

CHAPTER 6. OTHER CEQA CONSIDERATIONS

This chapter of the environmental impact report (EIR) discusses other potential environmental effects for which the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires analysis, in addition to the specific issue areas discussed in Chapter 4, *Environmental Impact Analysis*. These additional effects include the potential for the 2045 General Plan Update and subsequent Atascadero Code of Ordinances (Municipal Code) update (collectively referred to as the project) to result in growth-inducing impacts and the irreversible commitment of resources.

6.1 GROWTH-INDUCING IMPACTS

State CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.2(d) requires EIRs to include a discussion of the growth-inducing impacts of a proposed project. Such impacts may occur when a project fosters economic or population growth or results in the construction of additional housing, either directly or indirectly, in the surrounding area. Growth-inducing effects may also result from project features that accommodate growth by removing obstacles to population increases, such as the expansion of a wastewater treatment plant. In addition, growth-inducing impacts can arise from project characteristics that encourage or facilitate other activities that could have significant environmental effects, either individually or cumulatively, including population increases that require the provision of new community service facilities. In general terms, a project may induce spatial, economic, or population growth in a geographic area if it meets any of these four criteria:

- Removal of an impediment to growth (e.g., establishment of an essential public service or the provisions of new access to an area);
- Economic expansion or growth (e.g., changes in revenue base, employment expansion);
- Establishment of a precedent-setting action (e.g., an innovation, a change in zoning, or general plan amendment approval); or
- Development or encroachment in an isolated area or adjacent to open space (being different from an “infill” type of project).

Should the 2045 General Plan and Zoning Code Update meet any of these criteria, it could be considered growth-inducing. The evaluation of growth-inducing impacts for the 2045 General Plan and Zoning Code Update considers the City’s long-term vision for preservation, growth, and change, as well as the potential for new development, infrastructure improvements, and policy changes that may facilitate economic and population growth throughout the City and Planning Area.

The analysis of growth-inducing impacts is based on the buildout scenario envisioned in the 2045 General Plan and Zoning Code Update, which encompasses a range of land use changes, infrastructure investments, and policy initiatives designed to accommodate future housing, employment, and community needs. These changes include updates to zoning and development standards, expansion or enhancement of public services and amenities, and the implementation of programs to support sustainable growth and economic vitality.

The impacts of the 2045 General Plan and Zoning Code Update are evaluated below with respect to these four growth-inducing criteria, consistent with State CEQA Guidelines.

6.1.1 Population Growth

As discussed in Chapter 2, *Project Description*, the 2045 General Plan provides a comprehensive regulatory framework for the City’s growth and development through the year 2045. Planned growth includes the expansion of employment-generating uses, enhancement of existing neighborhoods, and creation of new

residential opportunities, all based on the City’s land capacity, infrastructure potential, and anticipated growth rates for both residential and commercial sectors. The 2045 General Plan does not propose any single project that would directly induce substantial unplanned population growth, such as a major new residential development outside of currently designated residential areas. Instead, the plan guides future development in accordance with established land use policies and the City’s authority to review and approve or revise growth assumptions and the Zoning Code Update implements these policies and goals.

The 2045 General Plan includes City population and employment growth projections based on land capacity, ability to expand infrastructure, and anticipated growth rates for both residential and commercial sectors based on multiple factors. These projections were used to make assumptions about anticipated infrastructure and service needs over the planning period. Growth projections were also informed by historic trends, anticipated future conditions, and input from City staff and City Council members. As described in Chapter 2, the City’s total population as of 2024 was 30,683, consisting of a base population of 29,365 and 1,318 group-quarter residents at the Atascadero State Hospital. The City’s forecasted total population for the General Plan Update planning period (through 2045) is 37,279, reflecting an overall increase of 6,596 over the 20-year planning period. Similarly, the number of dwelling units is projected to increase from 12,660 in 2024 to 15,550 by 2045. Employment is expected to increase from 9,729 employees in 2024 to 12,914 employees in 2045, improving the city’s jobs/housing ratio from 0.77 to 0.83 (Table 6-1) (City of Atascadero 2025).

