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# Introduction

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## Chapter 1 of the Santa Cruz County General Plan/LCP

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Adopted by the Santa Cruz  
County Board of Supervisors:  
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## 1.1 VISION FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

The purpose of the Santa Cruz County General Plan/Local Coastal Program (LCP) is to guide and regulate land use and development in unincorporated Santa Cruz County.

Santa Cruz County is a place of great beauty, diverse natural resources, and treasured communities. The citizens of Santa Cruz County are committed to sustainable growth and development that improves environmental, economic and social well-being today without compromising the needs of future generations.

Between 2012 and 2014, Santa Cruz County prepared the *Sustainable Santa Cruz County Plan*, which was a planning study accepted by the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors in October 2014. Development of the *Sustainable Santa Cruz County Plan* involved extensive community participation. The study focused on sustainable development of the County's urban areas and identified strategies to meet Assembly Bill (AB) 32, which requires California jurisdictions to reduce and limit the production of greenhouse gases (GHGs). The *Sustainable Santa Cruz County Plan* therefore focused on the development of healthy communities based on strong links between land use patterns and multi-modal transportation, with the goal of reducing commute and travel times.

The *Sustainable Santa Cruz County Plan* resulted in the development of a vision statement and guiding principles consistent with three fundamental sustainability concepts—environmental protection, economic strength, and social equity. The following vision statement reflects the community's values for the future and provides the foundation for the Santa Cruz County General Plan/LCP.

### What is a General Plan?

A General Plan is a legal document that serves two functions: it is a vision for the desired future of the community and a regulatory framework against which proposed land use and development is evaluated. Every city and county in California is required to prepare a General Plan with public input.

The plan includes goals, objectives, policies and implementation strategies to guide future growth and development in a manner consistent with the quality of life desired by citizens. The plan has a major impact on a community's residents, businesses, workers, and visitors.

Once adopted, all land use and development decisions must be consistent with the Plan, as well as decisions on activities related to water and sewer systems, roads, natural resource protection, public safety, fire and emergency services, libraries, schools and parks.



## VISION STATEMENT

*All parts of Santa Cruz County, both urban and rural, benefit from the increased vitality of more sustainable patterns of development and conservation. Within all neighborhoods, investments in transportation improvements have increased residents' transportation options, mobility, and quality of life. The unique needs of the various communities are taken into account in County policymaking and transportation decisions, allowing appropriate solutions for each area. The rural areas maintain the character and densities that recognize their topography and important natural resources, and that distinguish them from the urban part of the County. There are improved links among rural areas and between rural and urban areas. Residents, businesses, non-profit organizations, and governmental agencies work together in an effective partnership to encourage economic growth and private investment that benefits County residents and businesses and support the ability of governmental agencies to provide necessary facilities and services.*

*Within all neighborhoods, there are retail and other services that meet the needs of residents. The robust economy generates increased County revenues, which can then be leveraged to obtain grant funding necessary to provide the expanded multi-modal transportation system desired by the community. Commercial centers feature quality design and convenient connections to neighborhoods for pedestrians and cyclists. Local businesses contribute to a distinctive sense of place and community pride, with jobs providing a living wage to residents. The area is attractive to knowledge-based industries that benefit from the County's unique assets, such as lifestyle enterprises, ecotourism, and sustainable industries. The environmental and social stresses of a large commuter population have been reduced by increasing the number of local well-paying jobs. All residents have the opportunity to benefit from this growth and prosperity—the area is known as a diverse and inclusive community with equal access to opportunity. A healthy local economy contributes to the fiscal sustainability of schools and public agencies and enables the County to provide the high-quality services desired by all residents.*

*Within urban areas, infill development has occurred on vacant and underutilized commercial properties along key transportation corridors. In some places, this development is mixed use with residential or office uses located above ground-*



*floor commercial uses. The best characteristics of favorite areas, such as the Villages and lower 41st Avenue in Pleasure Point, have been replicated elsewhere. Development is well designed to support a walkable environment and a unique sense of place. Along key corridors, development is of sufficient intensity to support an active environment with transportation choices. New development provides a variety of housing types, and there are housing options that are affordable to households of all income levels. All residents who wish to are able to live within easy walking distance of activity centers that enhance community ties.*

*Transportation choices are such that residents can leave cars at home for some of their daily trips. Bike and pedestrian infrastructure has been optimized so that there is a good network of on-road lanes and sidewalks, supplemented by some off-road facilities. It is easy and safe to walk or bike from one neighborhood or commercial area to another, as new connections supplement the existing grid pattern. The railroad and Monterey Bay Sanctuary Trail Network, popularly known as the “rail-trail,” contribute to transportation and recreation choices, as well as enhancing the sense of community and the vitality of the industries that use the rail. The barrier created by Highway 1 between the ocean and inland sides of the County has been lessened by strategic improvement of crossings and connectivity to those crossings. Better functioning Highway 1 reduces travel times on the freeway and also removes some pressure from local streets, increasing the reliability of travel.*

*Development within urban areas reduces development pressure in rural areas of the County and helps to preserve valued open space. Development is environmentally friendly due to its location, density, and green building practices. Within the urban area open space and natural habitat are protected, and new development is designed to help protect these resources. The area is a part of a sustainable system of food production with community gardens, urban agriculture, artisan food businesses, and organic farming practices. Development is designed to minimize per capita consumption of resources such as water and energy.*



## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following guiding principles were developed during the preparation of the *Sustainable Santa Cruz County Plan* and have in turn been incorporated throughout the elements of *the Santa Cruz County General Plan/LCP*:

- **Focused Development.** New development should be compact, located primarily within existing urban areas, and should feature a mixture of uses and development intensities that support transportation choices.
- **Transportation Choices.** Develop safe, reliable, and efficient transportation choices to improve air quality, reduce GHG emissions, promote public health, and enhance quality of life.
- **Open Space and Resource Preservation.** Preserve the County's unique natural resources and habitats by carefully managing new development outside the urban and rural services line.
- **Unique Community Character.** Enhance the unique characteristics of communities by investing in healthy, safe, attractive, and walkable neighborhoods and efficient transportation choices.
- **Economic Vitality.** Support locally owned businesses that bind the community together and new businesses that generate jobs and local economic prosperity. Encourage businesses that generate tax revenue and support efforts to train residents to occupy locally available jobs.
- **Housing Options.** Expand housing choices for people of all ages and incomes to lower the combined cost of housing and transportation and to promote diversity in terms of age, income, and family size throughout the County.
- **Equity and Inclusive Decision-Making.** Encourage a broad range of community and stakeholder involvement representing all communities in the County to ensure equitable land use planning and decision-making.
- **Governmental Coordination.** Align policies and funding among local, County, regional, and State governmental agencies. Remove barriers to collaboration, leverage funding, improve local control over local resources.
- **Fiscal Sustainability.** Recognize that there is a significant gap between the level of revenue that is generated by the existing land use pattern. Promote development patterns that generate revenues to provide the infrastructure and services necessary for thriving communities.





## PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Public participation ensures that meaningful input from the community informs the development of the *General Plan* and subsequent amendments. The Santa Cruz County General Plan/LCP represents an update of the General Plan/LCP adopted in 1994, with an emphasis on sustainability principles. Between 2012 and 2014, the County engaged in intensive public outreach for the preparation of the *Sustainable Santa Cruz County Plan*, which provided the basis for the Santa Cruz County General Plan/LCP. Opportunities for public participation included 16 workshops, advisory group meetings, and stakeholder meetings. The efforts focused on visioning, the meaning of “sustainability,” focus areas, and plan concepts.

In addition, concurrent with the release of the Draft Environmental Impact Report for the update of this Plan, the proposed *General Plan/LCP* update and amendments to the County Code/zoning ordinance were available for an extended public review period. Additional community meetings to gather public comment on the draft amendments occurred during the Spring of 2021, and refinements to the General Plan/LCP were incorporated based upon public input prior to adoption.



Photo Credit: Santa Cruz County



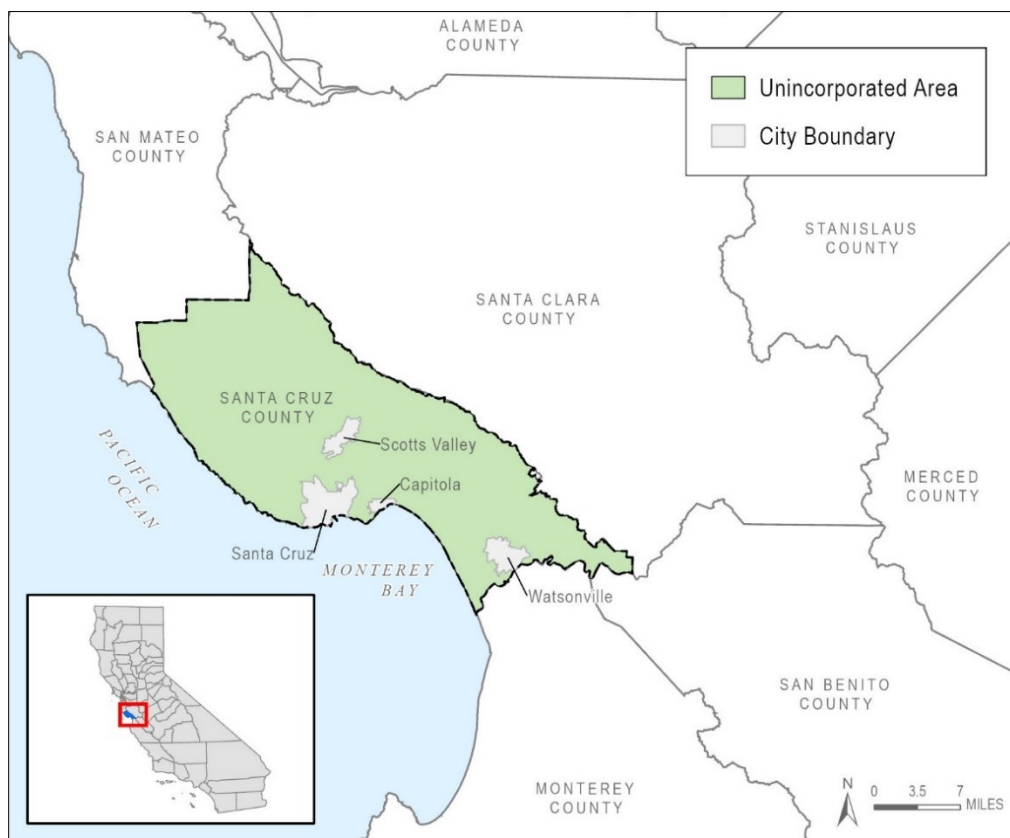
# 1.2 UNDERSTANDING SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

## PHYSICAL SETTING

Santa Cruz County is the second smallest county in California, containing a total of 446 square miles, located between the San Francisco Bay Area and Monterey Peninsula. Four cities are located within the County—Capitola, Santa Cruz, Scotts Valley, and Watsonville. (See Figure 1-1.)

The physical environment of Santa Cruz County is truly one of the most beautiful and diverse in California. The topography of the County is varied in character, containing such features as the forested Santa Cruz Mountains in the north and northwest, the mid-County coastal terraces where a large portion of the County’s population is located, and the alluvial south County which is predominately in agricultural use. The central California coast location and the County’s topographic features contribute to the ideal Mediterranean climate of Santa Cruz County.

**Figure 1-1: Santa Cruz County Vicinity Map**



Source: Santa Cruz County



Five major state highways connect Santa Cruz County with adjacent counties. Highway 1 is located along the coast from San Francisco, through San Mateo County along the coast, south to the cities of Santa Cruz, Capitola, and Watsonville, and then on to Monterey County. Highway 9 traverses the County from the City of Santa Cruz through the rural villages of Felton, Ben Lomond, and Boulder Creek, before descending into Santa Clara County. Highway 17 crosses the Santa Cruz Mountains into Santa Clara County passing through the City of Scotts Valley. To the south, Highways 129 and 152 join the City of Watsonville with neighboring Santa Clara County. The Union Pacific Railroad corridor, owned by the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission, presently provides limited freight service to the Pajaro Valley along the coast of the County. One small municipal airport accommodating private planes is located in Watsonville.

## LAND USE

Consistent with the California Coastal Act of 1976 and Measure J, the County's growth management ballot measure approved by the voters in 1978, the County maintains a distinction between urban and rural areas through the use of an urban/rural boundary, which is represented by an Urban Services Line (USL) and Rural Services Line (RSL) shown in Figure 1-2.

County land use designations are also shown in Figure 1-2. Nearly 90% of the unincorporated County land is located outside of the USL/RSL, with lands in use as low-density residential, agriculture, open space, timber, resource conservation, and parkland. Within the USL and RSL, there are higher intensity residential land uses, as well as a variety of commercial and public facility uses, with concentrations in historic town centers and along major transportation corridors. Diagrammatic General Plan/LCP land use designation maps for each of the County's 15 planning areas are provided in Appendix B: Land Use Designation Maps, and further data regarding existing County land uses is provided in Appendix C: Community Profile.

## ECONOMIC SETTING

The dominant economic activities in Santa Cruz County are centered in agricultural and food processing within South County, in educational, governmental, and health care services; and in tourism within North County. Other economic activities include quarrying, forestry, wood products, fishing, and other manufacturing. Over the last decade, other commercial service industry jobs—protective services, food service, building and groundskeeping work, and personal care—have seen sustained growth. In recent years, “brick-and-mortar” retail activity has flagged with the rise of Internet shopping, and the cannabis industry has changed and strengthened in response to legalization at the state level. Two major educational institutions—



Cabrillo Community College and the Santa Cruz campus of the University of California—are located in Mid- and North County areas respectively.

With a spectacular coastline, accessible beaches, and wooded mountains all in proximity to several major northern California metropolitan areas, Santa Cruz County is an important vacation and recreation area. Within its borders are several state parks and a number of state beaches, and federal lands are located in the North Coast area.

