



# 2045 General Plan Existing Conditions Report

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

## 1.1 Introduction

In 2022, the City of Atascadero began a two-year process to comprehensively update its General Plan. This process, known as the “Authentic Atascadero” or the 2045 General Plan Update, is an opportunity for the City and community to discuss ways that Atascadero can become an even more sustainable, economically successful, fiscally strong, resilient, healthy, and inclusive community in the years and decades ahead.

The 2045 General Plan Update provides an important opportunity for the community to discuss ways to ensure housing for all, improve neighborhood quality and connectivity, foster economic development, support long-term fiscal health, improve public health, create more equitable access to community amenities and services, enhance education, and reinforce environmental stewardship. As a starting point for this project, the City has prepared a comprehensive inventory and evaluation of existing conditions in the Atascadero. This Existing Conditions Report summarizes information, data, and resources regarding a range of physical, environmental, and social topics important to the community.

This chapter discusses the role and functions of a General Plan and explains the purpose and structure of the Existing Conditions Report.

## 1.2 What is a General Plan

A General Plan is a city's road map for the future. A General Plan describes a community's aspirations and identifies strategies for managing preservation and change. Sometimes referred to as a community's "constitution," it is a comprehensive planning document that provides a city with a policy framework to guide decision-making related to land use, growth and development, public safety, mobility, and resource conservation. California State law requires every city and county to prepare and adopt a comprehensive and long-range General Plan that includes the following eight mandatory chapters (referred to as "elements"): Land Use, Circulation, Housing, Open Space, Conservation, Noise, and Safety. State law also allows for the inclusion of optional elements that can be added at the City's discretion. Any optional element the City chooses to include in its General Plan has the same policy weight as the required elements.

A General Plan establishes the policy framework to be used and implemented by residents, businesses, developers, City staff, the City Council and appointed boards and commissions. General Plans typically include goals, policies, and implementing actions, as well as tables, maps, and diagrams. These components work together to convey a long-term vision and to guide local decision-making to achieve that vision. The General Plan and its maps, diagrams, policies, and programs form the basis of a City's zoning and subdivision ordinances and public works projects. Under California law, no specific plan, area plan, community plan, zoning ordinance, subdivision map or public works project may be approved unless the City finds that it is consistent with the General Plan.

## 1.3 Purpose of a General Plan

Atascadero's General Plan plays the foundational role in regulating land use; it is the top-level planning document, providing direction for all zoning regulations, ordinances, guidelines, and other plans. The goals and policies included throughout the General Plan are interrelated and should be considered together when making decisions related to land use, mobility, growth, preservation, and development. Since Atascadero adopted its current General Plan in 2002, last updated in 2016, significant shifts in demographics, land use, transportation, economics, community character, and the housing market warrant the need for a comprehensive update. The pandemic and an ever changing economic and fiscal landscape further support the need to ensure the City's visions, goals, policies, and programs are current and adequately addresses community needs.

The General Plan is a tool to help City staff make decisions related to programs and services, capital improvement projects, land use decisions, and development applications. City staff use General Plan policy to provide direction to applicants and provide land use analysis 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 the City staff and can be used as a guide to establish annual work programs and budgets.

For the City Council and appointed boards and commissions, the General Plan is a tool to guide decisions and capital improvement projects. Future land use and development decisions and infrastructure improvements must be consistent with the General Plan.

## 1.4 Purpose of the Existing Conditions Report

This Existing Conditions Report – a compilation of existing conditions technical studies - is the first major step in the General Plan Update process. This report analyzes and summarizes demographic, economic, land use, community character, mobility, natural resources, infrastructure, community health, and other conditions in Atascadero, with the goal of helping the community and City better understand the issues and opportunities facing Atascadero. This analysis will be used to support the planning and community engagement process conducted during development of the updated General Plan. It will also be used as the Existing Settings portion of the Environmental Impact Report prepared on the updated 2045 General Plan.

## 1.5 Format and Contents

This Existing Conditions Report provides an overview of the baseline (2022) character, form, and context of Atascadero organized into the following topical chapters:

**Chapter 2: Land Use and Community Form:** This chapter discusses Atascadero's existing community profile, projected growth, baseline land uses and zoning, adopted regulatory plans, related planning efforts, growth policies and strategies, and urban form characteristics.

**Chapter 3: Economic, Market, and Fiscal Conditions:** This chapter discusses existing real estate market and City fiscal conditions and trends. A key focus of this chapter is analyzing the fiscal implications of land use decisions, the jobs/housing balance in the city, and ways to support economic growth and fiscal health in the coming years and decades.

**Chapter 4: Circulation and Mobility:** This chapter discusses transportation agencies and service providers, the existing transportation network (including roadway, transit, bicycle, and pedestrian), parking, freight and goods movement, aviation, commute patterns, congestion, and network safety in Atascadero.

**Chapter 5: Biological Resources:** This chapter discusses the waterbodies, rivers and streams, watersheds and management, groundwater basins, land cover, sensitive habitats, local vegetation, soils, minerals, wildfires, conservation areas, and major pollutants in Atascadero.

**Chapter 6: Cultural Resources:** This chapter discusses the area's Native American Heritage and the city of Atascadero's historical context, districts, landmarks, resources, and points of interest.

**Chapter 7: Parks and Recreation:** This chapter discusses the existing parks, recreation, and trails system in the city, including park access and capital improvement projects.

**Chapter 8: Noise:** This chapter discusses the existing noise environment in the city and identifies sensitive land uses and noise mitigation measures.

**Chapter 9: Infrastructure:** This chapter discusses the water supply and distribution system, wastewater collection and treatment, stormwater drainage, and dry utilities in Atascadero.

**Chapter 10: Community Health:** This chapter summarizes community health and exposure to pollutants data, explores access to grocery stores and healthy foods, and identifies low-income/subsidized housing and housing opportunity areas in Atascadero.

**Chapter 11: Vulnerability Assessment:** This chapter provides an assessment for how the effects of climate change could be harmful to the people, buildings and infrastructure, ecosystems, economic drivers, and key services in Atascadero.