



**STAFF REPORT**  
**CATHEDRAL CITY PLANNING COMMISSION**

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**MEETING DATE:** February 5, 2025

**CASE NO.:** General Plan Annual Progress Report - Part 3

**APPLICANT:** City of Cathedral City

**LOCATION:** City-wide

**REQUEST:** Presentation and discussion of the General Plan Annual Progress Report for calendar years 2023 and 2024, Part 3.

**STAFF PLANNER:** Dominique Camps, Associate Planner

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

To receive Part 3 of the 2023 and 2024 General Plan Annual Progress Report for information and discussion.

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**BACKGROUND/ ANALYSIS:**

Government Code Sections 65400 and 65700 require the City to prepare an annual progress report (APR) on the status and implementation of the General Plan for submittal to the Governor’s Office of Planning and Research (OPR).

The General Plan is the City’s comprehensive, long-term plan to guide development of the community and preserve its resources. While it has a long-term perspective, it is not a static document. Rather, it is dynamic, evolving and multi-faceted, continuously defining and addressing the changing needs of the community. It is also based on an ongoing assessment and understanding of existing and projected community needs and conditions.

State General Plan Guidelines do not mandate a specific structure or format for the General Plan, nor do they specify an appropriate number of elements. “Elements” are referred to as “topics that California law require to be covered in a General Plan” (Gov. Code Sec. 65302). Mandatory element discussion topics include Land Use, Circulation, Housing, Conservation, Open Space, Noise, Safety, Environmental Justice, and Air Quality. These topics may be discussed separately or logically grouped within a common element. The General Plan stands at the apex of a pyramid of City regulatory documents. As such, zoning, subdivisions,

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public works, specific plans, and other regulatory documents must be consistent with the General Plan and its elements.

The 2040 Cathedral City General Plan was adopted by the City Council on July 28, 2021. The General Plan is comprised of thirteen elements, each of which provides a discussion of the topic and contains goals, policies, and programs. The programs provide implementation measures, including an implementation schedule and identification of the responsible departments, needed to carry out the policies and achieve the stated goals.

This APR provides an update on the implementation status of each of the General Plan policies and programs for calendar years 2023 and 2024. To make the reporting more digestible, the City's General Plan APR is being presented to the Planning Commission in three parts:

- Part 1: "Development" (Ch. 4 – Land Use Element; Ch. 5 – Circulation and Mobility Element; Ch. 6 – Housing Element; Ch. 8 – Community Design Element; Ch. 10 – Economic & Fiscal Health Element)
- Part 2: "Community Services and Facilities" (Ch. 7 – Parks and Recreation Element; Ch. 9 – Arts & Culture Element; Ch. 11 – Environmental Justice Element; Ch. 12 – Healthy & Sustainable Community Element; Ch. 16 – Public Services & Facilities Element)
- Part 3: "Environment" (Ch. 13 – Open Space & Conservation Element; Ch. 14 – Air Quality & Climate Stability Element; Ch. 15 – Safety Element)

This report provides Part 3 of the APR for calendar years 2023 and 2024. The APR will be presented to the City Council for review and acceptance prior to submittal to OPR.

## **ANALYSIS**

This report provides Part 3 of the General Plan APR to the Planning Commission for information and discussion. Please refer to Attachment 1 for a detailed list of the goals, policies and programs contained in the Open Space and Conservation, Air Quality and Climate Stability, and Safety Elements. Attachment 1 also includes a checklist with the implementation status and a description for each policy and program. The full General Plan document can be accessed on the City website (<https://tinyurl.com/mryevh4v>).

For purpose of discussion, this report highlights four key areas of activity undertaken across City departments to implement these elements of the General Plan during 2023 and 2024.

### Preliminary Review

New development proposals are subject to a comprehensive review process, including review for consistency with the General Plan, Zoning Ordinance, and other applicable regulatory documents. In addition to ensuring consistency with land use requirements, the City's interdepartmental development review process supports implementation of the Open Space and Conservation, Air Quality and Climate Stability, and Safety Elements.

