



Chapter 8: Public Services and Infrastructure Element

Introduction

City residents, institutions, and the business community depend upon reliable, flexible, and cost-effective public services and infrastructure to ensure that homes and businesses have efficient utility services and that desired growth can be accommodated. Citywide, the commitment remains to ensure all residents benefit from high-quality public services and infrastructure suited to community character and growth objectives. The City's Public Works Department oversees many of the local infrastructure and service delivery systems: street maintenance and rehabilitation, stormwater management and flood control, sewage collection and treatment, and maintenance of City-owned parks, trails, and municipal buildings (see **Chapter 7**). The Atascadero Mutual Water Company, a publicly owned enterprise whose founding dates to the original colony in 1913, provides water service, drawing supplies from local groundwater sources and distributing that water to customers through over 250 miles of pipelines.

Working together to **serve**, **build community** and enhance **quality of life**.

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City-provided public services include law enforcement, fire prevention and protection, development review, building permitting, recreation activities, and community events (see **Chapter 9**). The San Luis Obispo County Public Libraries system operates the Atascadero Library in Downtown. The Atascadero Unified School District, an independent government agency, provides public education services for students in transitional kindergarten through grade 12.

For solid waste collection, disposal, and recycling, the City contracts with a private franchised waste company. Natural gas is supplied by the Southern California Gas Company, and Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) provides electric power transmission and service. Alternative electric service providers are also expanding into the area. Residents and businesses have access to several telecommunications service providers, with available companies and services continually shifting in response to advances in technology.

Public Services and Infrastructure Priorities

To help accommodate future projected growth, prioritize future investments, and deliver high-quality community amenities, this General Plan addresses the following public services and infrastructure issues.

Water Supply

The Atascadero Mutual Water Company 2020 Urban Water Management Plan (UWMP) projected future groundwater budget period (2020–2042) identifies an average annual increase in groundwater storage of 800-acre feet per year¹. Looking forward, areas for above-ground or below-ground storage (such as tanks), or groundwater recharge areas, may be identified to expand water storage. This will address concerns related to future multi-year drought events that could potentially impact seasonal groundwater capacity.

Wastewater

The City owns, operates, and maintains local sanitary sewer collection facilities and the local water reclamation facility, which as of 2024, had a treatment capacity of 1.4 million gallons per day. Approximately 50 percent of properties in Atascadero rely on individual onsite septic systems and are not connected to the sanitary sewer system, with most of these located outside of the Urban Services Line (USL). Two factors affect the need for a significant upgrade to the wastewater treatment plant: (1) compliance with new water quality standards for effluent and (2) demands associated with planned growth and sewer service expansion within the USL.

Flood Control Facilities

The Salinas River and several creeks traverse the City, providing some measure of natural flood control. Installed flood control improvements, both private and public, consist of catch basins,

¹ An acre-foot of water is 325,821 gallons, or roughly the amount sufficient to meet the needs of a household of four for one year.

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culverts, and pipes designed to manage runoff. In 2023, a major 100-year storm resulted in significant flooding citywide, highlighting the need to evaluate opportunities to incorporate flood control facilities where possible and maintain the capacity of natural creeks and waterways to respond to potentially significant weather patterns and events in addition to the need to respond to aging infrastructure conditions.

Infrastructure Undergrounding

Most electric power utility lines extend across the Atascadero via overhead lines. The threat of extreme wind and heat present wildfire risks associated with sparking from these overhead lines. Undergrounding utilities for new development can reduce fire risk, offer more reliable electrical and communications service during and after storms, and reduced visual clutter.

High-Speed Communications Services

Reliable, convenient, and affordable access to high-speed internet and cell phone coverage throughout the community promotes commerce and connectivity. The eastern side of Atascadero generally has good access to broadband technology, but the steep terrain and low-intensity development on Atascadero's western side pose challenges for providers to offer reliable service. Provision of reliable, high-speed communications services allows residents to stay connected to the world and businesses to operate at their optimum.

Public Services and Infrastructure Goals, Policies, and Actions

The following sections include goal sections, with supporting policies and implementation actions, related to the following topics:

- Efficient and Fiscally Sustainable Operations
- Water Supply and Delivery
- Wastewater Collection and Treatment
- Stormwater Drainage and Flood Protection
- Solid Waste and Recycling
- Energy
- Telecommunications

Efficient and Fiscally Sustainable Operations

The City places a high priority on ensuring quality municipal facilities and services, from fire and police services to street maintenance, flood control, and well-maintained parks and community buildings.

