

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **A. Overview of the City of Palmdale**

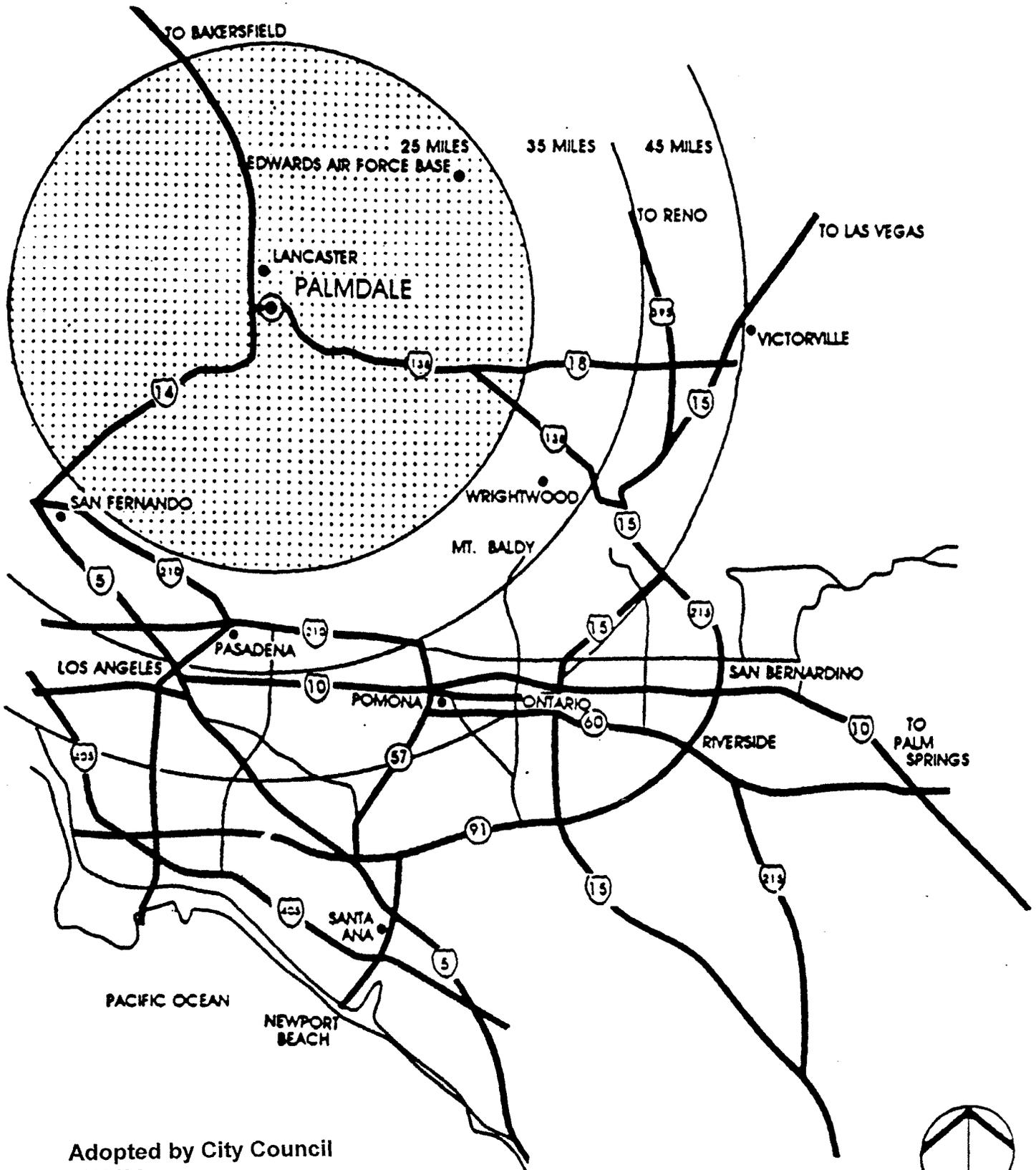
#### **1. Location and Regional Setting**

The City of Palmdale is located in the High Desert region of Los Angeles County, approximately 60 freeway miles north of downtown Los Angeles (see Exhibit I-1). Palmdale is one of two incorporated cities and several unincorporated communities within the Antelope Valley. The City is bordered by the City of Lancaster and unincorporated community of Quartz Hill to the north; unincorporated communities of Lake Los Angeles and Littlerock to the east; the unincorporated community of Acton to the south; and the unincorporated community of Leona Valley to the west (see Exhibit I-2).