Table 6-1. General Plan Forecasted Growth

Type	Baseline	General Plan Horizon Year (2045)	Net Change (2024–2045)
Dwelling Units (Total)	12,660	15,550	2,890
<i>Single-family Units</i>	9,786	9,991	205
<i>Multifamily Units</i>	2,874	5,559	2,685
Population ¹	30,683	37,279	6,596
Employees	9,729	12,914	3,185
Jobs/Housing Ratio ²	0.77	0.83	0.06

Notes:

* Population includes group quarters (1,318) at Atascadero State Hospital.

† Jobs/housing ratio is an equation used to determine how many jobs are available in a community relative to the number of dwelling units (homes). The policy approach assumes that a “balanced community” has a 1:1 ratio, which strives to match the number of local jobs to the number of available housing units. This approach does not require residents to work in town; rather, it looks to provide the opportunity for residents to have jobs within the community.

This projected growth would improve longstanding jobs-housing imbalances and housing affordability challenges within the City, whereas the rate of growth would provide new employment opportunities that could be filled by both current residents and workers commuting from nearby communities.

The 2045 General Plan presents a comprehensive framework of goals, policies, and actions designed to guide economic development in alignment with anticipated population growth. The following goals and policies illustrate the City’s strategy for managing and supporting this growth:

- **Goal ED-1:** A sound economic base to sustain the City’s unique character through a range of employment and business opportunities and generation of sufficient revenue to support adequate levels of public services, as well as environmental and social quality
 - **Policy ED-1.1: Business Attraction.** Facilitate establishment of a full range of goods and services desired by Atascadero residents, workers, and visitors.

- **Action B:** Consider the use of a form based code to guide development in the Innovation/Flex district to respond to changing business trends over time.
- **Action C:** Ensure that development in commercial and innovation/flex zones is geared to tax-generating uses and/or provides flexible use spaces for evolving trends that allow local businesses to capitalize on emerging economic growth sectors.
- **Action E:** Maintain key commercial sites and nodes that prioritize commercial activities and provide spaces for larger-scale commercial uses, technical education facilities, and light-industrial uses.
- **Goal ED-2:** Retention and expansion of existing businesses and attraction of new businesses and industries to increase economic growth, improve the availability of goods and services, and increase opportunities for higher-wage jobs in Atascadero
 - **Policy ED-2.1: Existing Business Support.** Encourage established businesses to continue providing products and services the community desires.
 - **Action A:** Continue to support Chamber of Commerce efforts to market goods and services available in Atascadero, particularly those produced locally.
 - **Action B:** Identify locations with adequate land to accommodate established businesses looking to expand.
 - **Policy ED-2.2: Local Job Growth.** Attract new development and enterprises that provide jobs and services for current residents and that build the local jobs base of higher-wage positions.
 - **Action A:** Update the Municipal Code to provide flexibility for home occupation uses.
 - **Action B:** Update the Zoning Ordinance to ensure land use regulations accommodate a broad range of desired industries and that entitlement processes are more efficient.

The 2045 General Plan and Zoning Code Update aligns with regional growth projections developed by the San Luis Obispo Council of Governments (SLOCOG). According to SLOCOG’s 2050 Regional Growth Forecast, Atascadero’s population is expected to reach 34,278 by 2045 under a medium-growth scenario, and 38,549 under a high-growth scenario (SLOCOG 2017). The City’s plans to accommodate these anticipated increases in population and housing are consistent with regional growth management policies and remain within established thresholds.

The 2045 General Plan is designed to accommodate planned, orderly growth that supports economic vitality, housing diversity, and quality of life for residents. Any indirect population growth resulting from increased housing and employment opportunities under the 2045 General Plan and Zoning Code Update is anticipated to be consistent with City and regional projections, and impacts related to unplanned population growth would be *less than significant*.

