



SCOPING MEETING BRIEFING BOOK

ATASCADERO 2045 GENERAL PLAN UPDATE

JANUARY 20, 2022

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PART I INTRODUCTION

PLANNING ATASCADERO'S FUTURE

More than 20 years ago, the City undertook a comprehensive planning process to create a vision for the new millennium, producing the General Plan 2025 (adopted in 2002) focused on “smart growth” and shaped by four guiding principles:

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

As the City approaches 2025, residents, business owners, and City leaders can look proudly on what has been achieved as envisioned in the plan: new housing types, public and private reinvestments in downtown, development focused within the Urban Services Line, and the continued protection 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, recreate, and move around. 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.

PART I: INTRODUCTION

The focus of the General Plan Update project is to revisit, refine, and update the Land Use, Circulation, Noise, Safety, and Conservation and Open Space Elements of the existing General Plan. Since the City's Housing Element was updated and adopted in 2020 and is valid until 2028, the Housing Element will not be a part of the current update process (but can be used to inform and supplement this activity).

The updated General Plan should be based upon the results of a comprehensive visioning process and robust public engagement program to ensure that all facets of the community participate and are fully represented in shaping Atascadero's future.

PURPOSE OF THE BRIEFING BOOK

The General Plan Update project will be a major, multi-year undertaking for the City and community. The City plans to use an innovative and collaborative public process to craft the scope for the General Plan work program to ensure the resulting changes to policy and programs reflect the community's vision and addresses current and future issues and opportunities. The final project scope will result from an interactive discussion with the City Council and Planning Commission—and the community—at a **joint session on January 28, 2022**.

The City envisions using the scoping meeting as the first opportunity to introduce the General Plan Update program to the community and to get people excited and interested in shaping the next 20 years and beyond.

This **Briefing Book** provides an overview of what a General Plan is and how it guides City decisions, key elements of the 2025 General Plan, emerging issues and opportunities, the initial community engagement approach, and anticipated process schedule.

Throughout the document you will see **green callout boxes with initial prompting questions** that will be discussed during the study session. As you review this document, please consider these prompting questions to help you think about potential scope and process components of this project.

? DISCUSSION QUESTION

What are the most pressing issues Atascadero faces today that will shape decisions for the next 15-20 years and beyond?





PART II

GENERAL PLAN 101

WHAT IS A GENERAL PLAN?

A General Plan is a **comprehensive policy document** that provides the general framework for all land use and zoning decisions within a community. It establishes a community's long-term vision for the future and contains **goals** and **policies** that will shape future housing, support economic development and job growth, foster healthy and resilient neighborhoods, protect and manage natural resources, ensure community safety, and promote social and economic equity.

The City of Atascadero's current General Plan was last comprehensively updated in 2002 (General Plan 2025). The State of California recommends that cities update their General Plans approximately every 15 to 20 years. The State also provides guidance on the required and suggested content for General Plans. However, each community is encouraged to identify policy and program solutions in their General Plan that **address local community needs and desires**.

WHY IS A GENERAL PLAN IMPORTANT?

The General Plan **frames the community vision** for how Atascadero should grow and change over the coming years and decades. It is important for the document to reflect community priorities and values while shaping this future. As the City's overarching policy document, every land use, mobility, infrastructure, program, and environmental decisions made by the City Council, Planning Commission, other commissions, and City staff needs to be consistent with the vision, goals, policies, programs, and actions included in the General Plan.

PURPOSE AND ROLE OF A GENERAL PLAN

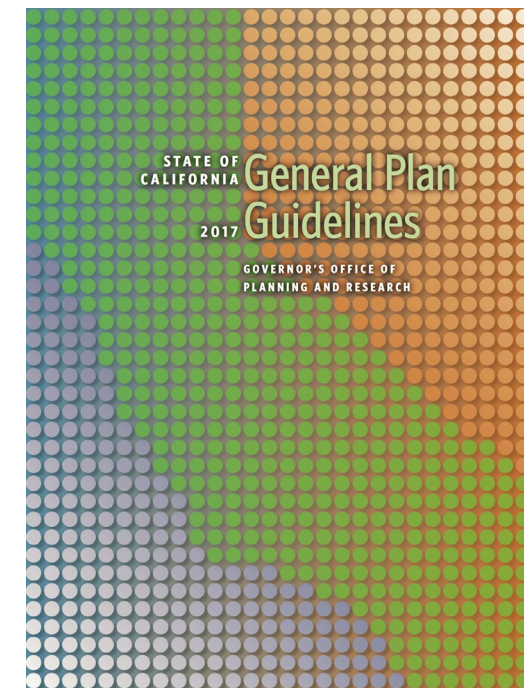
At its core, a General Plan is a long-term plan for development of the community. The State requires that each city or county General Plan address a minimum set of topics, is internally consistent, and is legally enforceable by virtue of numerous consistency requirements. At the local government level, the General Plan has been described as a **“blueprint”** or **“constitution”** for land use and development decisions.