The City of Palmdale Planning Area encompasses approximately 174 square miles within a transitional area between the foothills of the San Gabriel and Sierra Pelona Mountains and the Mojave Desert to the north and east (see Exhibit I-3). As a result, the Planning Area contains a variety of plant and animal communities, slope conditions, soil types and other physical characteristics. In general, the Planning Area slopes from south to north-northeast, with surface flows and subsurface flows trending away from the foothills to Rosamond Dry Lake. The major watercourses flowing through Palmdale are Amargosa Creek, Anaverde Creek, Little Rock Wash and Big Rock Wash. While foothill areas within and adjacent to the City contain significant slopes, a majority of the Planning Area is relatively flat.

The climate of Palmdale and the Antelope Valley is dominated by the region's Pacific high pressure system, which contributes to the area's hot, dry summers and relatively mild winters. The climate is characterized by its wide swings in temperature between day and night. Temperatures in the area average lows and highs of 71°F and 95°F, respectively, in the summer months and 36°F and 58°F, respectively in the winter months. Average annual precipitation is eight (8) inches.

# REGIONAL SETTING

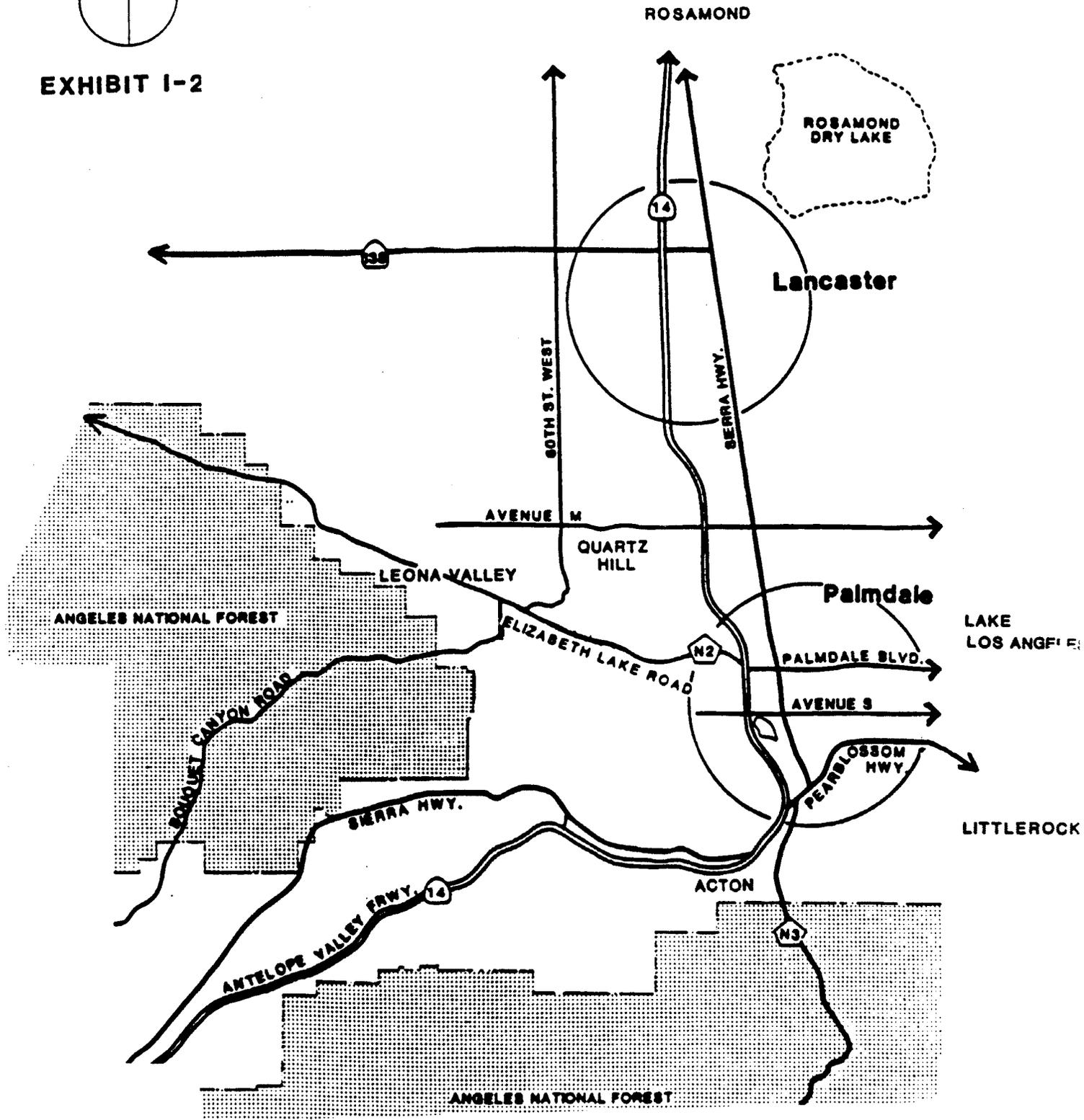


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1/25/93

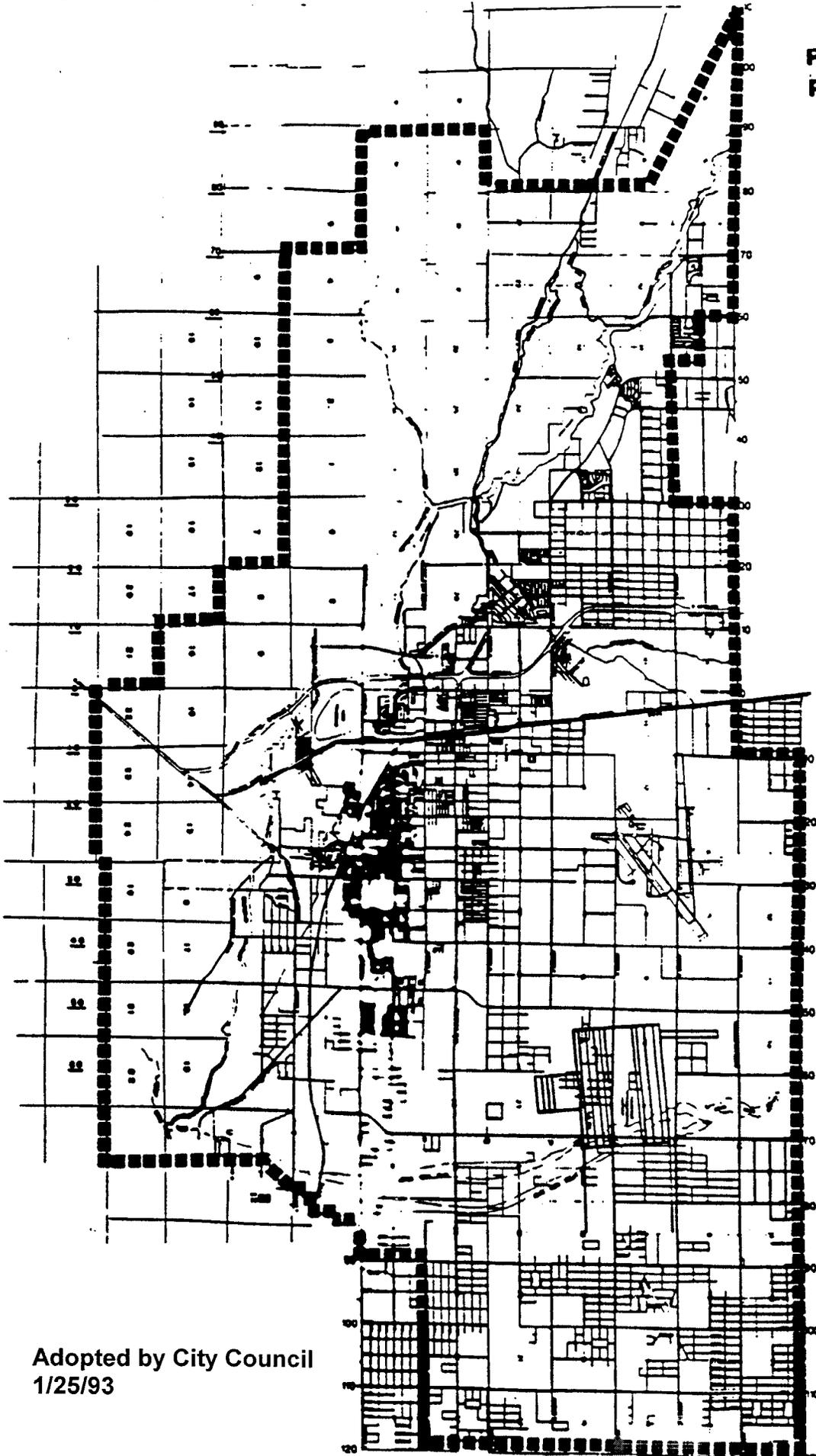




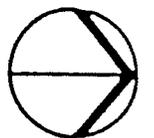
EXHIBIT I-2