6.1.2 Economic Growth

In 2024, Atascadero had a jobs-to-housing ratio of 0.75, indicating substantially more households than jobs in the City. Over 10,700 Atascadero residents were employed outside of the City in 2019, whereas 6,000 employees traveled to Atascadero for work (City of Atascadero 2025). Citywide buildout under the 2045 General Plan and Zoning Code Update is projected to generate new full-time equivalent jobs, in addition to short-term employment. This increase in employment opportunities is designed to help address the existing jobs-to-housing imbalance.

The 2045 General Plan and Zoning Code Update envisions a balanced approach to citywide growth, accommodating a mix of employment, commercial, and visitor-serving uses. This strategy supports the development of clean, attractive businesses and industries, expands opportunities for visitor-serving activities, and ensures adequate space for economic growth within the City. Importantly, the 2045 General Plan and Zoning Code Update is designed not only to enhance Atascadero’s economic vitality but also to prevent additional or unplanned impacts by focusing new development within the Urban Services Line (USL), coordinating growth planning efforts with neighboring cities and community services districts, and maintaining key areas for commercial and employment uses that are not compatible with integrated residential development. These measures help manage growth responsibly, minimize regional impacts, and preserve the character and functionality of the community.

The following goals and policies from the Land Use and Economic Elements illustrate the City’s commitment to sustainable economic development and responsible growth management:

- **Goal LU-1:** Growth integrated and compatible with established land use patterns and the community aesthetic
 - **Policy LU-1.2: Urban Services Line (USL).** Concentrate new and infill development within the USL in areas where utilities and public services exist or are planned.
 - **Action A:** Revisit density and intensity requirements for land use(s) if sewer extends into new areas.
 - **Action B:** Maintain Rural Residential as the predominant use and limit the subdivision of land beyond the USL.
 - **Action C:** Consider future planned density and intensity when repairing infrastructure and ensure that infrastructure is sized to accommodate future growth.
- **Goal ED-2:** Retention and expansion of existing businesses and attraction of new businesses and industries to increase economic growth, improve the availability of goods and services, and increase opportunities for higher-wage jobs in Atascadero
 - **Policy ED-2.1: Existing Business Support.** Encourage established businesses to continue providing products and services the community desires.
 - **Action A:** Continue to support Chamber of Commerce efforts to market goods and services available in Atascadero, particularly those produced locally.
 - **Action B:** Identify locations with adequate land to accommodate established businesses looking to expand.
 - **Policy ED-2.2: Local Job Growth.** Attract new development and enterprises that provide jobs and services for current residents and that build the local jobs base of higher-wage positions.
 - **Action A:** Update the Municipal Code to provide flexibility for home occupation uses.
 - **Action B:** Update the Zoning Ordinance to ensure land use regulations accommodate a broad range of desired industries and that entitlement processes are more efficient.

These uses are intended to foster clean, attractive businesses and industries, expand opportunities for visitor-serving uses, and provide space for economic growth within the City.

The 2045 General Plan and Zoning Code Update emphasizes economic growth as a priority and has identified policies to ensure that this planned growth can be accommodated by the City’s infrastructure; the location of the growth occurs in a way that minimizes environmental impacts and is compatible with surrounding uses and the existing character of the community; and the growth would contribute to

improving the City's longstanding jobs-housing imbalance. The focus of the 2045 General Plan and Zoning Code Update on providing additional job opportunities within the City will help improve the jobs-to-housing balance, reduce commute distances for local residents, and support a more sustainable, economically vibrant community. Therefore, impacts related to unplanned population growth as a result of increased employment opportunities would be *less than significant*.

6.1.3 Precedent Setting Action

As described in Chapter 2, *Project Description*, the 2045 General Plan and Zoning Code Update involves comprehensive changes to land use and zoning designations throughout the City and its sphere of influence (SOI). The project is intended to allow for a range of residential, commercial, industrial, and visitor-serving uses in appropriate areas, in alignment with the City's long-term vision and community needs. All future development under the 2045 General Plan and Zoning Code Update would be required to comply and/or be consistent with the City's General Plan, Municipal Code, and applicable zoning and land use regulations.