Current General Plan requirements date to the mid-1950s. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the required scope expanded from two to nine elements, then reduced to seven in 1984. In 2017, an eighth Environmental Justice Element was added. The State legislature passed the first consistency requirements in 1970 and 1971.

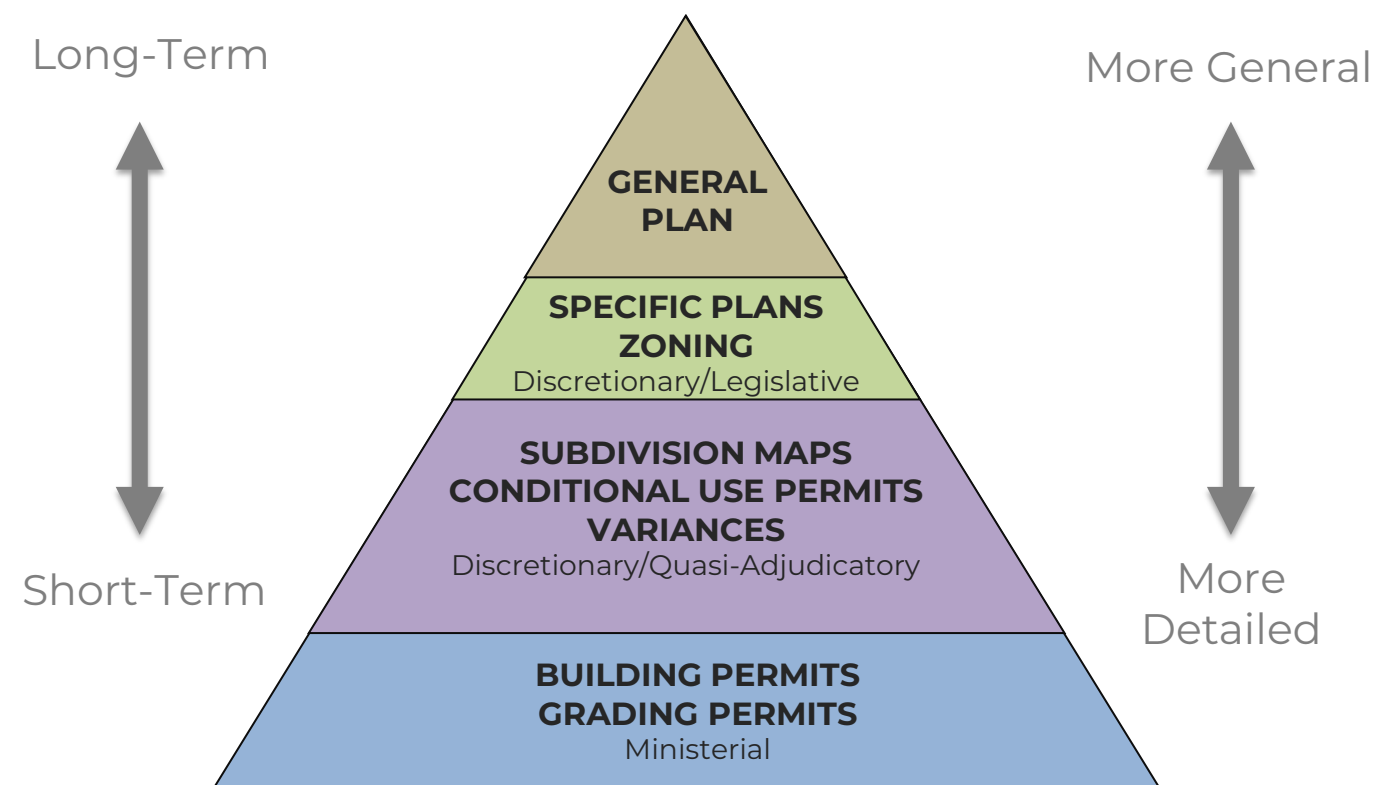
Over the years, the State Legislature has linked many new mandates directly and indirectly to the General Plan. The Governor’s Office of Planning and Research (OPR) regularly updates **General Plan Guidelines** to help communities understand the content requirements.

LAND USE PLANNING HIERARCHY

Probably the most important role of a General Plan is that it functions as the overarching policy guidance and defines land use requirements for all City decision making. This means that all other City plans, zoning rules, regulations, permits, and other actions are required by law to be consistent with the policy guidance in the adopted General Plan. The diagram below shows the hierarchy of local land use planning, with the General Plan sitting at the top of the pyramid. It is worth noting that the **General Plan is envisioned to be the longest-term and most general document** (e.g., other plans, regulations and ordinances provide greater detail in *how* policies are implemented).



Land Use Planning Hierarchy



LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

The State requires every General Plan to address certain requirements to ensure it can function as an overarching policy document.

