



CREATING AN EQUITABLE INFILL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK FOR KERN COUNTY:

**Analysis and community recommendations
to support the 2019 General Plan Update**



**POLICY BRIEF
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AUTHORS

Anisha Hingorani, Policy and Research Analyst, Advancement Project California
Jacky Guerrero, Senior Policy & Research Analyst, Advancement Project California
Adeyinka Glover, Esq., Attorney, Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability
Chris Ringewald, Director of Research and Data Analysis, Advancement Project California

PHOTO CREDIT: Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability

WITH DEEPEST THANKS TO OUR TEAM AND PARTNERS FOR OFFERING YOUR INVALUABLE EXPERTISE THROUGHOUT THIS PROJECT:

Michael Russo, Director of Equity in Community Investments, Advancement Project California
Daniel Wherley, Senior Policy & Research Analyst, Advancement Project California
Katie Smith, Director of Communications, Advancement Project California
John Joanino, Senior Communications Associate, Advancement Project California
Leslie Poston, Grant and Writing Consultant, Advancement Project California
Ebonye Gussine Wilkins, Chief Executive Officer, Inclusive Media Solutions
Jasmene Del Aguila, Policy Advocate, Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability
Phoebe Seaton, Co-Founder And Co-Director And Legal Director, Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability
Veronica Garibay, Co-Founder And Co-Director, Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability
Gustavo Aguirre, Director of Organizing, Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment
Chelsea Tu, Senior Attorney, Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment
Building Healthy Communities—South Kern (South Kern BHC) Staff
Committee for a Better Arvin Members
Comite Progreso de Lamont Members
Greenfield Walking Group Members



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ABOUT BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES SOUTH KERN

Since 2010, Building Healthy Communities—South Kern (South Kern BHC) has been diligently working through the Comunidades Unidas (United Communities) Action Team, led by Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability (LCJA), the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment (CRPE), and the Central California Environmental Justice Network (CCEJN), to improve health and the environment for low-income county residents living in unincorporated communities. In addition, a network of community representatives and organizations has worked to address the urgent health and safety needs of Kern County’s most underserved neighborhoods. This network of equity advocates includes the leaders and members of Committee for a Better Arvin, Comite Progreso de Lamont, and Greenfield Walking Group.



INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to document existing land use concerns, provide maps and analysis of infill opportunities in unincorporated areas, and outline community-developed infill priorities in Kern County's unincorporated communities to support the County in its General Plan update.

The report includes research on Kern County's disadvantaged, unincorporated communities to highlight the stark economic and health inequities that exist in these areas.

The report also serves to convey the urgency of designing infill development policies to support these communities' ability to access critical public services, affordable housing, public transportation, and more. Done right, infill development has the potential to create long-lasting, healthy built environments and repair environmental harm for adversely-impacted communities.¹ The report concludes with a list of infill development recommendations that will help Kern County meet its regional housing and sustainability objectives and support healthy, thriving communities.



KERN COUNTY PROFILE

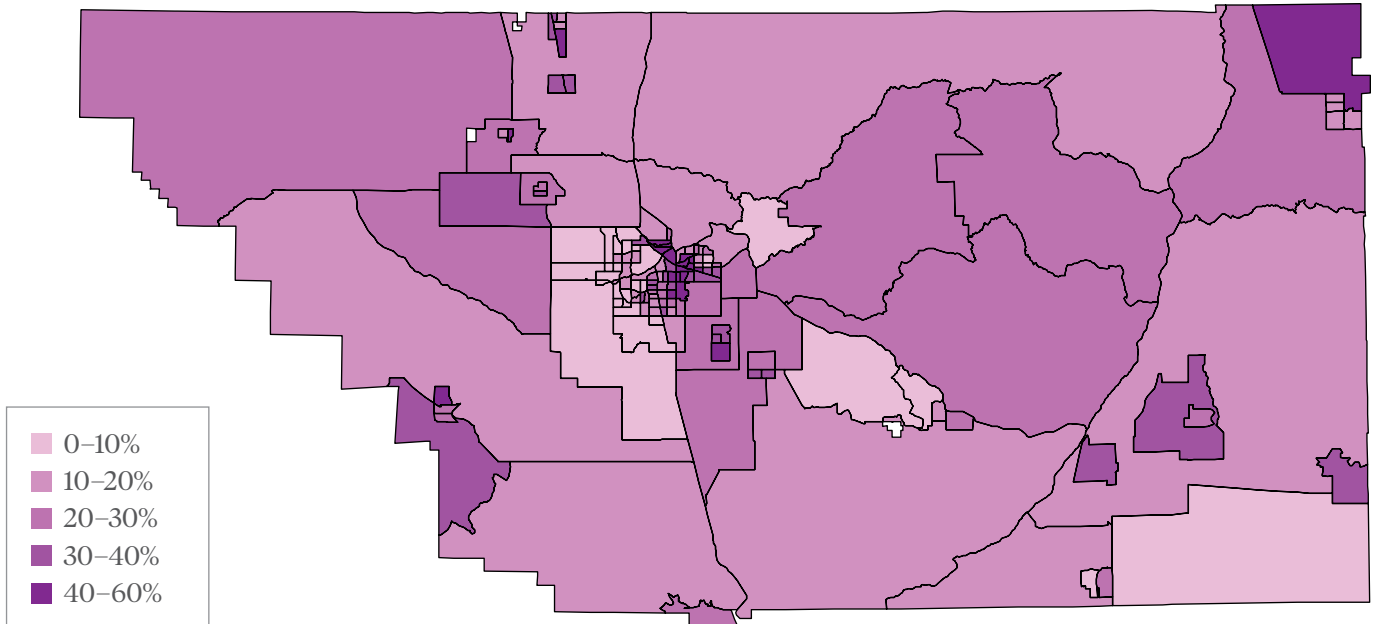
Kern County, the third largest county in California, is situated at the southern end of the San Joaquin Valley with an area of 8,132 square miles and a population of 905,801 as of 2018.²

The county includes 11 incorporated cities, with its largest city, Bakersfield, containing approximately 43 percent of the county's population.³ Over 40 percent of the population lives in unincorporated areas of the county. Kern County has one of the fastest growing populations in the state and is expected to grow to 1.5 million by 2042.⁴

Agriculture, oil and gas production, and resource extraction are the major industries in the region; Kern County leads the nation in agricultural crop value and produces over 65 percent of California's oil and natural gas.⁵ While these industries generate significant revenue for the county, the profits are concentrated in the hands of the few and are highly dependent on a low-wage workforce, contributing to high levels of income inequality and concentrated poverty, especially in communities of color.⁶ Map 1 displays significant areas of poverty throughout Kern County. More than 22 percent of Kern County residents live in poverty, with Latino, Black, and Hawaiian/Pacific Islander households experiencing poverty rates of 30 percent and higher.⁷ In fact, Kern County has one of the highest racial disparities in median household incomes in the state, with a nearly \$30,000 difference between White household incomes, who average \$59,592, and Black household incomes, who average \$30,926.⁸

