



Chapter 3: Land Use and Community Form Element

Introduction

Nestled between the Salinas River to the east and oak-covered hillsides of the Santa Lucia Mountains to the west, Atascadero is a vibrant community with a rich history and rural community form. While Atascadero's nascent land use pattern was established by and built to conform to the 1913 Colony Plan, over 100 years of development, evolving community needs, and external influences—most notably the 1954 construction of Highway 101 through the middle of Atascadero—have resulted in a community largely organized around two major corridors: El Camino Real and Highway 41. Businesses predominate along the corridors, with single-family residential neighborhoods extending east and west. This Land Use and Community Form Element accounts for the City's history of growth and development but is intentionally forward thinking about how Atascadero can evolve into a more mixed-use and job-rich community, supported by a range of new housing types, businesses formats, walkable neighborhoods, and a dynamic and active Downtown.

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Grounded on the community vision (see **Chapter 2**) this chapter establishes the framework for short- and long-term decisions about land use and development patterns. The primary objective is to accommodate moderate growth that respects established neighborhoods, historical assets, and natural landscapes.

Integral to the vision is preservation of the qualities that distinguish the community. Residents consistently tout the balance Atascadero achieves between accommodating rural lifestyles and providing places more suburban in nature. This General Plan continues to implement the Urban Services Line (see **Figure 1-2**).

Land Use and Community Form Priorities

To ensure Atascadero has the right mix of land uses, range of housing types, job-rich commercial and mixed-use districts, a thriving economy, and vibrant Downtown, this General Plan addresses the following land use and community attributes.

Atascadero's Authentic Character

Atascadero is a unique place. The community values Atascadero's special character, with a strong will to preserve these features when exploring opportunities for growth. The people make Atascadero the supportive, family-oriented community that it is, and the General Plan needs to promote areas to gather, recreate, socialize, and conduct business as the community grows and evolves.

Rural Residential Focus

Atascadero's predominant land use, in terms of total acreage, consists of large lot homesites with a rural character, encompassing over 9,000 acres (just over 41 percent of the City). Most of these homesites lie west of Highway 101, beyond the Urban Services Line, and extend to the northern and southern edges of the City limits. Terrain and the absence of sewer service will continue to limit growth west of Highway 101.

Commercial Corridors

Commercial businesses extend over seven miles along El Camino Real and Morro Road south of El Camino. Industrial uses are concentrated along the northeastern fringe of the City, along Traffic Way and the Salinas River. No other areas of Atascadero are suitable for business activity based on topography and infrastructure limitations, so land use decisions will need to account for the City's strategic job growth objectives and provide space for desired local businesses.

Housing Affordability

Housing affordability is a continuing concern voiced by the community, both locally and throughout the region. The type and size of housing has made it challenging for younger residents and first-time home buyers to find housing that they can afford. Regional desirability and the increasing ease of remote work resulted in people moving to Atascadero from the Los Angeles and Bay Area regions, tightening the housing market. Expanding the range of housing types and

affordability in Atascadero has become more critical to meet the needs of long-time residents. Higher density, multi-family, and accessory dwelling unit (ADU) projects all represent ways to increase the supply of affordable housing for the local workforce.

Jobs-Housing Balance

In 2024, Atascadero had a job-to-housing ratio of 0.77, indicating substantially more households than jobs in the City. Over 10,700 Atascadero residents were employed outside of the City in 2019, while 6,000 employees traveled to Atascadero for work. The jobs-to-housing imbalance has persisted over time, with one reason being that the land area available to support large-scale employment centers is limited. However, evolving technologies and the ways that business is conducted mean that limited space can be used more efficiently. The City's economic development strategy focuses on attracting a greater diversity of businesses that create new jobs for residents, as well as placemaking to support commercial synergy and vitality. Land use policy in this element supports this objective.

Strategic, Targeted, and Managed Growth

The City is committed to accommodating and planning for future growth through higher allowed housing densities and expanded opportunities for job-generating businesses, all within the Urban Services Line. Areas targeted for change and growth are close to the Downtown and along El Camino Real and Morro Road, creating a synergy of focused land uses at key nodes along the each corridor. This element supports these two key City objectives, and any public infrastructure improvements needed to support this growth will occur in line with these objectives.

- Moving toward a 1.0 jobs/housing ratio, meaning local employment opportunities will increase. This objective aims to achieve a balance between the number of available jobs and the number of workforce residents within a community, potentially resulting in enhanced economic vitality, improved quality of life and affordability, and reduced commutes and vehicle miles traveled. These initiatives will limit environmental impacts associated with growth.
- Focusing new housing production on the creation of higher-density development, thereby diversifying the housing stock and accommodating households of all income levels. This includes a combination of traditional multi-family style development, missing middle style development, and incremental neighborhood infill development to create a range of housing types and settings.

Land use policy will allow for approximately 4,800 new jobs and 4,500 new dwelling units relative to the 2024 baseline. Planned residential density increases could increase Atascadero's population by approximately 7,800 people. The forecasted growth included in this General Plan is shown on **Table 3-1**.

