



Chapter 1: Introduction

The 2045 General Plan articulates the shared community vision for preservation, growth, and change in our community. This General Plan is a long-range policy document that guides decision-making and establishes the intent for the design and development of new projects, conservation of natural resources, promotion of economic development, improvements to mobility and infrastructure systems, expansion of public services, and enhancement of community amenities. This General Plan directs how Atascadero will look and how residents, property owners, business owners, and visitors will experience our City today and well into the future. While the Plan identifies 2045 as a horizon year, not all initiatives and goals in this Plan may be achieved by then. However, this Plan defines the interconnected actions we will pursue to create the conditions for the City we envision.

In 2002, the City adopted a plan focused on “smart growth” shaped by four guiding principles:

- Protect the natural environment.
- Improve the appearance and character of Atascadero.
- Provide a secure revenue base.
- Promote well-planned neighborhoods.

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

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This Plan recognizes what has been achieved: new housing types, public and private reinvestments in Downtown, development focused within the Urban Services Line, and the continued consideration of hillsides and habitats. Planning for the next two to three decades will build upon these successes while accounting for the rapid technological and societal changes affecting how people work, shop, enjoy leisure time, and move in, around, and through the City. The COVID-19 pandemic caused many shifts likely to be permanent, particularly work-at-home jobs, online shopping, and home food delivery. These conditions, as well as the impacts of climate change, will guide development of Atascadero's next generation General Plan.

Initiated in 2021, this update effort focused on revisiting, refining, and updating goals, policies, and actions to reflect evolving trends, demographics, and collective ideas. Residents, business owners, and other community members participated in a robust public engagement program to ensure that all perspectives were shared and represented in the shaping of this Plan.

Historical Context

While this General Plan looks towards the future, it is also important to understand the past, Atascadero is distinguished by its unique history. The community was founded in 1913, when Edward Gardner Lewis envisioned establishing a model colony of 38 square miles that could grow to 30,000 residents. Lewis moved forward with the vision, overseeing the sale of land plots, construction of more than 100 miles of local roads, and founding of the Atascadero Mutual Water Company. Development halted abruptly in 1924 when Lewis declared bankruptcy, and the Great Depression slowed growth for decades after.

Atascadero was a planned community from the beginning, with a focus on creating a welcoming environment for residents through features such as wide, tree-lined streets and a defined civic center. The City attracted individuals and families seeking a retreat from the busier urban centers of California. Atascadero incorporated in 1979, after which a surge in population and ensuing development of residential and commercial areas shaped the community we experience today.

Throughout the mid-20th century, Atascadero continued to develop as a suburban community with a strong sense of local identity. The City's growth was influenced by its early master planning efforts and the charm of its surrounding landscapes, which attracted both new residents and visitors. Today, Atascadero is known for its blend of historical charm, community-focused living, and its scenic Central Coast setting, reflecting its origins as a thoughtfully designed, model City.

Atascadero has a historic charm that comes from many preserved sites citywide. Although most of the colony-era homes are not listed on the State or National register, 17 prominent sites are either listed or eligible for historic status, and another 17 potential historic resources are located throughout the community.

Atascadero City Hall (also known as the City Administration Building) is a key architectural landmark and symbol of the City's early vision. Designed by architect Walter D. Bliss in the Italian Renaissance style, the building is central to the City's historic identity and continues to serve as a

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civic hub. Built in 1914, the Atascadero Printery is a notable example of early 20th-century industrial architecture. Originally constructed as a printing facility, it features distinctive Italian Renaissance design elements.

The Atascadero Estates Residential Historic District, established in the early 20th century, encompasses a collection of well-preserved residential properties that showcase the City's early planning and architectural styles, including Mission Revival and Craftsman. Both the Bucklin House and the Jorgens House serve as early examples of residential architecture in Atascadero. The homes feature elements of the Mission Revival style and have been well preserved.