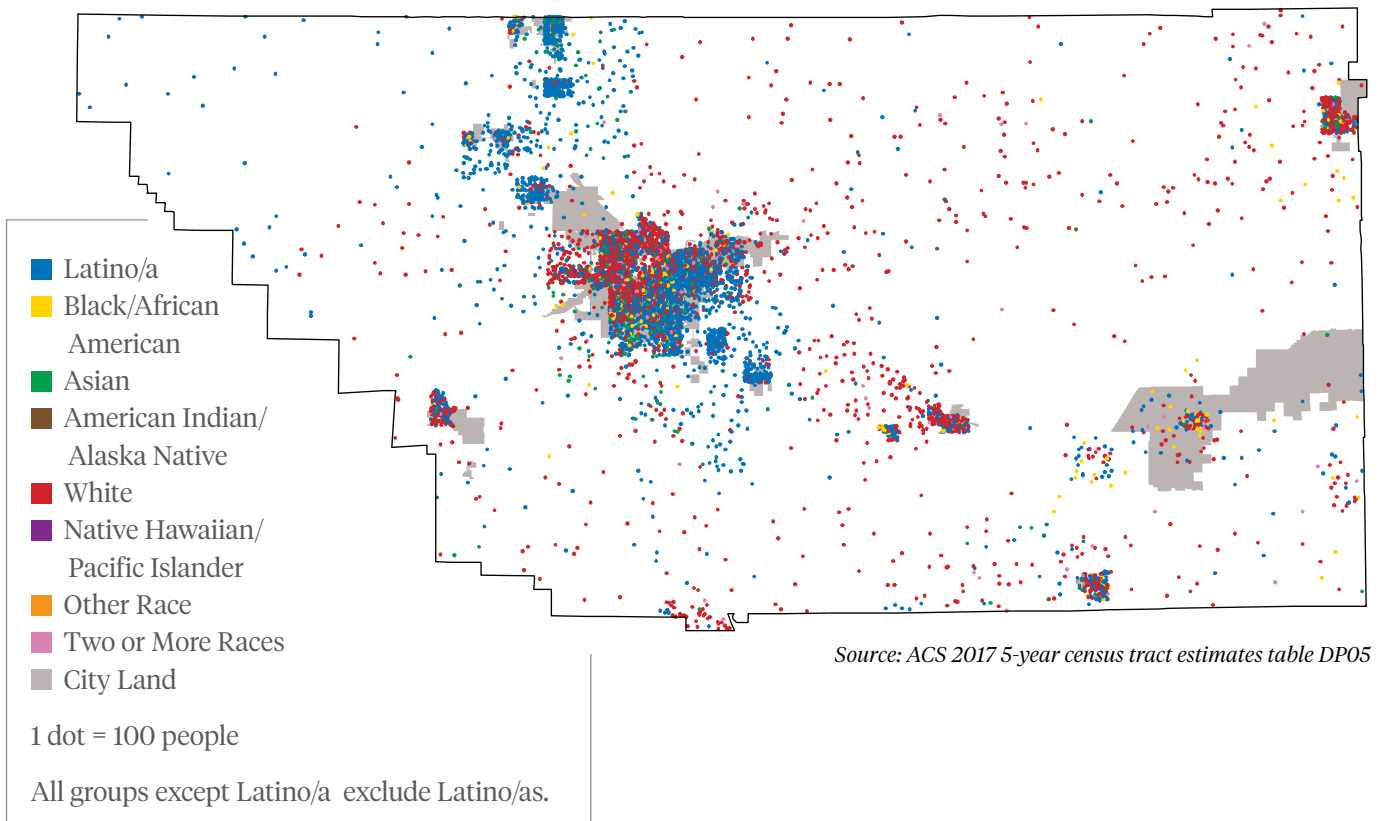
Kern County is a majority-minority county, with Latinos comprising 50.4 percent of the population; by 2060, Latinos will make up 60 percent of the population.⁹ As documented in Map 2, Latino households are concentrated in the northern and central parts of the county, in and along the outskirts of major urban areas. Almost one-third of Kern County's population is under 18 years old, giving Kern County the third highest youth population in the state.¹⁰

MAP 1. KERN COUNTY PEOPLE IN POVERTY (%)¹¹



Source: ACS 2017 5-year census tract estimates table DP03.
Census tracts without data in white.

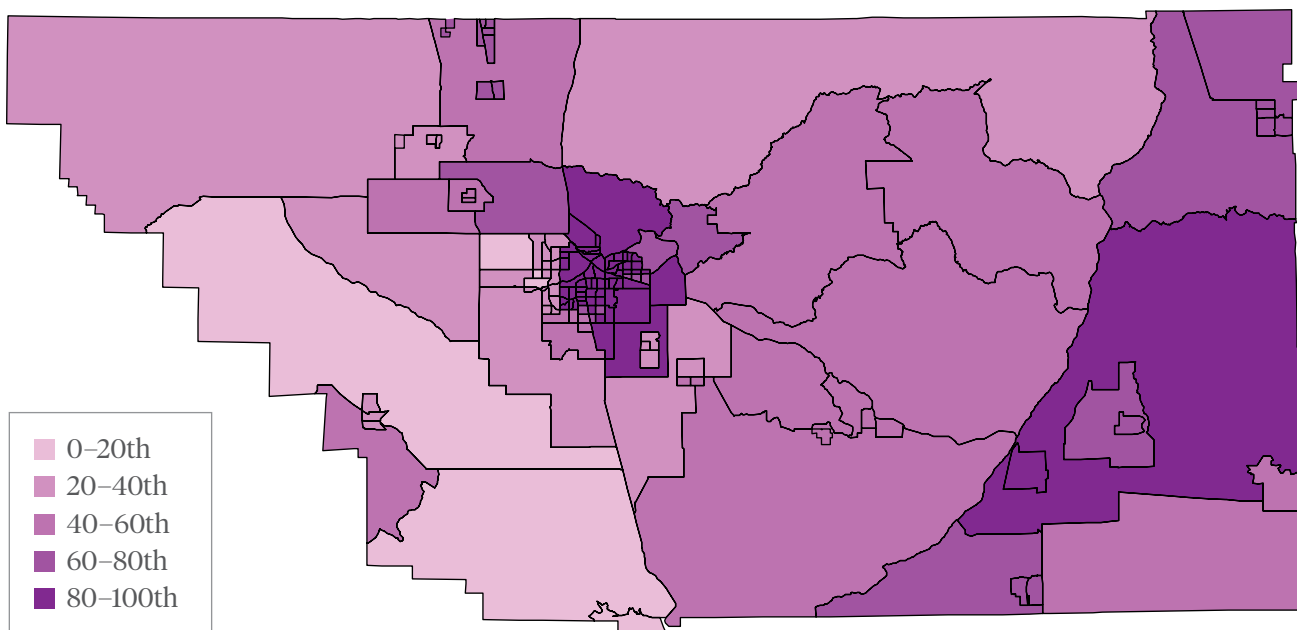
MAP 2. KERN COUNTY POPULATION BY RACE/ETHNICITY¹²



Source: ACS 2017 5-year census tract estimates table DP05

Kern County’s community health indicators paint a vivid picture of complex health challenges that are compounded by minority and low-income status. According to California Department of Public Health, at 36 deaths per 100,000 individuals, Kern County leads the state in death rates from diabetes.¹³ There is an eight-year discrepancy in life expectancy between Asian (79 years) and Black residents (71 years) in Kern County.¹⁴ In addition, at least one in 10 Kern residents lack health insurance coverage.¹⁵ A 2018 report by American Lung Association found that Kern County is the most polluted county in the nation, and ranks in the top three counties across other poor air quality indicators, including particle and ozone pollution.¹⁶ As illustrated in Map 3, the central and eastern areas of the county experience higher levels of emergency room visits due to asthma.

