

# CHAPTER 2 – SETTING & CONTEXT



## 2.1 Regional Context

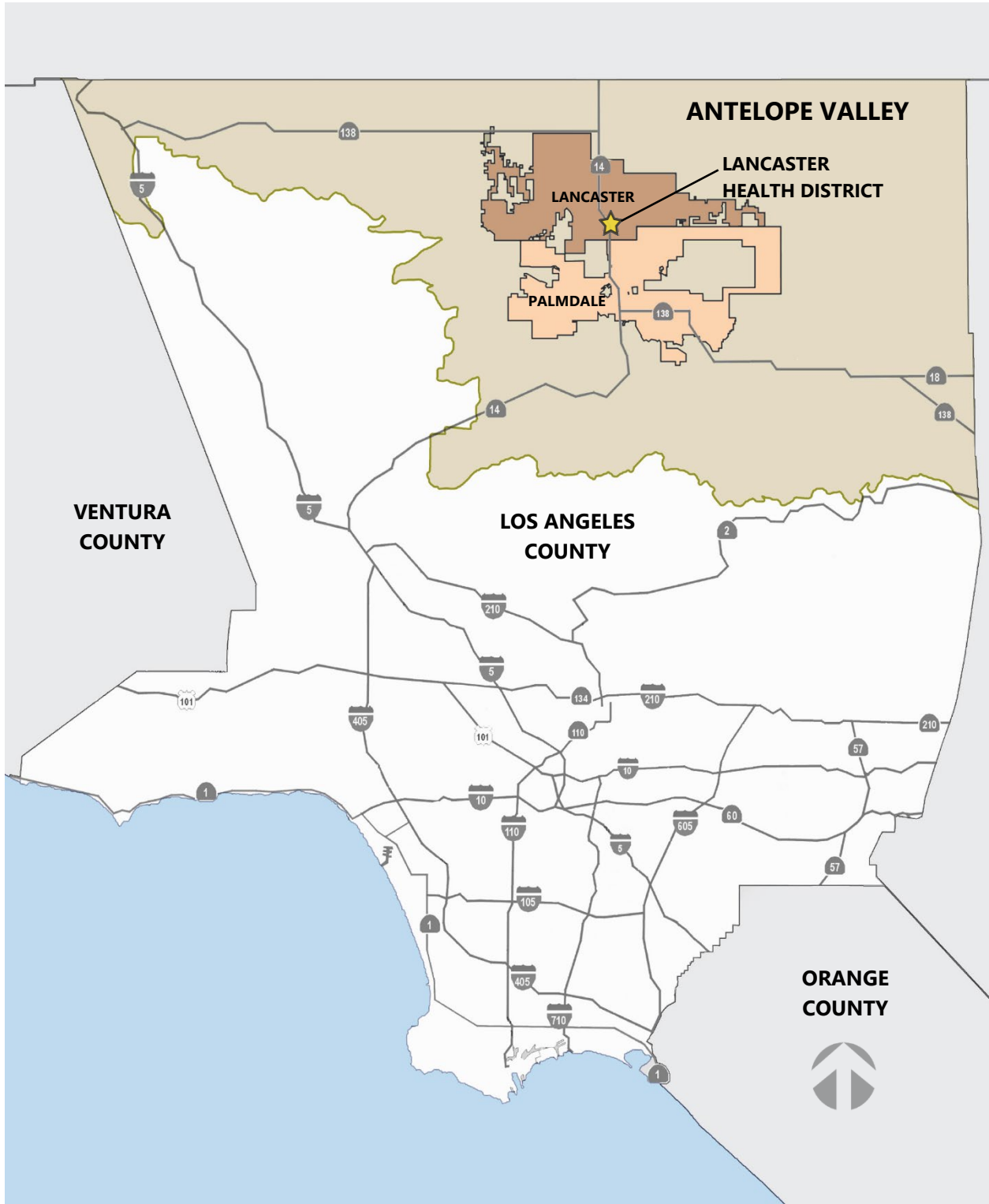
### 2.1.1 Overview

The City of Lancaster is located in the high desert of the Antelope Valley, in northern Los Angeles County, 10 miles south of the Kern County line. The City covers almost 95 square miles, much of which is still rural in character and lightly populated. The City's population of just over 160,000 represents just over a third of Antelope Valley residents. Just under a third of Antelope Valley residents live in Palmdale to the south, and the remaining third live in the unincorporated areas.

Lancaster is well-known for its history as a center of the aerospace industry and proximity to Edwards Air Force Base. Further demographic and economic background information is provided in Section 2.6, Market Setting.

Primary north/south auto access is provided by State Route (SR) 14, connecting to Los Angeles to the south and to Interstate 395 and the Owens Valley to the north. Primary east/west auto access is provided by SR 138, connecting to Interstate 15 at Cajon Junction to the east and to Interstate 5 just south of Gorman to the west. Additional access is provided by Metrolink commuter rail connecting south to Los Angeles, and Kern Transit bus routes connecting to southern Kern County destinations, including California City, Tehachapi, and Bakersfield (Figures 2.1 and 2.2).

