and Vitality*

The Economic Development section of the City of Lancaster's General Plan shows strong and consistent performance, with a score range of only 7 points between the highest and lowest rated policies. This narrow-spread highlights the city's focused and well-aligned approach to economic planning. With an average score of 36.04 and most policies falling close to this value, the data suggests a solid commitment to supporting business growth, workforce development, and infrastructure.

***Lowest Scoring Policies (Score: 32)***

- Encourage new forms of civic engagement at all levels in order to achieve pride, goodwill, and a strong sense of place within the community.
- Promote the advantages and opportunities for businesses and industries to locate within Lancaster due to the establishment of the Enterprise Zone and the Redevelopment Agency's various business attraction programs.

These lower scores likely result from generalized language and the absence of measurable implementation criteria, which reduces their effectiveness in practice.

***Highest Scoring Policies (Score: 39)***

- Continue to promote the creation of a transit village development district around the Metrolink commuter rail station to provide opportunities for transit-oriented development, including mixed-use housing, shopping, public services, employment opportunities, and cultural/recreational activities within a safe, pedestrian-friendly environment.
- Require new development to construct and/or pay for new on-site capital improvements necessitated by their project, consistent with performance criteria identified in Objective 15.1.
- Encourage the planning and development of large-scale self-sufficient, mixed-use communities with integrated phasing and financing of infrastructure improvements, public facilities, and municipal service costs.

These top-performing policies are distinguished by their specific, actionable language and alignment with best practices in sustainable urban development and infrastructure investment.

The Economic Development section of the City of Lancaster's General Plan includes 25 policy statements, each evaluated on a scale from 0 to 40. The cumulative score for this section is 901 out of a possible 1000 points, reflecting a strong performance overall. The mean score is 36.04, with a median of 36 and a mode of 38, indicating a high level of consistency in how policies are rated. The scores range from a minimum of 32 to a maximum of 39, resulting in a range of 7 points. The standard deviation is 2.21, with a sample variance of 4.87, suggesting relatively low dispersion in how policies are evaluated. The standard error is 0.44, and the confidence interval at a 95% level is  $\pm 0.91$ , indicating a precise estimate of the mean. The skewness of -0.38 points to a slight leftward tilt in the distribution, while the kurtosis of -0.98 implies a flatter distribution with fewer extreme values. This analysis highlights Lancaster's strong commitment to fostering economic development through a focus on workforce development, business growth, and infrastructure. There are a few areas where further refinement could enhance consistency, particularly in the promotion of new development and the attraction of specific industries or sectors.

#### *Plan For Physical Development*

With a score range of 11 points, the Urban Form and Design section shows a mix of strong and weaker policies. The top-scoring policies focus on sustainability, walkability, and community development, aligning well with current planning goals. However, the lowest-scoring policy on hillside development may need clearer guidelines to improve its effectiveness. This range highlights areas where the city is succeeding and where further refinement is needed.

#### ***Lowest Scoring Policy (Score: 28)***

- Ensure that development proposed within hillside areas is tailored to the terrain and preserves natural hillside characteristics.

This lower score may reflect challenges related to policy clarity or the absence of specific standards for development in topographically sensitive areas. Further refinement could include clearer guidance on grading, erosion control, and hillside conservation to strengthen implementation.

***Highest Scoring Policies (Score: 39)***

- Promote the neighborhood as the basic building block of urban design to achieve a sustainable community form, providing for the needs of existing residents and businesses while preserving choices for future generations.
- Enhance the image and character of the city by embracing public art to promote the history, heritage, and culture of Lancaster.
- Create walkable, mixed-use, transit-accessible neighborhoods and commercial districts that provide opportunities for young and old to live, work, shop, and recreate.

These high-performing policies are characterized by strong integration of sustainability, placemaking, and inclusivity. Their success lies in the presence of actionable language and alignment with best practices in urban planning.

The Plan for Physical Development section of the City of Lancaster's General Plan includes 34 policy statements, each evaluated on a scale from 0 to 40. The cumulative score for this section is 1,201 out of a possible 1,360 points, reflecting a strong overall performance. The mean score is 35.32, with a median of 36 and a mode of 36, suggesting a relatively consistent and favorable evaluation across the policies. This score consistency indicates effective planning and



implementation of physical development policies. The scores range from a minimum of 28 to a maximum of 39, resulting in a range of 11 points. The standard deviation is 2.74, with a sample variance of 7.50, indicating a moderate level of variability in the scores. This moderate spread points to areas where certain policies may need clarification or better support. The standard error is 0.47, and the confidence interval at a 95% level is  $\pm 0.96$ , providing a reasonably precise estimate of the mean. The skewness of -0.94 indicates a slight leftward distribution, while the kurtosis of 0.52 suggests a relatively higher peak in the score distribution with fewer extreme values. This analysis shows that the City of Lancaster's policies in the Plan for Physical Development are generally well-aligned, though certain areas, such as hillside development and land use compatibility, may benefit from additional refinement to further improve consistency and address localized planning challenges.

### *Key Takeaways*

The analysis reveals that the majority of the policies in Lancaster's General Plan receive positive evaluations, with the average score across all policies being 34.60. This suggests that while the city's policies are generally effective, there is room for improvement in certain areas. Notably, sections like Public Health and Economic Development performed relatively well, with scores of 37.15 and 36.04, respectively. These areas demonstrate strong policy alignment with city goals, particularly in fostering public safety, healthcare infrastructure, and economic growth. Conversely, the Active Living policies showed significant variability in their scores, with a spread of 20 to 37, indicating that while some policies support community services effectively, others may require further refinement for consistency.

The analysis affirms that while Lancaster's General Plan generally supports its sustainability goals, there are opportunities to address inconsistencies across several policy

sections. For instance, the Natural Environment policies, scoring an average of 34.38, could benefit from more focused approaches to water conservation and energy use. Similarly, Active Living and Mobility policies, which showed a broader spread of scores, suggest that further refinement in community engagement and infrastructure may strengthen the city's long-term sustainability efforts. Overall, targeted amendments to these policy sections could better align Lancaster's planning goals with its environmental, social, and economic objectives.

### Site Evaluations

To provide a clearer perspective on the practical application of Lancaster's policies, this section evaluates three key projects: Imagine Village II, the 30th Street West and Avenue K development, and the SGH2 Renewable Hydrogen Facility. The evaluation focuses on real-world conditions, using key indicators such as housing affordability, income levels, and access to services within a 1, 3, and 5-minute driving radius. These factors help assess how well current policies align with the actual needs and challenges of the surrounding communities.