Following the early colony years, Atascadero's growth resulted from major infrastructure investments: the construction of Highway 101, establishment of the Atascadero State Hospital (which brought many new jobs to the community), and provision of sewer service to the town center, which resulted in a near doubling of the population within the town boundaries. In 1979, Atascadero incorporated, becoming the second largest City in the County at that time.

Authentic Atascadero

The 2045 General Plan — **Authentic Atascadero** — frames the community vision for how Atascadero should grow and respond to change over the coming years and decades. As the City's overarching policy document, every land use, mobility, and infrastructure decision made by elected and appointed City officials and City staff must be consistent with the General Plan vision, goals, policies, programs, and actions.

State law requires that every City prepare and adopt a comprehensive and long-range General Plan (California Government Code Section 65300) and that the plan inform the content and application of programs and ordinances that govern land use, infrastructure investments, and generally, the spending of public monies. The General Plan and its maps, diagrams, and policies are reflected, for example, in the Zoning Ordinance and economic development strategies. Also, under California law, all specific plans, area plans, community plans, zoning ordinances, subdivision maps, and public works projects must be consistent with the General Plan.

While a General Plan can cover a variety of topics based on a community's specific needs, State law requires that it address these seven topics, or elements: Land Use, Circulation, Housing, Conservation, Open Space, Noise, and Safety. An eighth topic, Environmental Justice, is only required to be addressed if a City includes "disadvantaged communities," as designated by the State. Atascadero does not have any State-identified disadvantaged communities.

The required elements must establish policy direction relating to:

- The use and development of properties citywide
- Accommodation of all modes of transportation
- The provision of parks and other open spaces to meet community needs
- The types of housing available in the community
- The use and consideration of natural resources

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- The provision of public safety services and protection against natural and human-caused hazards (including noise)

The 2045 General Plan is structured around topics that emerged through an extensive community engagement process. As noted above, General Plans are required to contain a minimum of seven State-mandated elements, but municipalities have flexibility in the organization of the chapters and content to reflect local preferences and sensibilities. **Table 1-1** indicates how the General Plan chapters relate to the State-mandated elements.

Table 1-1: State-Required General Plan Topics									
Atascadero 2045 General Plan Chapters	State Mandated Elements							Environmental Justice ²	Optional Topics
	Land Use	Circulation	Housing ¹	Conservation	Open Space	Noise	Safety		
Chapter 1: Introduction			Prepared under separate cover					Not required in Atascadero	
Chapter 2: General Plan Vision and Guiding Principles									
Chapter 3: Land Use and Community Form Element									
Chapter 4: Economic Development Element									
Chapter 5: Housing Element									
Chapter 6: Mobility Element									
Chapter 7: Recreation and Open Space Element									
Chapter 8: Public Services and Infrastructure Element									
Chapter 9: Safety and Emergency Preparedness Element									
Glossary									

1. The State of California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) requires Housing Elements to be periodically reviewed, updated, and certified. The City of Atascadero Housing Element is included under separate cover.
2. The State of California requires jurisdictions to prepare an Environmental Justice Element only if they have one or more communities that are identified as “disadvantaged communities” based on CalEnviroScreen 4.0. The City of Atascadero does not have any identified disadvantaged communities as of 2024 when this General Plan was prepared.

Community Involvement

Beginning in early 2023, City staff undertook a series of community engagement activities to promote and inform the 2045 General Plan. The City was committed to designing and implementing an inclusive and dynamic engagement process to ensure robust and genuine feedback from the community, civic and City leaders, and the private sector. The following is a summary of key engagement materials and activities that took place during the process.

General Plan Update Website

The City prepared a dedicated General Plan Update website (www.atascadero2045.org) that kept the public informed and allowed people to directly submit comments. The website compiled all events, documents, and other materials associated with the project.

Stakeholder Interviews and Focus Groups

City staff met with a range of stakeholders, civic leaders, and community groups throughout the process to discuss challenges and opportunities, alternatives, and draft policies. These meetings allowed for important discussions to occur that helped inform the process and ultimately the goals, policies, and actions included in the 2045 General Plan.