**PALMDALE  
PLANNING AREA**



Adopted by City Council  
1/25/93



**EXHIBIT I-3**

Palmdale is sheltered from import of inter-basin pollution by mountain barriers extending on the north and south. Air quality is generally good; however, the City receives windborne air pollutants from the greater Los Angeles area via canyons, such as the Newhall Pass and Soledad Canyon, which lie to the south of the City.

The City of Palmdale is strategically located with respect to the Antelope Valley, San Joaquin Valley, Owens Valley and the San Fernando Valley/Los Angeles Basin. With direct access to State Route 14 (Antelope Valley Freeway) and Highway 138, as well as rail access via the Southern Pacific Transportation Company, Palmdale is readily accessible to commuters and future commercial or industrial users.

Being the most southerly community in the Antelope Valley, the City of Palmdale enjoys a locational advantage for homebuyers from the San Fernando Valley, Santa Clarita Valley, Los Angeles Basin and Ventura County. The Planning Area contains approximately 11 miles of freeway frontage along SR-14. A large portion of this frontage is undeveloped, giving the City ongoing opportunities to attract quality development. The Planning Area also contains 17,750 acres which has been designated as Palmdale Regional Airport, owned by the City of Los Angeles Department of Airports. More than 12,000 acres of vacant land exist adjacent to the airport site, allowing the City to attract related commercial/industrial uses. The Planning Area also contains a variety of housing types, including estate, equestrian, single family and multi-family residential development.

## **2. City and Sphere Boundaries**

The City of Palmdale encompasses approximately 95 square miles and has been an adopted sphere of influence containing approximately 174 square miles. The Planning Area referred to in the General Plan generally extends east to 120<sup>th</sup> Street East, south to the alignment of Avenue W (Angeles National Forest) to the east of SR-14 and follows an irregular boundary along the Sierra Pelona ridgeline west of SR-14, north to Avenue M and L, west to 80<sup>th</sup> Street West south of the Ritter Ridge and 110<sup>th</sup> Street West north of Portal Ridge (see Exhibit I-3).

The City of Palmdale was incorporated on August 24, 1962. At incorporation, the City encompassed a total of 2.1 square miles. Since that time, numerous annexations and sphere of influence amendments have been approved by the County's Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO). The most recent sphere of influence amendment involved approximately 23,000 acres on the southern and western boundary of the City, including the Ritter Ranch Specific Plan area. There is currently a large annexation being processed to the southwest of the City (City Ranch) which, if approved, would add approximately 3 square miles to the City. A number of smaller areas, including ten "County Islands", are under consideration for annexation.