By linking policy language to on-the-ground realities, this evaluation highlights the effectiveness of Lancaster's General Plan in promoting equitable growth and sustainable development. It also identifies opportunities to refine policies and project strategies to better address housing needs, reduce environmental impacts, and ensure greater access to essential services. The following sections provide detailed insights into each project and offer recommendations to enhance their alignment with the city's long-term goals for sustainability and equity. (Site Evaluations are provided in **Appendix B**)

#### *Imagine Village II*

Imagine Village presents a commuter profile that highlights a strong reliance on personal vehicles and limited access to nearby employment opportunities. Data from the American

Community Survey (2018–2022) indicates that 77.8% of the 6,049 workers aged 16 and older drive alone to work, while only 1.8% use public transportation and 1.1% walk. A considerable portion of workers also endure long commute times, with many traveling 30 to 60 or more minutes each way. These trends contribute to increased greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, higher household transportation costs, and reduced quality of life. The lack of local employment options is further emphasized by the community's workforce composition—25% are employed in blue-collar jobs and 18.5% in service-related occupations, indicating the need for jobs that align with these sectors closer to home.

The Lancaster General Plan 2030's Policy 16.2.2 is intended to support local business success through financial, technical, labor, and regulatory assistance. This includes ongoing partnerships with organizations such as the Lancaster Incubator, the Small Business Development Center, and GAVEA. However, the policy's general language and focus on program referrals limit its potential impact on critical issues like job accessibility and commuter patterns. The policy received a score of 34 out of 40, showing that while it is a step in the right direction, it lacks the specificity needed to address existing gaps in employment and transportation.

There is a clear opportunity to strengthen this policy to better support Imagine Village residents. The presence of vacant land to the east and south of the neighborhood creates a tangible opportunity for the city to encourage development of employment hubs, particularly for retail, light industrial, and service-sector jobs that match the area's labor force. Localized job creation in these areas would reduce commuting distances, cut emissions, and increase residents' disposable income by lowering fuel and vehicle costs. Furthermore, Imagine Village's minimal use of public transit suggests the need for integrated transportation planning, including improved access to transit and infrastructure for alternative modes like biking and walking.

Policy 16.2.2 should be revised to include targeted strategies. These could involve designating employment zones near residential areas, providing incentives for mixed-use and light industrial development, and coordinating with regional agencies to attract businesses that align with the local workforce. In addition, the policy should include performance metrics such as reduced average commute times, increased local job availability, and lower vehicle miles traveled per capita. By focusing on measurable outcomes and aligning economic development with transportation planning, the City of Lancaster can better serve Imagine Village and move closer to its sustainability and equity goals.

### *30<sup>th</sup> Street West and Avenue K Project*

The area within a five-minute drive of the project site exhibits strong indicators of untapped commercial potential and community need, particularly when considering its current population of 32,351 and 11,482 households. Despite a median household income of \$83,223 and a diversity index of 84.9, the surrounding retail environment is relatively underdeveloped. Key national retailers like BP Food Mart, Dollar General, and Tractor Supply all have low regional market indices (58, 75, and 76, respectively), suggesting that residents are traveling farther to meet basic retail and service needs. Average household spending patterns support this conclusion, with local families spending nearly \$3,000 annually on travel alone, an indicator of unmet demand for nearby goods and services.

The area's demographic profile adds further support for local mixed-use development. The largest age cohort is males aged 30–34, a group generally associated with high mobility and spending power. Moreover, 24% of all households consist of single-person occupants, reflecting a strong need for convenient access to restaurants, entertainment, and essential services. The relatively high number of vacant seasonal housing units, 16.2% of all housing stock, represents a

physical opportunity to repurpose or redevelop sites for more permanent, mixed-use development that serves existing residents while attracting new ones.

Policy 16.6.3 of the Lancaster General Plan 2030 encourages the development of large-scale, self-sufficient mixed-use communities that include integrated planning for infrastructure, public services, and financing. While the policy articulates a strong vision for fiscally sustainable development, it falls short on implementation mechanisms and measurable outcomes. Supporting Action 16.6.3(a) promotes financial self-sufficiency through developer contributions to capital improvements, but it does not clearly define thresholds, funding formulas, or incentives to facilitate these contributions on a scale.

Given current retail leakage and demographic alignment, this policy presents a clear opportunity to better support equitable and sustainable growth. Mixed-use development tailored to the community's retail and service needs, such as grocery stores, childcare centers, co-working hubs, and restaurants, could reduce travel distances, improve local quality of life, and retain local spending. Prioritizing such development in underutilized or vacant parcels would also maximize land efficiency without placing undue strain on public infrastructure.

To ensure Policy 16.6.3 fulfills its potential, the City of Lancaster should consider amending the policy to include more targeted and measurable implementation strategies. First, it should identify priority zones within underserved neighborhoods where mixed-use development is both feasible and necessary to meet local demand. Second, the policy should require or incentivize fair-share infrastructure contributions from developers, particularly for essential components like transit access, utilities, and public facilities. Additionally, the City could encourage pilot programs or interim uses such as pop-up markets or flexible co-working spaces to test the local appetite for expanded retail and service offerings. Finally, equity metrics should be

integrated into the policy framework, including improved access to daily needs within a 15-minute walk or drive, and reductions in household transportation costs. By grounding land use strategies in demographic data and measurable community needs, Lancaster can transition from aspirational planning language to policies that produce real, on-the-ground benefits.

The economic impacts of implementing targeted mixed-use development in Lancaster could be significant and far-reaching. Localizing retail and service offerings would help recapture outflowing consumer spending, potentially generating millions in additional annual sales revenue and boosting the city's tax base. This increased economic activity could, in turn, support job creation across a range of sectors, including construction, retail, food service, and childcare, while also attracting entrepreneurial investment in small businesses and startups. Furthermore, by reducing household transportation costs and commute times, mixed-use development would increase residents' disposable income, which could circulate back into the local economy. These effects compound when paired with policy tools that prioritize local hiring, support for minority-owned businesses, and community benefit agreements, amplifying the positive economic ripple effects across Lancaster's neighborhoods.

### *SGH2 Renewable Hydrogen Facility*

This policy review is based exclusively on written policy analysis; no on-site evaluations or physical conditions assessments were conducted. Among the policies reviewed, Objective 15.2, "Minimize the negative impacts of solid waste disposal using a variety of methods, including mitigating the disposal of waste from outside the Antelope Valley," received one of the lowest scores, earning 28 out of 40 points. Policy 15.2.1 aims to "consider the use of conversion technologies at appropriate facilities" and identifies a single action item: to collaborate with disposal franchises to explore the feasibility of waste-to-energy systems and potential funding

sources for their implementation. This policy is designated as an existing program under the responsibility of the Public Works Department, funded by the general fund, and listed with an ongoing timeline.