Community Engagement Series #1: Vision for the Future

In early 2023, the City hosted a series of targeted group discussions and an open house to solicit community ideas on a vision for the future of Atascadero and feedback on challenges and emerging opportunities; these conversations informed the Alternatives phase of the project. These meetings and workshops provided an opportunity for the community to learn about the process and the importance of the General Plan, and to discuss the future of Atascadero. Events in this series included informational pop-up events during concurrent community-led programming, an open house that allowed discussions based on each General Plan element, and the creation of an Existing Conditions Atlas that allowed community members to use maps to comment on specific areas throughout the City and identify opportunities, challenges, or additional questions.

Community Engagement Series #2: Alternatives

In Fall 2023, the City hosted a series of pop-up events, focus group meetings, open houses, high school student policy projects, and an online survey to solicit community ideas on a preferred land use and growth alternative for the future of Atascadero. These interactive events and activities provided community members and stakeholders with an opportunity to learn about the proposed new land use designations—called Placetypes—and areas of change (focus areas), provide feedback on growth ideas and concepts for each focus area, and discuss additional things they would improve or change in the future. Focus areas were a key part of the alternatives discussion and used throughout the planning process to inform community discussions around potential changes, investments, and key priorities.

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Community 2045 General Plan Open House

The City hosted a Community Open House on the draft 2045 General Plan on October 6, 2025. The event, held at the City Hall Foyer, provided an opportunity for the community to review and provide input on the Draft General Plan Elements, preliminary zoning districts, and proposed land use regulations. The informal drop in event was a valuable opportunity for residents to meet one-on-one with City staff and the consultant team to discuss the project and provide feedback before the Draft General Plan was finalized.

City Council Study Sessions

The Atascadero City Council was actively involved in all phases of the project. In addition to their role as the legislative body for the City, the Council also functioned as an advisory committee for the General Plan Update, holding study sessions on a regular basis to consider policy strategies, review community feedback, and provide direction to City staff on key topics to study and choices for the future. Each study session was a public meeting, and the community was encouraged to attend and provide feedback.

Planning Area

In 2023, when the planning process for this General Plan began, the incorporated City boundaries encompassed about 26 square miles, less than the extent Lewis envisioned for the model colony. However, under State law, the City has the authority and ability to plan beyond its boundaries within an area referred to as its sphere of influence (SOI). Together, the incorporated City area and the sphere of influence are termed the “Planning Area,” which generally coincides with the historic Atascadero Colony boundary. The 2045 General Plan Planning Area boundary (see **Figure 1-2**) covers about 32 square miles. The following is a more detailed summary of the purpose and size of each major boundary.

City Limits

The Atascadero City limits encompass approximately 26 square miles, or 16,738 acres, as of 2024. The City has land use authority over all properties within these limits, except for properties owned by the State of California, San Luis Obispo County, and public school districts.

Urban Services Line (USL)

Atascadero’s Urban Services Line (USL) designates land within the City limits where services, in particular water and sewer, are provided or may be provided in the future. Due to topography, environmental, and physical constraints, rural residential development is and will remain the predominant land use development pattern outside the USL.

Sphere of Influence (SOI)

The SOI represents adjacent unincorporated areas that currently, or may in the future, receive City services. The San Luis Obispo County Local Agency Formation Commission, or LAFCo, identifies two unincorporated areas within the City’s SOI, totaling approximately five square

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miles, or 3,466 acres. The most significant is a property known as Eagle Ranch, abutting Atascadero’s southern City boundary. Eagle Ranch contains existing colony lots (452) and is subject to a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between San Luis Obispo County and the City of Atascadero that guides the future annexation and development of this area.