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### **3. City Structure and Planning Functions**

Palmdale is a “general law” city operating under the council-manager form of government. Four City Council members are elected at large for four year overlapping terms. The Mayor is elected at large for a two year term. The City Administrator is appointed by, and serves at the pleasure of, the City Council.

The Planning Commission is a five member advisory body, appointed by the City Council for two-year terms. The City’s Planning Department provides support staff to the Planning Commission, under the direction of the Director of Planning. Development proposals are reviewed by the Development Advisory Board (DAB), comprised of representatives of the City’s Planning, Building and Safety, and Public Works/Engineering Departments, the Los Angeles Fire Department, and the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department.

The City of Palmdale currently provides general administrative, recreational, and library services, and performs most community development and public works functions. Fire prevention and protection are provided through the Los Angeles County Consolidated Fire Department. Police, road maintenance, and animal control services are provided under contract by Los Angeles County. The City is served by the Los Angeles County Sanitation District, Los Angeles County Waterworks District, Palmdale Water District and a number of local mutual water companies. These districts function independently of the City.

### **4. Planning Issues**

During the last ten years, the City of Palmdale has evolved from a small established agricultural town to a thriving urbanized city of more than 80,000 residents. With this growth came the challenges of meeting increasing needs of the City and its residents. Over the last several years, numerous meetings and public hearings have been conducted by the City Council, Planning Commission, and Citizen’s Advisory Committee (CAC). Additionally, a community attitude survey was conducted prior to initiation of the General Plan process. Through this process the following issues and opportunities have been identified to be addressed in the General Plan.

#### *Existing Growth Patterns*

The City of Palmdale occupies a unique position. It lies at the entrance to the Antelope Valley, a spectacular location with strong physical assets including hillsides that define the western, southern, and eastern edges of town and an expansive central core. The

City has been in a development boom with a potential to be an example to the region in terms of growth patterns.

The physical expanse of land within the City and its potential for growth within that area are both an issue and an opportunity for the community. The planning process has helped shape community goals such as:

- Provision of adequate land in various use designations and development of policies to promote a stable and diversified economic base;
- Buffering of incompatible land uses;
- Revitalization of the historic downtown;
- Protection of sensitive ecological areas;
- Development of a community identity;
- Maintenance of a high quality of development;
- Provision of adequate infrastructure to support new development;
- Preservation of viewsheds and open space.

Issues on growth patterns and community goals are addressed in all the Elements of the General Plan.

### *Circulation Patterns*

The City's circulation system has developed around a grid system in which major arterials are spaced every mile and minor arterials are spaced at half-mile intervals between the major arterials. This pattern provides a solid foundation for serving the community's mobility needs. Palmdale has the opportunity to develop a master circulation system before new development takes place. By establishing ultimate rights-of-way today, the problems associated with inadequate roads to meet future traffic demands can be mitigated.

The majority of arterial street segments currently operate at LOS C or better, indicating good traffic flow. However, substantial growth in all sectors of the community has created concerns among residents regarding the adequacy of the street system to accommodate future traffic volumes. These concerns will be addressed through development of the roadway network proposed in the Circulation Element. Components of this network are in place in the developed portions of the City; as the City continues to develop, the arterial roadway network will be expanded to those areas currently vacant. However, due to land use and topographic constraints, there are several arterials which will not be continuous, even at buildout of the General Plan, because they are interrupted by USAF Plant 42, the proposed regional airport, or steep terrain.

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This discontinuous street pattern may contribute to connectivity problems, making the circulation network less efficient.

As with many agricultural communities, Palmdale's growth occurred adjacent to the railroad and highways that carried livestock and agricultural products to distant markets. The Southern Pacific Railroad, Sierra Highway, and Pearblossom Highway, running at grade through the Planning Area, served that function. Although these major transportation links offer excellent opportunities to increase local commerce, their present design contributes to localized congestion. As development occurs, congestion at railroad crossings will likely increase. In addition, congestion on Palmdale Boulevard will increase until Caltrans' plan to reroute Highway 138 up to the vicinity of Avenue P-8 is implemented.