- **Identified Planning Area:** The General Plan must cover the city’s entire planning area and address the broad range of issues associated with a city’s development. The overall General Plan may also include linkages to regional plans, incorporating, where appropriate, regional policy and context.
- **Long-Term Perspective:** Since the General Plan affects the welfare of current and future generations, State law requires that the plan take a long-term perspective. Most jurisdictions have selected 20 years as the horizon for the General Plan. The horizon does not mark an end point but rather provides a general context in which to make shorter-term decisions. The local jurisdiction may choose a time horizon that serves its needs, including a later horizon year time frame to address long-term issues.
- **Internally Consistent:** Internal consistency requires that no policy conflicts, either textual or diagrammatic, can exist between the components of an otherwise complete and adequate General Plan such as internally referenced external documents like a climate action plan or a local energy assurance plan.
- **Equal Status Among Elements:** All elements of the General Plan have equal legal status. This means that one policy does not supersede another policy. It also means that any optional element or topic a city includes in its General Plan has the same legal status as required elements.

MANDATORY ELEMENTS

The State also requires General Plans to address eight “elements” or topical chapters. These topics can be addressed as stand-alone chapters or integrated into other parts of the General Plan (e.g., the State allows flexibility in how the General Plan is organized, as long as the required topics are addressed).



Land Use Element

Designates the type, intensity, and general distribution of uses of land for housing, business, industry, open space, education, public buildings and grounds, waste disposal facilities, and other categories of public and private uses.



Circulation Element

Correlates with the land use element and identifies the general location and extent of existing and proposed major roads, transportation routes, terminals, and other local public utilities and facilities.



Housing Element*

Assesses current and projected housing needs for all economic segments of the community and embodies policies and programs for providing adequate housing.



Open Space Element

Details plans and measures for the long-range preservation and conservation of open-space lands, including open space for the preservation of natural resources, the managed production of resources, agriculture, outdoor recreation, and public health and safety.



Conservation Element

Addresses the conservation, development, and use of natural resources, including water, forests, soils, rivers, and mineral deposits.



Safety Element

Establishes policies and programs to protect the community from risks associated with seismic, geologic, flood, and wildfire hazards, as well as from other concerns such as drought.



Noise Element

Identifies and appraises noise problems within the community and forms the basis for land use distribution determinations.



Environmental Justice Element

Identifies objectives and policies to reduce pollution exposure, improve air quality, promote public facilities, improve food access, advance access to housing, and increase physical activity in identified disadvantaged communities.

Source: California Governor’s Office of Planning and Research (OPR), 2017 General Plan Guidelines.

* Note that the City’s Housing Element was adopted in 2020 and is valid until 2028. It will not be a part of this current update process but can be used to inform and supplement this activity.

OTHER MANDATORY ISSUES AND TOPICS

In addition to consistency and element/topic requirements, the State also requires a broad set of other issues be addressed in local General Plans. This list includes dozens of requirements, largely organized around the following areas:

- Coastal Act
- Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zones
- Solid Waste Management
- Hazardous Waste Management
- Surface Mining and Reclamation
- Airport Land Use Compatibility
- Affordable Housing Policy

OPTIONAL ELEMENTS

Every city can include and address other topics or issues that are not specifically outlined in State law or content requirements. This allows cities to customize their General Plans to the specific needs of the local community. Topics many cities address in their General Plans include:

- Economic Development
- Fiscal Sustainability
- Community Design
- Healthy Communities
- Public Facilities and Services
- Climate Change
- Education and Childcare
- Water

FORMAT OPTIONS

Cities have free range on how they want to structure and format their General Plan. Typically, General Plans are created as highly visual printed documents that include a range in imagery, graphics, and diagrams to convey policy ideas and requirements.

Another option is to create an online ePlan that can provide information quickly to the public, planners, and Council for transparent decision-making (e.g., more accessible) and allows potential developers and investors to easily understand the City's goals regarding economic development. Examples of ePlans include:

www.envisionburlingame.org

www.hayward2040generalplan.com

www.smokyhollowspecificplan.com

? DISCUSSION QUESTION

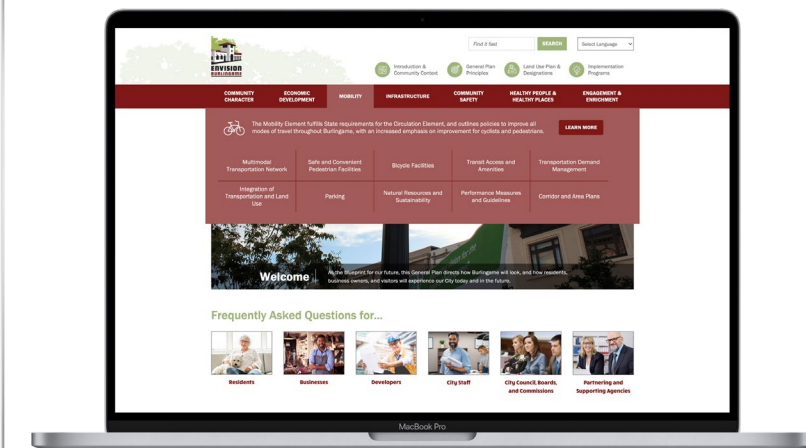
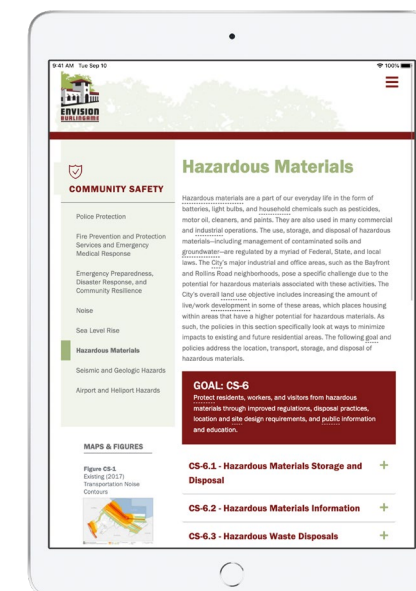
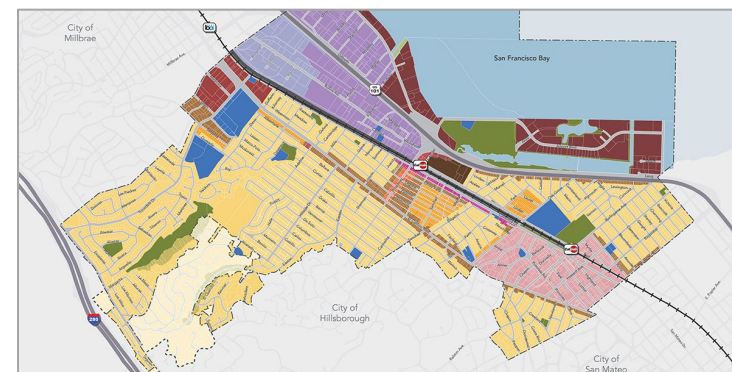
Would the City like to use the updated General Plan to help streamline future development projects that are consistent with new policy direction?

? DISCUSSION QUESTION

What level of economic and/or fiscal analysis would be helpful to inform community and Council policy discussions?

? DISCUSSION QUESTION

What is the desired final format for the General Plan: a printed copy and/or interactive website?



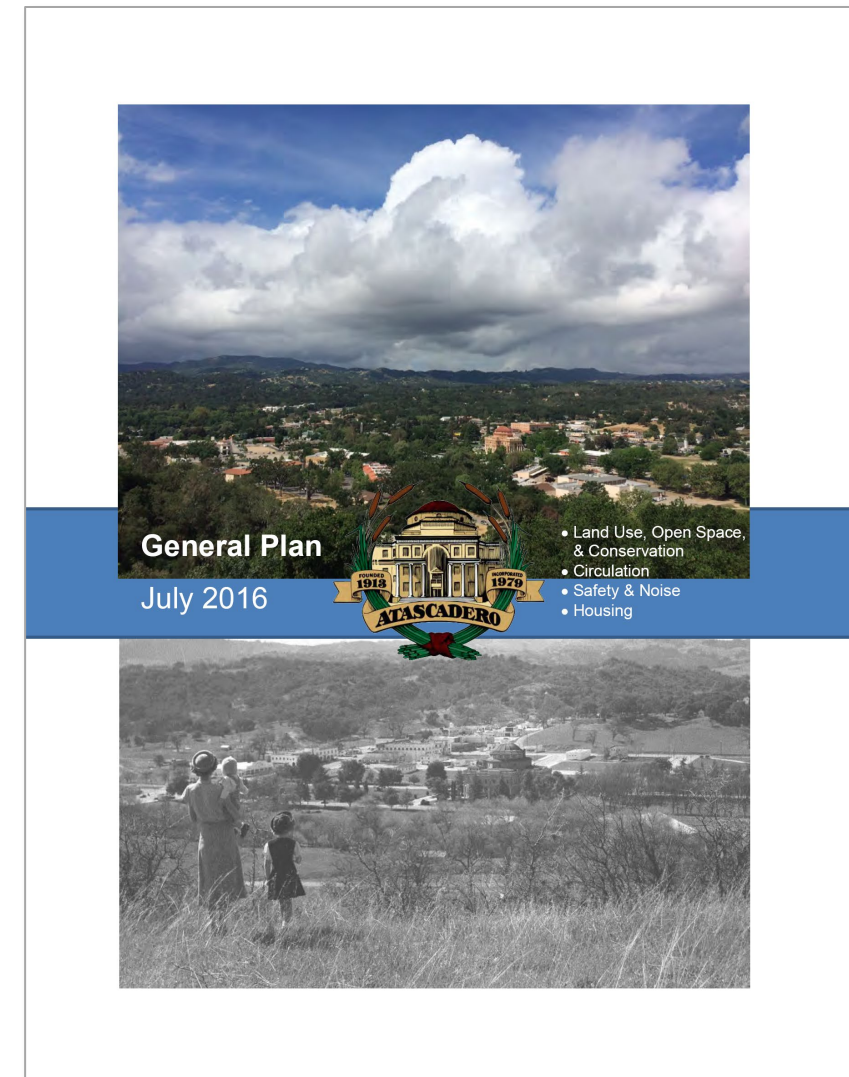


PART III

CURRENT ATASCADERO GENERAL PLAN AND COUNCIL PRIORITIES

OVERVIEW

The current **General Plan 2025** (adopted in 2002 and amended most recently in 2016) contains many goals and policies that will have continuing relevance for the updated plan, and City staff and the consultant team anticipate that the current overarching principles cited above will continue to provide the planning framework. The plan addresses land use, open space, and conservation as one element, holistically recognizing how the natural environment informs land use decisions in Atascadero.



