

I. General Plan Overview

Nestled between the Salinas River to the east, and the oak covered hillsides of the Santa Lucia Mountains to the west, Atascadero is a vital community within a rural landscape. Atascadero has an attractive downtown and linear commercial corridors along El Camino Real and Morro Road. The City offers residents a small-town lifestyle combined with modern amenities. Atascadero's General Plan is a comprehensive plan that embraces these qualities to ensure that they are protected for present and future generations.

A. Atascadero's History

When Mission San Miguel was founded in 1797, the area that became Atascadero was used primarily for cattle grazing. The first building in the area was an 1812 adobe that served as the southern grazing outpost for the mission. Portions of the adobe walls stood until the late 1900's near Traffic Way. During the 19th century, cattle ran in large tracts that had been Mexican land grants. Toward the end of the century, J.H. Henry consolidated a number of tracts into the 23,770-acre Atascadero Ranch, which included all of the present planning area, except for Baron von Schroeder's Eaglet, now part of Eagle Ranch.

During the early years of the 20th century, the U.S. Army used the central plain of the ranch for annual encampments and maneuvers and at one time considered acquisition of the ranch for a permanent military camp.

1. E.G. Lewis

In 1913, Edward Gardner "E.G." Lewis selected the Atascadero Ranch as the ideal location for a model colony. It was Lewis' plan that this model community would provide its residents with the most favorable aspects of both urban and rural life, in part by anticipating widespread use of the automobile. Lewis purposely chose a location halfway between the major urban centers of the state on both a railway and state highway. The oak covered rolling foothills of the Santa Lucia Range provided ample water, pleasant climate and proximity to the coast.

After purchasing the property, Lewis employed a group of nationally recognized experts to plan, survey and subdivide the entire 38 square miles. Many of the concepts put into practice then were progressive even by today's standards. Instead of subdividing on a piecemeal basis as immediate demand might require, the full colony area was surveyed, subdivided and plats filed with the County Recorder in October 1914. Contrary to the speculative nature of many early cities in the United States and California, some 100 miles of roads were constructed with care for aesthetics as well as circulation. A water system of wells, tanks and mains was installed as part of what would become the Atascadero Mutual Water Company. Nearly 3,000 acres of orchards consisting of more than 20,000 pear, apple, peach, prune, and apricot trees were planted. To provide a complete community, parks were laid including the Sunken Garden and public buildings like Administration Building were constructed.

Meanwhile, a nationwide promotional campaign successfully provided money for development and attracted residents to the colony. As many as 1,000 prospective residents lived in a tent city until construction began in 1915. That year the four-story Administration Building neared completion at a cost of \$136,000, as did a large printing plant for Lewis' magazine and a shopping center to serve the residents. An industrial center was producing the construction materials and included machine and maintenance shops and warehouses. A ten-mile stretch of what is now El Camino Real was paved with concrete and a lighted bridge spanned Atascadero Creek.

A twenty-mile road through the Santa Lucia Mountains connecting the Colony to the 1,000-acre Atascadero Beach properties near Morro Bay was completed at a cost of \$90,000. Subsequently schools, a community center with a swimming pool, a hospital and a hotel were built at the beach. Pine Mountain Stadium was developed and used for a variety of community activities. Golf courses were built in the Colony and on the beach property. Tennis courts were installed near the Civic Center. The Community Center was, in addition to many other uses, the home of the Federated Church of Atascadero, where members of twenty-three Protestant denominations worshipped together.

2. The Atascadero Colony

The Colony's major enterprises, other than agriculture and a flower seed experiment were a lumber mill and yard, a brick plant, the shopping center, the offices of the Colony Holding Corporation, a doll factory, a fruit and vegetable processing plant and a large and active printing and publishing plant. At their zenith, each of the latter two plants employed several hundred persons, and the local post office was third in mail volume statewide.