Table 3-1: General Plan Forecasted Growth			
Type	Baseline (2024)	General Plan Horizon Year (2045)	Net Change (2024 – 2045)
Dwelling Units (total)	12,660	15,550	+2,890
<i>Single-Units</i>	9,786	9,991	+205
<i>Multi-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

1. Population includes the city’s population (29,365) and group quarters (1,318) at Atascadero State Hospital.

2. 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 1.0 ratio (or 1:1), 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.

Maintaining the historic Colony land use pattern and rural character of Atascadero is of utmost importance to residents. This will be achieved using Placetypes to guide and accommodate Atascadero’s desired growth through 2045. Placetypes, or land use classifications, illustrate the type, character, and density/intensity of development envisioned. This will ensure compatibility with Atascadero’s established character while creating a vision for growth.

Placetypes and Land Use Plan

To identify existing and planned land uses throughout the Planning Area, this General Plan uses a designator system consisting of “Placetypes.” Each Placetype category defines both the primary uses of land allowed and the character of those uses. Placetypes are broad enough to provide flexibility in implementation and clear enough to provide sufficient direction to carry out the General Plan. While most of the Placetypes reflect existing and long-established development types such as Rural Residential, Commercial, and Industrial, three new Placetypes are established as part of this General Plan: High Density Multi-Family, Mixed Use, and Innovation/Flex.

Table 3-2 summarizes each Placetype, including generally allowed uses, development intensities, and corresponding zoning districts. The extent to which properties may be developed or redeveloped over time is expressed in terms of density (ranges) for residential uses and intensity (maximums) for nonresidential development.

Density reflects how many units may be built per acre of land (dwelling units per acre). Intensity is analyzed using a floor-area ratio (FAR) metric for analysis purposes, which measures the building square footage on a property relative to the size of that property. Density and intensity

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do not control building height, setbacks, required open space area, or other development parameters. The Zoning Code establishes how density and intensity are implemented citywide through development standards and other provisions.

The General Plan Land Use Plan (see **Figure 3-1**) illustrates the planned distribution, location, and extent of future land uses within Atascadero and the sphere of influence. Beyond what is required by State law, each Placetype is further described to inspire the general character, desired building types, and streetscape elements.

Table 3-2: Placetypes

Placetype	Density and Intensity	Primary Use(s)	Corresponding Zoning Districts	Character
RURAL RESIDENTIAL One home on a lot generally greater than one acre in size, depending on slope conditions	0.1 – 1 unit per gross acre	Residential	Residential Rural – 2.5-10 acres Residential Suburban: 1.5-2.5 acres	
SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL One home on a lot generally one-acre or less in size	1 – 4 unit per gross or net acre (<i>zone district dependent</i>)	Residential	Residential Single Family – 1 acre Residential Single Family – 0.5 acre Residential Small Lot Single Family	
LOW DENSITY MULTI-FAMILY Duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, and cottage clusters	5 – 12 units per net acre	Residential	Low Density Multi-Family Residential	

Table 3-2: Placetypes

Placetype	Density and Intensity	Primary Use(s)	Corresponding Zoning Districts	Character
MEDIUM DENSITY MULTI-FAMILY Duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, cottage clusters, townhomes, and mobile home parks	13 – 24 units per net acre	Residential	Medium Density Multi-Family Residential	
HIGH DENSITY MULTI-FAMILY Apartments and condominiums	25 – 36 units per net acre	Residential	High Density Multi-Family Residential	
MIXED USE Combined commercial and residential uses on a project site	20 – 36 units per net acre 1.0 FAR	Residential Commercial Civic and Institutional	Mixed Use – Commercial 1 Mixed Use – Commercial 2 Mixed Use – Office	

Table 3-2: Placetypes

Placetype	Density and Intensity	Primary Use(s)	Corresponding Zoning Districts	Character
DOWNTOWN MIXED USE Mix of civic, dining, shopping, recreation, residential, entertainment, and other pedestrian-oriented uses	20 – 45 units per net acre 3.0 FAR	Residential Commercial Civic and Institutional	Downtown Commercial Downtown Office	
COMMERCIAL Retail stores, offices, restaurants, entertainment, and service uses	0.6 FAR	Commercial	Commercial Commercial Service	
INNOVATION/FLEX Research and development, light manufacturing, creative industries, and dining	0.6 FAR	Commercial Light Industrial	Commercial Innovation	

Table 3-2: Placetypes				
Placetype	Density and Intensity	Primary Use(s)	Corresponding Zoning Districts	Character
INDUSTRIAL Manufacturing, materials processing, assembly, and limited storage	0.8 FAR	Industrial and Warehousing Transportation and Utilities	Industrial	
PUBLIC/QUASI-PUBLIC Government facilities, public schools, and private utilities	0.8 FAR	Civic and Institutional	Public	
CONSERVATION/PARKS/OPEN SPACE Parks and recreation and community-serving uses, habitat preserves, rivers and creeks, other protected lands	Not applicable	Conservation Parks and Recreation Open Space	Recreation – Parks Conservation/ Parks/OS Conservation/ Parks/OS	

Table 3-2: Placetypes				
Placetype	Density and Intensity	Primary Use(s)	Corresponding Zoning Districts	Character
AGRICULTURE Livestock, crop production, and one home on a lot one acre or larger in size, depending on slope conditions	0.1-0.4 units per gross acre	Agriculture Residential	Agriculture	



RURAL RESIDENTIAL

General Location

Rural Residential is the prevalent Placetype outside the Urban Services Line. Within the Urban Services Line, Rural Residential is concentrated west of Highway 101 and east of El Camino Real north from San Benito Road and east from the Southern Pacific Railroad corridor.