GENERAL PLAN STRUCTURE

The current General Plan is based on **Smart Growth Principles** that frame the aspirational goals for the future growth and change of Atascadero. These principles, shown to the right, form the foundation “vision” for the entire document.

The table below identifies the overall structure of the current General Plan and how each section relates to the State-required General Plan elements. As the General Plan is updated, one approach is to work within the current General Plan element framework but to comprehensively update each element’s content for the interests of today and the issues of tomorrow. New elements that may be added—or integrated into established elements—include economic development, environmental justice, and community health and resiliency.

Table I-5: General Plan Organization

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

2002 Atascadero General Plan Guiding Principles

Aware that concern for environmental protection and resource conservation, the City Council and Planning Commission jointly developed a set of "Smart Growth Principles" to guide the 2025 General Plan. Smart Growth is a concept in city planning that encourages more compact, walkable communities that encourage pedestrian scale mixed use infill rather than automobile dependent subdivisions.

These principles were intended to supplement the Goals of the previous General Plan and provide a foundation for the new General Plan that combined the communities’ previous 20-years of planning with the most current principles of good community development.

1. Provide for **well-planned** new growth
2. Maximize use of **existing infrastructure**
3. Support **vibrant city centers**
4. Develop and support **coordinated planning** for regional impacts
5. Support **high quality education** and school facilities
6. Build **strong** communities
7. Emphasize **joint-use** of facilities
8. Support **creative entrepreneurial** efforts
9. Encourage **full community participation**
10. Establish a secure **local revenue base**

CITY COUNCIL 2021 STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS PRIORITIES

The City Council recently went through a lengthy strategic planning process that began with community input, then worked its way through Council direction and department review, concluding with public meetings involving the City Council and community. The outcome of this process was the development of Council's **top priorities** for the next two years, which are shown to the right. These priorities provide a strong foundation for the updated vision and key topics to be addressed during the General Plan Update.

2021 City Council Strategic Plan Goals

A. Supporting Economic and Community Vibrancy

Creating the environment and services to nurture quality and diverse economic, recreational, and community connections that create prosperity and enrich our genuine, authentic community.

B. Ensuring Fiscal and Infrastructure Efficiency and Sustainability

Continuing to be responsible and accountable stewards of our resources now and into the future by efficiently and effectively investing in modern and reliable infrastructure and equipment and maintaining financial stability regardless of economic conditions. Staff has the tools, technology and resources they need to do their jobs.

C. Ensuring Public Safety and Providing Exceptional City Services

Ensuring we have the tools, resources, and professional staffing necessary to create and maintain an environment where our community (residents, businesses, visitors, and staff) feels safe, served, and mutually respected.

D. Improving Quality Of Life

Embracing our warm friendly atmosphere and building on our sense of community by providing attractions, open spaces, outdoor interactions, and a variety of things to do for all. Atascadero: Where everybody knows your name and is willing to lend a hand.



PART IV

EMERGING CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

INFLUENCES

Many **local** and **external conditions** will inform creation of Atascadero's updated General Plan. With many people working from home—and attending school remotely—more people may elect to buy or rent in Atascadero rather than closer to jobs in nearby communities, thereby changing housing demands and affecting commute traffic. While retail buying trends have been shifting over the last five or more years, COVID-19 illustrated how easy it is to have almost anything delivered to your doorstep. In turn, retail and dining establishments in the City may increasingly focus on capturing the tourism market and look to locate in concentrated, walkable districts.