MAP 3. AGE-ADJUSTED ASTHMA EMERGENCY ROOM VISIT PERCENTILE¹⁷



Source: California Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, CalEnviroScreen 3.0

Kern County’s unincorporated communities experience concentrated economic and environmental disadvantages. A PolicyLink analysis looked at disadvantaged communities in the San Joaquin Valley and found that while only 20 percent of Central Valley residents live in Kern County, 42 percent of Central Valley residents living in unincorporated, disadvantaged communities are located in Kern County, an overwhelming majority of whom are from low-income communities of color.¹⁸ The scale of the problem is vast: according to PolicyLink’s research, 38 percent of Kern County unincorporated residents live in disadvantaged areas, which are defined as being predominantly low-income places outside of city limits.¹⁹ Kern County’s large geographic area makes it difficult to extend quality services to rural, unincorporated communities. Given the socioeconomic realities that many of Kern County residents face, it is critical that County staff prioritize the land use needs of its disadvantaged, unincorporated communities.

INFILL DEVELOPMENT DEFINITION AND BENEFITS

Infill development refers to the development of vacant or underutilized land or buildings within the boundaries of an existing city or small town.

Infill development is a planning strategy used to accommodate population growth, manage sprawl, and mitigate the costs associated with extending public infrastructure—such as sanitation, utilities, and roads—further away from an urban or rural hub. By developing or rehabilitating areas between existing developed sites, infill development is meant to encourage compact and efficient growth, create more walkable and bikeable communities, and provide better connections to existing public services and public transportation.²⁰





The environmental, climate, and health benefits of infill development are well documented. Infill development adjacent to existing public transportation networks—also known as transit-oriented development—can reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT), encourage residents to drive less, promote physically-active transportation like biking and walking, and increase access to and the usage of public transportation.²¹ Reducing the number of cars on the road, building parks, or encouraging tree canopy placement within infill sites can enhance community safety, increase physical activity, cut greenhouse gas emissions, and improve air quality for the surrounding neighborhoods.²²

Done right, infill development has the potential to create long-lasting, healthy built environments and repair environmental harm for adversely-impacted communities. From a public health standpoint, infill development can be a solution in addressing a community’s social and physical determinants of health and quality of life, which range from better access to vital resources like food, jobs, housing, child care, and health services (including costs savings resulting from improved health), and reduced exposure to pollution, crime, and violence.²³

Local governments have also prioritized infill strategies for their economic benefits: compact growth can result in infrastructure and maintenance cost savings, mixed-use development can yield more property tax revenue, and increased mixed-income housing and job opportunities can help stabilize smaller communities.²⁴

Infill lots vary in size, shape, zoning, ownership, previous uses, and land use capacity, and thus often require a range of different and complex development, permitting, and financing strategies to effectively develop land for a specific use. For this reason, infill development often happens through a site-by-site, piecemeal approach that fails to consider how individual land parcels fit within an existing community design. Yet, research has shown that cities and counties are more effective in meeting a region’s equity, health, and sustainability needs when infill development is guided by an integrated community vision.²⁵

INFILL DEVELOPMENT— STATE AND LOCAL REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Infill development is governed by a city or county’s general plan, which is a locality’s comprehensive, long-term planning framework document composed of mandatory elements, or chapters.

Infill development is primarily housed within the land use element but has applications to other elements including circulation, housing, open space and conservation, and safety.²⁶ Because localities are required to update their general plan regularly, the update process provides an important opportunity for localities to analyze regional trends, incorporate state mandates, and understand community needs. For infill development, that means aligning policies with state requirements to prioritize environmental justice, analyzing where local infill opportunities exist, and working with residents to develop infill prioritization strategies that are grounded in community priorities.

A review of the 2004 Kern County General Plan Land Use, Open Space and Conservation Element shows room for improved policies regarding infill development.²⁷ While the Plan has broader statements encouraging new residential development to infill existing development—noting infill as a smart growth strategy—and encouraging public services and facilities to expand within urban areas in a “compact and orderly pattern,”²⁸ the policies lack measurable goals and specificity and do not adequately address the needs of rural communities. The element should highlight policies and implementation plans that have timelines, are enforceable, reflect community input, and identify adequate resources to support them.

For the past several decades, California state legislators have passed policies that require local governments to consider race, income, and sustainability when making general plan and land use decisions—including mandates around environmental justice and sustainable development—both of which have implications for infill development.²⁹ Table 1 outlines a list of recent state legislation and a brief description of its application to the Kern County General Plan.

TABLE 1. RECENT STATE LEGISLATION AND APPLICATIONS TO THE KERN COUNTY GENERAL PLAN

STATE BILL	YEAR	APPLICATIONS TO KERN COUNTY'S GENERAL PLAN UPDATE
SB 375	2008	Requires localities to develop Sustainable Communities Strategy plans to outline how the region will meet VMT and greenhouse gas reduction goals by adopting planning objectives that encourage more walking, biking, and public transportation usage. Requires regional agencies to align their Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) with the Regional Housing Need Allocation (RHNA). ³⁰
SB 743	2013	Requires alternative criteria to be developed when evaluating transportation impacts to encourage a reduction in greenhouse gases, multimodal transportation networks, and a diversity of land uses. Creates guidelines for transit-oriented development.
SB 244	2011	Requires local government agencies to review and update its land use element to incorporate the public infrastructure needs of disadvantaged, unincorporated areas. The 2015 Kern County Housing Element identified 22 disadvantaged unincorporated communities (DUCs), which includes Lamont, Fuller Acres, Lost Hills, Oildale, Weedpatch, and others. ³¹
SB 1000	2016	Requires localities to adopt an environmental justice element that identifies disadvantaged communities, both incorporated and unincorporated, as part of the general plan process. ³²
SB 35	2017	Applies to jurisdictions that have not met their housing targets by income category, streamlining the approval process for developments on infill sites that comply with existing mixed-use and residential zoning. ³³ Under the statute, all participating developments must provide at least 10 percent of units for lower-income households generating 80 percent of the area median income. Jurisdictions are charged with developing planning objective standards that are subject to the streamlined, ministerial approval process.

As Kern County updates its General Plan, it must be mindful that the objective standards developed are consistent with the General Plan. Kern County staff should seek input from residents from disadvantaged communities, both incorporated and unincorporated, when determining what standards would meet objectivity.

State agencies have developed technical guidance on how to implement these broad and far-reaching legislation. California Governor’s Office of Planning and Research (OPR), the lead state agency overseeing long-range planning—including environmental justice matters—developed general plan guidelines to support sustainable development practices, such as infill and transit-oriented development. OPR also advises localities on how to address procedural and geographic equity planning concerns that can exacerbate racial and economic disparities in the distribution of public services and sensitive land uses.³⁴ As part of a slate of strategies to reduce VMTs and protect communities from traffic-related pollution, the California Air Resources Board advises local governments to locate schools, child care facilities, playgrounds, and housing located at least 500 feet from freeways.³⁵ Taken together, these requirements speak to the urgency of adopting strong infill planning guidelines that support healthy, sustainable, and equitable development.

IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY PLANNING FOR KERN COUNTY’S RURAL UNINCORPORATED COMMUNITIES

For Kern County’s rural, unincorporated communities, understanding and identifying land use conditions in disadvantaged areas are critical to a successful infill development policy.

The EPA Office of Sustainable Communities looked at infill development challenges and barriers in “distressed communities,” defined as places with high rates of unemployment, poverty, and residential vacancies, weak real estate markets, and fiscal constraints at the municipal level.³⁶ Many rural, unincorporated communities in Kern County fall into this category, which means that agency staff overseeing the general plan update process should prioritize context and concerns facing residents living in distressed communities. The report included a case study of Fresno, a distressed community that has seen disinvestment and declin-



ing property values over many decades, and offered insights and dozens of strategies on how distressed localities can overcome obstacles to infill. The report emphasized the need to employ robust community engagement strategies to involve residents in the infill development process and ensure that existing residents benefit from—and are not displaced by—infill investment and revitalization efforts.³⁷



Advocates and community residents are actively engaged in developing infill development guidelines that encourage equitable and health-promoting development and spur the local economy. In a major agricultural and oil-producing region like Kern County—which does not currently have an infill development framework—a proactive and holistic approach to infill development can help safeguard unincorporated, rural communities from the public health and environmental impacts of harmful agricultural and industrial activities and address critical gaps in access to public resources like affordable housing, transportation, parks, and health services. Input from residents from disadvantaged communities is critical throughout the General Plan update process. Due to the wide array of development that can be created on infill sites, it is important to ask residents directly what types of investments they would prioritize in their communities. Depending on the communities' location, existing investments, and proximity to services, needs may vary.

UNDERSTANDING UNINCORPORATED RURAL COMMUNITIES' INFILL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

Historic and irregular growth patterns and limited planning capacity have concentrated inequities in rural, unincorporated communities. As a result, rural, unincorporated communities face entrenched land use challenges that exacerbate existing health, economic, and environmental inequities, disproportionately impacting low-income communities of color. Updating Kern County's General Plan presents a unique opportunity to develop a strong development framework that prioritizes infill, is transit-oriented, and is responsive to what communities will need over the next several decades to achieve positive and lasting health, sustainability, and quality of life outcomes.

Kern County should include strategies that specifically plan for how vacant buildings, underutilized sites, and abandoned property may be utilized to benefit existing communities, while mitigating negative outcomes of such development that might have a detrimental impact to community vision and the makeup of existing communities. The County can also include specific public facility infill objectives for rural areas and recognize that urban expansion can be "compact and orderly" not only near existing public facilities, but also within communities that lack such services. A holistic, infill development framework can begin to address larger unequal access to public services, child care, health care, affordable housing, parks, and public transportation. Community residents from rural, unincorporated communities have lifted up their prioritized land use services for infill development as detailed below:



PUBLIC RESOURCES

County-operated public services—such as hospitals, libraries, recreation centers, and other community resources, including grocery stores and child care facilities—tend to be concentrated in major cities or areas closer to the urban core and Kern County is no exception.³⁸ The California Health Interview Survey found that 20.3 percent of Kern residents do not have a usual source of health care, meaning they primarily rely on emergency room visits and urgent care centers to address acute health problems.³⁹ The lack of access to quality, affordable care compromises community health and contributes to Kern County’s already poor health outcomes. This issue is further complicated by low vehicle ownership by residents living in unincorporated communities and their reliance on County public transportation services that have limited frequency and routes in rural, unincorporated communities. For these neighborhoods, siting County facilities in infill priority areas can address the inequitable distribution of public resources and improve access for residents of unincorporated areas.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

As federal affordable housing financing tools dry up and affordable housing production stagnates, infill development guidelines should be designed to meet Kern County’s Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) and Housing Element objectives, the two state-mandated policies that guide housing development and set targets in the County.⁴⁰ The RHNA determined that Kern County needs to supply 21,583 housing units in unincorporated areas, 40 percent of which must be affordable to very-low and low-income households. The Housing Element review of Kern’s disadvantaged unincorporated communities concluded that Kern County needs to expand public infrastructure in these areas to support the existing population and accommodate future growth.⁴¹ Fortunately, Kern County is rich in residential development opportunities: a vacant land inventory included in Kern’s Housing Element looked at all available residential land equipped with existing water and sewer infrastructure and identified almost 5,700 acres with a development capacity of 44,000 residential units.⁴² Similarly, it estimates that the County should receive a minimum of \$5.3 million

in federal housing grants to support affordable housing production and homeownership programs over the next five years.

The need to take bold steps to produce affordable housing in Kern County is high since there are more households across the county struggling to afford rent. In recent years, Kern County has witnessed its most severe drop in low-income housing production compared to other counties in the Central Valley. Since 2016, Kern has witnessed an 85 percent drop compared to a 55 percent reduction in the Valley and 45 percent reduction statewide.⁴³ Over two-thirds of Kern's lowest income households are severely rent-burdened, meaning they spend over 50 percent of their income on housing costs.⁴⁴ A 2018 study by the California Housing Partnership Corporation found that Kern County needs to produce over 30,000 more affordable rental homes in addition to strictly covenanted affordable units to accommodate its existing population.⁴⁵ The number of families falling into homelessness has also increased as a direct result of the lack of affordable housing. In the past year, the County experienced a 9 percent rise in the number of homeless individuals and within that, a 38 percent increase in the number of unsheltered homeless individuals.⁴⁶ The County can address the shortfall in affordable housing by including affordability requirements for housing developments on infill sites. By prioritizing infill developments for affordable housing, the County can stabilize communities and ensure that neighborhoods stay affordable to low-income residents.

Given the crisis-level demand for affordable housing, Kern County residents still face entrenched racial and economic disparities in accessing affordable housing and homeownership opportunities. Homeownership continues to be out of reach for Latino, Pacific Islander, and Black households in Kern County compared to other racial groups.⁴⁷ The Housing Element and Assessment of Impediments to Fair Housing (AI) found that Latinos were underrepresented in mortgage loan applications but overrepresented in mortgage loan denials compared to other racial groups.⁴⁸ The AI mortgage lending analysis also determined that residents seeking to purchase homes in lower-income communities were more likely to have their request for mortgage credit denied compared to moderate- or high-income communities.⁴⁹ While infill development can increase the supply of affordable housing, the County still needs to deepen its commitment to removing barriers to renting or owning affordable homes for marginalized populations.



NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS AND GREEN SPACE

Infill sites that are irregularly shaped or too small for commercial or residential development are prime locations to build pocket parks, neighborhood parks, or community gardens. In fact, prioritizing infill development for open space achieves an important goal in addressing geographic disparities in park access for park-poor, unincorporated communities. Currently, there are 1.6 acres of park per 1,000 residents in Kern County, which falls short of the desired goal of 2.5 acres per 1,000 residents as listed in the current Kern County General Plan.⁵⁰ A March 2018 study by Advancement Project California found that the regional parks have received almost two-thirds of Kern County's park and recreation investments in the last decade compared to smaller, community parks.⁵¹ Local parks serve as community-enhancing assets that increase access to regular physical activity, minimize racial disparities in childhood obesity, and provide safe places for young people to recreate; neighborhood parks also deliver important environmental benefits, including improvements in air quality and reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION, PEDESTRIAN SAFETY, AND AREA IMPROVEMENTS

In addition to creating site-specific infill guidelines that promote healthy and sustainable uses, the County can increase demand for public and private infill development by investing in neighborhoods where infill development opportunities exist. A review of infill development best practices found solid evidence that the success of infill development is dependent on public investments in amenities surrounding these sites.⁵² According to the 2017 5-year American Community Survey, 71 percent of Kern County households do not own a vehicle.⁵³ However, public transportation is used by only 1 percent of the County population.⁵⁴ The County can encourage healthy and sustainable development by enhancing the existing transportation network and adding additional stops and increasing the frequency in which they run, and providing pedestrian-friendly amenities such as bus shelters, lighting, bike lanes, and paved sidewalks. By complementing private infill development, the County can maximize usage of existing resources, realize higher returns on its public infrastructure investments, and help existing unincorporated rural communities thrive.