Character and Typical Development

Rural Residential neighborhoods are well established and rural in nature. Development is characterized by large lots (1.5 to 10+ acres) and large setbacks, single-family detached homes, vacant land, and livestock.

Major Corridor(s) or Mobility Characteristics

The road network in Rural Residential areas supports low traffic volumes and is primarily composed of winding, tree-lined local streets, some of which have no outlet.

Defining Features

- Steep topography
- Ample private outdoor space
- Dependent on onsite wastewater facilities



SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL

General Location

Single-Family Residential is the prevalent Placetype within the Urban Services Line, outside the Downtown core and commercial corridors. This Placetype buffers the Rural Residential Placetype from other, more intensive residential and commercial uses.

Character and Typical Development

Single-Family Residential neighborhoods are well established and suburban in nature. Development is characterized by medium to large lots (less than or equal to one acre) occupied by single-family detached homes. Additional characteristics include irregular block shapes, curvilinear streets, absence of streetlights, and limited or no sidewalks. The smaller lot size zone within this designation allow opportunities for missing middle and gentle density style infill development.

Major Corridor(s) or Mobility Characteristics

The road network in Single-Family Residential areas supports low traffic volumes and is primarily composed of narrow local streets. Key connections from Single-Family Residential neighborhoods to major corridors/destinations include San Anselmo Road, San Jacinto Avenue, Curbaril Avenue, Portola Road, and Santa Lucia Road.

Defining Features

- Private outdoor space
- Proximity to nearby parks, recreation opportunities, shopping, and public facilities



LOW DENSITY MULTI-FAMILY

General Location

Low Density Multi-Family neighborhoods are concentrated adjacent to more urban uses, positioned between the Mixed Use and Single-Family Residential Placetypes.

Character and Typical Development

Low Density Multi-Family neighborhoods continue to grow in Atascadero, providing a mix of housing types and affordability. Development in this Placetype is urban in nature and characterized by detached and attached multi-unit development (cottage cluster, duplex, triplex, fourplex, multiplex with 5+ units). Additional characteristics include irregular block shapes, streets that run parallel and/or connect to major corridors, on-street parking, and sidewalks.

Major Corridor(s) or Mobility Characteristics

The road network in Low Density Multi-Family areas supports low traffic volumes and is primarily composed of local streets. Key connections from Low Density Multi-Family neighborhoods to major corridors/destinations include San Benito Road, Rosario Avenue, Curbaril Avenue, Atascadero Avenue, and San Andres Avenue.

Defining Features

- Private and/or shared amenities (e.g., entries, outdoor space, driveway, pedestrian path)
- Pedestrian and bicycle access to and from nearby parks, recreation opportunities, shopping, and public facilities
- Consolidated or shared parking



MEDIUM DENSITY MULTI-FAMILY

General Location

Medium Density Multi-Family is concentrated along major corridors, including El Camino Real, Morro Road, and Traffic Way, in addition to adjacent streets. This Placetype acts as a buffer between nonresidential or mixed-use and lower-density residential uses.

Character and Typical Development

Medium Density Multi-Family neighborhoods continue to grow in Atascadero, providing a mix of housing types and affordability. Development in this Placetype is urban in nature and characterized by detached and attached multi-unit development (duplex, triplex, fourplex, and multiplex with 5+ units). Additional characteristics include irregular block shapes, streets that run parallel and/or connect to major corridors, and sidewalks.

Major Corridor(s) or Mobility Characteristics

The road network in Medium Density Multi-Family areas supports moderate traffic volumes and is primarily composed of collector and arterial streets. Key connections from Medium Density Multi-Family neighborhoods to major corridors/destinations include La Linia Avenue, Santa Ysabel Avenue, Santa Ynez Avenue, Curbaril Avenue, Atascadero Avenue, and San Andres Avenue.

Defining Features

- Private and/or shared amenities (e.g., entries, outdoor space, driveway, pedestrian path)
- Pedestrian and bicycle access to and from nearby parks, recreation opportunities, and public facilities
- On-street and consolidated or shared parking



HIGH DENSITY MULTI-FAMILY

General Location

High Density Multi-Family is concentrated along the southern segment of El Camino Real, between Paloma Park and Santa Rosa Road. Additional High-Density Multi-Family areas are located near the Downtown core.

Character and Typical Development

This Placetype is intended to promote high-density residential development to support commercial nodes and enhance neighborhood vibrancy. This Placetype is characterized by moderate residential building heights of a more urban character, including apartments and condominiums with shared entrances and open spaces. Lower-scale structures are typically found in areas transitioning to surrounding residential neighborhoods. Transitions between Placetypes are established with development standards in the Zoning Code.

