

City of Hesperia STAFF REPORT



DATE: July 15, 2025
TO: Mayor and Council Members
FROM: Rachel Molina, City Manager
BY: Nathan R. Freeman, Director of Development Services
Ryan Leonard, Principal Planner
SUBJECT: 2025 General Plan Update

RECOMMENDED ACTION

The Planning Commission recommends that the City Council adopt Resolutions Nos. 2025-28 and 2025-29 to: 1) Certify the Addendum as being complete and in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA); and 2) Adopt the updated Land Use Element and Health and Safety Element.

BACKGROUND

The City Council adopted Hesperia's last General Plan update on September 7, 2010. Since then, state legislation has evolved, requiring specific revisions to maintain legal compliance. In 2024, the City engaged PlaceWorks, Inc. (Placeworks) to update the Land Use, Circulation, and Safety Elements and prepare an Addendum to the 2010 General Plan Environmental Impact Report (EIR). PlaceWorks was also contracted to draft Objective Design Standards in support of the City's recently adopted Housing Element. These standards will be advanced separately at a future date.

To prepare for the update, the City and Placeworks hosted several public meetings and workshops. In 2024, four public meetings and two study sessions were held with the Planning Commission (Commission) and City Council (Council). The Commission and Council reviewed and discussed critical components of each element, as well as the Objective Design Standards. The project team also consulted stakeholder groups and distributed a public survey to gather input, particularly for the Health and Safety Element.

On June 12, 2025, the Planning Commission voted 4-0 (with Commissioner Steeno absent) to forward the item to the City Council with a recommendation for approval. During the hearing, one resident, Bill Jensen, provided public comment. He recommended that the City preserve commercially zoned properties along the Main Street freeway interchange and avoid converting prime commercial properties near the Main Street on and off ramps to industrial uses. However, he expressed support for changing the zoning of properties along Amargosa Road, north of the "Heilig Meyer" building, from commercial to industrial.

ISSUES/ANALYSIS

The General Plan is the City's "Constitution" and guide for development, outlining the City's vision for itself, how it will develop over time, and how it will maintain quality of life. All decisions made

by the City, from the adoption of the annual budget and implementation of capital improvements to the issuance of building permits, must be consistent with the General Plan.

Since the last General Plan update in 2010, the City's population has increased from approximately 90,000 to over 100,000, and employment has grown from 11,000 to 17,000. Ongoing development interest has helped sustain this economic growth, which is expected to continue. The updated General Plan must also respond to new laws, regulations, and conditions that have emerged since 2010. For instance, recent state legislation on climate adaptation and resiliency requires cities to take steps to better withstand extreme weather events. Additionally, new mandates have been enacted by the State Legislature to address community health, education, and economic equity.

General Plan Goals

As a focused update, the primary objective of the project team was to integrate new policies and programs that comply with State law while preserving the overall vision and direction established by the 2010 General Plan. Throughout the process, input from community members, stakeholders, and City staff consistently reaffirmed that the goals set forth in the original plan remain relevant today. The focused General Plan Update supports the following goals:

- Preserve existing neighborhoods;
- Enhance the quality of residential areas across a variety of densities, with landscaping and architectural standards;
- Reinforce efforts to build a local job base and establish sales-tax-producing businesses along Bear Valley Road, Main Street and the Freeway Corridor;
- Preserve lot sizes and prevent premature subdivision of land;
- Enhance the quality of life in higher residential density developments with paseos, parks, and other amenities;
- Establish a circulation system of arterial and connector streets to carry traffic efficiently within and across the City;
- Support the urban design framework, which includes two new greenways to link the freeway corridor with the downtown area;
- Dedicate housing units for senior citizens as well as for all income levels; and
- Permit mixed-use developments in the downtown area and along the freeway corridor.