MITIGATING NEGATIVE INFILL DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES

It is important to note that infill development is not inherently sustainable or health-promoting; in fact, infill development can also produce negative social and environmental outcomes, including haphazard development, increased exposure to harmful pollutants, and residential and commercial displacement.⁵⁵

When infill development is implemented without considering local context, the site can exacerbate existing environmental harms. Hazards such as contaminated water supplies, pesticide exposure, and industrial pollutants tend to be sited close to low-income communities of color. In Kern County, Black, Latino, and Pacific Islander residents are more likely to live in proximity to hazards and within 1,000-3,000 feet of harmful land uses compared to other racial groups.⁵⁶ Many of Kern County's unincorporated communities are situated alongside high-volume roadways and freeways and therefore bear the brunt of the region's severe air quality issues and associated adverse health impacts. Populations that live in areas with prolonged exposure to traffic-related air pollution, a majority of whom are low-income communities of color, face worsening asthma, cardiovascular disease, and adverse birth outcomes.⁵⁷ Infill development guidelines for unincorporated areas should limit exposure to toxic and harmful land uses and take proactive measures to mitigate the impacts of these harms.



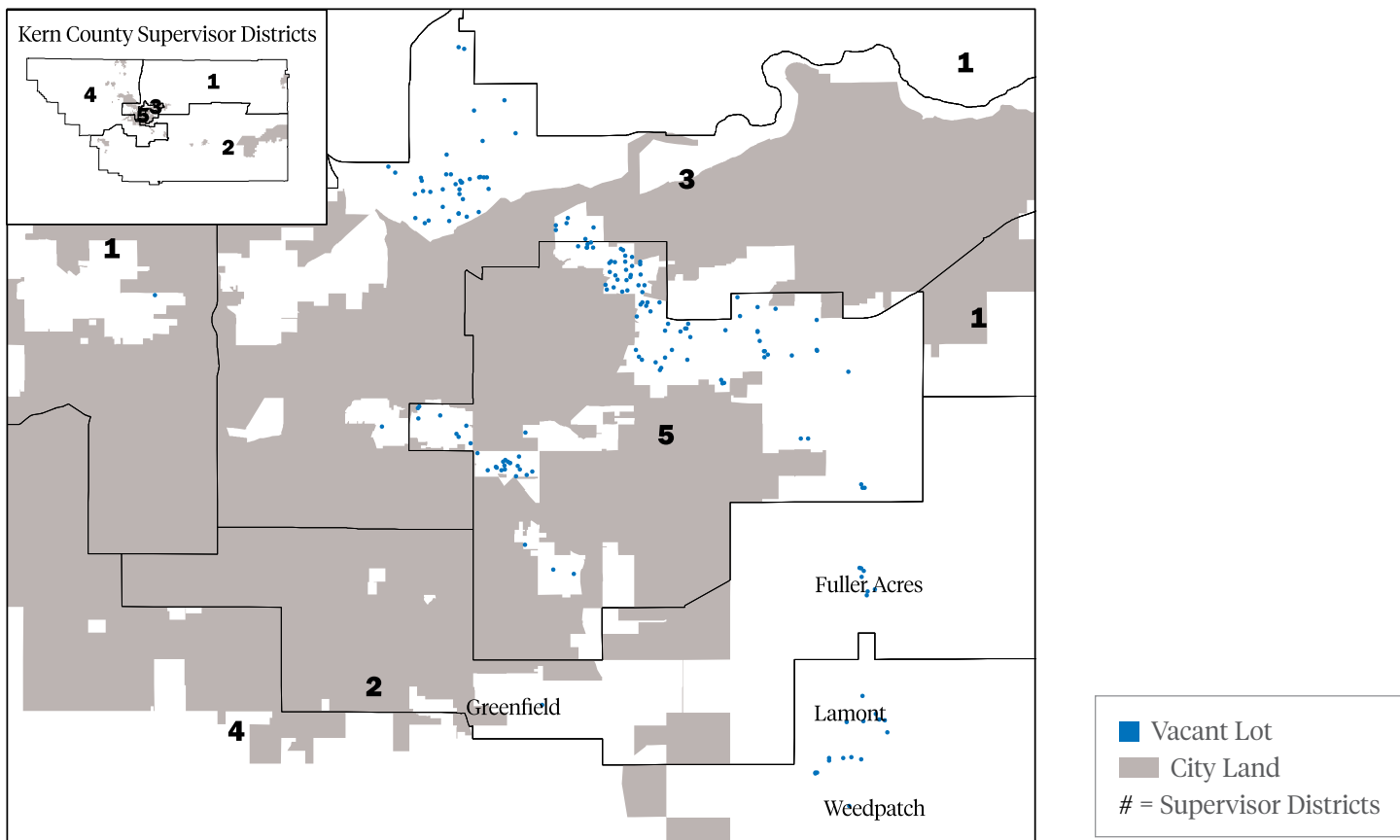
MAPPING KERN COUNTY'S LAND USE OPPORTUNITIES FOR INFILL DEVELOPMENT

In partnership with the South Kern Building Healthy Communities Collaborative, Advancement Project California joined vacant lot data suitable for infill development to parcel boundaries and calculated total and average vacant lot acres per County Supervisor District and for unincorporated areas.

The analysis also looked at four of Kern County's disadvantaged, unincorporated communities, where a number of community residents and advocates have been working on land use issues. The list is not exhaustive and does not cover all potential infill development sites, which can include non-vacant, underutilized land parcels with or without existing structures.