The “Big Moves”

The 2045 General Plan process involved extensive community and decision-maker discussions regarding future growth and evolving community character. This engagement process (summarized above) helped inform the goals, policies, actions, and programs included in this General Plan. While each chapter discusses specific topics, the community and City Council identified a series “Big Moves” that establish the overarching focus of the 2045 General Plan. The Big Moves represent key land use objectives and strategies that will help advance the Vision and Guiding Principles (see **Chapter 2**) and define how the community grows and evolves into the future.





Big Move A

Create a Mix of Housing

This 2045 General Plan identifies ways to support future community needs and choices by expanding the types, formats, and affordability of new housing in Atascadero.

Key Policy Considerations

- Allow higher-density residential and mixed-use projects within Downtown and along key stretches of El Camino Real and Morro Road that are accessible to a range of community services, amenities, and activities.
- Consider development incentives for projects that provide needed workforce housing near areas of employment.
- Encourage incremental infill housing in traditionally single-family areas that maintains the character and neighborhood scale (second units, duplexes, cottage clusters).



Big Move B

Attract New Industries and Higher Wage Jobs

The 2045 General Plan identifies ways to cultivate a successful, resilient, and diverse business environment that supports existing and new businesses, attracts innovative and emerging industries, and increases higher wage jobs in Atascadero.

Key Policy Considerations

- Encourage business investment through targeted regulatory incentives and infrastructure prioritization (onsite parking reductions, infrastructure upgrades).
- Actively market Atascadero as a business-friendly City, and engage technology, research and development, and similar industries to locate in the City.
- Provide opportunities for flexible building uses and conversion of spaces within key commercial and mixed-use areas.



Big Move C

Improve Mobility, Access, and Safety

The 2045 General Plan identifies ways to create and maintain a circulation network that provides safe, efficient, and convenient mobility choices.

Key Policy Considerations

- Enhance multi-modal street design and amenities along El Camino Real and Morro Road to encourage and accommodate more walking and biking.
- Create a network of emergency routes for wildfire-prone areas that provide safe evacuation for residents and efficient entry for first responders.
- Prioritize key collector streets for multi-modal improvements to enhance mobility options.



Big Move D

Address Public Infrastructure Needs

The 2045 General Plan identifies ways to maintain adequate and efficient backbone infrastructure to support current and future community, business, and development needs in Atascadero.

Key Policy Considerations

- Expand telecommunications infrastructure and public utilities to and within key employment areas.
- Implement streetscape improvements along El Camino Real and Morro Road near major planned residential and employment nodes to incentivize new development.
- Develop fiscal strategies for maintaining and expanding key infrastructure.



Big Move E

Ensure Fiscal Sustainability

The 2045 General Plan identifies ways to balance new public investment and private development to maintain sustainable and resilient fiscal resources for the City.

Key Policy Considerations

- Prioritize public investments that have a positive influence on long-term economic growth, including focusing infrastructure improvements within employment-generating areas.
- Use financing mechanisms that attract new development that contributes to near-term investment and long-term infrastructure maintenance.
- Acknowledge the fiscal implications of different land use types and the necessity of maintaining a balanced land use mix to mitigate fiscal vulnerabilities during variable market cycles.

General Plan Chapters

The 2045 General Plan is organized into the following chapters.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Describes the context of Atascadero and the 2045 General Plan process, including the extensive community outreach and feedback that informed goals, policies, actions, and programs going forward. It also identifies the Planning Area, provides an overview of general plan requirements, presents the “Big Moves,” and summarizes the approach, structure, and key components of the 2045 General Plan.

Chapter 2: General Plan Vision and Guiding Principles

Presents the community’s vision for Atascadero and guiding principles that will shape the vision.

Chapter 3: Land Use and Community Form Element

Fulfills the State requirements for the Land Use Element and identifies policies to preserve and foster community character when exploring opportunities for growth. This chapter outlines goals and policies for development citywide, as well as for unique areas within Atascadero.

Chapter 4: Economic Development Element

Represents a topic emphasized by community members and City leaders, but it is not required by State law. This chapter provides policies to diversify the economic base and expand employment opportunities by attracting new businesses and supporting existing businesses.