The Atascadero Mutual Water Company is the one commercial organization dating from the Colony's founding that still retains its original form: shares of capital stock are deeded with each lot and can't be sold or disposed of separately from the land. The entire water system, pumping plants, reservoirs, distribution mains, and wells are the property of the Atascadero Mutual Water Company, which is owned mutually by the owners of Colony lots. Development of the planned community halted abruptly in 1924 when Lewis declared bankruptcy, and the effects of the Depression slowed growth for several decades.

3. The 1950's

Two important factors that stimulated growth in the 1950s have also significantly affected the design and demographics of the community: bisection of the City in 1954 by Highway 101, and siting of the Atascadero State Hospital on the edge of the community in 1956.

In 1956, a sanitary district was established through San Luis Obispo County. A sewer bond was passed in 1968 and sewer service was subsequently provided for the center of the community by 1972. In addition to resolving a public health problem, sewer enabled intensification of land uses. Between 1960 and 1970 the population of Atascadero virtually doubled from 4,583

persons to approximately 9,100 persons in 1970. Between 1970 and 1980, the population increased by over 78% with an additional 7,141 persons being added to the community. Most of the growth was in-migration, both from the major metropolitan areas to the south and north and through resettlement from other communities within the county. Owing to the character of the area with rolling woodlands subdivided for large lots, many incoming residents sought the rural lifestyle of a bedroom community and commuted to jobs beyond the community.

Table I-1: Population Trends: 1960- 2000

	City of Atascadero	
Year	Population	10 year rate
1940	2,600	
1950	3,400	31%
1960	4,583	35%
1970	9,100	99%
1980	16,232	78%
1990	23, 138	43%
2000	26, 411	14%

• Source: U.S. Census

4. Incorporation of the City of Atascadero

In 1968, the county adopted a General Plan to guide growth in the unincorporated community of Atascadero as recommended by the local advisory committee. In 1972, pressed by continuous growth and the more stringent requirements of state planning law, the local advisory committee was expanded, and served as a policy-directing entity for the 1980 General Plan. The San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors adopted the draft plan in December, 1978. In June, 1979 the residents of Atascadero voted in favor of incorporation. The newly elected City Council directed the Planning Commission to review and update the 1978 General Plan as its first major task. Public hearings were conducted and the 1980 General Plan became the first major planning document adopted by the newly incorporated City of Atascadero. Subsequently, in 1983, a new zoning ordinance designed to implement that plan consistent with state law was also adopted.

In 1985, the City began updating the 1980 General Plan, which was phased over fiscal years 1986 and 1987. This planning process resulted in Atascadero planned for a population capacity of slightly less than 33,000 persons, which was consistent with the goals set by E.G. Lewis when planning the original colony. The revised General Plan was adopted in 1992.

B. General Plan Update 2000

1. The General Plan Update Process

The most recent update to the General Plan began in the winter of 2000. To respond to community concerns about protecting the integrity of the current General Plan, the City prepared a General Plan that is an update and refinement of the 1992 General Plan rather than a complete rewrite. In the first step, the City Council adopted *Guiding Community Goals* by readopting the Goals of the previous General Plan. These goals provide the foundation for the direction of all the required components of the General Plan, and they provide continuity with the public's desires that were incorporated into the 1980 and 1992 General Plans.

2. Smart Growth

Aware that concern for environmental protection and resource conservation are becoming increasingly important issues at all levels, the City Council and Planning Commission jointly developed a set of "Smart Growth Principles". Smart Growth is a concept in city planning that encourages more compact, walkable communities that encourage pedestrian scale mixed use infill rather than automobile dependent subdivisions. The "Atascadero Smart Growth Principles" were intended to supplement the Goals of the previous General Plan and provide a solid foundation for the new General Plan that combined the communities' previous 20-years of planning with the most current principles of good community development.