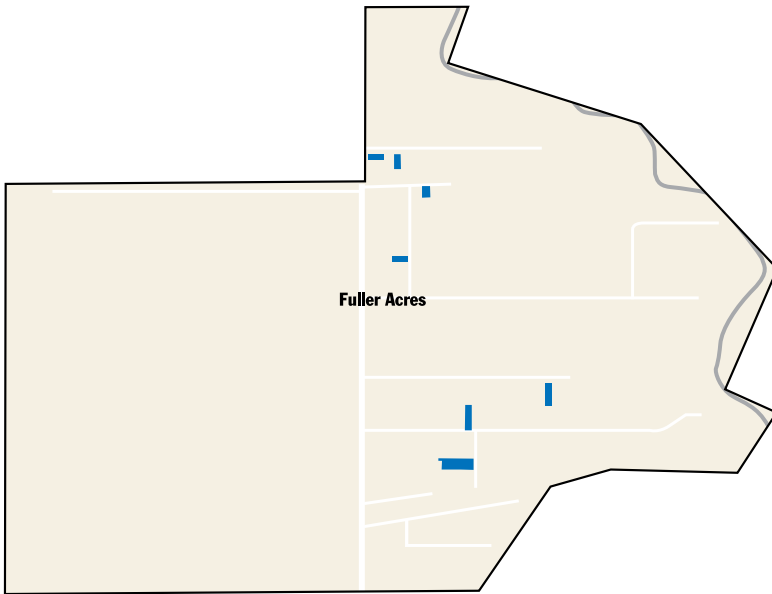
Map 4. Kern County Vacant Lots, City Land, and Supervisor Districts



Only vacant lots in unincorporated areas are shown. Source: Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department

Kern County has 50 acres of vacant land across 182 infill sites. As Map 4 illustrates, the sites are concentrated in northeast and south communities outside of Bakersfield in Districts 2, 3, 4, and 5. A majority of the vacant sites are privately owned, with a few sites owned by various County agencies. In Maps 7-8, specific unincorporated communities are highlighted to illustrate the number of available vacant infill sites and the availability of County community-serving resources (e.g. hospitals, clinics, libraries, parks, and Transit Priority Areas⁵⁸).

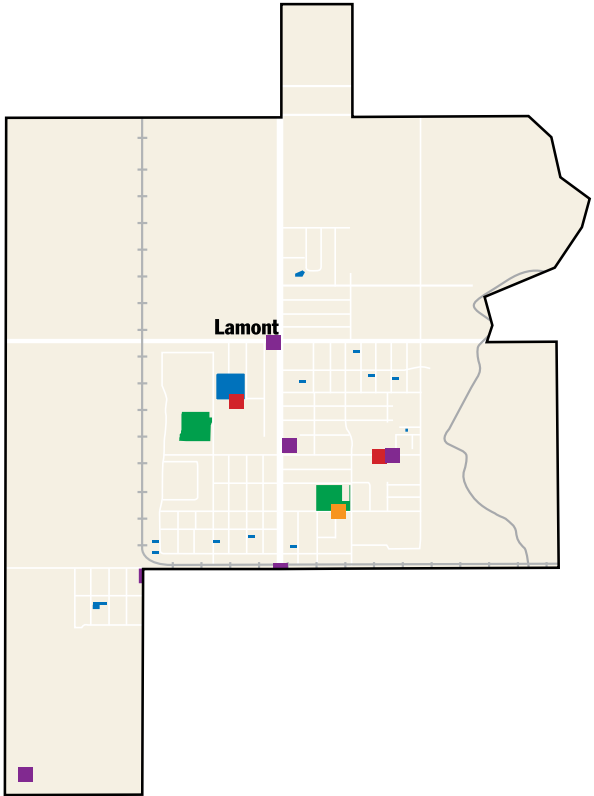
MAP 5. FULLER ACRES VACANT LOTS, HOSPITALS, HEALTH CENTERS, LIBRARIES, PARKS, AND TRANSIT PRIORITY AREAS



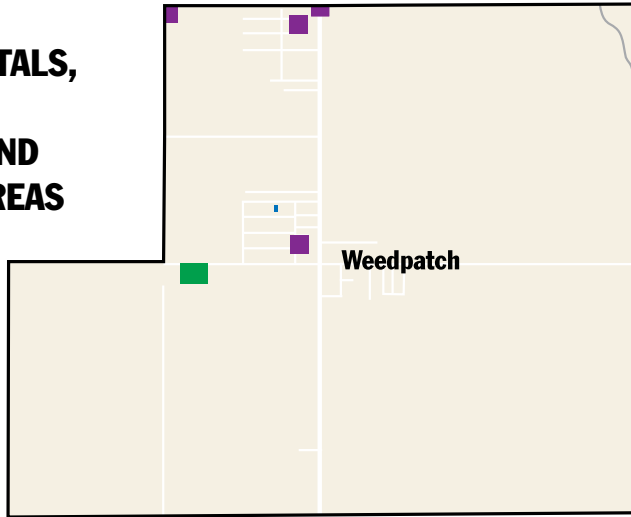
Fuller Acres is a Census Designated Place in Kern County Supervisor District 2 with 1.66 acres of vacant land in seven lots. There are no hospitals, health centers, libraries, parks, or transit priority areas in Fuller Acres.⁵⁹

MAP 6. LAMONT VACANT LOTS, HOSPITALS, HEALTH CENTERS, LIBRARIES, PARKS, AND TRANSIT PRIORITY AREAS

Lamont is a Census Designated Place in Kern County Supervisor District 4 with 10.16 acres of vacant land in 15 lots. There are no hospitals. Three health centers (two at the same address), one library, two parks, and four transit priority areas are located in Lamont.⁶⁰



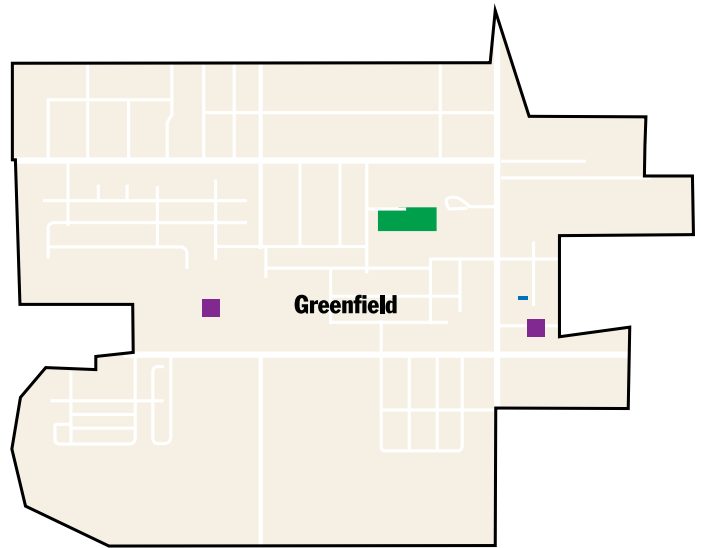
MAP 7. WEEDPATCH VACANT LOTS, HOSPITALS, HEALTH CENTERS, LIBRARIES, PARKS, AND TRANSIT PRIORITY AREAS



Weedpatch is a Census Designated Place in Kern County Supervisor District 4 with 0.16 acres of vacant land in one lot. There are no hospitals, health centers, or libraries. One park and five transit priority areas (two at the same address) are located in Weedpatch.⁶¹

MAP 8. GREENFIELD VACANT LOTS, HOSPITALS, HEALTH CENTERS, LIBRARIES, PARKS, AND TRANSIT PRIORITY AREAS

Greenfield is a Census Designated Place in Kern County Supervisor District 2 with 0.12 acres of vacant land in one lot. There are no hospitals or libraries. One health center (covered by the northwestern border), one park, and two transit priority areas are located in Greenfield.⁶²



- Vacant Lot
- Hospital
- Health Center
- Library
- Park
- Transit Priority Area

*Maps are at different scales.
Sources: County of Kern: Open GIS,
U.S. Department of Health and
Human Services Health Resources &
Services Administration*



The mapping analysis shows that disadvantaged, unincorporated communities lack access to basic public amenities to meet their daily needs. The vacant infill sites located in each community present a significant opportunity to address the inequitable allocation of County resources and improve the health of the community.