Chapter 5: Housing Element

Fulfills State requirements and certified by the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) in January 2021 as part of the 6th Cycle Housing Element update process. Adopted by the City Council in November 2020, the City of Atascadero 2021-2028 Housing Element is a coordinated and comprehensive strategy for promoting the production of safe, decent, and affordable housing for residents. In accordance with State law, Housing Elements are updated every eight years and thus is on a different update cycle than this General Plan

Chapter 6: Mobility Element

Fulfills State requirements for the Circulation Element and outlines policies to balance all modes of travel throughout Atascadero, with an emphasis on multi-modal transportation along major corridors, strategies to improve circulation at key intersections and freeway overpasses, and identifying opportunities for expanded bicycle routes and pedestrian connections and trails.

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Chapter 7: Recreation, Open Space, and Natural Resources Element

Fulfills State requirements for the Conservation and Open Space Elements, which focus on resource preservation, park space, and recreation resources.

Chapter 8: Public Services and Infrastructure Element

Addresses topics required for the Safety and Circulation Elements, including water supply, storage, and delivery, wastewater collection and treatment, flood control and stormwater management, solid waste management, energy, and telecommunications.

Chapter 9: Safety and Emergency Preparedness Element

Fulfills State requirements for the Safety and Noise Elements. This chapter establishes goals and policies regarding adequate emergency services and response systems, encompassing both preventative and proactive practices. It also outlines policies to protect the community from wildland fire hazards, noise, hazardous materials, adverse effects of climate change, and geological events.

Key Terms

Each chapter contains goals, policies, and actions crafted to achieve the community's vision.

- A **goal** is an overall statement of community desires and consists of a broad statement of purpose or direction. For each goal in the 2045 General Plan, associated and more definitive policy statements follow.
- A **policy** provides more specific guidance to the City Council, Planning Commission, other City commissions and boards, and City staff in their review of development proposals and other actions taken.
- Implementation **actions** further articulate how the City will achieve its goals and policies.

Implementation Categories

The 2045 General Plan is implemented in a variety of ways. Each policy and action include one or more of the abbreviations below to identify how they will be implemented. Many policies are implemented through City legislative or regulatory actions, while others require either new research or community partnerships. This approach of tracking how each policy is implemented allows City decision-makers and staff, business and property owners, residents, and the entire Atascadero community to actively monitor General Plan implementation progress.

Development Review [DR]

Many General Plan policies are implemented through regulations based on the City's "police power" to protect public health, safety, and welfare. City ordinances also create a development review process that provides for review of individual project proposals and authorizes the City to approve, conditionally approve, or deny projects based on their consistency with the General

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Plan. The following plans, ordinances, and procedures are commonly used by the City to implement the General Plan:

- Specific Plans
- Zoning Code
- Objective Design Standards
- Design Guidelines
- Subdivision Code
- Building Code
- Development Review Process
- Annexation Requirements

Master Plans [MP]

The City has adopted master plans, strategies, and programs for various City services and facilities, types of development, and geographic areas. These are prepared to provide more specific direction for decision-makers, staff, and the public about policy and program decisions in the future. They are not elements or components of the General Plan; rather, they are tools that implement the General Plan. Specific General Plan implementation programs call for the annual or periodic review of many of these master plans, strategies, and programs, in addition to adoption of new ones.

Financing and Budgeting [FB]

The development, maintenance, and operation of public facilities such as parks and civic buildings require financial resources derived from various sources. Programming of City capital projects and their funding, as outlined in the Capital Improvement Projects list, is updated annually. The following revenue sources used by or available to the City will continue to support the development, maintenance, and operation of public facilities and services:

- Property Tax Revenue
- Sales Tax Revenue
- User Fees
- Development Impact and Linkage Fees
- Community Facilities and Special Assessment Districts
- Municipal Bonds
- Special Taxes
- Regional Agency, State, and Federal Grants
- Other Regional Agency, State, and Federal Funding

Studies and Reports [SR]

The City conducts studies and produces reports to collect and evaluate information related to specific issues. These studies and reports are undertaken at the direction of the City Council as needed or are prepared annually to report on the status and implementation of the General Plan.