## POPULATION + DEMOGRAPHICS

As of January 1, 2020, the California Department of Finance estimated the total County population to be 271,233 and the unincorporated County population to be 133,493. Urban concentrations of development are located within the four incorporated cities of Capitola (2020 estimated population 10,108), Santa Cruz (population 64,424), Scotts Valley (population 11,693), and Watsonville (population 51,515), and within in the unincorporated areas of Live Oak, Soquel, Seacliff/Aptos, and Rio Del Mar, as defined by the USL. The urbanized portion of unincorporated areas actually have a higher population than the City of Santa Cruz, which means that the County must establish appropriate land use policies for both urban and rural contexts.

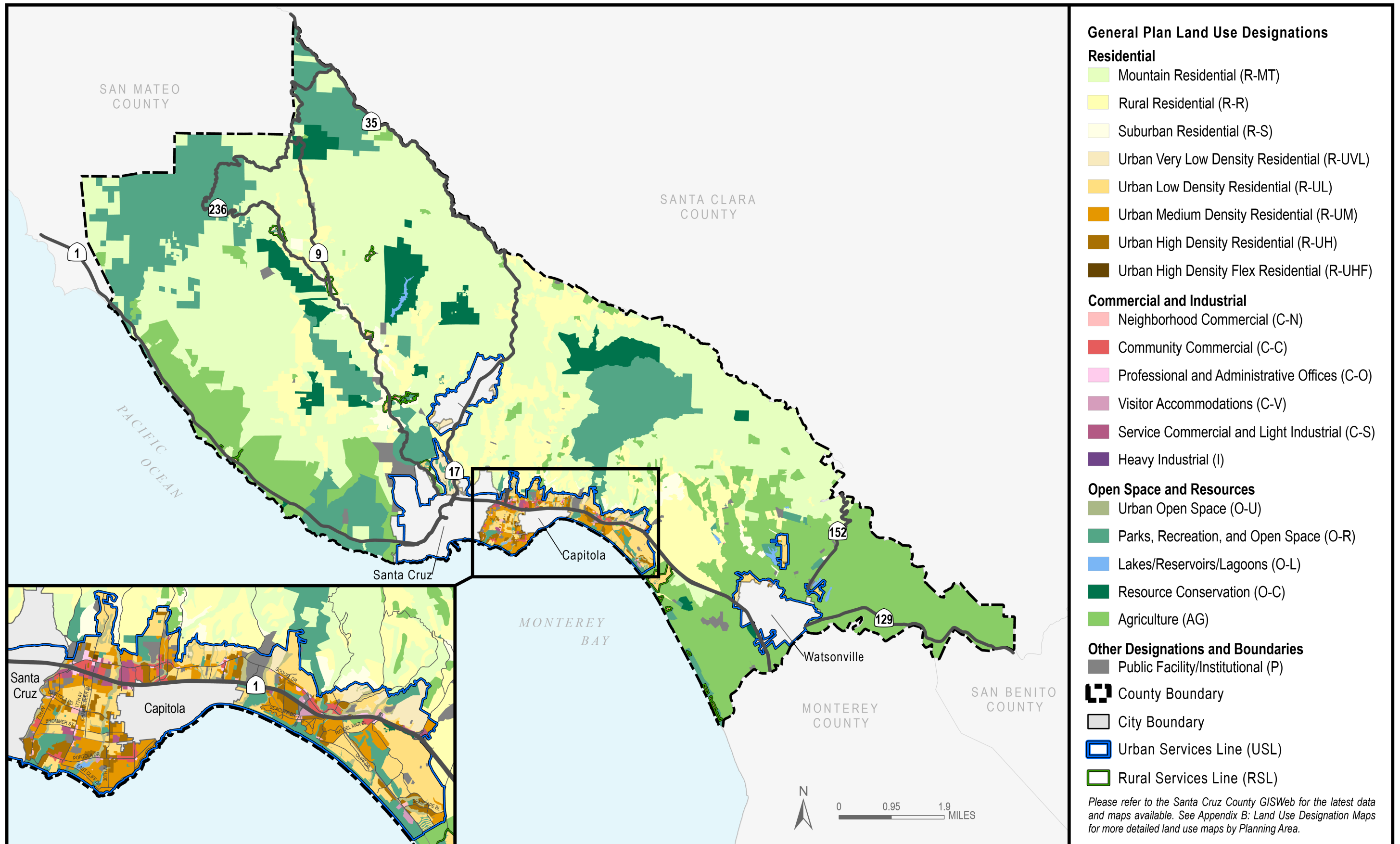
The County's population growth rate peaked at over 50% in the 1970s, but after growth management measures were established, the annual growth rates have fluctuated between 5 and -.42 percent per year over the past 40 years. According to the 2018 American Community Survey, average household size is 2.7 people, and most residents live in single-family homes. Approximately 59% of housing units in the County are owner occupied, and 41% are rentals. The median age is 37.9 years and is increasing year after year, reflecting an aging baby boomer generation. In terms of ethnicity, the community is mostly Non-Hispanic White, but the Hispanic/Latino population is a significant and growing segment of the population, especially in South County. In 2018, median household income was \$78,041. Income disparity between high and low earners is widening as high-income workers continue to move here and commute out of the County. For more detailed demographic information, see Appendix C: Community Profile.



*East Cliff Village Apartments, for low-income seniors and the disabled.*



**Figure 1-2: Santa Cruz County Land Use Designations and Urban/Rural Services Lines**



Source: Santa Cruz County.



## PROJECTED POPULATION AND EMPLOYMENT GROWTH

The Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG) is responsible for projecting regional growth for Santa Cruz, San Benito and Monterey counties. As shown in Table 1-1, AMBAG projects that the county’s unincorporated population will grow to 135,625 by 2040 and 135,953 by 2045, relative to 293,156 and 294,967 for the county as a whole, respectively. AMBAG projects that the county’s unincorporated population will grow at a slower rate than the county as a whole. The projected 2040 population forecast estimates an increase of 2,132 persons in the unincorporated area over 2020, which results in an average annual growth rate in the unincorporated area of 0.08%, relative to approximately 0.4% for the county as a whole. These percentages are relatively low compared to past annual growth rates of 0.3% to 0.5% in previous decades.

AMBAG adopted the 2022 Regional Growth Forecast in June 2022 as part of the 2045 Metropolitan Transportation Plan/ Sustainable Communities Strategy (AMBAG 2022).

Table 1-1: Population Projections		
Year	Santa Cruz County (Unincorporated)	Santa Cruz County (Whole)
2020	133,493	271,233
2025	134,675	278,641
2030	135,207	284,146
2035	135,304	288,523
2040	135,625	293,156
2045	135,953	294,967
Change, 2020-2040	2,132	21,923
Average Annual Growth Rate, 2020-2040	0.08%	0.40%

Source: AMBAG 2022

AMBAG’s adopted employment forecast projects that countywide employment is expected to grow by 7.2% between 2020 and 2040, with the unincorporated county growing by 6.5%, or 2,938 jobs over the same time period (from 45,264 to 48,202 jobs). Industries projected to grow the most are education and health services, financial services, professional services, and manufacturing. The County’s economic base (net export) industries of agriculture and tourism are projected to experience moderate growth. Overall, job growth in Santa Cruz County is projected to be slower than the state average, due to below-average representation in the fast-growing, high wage industries of information, professional services, finance, and transportation, warehousing, and utilities.