Table I-2: Atascadero's Smart Growth Principles

- 1. Provide for well-planned new growth.** Recognize and preserve critical areas of open space, environmental habitats, and agricultural lands, while accommodating new growth in compact forms in areas designated for higher density, in a manner that encourages multi-modal transportation opportunities, integrates the new growth, and creates housing and job opportunities for people of all ages and income levels.
- 2. Maximize use of existing infrastructure.** Accommodate additional growth by first focusing on the use and reuse of existing urbanized lands supplied with infrastructure, with an emphasis on reinvesting in the maintenance and revitalization of existing infrastructure.
- 3. Support vibrant city centers.** Give preference to the redevelopment and reuse of Downtown Atascadero and appropriate nodes along existing transportation corridors through the encouragement and retention of mixed-use development, business vitality, housing opportunities for people of all income levels, and safe, reliable and efficient multi-modal transportation systems.
- 4. Develop and support coordinated planning for regional impacts.** Coordinate planning with neighboring communities and the County so that there are agreed upon regional strategies and policies for dealing with the regional impacts of growth on transportation, housing, schools, air water, wastewater, solid waste, natural resources, agricultural lands, and open space.

5. **Support high quality education and school facilities.** Encourage and support high quality public education, neighborhood-accessible school facilities and adequate library services as a critical determinant in making our community attractive to families, maintaining a desirable and livable community, promoting life-long learning opportunities, enhancing economic development, and providing a work force qualified to meet the full range of job skills required in the future economy.
6. **Build strong communities.** Support and embrace the development of strong families and a socially and ethnically diverse community, by: (1) working to provide a balance of jobs and housing within the community; (2) reducing commute time; (3) promoting community involvement; (4) enhancing public safety; and (5) providing and supporting cultural and recreational opportunities.
7. **Emphasize joint-use of facilities.** Emphasize the joint-use of existing compatible public facilities operated by City, school, County, and state agencies, as well as take advantage of opportunities to form partnerships with private businesses and non-profit agencies to maximize the community benefit of existing public and private facilities.
8. **Support creative entrepreneurial efforts.** Support local endeavors to create new products, services and businesses that will expand the wealth and job opportunities for all social and economic levels.
9. **Encourage full community participation.** Foster an open and inclusive community dialogue and promote alliances and partnerships to meet community needs.
10. **Establish a secure local revenue base.** Create/support the establishment of a secure, balanced, and discretionary local revenue base necessary to provide the full range of needed services and quality land use decisions.

3. Community Involvement

The next step of the General Plan update process was to get the community involved consistent with Smart Growth Principle #9. The City held over a dozen neighborhood meetings, workshops and charettes to gather input from residents on what they thought was important about Atascadero, and what they would like Atascadero to be in the future. The results of this outreach effort found that the community is deeply concerned about maintaining the small-town / rural atmosphere of Atascadero. This concern included preserving the natural qualities of community; protecting native oaks, creeks, open vistas, hillsides and natural habitats; providing good public services and amenities; maintaining safe, clean neighborhoods; providing a range of commercial opportunities; increasing local employment and improving the appearance of the community. These issues were organized into the following four categories under the title of General Plan Framework Principles: 1) protecting the natural environmental, 2) improving the appearance of the community, 3) developing a strong revenue base and 4) creating strong neighborhoods.

Table I-3: General Plan Framework Principles

Protect the Natural Environment

- Open Space and Hillside
- Oak Woodlands
- Wildlife
- Creeks and the Salinas River

Improve the Appearance and Character of Atascadero

- Rural Atmosphere /Small Town Scale / Architectural Character
- El Camino Real & Morro Road / streetscape appearance
- US 101 corridor
- Signs

Provide a Secure Revenue Base

- Provision of City Services
- Downtown Revitalization
- Primary Wage Earner Jobs
- Business and Industry
- Additional Commercial Services & Variety

Promote Well Planned Neighborhoods

- Parks and Trails
- Affordable Housing
- Traffic and Streets
- Large Lot Residential Areas
- Mixed Use Areas

4. The Draft Plan

The Readopted Goals, Smart Growth Principles and the Framework Principles were incorporated into a series of land use alternatives that were reviewed by the public in the spring of 2001. At the same time, a list of Policy Options was developed to determine if there were existing General Plan policies that should be updated. Through a series of public workshops and meetings, the three alternatives were refined into a Preferred Alternative and a number of opportunities and challenges were identified in the Policy Options report.