Goal PSI-1: Continued reliable public infrastructure and services that support orderly and desired growth

Policy PSI-1.1: Urban Services Line. Direct growth to areas where services can be provided cost effectively.

Action A: Maintain lower-density residential Placetypes on non-City maintained streets.

Policy PSI-1.2: Capital Improvements Program. Maintain an updated Capital Improvements Program (CIP) that forecasts needs at least five years into the future and implements General Plan policies and programs as feasible.

Action A: Include in the CIP a prioritized list of projects, timing, and cost estimates.

Action B: Apply for grants to assist in the expansion of sewer to priority areas.

Action C: Seek funding to address aging and undersized infrastructure to support existing and future service needs.

Policy PSI-1.3: Private Utility Service. Ensure that adequate private utility service capacity and facilities exist prior to approving new development.

Action A: Coordinate with electric power, natural gas, and telecommunications service providers to identify and ensure adequate service levels for existing and planned development.

Action B: Require that private utilities development projects conform to City site improvement standards and applicable ordinances.

Policy PSI-1.4: Capital Facilities Funding. Ensure that new development pays its fair share of providing and/or installing all capital facilities needed to support it, including the infrastructure necessary to attract high-tech and professional support businesses.

Action A: Continue to require new development to finance construction of facilities.

Policy PSI-1.5: Solid and Hazardous Waste Disposal. Continue to support effective regional planning for solid and hazardous waste disposal.

Action A: Contract with solid waste collection service providers capable of meeting City and State goals regarding waste diversion at reasonable cost to residents and businesses.

Policy PSI-1.6: Public Libraries. Coordinate with the San Luis Obispo Public Libraries to maintain the local library, with continuing access for all residents to modern, high-quality resources and programs.

Policy PSI-1.7: Coordination between Agencies. Encourage independent public agencies to consult and coordinate with the City on their development projects.

Action A: Support expansion of Atascadero State Hospital facilities and functions only when impacts can be adequately mitigated.

Action B: Support the efforts of public and private K-12 schools, post-high school, and trades educational facilities to provide diverse and high-quality learning opportunities, and ensure such facilities integrate well into neighborhoods and districts.

Action C: Work with the school district, Atascadero Mutual Water Company, PG&E, the State Hospital, and the County, in addition to other independent agencies, to ensure that frontage and streetscape improvements adjacent to school sites area consistent with City plans and standards.

Water Supply and Delivery

The Atascadero Mutual Water Company services over 30,000 residents through 10,000 service connections and a system of groundwater wells, booster pumps, storage tanks, water treatment facilities, pressure-reducing stations, and fire hydrants. In contrast to other Central Coast cities, Atascadero (through the water company) enjoys a reliable water source. As required by State law, the Atascadero Mutual Water Company prepares updates to its water system and water supply plans to forecast and plan for future needs. The City works with Water Company staff to ensure the plans reflect General Plan growth capacities.

Given that this General Plan accommodates growth largely within the USL, the Atascadero Mutual Water Company will need to provide assurances that water system facilities will support the type and location of new development. Through its master plan, facilities will continue to be defined to provide needed service levels. Regarding water supply, a continued focus on water conservation will help moderate demand withdrawals from local groundwater basins.

Goal PSI-2: Continued high-quality water services

Policy PSI-2.1: Water Service Capacity. Ensure that adequate water service capacity and facilities exist prior to approving new development.

Action A: Coordinate with the Atascadero Mutual Water Company to ensure provision of facilities and water supplies commensurate with demand and projected need.

Action B: Require all proposed new projects and new development requiring domestic water service to obtain a will serve letter from the Atascadero Mutual Water Company.

Wastewater Collection and Treatment

The Public Works Department Wastewater Division manages all sewage collection, treatment, and disposal services in the City. As of 2024, approximately 5,500 properties are served by City sewer, with a roughly equal number rural properties served by individual private on-site disposal systems. All collected sewage either flows or is pumped to the City's water reclamation facility located east of Chalk Mountain Golf Course, adjacent to the Salinas River. The plant's effluent, after being cleaned to meet State Water Quality Control Board standards, is directed into percolation ponds which recharge groundwater, with a portion of the reclaimed groundwater then used to irrigate the adjacent County-owned golf course.