The Plan area is located in the center of the City, just a mile to the southwest of the historic center and current downtown, which is in turn adjacent to the original Southern Pacific Rail depot and current Metrolink Station. Bounded on the north by Avenue J and bisected by 15<sup>th</sup> Street West, the Plan area is provided with excellent access. The westerly edge of the Plan area abuts SR 14 on the west and Avenue J connects to SR 14 with interchanges currently undergoing capacity and design improvements.



**Figure 2.1, Regional Context**



SR 14 a prominent site edge



Lancaster Metrolink Station



The BLVD District



Lancaster undeveloped site

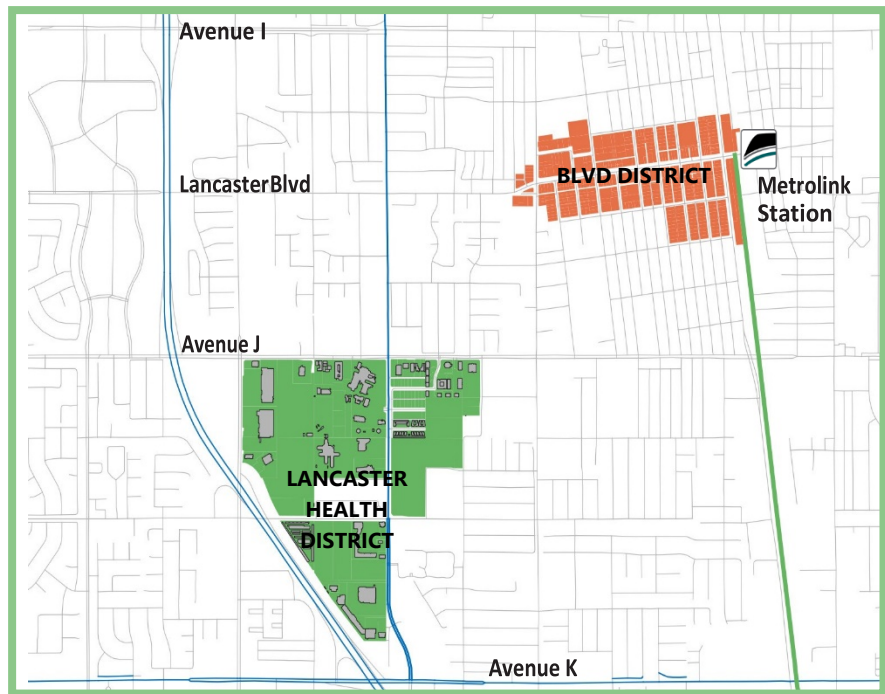


Figure 2.2, Local Context

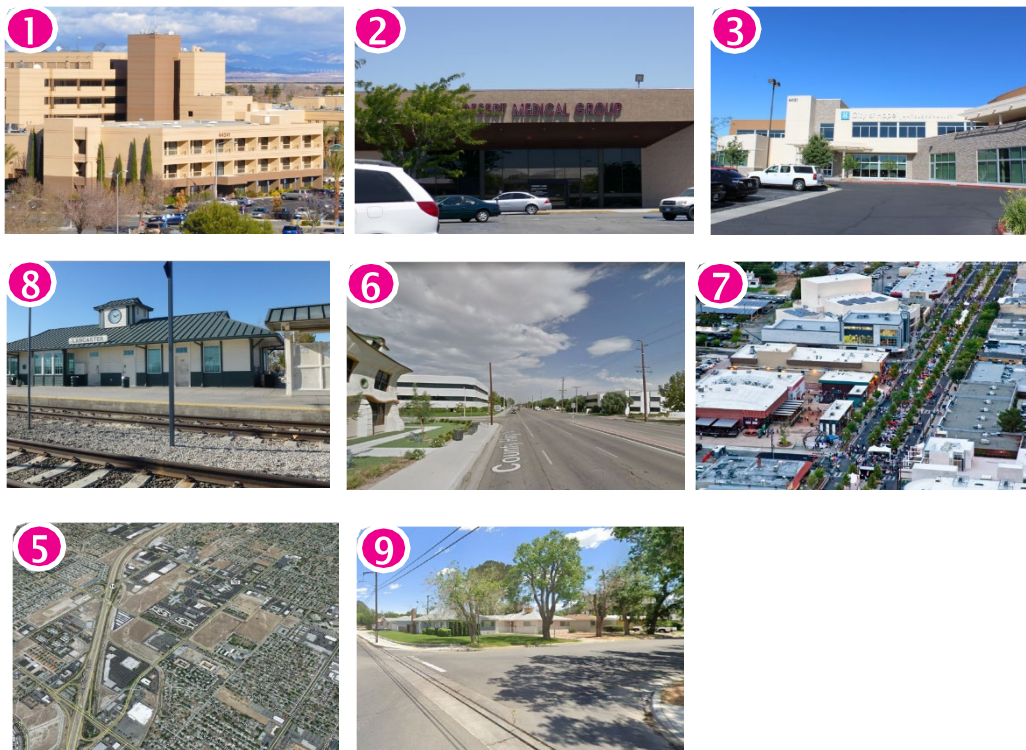
## 2.2 Plan Area and Context

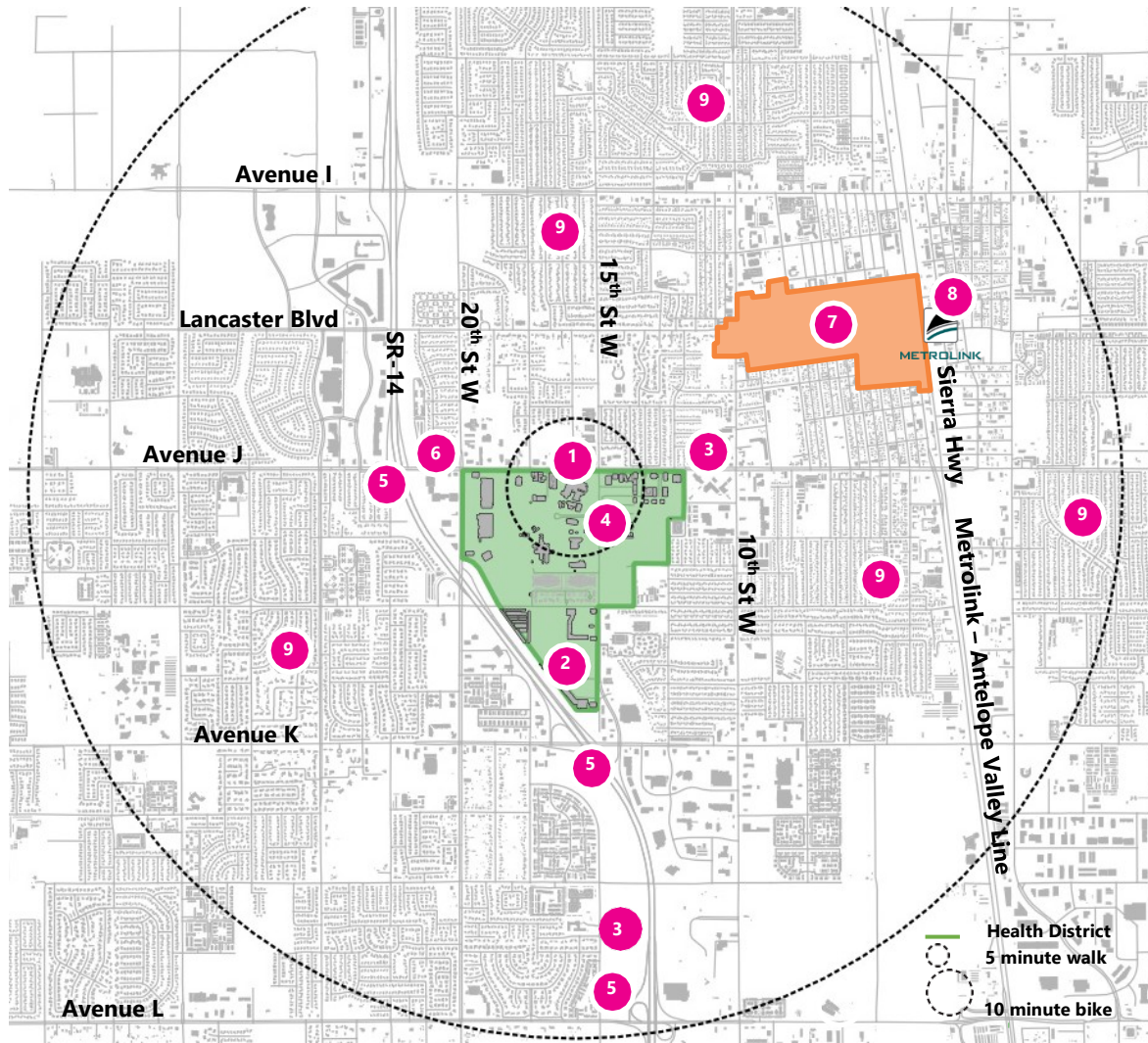
### 2.2.1 Health District Plan Area

The 272.4-acre Health District Plan Area is located at the geographic center of Lancaster. It is bounded on the west by SR 14 and 20<sup>th</sup> Street West, on the north by Avenue J, on the south by Avenue J-12, and on the east by a ladder-like border comprised of Kingtree Avenue, 12<sup>th</sup> Street West, 13<sup>th</sup> Street West, and 15<sup>th</sup> Street West.

The Plan Area includes the entire half-mile square area defined north to south by Avenue J and Avenue J-8, east to west by 15<sup>th</sup> Street West and 20<sup>th</sup> Street West, as well as portions of large blocks to the east and to the south. The above-noted arterial streets currently provide primary access to the Plan Area.

Antelope Valley Hospital is the City's primary critical care medical center, located on the southwest corner of 15<sup>th</sup> Street West and Avenue J. Within the Plan Area, and along Avenue J to the east, is the City's greatest concentration of medical office and clinic facilities. The High Desert Medical Group is located in the southerly portion of the Plan Area nearest Avenue K, less than a mile from the hospital. Key physical features of the Plan Area and its vicinity are shown on Figure 2.3.