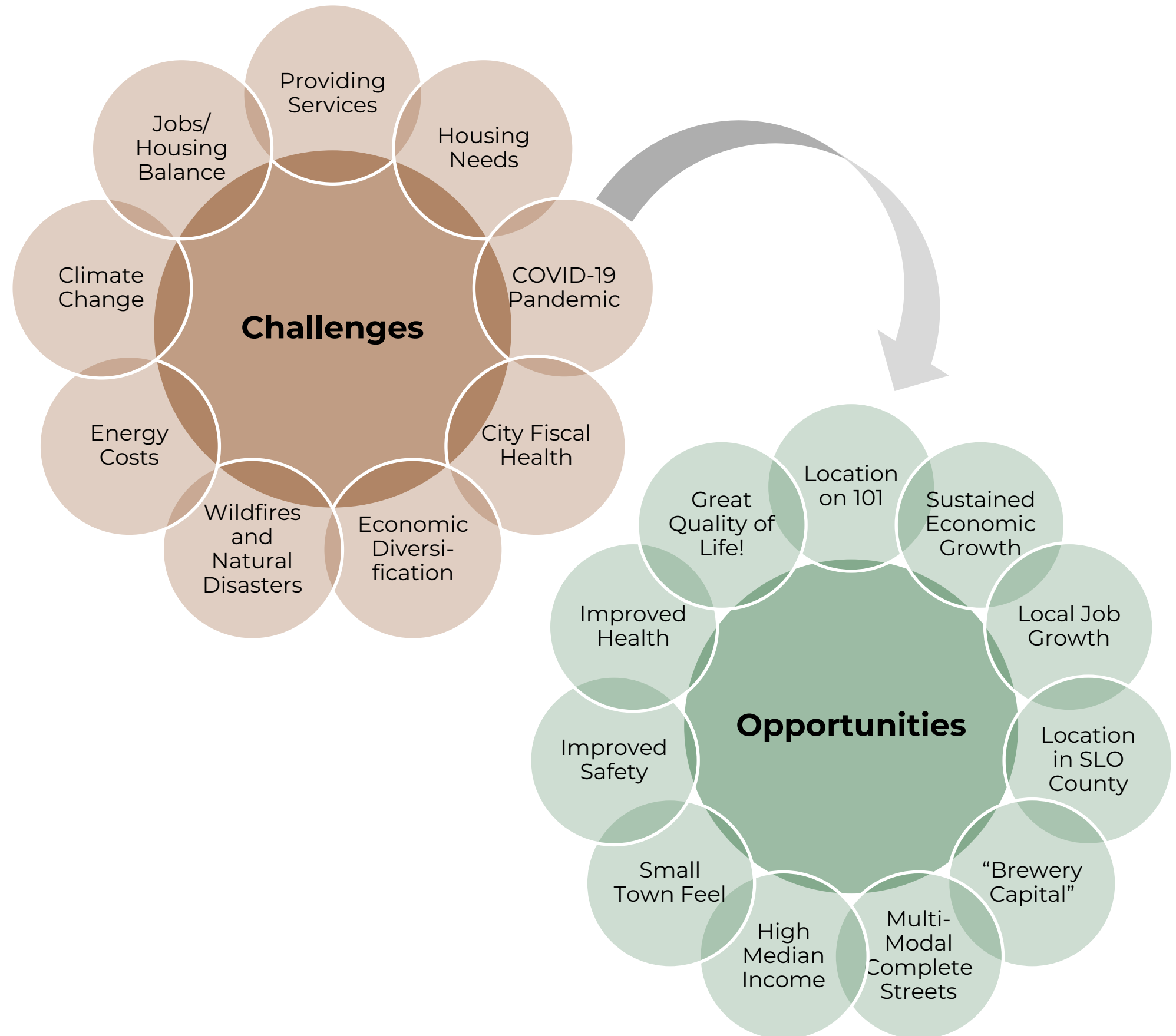
Other primary factors to consider could include:

- The growing Central Coast **tourism industry** focused on wineries and outdoor activities
- Increasing use of **delivery services** by residents and associated effects on the roadway network and in the not distant future, use of low airspace by drone vehicles
- Convenient and affordable access to **broadband internet** and **cell phone coverage** throughout the community.
- Demands for **localized warehousing** for last-mile delivery needs
- Effects of **climate change**: wildfire threats, prolonged drought periods, and elevated temperatures
- **Resiliency** and **sustainability** planning
- The regional effort to **attract tech industries** and bring higher-wage job opportunities to Central Coast communities
- **Environmental Justice** issues and how planning decisions affect community health and well-being

KEY CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

A key part of a General Plan update is the identification of current and future **challenges** through a combination of technical analysis (e.g., existing conditions report), community input, and staff/Council feedback. Similarly, there will be extensive discussion about the various **opportunities** that can be capitalized on as the City moves forward.

As we work through the General Plan update process, it is important to discuss, refine and identify policy approaches for addressing both the challenges and the opportunities. The flower diagrams to the right identify an initial list of challenges and opportunities based on initial community and staff feedback. However, this is just a starting point for the community discussion.



? DISCUSSION QUESTION

What are the greatest assets of Atascadero that make the community special and unique?

? DISCUSSION QUESTION

What are the most pressing issues Atascadero faces today that will shape decisions for the next 15-20 years and beyond?

? DISCUSSION QUESTION

How can the General Plan Update process better understand and address these issues through focused research, policy analysis, alternatives, and implementation actions?



PART V

INITIAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY

The City is committed to ensuring a thoughtful, focused, and purposeful engagement process during the General Plan Update. The goal is to have broad, inclusive stakeholder and community engagement with multiple and genuine opportunities for people to be involved and have their ideas heard.