The City of Los Angeles Department of Airports is planning to develop Palmdale Regional Airport on 17,750 acres in the northeastern section of the Planning Area. When fully operational, the airport will handle up to 12 million air passengers annually. The airport will become a major employment base and will attract commercial and industrial uses and support services to the area. To accommodate future traffic around the facility, an east/west freeway linking the Airport to the Antelope Valley Freeway will be needed.

These issues are addressed in the Circulation Element of the General Plan.

### *Housing Opportunities*

Rapid growth in the Antelope Valley has changed the composition of the City's population and housing stock. Affordable land has made Palmdale attractive to residential developers, who have constructed thousands of single family residences in the past few years. This extensive amount of affordable housing, providing a range of residential options and locations, has lured many former residents of the Los Angeles area to the Antelope Valley. Although single family residential housing opportunities abound locally, there are other housing issues that the City must address. These issues include:

- Provision of a wide range of housing types;
- Provision of low to moderate-income housing;
- Buffering of residential areas from incompatible uses;
- Rehabilitation of older housing stock; and
- Provision of adequate infrastructure to support residential uses.

Housing issues are addressed in the Housing Element of the General Plan.

### *Availability of Public Services and Utilities*

Development and population increases have placed new demands on service providers, including the City, resulting in increased demands for new infrastructure, schools, parks, fire, and other related facilities. While the City and other agencies have worked to improve facilities and services to meet present and future needs, the General Plan will provide an action program to achieve this goal.

Rapid growth in the Planning Area has substantially increased the demand for water, which has been obtained from groundwater pumping and delivery of imported water from the State Water Project's California Aqueduct. Reliance on groundwater, even when supplemented by imported water, has caused overdrafting of the aquifer. This overdraft condition will continue to worsen in the future unless imported water is used to fill the gap between the safe yield from the aquifer and the local demand for water. Without assurance of adequate water resources, the City may not be able to maintain the rate of development experienced during the past decade. The continued availability of water to meet the demands of a growing population is an issue that must be addressed.

The contamination of groundwater from septic tanks, solid waste, and hazardous materials also raises a concern for public health and safety. Not all areas are served by a sewer system. Reliance on septic systems to dispose of sewage may pose potential health problems. Treatment plant capacities should keep pace with the growth and development of the area as the amount of sewage generation increases proportionately with population.

Floodplains are associated with drainage channels which cross the Planning Area. They include Little Rock Wash, Big Rock Wash, Amargosa Creek and Anaverde Creek. While creek channelization will control flood hazards, it decreases recharge of the aquifers and disturbs sensitive habitats. The use of drainage swales and compatible land uses around flood hazard areas could have less adverse impacts on the environment.

The lack of a storm drainage system has caused intermittent street flooding in certain areas of the City. Impermeable soils in hillside areas and increases in storm runoff within developed areas add to flooding in low-lying areas. Implementation of the City Drainage Master Plan is expected to mitigate flooding impacts within the City and downstream.

Present developments have occurred far from existing infrastructure and public services, resulting in the underutilization of existing utilities and services in developed

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areas and the costly extension of new infrastructure in outlying areas. Overlapping of service areas has also raised service costs and made coordination difficult.

These issues are addressed in the Land Use and Public Services Elements of the General Plan.

### *Preservation of Quality of Life*

The character of the Planning Area is defined by its location. The high desert climate, vegetation and wildlife, nearby mountains, abundant land, and affordable housing have drawn residents to the City of Palmdale. With so much open space, the City has the opportunity to plan a cohesive community, preserve scenic views, and maintain air quality. Uncontrolled development could eliminate these qualities and deprive the City of these resources.