General Plan Elements

The General Plan Update consists of three chapters, or elements. A summary of each element and the associated issues are as follows:

Land Use: The motivating force behind updates to the Land Use Element stems from programs contained within the City's adopted Housing Element. Crucially, the update process focused on revising development standards for the R-3, C-2, and R-C designations that more clearly and concisely communicate the City's intent for these areas. The changes are summarized as follows:

- *R-3 Multiple Family Residence:* The R-3 land use designation is amended to increase the maximum density of residential development from 15 dwelling units per acre to 30 dwelling units per acre and to conditionally permit group homes for seven or more persons.

- *C-2 General Commercial:* The C2 land use designation is amended to allow 100 percent residential development up to 30 dwelling units per acre and to permit group homes for six or fewer persons.
- *R-C Regional Commercial:* The RC zone (part of Main Street and Freeway Corridor Specific Plan) is amended to increase the maximum density of residential development from 25 dwelling units per acre to 30 dwelling units per acre. The zone is also amended to allow 100 percent residential development and to permit group homes for six or fewer persons. The development of residential uses is limited primarily to the east side of Interstate 15.

The most frequently referenced part of the General Plan is the Land Use Map. This map shows the location of residential, commercial, industrial uses, as well as schools and parks. The map also shows other features such as railroads, the airport, and the California Aqueduct. Residential uses are classified by density in dwelling units per acre. The proposed Land Use Map does not propose new changes beyond reflecting all General Plan Amendments processed since the 2010 General Plan was adopted.

The text of the Land Use Element includes a description of the City's existing development pattern, infrastructure, and public services. In addition, the intent for each land use designation is described alongside general density and intensity standards. The goals intended to guide future growth and development include:

- Ensuring compatibility between adjacent uses;
- Preserving and enhancing residential areas;
- Promoting balanced, efficient commercial development to generate sales taxes;
- Providing for industrial development to increase opportunities for local employment;
- Investing in high-quality public facilities;
- Sustainable development measures, including water conservation, energy efficient design and Leadership in Energy Efficient Design (LEED) building certification;
- Improving the quality of life for all community members; and
- Ensuring that future growth is fiscally sustainable.

Circulation: The Circulation Element was presented to the Planning Commission at its June 12, 2025 meeting. However, it will be presented to the City Council at a later date. Staff is currently analyzing potential changes to the roadway network to ensure it supports the City's long-term growth and mobility needs.

Health and Safety: The Health and Safety Element includes both safety and environmental equity components pursuant to the California Government Code sections 65302(g) and 65302(h). The safety components focus on naturally occurring and human-induced hazards, as well as emergency preparedness and response to protect the community from the effects of natural disasters and environmental hazards. The healthy community components focus on strategies to improve health and environmental equity.

Safety Topics

In Hesperia, the key safety issues include seismic and geological hazards, flood risk and water inundation hazards, wildfires, hazardous waste and materials, emergency preparedness and response, and climate change resilience. The Safety Element works in tandem with the City's Local Hazard Mitigation Plan and Emergency Operations Plan to provide a cohesive safety approach for Hesperia.

Since the previous update to the Safety Element in 2010, several new laws have taken effect, requiring updates to the Safety Element:

- AB 2140 (2006): Allows for the incorporation of the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan into the Safety Element;
- SB 1241 (2012): Requires the review and update of the flood and wildfire sections to minimize risk to new buildings and essential facilities and identify responsible agencies and ensure coordination among agencies;
- SB 379 (2015): Requires the preparation of a climate change vulnerability assessment that identifies risks to hazards, and develops goals, policies, and implementation actions to build resilience in the community;
- SB 99 (2019): Requires the identification of residential areas in hazard zones with less than two ingress/egress routes; and
- AB 747 (2019)/1409 (2021): Requires the identification of evacuation route capacity, safety and viability, and evacuation locations under a range of hazard scenarios.