- |   |                             |   |                            |
|---|-----------------------------|---|----------------------------|
| 1 | Antelope Valley Hospital    | 6 | Avenue J Business Corridor |
| 2 | High Desert Medical Group   | 7 | The BLVD District          |
| 3 | Medical Offices and Clinics | 8 | Metrolink Station          |
| 4 | Housing Authority Site      | 9 | Residential Neighborhoods  |
| 5 | Freeway Interchanges        |   |                            |

**Figure 2.3, Plan Area and Vicinity**

## 2.3 Physical Setting

### 2.3.1 Built Context

The Lancaster Health District contains 272.4 acres of which 110 acres are vacant land. The site is one mile from Downtown and Lancaster Boulevard, with good visibility and auto access from SR-14. The developed pieces are characterized by a variety of commercial, industrial, retail, medical facilities and residential uses.

Physical review of the available and developable land in the District has found that the area has very few constraints for future intensification of the properties. A flood control channel, known as Amargosa Creek, forms the southwestern boundary and intersects the southern portion of the Plan Area. Utility lines are present in the existing arterials streets serving the Plan Area, but the breaking up of extra large blocks will require a new distribution network. The existing storm water and sewer network can be extended to and will support additional development. Noise levels within the site are acceptable for most uses.

A Phase I Environmental Site Assessment for the undeveloped property was prepared in 2017, and updated in 2020, and identified no current or historic environmental conditions that would constrain development and no chemicals or hazardous materials were observed at the time of the site reconnaissance.



*Existing housing*



*Vacant parcels*



*Existing Commercial building*

### 2.3.2 Challenges and Opportunities

A challenge for the growth of the District is that the existing infrastructure is designed for low intensities. In order to become a more urban designation, the site required updated and expanded infrastructure, including a tighter street grid.

Fortunately, the City has secured a Metro grant for street construction and internal funding for initial infrastructure improvements to help attract private investment and

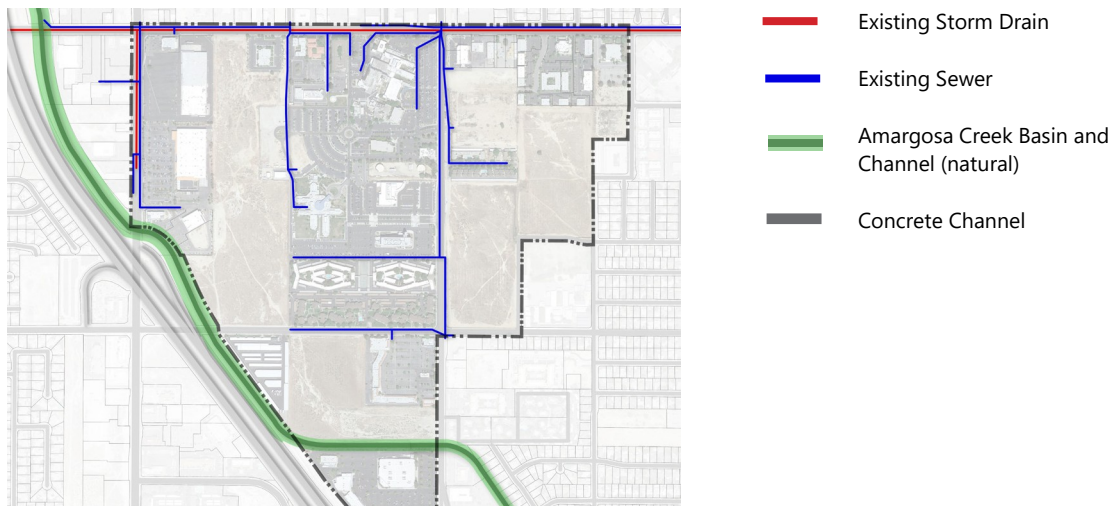
begin transforming the area into a more pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use district. Another advantage of the Health District's situation is the 110 acres of undeveloped land within the Plan area.

#### Challenges:

- Current infrastructure not adequate for urban development.
- Street grid/block pattern not adequate for urban development

#### Opportunities:

- Size and capacity of existing utilities allows for future development
- City has secured finances for street improvements from a Metro grant
- 110 acres of undeveloped land
- Antelope Valley Hospital and other property owners engaged in plan
- Good freeway visibility and access



**Figure 2.4, Existing Sewers and Drainage**



## 2.4 Environmental Setting

### 2.4.1 Physical Context

Environmental review of available and developable land in the Health District found that the area has very few constraints for future intensification of the properties.

The project area contains 110 acres of undeveloped land, much of which is home to a mixture of both native and non-native plant assemblages, including several ornamental non-native trees. A flood control channel, known as Amargosa Creek, forms the southwestern boundary and intersects the southern portion of the Planning Area. Vacant parcels surrounded by development have been disturbed due to alteration from compaction of soil, dumping, excavation, and off-road vehicle use.