When reviewing a development proposal, staff review the existing site conditions and context to evaluate whether a site is suitable for the proposed use. The Planning Division now requests that proposals for new development apply for a Preliminary Review before making a formal application. The Preliminary Review application allows staff in the Planning, Building, Engineering, Fire, and Police Departments to provide high level feedback early in the review process.

During the Preliminary Review process, staff will consider whether the proposed use or site

configuration could conflict with surrounding uses. For example, sources of significant noise or air pollution are generally not suitable in proximity to residential areas. Similarly, to the greatest extent possible, critical facilities such as hospitals should be located outside of flood plains, very high fire hazard severity zones, and geological hazard areas.

The Preliminary Review process also allows staff the opportunity to advise applicants about additional requirements that may apply to their project. For example, sites located in the northern- or southern-most portions of the City may be subject to hillside preserve regulations or the land use adjacency requirements of the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP). Staff may also provide site design recommendations during this stage, such as building orientations to improve energy efficiency or fire access requirements.

As the outcome of a Preliminary Review, staff will provide the applicant with a recommended course of action for the project. The applicant will be advised on what planning permits and approvals will be required, such as a CUP for uses that may generate traffic and noise impacts, potential odors and light pollution, vibration, or other negative externalities. Staff will also advise on what level of environmental review will be required, or whether the project will be exempt. Overall, the Preliminary Review application allows staff to ensure that, at a high level, proposed projects are consistent with the City's goals, policies and programs, including those pertaining to open space and conservation, air quality, and safety.

Goals, policies and programs implemented (ongoing or completed) through this activity:

#### Open Space and Conservation Element

- **Program 3.A:** Maintain and enforce a Hillside Preservation Regulations, which establish appropriate design standards that preserve the natural scenic value of hillsides.
- **Program 11.A:** The development and design review process shall assess the adequacy of proposed design features and landscaping materials.
- **Biological Resources Program 1.B:** The City shall continue to implement and abide by the provisions of the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan, including collection of development impact fees and implementation of land use adjacency guidelines for development within or adjacent to MSHCP-designated Conservation Areas.
- **Biological Resources Program 1.D:** When considering development proposals near the Willow Hole CA and the Willow Hole-Edom Hill Preserve, the City will require developers to consider the impacts of their project on wind-blown sand transport, and encourage creative design techniques, such as units clustering and open space areas, in project design that sustain these ecological processes.
- **Water Resources Policy 11:** Require new development to minimize the use of directly connected impervious surfaces and to retain stormwater run-off caused from the development footprint at or near the site of generation.
- **Energy and Mineral Resources Program 2.A:** Amendments to the land use map and Land Use Element shall consider the provision of convenient neighborhood shopping, medical and other professional services appropriately located to minimize travel and facilitate the use of alternative means of transportation.

#### Air Quality and Climate Stability Element

- **Program 3.B:** Buffer zones between sensitive receptors and potential air pollutant emitters shall be incorporated into new and proposed residential developments and other developments, to the greatest extent feasible.
- **Program 5.B:** Site plans shall incorporate energy-efficient design elements, including

appropriate site orientation, possibility for incorporation of active and/or passive solar design, and the use of shade and windbreak trees, to reduce fuel consumption for heating and cooling.