Major Corridor(s) or Mobility Characteristics

Key connections from High Density Multi-Family neighborhoods to major corridors/destinations include El Bordo Avenue, Santa Lucia Avenue, and Atascadero Avenue. High Density Multi-Family areas front or back up to El Camino Real.

Defining Features

- Private and/or shared amenities (e.g., entries, outdoor space)
- Pedestrian, bicycle, and transit connectivity to major corridors and community amenities
- On-street and consolidated shared parking



MIXED USE

General Location

Mixed Use is generally concentrated near major intersections, as well as along El Camino Real and Morro Road between El Camino Real and Atascadero Lake Park.

Character and Typical Development

This Placetype is intended to promote a flexible and compatible mix of residential and commercial uses in focused areas. A commercial land use dominates the street facing façade or ground floor of a mixed-use project, while office and residential dominate the upper floors (vertical mixed-use) or buildings that are set back from a public street (horizontal mixed-use). Each area that includes the Mixed Use Placetype is unique. The composition and mix of permitted uses are established by zoning districts in the Zoning Code. Development may allow for a horizontal or vertical mix of commercial and residential uses, depending on zoning district. This Placetype is characterized by moderate-scale residential and commercial building heights that promote urban character. Buildings are oriented toward the street to encourage pedestrian activity.

Major Corridor(s) or Mobility Characteristics

Mixed Use areas generally abut arterial and collector roads and have direct frontage along these major corridors. Parking is generally on-site with limited street parking.

Defining Features

- Multi-family residential developments, either above or adjacent to commercial uses
- Neighborhood-serving retail, office, and services
- Employment centers
- Active ground-floor uses
- High pedestrian and bicycle activity due to streetscape improvements
- Focal points of economic investment and activity
- Shared and on-street parking
- Shared or private amenities

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DOWNTOWN MIXED USE

General Location

Downtown extends north of Morro Road and south of Rosario Avenue along El Camino Real, Traffic Way, and adjacent cross streets.

Character and Typical Development

Downtown Mixed Use encourages an eclectic and complementary mix of uses, pedestrian-scale development, and locally owned retail and restaurant businesses with upper-story residential and office units. Ground-floor uses should consist of businesses with a weekday, evening, and weekend presence. The Downtown Mixed Use Placetype is characterized by moderate to high building heights to promote urban character. This district has the highest density of any district.

Major Corridor(s) or Mobility Characteristics

The 0.6-mile Downtown corridor extends along El Camino Real from Rosario Avenue to the intersection of State Route 41. High levels of pedestrian and bicycle use occur throughout the Downtown core, and this district has the greatest access to transit. A street grid, with consistent block shapes and sizes surrounds City Hall. Short walking distances, sidewalks, street trees, street parking, and access to the Sunken Gardens Park and the Salinas River corridor encourage pedestrian activity.

Defining Features

- Civic center
- Vibrant, walkable, town center
- Active ground-floor commercial uses, many of which are open during evening hours and/or weekends
- Buildings have consistent orientation with no or shallow front setbacks or with recessed storefronts for outdoor dining
- Minimized on-site parking



COMMERCIAL

General Location

Commercial Placetypes are concentrated along El Camino Real adjacent to major intersections with San Ramon, Del Rio, San Anselmo, Morro Road and Santa Rosa Road, particularly where these intersections have access to Highway 101. This Placetype is generally adjacent to Mixed Use, Innovation/Flex, and Multi-Family Placetypes.

Character and Typical Development

Commercial uses include regional- and local-serving retail, restaurants, office, tourist, and service businesses with easy access to and from residential neighborhoods. Development is characterized by single-use commercial buildings, multi-tenant shopping centers, and office buildings. Commercial tenants may include businesses targeted toward visitors to Atascadero, such as breweries, distilleries, and recreation hubs. Uses with outdoor storage are not typically permitted. Residential and Mixed-Use are adjacent to, but not within, this district to prioritize commercial activities and reduce conflict between uses.

Major Corridor(s) or Mobility Characteristics

Commercial areas about El Camino Real and are in locations with easy access to Highway 101. Multi-modal access is encouraged as well as on-street parking to supplement on-site parking areas.

Defining Features

- Retail, tourist, and employment based
- Day-to-day needs for residents, visitors, and employees

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INNOVATION/FLEX

General Location

Innovation/Flex is concentrated along El Camino Real between Santa Cruz Road and San Anselmo Road, Morro Road and Curbaril, and Palomar and Principal Avenue.

Character and Typical Development

This Placetype is intended to promote opportunities for startup businesses and head-of-household jobs and provide spaces that can be adaptable to a variety of compatible uses as workforce trends evolve. This Placetype should attract concentrations of production, design, and maker-space businesses as well as uses that support those businesses and the people that work there. Development is characterized by multi-tenant buildings, often with office or retail uses oriented toward the street and light industrial/manufacturing in the back. Scale varies greatly dependent upon the surrounding context and character. Innovation/Flex has the potential to serve as a primary place for employment and commerce in the Central Coast region in support of emerging technologies and space innovations. Uses with outdoor storage are not permitted except in appropriate locations and limited quantities, and all subject to discretionary review. Residential and Mixed-Use are adjacent to, but not within, this district to prioritize commercial activities and reduce conflict between uses.