Since the mid-2010s, the treatment plant has strained to meet increased treatment capacity needs. With initiation of the 2045 General Plan, the City began the process of updating the wastewater treatment and collection master plans to identify upgrades needed to support planned growth levels and achieve high water quality for reclaimed water. The updated Water Reclamation Facility Master Plan addresses long-term development goals. The study also considered expanded treatment capacity to serve properties less suitable for on-site wastewater treatment systems within the USL where not currently connected to the sewer system. Additionally, in 2020, the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (CCRWQCB) adopted a new Wastewater Discharge Requirements General Permit (General Permit) that significantly tightened requirements for wastewater effluent. The new General Permit will require a new wastewater treatment process to meet these stricter requirements.

Goal PSI-3: A comprehensive wastewater collection system and wastewater treatment plant capacity that support growth and economic development goals

Policy PSI-3.1: Water Reclamation Facility Master Plan. Ensure the Water Reclamation Facility Master Plan responds to long-term growth objectives and local water quality goals.

Policy PSI-3.2: Reclamation Facility. Construct and maintain a water reclamation facility with capacity for forecasted growth that allows for beneficial reuse of treated wastewater.

Policy PSI-3.3: Wastewater Collection System Master Plan. Ensure the municipal sewage collection system serves the needs of all customers efficiently and cost effectively.

Action A: Establish sewer service fees and adjust to levels that can fund planned improvements to the water reclamation facility and sanitary sewer collection system.

Action B: Pursue State and Federal funding opportunities to update the current system and comply with regional regulations.

Action C: Include provisions in the Sewer Collection System Master Plan to address providing sewer service to identified areas in the Local Agency Management Program (LAMP).

Stormwater Drainage and Flood Protection

Four natural watersheds cover Atascadero: Atascadero Creek, Graves Creek, Paloma Creek, and the Salinas River. The Salinas River flows most of the year, whereas the other creeks are more seasonal in nature. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has identified 100-year floodplains along Atascadero Creek, Graves Creek, Paloma Creek, and the Salinas River. While localized flooding can and does occur during heavy rain events, including the major storms in January 2023, the potential for major flooding is most likely to occur along Atascadero Creek and Graves Creek (see additional discussion of flood zones in the Safety and Emergency Preparedness Element).

The City has developed and maintains an extensive stormwater drainage system to protect properties from flooding conditions. The system was designed and constructed before much of the current development and prior to the rise of extreme weather events attributed to climate change. Historical large storm events, including the large rainstorms of January 2023, have identified system vulnerabilities. During the 2023 event, storm drains could not accommodate the rapidly accumulating runoff or became clogged from stream sediment, resulting in flooded roads, homes, and municipal buildings. Significant sources of stormwater inflow and infiltration throughout the sewer collection system challenged the ability of the water reclamation facility to handle loads.

Many of the system's culverts and catch basins are undersized relative to the volumes of anticipated runoff or require upgrades due to age. The Public Works Department maintains maps identifying all stormwater drainage system components and, as part of the Capital Improvement Plan, itemizes planned improvements to reduce flooding potential or otherwise improve the drainage system. While the City historically has not prepared a stormwater management system master plan, having such a plan in place might qualify the City for grants for more comprehensive system enhancements.

Goal PSI-4: Minimized flood risks via a well-functioning stormwater management system

Policy PSI-4.1: Stormwater Drainage Planning. Plan comprehensively for stormwater drainage, considering the age of the City's system and emerging needs based on targeted growth areas and areas of concern.

Action A: Prepare, implement, and keep current a stormwater drainage master plan. Identify infrastructure in need of significant improvements or capacity upgrades.

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Action B: Require improvement and ongoing maintenance of private stormwater drainage and retention areas as a condition of development approval.

Action C: Identify and collect development impact fees needed to pay for mitigation of regional stormwater drainage impacts for new development.

Action D: Require implementation of best management practices for new development to reduce discharges of nonpoint-source pollutants to the storm drain system.

Action E: Require implementation of post-construction structural control measures for new development to mitigate and treat additional stormwater runoff created by new impervious surfaces.

Action F: Consider adopting watershed management plan(s) and implementation mechanisms in Downtown to facilitate off-site stormwater management aimed at maximizing development potential.

Policy PSI-4.2: Stormwater Management. Manage stormwater drainage in a manner that protects and enhances natural drainage areas as habitat and outdoor places people enjoy.

Action A: Establish guidelines or standards for drainage improvements in natural areas that respond to applicable Federal and State requirements.