While Lancaster has demonstrated innovation in renewable energy, particularly through projects like SGH2, this specific policy does not reference SGH2 or similar initiatives. As a result, the policy's language remains vague and lacks a clear, actionable framework. The absence of direct reference to concrete projects such as SGH2 makes it difficult to measure progress or to evaluate the effectiveness of the policy in achieving its stated goal. The general and ambiguous language of Policy 15.2.1 fails to establish measurable benchmarks, timelines, or implementation strategies. This lack of specificity limits its ability to drive meaningful changes. Research supports the idea that effective waste-to-energy policies must be detailed, with well-defined actions and performance metrics to facilitate implementation and measurable results (Yuan et al., 2019). Strengthening Policy 15.2.1 with more concrete and measurable directives would not only improve local sustainability outcomes but could also position Lancaster as a model for others seeking to replicate its renewable energy success.

### *Key Takeaways*

The evaluation of three major projects in Lancaster—Imagine Village II, the 30th Street West and Avenue K development, and the SGH2 Renewable Hydrogen Facility—demonstrates that while the city's General Plan promotes sustainability and equity, its policies often lack the specificity and measurable benchmarks needed to produce tangible community outcomes. In Imagine Village II, long commute times and limited job access reflect the need to revise Policy 16.2.2 with targeted strategies for local employment and improved transportation options. The 30th Street West and Avenue K site reveals strong potential for mixed-use development, yet Policy 16.6.3 does not

provide the implementation tools necessary to address retail gaps or reduce household travel burdens. Meanwhile, Policy 15.2.1 fails to reference or support innovative projects like SGH2, limiting the city's ability to lead in waste-to-energy conversion. Collectively, these findings point to an urgent need for Lancaster to move beyond aspirational policy language and adopt more actionable, measurable strategies that respond directly to the needs of its residents and advance long-term goals for sustainable, equitable development.

## Discussion

The evaluation of Lancaster's General Plan revealed a generally strong performance across all policy categories, with an average policy score of 34.6 out of 40. The *Public Health* and *Economic Development* sections, in particular, scored the highest, reflecting clear alignment with strategic objectives such as community well-being and economic resilience. These high-scoring areas align well with the findings from the site evaluations of Imagine Village II, 30th Street West, and Avenue K development, and the SGH2 Renewable Hydrogen Facility, where policies in these domains have supported key outcomes like business success, economic development, and renewable energy innovation. This supports the research hypothesis that Lancaster's General Plan reflects a forward-thinking, sustainability-oriented vision, particularly in areas that impact public health and economic vitality.

However, certain sections, such as Active Living and Municipal Services, showed greater variability and lower average scores, which point to inconsistencies in policy clarity or gaps in implementation mechanisms. These results mirror the findings from the site evaluations, particularly about Imagine Village II and the 30th Street West and Avenue K development, where issues like transportation infrastructure and mixed-use development are critical for improving local quality of life. For example, the Imagine Village II evaluation highlighted the area's high reliance



on personal vehicles and long commute times, suggesting the need for stronger *Active Living* policies that integrate transportation planning with localized job creation. Similarly, the 30th Street West and Avenue K development evaluation underscored a retail leakage issue, pointing to the need for clearer *Municipal Services* policies that support mixed-use development and accessible services, as current policy lacks concrete implementation strategies.

These findings suggest that while Lancaster's General Plan excels in fostering economic and public health outcomes, areas like *Active Living* and *Municipal Services* require targeted policy revisions. These sections should include more specific directives, performance metrics, and strategies that address real-world needs, as evidenced in the site evaluations. The findings from Imagine Village II and 30th Street West and Avenue K suggest that Lancaster would benefit from incorporating localized job creation and improved infrastructure planning into its General Plan to address gaps in these areas.

The slightly negative skew across multiple sections also suggests a clustering of mid-to-high policy scores, meaning that while most policies are well-crafted, there is untapped potential for improving the lower-performing outliers. For instance, Policy 16.2.2 in the *Economic Development* section, which aims to support local businesses, could be revised to include more targeted strategies and measurable outcomes, as identified in the evaluation of Imagine Village II. Similarly, the policy under Policy 16.6.3 for mixed-use development could benefit from more concrete implementation strategies, as highlighted in the evaluation of the 30th Street West and Avenue K project. These areas exhibit the potential for refining policy language and introducing specific mechanisms for better alignment with community needs, as emphasized by Baer's (1997) framework on policy comprehensiveness.

These findings align with the evaluation frameworks of both Baer (1997) on policy comprehensiveness and Laurian et al. (2004) on implementation mechanisms. The presence of strong accountability structures in the highest-scoring sections supports the argument that enforceability is central to planning effectiveness. Conversely, the weaker performance in *Active Living* resonates with Brinkley and Stahmer's (2024) observation that cultural and recreational components in plans are often underdeveloped or unevenly implemented. The Imagine Village II site evaluation, in particular, highlights how poor integration of transportation and local job creation can limit the effectiveness of policies that aim to improve active living.

In summary, while Lancaster's General Plan is largely effective, the site evaluations reveal specific opportunities to refine policies in areas like transportation, mixed-use development, and employment access. These refinements will ensure the city's policies not only reflect the vision of sustainability and equity but also address the on-the-ground realities and unmet needs in key development areas.

### Future Considerations and Implications

Additionally, the study's focus on Lancaster as a single case limits the generalizability of the results. Future studies could benefit from comparative analysis with other cities to contextualize Lancaster's strengths and gaps more broadly.

Future research should explore how General Plan policies translate into measurable implementation outcomes. This could include mixed methods approaches incorporating interviews with city staff, community members, and developers. Longitudinal studies would also be beneficial to assess whether recent updates to elements like Environmental Justice and Safety are yielding tangible improvements over time.

This project demonstrates the critical role of thorough, structured evaluations in strengthening General Plans and ensuring they serve as meaningful tools for sustainable and equitable urban growth. Lancaster's plan exhibits a solid foundation, especially in public health and economic development. Still, areas like Active Living and Municipal Services require sharper policy language and better integration with strategic goals.

By identifying these opportunities, the project contributes to the broader planning discourse on how cities can make their foundational policy documents not only legally compliant but visionary and actionable. Ultimately, these findings support Lancaster's path toward becoming a resilient, inclusive, and future-ready city.

### **Policy Suggestions and Recommendations**

When looking at the 2008 General Plan, it is clear that Lancaster has gone above and beyond in meeting many of its stated goals. While many of the goals and policies were actionable, most lacked concrete accountability mechanisms to ensure long-term implementation and impact. Research shows that the absence of accountability structures such as formal monitoring, performance benchmarks, or community oversight can significantly reduce the effectiveness of planning documents (Nguyen et al., 2019). For instance, a study analyzing mixed-income housing projects in the U.S. found that projects with formal accountability tools like consent decrees or oversight bodies were far more likely to adhere to their stated goals than those without (Nguyen et al., 2019). These mechanisms encouraged transparency and performance tracking, which allowed for adaptive management in the face of political or administrative changes.