In September 2020, the California Fish and Game Commission listed the Western Joshua tree as a Candidate Species under the California Endangered Species Act. A formal decision on the listing is expected in approximately one year. There are nine recorded Joshua trees found on the vacant parcels throughout the Plan Area. Removal of these trees would require an Incidental Take Permit from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

A Phase I Environmental Site Assessment (ESA) for the vacant parcels was prepared in 2017, and updated in 2020. The ESA did not identify any current or historic environmental conditions that would constrain development and no chemical or hazardous materials were observed during the site reconnaissance.

### 2.4.2 Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges presented by the environmental setting relate mostly to the desert climate. Careful review will be conducted of how proposed developments aim to provide ample shade on adjacent sidewalks, their parking areas, public open spaces, etc.

The environmental impact of developing on land that has already been disturbed by surrounding development due to alteration will be minimal and manageable.

#### Challenges:

- Desert climate

#### Opportunities:

- Very little constraining environmental conditions
- Vacant parcels have already been disturbed due to alteration from surrounding development

## 2.5 Mobility Setting

### 2.5.1 Auto Mobility

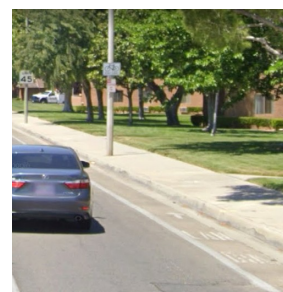
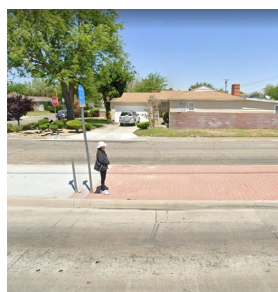
With wide streets and low density, the street network in the Plan Area is generally operating without issues. Even so, the current street and building arrangement is not optimal for a heavy circulation of emergency vehicles. Interviews with stakeholders indicate that patients frequently drive between buildings on the Antelope Valley Hospital campus, and some must occasionally be transported across parking lots by ambulance. Additionally, emergency-vehicle access into the Antelope Valley Hospital campus is awkward and dangerous; ambulances traveling west on Avenue J travel against traffic south of a raised median to turn left into the emergency area.

### 2.5.2 Non-Auto Mobility

**Walking.** While sidewalks exist on most streets, many are poorly shaded and lack physical buffers from adjacent vehicular traffic. Large blocks to circumnavigate and wide streets to cross further discourage walking.

**Biking.** There are Class II bike lanes on both sides of Avenue J-8. However, they are each 4-feet wide (including gutter) and adjacent to vehicular traffic where the speed limit is posted at 45 mph. Class II bike lanes are also present on 15<sup>th</sup> Street West north of the Plan Area, but terminate at its northern boundary.

**Transit.** Antelope Valley Transit Authority (AVTA) runs several local buses through or near the Plan Area, several of which stop at the Lancaster Metrolink Station which is located approximately one mile to the northeast. The routes that run in the Plan Area run approximately every 30 minutes at highest frequency times, and every hour otherwise. AVTA also runs the 785 bus, which shuttles commuters between Downtown Los Angeles and Owen Memorial Park, just south of the Plan Area. Kern Transit runs buses to Bakersfield to the northwest and California City to the northeast.



### 2.5.3 Challenges and Opportunities

The primary challenge in the Plan Area will be the transformation of the auto-oriented suburban infrastructure into a walkable and active urban environment. However, the oversized streets will allow for reconfiguration and retrofits that can better suit the future Health District’s traffic and transit needs.

#### Challenges:

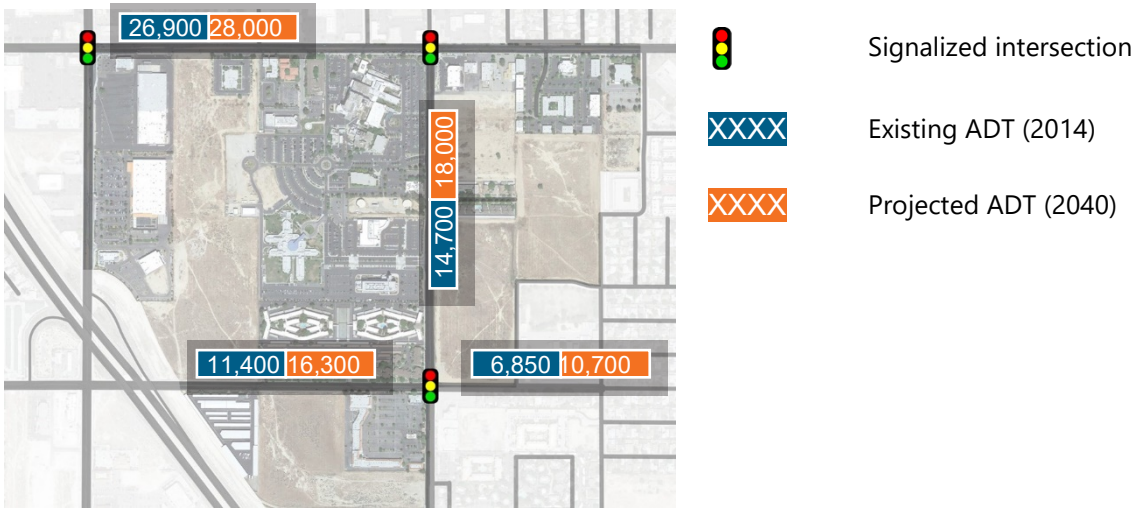
- Lack of good pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure and connectivity
- Bus service is relatively infrequent, and several stops lack seating or shade
- Ambulance access to Emergency Room entrance is difficult