#### Safety Element

- **General Safety Policy 2:** The City shall ensure to the greatest extent practicable the siting of critical public facilities, including hospital and healthcare facilities, emergency shelters, police and fire stations, and emergency communications, facilities outside 100-year flood plains.
- **Flooding and Hydrology Program 6.A:** Stormwater retention for the 100-year storm shall be enforced through the development review process and routine site inspection.
- **Geotechnical Policy 7:** To the extent feasible, regulate the location of new structures, including utilities, schools, hospitals, healthcare and eldercare facilities, police and fire stations, and emergency communication facilities, in and near areas that would directly be affected by seismic or geologic hazards.
- **Hazards and Hazardous Materials Program 1.C:** A Conditional Use Permit (CUP) shall be required for all new development that generates, transports, or stores hazardous materials and shall be so reflected in the City's Zoning Ordinance.
- **Hazards and Hazardous Materials Program 8.A:** The development review process shall be used to assure that all new development connects to the sewage collection systems of the Coachella Valley Water District and Desert Water Agency where that service is available.
- **Emergency Preparedness Program 6.A:** In order to assure the maximum possible protection from environmental and manmade hazards, including earthquakes and flooding, the City shall consider vulnerability to natural and manmade disasters and emergencies when reviewing proposals for critical and essential facilities, as well as sensitive land uses.
- **Noise Program 1.F:** Require major stationary noise-generating sources throughout the City to install additional noise buffering or reduction mechanisms on development sites and/or within facilities to reduce noise generation levels to the lowest extent practicable prior to the renewal of conditional use permits or business licenses or prior to the approval and/or issuance of new conditional use permits for said facilities.
- **Noise Program 1.G:** Parking lots, loading zones, and large trash bins shall be located the greatest distance practicable from adjacent residential properties, and designed in a manner that reduces associated noise impacts to levels allowable by the City's Noise Ordinance.
- **Noise Program 4.B:** Development projects which result in through-traffic in residential neighborhoods shall be discouraged through the development review process, and most viable alternative routes shall be identified and adhered to.

#### Environmental review

When the planning staff review new development proposals, staff assess what level of environmental review might be needed for the project. This assessment is based on the preliminary review application or project submittal, as well as using the Environmental Information Form that is provided to applicants through the Citizen Self Service (CSS) portal during the application process. Based on the scope of the development, the proposed location and use, and whether there are previous approvals for the project, a preliminary determination is made about whether an Initial Study or Environmental Impact Report will be required, whether the project is eligible for a ministerial or categorical exemption, or whether the project is consistent with the previous environmental review.

New development proposals are also distributed for review by the Development Services Committee, including the planning, building, engineering, fire, and police departments. A

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component of this interdepartmental review is to determine whether project-specific studies may be required, such as site-specific biological and cultural resource surveys, site-specific geotechnical investigations, the preparation of a Water Quality Management Plan, project-specific air quality analysis, traffic studies, or noise and vibration impact analysis.

For example, a project-specific traffic study and noise analysis may be required when a change of zone or general plan amendment is being proposed. If a proposed development will diverge from the conditions analyzed in the General Plan Environmental Impact Report (EIR), then new review may be required. Additional review may also be required when uses with potential negative impacts, such as traffic and noise, odors, light pollution, or vibration, are proposed in proximity to sensitive uses such as residences or schools. Technical studies, such as project-specific noise or traffic studies, provide the opportunity for staff to evaluate the severity of these potential impacts and impose mitigation measures if required.

Site-specific analysis may also be required when projects are proposed in areas with known environmental sensitivities such as sites with known cultural significance for the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, or with critical habitat for species protected by the federal or state endangered species acts. Site-specific analysis may also be required for properties located in hazard zones, such as in Alquist-Priolo fault zones or in areas prone to subsidence or liquefaction. In addition to mitigation measures and monitoring programs, the results of these technical studies may require consultation with state and federal agencies.

Ultimately, the environmental review process ensures that new developments in Cathedral City are consistent with local, state, and federal requirements, including to protect biological and cultural resources, to reduce air pollution, and to protect residents from environmental hazards.

Goals, policies and programs implemented (ongoing or completed) through this activity:

#### Open Space and Conservation Element

- **Biological Resources Program 1.C:** City staff will continue to request biological resource surveys for new development in compliance with applicable state and federal requirements.
- **Biological Resources Program 1.F:** The City shall continue to implement and abide by the provisions of the US Fish & Wildlife Service Casey's June Beetle management plan, requiring surveys and mitigation where appropriate, and implementing land use adjacency guidelines of the CVMSHCP, where appropriate.
- **Cultural Resources Program 1.B:** City staff shall require, early in the project review process, the preparation of focused cultural resource surveys in areas of known sensitivity.
- **Water Resources Policy 10:** Require new development to protect the quality of water bodies and natural drainage systems through site design, source controls, storm water treatment, runoff reduction measures, and best management practices (BMPs).