As part of the General Plan update, the County should look critically at the available sites and seek feedback from residents in those communities to determine community-specific interests to advance its community’s vision. The update will include a list of 10 priority projects—including complete streets, parks, and infrastructure solutions for flooding, water, and sewer, and certain park and infrastructure improvements—which can advance infill development goals.⁶³ Employing a data-driven approach that complements a community engagement process can help local governments understand where land use and infill opportunities exist and how to design guidelines that improve access to vital services and amenities while mitigating unintended outcomes.

KERN COUNTY GENERAL PLAN —ROLE AND REGULATIONS

RELEVANT COUNTY ACTORS

Kern County is in a unique position to define and shape how infill sites are utilized within its boundaries during the course of the General Plan update and beyond.

Sound planning and implementation measures can propel communities forward. They can decrease blight and sprawl and create strong, effective policies that reflect community input to build needed investments within existing communities. Various departments and divisions can work together to effectively bring various skill sets and expertise levels to serve Kern County residents. Table 2 lists important roles and responsibilities for Kern County Departments and actors as it relates to the Kern County General Plan.

TABLE 2. KERN COUNTY GENERAL PLAN—IMPORTANT ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

DEPARTMENT	ROLE	RESPONSIBILITIES	SPECIFIC ACTIONS THAT CAN BE TAKEN
<p>County Administrative Office (CAO)</p>	<p>Provides staff support to the Board of Supervisors, researches issues, prepares reports and analyses.</p>	<p>Executes adopted policies, regulations, and direction by County Board of Supervisors.</p>	<p>Develop the necessary datasets to add filters to GIS software to track infill sites, public or private ownership, and geographic size. Develop a strategy for infill development in its Tourism, Recreation and Entertainment development cluster of its Economic Development division⁶⁴</p>
<p>Planning and Natural Resources</p>	<p>Provides consolidated land use planning and community development programs.</p>	<p>Prepares and administers Kern County and Metropolitan General Plan policies. Ensure compliances with zoning, land division ordinances, and agriculture programs. Prepares California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) documents. Issues oil and gas permits.</p>	<p>Develop a county definition for infill sites with input of residents to be approved by the Kern County Board of Supervisors. Develop and maintain an up-to-date infill development-ready sites list. Develop criteria for other departments to use to report potential sites for inclusion on the list. Create a program where developers will receive incentives for developing on infill sites.</p>
<p>Public Health</p>	<p>Provides a wide range of services to assist in the prevention of disease and the improvement of health, safety, and quality of life.</p>	<p>Operates public health programs such as, California Children’s Services (CCS), food handling programs, women’s health, infant health and safety, sexually transmitted disease prevention, tobacco education, and obesity prevention through education. Promotes healthy behaviors and disease prevention through marketing and community health education and engagement.</p>	<p>Bring critical health services to low-income communities in the form of outreach, education, and clinics to increase access to services and decrease travel burdens. Identify gaps in health-related services that can be brought to communities through infill development. The department can support and collaborate on efforts to apply for Active Transportation Program (ATP) funding since the department actively promotes walking and other outdoor activities.</p>



DEPARTMENT	ROLE	RESPONSIBILITIES	SPECIFIC ACTIONS THAT CAN BE TAKEN
Public Works	Provides public infrastructure, facilitates development, and delivers services for County residents.	Responsible for the planning, design, construction, maintenance, and operations of roads, bridges, traffic signals, sanitary landfills, recycling centers, wastewater treatment plants, and public transit. Provides road and building permit inspections, code compliance, and engineering and surveying review of proposed land development, solid and hazardous waste disposal, and wastewater treatment.	Work with the Planning and Natural Resources Department to ensure surrounding infrastructure supports development. Apply for project funding to support and improve walkability and frequency of non-motorized and public transportation. Regularly update the Planning and Natural Resources-maintained list with registered vacant/abandoned residential properties pursuant to Kern County Ordinance Code Chapter 8.45.
General Services	Provides support services to other County departments.	Responsible for Administration, Energy Coordination, Parks and Recreation, Construction Services, Communication, Custodial Services, Purchasing, and Property Management.	Develop a plan within the Parks and Recreation Division to create parks and recreation spaces on smaller vacant lots. Develop a plan within its Farm and Home Division to support community gardens on infill sites.
Kern County Board of Supervisors (Collectively)	The five-member Board of Supervisors is the governing body of Kern County and various special districts within its boundaries. Passes legislation and determines policies for the operation of the County. ⁶⁵	Adopts policies, regulations, and legislation that are applied to people and land within its jurisdiction.	The Supervisors can enact integrated, community-driven policies concerning how these sites will be utilized. Approve a County definition of infill that is driven by input from the community.

DEPARTMENT	ROLE	RESPONSIBILITIES	SPECIFIC ACTIONS THAT CAN BE TAKEN
Kern County Board of Supervisors (Individually)	Each Board of Supervisors' district is unique with various landscapes, resident demographics, and needs.	Adopts policies, regulations, and legislation that are applied to people and land within its jurisdiction.	Meet with residents from their respective districts to discuss the types of investments they would want on available sites in various neighborhoods.
Kern Council of Governments (agency)	Coordinates transportation planning between cities and Kern County and distributes federal and state-allocated funding.	Responsible for creating and updating various transportation plans and allocating state and federal funding to implement the plans. Kern Council of Governments (COG) is also involved in other regional issues, like air quality.	Kern COG can collaborate on transit-oriented development projects near infill sites. Kern COG can incorporate more policies within its Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) to encourage more use of public transportation, walking, and bicycling.

INFILL DEVELOPMENT POLICY GOALS FOR THE GENERAL PLAN LAND USE ELEMENT

Countywide, long-term planning processes are traditionally inaccessible to and ignore the needs of marginalized populations, especially low-income communities of color.

As a result, these far-reaching land use decisions have perpetuated systemic racial and economic inequities in the built environment, including environmental injustice, residential segregation, and displacement. Interrupting these systemic inequities is long overdue. Thanks to the efforts of grassroots advocacy, state and local governments across the country are understanding the value of residents' lived experiences, incorporating community priorities in land use planning, and developing trust and mutual cooperation along the way. In fact in California, major state funding



opportunities for housing, transportation, and sustainable community development require documentation of public education and outreach efforts and the State assigns points by how effectively a local government has incorporated community input and concerns.⁶⁶ By investing in meaningful community engagement, the County can increase the likelihood of meeting its long-term objectives, improving public opinion of land use decisions, building community buy-in, and leveraging additional state assets.

The County should utilize the General Plan update as an opportunity to invest time and resources in understanding where infill development opportunities exist throughout the unincorporated communities of Kern County and develop strong guidelines that enhance equity and reflect community priorities and needs. The Land Use Element of the General Plan should also advance Kern County’s regional housing and sustainable community objectives outlined in Kern County’s Regional Housing Need Allocation (RHNA), Housing Element, and Sustainable Community Strategy.

The following infill development policy goals and recommendations were developed by Comunidades Unidas. The recommendations are grounded in residents’ lived experiences and their commitment to improving and protecting their families and communities for generations to come. The list of infill development policy recommendations is included in Appendix A of this report.