To enhance accountability in Lancaster's planning efforts, the city could consider establishing a Public Accountability Oversight Committee (PAOC). This committee would be

tasked with monitoring the progress of General Plan initiatives, ensuring transparency, and holding responsible parties accountable. Key components of the PAOC could include:

- **Regular Public Reporting:** Mandating quarterly reports that detail the status of ongoing projects, challenges encountered, and steps taken to address them.
- **Community Engagement:** Hosting biannual town hall meetings to gather public feedback, address concerns, and adjust plans as necessary.
- **Performance Metrics:** Developing clear, measurable indicators to assess the effectiveness of implemented policies and projects.
- **Independent Audits:** Commissioning third-party evaluations to assess the efficiency and impact of plan execution.

A comparable example comes from Portland, Oregon, which instituted a similar oversight mechanism as part of its Portland Plan implementation. The city created a Progress Board, a group of civic leaders and stakeholders tasked with issuing annual progress reports and aligning agency performance with plan goals. This level of transparency led to significant improvements in equity reporting and program responsiveness (City of Portland, 2015). If adopted in Lancaster, a comparable body could ensure ongoing progress and public trust in plan implementation.

Using scenario planning and incorporating planning tools to model potential environmental, economic, and demographic shifts. Future-proofing a General Plan involves integrating adaptive policies that prepare cities for long-term uncertainties such as climate change, demographic shifts, and economic volatility. The California Governor's Office of Planning and Research (OPR) emphasizes flexibility and scenario planning as essential tools for building resilient urban systems (OPR, 2017). Cities like Lancaster, located in the Antelope Valley, face heightened vulnerability

due to extreme temperature fluctuations, prolonged drought, and wildfire risk, all of which are intensifying with climate change. Senate Bill 379 (SB 379) requires cities to update their Safety Elements to incorporate climate adaptation strategies, guided by vulnerability assessments and consistent with Local Hazard Mitigation Plans. A successful example of this approach is the City of Santa Cruz, which embedded scenario-based climate adaptation strategies into its planning documents. This model has been praised for integrating scientific data with flexible policy tools to enhance local resilience (Binder et al., 2015). As Iwaniec and Wiek (2014) argue, future-oriented planning frameworks that allow for iterative updates and cross-sector coordination are critical for keeping plans responsive to emerging threats. For Lancaster, adopting similar methods ensures not only compliance with state mandates but also proactive protection of its residents, infrastructure, and natural resources from climate-related risks specific to the high desert environment.

Lancaster should revise its Active Living and Mobility policies to prioritize inclusive, connected, and equitable access to recreational, educational, and cultural amenities, particularly for historically underserved neighborhoods and marginalized populations such as youth, the elderly, immigrants, and low-income families. This includes strengthening the implementation of Objective 9.1 (educational access), Objective 10.1 and 10.2 (recreational equity and trail systems), Objective 11.1 (cultural resources), and Objective 13.1 (social services).

The Active Living section had the widest range of policy performance scores, signaling inconsistency in implementation and effectiveness. This inconsistency directly affects vulnerable populations in Lancaster, many of whom live in areas with limited park access, inadequate sidewalk infrastructure, and few safe routes to schools or libraries. While the General Plan includes excellent intent through trail systems (Objective 10.2), parkland ratios (Objective 10.1), and partnerships with school districts (Objective 9.1), the absence of explicit prioritization for equity-

focused investment leaves many communities without access to the physical and social infrastructure needed for well-being.

Despite a young population base, 27% under age 18, and a growing bilingual community, many of Lancaster's low-income and minority neighborhoods remain disconnected from these amenities. For instance, schools often lack safe walking or biking access, and equestrian or bicycle trails do not extend evenly across all districts. Furthermore, while the General Plan emphasizes arts, cultural heritage, and social services (Objectives 11.1–13.1), these services must be geographically and culturally accessible to have a real impact. Revising the Active Living and Mobility policies should include:

- Mapping equity gaps in park access, safe routes, and public transportation connectivity, using tools like CalEnviroScreen and community-led surveys.
- Revising trail planning standards under Objective 10.2 to ensure that bicycle, pedestrian, and equestrian infrastructure connect low-income areas to schools, parks, and job centers.
- Expanding joint-use agreements with school districts to create multi-use spaces that serve educational and recreational needs.
- Requiring new developments to integrate schools, parks, libraries, and trails into site designs and contribute to culturally relevant public space (e.g., community gardens, art installations, and plazas).
- Investing in child care access, social programming, and trail safety by Objectives 13.1 and 12.2, especially for single-parent households and commuting families.

The City of Richmond, California, revised its general plan to include health equity zones and neighborhood-level investments in green space and mobility based on community health

disparities. This led to targeted improvements in trail access and safe school routes in historically underserved areas (Corburn & Bhatia, 2007). Lancaster can follow a similar model by weaving equity into the very design and implementation of Active Living policies.

The last recommendation is to restructure its General Plan update to align with the OPR guidelines by explicitly organizing and labeling all mandatory elements, including Land Use, Housing, Circulation, Conservation, Open Space, Noise, Safety, and Environmental Justice, as required by California Government Code §65302. In addition, the Plan should incorporate and present complementary policy sections such as Alternative Energy, Urban Design for Climate Adaptability, Public Services and Facilities, and Economic Development as stand-alone components to avoid burying them under unrelated categories.

The current organization of Lancaster's General Plan does not fully reflect the clarity, accessibility, or integration that OPR recommends for effective implementation and public engagement. While the Plan includes strong content across several areas, policies related to energy, design, and resilience are often embedded within broader chapters, making it difficult for staff, developers, and community members to identify goals and regulatory frameworks (OPR, 2017).

For example, the Energy and Sustainability content is spread across mobility, environmental, and economic development objectives rather than being consolidated under a coherent alternative energy framework. Similarly, strategies related to urban design for heat adaptation or cooling infrastructure are critical in Lancaster's hot desert climate and are not consistently labeled or grouped. This lack of structural clarity can hinder coordination between departments and reduce accountability in implementation (Carlson & Mathur, 2020).

Restructuring the Plan would support better alignment with state goals such as SB 100 (renewable energy) and SB 379 (climate adaptation in safety elements) and allow for clearer cross-referencing between elements (Mullen, 2019). Other cities, such as San Diego and Sacramento, have adopted a more modular structure that explicitly outlines required and supplementary elements, improving usability for both internal and external stakeholders. A key Table of findings and Summary is included below.