Many residents moved to the community to enjoy the less congested atmosphere of the Antelope Valley. Many take pleasure in the keeping of horses and other livestock. The recent construction of new housing tracts has rapidly changed the appearance and function of Palmdale from a rural community to an urban center. Therefore, the balance between rural and urban lifestyle needs to be considered in the policies and programs of the General Plan.

The prevalence of vacant land allows for the future preservation and conservation of open space within the City. Significant open space areas and parkland must be preserved from premature development and urbanization. The rational management of natural resources and preservation of quality of life should recognize and retain the following significant resources:

- Hillside areas and viewsheds;
- Agricultural land;
- Sand and gravel resources;
- Sensitive ecological areas;
- Endangered plant and animal species.

Open space and resource conservation are addressed in the Land Use and Environmental Resources Elements of the General Plan.

### *Safety*

The General Plan acknowledges a number of natural and man-made hazards which constrain development. To minimize these hazards, public safety will be promoted through educated land use decisions in order to avoid loss of life or major property

damage. Emergency preparedness programs and procedures have been established and will continue to be updated and implemented, to ensure adequate response in case of a threat to public safety. Significant hazards which are addressed in this General Plan are described below.

- The San Andreas Fault zone traverses the southwest portion of the Planning Area. Geologic hazards associated with seismic activity will be reduced by application of setbacks and building construction standards.
- Flooding associated with the natural drainage courses in the Planning Area, and geologic hazards associated with soil conditions or topography, present planning and structural considerations for development which are addressed in various policies.
- Aircraft crash zones associated with the USAF Plant 42 and the proposed regional airport are delineated and adjacent land uses regulated to minimize public safety hazards.
- Further development of United States Air Force (USAF) Plant 42 and other industrial uses will increase the potential for the use and handling of hazardous materials, and consequently, the accidental release of these materials. Appropriate policies are established to respond to these concerns.
- The increase in population brings with it an increase in criminal activity. The security of neighborhoods has become a priority of many residents.

These issues are addressed in the Land Use and Safety Elements of the General Plan.

### *Noise*

The USAF Plant 42 is a major employment base in the Planning Area. At the same time, it is a source of aircraft noise. The Southern Pacific Railroad, the Antelope Valley Freeway, and several major arterial roadways also serve as major transportation corridors which generate noise impacts. Measures should be taken to reduce noise at their sources or to protect sensitive uses from noise impacts. This issue is addressed in the Land Use and Noise Elements of the General Plan.

### *Future Growth*

With approximately 79 percent of the Planning Area vacant, buildout of the City could completely change the character of the community. In order to ensure that new development is an asset, the General Plan must address the issues of balanced growth,

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adequate infrastructure and public services, development standards, economic stability, and the preservation of scenic qualities and open space.

Rapid development in the past few years was influenced by the favorable economic climate. The effects of urbanization on physical, social, and economic resources of the City must be carefully evaluated, and development paced to avoid boom and bust cycles.

These concerns are addressed in all Elements of the General Plan.

### *Economic Development*

Palmdale's economic base has historically been tied to the aerospace industry. Fluctuations in the world political landscape, economy and federal program funding have affected the aerospace industry throughout the country and particularly Southern California. At present, approximately 34 percent of residents of the City commute to jobs outside the Antelope Valley. A majority of these persons are employed within the San Fernando Valley or the Los Angeles Basin.

While increased development has led to a dramatic increase in retail sales and jobs within this sector, service and industrial sector jobs have not been as readily created.

Constraints to the expansion of employment-generating development include the lack of infrastructure and perceived limitations in inter- and intra-state access. The City of Palmdale must coordinate efforts to provide infrastructure, ensuring that new development continued to provide infrastructure to support itself without burdening existing residents. Continued efforts by the City through the economic development process and implementation of the General Plan will be necessary to continue expansion of the local economy.

These issues point to a need for diversification and development of employment opportunities in the City. Thus, the General Plan addresses:

- Designation of land for a diversity of commercial and industrial land uses to improve the jobs/housing balance and create a more stable economic base.
- Enhancement of the downtown area.

This issue is further addressed in the Land Use Element of the General Plan.