#### Air Quality and Climate Stability Element

- **Program 4.A:** The City shall conduct an Initial Study and, where appropriate, require a detailed air quality analysis for all proposals that have the potential to adversely affect local or regional air quality.
  - **Program 4.B:** Projects that may generate significant levels of air pollution shall be required to conduct detailed impact analyses and incorporate mitigation measures into their designs using the most advanced technological methods practicable. All proposed mitigation measures shall be reviewed and approved by the City prior to the issuance of grading or demolition permits.
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- **Program 10.B:** Projects that require CEQA analysis shall be required to conduct detailed impact analyses and incorporate mitigation measures into their designs using the City's current Climate Action Plan prescribed reduction measures for achieving greenhouse gas emission reduction targets. All proposed mitigation measures shall be reviewed and approved by the City prior to the issuance of grading or demolition permits.

#### Safety Element

- **Geotechnical Policy 9:** Where development is proposed in areas identified as being subject to geotechnical hazards (including, but not limited to slope instability, soil collapse, liquefaction and seismically induced settlement), the City shall require the preparation of site-specific geotechnical investigations by the applicant prior to completion of CEQA studies and development approval. All such studies shall include mitigation measures that reduce associated hazards to insignificant levels.
- **Noise Program 1.C:** Prior to development plan approvals for new residential and similar noise sensitive projects, require submittal of noise impact and mitigation analyses to the Planning Department that demonstrates that the interior noise levels in all habitable rooms will satisfy the 45 dBA CNEL interior noise level standard of the General Plan and Title 24, Part 2, of the California Building Code.
- **Noise Program 1.D:** Prior to development plan approvals for new noise-sensitive development projects within 150 feet of UPRR railroad tracks, require submittal of a final vibration study, which identifies all practicable mitigation measures to satisfy the 72 VdB noise-sensitive and 75 VdB non-noise-sensitive vibration level standards, as defined by the FTA for frequent rail events.

#### Interagency Collaboration

An important component of the City's conservation, air quality, and safety goals is collaboration with community organizations as well as local, regional, and state agencies.

For example, the Coachella Valley MSHCP is the result of participation from local governments across the valley to enforce the guidelines and charge the impact fees for applicable developments within each jurisdiction. In Cathedral City, development standards are applied to properties within or adjacent to the Willow Hole and Edom Hill Conservation Areas in the north of the city, and the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area in along the southern boundary of the City. The City also regularly consults with the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians to ensure that development projects are consistent with the Tribal Habitat Conservation Plan, as well as the Tribal Historic Preservation Management Plan and ACBCI THPO Ordinance.

Interagency collaboration is also essential to managing environmental issues, such as air pollution and flood control, that transcend city boundaries. The engineering department regularly cooperates with the Riverside County Flood Control District and Coachella Valley Water District, including for City projects that impact flood control channels, such as the construction of bridges and CV Link. The Coachella Valley Association of Governments (CVAG) is currently working with the cities in the Coachella Valley to develop a regional Comprehensive Climate Action Plan that will include workable strategies that can be implemented locally to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The Fire Department has initiated the process of updating the City's Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP) and Emergency Operations Plan (EOP). The process of updating these plans will involve stakeholder engagement with relevant local and regional agencies, potentially including Riverside County, neighboring cities, community organizations, as well as organizations representing vulnerable groups such as seniors services and low-income

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housing organizations. The Fire Department also regularly engages with local schools and community organizations to provide emergency preparedness information. For example, the Department offers the Teen Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program to high school students with the aim of empowering youth community members to practice essential emergency preparedness and response technical as well as disaster management skills.

Goals, policies and programs implemented (ongoing or completed) through this activity:

#### Open Space and Conservation Element

- **Program 6.A:** Coordinate with the Coachella Valley Water District, Riverside County Flood Control District, and utility purveyors to maximize use of flood control levees and watercourses and utility easements for inclusion in the City and regional multi-use trails systems.
- **Program 7.A:** Confer and coordinate with the Riverside County Flood Control, Coachella Valley Water District and other appropriate agencies to conduct optimum revegetation management in flood control channels and drains in order to retain wildlife habitat and as natural an appearance as possible without compromising functionality.
- **Cultural Resources Program 1.D:** The City shall work closely with the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians Tribal Historic Preservation Office to help assure that development near culturally sensitive areas conforms to the provisions of the Tribal Historic Preservation Management Plan and the ACBCI THPO Ordinance.
- **Water Resources Program 2.B:** Coordinate with the Coachella Valley Water District and Desert Water Agency to expand and strengthen educational materials and programs that inform residents of the methods and benefits of water-saving techniques available.
- **Energy and Mineral Resources Program 6.C:** The City will leverage state and federal incentives for energy efficiency to augment incentives provided by Southern California Edison, Southern California Gas, and others. Consider energy efficiency in capital improvement budget discussions.