<b>Category</b>	<b>Key Findings</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
<b>Public Health &amp; Economic Development</b>	High policy scores; strong alignment with community well-being and economic resilience. Effective in supporting projects like SGH2, Imagine Village II.	Maintain current momentum. Enhance measurable outcomes for policies like Policy 16.2.2 (supporting local businesses) to ensure lasting impact.
<b>Active Living</b>	Wide variation in policy scores; limited transportation infrastructure and recreational access in underserved areas (e.g., Imagine Village II).	Revise policies (Objectives 9.1, 10.1, 10.2, 11.1, 13.1) to prioritize equity. Map equity gaps, improve safe routes, and update trail planning standards. Expand school-district partnerships for joint-use spaces.
<b>Municipal Services</b>	Lack of clear implementation strategies; retail leakage noted in the 30th St West/Avenue K evaluation.	Strengthen policies with specific implementation strategies for mixed-use development. Amend Policy 16.6.3 to include clearer development criteria.
<b>Policy Consistency &amp; Clarity</b>	Some policies lack detailed directives or performance metrics. Mid-to-high policy scores cluster with underdeveloped outliers.	Refine language in weaker policies using Baer's (1997) framework. Introduce targeted performance metrics for clarity and comparability.
<b>Accountability &amp; Oversight</b>	Strong sections had accountability structures; others lacked mechanisms for monitoring or public reporting.	Create a Public Accountability Oversight Committee (PAOC). Include quarterly public reports, town halls, performance metrics, and third-party audits.
<b>Climate Resilience &amp; Future Planning</b>	Need for adaptive planning tools in light of climate risks (drought, wildfire, temperature).	Use scenario planning per OPR guidance. Integrate adaptive strategies aligned with SB 379. Follow Santa Cruz's example of climate-integrated planning.
<b>Equity in Access to Amenities</b>	Underserved populations face barriers to educational,	Prioritize investments in low-income neighborhoods. Require developers to



	cultural, and recreational infrastructure.	include integrated community-serving amenities in site design.
<b>General Plan Responsiveness</b>	Plan shows strong intent but lacks flexibility for long-term shifts (economic, environmental, demographic).	Use tools for iterative updates. Align with Iwaniec & Wiek's (2014) adaptive frameworks. Build capacity for cross-sector coordination.

## Conclusions

This research set out to evaluate the City of Lancaster's General Plan to identify gaps, strengths, and opportunities for aligning long-range planning with the city's sustainability, equity, and climate resilience goals. Using a rigorous qualitative framework that assessed policy clarity, strategic alignment, implementation capacity, and outcome orientation, the study revealed that while many sections of Lancaster's General Plan are well-developed particularly in areas such as public health and economic development other elements, like Active Living and Municipal Services, show significant variability in clarity and equity-focused implementation.

The findings underscore the need for Lancaster to evolve from a policy framework that is mostly responsive to one that is proactively adaptive. Given the city's unique environmental context in the Antelope Valley, marked by high temperatures, water scarcity, and socioeconomic disparities, future planning must center equity, resilience, and flexibility. This is especially true for marginalized communities that are disproportionately impacted by environmental hazards and lack consistent access to safe infrastructure, recreational spaces, and education-aligned development.

Key recommendations from this study include strengthening accountability mechanisms, embedding climate adaptation across all plan elements, prioritizing infrastructure investment in underserved areas, and integrating educational, cultural, and health access into mobility and land

use planning. These recommendations not only reflect best practices aligned with the California OPR guidelines but also respond to real and growing needs within the community.

Ultimately, this research contributes to a broader understanding of how general plans can function not just as compliance documents, but as tools for shaping inclusive, livable, and future-ready cities. For Lancaster, implementing these recommendations offers a path to reaffirm its leadership in sustainability while ensuring that no community is left behind in the process of growth.

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## Appendix A- Cumulative Policy Grades

Policy	Score	Maximum Score
<b>Facilitate the establishment of a four-year university within the City of Lancaster</b>	20	40
<b>Facilitate the development and use of public transportation and travel modes such as bicycle riding and walking.</b>	28	40
<b>Minimize air pollutant emissions generated by new and existing development.</b>	28	40
<b>Protect sensitive uses such as homes, schools and medical facilities, from the impacts of air pollution.</b>	28	40
<b>Consider the use of conversion technologies at appropriate facilities</b>	28	40



<b>Ensure that development proposed within hillside areas is tailored to the terrain and preserves natural hillside characteristics.</b>	28	40
<b>Encourage the design of roads and traffic controls to optimize safe traffic flow by minimizing turning movements, curb parking, uncontrolled access, and frequent stops.</b>	30	40
<b>Provide adequate roadways and a support system to accommodate both automobile and truck traffic.</b>	30	40
<b>Ensure that mitigation is provided for all development in recognized flood prone areas. Any mitigation of flood hazard in one area shall not exacerbate flooding problems in other areas</b>	30	40
<b>Ensure that the City is proactive in addressing the infrastructure and service needs of the wireless communications industry.</b>	30	40
<b>Provide a hierarchical pattern of attractive commercial developments which serve regional, community, and neighborhood functions with maximum efficiency and accessibility</b>	30	40
<b>Consider the detachment of incorporated areas that do not meet the intent of Objective 18.3.</b>	30	40
<b>Cooperate with the AVAQMD and other agencies to protect air quality in the Antelope Valley</b>	31	40
<b>Encourage educational programs that: • promote awareness of local biological resources; • inform about potential protection and preservation programs; • foster community attitudes and behaviors that protect local plants and wildlife; • encourage community involvement in protection programs.</b>	31	40
<b>Ensure that appropriate rail access is provided to accommodate the needs of industrial development.</b>	31	40
<b>Provide sufficient lands for the conduct of public, quasi-public, institutional, cultural, educational, and recreational activities.</b>	31	40
<b>Evaluate opportunities for significant mineral extraction within the General Plan study area.</b>	32	40
<b>Establish and acquire rights-of-way for master planned trails.</b>	32	40
<b>Promote the acquisition of library materials, databases and programs that reflect the needs and inter</b>	32	40
<b>Require that the fair and equitable cost of constructing arterials which connect outlying urban development to the City core be borne by developments which create the need for them.</b>	32	40

<b>Promote the use of alternative modes of transportation through the development of convenient and attractive facilities that support and accommodate the services.</b>	32	40
<b>Support and encourage the addition of and accessibility to regional air transportation services at air installations in the vicinity, while acknowledging necessity for land use coordination between the City and the air installations regarding land surrounding these facilities (see also policies and programs in the Air Installation and Land Use Compatibility subsection of the Plan for Public Health and Safety and the Interagency Land Use Coordination subsection of the Plan for Physical Development).</b>	32	40
<b>Promote continued coordination between the City of Lancaster and local service providers.</b>	32	40
<b>Encourage new forms of civic engagement at all levels in order to achieve pride, goodwill and a strong sense of place within the community</b>	32	40
<b>Promote the advantages and opportunities for businesses and industries to locate within Lancaster due to the establishment of the Enterprise Zone and the Redevelopment Agency's various business attraction programs.</b>	32	40
<b>Provide sufficient land to accommodate a variety of housing types meeting the economic, lifestyle, and social needs of current and future residents.</b>	32	40
<b>Encourage the long-term maintenance of new residential development.</b>	32	40
<b>Ensure that development does not adversely affect the groundwater basin</b>	33	40
<b>Ensure the comprehensive management of programs for significant biological resources that remain within the Lancaster sphere of influence.</b>	33	40
<b>Minimize erosion problems resulting from development activities.</b>	33	40
<b>Since certain soils in the Lancaster study area have exhibited shrink- swell behavior and a potential for fissuring, and subsidence may exist in other areas, minimize the potential for damage resulting from the occurrence of soils movement.</b>	33	40
<b>Facilitate the use of bicycles as an alternative form of transportation, as well as a form of recreation (see also Policy 14.4.3 and related Specific Actions of the Plan for Physical Mobility).</b>	33	40