Following extensive technical analysis, staff updated the Safety Element hazard descriptions, goals, and policies to meet current Government Code requirements. The key changes are summarized as follows:

- Incorporate the Hesperia Local Hazard Mitigation Plan by reference, as supported by AB 2140;
- Update hazard background information and mapping with the most current data from federal, state, and local sources;
- Update policies in the seismic and geologic hazards, flooding hazards, fire hazards, hazardous materials, and emergency preparation and response sections, based on the technical Background Report and California Government Code requirements;
- Address climate change vulnerability and adaptation as directed by SB 379 through a new Climate Change Resilience section, including a goal and policies based on the findings of the Climate Vulnerability Assessment; and
- Provide a matrix of actions for implementing the goals and policies of the Safety Element.

Pursuant to California Government Code Section 65302.5(b), the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection reviewed the draft Safety Element and consulted with the City from December 2024 to January 2025. The State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection's Resource Protection Committee reviewed the Safety Element on March 4, 2025, during its regular meeting and granted approval for the City to proceed with the public hearings and adoption of the Safety Element without revisions.

Healthy Community Topics

With the passage of SB 1000, the Planning for Healthy Communities Act, a City's general plan must incorporate goals, policies, and actions to improve health and environmental equity. In addition to SB 1000, the 2021-2029 City's Housing Element contained commitments to address issues within the built environment as a condition for its certification by the State of California. As a result, the City's General Plan Safety Element contains a Healthy Communities section that addresses both requirements and builds upon the City's Resolution 2010-030, which affirms the commitment to promoting and developing a safe and healthy Hesperia for all residents.

To shape goals, policies and programs in the Health and Safety Element, a Healthy Community Technical Report was prepared, supported by information gathered from community workshops, stakeholder interviews, and a public survey. Based on the findings and as required by Section 653902(h) of the Government Code, the Element provides goals, policies, and programs that address the following topics:

- Reduction of pollution exposure;
- Improvement in air quality;
- Opportunities for physical activity;
- Access to healthy food;
- Affordable, safe, and sanitary homes;
- Access to public facilities and services; and
- Increasing opportunities for civic involvement.

Addendum to the 2010 Environmental Impact Report: PlaceWorks prepared the Addendum to the 2010 Certified Environmental Impact Report (Certified EIR) for Hesperia’s General Plan. The Addendum evaluates whether the General Plan Update (proposed project) would modify the existing General Plan in such a way that it would create new environmental impacts or substantially increase the severity of previously identified significant effects, potentially requiring further environmental review. The Addendum, in conjunction with the Certified EIR, serves as the environmental review for the proposed modifications to the existing General Plan, ensuring compliance with CEQA. The Addendum evaluates the potential environmental impacts associated with the existing General Plan as modified by the General Plan Update.

The proposed project will update the Land Use and Health and Safety elements, as well as the environmental equity policies to address state laws and support projected growth over the next 25 years. The proposed project is a focused update of the current General Plan to conform with new State laws related to community health, climate adaptation, resiliency, and mobility, and to bring long-term growth projections into alignment with current economic conditions and state mandates. Differences in population, jobs, housing units, and non-residential square feet between the existing General Plan and General Plan Update at buildout are shown in the following table.

Comparison of Buildout Conditions for Existing General Plan and General Plan Update

	Existing General Plan ¹ (2050)	General Plan Update (2050)	Difference
Population	144,538	162,835	+18,297
Jobs	48,527	48,502	-25
Housing Units	54,430	61,570	+7,140
Non-Residential Square Feet	67,613,266	66,733,917	-879,349

¹ The 2010 Certified EIR did not include a planning horizon, and therefore, the buildout under the existing General Plan was adjusted to account for a 2050 horizon year. The buildout under the proposed project is within the overall buildout as envisioned in the 2010 Certified EIR.

Addendum Process: Pursuant to the CEQA Guidelines Section 15164, an Addendum to a previously certified EIR may be prepared under specific circumstances. The Addendum process

allows for the documentation of minor project changes or technical updates that do not result in new or substantially more severe environmental impacts.