#### Air Quality and Climate Stability Element

- **Policy 1:** The City shall be proactive in regulating local pollutant emitters and shall cooperate with Coachella Valley Association of Governments and the South Coast Air Quality Management District to assure compliance with air quality standards.
- **Program 2.A:** On an on-going basis, the City shall continue to cooperate and participate in efforts to monitor and control PM10 emissions from construction and other sources, and all other air pollutants of regional concern. The City shall coordinate with CVAG and the SCAQMD to provide all reporting data for SCAQMD annual report.

#### Safety Element

- **Flooding and Hydrology Program 4.A:** The City shall coordinate and cooperate in the filing of appropriate FEMA application materials to secure amendments to the Flood Insurance Rate Maps for the City, consistent with existing and proposed improvements.
  - **Flooding and Hydrology Program 5.B:** Explore and pursue County funding, state funding under the Cobey-Alquist Flood Plain Management Act, other State programs, and federal funding options for local and area-wide flood control projects.
  - **Geotechnical Program 6.C:** Coordinate and cooperate with Caltrans, County Transportation and adjoining cities to maximize the resilience of local and regional transportation systems, including US Interstate-10 and other major transportation corridors in the event of a major quake.
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- **Geotechnical Policy 11:** To minimize the potential impacts of subsidence due to the extraction of groundwater, the City shall actively support and participate in local and regional efforts at groundwater conservation and recharge.
- **Emergency Preparedness Program 2.B:** The City shall coordinate with responsible flood control agencies and shall jointly develop long-term strategies and capital improvement plans that, to the extent practicable, eliminate or minimize significant flooding hazards which threaten lives, property and emergency access.
- **Emergency Preparedness Program 3.A:** Establish and appoint a staff liaison with adjoining cities, Riverside County, CVAG and Caltrans to facilitate the designation of emergency evacuation and supply routes, and for the development of a multi-agency emergency response plan that provides expeditious and timely repair to major streets and highways damaged by earthquakes, flooding or other disasters.
- **Emergency Preparedness Program 5.A:** Coordinate and cooperate with Riverside County Emergency Management, Desert Water Agency, CVWD, Southern California Edison, Southern California Gas, and other agencies and utilities in the development and dissemination of information and instructions on appropriate actions in the event of a local disaster or emergency.
- **Emergency Preparedness Program 5.B:** Coordinate with local schools and appropriate public and quasi-public agencies to ensure that they are adequately prepared for and are a part of a city-wide and regional emergency response when disaster strikes.
- **Noise Policy 5:** Maintain an ongoing contact with the Palm Springs Airport to ensure that flight paths and airport improvements and operations do not impact or extend noise contours into the City.

### GIS Mapping

The City's MIS Department manages the Cathedral City Public GeoHub and Staff GeoHub, online GIS maps that display information pertinent to planning, building, engineering, and public works activities. The Staff GeoHub displays geographic data from federal and state agencies, such as the FEMA Flood Hazard Zones and Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zones. The Staff GeoHub also displays data specific to Cathedral City, such as the City's Zoning and General Plan Land Use Maps as well as the Master Roadway Classification Map.

As discussed in the Preliminary Review and Environmental Review sections of this report, staff review new development proposals to prevent conflicting land uses or significant environmental impacts. This review takes into account GIS data available on the GeoHub, such as the boundaries for the MSCHP Conservation Areas. This information helps staff determine development proposals are subject to the MSHCP fees and when the land use adjacency guidelines apply to a project. The Geohub also includes mapping of open space land and park facilities, as well as the Zoning and General Plan Land Use Maps to show residential areas. Combined with mapping of existing schools and other public facilities prepared for the General Plan EIR, this information will help as the City explores potential locations for future community center.