In order to forecast the amount of growth that could be accommodated by the land uses within this General Plan, County forecasts were also completed to estimate the number of dwelling units and amount of commercial growth that could be accommodated in the planning horizon (2020-2040). A potential increase of approximately 4,448 dwelling units and 6,209,500 square feet in non-residential growth were estimated for potential growth within the 20-year planning horizon.



## STRENGTHS, CHALLENGES + OPPORTUNITIES

Santa Cruz County's physical setting between the Santa Cruz Mountains and the Pacific Ocean, mild climate, and natural resources and open spaces play major roles in the attractiveness of the County. Other strengths include the County's unique communities that are diverse and have preserved their individuality over time. Opportunities for recreation, proximity to Silicon Valley and the San Francisco Bay Area, and a diverse and growing economy have also contributed to the County's many strengths.

However, challenges of both a global and regional nature have affected Santa Cruz County, just as in many California coastal communities. Dependence on motor vehicles increases traffic congestion and unpredictable travel times, increases commute distances and times, and ultimately contributes to lower mobility and quality of life. Climate change and the proliferation of greenhouse gases threaten the County's air quality, coastal beaches, and forested mountains. A regional housing supply and affordability crisis, as well as homelessness, challenge the livability and diversity of our communities. Despite recent economic growth in the County, workers continue to migrate out of the County for work and affordable housing. The jobs that are being created tend toward low-skill, low-wage jobs, while the creation of higher paying professions in the County has lagged behind. Finally, global and regional health conditions, such as the spread of COVID-19, which sparked a worldwide pandemic, challenge the business-as-usual approach to both living and working conditions.

Looking forward, development patterns in Santa Cruz County will need to shift to address the challenges noted above. Detached single-family housing separated from jobs and services and dependent on motor vehicles as a dominant land use will not address the housing choice, transportation options, quality communities, and environmental protection goals of the community, nor will it ensure the sustainability of the County's future. Focused improvements to the transportation network must prioritize reduced congestion, multimodal mobility and coordination with local land use development and regional planning initiatives. A wider diversity of housing options must be provided so that low- and moderate-wage workers can afford to live here; and development regulations must encourage more high-wage businesses to locate in Santa Cruz County so that high-wage workers living here can work where they live and more County residents can have access to higher-paying job opportunities. Due to the County's proximity to Silicon Valley and changes in state law, opportunities in the County for higher-wage jobs exist in the technology, professional offices, healthcare, and cannabis sectors.

The challenges Santa Cruz County faces require a multi-disciplinary approach to planning for future change, using a sustainable growth framework.



# 1.3. STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

## STATE GENERAL PLAN LAW

The California Planning and Zoning Law (Government Code section 65300 et seq. of the Government Code) requires adoption of a comprehensive long-term *General Plan* to guide the physical development of a county. Certain elements are required by law to be included in the *General Plan*, including Land Use, Circulation, Housing, Conservation, Open Space, Public Safety, and Noise; other elements, such as Community Design, Parks and Recreation, and Public Facilities are optional. However, jurisdictions are given leeway to structure their general plans, as long as all required elements are covered and consistent with one another, as required by Government Code section 65300.5.

Table 1-2 indicates which chapters address the issues of the required General Plan elements, and also identifies how two other required County plans - the Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan and Local Coastal Program (LCP) - are incorporated within the *General Plan*.

Table 1-2: Chapters Addressing Required General Plan Elements								
	Chapter							
	1: Introduction	2: Built Environment	3: Access + Mobility	4: Housing	5: Agriculture, Natural Resources + Conservation	6: Public Safety	7: Parks, Recreation + Public Facilities	8: Noise
<b>Required Elements (State Law)</b>								
Land Use	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	
Circulation			✓					
Housing		✓		✓				
Conservation					✓		✓	
Open Space					✓	✓	✓	
Safety						✓		
Noise								✓
Environmental Justice	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan		✓						
The LCP Land Use Plan is incorporated in seven chapters of the General Plan and the Glossary	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓

In Santa Cruz County, there are extensive natural resources and environmental constraints to development. Therefore, it is appropriate to separate statutory land use requirements into those that focus on development and growth of the built environment, and those that focus on





agricultural and natural resources. For this reason, Chapter 2: Built Environment meets California’s General Plan Land Use Element statutory requirements with the following exceptions: agriculture, open space, and timberland are addressed in Chapter 5: Agriculture, Natural Resources + Conservation; flood risk is addressed in Chapter 6: Public Safety; and parks, public facilities and greenways are addressed in Chapter 7: Parks, Recreation + Public Facilities. Table 1-3 lists each of Santa Cruz County *General Plan* and LCP land use designations, followed by the chapter that contains the primary policies corresponding to the designation.

<b>Table 1-3: General Plan Land Use Designations</b>		
<b>Designation</b>		<b>Chapter</b>
AG	Agriculture	5: Agriculture, Natural Resources + Conservation
C-O	Office Commercial	2: Built Environment
C-N	Neighborhood Commercial	2: Built Environment
C-C	Community Commercial	2: Built Environment
C-V	Visitor Accommodations	2: Built Environment
C-S	Service Commercial/Light Industrial	2: Built Environment
I	Heavy Industrial	2: Built Environment
Q	Quarry/Mining	5: Agriculture, Natural Resources + Conservation
O-U	Urban Open Space	5: Agriculture, Natural Resources + Conservation
O-C	Resource Conservation	5: Agriculture, Natural Resources + Conservation
O-L	Lake, Reservoir, Lagoon	5: Agriculture, Natural Resources + Conservation
O-R	Parks, Recreation and Open Space	7: Parks, Recreation + Public Facilities
P	Public Facility/Institutional	7: Parks, Recreation + Public Facilities
R-M	Mountain Residential	2: Built Environment
R-R	Rural Residential	2: Built Environment
R-S	Suburban Residential	2: Built Environment
R-UVL	Urban Residential, Very Low Density	2: Built Environment
R-UL	Urban Residential, Low Density	2: Built Environment
R-UM	Urban Residential, Medium Density	2: Built Environment
R-UH	Urban Residential, High Density	2: Built Environment
R-UHF	Urban Residential, Flexible High Density	2: Built Environment



## ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

SB 1000 requires that a general plan address seven overarching environmental justice themes: pollution exposure and air quality, public facilities, food access, safe and sanitary homes, physical activity, “civil” or community engagement, and improvements and programs that address the needs of disadvantaged communities. These topics can be addressed in a separate element or incorporated throughout various elements. Environmental justice is an issue that affects the policy approach of almost every element in the *General Plan*. Therefore, the County has incorporated policies and implementation strategies throughout the *General Plan* that address the disproportionate environmental and health impacts on the County’s most vulnerable residents. A summary of the various environmental justice topics required by SB 1000 and where they can be found is included in Appendix E: Environmental Justice Policies and Implementation Strategies. Environmental Justice goals, objectives, policies and implementation strategies in each chapter of the *General Plan* are noted by the initials “EJ.”