Major Corridor(s) or Mobility Characteristics

Innovation/Flex areas generally abut El Camino Real, with some areas along adjacent collector roads. Most of the parking is located on-site, but some on-street parking may be provided.

Defining Features

- Employment center providing opportunities for a mix of job types/experience
- Desired industries and businesses include but are not limited to research and design, labs, robotics and technology, and artisan business such as microbreweries, and small-scale wineries and distilleries, as well as artisanal food and craft production
- Supportive uses may include restaurants, hotels, and offices



INDUSTRIAL

General Location

Industrial is limited to two areas within Atascadero: along Traffic Way/Sycamore Road and as part of the Woodlands Specific Plan (Las Lomas Neighborhood) at Halcon Road/the Southern Pacific Railroad corridor.

Character and Typical Development

Industrial uses typically include heavy and moderately intense manufacturing, distribution, and vehicle-related uses. Development consists of varying-sized industrial buildings, either as stand-alone businesses or as part of an integrated development. These areas are intended to support industry that contributes to the fiscal health of the City.

Major Corridor(s) or Mobility Characteristics

Industrial areas abut Sycamore Road, Traffic Way, and Halcon Road. As these areas abut streets where pedestrian linkage to bordering uses is a priority, streets include pedestrian paths and bike lanes. Where areas abut the Salinas River, incorporation of trails or landscape setbacks and buffering to recreational areas is integrated. Parking is concentrated on-site.

Defining Features

- Access to Highway 101 and State Route 41
- Larger parcels for a mix of tenant uses
- Buffers between industrial and surrounding uses (e.g., landscaping, open space, large setbacks, gradual changes in density)
- Screening from the public rights-of-way



PUBLIC/QUASI-PUBLIC

General Location

Public/Quasi-Public parcels are distributed throughout the City based on the location of existing facilities, mostly within the Urban Services Line.

Character and Typical Development

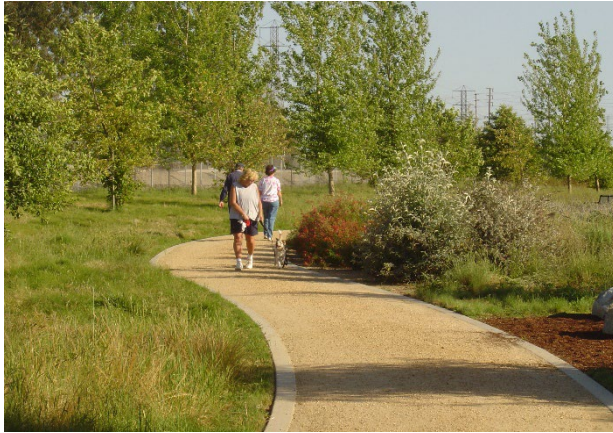
Public/Quasi-Public parcels are set aside for governmental or semi-public facilities, such as hospitals, schools, utilities, and government offices/facilities or related uses such as cemeteries. However, such public facilities may also be allowed in areas with other Placetypes, provided they comply with applicable Zoning Code standards.

Major Corridor(s) or Mobility Characteristics

The road network that connects the Public/Quasi-Public Placetype to surrounding areas is primarily composed of arterial and collector streets.

Defining Features

- Civic buildings, formal public spaces, emergency services, schools, State facilities, and community centers
- Atascadero State Hospital



CONSERVATION/PARKS/OPEN SPACE

General Location

Most of the land designated Conservation/Parks/Open Space lies along the Salinas River, Atascadero Creek, and Graves Creek. The Three Bridges Oak Preserve is the largest Conservation/Open Space area outside the Urban Services Line. Multiple City parks are located throughout the community to serve adjacent neighborhoods and citywide sports needs. The City also includes Heilman Park, which is owned and maintained by the County of San Luis Obispo.

Character and Typical Development

The Conservation/Parks/Open Space Placetype applies to lands:

- Currently used or planned for parks or recreation purposes, including trail corridors, sports fields, community gathering spaces, and equestrian facilities
- Identified as a park or creek reservation parcel
- Established for conservation purposes due to the presence of sensitive wildlife or habitats

Land designated for these uses include both publicly and privately owned land. See **Chapter 7** for additional details, including a summary of park types.

Major Corridor(s) or Mobility Characteristics

Parks are located throughout the community, with larger scale facilities generally located off arterials and collector streets and smaller neighborhood serving spaces off local roads. Parking may be provided on-street or on-site.

Defining Features

- Atascadero's park system (as of 2024) includes regional parks, community parks, neighborhood parks and special use parks, trails, equestrian facilities, natural areas, and open space.
- City recreation facilities include the Atascadero Lake Pavilion, Central Coast Zoo, and Colony Park Community Center.



AGRICULTURE

General Location

The Agriculture Placetype applies to two areas in Atascadero: an approximately 44-acre area adjacent to Graves Creek south of Balboa Road and an approximately 27-acre area along the Salinas River east of the Las Lomas neighborhood (Woodlands Specific Plan area).