That Preferred General Plan Land Use Alternative was endorsed by the City Council in September 2001 with a build-out population of approximately 36,000 persons as the preferred plan for the General Plan update. In addition, the Council provided direction on each of the Policy Options which was in turn developed into General Plan policies. A Draft General Plan encompassing the revised goals, land use plan and circulation diagram was distributed for

public review in February 2002, along with an accompanying Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR). The DEIR disclosed potential effects of the Draft Plan and recommended appropriate mitigation measures, pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act.

C. General Plan Requirements

This section discusses the legal framework and requirements for the General Plan, its organization, and the relationship of the General Plan to the local planning process in Atascadero.

California planning law requires the City to prepare and adopt a “comprehensive, long-term General Plan for [its] physical development” (Government Code 65300). A General Plan expresses the community’s goals for the future distribution and character of land uses and development, both public and private. The General Plan is required to be comprehensive in terms of issues addressed and must include the City’s entire physical planning area. It is required to be long-term and internally consistent. Towards this end, planning activities including zoning approvals and amendments, subdivision approvals, capital improvements, and development activities need to conform to the City’s General Plan. Preparing, adopting, implementing and maintaining a General Plan serves to:

- Identify the community’s land use, circulation, environmental, economic, and social goals and policies as they relate to land use and development.
- Provide a basis for local government decision-making, including decisions on development approvals and exactions.
- Provide citizens with opportunities to participate in the planning and decision making processes of their community.
- Inform citizens, developers, decision makers, and other cities and counties of the ground rules that guide development within the community.

The General Plan bridges the gap between community values, visions and objectives, and physical decisions such as subdivisions, land development and public works. California law (Government Code Section 65302) requires that the General Plan include a statement of policies for each of the following topics: land use, circulation, housing, conservation, open space, noise and safety. The typical content of these required “elements” include the following:

- **Land use.** Designates the general distribution and intensity of land uses, including the location and type of housing, businesses, industry, open space, education, public buildings, and parks.
- **Circulation.** Identifies the general location and nature of existing and proposed circulation, including roadways (e.g. arterial, collector, and local streets), highways, transit, and other transportation facilities and modes.

- **Housing.** Assesses the current and projected housing needs of all segments of the community and identifies land and programs to provide adequate housing to meet those needs.
- **Open Space.** Identifies open space resources, and provides techniques for preserving open space areas for natural resources, outdoor recreation, public health and safety, and agricultural activities.
- **Conservation.** Identifies conservation resources and issues and provides measures for conservation and use of natural and cultural resources, including wetlands, forests, rivers, archeological resources, and historic structures.
- **Noise.** Identifies and evaluates noise sources in the community and develops methods to mitigate noise nuisances.
- **Safety.** Establishes policies to protect the community from risks associated with seismic, geologic, flood, and fire hazards.

General Plans may also include additional, optional topics as necessary to address local issues relevant to the physical development of the community. In addition, individual elements may be consolidated and reformatted as desired, provided that all seven topical areas are addressed in the plan.

The General Plan is the foundation in the hierarchy of local government law regulating land use. Subordinate to the General Plan are specific plans, the Redevelopment Area Plan, the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, and special planning area projects such as the Downtown Plan. These planning efforts must conform to the City's adopted General Plan.

D. Regional Considerations

Atascadero is one of seven incorporated cities in San Luis Obispo County. Each jurisdiction carries a responsibility to coordinate its General Plan with regional planning efforts, including the Safety Element of the County General Plan. The City's General Plan should be coordinated with other local government agencies to ensure consistent planning decisions, as well as attainment of regional circulation, environmental and housing goals. The principal regional agencies with planning policies and standards that may affect the City of Atascadero are shown in Table I-4.