The Santa Cruz County General Plan/LCP is also required to identify disadvantaged communities, which are populations that are disproportionately affected by environmental pollution or hazards or that have high concentrations of people who are low income, high unemployment, low levels of homeownership, high rent burden, sensitive populations, or low levels of educational attainment (Health and Safety Code [HSC] section 39711). There are a number of public agencies that use varying interpretations of this definition resulting in different areas of the County being defined as a disadvantaged communities. For example, while State Department of Transportation (Caltrans) accepts regional definitions of disadvantaged communities, the State Department of Water Resources uses a stricter definition that results in different population groupings. Additionally, because the definition is partly dependent on sociodemographic characteristics such as income and race, areas that fall into this definition will transition or change over the life of the *General Plan*. In order to account for the changing characteristics of the community, as well as the variety of state mandated definitions, the County maps disadvantaged communities as those that are defined as such by HSC section 39711, and by state agencies such as the California Air Resources Board, the California Environmental Protection Agency, and the State Water Resources Agency, or Census tracts where the majority of the population are low income, poverty, or minority as defined by Census data or local income surveys.<sup>1</sup> Additional communities may be considered disadvantaged based on unmapped environmental risks.

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<sup>1</sup> Mapping of EJ populations are provided in the Built Environment Element using the CalEPA <https://oehha.ca.gov/calenviroscreen> tool. Other State agencies provide additional mapping resources that are updated regularly to identify disadvantaged communities. These tools include, the State Water Resources Agency <https://gis.water.ca.gov/app/dacs/>, the California Air Resources Board Low-Income Communities map <https://ww3.arb.ca.gov/cc/capandtrade/auctionproceeds/communityinvestments.htm>, and the California Healthy Places Index <https://map.healthyplacesindex.org/>.



## GENERAL PLAN GUIDELINES + STATE PLANNING PRIORITIES

The State Office of Planning and Research published a revised set of *General Plan* Guidelines in 2017. While advisory, the guidelines provide direction and recommendations for addressing mandated requirements. This *General Plan* is consistent with the 2017 Guidelines.

This *General Plan* also addresses the State's Planning Priorities. California Government Code section 65041.1 includes priorities to promote and protect equity, the economy, and public health and safety, as summarized below:

- (a) To promote infill development by improving existing infrastructure that supports infill development, reuse, and redevelopment of previously developed, underutilized land that is presently served by essential services, and to preserving cultural and historic resources.
- (b) To protect environmental and agricultural resources, forest lands, natural lands, recreation lands and open space, and unique landscapes.
- (c) To encourage efficient development patterns by ensuring that any infrastructure supports new development that uses land efficiently, is served by essential utilities, and minimizes costs to taxpayers.

In addition, State Planning Law (Government Code Section 65300.5) requires that General Plan elements be consistent with one another: “. . . the Legislature intends that the general plan and elements and parts thereof comprise an integrated, internally consistent and compatible statement of policies for the adopting agency.”

## OTHER LAWS + REQUIREMENTS

A variety of changes to state laws have been adopted in recent years that are intended to foster the development of safe, inclusive, and sustainable communities and to avoid and minimize environmental impacts caused by sprawl and reliance on automobiles.

AB 32, the Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006, established a program to reduce GHGs and was followed in 2008 by Senate Bill (SB) 375 (the Sustainability Communities Strategy), which requires coordinated land use and transportation planning and sets regional GHG reduction targets to achieve the GHG reduction goals of AB 32. AB 1358, the Complete Streets Act (2008), requires jurisdictions to include multimodal transportation policies within the circulation element. SB 743 (2013) requires jurisdictions to use Vehicle Miles Traveled as the metric for determining whether a project has transportation impacts under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). SB 35, Affordable Housing Streamlined Approval (2017), allows for streamlined ministerial approvals of housing developments within jurisdictions that are not meeting their Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) targets.



SB 244 and SB 535 (along with SB 1000) require general plans to identify and plan for disadvantaged communities; and AB 1505 addresses farmworker housing. The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act of 2014 requires coordination with water supply agencies prior to the adoption of substantive general plan amendments. Finally, AB 3065, 2140, and 162 require revisions to Safety Elements to address requirements related to fire hazard severity zones, local hazard mitigation plans, and flood hazards. The Santa Cruz County General Plan/LCP is also required by Government Code Section 65302.3(a) to be consistent with the California Airport Land Use Planning Handbook. In this case, the County Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan is included within Chapter 2: Built Environment and Appendix H: Airport Land Use Compatibility Requirements and County Strategy.

## CALIFORNIA COASTAL ACT

The California Coastal Act of 1976 (Coastal Act) requires local jurisdictions to adopt an LCP to regulate development within the coastal zone (see Figure 1-4 for the County's coastal boundary). The basic goals of the Coastal Act, as stated in Public Resources Code Section 30001.5 are to:

- (a) Protect, maintain, and where feasible, enhance and restore the overall quality of the coastal zone environment and its natural and man-made resources.
- (b) Assure orderly, balanced utilization and conservation of coastal zone resources taking into account the social and economic needs of the people of the state.
- (c) Maximize public access to and along the coast and maximize public recreation opportunities in the coastal zone consistent with sound resource conservation principles and constitutionally protected rights of private property owners.
- (d) Assure priority for coastal-dependent development over other development on the coast.
- (e) Encourage state and local initiatives and cooperation in preparing procedures to implement coordinated planning and development for mutually beneficial uses, including educational uses, in the coastal zone.

The Coastal Act requires jurisdictions to have an LCP consisting of both a Land Use Plan (LUP) and a Local Coastal Implementation Plan (LCIP) with implementing actions that are consistent with the statewide Coastal Act policies. The LCP is legally binding on the County and provides a permanent program for coastal protection. The County's LUP is contained within the *General Plan*; goals, objectives, policies, and implementation strategies in each chapter of the *General Plan* that are also part of the LUP are noted by the initials "LCP." The County's LCIP implementing ordinances are listed in Santa Cruz County Code (SCCC) section 18.60.050 and include portions of SCCC Titles 7 – Health and Safety, 12 – Building Regulations, 13 – Planning and Zoning Regulations, 15 – Community Facilities, 16 – Environmental and Resource Protection, 17 – Community Development, and 18 – Procedures. Once a jurisdiction's LCP has been certified, the local jurisdiction is responsible for development review in the coastal zone, while the Coastal



Commission maintains regulatory authority over tidelands, submerged lands, and public trust lands, as well as an appealable area. For more information about the history of the LCP in Santa Cruz County, see Appendix D: Planning History.

**Figure 1-3: Coastal Zone**



Source: Santa Cruz County





East Cliff Drive and coastline in Pleasure Point.  
*Photo credit: Santa Cruz County*



## 1.4 LOCAL + REGIONAL COORDINATION

The Santa Cruz County *General Plan* is aligned and coordinated with other planning initiatives at the County, and the surrounding region.

### OTHER COUNTY PLANNING INITIATIVES

Aside from this General Plan/LCP, the County has undertaken several planning initiatives to address current and future challenges. Development of the *Sustainable Santa Cruz County Plan* in 2014 followed development of the *Climate Action Strategy* (2013) to address the County's response to long-term climate change. In the past several years, the County has focused on the need for quality economic development, and in 2013 began the development of an *Economic Vitality Study*. The results of the study supported the development of an *Economic Development Vision and Strategy*, adopted by the County Board of Supervisors on November 18, 2014. That document presents a vision for economic development centered around seven goals that address sustainable development, key economic sectors, public investment and infrastructure, community development, and promotion of the County's economic strengths. The General Plan/LCP furthers the goals of the *Economic Development Vision and Strategy*.