As the Fire Department updates the City's Local Hazard Mitigation Plan, the consultant may use GIS to map critical infrastructure in relation to hazard zones and areas of high population density, in order to inform risk assessment. When staff evaluate sites proposed for critical facilities, GIS data displaying Alquist-Priolo Fault Zones, Fire Hazard Severity Zones, as well as Flood Hazard Zones help staff ensure that these facilities are located outside of areas susceptible to hazards. In order to minimize the risk of a hazardous materials incident in proximity to residential areas, the City's Truck Route Map, available both in the GeoHub and on the Engineering section of the City's website, designates routes appropriate for the

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transport of hazard materials and waste.

Geographic information, including information from external agencies, provides a valuable basis for staff to review development proposals and to ensure continued implementation of the goals, policies and programs in the Open Space and Conservation, Air Quality and Climate Stability, and Safety Elements.

Goals, policies and programs implemented (ongoing or completed) through this activity:

#### Open Space and Conservation Element

- **Program 1.A:** With the assistance of CVCC and/or CVAG, develop and routinely update maps and other information about various open space land and facilities in the City and SOI.
- **Policy 16:** Locate new local parks and recreation facilities near other community-oriented public facilities, such as schools, libraries, and recreation centers, where feasible, so that they may function as the heart of the community.
- **Biological Resources Program 1.A:** Through the Coachella Valley Conservation Commission, maintain an accurate and regularly updated map of sensitive plant and animal species and habitat in Cathedral City and its planning area.
- **Biological Resources Program 1.B:** The City shall continue to implement and abide by the provisions of the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan, including collection of development impact fees and implementation of land use adjacency guidelines for development within or adjacent to MSHCP-designated Conservation Areas.

#### Air Quality and Climate Stability Element

- **Policy 8:** The City shall continue to implement effective street sweeping and post-windstorm cleanup programs to reduce the cumulative impacts of blowsand and nuisance dust resulting from construction activities, natural processes, and other sources.

#### Safety Element

- **General Safety Policy 3:** The City shall identify and establish specific travel routes for the transport of hazardous materials and wastes, with key considerations being capacity to safely accommodate additional truck traffic, avoidance of residential areas, and use of interstate or state divided highways as preferred routes.
  - **General Safety Policy 4:** The City shall work to achieve consistency between the General Plan land use and related policies and the Palm Springs International Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan, as appropriate. Measures may include restrictions on permitted land uses, limitation on the intensity of a use, and such development criteria as height restrictions.
  - **Flooding and Hydrology Program 4.A:** The City shall coordinate and cooperate in the filing of appropriate FEMA application materials to secure amendments to the Flood Insurance Rate Maps for the City, consistent with existing and proposed improvements.
  - **Geotechnical Program 1.B:** Establish and maintain a GIS database and mapping of the various geotechnical conditions, hazards and constraints within the City.
  - **Hazards and Hazardous Materials Policy 4:** The City shall designate appropriate access routes to facilitate the transport of hazardous and toxic materials and wastes.
  - **Hazards and Hazardous Materials Policy 9:** The travel route for the transport of hazardous materials and wastes shall have adequate capacity to safely accommodate additional trucks and shall avoid the residential areas.
  - **Emergency Preparedness Policy 15:** Every effort shall be made to avoid the location of essential public facilities outside State Responsibility Areas (SRAs) or Very
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High Fire Hazard Severity Zones (VHFHSZ) without comprehensive mitigation that precludes or minimizes the threat to these facilities.

- **Noise Policy 4:** Maintain a circulation map which ensures low levels of traffic within residential neighborhoods, and assigns truck routes to major roadways only.
- **Noise Program 4.A:** Designate primary truck routes and ensure that they are clearly marked throughout the community and properly identified on mobile apps and other web-based platforms. Except for traffic providing location-specific services and deliveries, construction and delivery trucks shall be limited to those truck routes identified in the Circulation and Mobility Element.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Attachment 1: General Plan APR Checklist - Part 3 (Environment)