Because any future proposed development must be consistent with these established planning parameters and regulatory frameworks, the 2045 General Plan and Zoning Code Update does not set a precedent for growth-inducing development outside of designated areas. The types of uses anticipated under the proposed Placetypes are not precedent setting, as similar development is already permitted and present in various parts of Atascadero. The 2045 General Plan and Zoning Code Update supports the City's ongoing efforts to provide for balanced growth, economic vitality, and housing diversity while ensuring that new development remains orderly and consistent with Atascadero's character and existing regulatory requirements. Therefore, impacts related to unplanned population growth as a result of a precedent-setting action would be *less than significant*.

6.1.4 Development in an Isolated Area

Development is generally considered growth-inducing when it occurs outside established urban boundaries or in isolated locations rather than as infill within existing developed areas. The 2045 General Plan and Zoning Code Update applies to all properties within the City's incorporated limits and its SOI. The 2045 General Plan and Zoning Code Update directs future growth within Atascadero's USL by permitting higher housing densities and expanding opportunities for job-generating businesses, with targeted change focused near Downtown and along major corridors such as El Camino Real and Morro Road. This strategy supports the City's objectives of achieving a balanced jobs-to-housing ratio of 1:1, which enhances local employment opportunities, reduces commute distances, and limits environmental impacts. At the same time, the project aims to diversify the housing stock through a mix of multifamily and infill development that would accommodate households of all income levels. Policies within the 2045 General Plan would enable approximately 4,794 new jobs and 2,890 new dwelling units relative to the 2024 baseline as depicted in Table 6-1, and the City is committed to ensuring any necessary infrastructure improvements are implemented in a manner compatible with surrounding uses and the existing character of the community. The use of new and refined Placetypes ensures that future development would be compatible with existing land use patterns and supported by necessary infrastructure improvements that are planned in conjunction with growth.

Whereas the 2045 General Plan and Zoning Code Update anticipates moderate increases in population, housing, and employment, these changes would be carefully managed to avoid creating growth pressure on surrounding agricultural or open space lands outside the City boundary. The 2045 General Plan and Zoning Code Update encourages infill development and revitalization within the existing USL, focusing new growth in areas where public utilities and services already exist or are planned. Despite these anticipated land use changes, the 2045 General Plan and Zoning Code Update would generally preserve the existing pattern of land uses in the city. By directing growth to already urbanized areas, the 2045 General Plan and

Zoning Code Update would reduce development pressure on undeveloped lands at the City’s periphery. Adjacent lands within the unincorporated San Luis Obispo County (County) remain subject to the County General Plan and Land Use Ordinance, further ensuring resource protection. The 2045 General Plan Land Use and Community Form Element requires that land beyond the City limits considered for annexation serve the community as described in the following policy and action items:

- **Policy LU-1.8: Annexations.** Ensure that growth beyond the City limit serves community needs, enhances fiscal stability, and improves quality of life for community members.
 - **Action A:** Require annexation proposals align with the Vision, Guiding Principles, Goals, and Policies included in this General Plan.
 - **Action B:** Oppose all development within the sphere of influence the site prior to annexation.
 - **Action C:** Require the approval of a Specific Plan prior to the annexation of the Eagle Ranch property.

Through these measures, the 2045 General Plan and Zoning Code Update’s land use framework accommodates future growth in an orderly and sustainable manner, consistent with both City and County objectives for resource protection and community character. Therefore, impacts related to unplanned population growth as a result of development in an isolated area would be *less than significant*.

6.1.5 Removal of an Impediment to Growth

The City is within an established urban area that is served by existing infrastructure. The 2045 General Plan/Zoning Code Update encourages infill development and revitalization within the existing USL, focusing new growth in areas where public utilities and services already exist or are planned. Downtown Atascadero and key activity nodes are identified as primary locations for higher-density residential and mixed-use development, supporting the efficient use of infrastructure and public services.