In 2017 and 2018, the County embarked upon a public process to develop a *County Strategic Plan* for the County organization. The *County Strategic Plan* (2018) sets goals in six focus areas: Attainable Housing, Comprehensive Health and Safety, Dynamic Economy, Sustainable Environment, Reliable Transportation, and County Operational Excellence. The Santa Cruz County General Plan/LCP relates to each of these goals. In June 2019, the County also adopted an *Operational Plan*, with objectives and key steps identified that would implement the six *County Strategic Plan* goals. The 2018 County Strategic Plan and the 2019 Operational Plan efforts involved extensive public participation, and those plans have also informed development of the Santa Cruz County General Plan/LCP.

In 2018, the Parks, Open Space and Cultural Services Department (Parks Department) adopted a *Santa Cruz County Parks Strategic Plan* reflecting public input and a 10-year roadmap for improvement of County parks. The County Health Services Agency's *Community Health Improvement Plan* (2018-2023) addresses quality of life and public health concerns in the community. The Santa Cruz County General Plan/LCP supports the policies and programs in these two documents. The plan also informs and coordinates with Department of Public Works plans such as the *Capital Improvement Plan* and *Public Works Design Criteria*.



Finally, in December 2018 the County Board of Supervisors accepted the *Pleasure Point Commercial Corridor Vision and Guiding Principles* for public and private improvements along Portola Drive and 41<sup>st</sup> Avenue in Pleasure Point. This document was accompanied by the Portola Drive Streetscape Concepts, which reimagines the way Portola Drive functions. The goals and standards of these documents are included within the General Plan/LCP and implementing codes and design guidelines.

## REGIONAL COORDINATION

Development, amendment, and implementation of a community's general plan is related to and contingent upon the planning activities of regional agencies, utility providers, school districts, and other local jurisdictions. To this end, the General Plan/LCP reflects coordination with these agencies, population and employment forecasts, sharing of data, aligning policies, and consideration of projects that implement agency plans. The County invited review of the draft amendments associated with the update of the General Plan/LCP prior to adoption.

## REGIONAL GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

AMBAG is the metropolitan planning organization for Santa Cruz, Monterey, and San Benito counties. AMBAG manages the regional transportation demand model, prepares the Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Program that allocates federal funding for transportation projects, and develops affordable housing goals for the counties and cities in the region as part of the RHNA process. AMBAG adopted the *2040 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP)/Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS)* in 2018 for the region, which contains updated population, housing and employment growth forecasts, and is expected to adopt a 2045 update by June 2022.

The Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (SCCRTC) is the regional transportation planning agency for the County, responsible for developing transportation policy and funding decisions. SCCRTC adopted the *2040 Regional Transportation Plan* in June 2018, and adopted the *Regional Transportation Improvement Program*, which allocates state funding for transportation projects, in December 2017. The General Plan/LCP is consistent with the SCCRTC transportation planning documents, which also include but are not limited to the *Santa Cruz County Bicycle Plan*, *Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail Network Master Plan*, and the *Monterey Bay Area Complete Streets Guidebook*.

Other transportation agencies, including the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), which has jurisdiction over the major highways in the County (Highways 1, 9, 17, 35, 129, 152, and 236), and the Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District, which provides bus service within the





County, are also planning for transportation improvements and services reflected in this General Plan/LCP.

## NEIGHBORING JURISDICTIONS

**Incorporated Cities.** Coordination with and close monitoring of the County's four incorporated cities also inform this General Plan/LCP. Of special importance is the City of Capitola, since the County's unincorporated urban central coast surrounds this city, and this is one of the areas of the County where the growth and change is anticipated over the timeline of this General Plan/LCP. The *City of Capitola General Plan (2014)* expresses the city's intention to maintain and enhance the current land use distribution, with increased residential density around the 41<sup>st</sup> Avenue regional commercial corridor and redevelopment of the Capitola Mall. The *City of Santa Cruz General Plan (2012)* calls for commercial and higher-density residential and mixed-use development focused along major transportation corridors, and job growth in the city's western and northern industrial areas. The *City of Watsonville General Plan (2005)* allows a full range of urban land uses, within an Urban Limit Line designed to contain sprawl. Outside this line, the city and county prioritize rural land uses. The *City of Scotts Valley General Plan (1994)* emphasizes protection of hillside forests of the San Lorenzo Valley and concentrated development in the urban core along major transportation corridors. County land use bordering Scotts Valley is primarily rural residential, in keeping with the City's plan.

**Neighboring Counties.** This *General Plan* also considers the general plans of neighboring *San Mateo, Santa Clara, San Benito* and *Monterey* counties. Coordination with regional neighbors is particularly important to address regional and global issues such as climate change, reduction in greenhouse gases, housing supply and affordability. These neighboring counties plan to maintain existing rural land uses where they border Santa Cruz County in rural mountainous terrain to the north and east. To the south, both Santa Cruz and Monterey County prioritize preservation of agricultural land in the Pajaro River Valley.

**Other Agencies.** School districts, flood districts, groundwater management agencies, and utilities are also planning for resources and improvements that this General Plan/LCP has considered.

## COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

The Santa Cruz County General Plan/LCP considers the presence of two higher education institutions in Santa Cruz County: University of California, Santa Cruz and Cabrillo College. While UCSC provides approximately 80% of housing for students on campus, Cabrillo does not have any on campus housing. Students of both campuses therefore seek affordable off-campus housing while attending school. After graduating, students may settle in Santa Cruz and join the local workforce if opportunities are available.



**University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC).** UCSC offers undergraduate and graduate degrees, with a main campus in northern City of Santa Cruz bordering the County’s Carbonera Planning Area, and a satellite Marine Science Campus on the City’s west side bordering the County’s Bonny Doon Planning Area. Enrollment as of 2018 was about 18,500, growing by about 5,500 students over the course of the UCSC 2005-2020 Long Range Development Plan (LRDP). The LRDP projects growth to occur mostly through infill and in specified areas to the north of the developed campus. The LRDP was amended in 2019 to include a 30-acre, 3,000+ bed student housing project (Student Housing West) on the western and southeastern portions of campus. There is a new LRDP plan in progress; the County’s land use policies and implementation strategies will be updated as necessary to consider the new LRDP when it is developed.

**Cabrillo College.** Cabrillo College is a community college with a main campus in Aptos and a satellite campus in City of Watsonville, as well as small locations in the Cities of Scotts Valley and Santa Cruz. According to the school’s Master Plans for Education and Facilities, enrollment has been falling in recent years, although the college intends to restructure programming to boost enrollment, especially at the Watsonville campus. The 2015 enrollment was about 13,500 students, over 80% of which attended the main campus. The college is currently focusing on modernizing existing facilities, but the Facilities Master Plan identifies unfunded “highly desired projects” including the possibility of developing new affordable housing for students and a conference center.



Cabrillo College.

Source: *Economic Development Vision and Strategy, Santa Cruz County, 2014*



## 1.5 ORGANIZATION AND CONTENTS

The heart of the General Plan is a combination of the *General Plan* and LCP Land Use Plan. This document contains eight chapters, a glossary, and appendices, each addressing specific subject areas, and includes the seven State-mandated General Plan elements, as well as an optional Parks, Recreation + Public Facilities Element.