Key elements of this approach could include:

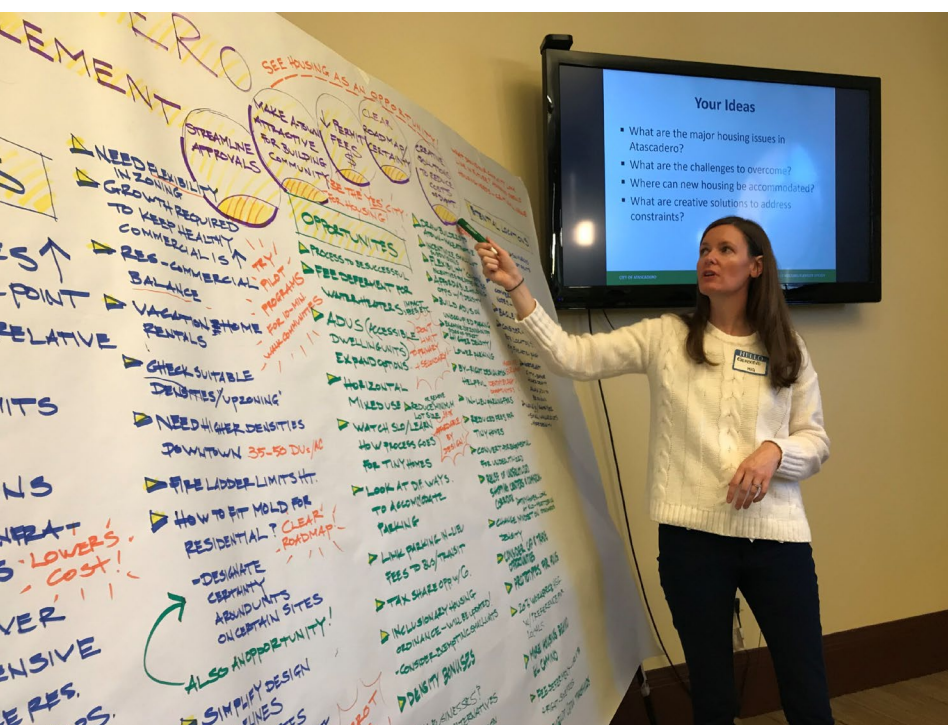
- Taking a holistic, inclusive approach to community engagement with a suite of both high-tech and high-touch methods to “cast the net” far and wide, engaging the community at the neighborhood, citywide levels. This will allow both **“tech-savvy”** people and **“hands-on”** community members the opportunity to actively participate in the process, bringing in new voices and ideas.
- Working closely with **City staff** (from all departments) and staff from **other public agencies** (as appropriate) to discuss project objectives, provide feedback on draft materials, and help the project team advertise surveys and workshops to the broader community.
- Utilizing **dynamic engagement tools** like online questionnaires, interactive exercises, virtual reality simulations and real-time electronic polling at workshops and charrettes that will allow a broad spectrum of the community to provide input and ideas in a real-time, anonymous fashion.
- Designing **fun, productive**, and **engaging workshops** that bring people into the process and ensure their voices are heard through hands-on exercises, wallgraphic recordings and interactive polling.
- Engaging **youth** through unique workshops and activities at area schools.

PART V: INITIAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

ENGAGEMENT GOALS

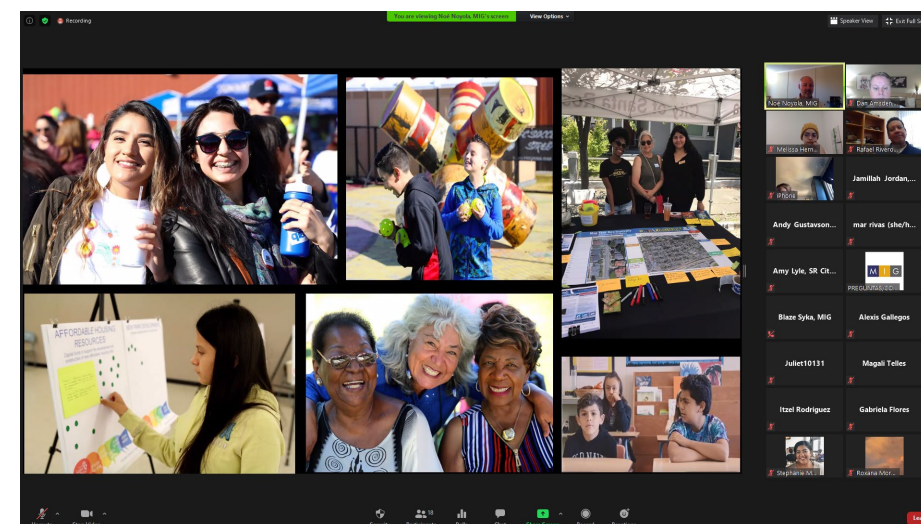
One of the first items that will be prepared during the General Plan Update process is comprehensive **Community Involvement Strategy**. This document will contain engagement goals, strategies, groups and organizations, and methods to ensure the City creates opportunities for inclusive and equitable participation. This will involve providing multiple and varied opportunities for a broad range of community members, businesses and interest groups to share meaningful input.

This engagement will focus on all neighborhoods throughout the city, and unique methods can be designed to specifically engage communities that have not traditionally participated in planning efforts, including disadvantaged communities, youth and limited-English proficient communities, and address barriers to participation.