Character and Typical Development

This Placetype designates lands to be used for agricultural activities, including field crops, orchards, and ranching and livestock raising, with the Zoning Code identifying specific permitted uses and operational standards. Allowed accessory uses include single-family detached homes and housing for agriculture employees, as permitted by the Zoning Code. Uses may also allow opportunities for public facing commercial uses such as event areas and bed and breakfasts.

Major Corridor(s) or Mobility Characteristics

Agricultural areas are largely served by local, rural roads.

Defining Features

- Graves Creek
- Tree farms, cropland, grasslands, ranching and livestock, and undeveloped land

Land Use and Community Form Goals, Policies, and Actions

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

- Citywide Growth and Development
- Key Nodes and Corridors
- Morro Road (Highway 41)
- Industrial Areas
- Downtown

Citywide Growth and Development

Atascadero is a collection of wonderfully diverse neighborhoods, commercial centers, streets, parks, and open space areas, all having their own unique character—and with some needing focused attention to create more vibrancy and long-term community vitality. The following goals, policies, and actions look to maintain the qualities that distinguish Atascadero and further neighborhood preservation, economic development, resource protection, and overall community well-being objectives.

Goal LU-1: Growth integrated and compatible with established land use patterns and the community aesthetic

Policy LU-1.1: Rural Character. Safeguard the rural character of Atascadero including the concept of “elbow room,” which calls for maintaining larger minimum lot sizes and lower-density and lower-intensity standards proportionate to the distance from the Downtown core and major corridors.

Action A: Maintain performance standards for determining minimum residential lot size in the Rural Residential Placetype.

Action B: Maintain “dark sky” requirements to minimize light pollution.

Action C: Provide streetlights only in the Downtown, along El Camino Real, at major intersections, and locations where street safety is of concern.

Action D: Maintain allowances for where livestock may be owned and kept within the Rural Residential, Single-Family Residential, and Agriculture Placetypes.

Action E: Continue to require undergrounding of utilities for new development.

Policy LU-1.2: Urban Services Line (USL). Concentrate new and infill development within the Urban Services Line in areas where utilities and public services exist.

Action A: Revisit density and intensity requirements for land use(s) if sewer extends into new areas.

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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.

Policy LU-1.3: Character and Scale. Ensure new and infill development complements the character and scale of existing neighborhoods, cultural resources, historic structures, and natural landscapes.

Action A: Maintain design standards that address the transitions between multi-family and mixed-use development and adjacent lower-density residential zones.

Action B: Provide parking/loading from secondary streets, wherever possible, to maintain an active frontage along major corridors.

Action C: Create a transition in density of development on large parcels moving back from El Camino Real.

Action D: Update or replace the Appearance Review Manual for nonresidential development.

Action E: Undertake a comprehensive Zoning Code update.

Action F: Continue abatement programs to remove unsafe buildings and require the cleanup of premises and vacant lots with code violations.

Policy LU-1.4: Gentle Density Infill. Allow opportunities for missing middle and gentle density style infill development surrounding mixed-use and commercial corridors.

Action A: Support the development of multi-family residential, including missing middle housing, in the neighborhoods adjacent to commercial corridors, including the neighborhood bordered by Morro Road, Highway 101, and Portola Road, as a way to increase density and maintain community character.

Policy LU-1.5: Historic Resources. Encourage the conservation and preservation of structures and houses that have historical and architectural significance.

Action A: Maintain a comprehensive Historic Resources Inventory.

Action B: Continue to implement the California Historical Building Code in review, approval, and design of projects involving historic resources.

Action C: Utilize the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Properties to assess proposed improvements to historic properties.

Action D: Develop incentives for retaining and rehabilitating Atascadero's historic resources, which may include exceptions to development regulations, conservation districts, staff technical assistance, programs to facilitate relocation instead of demolition, and Mill's Act contracts.

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Policy LU-1.6: Specific Plans. Adopt, update, and implement specific plans as necessary to address community needs and changing demographic, economic, and market conditions.

Action A: Require the preparation of a specific plan for single-family subdivision developments over 100 units to address fiscal and environmental impacts, community benefits, and neighborhood compatibility.

Action B: Update existing Specific Plans and Overlay Zones to be consistent with the General Plan.

Action C: Utilize Specific Plans to streamline the development process and incentivize development through modified development standards.

Policy LU-1.7: Regional Impacts. Coordinate with neighboring cities and community services districts, the County of San Luis Obispo, and regional transportation agencies to plan for growth and minimize regional impacts.

Action A: Continue to coordinate with the County to maintain rural land use patterns, agriculture, and open space uses beyond the City limit.

Action B: Discourage land use changes by the County within the Colony boundary that would result in more intensive or higher density development, particularly in unincorporated areas and east of the Salinas River.

Action C: Develop financial agreement(s) with the County to recoup the costs to the City if development occurs beyond the City limit that would rely on City services or infrastructure.

Action D: Update the County Memorandum of Understanding requiring City comment on development proposals in the area between Vineyard Drive and Cuesta Grade, between the ridges east of the Salinas River, and Cerro Alto Campground.

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 prior to annexation.

Action C: Require the approval of a Specific Plan prior to the annexation of the Eagle Ranch property.