#### Opportunities:

- Size and capacity of the existing streets allow for future alterations; the size of undeveloped large blocks allow for future connections



**Figure 2.5, Ambulance Route to Emergency Room**



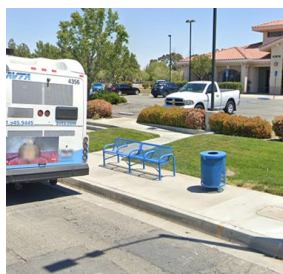
**Figure 2.6, Existing ADT/Traffic Patterns**



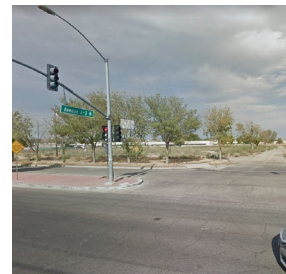
**Figure 2.7, Existing Public Transit**



*Entry road to hospital*



*15<sup>th</sup> Street West bus stop*



*15<sup>th</sup> Street West/Avenue J-3*

## 2.6 Market Setting

### 2.6.1 Residential Market

Based on a market analysis prepared in 2016, the Antelope Valley is expected to have a higher growth rate than many parts of Los Angeles County, and is expected to be home to an additional 35,000 people in twenty years. The majority of residential units in Lancaster are owner-occupied single-family homes. A steady rise in the rental housing prices, combined with a decrease in vacancy rates suggests there is a growing demand for housing. All recent apartment developments have been deed-restricted affordable housing. According to the market study, the Plan Area has the potential to support 220 to 380 market rate multi-family units, primarily rental, and 110 to 340 single family units by 2036.<sup>1</sup> However, with the redeveloped Antelope Valley Hospital as an anchor may act as a catalyst to promote more development than is currently indicated by an analysis of existing conditions.

### 2.6.2 Residential Challenges and Opportunities

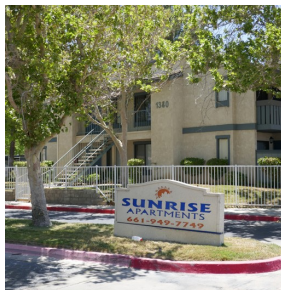
A study of the market area indicates a need for a consolidated health district supported by mixed-use neighborhoods. Currently, commuting patterns are such that 65 percent of Lancaster employees commute into the city for work, and 74 percent of residents commute out of the city for work. A mixed-use health district with new jobs and housing could increase opportunities for more people to live where they work.

#### Challenges:

- Commuting patterns in/out of the city

#### Opportunities:

- Population expected to grow
- Available land for new development



*Apartment complexes*



*Single-family detached*

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<sup>1</sup> Health & Wellness District Real Estate Opportunities, City of Lancaster, HR&A Advisors, February 10, 2017.

### 2.6.3 Commercial Market

The market study revealed the following existing conditions:

- 1.5 million square feet of smaller Class B and Class C office buildings are clustered along Lancaster Boulevard, 15<sup>th</sup> Street West, and Avenue J (see Figure 2.8)
- 50% of Lancaster's medical office space is clustered in the Plan Area near Antelope Valley Hospital (see Figure 2.9)
- The Plan Area contains 156 medical businesses near Antelope Valley Hospital

The office space market in Lancaster is dominated by Class B and Class buildings (see Appendix B: Glossary) and there are high office vacancy rates. Medical offices perform best in the market and have the highest absorption rates and get rents of three dollars per square foot on average above other office space types. The majority of existing medical offices are concentrated on Avenue J within a half mile of the Antelope Valley Hospital. Healthcare accounts for the largest employment sector in the City (30%) and is expected to continue growing.

The Lancaster Health District has the potential to capture 100,000 to 250,000 square feet of new medical office, and 110,000 to 220,000 square feet of new retail by 2036. As with the residential market, this projected number may be increased by the fact that the redevelopment of the Antelope Valley Hospital may promote and support more medical office and retail development than is indicated by current conditions. Lancaster's hotel market is currently performing well and the Lancaster Health District has the potential to support an additional 75-150 hotel rooms in the next twenty years.

### 2.6.4 Commercial Challenges and Opportunities

Currently, Lancaster and the surrounding region has the highest concentration of health problems county-wide. Although the City struggles to retain primary care physicians and lacks mental health facilities, healthcare is the largest employment sector in Lancaster and is expected to grow in the future.