Solid Waste and Recycling

The California legislature has enacted several laws designed to reduce the volumes of solid waste entering landfills with the overarching goals of producing less waste, protecting land and water resources, and making people more conscious about their consumption practices. With consumers increasingly purchasing online and receiving goods at home, the potential exists for waste volumes to level or increase. Coupled with State programs, local efforts can be targeted to increase people's awareness of the negative impacts of diverting waste into landfills and to shift toward less-impactful behaviors.

The City contracts with a franchise waste hauler for trash pick-up services. That company is required to provide services consistent with State law regarding separation of recyclable materials and organic waste (yard clippings, food scraps) from the rest of the trash. In partnership with the County's Integrated Waste Management Agency, the City promotes awareness of requirements.

Goal PSI-5: Reduced waste volumes entering regional landfills and increased consumer commitment to minimizing waste production

Policy PSI-5.1: Waste Hauler Contracts. Contract with franchise waste haulers whose operations make it easy for residents and business owners to divert recyclable materials and organics from the waste stream.

Action A: Continue to encourage the reduction of solid waste through source reduction, curbside recycling, green waste collection, and recovery in cooperation with the Integrated Waste Management Board (SLO IWMA).

Action B: Support outreach and education efforts related to waste reduction, recycling, and organic waste, including statewide programs for the reuse and recycling of boxes and other packaging materials.

Goal PSI-5.2: Efficient, effective, safe, and orderly waste collection services.

Action A: Work with the waste hauler to identify solutions for consolidated waste collection and pick-up service in higher density, commercial, and mixed-use areas.

Action B: Review and update, as needed, the municipal code to ensure that waste collection service does not impede on-street parking, emergency access, or visual character.

Energy

Electricity and natural gas power the systems that allow residents to enjoy comfortable lifestyles and businesses to thrive. When they work well, we do not think about them much. If systems fail or the price we pay for electricity or gas strains our budgets, we think about them a lot. In Atascadero, private companies—Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E)/Central Coast Community Energy (3CE)—provide electrical services with PG&E owning and maintaining the electrical transmission infrastructure. Southern California Gas Company (SoCal Gas) provides natural gas services, however, many residences on larger westside lots use propane gas. PG&E, 3CE, and SoCal Gas support their customers in efforts to conserve energy and lower their energy bills, including programs providing financial assistance and rebates/incentives, as well as advice on home solar energy system installation.

The City does not have the ability to affect private energy operations but can facilitate residents' and businesses' efforts to go "off grid" and establish their own onsite electric power systems. Such efforts can result in clean energy production—meaning less pollution—and lower energy costs for individuals.

Goal PSI-6: Increased development and use of clean, renewable energy systems

Policy PSI-6.1: Onsite Renewable Energy. Facilitate the installation of onsite renewable energy systems for residences and places of business.

Policy PSI-6.2: Energy Efficient Planning and Building Design. Encourage energy-efficient site planning and building design/construction.

Action A: Implement streamlined building permit review processes for onsite energy systems.

Action B: Continue to implement the California Green Building Standards.

Telecommunications

Access to available, affordable, and modern telecommunications infrastructure—including broadband, fiber optic, wireless (WiFi), and emerging technologies—connects Atascadero residents and businesses to the world and can serve as a major economic development tool, attracting businesses that require high-speed, reliable telecommunications service. Atascadero will work to facilitate and support a wide range of innovative telecommunications systems and services to attract and retain businesses, provide information and communication access for all residents, and facilitate public education.

Goal PSI-7: Increased access to modern and affordable telecommunications infrastructure and service throughout Atascadero

Policy PSI-7.1: Telecommunication System Upgrades. Facilitate the installation of and/or upgrades to private telecommunication systems that better connect Atascadero businesses, residents, and students to the world.

Action A: Encourage private investment in high-speed broadband telecommunications infrastructure that serves major commercial, business, and educational corridors.

Action B: Encourage private investment in wireless telecommunications infrastructure that efficiently and affordably connects rural residential neighborhoods, especially in the western half of Atascadero.

Action C: Facilitate and support the development of infrastructure necessary for all residents to use and benefit from new communication technologies.

Action D: Monitor information technology development to ensure compatibility with City infrastructure.

Action E: Strive to expand opportunities for all citizens to participate in City governance through use of communication technologies.

Action F: Continue to make essential City documents available for immediate retrieval by electronic transfer technologies.