<b>Encourage the provision of library outreach services for residents who cannot visit library facilities.</b>	33	40
<b>Work with regional partners to ensure that the regional circulation system provides adequate connections across the Antelope Valley for convenient circulation and rapid emergency access</b>	33	40
<b>Promote the creation of a high desert transportation corridor which will provide a direct connection between Interstate 5 and Interstate 15 to the City of Lancaster.</b>	33	40
<b>Maintain an adequate supply of parking that will support the present level of automobiles and allow for the expected increase in alternative modes of transportation.</b>	33	40
<b>Ensure sufficient infrastructure is built and maintained to handle and treat wastewater discharge.</b>	33	40
<b>Promote the development of a local high-skilled 21st Century workforce that will meet the needs of existing and prospective employers.</b>	33	40
<b>Encourage the attraction of public and quasi-public uses to locate in Lancaster.</b>	33	40
<b>Promote the use of water conservation measures in the design of new developments.</b>	34	40
<b>Protect lands currently in agricultural production from the negative impacts created when urban and rural land uses exist in close proximity, while recognizing the possibility of their long-term conversion to urban or rural uses.</b>	34	40
<b>Encourage the incorporation of energy conservation measures in existing and new structures.</b>	34	40
<b>Explore the potential for establishing scenic corridors within the Study Area.</b>	34	40
<b>Work with area school districts to identify funding programs for school site acquisition and facilities construction which recognize chronic shortfalls in traditional funding programs, and to ensure that schools are appropriately located.</b>	34	40
<b>Provide opportunities for a wide variety of recreational activities and park experiences, including active recreation and passive open space enjoyment within a coordinated system of local, regional, and special use park lands areas</b>	34	40

<b>Establish and maintain a Master Plan of Trails which designates trail status and approximate locations, providing for the following types of trails: • Urban Trails: multi-purpose pedestrian/ bicycle trails which connect residential areas to other residential areas, regional and community parks, schools, and commercial and industrial employment areas. • Rural Trails: multi-purpose equestrian/ pedestrian/ bicycle trails which connect residential areas to other residential areas, regional and community parks, schools, and commercial and industrial employment areas. • Bicycle Right-Of-Way: integrates with the urban and rural trails and provides additional access to residential, recreational, educational, and commercial/industrial employment areas.</b>	34	40
<b>Encourage a wide variety of performing and visual arts programs, productions and exhibits within the City of Lancaster.</b>	34	40
<b>Promote the construction of libraries or expansion of existing libraries as required to meet the needs of existing and future residents.</b>	34	40
<b>Maintain and improve the operation of the roadway network by adhering to the circulation system improvements of the Transportation Master Plan for the development and operation of the system, while providing the flexibility to allow consideration of innovative design solutions.</b>	34	40
<b>Manage the City's roadway network so that it is aesthetically pleasing through the development and maintenance of streetscapes</b>	34	40
<b>Encourage commuters and employers to reduce vehicular trips by implementing Transportation Demand Management strategies.</b>	34	40
<b>Encourage the continued development of pipeline and utility corridors and rail freight lines, while minimizing the impacts on adjacent land uses and the roadway network.</b>	34	40
<b>Ensure that adequate flood control facilities are provided, which maintain the integrity of significant riparian and other environmental habitats in accordance with Biological Resources policies.</b>	34	40
<b>Promote economic self-sufficiency through the application of programs and efforts that help to revitalize local commerce and create a sustainable and prosperous marketplace.</b>	34	40

<b>Provide local businesses with access to financial, technical, labor and regulatory assistance when feasible in order to promote business success.</b>	34	40
<b>Support Redevelopment Agency efforts to encourage appropriate professional offices, medical offices and services and related uses and commercial development in downtown Lancaster.</b>	34	40
<b>Maintain an adequate inventory of land for residential, commercial, employment, quasi-public, public and open space uses.</b>	34	40
<b>Encourage development that is compatible with the City's designated rural and non-urban areas.</b>	34	40
<b>Encourage appropriate development to locate so that municipal services can be efficiently provided.</b>	34	40
<b>Minimize the visual impacts of utility corridors and their associated equipment.</b>	34	40
<b>Preserve significant desert wash areas to protect sensitive species that utilize these habitat areas</b>	35	40
<b>Encourage the protection of open space lands in and around the Poppy Preserve, Ripley Woodland Preserve and other sensitive areas to preserve habitat for sensitive mammals, reptiles, and birds, including raptors.</b>	35	40
<b>Ensure that development proposals, including City sponsored projects, are analyzed for short- and long-term impacts to biological resources and that appropriate mitigation measures are implemented.</b>	35	40
<b>Support state and federal legislation that would eliminate wasteful energy consumption in an appropriate manner.</b>	35	40
<b>Consider and promote the use of alternative energy such as wind energy and solar energy. (Note: Policy 15.2.1 considers the use of waste to energy cogeneration systems as an energy source.)</b>	35	40
<b>Minimize the potential negative impact of mineral extraction on adjacent land uses.</b>	35	40
<b>Minimize the potential negative impact of mineral extraction on adjacent land uses.</b>	35	40
<b>Ensure that development proposals, including City sponsored projects, are analyzed for short- and long-term impacts to biological resources and that appropriate mitigation measures are implemented.</b>	35	40
<b>Encourage incorporation of water-saving design measures into existing developments.</b>	35	40
<b>Ensure that trail construction takes into consideration the safety and convenience of the trail users as the primary concern</b>	35	40

<b>Emphasize the downtown area as the cultural center of the City of Lancaster and the Antelope Valley by maintaining and expanding existing cultural facilities. (See also Objective 16.5 and related policies and specific actions)</b>	35	40
<b>Ensure that child care facilities are available to meet the needs of Lancaster residents.</b>	35	40
<b>Provide adequate levels of maintenance for all components of the circulation system, such as roadways, sidewalks, bicycle facilities, roadway drainage systems, pedestrian, recreational trails, and similar facilities (see also related policies and specific actions in the Pedestrian, Equestrian and Bicycle Trails' subsection of the Plan for Active Living).</b>	35	40
<b>Support and improve a roadway network that is sensitive to environmental issues such as, biological, land, and water resources, as well as air quality, while permitting continued development within the study area</b>	35	40
<b>Provide safe and convenient parking that has minimal impacts on the natural environment, the community image, and quality of life. Provide safe and convenient parking that has minimal impacts on the natural environment, the community image, and quality of life.</b>	35	40
<b>Cooperate with local water agencies to provide an adequate water supply system to meet the standards for domestic and emergency needs.</b>	35	40
<b>Stress the retention and expansion of basic industries to maximize economic growth.</b>	35	40
<b>Provide sufficient amounts of land zoned for each type of major revenue generating land use to allow for competitive development opportunities among many potential sites with a broad range of site features and land uses.</b>	35	40
<b>Provide for office and industrial-based employment-generating lands which are highly accessible and compatible with other uses in the community</b>	35	40
<b>Ensure that land use map designations are compatible with adjacent proposed land uses, surrounding developments, existing infrastructure, the roadway system, and Redevelopment Project Areas.</b>	35	40
<b>Encourage appropriate infill development.</b>	35	40
<b>Provide buffers to soften the interface between conflicting land uses and intensities</b>	35	40