COVID-19 REQUIREMENTS AND VIRTUAL ENGAGEMENT

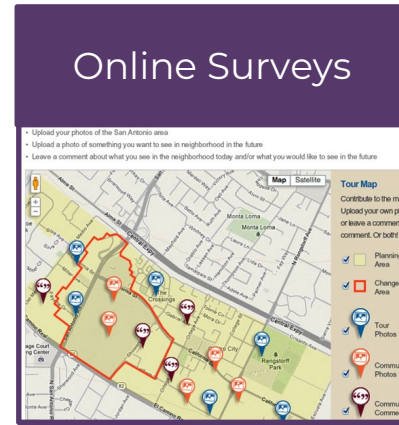
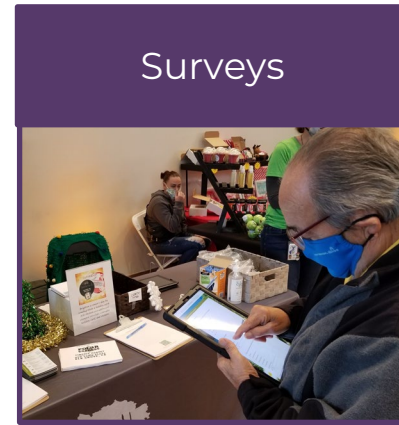
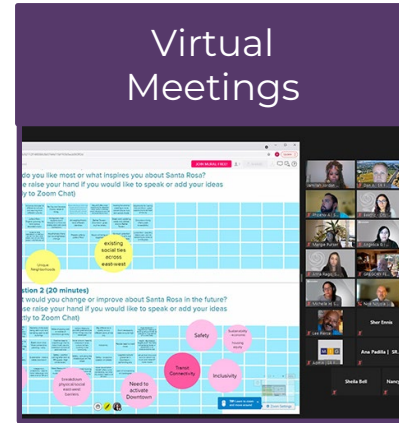
Considering the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the project team expects there will be a continued emphasis on virtual engagement due to the ongoing need for social distancing. However, we should anticipate conducting in-person activities as the project progresses. It is possible that even if restrictions on in-person gatherings are loosened, many people may continue to choose to keep their distance and prefer methods that allow for online and telephone participation. A hybrid approach that includes both high-tech and high-touch events will allow us to reach a broad cross-section of Atascadero community.



PART V: INITIAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

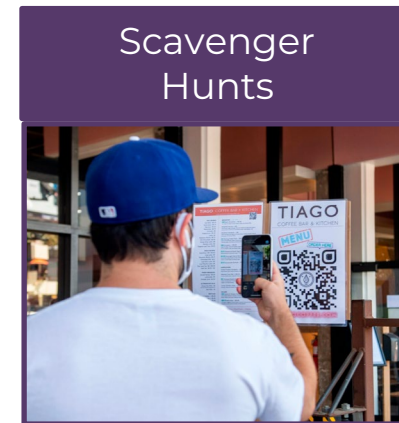
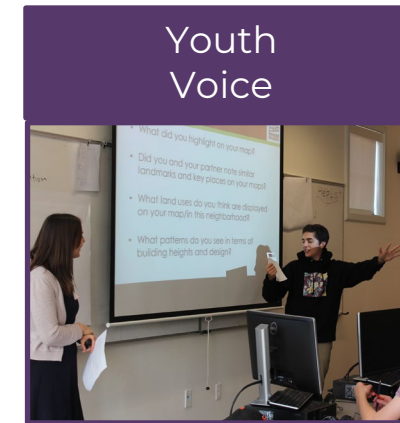
ENGAGEMENT METHODS AND OPTIONS

The tiles on the right show examples of different outreach and engagement tools that can be used during the General Plan Update to fully engage the community. Each method has a different purpose and advantage (*please note, this is not an exhaustive list*).



? DISCUSSION QUESTION
 What guiding principles should shape the community engagement process?

? DISCUSSION QUESTION
 What types of community engagement activities, platforms, and/or partnerships have worked well in the past that should be included or built upon for the General Plan Update?





PART VI

ANTICIPATED PROCESS

PROCESS APPROACH

The General Plan Update provides a tremendous opportunity for the community, City staff, Commissions, and Council to discuss and refine the vision for what the community can and should become over the coming years and decades. The overall process for updating a General Plan includes a combination of analysis, reports and designs that are reviewed and refined by the community during different phases of the project – with decisions for each phase informing the next phase.

The **Draft Schedule** on the following page shows how the phases and tasks outlined in the Draft Work Program can be completed within a 24-month timeframe. This approach includes meetings with the City Council at the beginning (to help frame the process) and end (to review community feedback and provide direction) of each project phase. The advantage about structuring a General Plan program is that there are no rules beyond ensuring the adopted General Plan addresses all State law content requirements.

? DISCUSSION QUESTION

How would the Council and Commission like to be involved in the General Plan Update?

? DISCUSSION QUESTION

Is there anything else we should discuss that will help inform the General Plan Update scope and process?

City of Atascadero: 2045 General Plan Update