The General Plan/LCP also includes the following appendices, which contain technical data and information, maps, and tables too detailed to include within the text of the Plan<sup>2</sup>:

- Appendix A – Sources and References
- Appendix B – Land Use Designation Maps
- Appendix C – Community Profile
- Appendix D – Planning History
- Appendix E – Environmental Justice Policies and Implementation Strategies
- Appendix F – Natural Resource and Environmental Hazard Areas: Maps and Development Constraints
- Appendix G – Coastal Priority Sites Use and Development Standards
- Appendix H – Airport Land Use Compatibility: Statutory Requirements and County Context
- Appendix I – Transportation Demand Management Strategies
- Appendix J – Roadways and Intersection Improvements
- Appendix K – Sensitive Habitat Plant and Animal Species
- Appendix L – Public Service Providers to Unincorporated Santa Cruz County
- Appendix M – Santa Cruz County Parks and Recreation Facilities
- Appendix N – Memorandum of Understanding Regarding Watsonville LCP Amendment 1-99

## GOALS, OBJECTIVES, POLICIES, AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

The text of the General Plan/LCP is written in the form of goals, objectives, policies, and implementation strategies. Goals are general statements formulated in light of identified issues and problems. Objectives are specific statements denoting measurable ends to be reached or achieved in the pursuit of goals. Policies are definitive guidelines to shape day-to-day decisions and actions in order to achieve the stated goals and objectives of the Plan. Implementation strategies are similar to policies except they represent the commitment of specific effort and resources in an organized manner to accomplish the intended objectives.

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<sup>2</sup> Chapter 4: Housing also contains appendices related to that element directly following the text of the element.

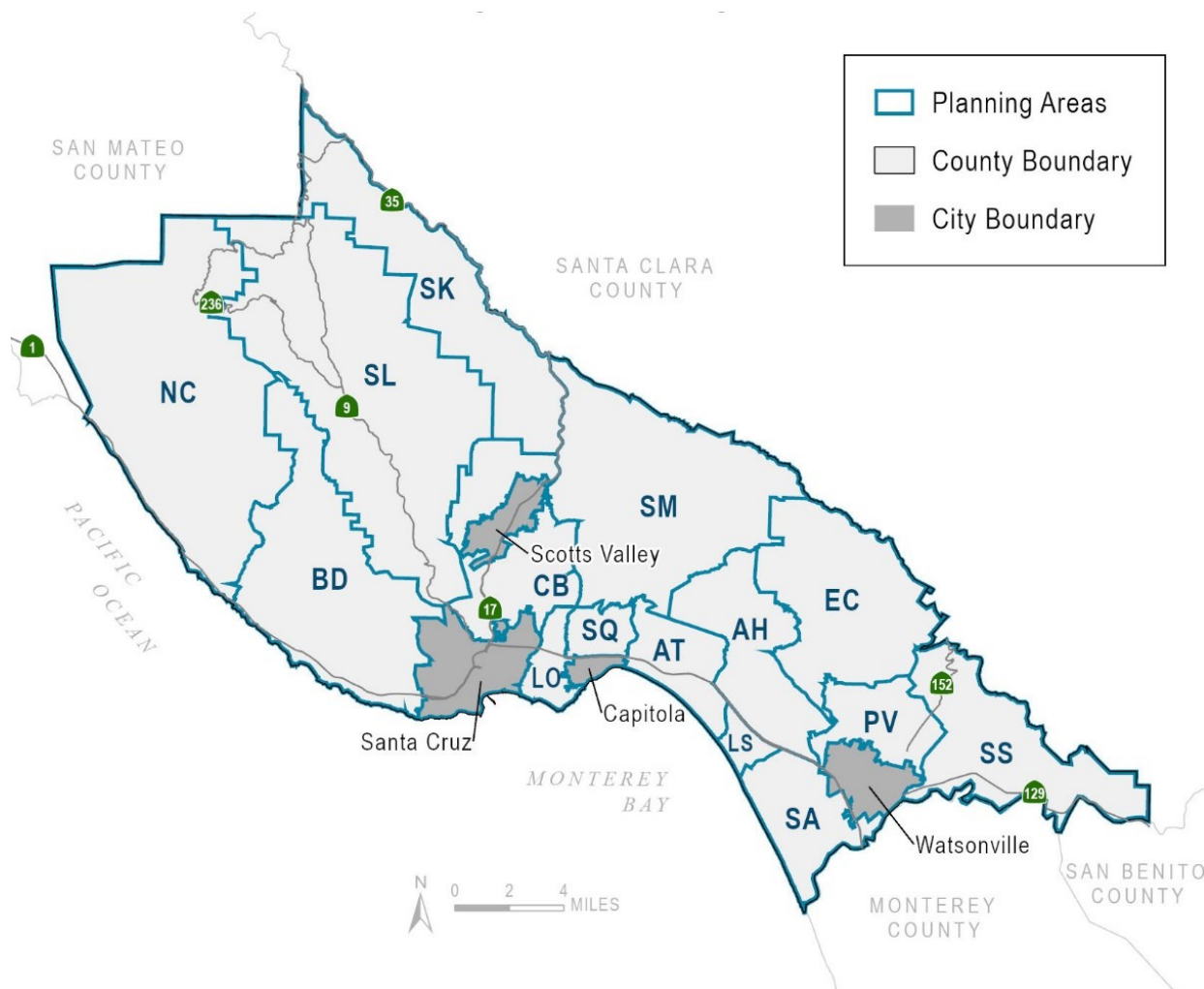


## PLANNING AREAS

For mapping and planning purposes, the County has been divided into 15 planning areas, which were created to correspond to geographic regions, as well as to generally follow the boundaries of census tracts in order to facilitate future data analysis.

- Aptos (AT)
- Aptos Hills (AH)
- Bonny Doon (BD)
- Carbonera (CB)
- Eureka Canyon (EC)
- La Selva (LS)
- Live Oak (LO)
- North Coast (NC)
- Pajaro Valley (PV)
- Salsipuedes (SS)
- San Andreas (SA)
- San Lorenzo Valley (SL)
- Skyline (SK)
- Soquel (SQ)
- Summit (SM)

**Figure 1-4: Planning Areas**



Source: Santa Cruz County.





## MAPS

Santa Cruz County has entered all General Plan- and LCP-related map information into a countywide Geographic Information System (GIS). Maps, General Plan land use designations and zoning districts, parcel data, and resource constraint maps are available in electronic graphical format and in tabular format on the County's website. The most current versions residing in the County's GIS are considered to be the official adopted General Plan/LCP maps.

The Resources and Constraints Maps are listed in Appendix F and reflect and implement the policies of the General Plan and LCP Land Use Plan, as well as policies of the State of California and the United States government, as applicable. Based on mapped features and/or technical data, map updates are performed continuously, and are based on approved technical data shown in Appendix F.

The County's GIS system consists of a series of layers representing land use and facilities information; and another series of layers which represent the land's natural and/or cultural resources to be protected and other development constraints. Both sets of data must be consulted in order to determine the development potential for any particular property.