<b>Promote harmonious and mutually beneficial uses of land between the City of Lancaster, the City of Palmdale, the Counties of Los Angeles, Kern and San Bernardino, and the United States Air Force (see also Policy 18.1.1 and related specific actions).</b>	35	40
<b>Consider the potential impact of new development projects on the existing water supply</b>	36	40
<b>Reduce energy consumption by establishing land use patterns which would decrease automobile travel and increase the use of energy efficient modes of transportation.</b>	36	40
<b>Reduce the amount of energy consumed by City operations and assist residents and businesses in reducing their energy consumption rates.</b>	36	40
<b>Preserve views of surrounding ridgelines, slope areas and hilltops, as well as other scenic vistas (see also Policy 19.2.5).</b>	36	40
<b>Maintain ongoing, open communication with area school districts, and take a proactive role to ensure that communication is maintained.</b>	36	40
<b>Preserve features and sites of significant historical and cultural value consistent with their intrinsic and scientific values</b>	36	40
<b>Design the City's street system to serve both the existing population and future residents</b>	36	40
<b>Support a roadway network that takes into consideration noise and safety issues, along with other quality of life issues</b>	36	40
<b>Under the guidance of the Transportation Master Plan, support and encourage the various public transit companies, ridesharing programs and other incentive programs, that allow residents to utilize modes of transportation other than the private automobile, and accommodate those households within the Urbanizing Area of the City that rely on public transit.</b>	36	40
<b>Encourage bicycling as an alternative to automobile travel for the purpose of reducing vehicle miles traveled (VMT), fuel consumption, traffic congestion, and air pollution by providing appropriate facilities for the bicycle riders (see also Policy 10.2.4 and subordinate specific actions of the Plan for Active Living).</b>	36	40
<b>Minimize the generation of solid wastes as required by State law (AB- 939) through an integrated program of public education, source reduction, and recycling.</b>	36	40

<b>Promote a jobs/housing balance that places an emphasis on the attraction of high-paying jobs which will enable the local workforce to achieve the standard of living necessary to both live and work within the community.</b>	36	40
<b>Ensure that there are sufficient and suitable finished sites to accommodate managed commercial and industrial growth.</b>	36	40
<b>Promote development patterns which will minimize the costs of infrastructure development, public facilities development and municipal service cost delivery.</b>	36	40
<b>Encourage the development of cultural facilities including museums, public spaces and related businesses in the downtown area.</b>	36	40
<b>Encourage the development of recreational uses which can stimulate economic growth and provide for local recreational needs</b>	36	40
<b>Revise the zoning ordinance to conform with the General Plan text and map and to address changing conditions with new concepts that will allow both flexibility in application as well as a pleasing and attractive built environment</b>	36	40
<b>Cooperate with other jurisdictions and communities in developing compatible land uses on lands adjacent to the Lancaster General Plan study area.</b>	36	40
<b>Consider more intense urban development in outlying portions of the Urbanizing Area only if designed as self-sufficient planned communities.</b>	36	40
<b>Encourage the rehabilitation and revitalization of declining development, in a manner consistent with community design and development objectives</b>	36	40
<b>Provide for and protect outlying lands designated rural residential, providing a distinct interface between urban and rural uses.</b>	36	40
<b>Establish a system of gateways and landmarks that will contribute to the character and image of Lancaster.</b>	36	40
<b>Promote efforts to exert greater City control over the existing water supply and to explore potential new sources.</b>	37	40
<b>Implement the public information/education component of the City's Water Conservation Program in order to develop and maintain public sensitivity to water conservation issues and to encourage voluntary compliance with programs designed to reduce water consumption.</b>	37	40