This area has the opportunity to take advantage of the existing concentration of healthcare services. A cluster of such services within a pleasant and walkable environment will support the delivery of an integrated health system that can work on many fronts from treatment to preventative care to public health education.

#### Challenges:

- Area struggles to retain healthcare professionals
- City lacks mental health facilities

- Office space

Opportunities:

- Healthcare sector expected to grow
- Medical offices command highest office rental rates

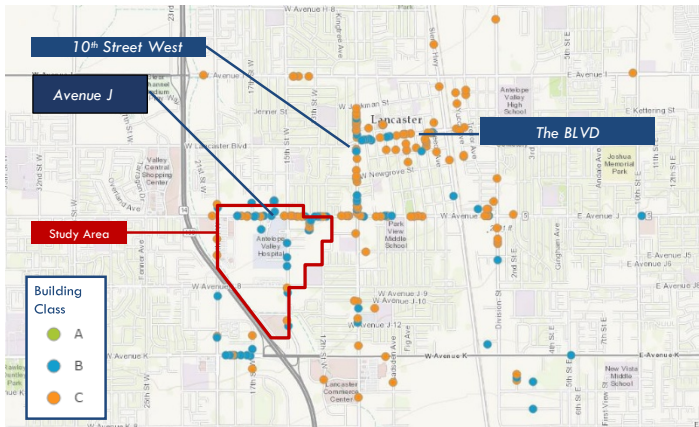


Figure 2.8, Lancaster – General Office Inventory

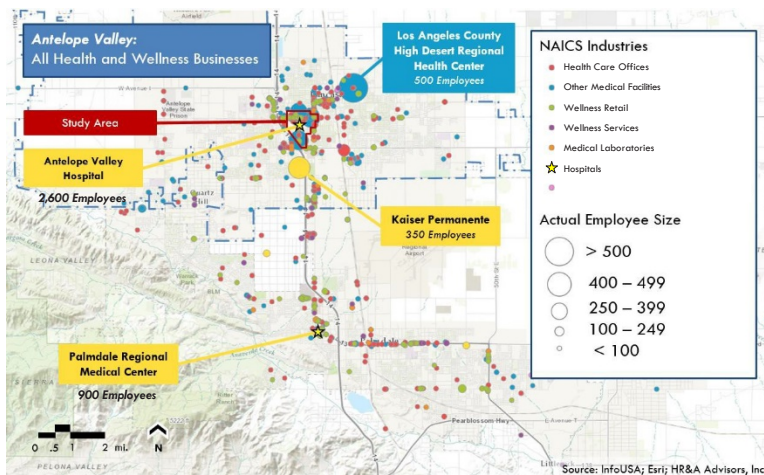
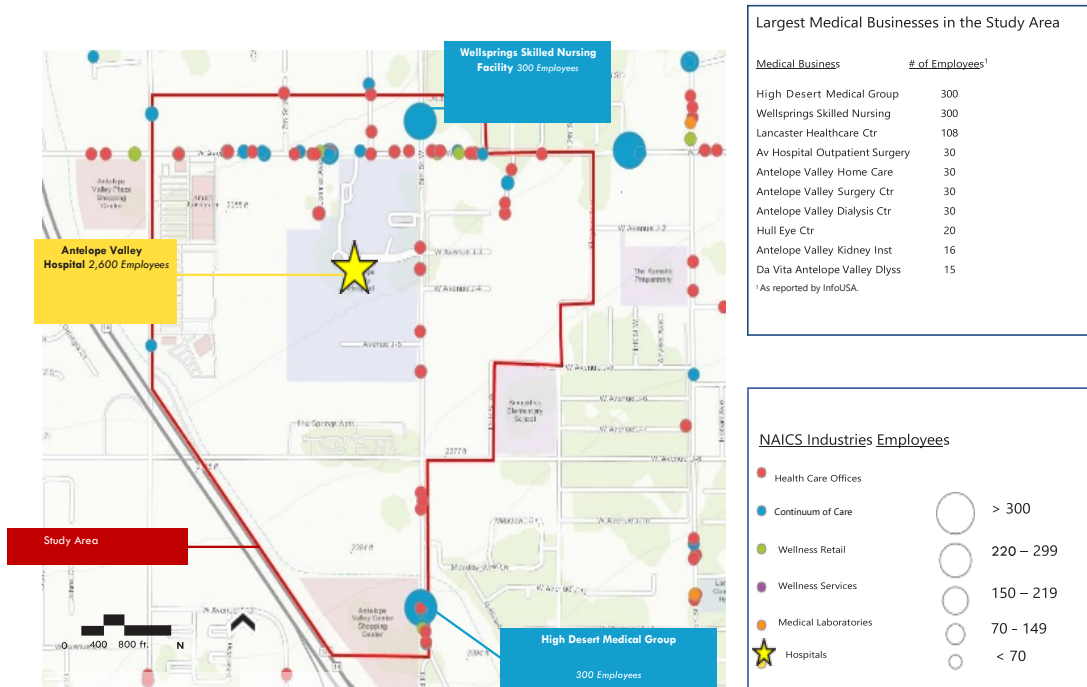