Key Nodes and Corridors

Atascadero is defined by its two major corridors: El Camino Real and Morro Road (Highway 41). These thoroughfares have been the centers of retail, commercial, and office uses since Atascadero's historic Colony founding. They act as the "spines" of the community—connecting residential neighborhoods to employment centers, schools, civic uses, parks, highways and freeways, and adjacent cities. To support local and regional commercial, office, and housing needs, these corridors must be improved, as described in the Mobility Element (see **Chapter 6**). They should be enhanced with more pedestrian, bicycle and transit facilities; supported by focused development standards that promote placemaking and a pleasing pedestrian environment; and encouraged to redevelop to meet the current and future community needs.

Focused and intentional development in Downtown and along the major corridors maintains Atascadero's "elbow room" principle, which calls for maintaining larger minimum lot sizes and lower density and intensity standards proportionate to distance from the Downtown core and major corridors. Areas of change and growth in this Plan center around the following principles:

- Areas that support the growth and community design objectives outlined in the Vision Statement and Guiding Principles (see **Chapter 2**).
- Areas designated for and developed with commercial, office, mixed use, or industrial uses.
- Areas along major corridors and near Highway 101 that have good access to local and regional road networks, pedestrian and bicycle amenities, and civic destinations.
- Areas that have infrastructure available to support new and more intensive commercial and residential development.
- Areas that have the potential to become more walkable and economically viable as new and more intensive development occurs.
- Areas where increased residential density can support intensified commercial activity and economic vitality.
- Underutilized commercial areas where the City can capitalize on redevelopment efforts and shape development to accommodate uses that support the City's desire for a more balanced jobs-housing ratio.

Goal LU-2: Enhanced major corridors that serve regional and local needs by creating focused, distinct, and economically viable nodes

Policy LU-2.1: Innovation/Flex Areas. Create innovation areas that allow and encourage a mix of lighter, creative employment uses, entertainment, and services.

Action A: Allow property owners to convert and reuse existing buildings for creative commercial, light industrial, and office use.

Action B: Maintain and update uses in the Innovation/Flex zone to allow for restaurant and entertainment uses that are compatible with light industrial and artisan uses.

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Action C: Maintain innovation/flex areas for non-residential uses to prioritize commercial activities without conflict with incompatible uses.

Policy LU-2.2: Commercial Vitality. Maintain key areas for commercial and employment uses that are incompatible with integrated residential uses.

Action A: Focus commercial retail development at key nodes to create commercial synergy and destinations for shopping and entertainment.

Action B: Maintain larger parcels of land to accommodate large format uses (e.g., business headquarters, light manufacturing, regional retail, and tourist-serving uses) at strategic locations along major corridors and key nodes.

Action C: Maintain key commercial nodes for non-residential uses to prioritize commercial activities without conflict with incompatible uses.

Policy LU-2.3: Mid-block Infill. Promote flexible land use patterns in areas between activity nodes along El Camino Real and support increased residential densities adjacent to and along commercial corridors to support commercial business activity and growth

Action A: Encourage infill mixed-use development between commercial nodes along El Camino Real to support the economic vitality of commercial centers.

Action B: Explore flexibility in standards for mixed-use development on commercially zoned mid-block infill lots where commercial use potential is limited.

Action C: Increase residential density in areas adjacent to key commercial nodes to support commercial viability and economic vitality.

Action D: Consider utilizing Development Agreements to allow for mid-block multi-family development in exchange for commercial development/redevelopment at key locations.

Policy LU-2.4: Mixed-Use Areas. Create mixed-use districts in locations that benefit from the synergy of commercial and residential uses.

Action A: Focus vertical mixed-use development at key nodes where a ground floor commercial presence is a priority.

Action B: Provide opportunities for horizontal mixed-use developments on deep or double frontage lots where ground floor commercial uses are focused along the primary street frontage.

Action C: Prioritize land uses in mixed-use areas that generate tax revenue, attract economic activity, create jobs, and cater to residents and short-term visitors.

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Policy LU-2.5: Multi-Modal Corridors. Improve pedestrian and bicycle facilities along El Camino Real and Morro Road. Major corridors should be safe, comfortable, and enjoyable for pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers alike.

Action A: Continue to make circulation and safety improvements in coordination and collaboration with the Public Works Department and consistent with this General Plan (see **Chapter 6**).

Action B: Require new development to provide pedestrian, bicycle, and trail alignments and facilities consistent with the Mobility Element (see **Chapter 6**).

Action C: Adopt plan lines for new neighborhood streets that allow for and support orderly development with increased residential density.

Action D: Support Caltrans' completion of its Morro Road complete streets plan to include pedestrian facilities and a safe buffer between the bike lane and travel/parking lanes.

Action E: Improve pedestrian and bicycle safety measures at intersections along major corridors.

Action F: Enhance entries to Atascadero along El Camino Real with gateway design elements (e.g., signage, entry monuments, landscaping, lighting, etc.).

Action G: Find locations for safe mid-block crossings on El Camino Real to connect neighborhoods and commercial centers.

Morro Road (Highway 41)

Goal LU-3: A new professional office, retail, and employment area focused on (but not limited to) the medical industry, including research and development uses

Policy LU-3.1: Medical/Office Development. Support medical, office, and supporting commercial uses along the Morro Road corridor.