Despite these anticipated land use changes, the 2045 General Plan/Zoning Code Update would generally preserve the existing pattern of land uses in the city. By directing growth to already urbanized areas, the 2045 General Plan/Zoning Code Update would reduce development pressure on undeveloped lands at the City’s periphery. This approach would minimize potential impacts to biological resources, regional traffic, and air quality compared to development extending beyond the City’s urban boundary.

The Planning Area is defined by existing City limits and the SOI. Any future annexations of land into City boundaries would be subject to review and approval by the City, County, and other relevant agencies and would be required to comply with applicable regional and state policies, including those established by the Local Agency Formation Commission. Most of the City’s Planning Area is within the Atascadero watershed, and the City’s municipal water supply is managed by Atascadero Mutual Water Company, which is projected to provide sufficient water to meet future demand under normal and drought conditions, as described in the 2020 Urban Water Management Plan (see Section 4-15, *Utilities and Service Systems*, for detailed analysis). Wastewater and stormwater infrastructure are similarly planned and maintained to accommodate projected growth, with ongoing improvements guided by the City’s adopted master plans. In practice, municipal water conveyance, wastewater conveyance, and stormwater infrastructure improvements are typically funded by and implemented in conjunction with specific development proposals at the time permit applications are submitted, rather in advance in a manner that would induce or facilitate future growth.

The 2045 General Plan and Zoning Code Update does not include policies or regulations that would induce substantial unplanned population increases. Projected population growth would be managed through policies that require infrastructure and public services to be in place before development proceeds and ensure that future expansion is consistent with adopted plans and policies. Therefore, implementation of the 2045 General Plan and Zoning Code Update would not remove any existing obstacle to growth, and impacts would be *less than significant*.

6.2 SIGNIFICANT IRREVERSIBLE ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES

6.2.1 Irreversible Commitment of Resources

State CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.2(d) requires that EIRs evaluate whether a proposed project would result in irreversible changes in the environment, particularly through the use of nonrenewable resources during construction and operation. This chapter assesses whether implementation of the project would result in impacts related to the irreversible commitment of resources.

Buildout under the 2045 General Plan and Zoning Code Update would allow for a range of new residential, commercial, industrial, and public uses throughout the City. Construction and operation of these new developments would irreversibly commit construction materials and nonrenewable energy resources, such as fossil fuels, wood, and other building materials. The use of these resources is typical for development projects throughout the region and is not unique to Atascadero. All new construction would be subject to the California Building Code, which regulates the use, properties, and performance of building materials, as well as state and local requirements.

In the long term, the 2045 General Plan and Zoning Code Update would contribute incrementally to the ongoing consumption of energy resources associated with residential, commercial, and industrial uses. Electricity for new development would be supplied by Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) and Central Coast Community Energy (3CE), both of which provide a significant portion of power from renewable sources. The 2024 PG&E electric power mix consisted of 35% renewable sources (PG&E 2025). The 2024 3CE power mix consisted of 56% renewable sources and is currently on a pathway to achieving 100% clean and renewable energy by 2030 (3CE 2025). Natural gas would be provided by Southern California Gas Company, which has committed to increasing its use of renewable natural gas in the coming years. All new development would be required to comply with applicable state and local standards for energy and water efficiency, including Title 24 of the California Code of Regulations, which mandates water conservation measures, energy-efficient appliances, and sustainable building systems and is updated every 3 years. Energy consumption associated with buildout of the 2045 General Plan and Zoning Code Update is discussed further in Section 4.3, *Air Quality, Greenhouse Gas Emissions, and Energy*.

Implementation of these standards and requirements would help reduce the demand for new energy and water resources, while also minimizing the consumption of nonrenewable materials. These measures would ensure that resource use remains consistent with, or better than, similar development throughout the region. Therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

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