1. **Infill development should be prioritized in and meet the needs of disadvantaged, unincorporated communities.** Infill development investments should be affordable to and directly benefit underserved, low-income communities of color. The County should invest in a rigorous data-driven process to identify need, understand where existing built-environment disparities exist, and commit to implementing an infill development framework that uplifts community priorities. For example, many of Kern County’s unincorporated communities are park-poor and are sited alongside harmful mobile and stationary sources. The County should identify disadvantaged communities that are underserved by public facilities and services that enhance quality of life and plan for such facilities and services.

2. **The County should prioritize public services and affordable housing on County-owned infill sites.** The County should use infill development opportunities to address the inequitable distribution of public resources in unincorporated communities. Many of these neighborhoods lack amenities that support healthy communities and could benefit from investments in public resources including, but not limited to, affordable housing, neighborhood markets, child care facilities, libraries, youth recreation centers, parks, and health clinics. For County-owned infill sites that are suitable for housing, the County should pursue joint development opportunities and design lease agreements for residential developers that include long-term affordability requirements and support small, single family, and multi-family development.

3. **The County should invest in public infrastructure to support infill development.** Successful infill strategies for both public and privately-owned sites are dependent on public investments surrounding infill development, including basic infrastructure, pedestrian-friendly amenities, and public transportation. The County should prioritize water and sewer infrastructure on infill sites to ensure they are development-ready and invest in offsite improvements like such as bus shelters, lighting, recycling and trash containers, bike lanes, and paved sidewalks to improve walkability and transit connectivity.

4. **The County should promote transit-oriented infill development and increase access to public transportation.** Only 1 percent of County residents use public transportation and 7.1 percent of Kern County residents do not own vehicles, pointing to a need to invest in multimodal networks to meet County residents' mobility needs. The County should expand opportunities for transit-oriented development in disadvantaged communities by supporting new housing opportunities near transit and by coupling new housing opportunities with transit investments, including active transportation, public transportation, and public-private transportation solutions tailored to individual community needs.





5. **The County should incentivize affordable housing and community-supportive uses on privately-owned infill sites.** Kern County faces a growing deficit in affordable housing and rising homelessness that is disproportionately impacting families in low-income, unincorporated communities. The County can design infill development guidelines that incentivize affordable housing by adopting inclusionary requirements for residential development, streamlining the permitting process for low-income housing, removing permit fees and ordinances that create barriers to build affordable housing, and hosting public educational sessions to build community support for affordable housing. For privately-owned infill sites that are not suitable for housing, the County should encourage or provide incentives for landowners to repurpose the site in alignment with community development priorities.



6. **The County should account for environmental and safety concerns around and on infill development sites and take proactive steps to mitigate harm.** Many of Kern County's unincorporated communities are situated between large industrial facilities, agricultural sites, and highly-polluted roadways. At the same time, infill sites may have blight, vandalism, and safety concerns that may stem from absentee ownership of vacant lots or poor property stewardship. The County should adopt robust requirements for infill sites to reduce VMTs, protect residents from traffic emission exposure, remove pollution from the air, dedicate resources to housing code enforcement, and discourage unsafe behaviors on infill development sites.

7. **The County should develop a comprehensive infill development funding strategy that leverages state, regional, and local financing tools to spur healthy community development.** According to the Kern County Housing Element, the County should receive a minimum of \$5.3 million in federal community development and housing block grants to support affordable housing production and homeownership programs over the next five years. In recent years, the state has unlocked millions to support housing affordability, homeownership, transportation, and community development through its Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities, Transformative

Climate Communities, Active Transportation, and No Place Like Home programs, affordable housing bonds, and gas tax revenues. The County should also identify opportunities to raise local revenues earmarked for infill development and leverage state and federal dollars, including impact and redevelopment fees, rehabilitation loans and grants, nexus studies, and tax-increment mechanisms.

8. **The County should commit to building transparency, accountability, and community oversight over infill development decisions.** The County should work with community advocates to make infill and land use planning process accessible to residents to better prioritize infill sites for different types of community investments. The County should maintain an up-to-date and publicly-accessible inventory of vacant and underutilized land parcels suitable for infill development and actively promote this information to community residents. The inventory should include all available information regarding zoning code designations, infrastructure availability, development barriers, and development incentives to help community residents better understand potential site uses. The County should also implement a community decision-making process for infill development and seek community input on financing tools for infill development.



APPENDIX A. COMUNIDADES UNIDAS INFILL DEVELOPMENT POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Overarching Concept: Infill policy recommendations include infill development in existing disadvantaged, unincorporated communities, fringe communities, county islands, and urban areas. Any infill development shall be affordable and otherwise primarily benefit low-income and other underserved community residents.

The County shall maintain an up-to-date inventory of vacant and underutilized parcels of land suitable for infill development and provide this data publicly on the Planning and Natural Resources Department website. The inventory shall include all available information regarding zoning code designations, infrastructure availability, development barriers, and development incentives.

Implementing Measure (I.M.): Construct an inventory of infill-appropriate sites based on the community land inventory information collected under the Housing Element Law, the Sustainable Communities Strategy developed for the region, and other relevant sources. The inventory should be updated bi-annually.

I.M.: Work with relevant local and regional agencies to detail existing and future infrastructure capacities for all parcels listed in the housing inventory—and parcels of land in infill priority areas—and proactively seek funding to promote infill development to meet existing underserved communities' needs and priorities.

The County will update and maintain land use designations in infill areas to facilitate development of essential public and private infrastructure and amenities to meet the needs and priorities of existing underserved communities in infill areas.

Identify low-income and minority neighborhoods that are underserved by public facilities and services that enhance quality of life and plan for such facilities and services.

The County shall require developers to provide pedestrian amenities—such as trees, lighting, recycling and refuse containers, seating, awnings, art, or other amenities—in pedestrian areas along project frontages in underserved communities.

I.M.: Implement a community-based process to assess current developer impact fees and identify new priority impact fees (including affordable housing). The County shall conduct nexus studies and impose impact fees based on community feedback.

In the development review process, the County shall prioritize projects that address key needs of existing underserved communities.

UTILIZING SMALL LOTS

- The County shall support the development of smaller parcels of land to encourage infill development that supports community development priorities by reducing permit fees for developments under a specific parcel size.
- The County shall create development variances and design guidance for small lots to enable the construction of small single-family homes and townhomes in infill priority areas within disadvantaged communities that support community development priorities.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

- **Overarching Policy:** Infill prioritization strategies shall aim to protect and increase affordable housing stock and prevent physical and economic displacement of existing populations.
- The County shall promote the integration of affordable housing for all communities—with a focus on including affordable housing in infill priority areas—by identifying and rezoning sites around the County for small lot single-family and multi-family development and implementing an inclusionary housing ordinance.
- The County shall conserve existing affordable housing stock through housing code enforcement and complementary programs such as rehabilitation loans and grants.

AIR QUALITY

- Identify areas of underserved communities where negative health impacts of poor air quality are likely and develop mandatory design measures to improve air quality in buildings.
- Consult with California Air Resources Board (CARB) and the regional air pollution control districts operating in Kern County to identify stationary and mobile toxic air contaminant sources near underserved communities and determine the need for and requirements of a health risk assessment for proposed infill developments.
- Adopt new development code provisions that ensure uses in mixed-use projects do not pose significant air pollution health effects.

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1910 W. SUNSET BLVD., STE. 500
LOS ANGELES, CA 90026
213.989.1300
TAX ID #95-4835230



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For questions, please contact Advancement Project California at info@advanceproj.org