Action A: Prioritize land uses along the Morro Road corridor that attract medical and healthcare-related businesses, generate high-quality jobs, and accommodate long- and short-term workforce needs.

Action B: Incentivize the relocation of existing medical offices and other weekday-only oriented uses from Downtown to the Morro Road corridor.

Policy LU-3.2: Increased residential density. Increase residential density within and adjacent to the Morro Rod corridor to support commercial and office viability.

Action A: Support higher density multi-family development between Morro Road and Atascadero Creek.

Action B: Develop standards for horizontal and vertical mixed use along Morro Road.

Industrial Areas

Goal LU-4: A dedicated, focused area for industrial activity that minimizes impact on nearby residential neighborhoods and protected open space areas

Policy LU-4.1: Employment Opportunity/Diversity. Protect and enhance viable industrial uses to retain job employment opportunities and job diversity.

Action A: Provide zoning flexibility for adaptive reuse of heavy industrial buildings.

Action B: Ensure that the properties along Via Ave are developed to maximize spaces for jobs, industry, and/or commerce. Partner with the property owners to develop a comprehensive master plan for the area.

Policy LU-4.2: Research and Development. Transition away from heavy industrial and storage uses in favor of light industrial uses.

Action A: Prohibit future uses solely devoted to outdoor storage in industrial areas.

Action B: Adopt development standards that focus on creating buildings and spaces that can be adapted over time and respond to changing trends. Consider a form based code for new development in the Industrial Zone.

Policy LU-4.3: Buffer Industrial Uses. Provide buffers between industrial and residential uses. Focus heavy industrial sites away from residential uses.

Action A: Establish standards for new industrial uses adjacent to existing residential and commercial uses, and standards for new residential and commercial uses adjacent to existing industrial uses.

Action B: Develop standards for the interface between industrial development and adjacent creeks and rivers. Consider requirements for public trails and access where appropriate.

Action C: Focus landscaping, including street trees and visual landscape buffers along Traffic Way and Sycamore Ave to enhance the pedestrian and bike connections between adjacent commercial and residential neighborhoods as well as adjacent schools.

Downtown

Goal LU-5: A Downtown core celebrated by the community, with places to shop, be entertained, live, gather outside, learn, and engage in civic discourse

Policy LU-5.1: Community Vibrancy. Intensify the Downtown core with restaurants, community-serving retail, shopping, and entertainment opportunities for residents and visitors.

Action A: Update the Downtown Revitalization Plan.

Action B: Encourage encroachment into the right-of-way and City plaza spaces for outdoor dining activities, where feasible and where public access is maintained.

Action C: Encourage new multi-story developments to accommodate office spaces above the ground floor in the Downtown core.

Action D: Develop standards to incentivize a reduction in surface parking on Downtown lots and develop a program for alternatives to on-site parking, such as an in-lieu fee program to consolidate parking within the Downtown core and optimize land use, increase commercial viability, and enhance the pedestrian experience.

Policy LU-5.2: Highest Density Residential/Mixed Use. Foster a dynamic Downtown environment by concentrating larger mixed-use projects, higher-density residential development, employment opportunities, and amenities Downtown.

Action A: Focus the highest density and intensity development within the Downtown core.

Action B: Create a discretionary review process for increased height and create standards to ensure that City Hall remains the most prominent structure Downtown.

Action C: Track vacant and underutilized sites. Compile, maintain, and publish an inventory of publicly owned vacant sites that may be developed to serve community needs.

Action D: Review fees, assessments, and development standards and consider strategies to incentivize and encourage mixed-use development.

Policy LU-5.3: Pedestrian Environment. Prioritize pedestrian safety and circulation Downtown with sidewalk improvements, street trees, and other streetscape and public realm amenities.

Action A: Update the Appearance Review Manual and the Downtown Design Toolkit to focus on pedestrian-scale design elements and private outdoor use areas that support a vibrant and active streetscape.

Action B: Explore the use and/or redevelopment of alleys for increased pedestrian and community gathering spaces.

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Action C: Continue outreach to Downtown business and property owners to facilitate street tree and frontage maintenance. Seek opportunities for City partnerships to support these actions.

Action D: Periodically review parking needs and continue to provide information on publicly available parking within and surrounding the Downtown core.

Policy LU-5.4: Civic Center. Promote the centralization of civic uses and functions in the Downtown core.

Action A: Support a variety of events Downtown year-round, including City-sponsored events and events that encourage partnerships with local and regional organizations.

Action B: Continue to support the adaptive reuse of the Printery building and the adjacent Armory site for future civic uses.

Policy LU-5.5: Atascadero Creek. Transform Atascadero Creek in the Downtown core into a recreation asset, including trails, outdoor plazas, and public gathering spaces.

Action A: Continue to make improvements to the multi-use path along the Atascadero Creek corridor.

Action B: Consider opportunities for creek-oriented development Downtown.

Action C: Enhance opportunities for public use of Atascadero Creek Reservation Parcels 2 and 3 and develop standards for adjacent businesses to orient toward the creek.

Action D: Partner with the Historic Society to focus future museum and historical resource operations at their Hotel Park parcel.