Table I-4: Regional Planning Agencies

Agency	Planning Responsibilities
County of San Luis Obispo	Responsible for the planning of lands directly outside the Atascadero City limits. Prepared the <i>Salinas Area Plan</i> as the guiding planning document for the land to the north/east of the Salinas River. The County has a referral agreement with the City for proposed development within the City's sphere of influence.
San Luis Obispo Council of Governments (SLOCOG)	The designated Regional Transportation Planning Agency (RTPA), Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), and regional Census Data Affiliate (CDA) for the County. Has a variety of responsibilities that support a continuous, comprehensive, coordinated planning process to help assure the development of an efficient, coordinated and balanced transportation system to meet the region's mobility needs and programming transportation funding. SLOCOG is responsible for preparing the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and the Regional Housing Needs Plan (RHNP).
SLO Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO)	Responsible for determining, adopting, and periodically reviewing and updating the City's sphere of influence and approve annexation requests.
Regional Water Quality Control Board	Responsible for developing and enforcing water quality plans which will best protect the beneficial uses of the State's waters, recognizing local differences in climate, topography, geology and hydrology
SLO County Integrated Waste Management Authority	Responsible for solid waste reduction and collection, as well as the siting and management of solid waste facilities in SLO County; prepares the SLO County Integrated Waste Management Plan.
SLO County Environmental Health Division	Responsible for the treatment, storage and disposal of hazardous wastes, as well as the siting and management of hazardous waste facilities; prepares the SLO County Hazardous Waste Management Plan.
SLO County Air Pollution Control District	Responsible for reducing and maintaining regional air pollution levels to within federal and state standards; prepares the Air Quality Management Plan (AQMP - federal) and Air Quality Attainment Plan (AQAP - state).
Upper Salinas-Las Tablas Resource Conservation District	The RCD works as a partner with the Natural Resources Conservation Service in land use planning, watershed planning, wetlands preservation, stream restoration, beneficial agriculture management practices (BAMP's), water conservation, water quality enhancement, soil protection, and conservation education.
California Department of Transportation (Caltrans)	Responsible for maintenance, congestion management and safety. of Highway 101 and Highway 41. Responsible for enforcement of the Scenic Highways program.

E. General Plan Organization

The Atascadero General Plan consists primarily of a policy document. The policy document contains the seven required elements and provides goals, policies, and programs for each elements and additional local topics.

The emphasis of this Plan is in the establishment of goals, policies, and programs to guide short- and long-range decision making by the community. Goals represent the ultimate end towards which an effort is directed and are general in nature with the intention of providing policy direction. Policies represent an official statement providing more specific direction to guide actions. Programs are the actions to be fulfilled to achieve the goals and policies.

The Atascadero General Plan includes the following elements:

- Land Use, Open Space and Conservation Element
- Circulation Element
- Safety and Noise Element
- Housing Element

Table I-5: General Plan Organization

Atascadero GP Elements	Required GP Elements	Examples of Topics Covered
Section II Land Use, Open Space & Conservation Element <i>(Includes Recreation and Economic policies)</i>	Land Use	Development patterns, residential neighborhoods, community character, recreation, public facilities and recreational facilities and standards.
	Open Space Conservation	Open space, hillside development, water quality, riparian areas, endangered plants and animals, greenbelt, agriculture, historic resources
	Recreation <i>(optional)</i>	Parkland location and standards, facility needs, coordination with land use issues
	Economic Development <i>(optional)</i>	Commercial and industrial land uses, economic diversification, job opportunities, tourism
Section III Circulation Element	Circulation	Traffic, street network, parking, transit services, bike routes
Section IV Safety & Noise Element	Noise Safety	Development in hazardous areas, wildfire protection, hazardous waste management, seismicity, flood control, noise
Section V Housing Element	Housing	Population, employment, income, housing needs, rehabilitation need, affordable housing development potential