The proposed project qualifies for an Addendum under CEQA Guidelines Section 15164, as the proposed changes are consistent with the scope of the previously Certified EIR and do not meet any of the conditions outlined in Section 15162(a) and Section 15163(a) of the CEQA Guidelines, that would require preparation of a Subsequent or Supplemental EIR. The environmental impacts remain within the range analyzed in the Certified EIR, and no new significant impacts or substantial increases in the severity of impacts have been identified. Therefore, preparation of a full Subsequent EIR is not warranted, and the Addendum process is both appropriate and compliant with CEQA requirements.

Tribal Consultation: In compliance with Senate Bill 18 (Government Code Section 65352.3), the City of Hesperia initiated tribal consultation by contacting California Native American tribes identified by the Native American Heritage Commission. Notification letters were sent on May 21, 2024, to the Desert Cahuilla Indians, the Cabazon Band of Mission Indians, and the Yuhaaviatam of San Manuel. The Yuhaaviatam of the San Manuel tribe responded on May 24, 2024, and requested formal consultation with the City. The City indicated that the proposed project would not allow for any ground-disturbing activities that would preclude a project from going through the standard CEQA requirements, and the Tribe concluded consultation on October 30, 2024. In addition, since the proposed project is being evaluated through a CEQA Addendum and not a new EIR, consultation pursuant to Assembly Bill 52 (Public Resources Code Sections 21073 to 21084.3) does not apply in this instance.

Significant Impacts: CEQA requires that the EIR identify the impacts of a project and propose mitigation measures to reduce those impacts. CEQA also requires disclosure of any impacts that cannot be mitigated to a non-significant level, even if all feasible mitigations are required. The Certified EIR determined that implementation of the existing General Plan would result in significant and unavoidable impacts related to air quality, noise, and transportation. The Addendum determined that these impacts would continue to be significant and unavoidable as part of the proposed project, as summarized:

- Air Quality
 - Results in construction emissions that would contribute substantially to an existing or projected air quality violation;
 - Results in operational emissions that would contribute substantially to an existing or projected air quality violation; and
 - Results in a cumulatively considerable net increase of any criteria pollutant for which the project region is nonattainment under an applicable federal or state ambient air quality standard (including releasing emissions, which exceed quantitative thresholds for ozone precursors).

- Noise
 - Results in a substantial permanent increase in ambient noise levels in the project vicinity.

- Transportation¹
 - Causes an increase in traffic, which is substantial in relation to the existing traffic load and capacity of the street system; and
 - Exceed, either individually or cumulatively, a level of service standard established by the county congestion management agency for designated roads or highways.

No new significant environmental impacts have been identified beyond those already assessed in the Certified EIR. While the proposed project may result in physical impacts due to future improvements, the analysis and mitigation measures from the Certified EIR will still apply. While the project involves physical impacts, it does not result in new significant environmental effects or substantially increase the severity of previously identified impacts. The analysis and mitigation measures from the previously Certified EIR remain applicable to the proposed project.

CITY GOAL SUPPORTED BY THIS ITEM

Future Development - Facilitate balanced growth to ensure cohesive community development and pursue economic development.

CONCLUSION

Adoption of the General Plan Update will bring the City's primary policy document into compliance with new state laws and mandates and ensure continued compliance with CEQA. The update will also address the changes the City has experienced in the previous 15 years since the General Plan was last updated. The update will provide guidance to the City's decision makers and staff to carry out the overall vision for the City of Hesperia. The Addendum substantiates that the proposed changes do not introduce any new significant environmental impacts beyond those already addressed by the 2010 General Plan EIR.

ALTERNATIVE

1. Provide alternative direction to staff.

ATTACHMENT(S)

- 1) Resolution No. 2025-28 (Certifying the Addendum in compliance with CEQA)
- 2) Resolution No. 2025-29 (Adoption of the 2025 General Plan Update)
- 3) Addendum to the 2010 General Plan EIR
- 4) Land Use Element
- 5) Health and Safety Element
- 6) June 12, 2025, Planning Commission Packet

¹ The 2010 Certified EIR found impacts to Level of Service (LOS) to be significant and unavoidable. However, since CEQA no longer uses LOS as a threshold standard, and has replaced it with Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT), the LOS significance is no longer applicable to CEQA.