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Services and Operations [SO]

The City provides a broad range of services to its residents, businesses, and visitors, and manages and operates its facilities to meet community needs. How the City provides services and carries out its operations influence the effectiveness of General Plan implementation.

Agency Coordination [AC]

The City must coordinate with numerous local, regional, State, and Federal agencies to implement the General Plan. These agencies provide services, facilities, or funding, and administer regulations that directly or indirectly affect many issues addressed in the General Plan. The following is a partial list of public agencies that may play a role in implementing the General Plan:

- Adjacent jurisdictions, including San Luis Obispo County, with which Atascadero shares certain municipal services and facilities
- Local water provider
- Regional agencies such as SLO Council of Governments
- State agencies such as Caltrans, General Services, State Parks, the State Lands Commission, The Water Quality Control Board, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the California Environmental Protection Agency
- Federal agencies such as U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services, the U.S. Park Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency

Partnerships with the Private Sector [PA]

The City may coordinate its activities with private sector efforts to improve public service delivery, manage public sector assets, or leverage private sector investment. By exploring new partnerships with the private sector, the City can use its technical, management, and financial resources in creative ways to achieve the goals of the General Plan.

Public Information and Education [PI]

A critical City function is providing information to residents and the business community about the policies and programs being carried out to achieve community goals. This is done either digitally (City website, email blasts, social media) or through physical materials (mailers, newspaper ads).

User Groups

The 2045 General Plan is intended for use by a variety of individuals and organizations, including residents, businesses, developers, City staff, the City Council, and appointed boards and commissions.

Residents

For Atascadero residents, the General Plan indicates: 1) the overall uses that are permitted in various Atascadero neighborhoods and districts, 2) the long-range plans and changes that may affect different areas of the community, 3) the programs and services the City will develop or refine to improve quality of life, and 4) the policies the City will use to evaluate future development applications. Sections of the General Plan of most interest to residents include the Vision and Guiding Principles (see **Chapter 2**), Land Use and Community Form Element (see **Chapter 3**), Mobility Element (see **Chapter 6**), Recreation and Open Space Element (see **Chapter 7**), and Safety and Emergency Preparedness Element (see **Chapter 9**).

Businesses

For Atascadero businesses, the General Plan outlines the actions the City will take in support of local business and to expand and diversify the local economy. General Plan sections of most interest to businesses include the Vision and Guiding Principles (see **Chapter 2**), Land Use and Community Form Element (see **Chapter 3**), Economic Development Element (see **Chapter 4**), Mobility Element (see **Chapter 6**), and Safety and Emergency Preparedness Element (see **Chapter 9**).

Developers

For developers looking to build in and contribute in a positive manner to Atascadero, the General Plan provides an overview of the Atascadero community, summarizes its vision, and outlines the overarching policies and expectations for development. Developers should review all elements of the General Plan to gain an understanding of challenges and opportunities related to land use and economic development. Other applicable documents, such as specific plans and the Zoning Ordinance, should also be reviewed to gain a complete perspective on the City's regulatory documents and processes.

City Staff

City staff uses the General Plan to make decisions related to programs and services, capital improvement projects, and land use and development applications. The Plan also provides the goal and policy framework for City staff to make land use recommendations to the City Council, Planning Commission, and other boards and commissions. In addition, the General Plan provides a detailed implementation program that identifies actions to be completed by City staff. The implementation programs can be used as a guide to establish annual work programs and budgets.

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City Council, Boards, and Commissions

For the City Council and appointed boards and commissions, the General Plan guides policy and development decisions and actions on capital improvement projects. Future land use and development decisions and infrastructure improvements must be consistent with the General Plan.