Figure 2.9, Antelope Valley Health and Wellness Industries



**Figure 2.10, Lancaster Health District – Non-Hospital Medical Businesses**



## 2.7 Regulatory Setting

### 2.7.1 General Plan

The 2030 Lancaster General Plan organizes the city into two general areas: the Rural Area and the Urbanizing Area. The Plan Area for the Lancaster Health District is located in the geographic center of the Urbanizing Area, which is noted as “that portion of the City which is currently designated for urban density development.” The General Plan also states, “it will be important to ensure that the remaining vacant uncommitted infill land within the Urbanizing Area is developed to its highest and best use. It is anticipated that much of the infill land will be developed with higher density mixed-use development, and that there will be a high level of connectivity between these urban areas and the transportation system.”

The General Plan identifies the Plan Area (“located in the vicinity of 15<sup>th</sup> Street West and Avenue J and including the area surrounding the Antelope Valley Hospital”) as a site of opportunity within the Urbanizing Area, and proposes that the area take advantage of “smart growth principles and practices” to accomplish a “Health Care Focus.” Antelope Valley Hospital is expected to soon be rebuilt within the Plan Area, and thus will serve as a revitalized anchor of a health care focused district.

Current zoning within the Plan Area includes Health Care (H), Commercial (C), Office/Professional (OP), Mixed Use, and Multi-Residential (MR2). Refining the zoning in the Plan Area in order to allow a more integrated mix of uses with a Health Care Focus is consistent with the vision for Lancaster’s growth and development represented in the General Plan.

The General Plan contains a number of objectives, policies, and specific actions that guide the development of an urban, pedestrian-oriented medical district. Table 2.1 lists a selection of these objectives, policies, and actions that inform the vision for the Lancaster Health District, particularly in relation to the Health Care Focus, multi-modal transportation and connectivity, and prioritization of pedestrian-oriented urban development.

### 2.7.2 Opportunities

The General Plan designation of the 272.4-acre Lancaster Health District area will be changed according to the development of a new Antelope Valley Hospital site, with the goal of achieving the block structure and urban mix of uses desired for the new Health District.

The Lancaster Health District will be zoned as Mixed Use-Health District and contain three new regulating zones/subdistricts to implement the intention presented in the General Plan and further refined in Chapter 3. The boundaries of the zones/subdistricts respond to the location of the hospital, which will anchor and attract nearby infill.

The proposed framework breaks up the large area of combined parcels in the center of the Plan Area with avenues that create small block structures, the opportunity for walkable and bikeable streets, and a plan in which the hospital as an anchor works with the rest of the surrounding neighborhood.

**Table 2.1**  
**Connection to General Plan 2030**

<b>Plan for Public Health and Safety</b>	
Specific Action 5.2.1(a)	Review zoning ordinance provisions regarding the development of hospitals and emergency medical facilities to identify and remove possible unnecessary constraints on their development.
Specific Action 5.2.1(c)	Review zoning ordinance provisions regarding the development of convalescent and nursing facilities to identify and revise possible unnecessary constraints on their development.
Specific Action 5.2.1(d)	Work with area medical providers to develop solutions for overcrowding of emergency medical facilities.
<b>Plan for Active Living</b>	
Policy 10.2.1	<p>Establish a Master Plan of Trails...providing for the following types:</p> <p>Urban Trails: multi-purpose pedestrian/bicycle trails which connect residential areas to other residential areas, regional and community parks, schools, and commercial and industrial employment areas.</p> <p>Bicycle Right-of-Way: integrates with the urban and rural trails and provides additional access to residential, recreational, education, and commercial / industrial employment areas.</p>

**Table 2.1  
Connection to General Plan 2030 (cont.)**

<b>Plan for Physical Mobility</b>	
Specific Action 14.2.3(a)	When considering the design of subdivisions, circulation patterns and street layouts, traffic flow requirements shall be balanced against their effect on pedestrian, bicycle, and transit access and the livability of both existing and proposed neighborhoods. Where conflicts arise between motorist convenience and the livability and wellbeing of neighborhoods, the latter concerns shall have priority.
Objective 14.4	Reduce reliance of the use of automobiles and increase the average vehicle occupancy by promoting alternatives to single-occupancy auto use, including ridesharing, non-motorized transportation (bicycle, pedestrian), and the use of public transit.
Policy 14.4.3	Encourage bicycling as an alternative to automobile travel for the purpose of reducing vehicle miles traveled (VMT), fuel consumption, traffic congestion, and air pollution by providing appropriate facilities for the bicycle riders.
Policy 14.4.5	Design transportation facilities to encourage walking, provide connectivity, ADA accessibility, and safety by reducing potential auto/pedestrian conflicts.
<b>Plan for Physical Development</b>	
Specific Action 18.2.1(d)	Amend the zoning ordinance to allow for alternative congregate living facilities, frail elderly care, assisted living developments and similar uses within the (H) Hospital zone, within the commercial zones, and within the residential zones at appropriate locations.