The specific conservation and development policies that apply to any particular area or property are determined by reviewing the policies in the General Plan/LCP text, which apply to the specific map designations for the given location. Taken together, along with applicable County Codes such as the Zoning ordinance, these policies will determine the allowable use and/or development density and constraints applicable to a property.



Changes to the General Plan/LCP land use maps are made only upon approval of a land use designation change by the Board of Supervisors, and when located in the Coastal Zone, the California Coastal Commission.



## 1.6 GENERAL PLAN + LCP PREPARATION, MONITORING + REVIEW

The *General Plan* is drafted by the Community Development & Infrastructure Department (CDID) and reviewed by the Planning Commission for adoption by the Board of Supervisors. To remain relevant and responsive to a growing and changing community, the General Plan/LCP should be updated as needed to address changes in the community. In addition to countywide updates of the Plan, property owners or interested persons may initiate property-specific land use designation map amendments or amendments to policies or other text. Amendments to any particular General Plan/LCP element may be made up to four times each year. An annual report shall be published each year detailing all amendments to the General Plan/LCP that have been adopted during the prior year.

Some of the information contained within the *General Plan* and LCP does not require *General Plan* or LCP amendment approval by the Board of Supervisors and certification by the California Coastal Commission. This document contains references to specific Assessor's Parcel Numbers and code sections of other documents, as well as a list of sensitive habitat species in Appendix K. As these and other documents change from time to time, reprints of the *General Plan* and LCP Land Use Plan may be updated to include accurate references to Assessor's parcel numbers and code sections without Board of Supervisors approval or California Coastal Commission certification.

The Coastal Act provides for California Coastal Commission review of each LCP at least every five years, and, in addition, the County may prepare and submit LCP amendments for review by the California Coastal Commission on a periodic basis (up to three LCP amendment "rounds" can be submitted each year; each round can include multiple separate amendments). The process for review and approval of the LCP and subsequent amendments includes public hearings before the Santa Cruz County Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors, and certification by the California Coastal Commission. When the California Coastal Commission determines the County's LCP amendments meet the requirements of the Coastal Act, the California Coastal Commission "certifies" the LCP amendments.

Santa Cruz County holds the responsibility for implementing its adopted LCP, including permit authority within the Coastal Zone above the mean high tide line. The LCP is binding not only on local public and private development, but also on special districts and state agencies. Actions taken by the County may be appealed to the California Coastal Commission only under defined circumstances (specified in Public Resources Code Section 30603 and the County Code Chapter titled Coastal Zone Regulations).



## GUIDANCE FOR REVIEWING + UPDATING THE GENERAL PLAN + LCP

The following guidance establishes general expectations for periodic review and update for the General Plan/LCP.

- (1) Prepare and submit an annual report on the General Plan/LCP to the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors. The report shall include a description of maps that have been updated based on the criteria outlined in Appendix F: Resource and Constraints Maps, as well as an assessment of the status of achieving General Plan/LCP action items. (Responsibility: CDID, Planning Commission, Board of Supervisors)
- (2) Adopt a yearly work program for the CDID as a part of the annual budget process. Establish priorities for General Plan/LCP implementation through the work program and the Capital Improvements Program. (Responsibility: CDID, Board of Supervisors, County Administrative Office)
- (3) Provide for amendments to General Plan elements up to four times per year (for each element) and the LCP up to three times per year. (Responsibility: CDID, Planning Commission, Board of Supervisors)
- (4) Undertake a major revision and updating of the General Plan/LCP as needed to address changes in the community, with substantial citizen participation and citizen task forces. Update the Housing Element every eight years to meet state law and strive to update other elements every 20 years. (Responsibility: CDID, Planning Commission, Board of Supervisors)

## INTERPRETATION

Although every effort has been made to write clear policies and clearly map land uses, resources, and constraints, it may occasionally be necessary to interpret policies and mapped designations. When such interpretations are necessary, the Planning Director is responsible for interpreting the *General Plan* policies or mapping designations. Where disputes arise, the Planning Commission is charged with the resolution of the disputes (with right of appeal to the Board of Supervisors).

The General Plan Land Use Designation Maps included in Figure 1-2 and Appendix B: Land Use Designation Maps are diagrammatic in nature and express relationships rather than parcel-specific detail. These diagrams represent approximate locations of land use types. Parcel-specific land use designation information, as well as implementing zoning information, is contained within the County's GIS and on file with the County Community Development & Infrastructure Department.



Because of the scale of the General Plan/LCP maps and the detail and accuracy of the source data, it is not always possible to show precise boundaries; and actual conditions on specific properties may not coincide with the mapped designation. Interpretation of land use boundaries is dependent on environmental resources, physical hazards, road access, and adequacy of public facilities and services. The application of specific resource and constraint policies (See Chapter 5: Agriculture, Natural Resources + Conservation) is dependent on the actual occurrence of the resource or hazard on the property or in the area of development. Information developed on a project or a site-specific basis may, therefore, be utilized in interpreting and applying this General Plan/LCP.

All of the policies of the *General Plan* apply in the Coastal Zone; however, where LCP policies are more protective of coastal resources, the LCP policies shall prevail. The adopted and certified LCP forms the legal standard of review for issuance of Coastal Development Permits (CDP) within the County’s coastal zone and is legally binding on the County. In any case of any conflict between the requirements of the LCP and any applicable local land use regulation, the requirements of the LCP and the Coastal Act shall take precedence. In any case of any conflict between the LUP and the IP, then the LUP shall take precedence. In any case in which the interpretation or application of an LCP policy is unclear, ~~as that policy may relate to a particular development application or project,~~ the application or interpretation of the policy that most clearly conforms to the relevant Coastal Act policy shall be utilized. When such interpretations are necessary, the Planning Director is responsible for interpreting LCP policies, in consultation with the Executive Director of the Coastal Commission. In some cases, the interpretation or application of one or more of the LCP’s policies might be affected by the results of an implementation measure proposed in the Land Use Plan. In any such case, until the implementation measure has been completed, the Land Use Plan policies contained in this document shall be interpreted and applied to particular development applications or projects in a manner that will be as most protective of coastal resources ~~as is possible~~.

Neither the County General Plan, the County LCP Land Use Plan, nor any implementing ordinance shall be construed as authorizing the County or any agency thereof to exercise its power to approve, conditionally approve, or deny any land use application in a manner which will take or damage private property for public use, without the payment of just compensation

### IDENTIFICATION OF LCP POLICIES

Goals, objectives, policies, and implementation strategies identified with (LCP) initials indicate language that is part of the LCP. However, language identified with “(LCP)” is not restricted to the coastal zone and applies countywide unless specifically stated in the policy.

Goals, objectives, policies, and implementation strategies that have no initials indicate the language applies countywide but is not LCP text.

The glossary at the end of this *General Plan* also identifies which definitions are part of the LCP, requiring certification by the California Coastal Commission.





therefor. The County General Plan, LCP Land Use Plan, and every implementing ordinance thereof shall be interpreted so as to avoid such taking in the absence of a duly adopted resolution of necessity for eminent domain proceedings. This section is not intended to increase or decrease the rights of any owner of property under the Constitution of the State of California or the United States of America.