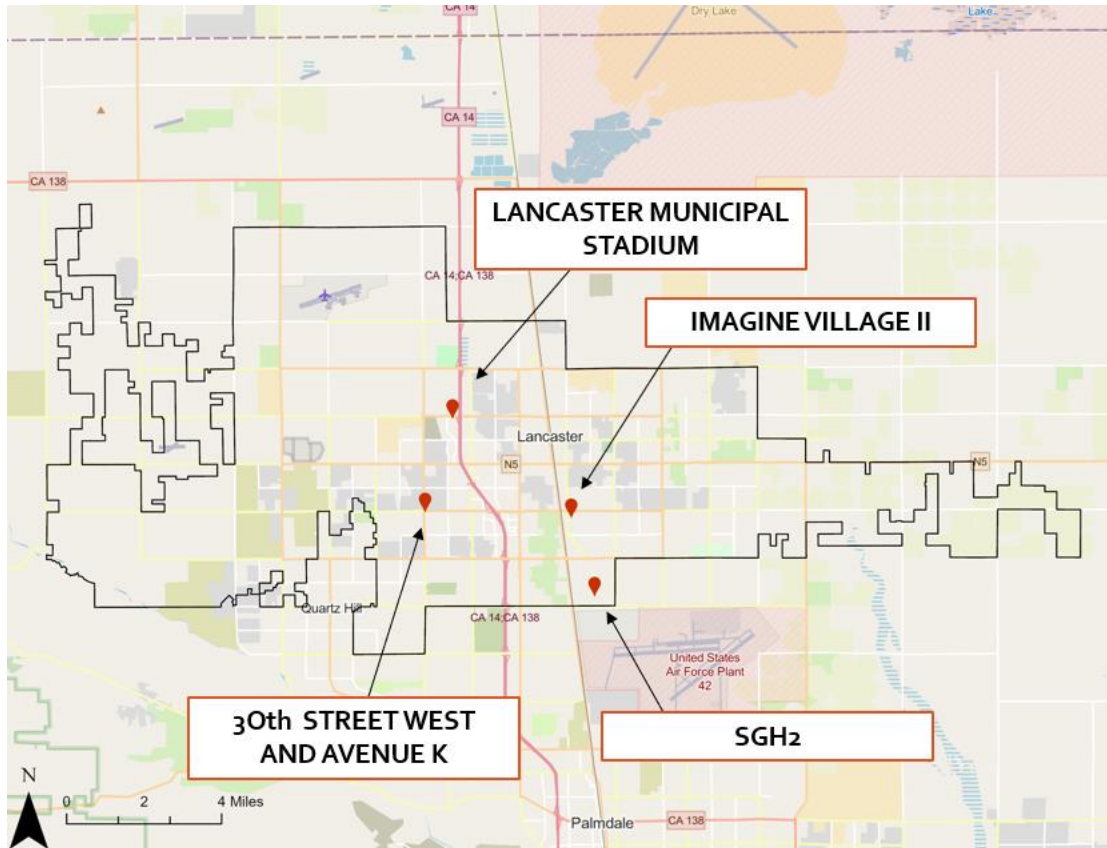
<b>Assist in establishing programs to provide a humane social service policy which addresses the needs of a diverse population, including but not limited to senior citizens, children, handicapped individuals, immigrants, the mentally ill, and other special needs groups</b>	37	40
<b>Design transportation facilities to encourage walking, provide connectivity, ADA accessibility, and safety by reducing potential auto/pedestrian conflicts.</b>	37	40
<b>Promote the attraction of regional public institutions to the Lancaster area.</b>	37	40
<b>Promote the development of entertainment uses and businesses which can stimulate tourism to the area and serve local needs.</b>	37	40
<b>Employ transitional or graduated density zoning patterns, alternative development standards, or design techniques to mitigate the interface between higher and lower intensity land uses</b>	37	40
<b>Promote a diversity of neighborhood environments, from the traditional downtown core to well-integrated new growth areas.</b>	37	40
<b>Enhance the interface between development and natural resource/open space areas.</b>	37	40
<b>Enhance the livability of Lancaster by creating attractive, safe, and accessible gathering spaces within the community.</b>	37	40
<b>Preserve and protect important areas of historic and cultural interest that serve as visible reminders of the City's social and architectural history</b>	37	40
<b>Maintain active participation in the regional planning programs intended to serve the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG)</b>	37	40
<b>Encourage the use of recycled tertiary treated wastewater when possible</b>	38	40
<b>Promote the use of water conservation measures in the landscape plans of new developments.</b>	38	40
<b>Minimize the amount of vehicular miles traveled.</b>	38	40
<b>Encourage innovative building, site design, and orientation techniques which minimize energy use.</b>	38	40
<b>Continue to provide water conservation leadership by example through implementing the Water Management Component of the City's Water Conservation Program at City facilities.</b>	38	40
<b>Direct growth to areas with adequate existing facilities and services, areas which have adequate facilities and</b>	38	40

<b>services committed, or areas where public services and facilities can be economically extended.</b>		
<b>Ensure that a variety of sites are available for a diversity of industrial and commercial users.</b>	38	40
<b>Encourage and assist in the early development of certified non- residential sites to promote the expansion of revenue-generating land uses, particularly those which service the entire Antelope Valley area.</b>	38	40
<b>Promote business development in those industrial sectors which are underrepresented in the Antelope Valley area economy.</b>	38	40
<b>Address and carry out revitalization programs and efforts within the Downtown area consistent with the adopted Downtown Specific Plan/Vision Plan</b>	38	40
<b>Periodically examine the need to expand government/civic related uses within the Downtown area to accommodate changing community needs.</b>	38	40
<b>Require new development to ensure that all new off-site capital improvements necessitated by their project are available, consistent with performance criteria identified in Objective 15.1.(1)</b>	38	40
<b>Require annexation proposals to demonstrate a positive relationship between facility and service costs and generated revenues and that there is a demonstrated need for such proposal.</b>	38	40
<b>Develop and apply a comprehensive set of community design standards and guidelines in conformance with the goals, objectives, policies and action programs contained in the Community Design subsection of the Plan for Physical Development.</b>	38	40
<b>Create a network of attractive paths and corridors that encourage a variety of modes of transportation within the city (see also Policy 3.8.1).</b>	38	40
<b>Promote high quality development by facilitating innovation in architecture/building design, site planning, streetscapes, and signage.</b>	38	40
<b>Continue to promote the creation of a transit village development district around the Metrolink commuter rail station to provide opportunities for transit-oriented development, including mixed-use housing, shopping, public services, employment opportunities and cultural/recreational activities within a safe, pedestrian-friendly environment.</b>	39	40

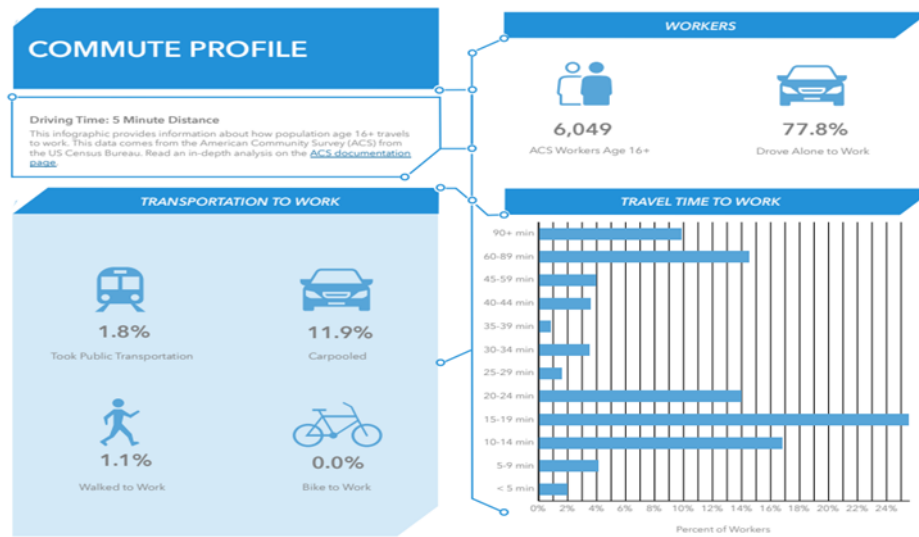
<b>Require new development to construct and/or pay for new on-site capital improvements necessitated by their project, consistent with performance criteria identified in Objective 15.1.</b>	39	40
<b>Encourage the planning and development of large scale self-sufficient, mixed use communities with integrated phasing and financing of infrastructure improvements, public facilities and municipal service costs.</b>	39	40
<b>Promote the neighborhood as the basic building block of urban design to achieve a sustainable community form, providing for the needs of existing residents and businesses while preserving choices for future generations.</b>	39	40
<b>Enhance the image and character of the city by embracing public art to promote the history, heritage, and culture of Lancaster.</b>	39	40
<b>Create walkable, mixed-use, transit-accessible neighborhoods and commercial districts that provide opportunities for young and old to live, work, shop, and recreate.</b>	39	40

## Appendix B- Site Evaluations

Map of Sites



Imagine Village II



30<sup>th</sup> Street West and Avenue K Project