



CITY OF ATASCADERO

PLANNING COMMISSION

STAFF REPORT

10/21/25 | Item G1 | Staff Report

Department: Community Development
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Placement: CD Staff Report

TO: PHIL DUNSMORE, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR
FROM: KELLY GLEASON, PLANNING MANAGER
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SUBJECT: Draft of the 2045 Atascadero General Plan

RECOMMENDATION:

Planning Commission receive an overview of the Draft 2045 General Plan, provide comments on the Draft Plan, and receive an overview of next steps.

BACKGROUND:

The time has come to unveil the Draft 2045 General Plan in its entirety. The City began the five-phased General Plan Update process in July 2021. At the City Council's November 2024 meeting, the City endorsed a "preferred alternative" land use map and corresponding growth assumptions, completing Phase 3 of the project. At that time, the City Council weighed in on key policy topics to inform the General and EIR analysis. Since then, staff and the consultant team have been working on developing the General Plan policies for each of the required Elements (chapters) and have begun preparation of the EIR (Phase 4) as required by CEQA.

As a reminder, the following is an overview of General Plan Update Phases:

- Phase 1: Scoping: included project process refinements and development of a community outreach strategy (**done**).
- Phase 2: Discovery: included development of the Existing Conditions Report, Vision and Guiding Principles, and a range of community engagement meetings and activities to hear early feedback on the City's assets, challenges, and opportunities (**done**).
- Phase 3: Exploring Alternatives: included the development of growth and policy alternatives for Atascadero's future. This phase includes the selection of a draft land use map, projected population and growth estimates, and general policy direction (**done**).
- Phase 4: A Plan for Atascadero 2045: involves development of:
 - Draft 2045 General Plan document (**done**)

- Draft Environmental Impact Report (**in process – January release date**).
- Final outreach on the Draft 2045 General Plan (**late 2025/early 2026**)
- Phase 5: *Celebrating our Future*: will involve preparation of a Final EIR, public hearings with both the Planning Commission and City Council, and final adoption of the 2045 General Plan and certification of the EIR by the City Council.
 - Public Hearings (**early 2026**)
 - Final 2045 General Plan document and final Environmental Impact Report (**early 2026**)

A new General Plan will require the City to subsequently adopt a new zoning code and zoning map. In an effort to get a head start, the City commenced a comprehensive zoning code update in September 2024. That update is intended to dovetail into the 2045 General Plan Update to minimize the gap between General Plan adoption and corresponding zoning code updates. Council and community direction has been incorporated into the draft General Plan policies and will be refined into future zoning standards. Upcoming General Plan outreach opportunities will inform further refinement of zoning standards.

REPORT IN BRIEF:

At the November 2024 meeting, City Council provided direction on key policy topics to aid in finalizing 2045 General Plan policies and solidifying a basis for the environmental analysis. The General Plan is divided into 9 chapters as follows:

- Chapter 1: Introduction
- Chapter 2: Vision and Guiding Principles
- Chapter 3: Land Use and Community Form
- Chapter 4: Economic Development
- Chapter 5: Housing element (***adopted in 2020 and excluded from this current effort***)
- Chapter 6: Mobility
- Chapter 7: Recreation, Open Space, and Natural Resources
- Chapter 8: Public Services and Infrastructure
- Chapter 9: Safety and Emergency Preparedness

While Atascadero remains rooted in its foundational policies to maintain public safety and infrastructure, promote economic development, prioritize fiscal sustainability, and maintain its historic character and natural resources, the City must also accommodate and guide growth in a way that supports our growing community, strives to meet State housing goals, and identifies opportunities to enhance economic prosperity. The 2045 General Plan provides a blueprint for the City aimed at maintaining the essence of Atascadero while acknowledging and accommodating growth in a way that integrates into the overall City goals and vision.

This report and meeting is a first look at the **Draft** 2045 General Plan, opening the Draft Plan for public comment, and providing the Commission and community a chance for dialog and input prior to completion of the environmental document and plan adoption in early 2026. Comments can be submitted in person at

City Hall, via email, at any future outreach event or community meeting, or on the website at Atascadero2045.org (click “Share Your Ideas” on the homepage).

DISCUSSION:

The updated Draft 2045 General Plan refines Placetypes (land uses) and policies that correspond to the goals and vision identified by the Council and community in the second phase of the project. The draft document is broken into chapters that incorporate all required General Plan Elements per State law. All chapters must be consistent to ensure that direction is comprehensive and clear. The following discussion provides an overview of the main chapters and provides an overview of key policy takeaways.

A. Chapter 3: Land Use and Community Form. This chapter fulfills State requirements for the Land Use Element. The chapter sets the stage for zoning and describes the purpose and characteristics of each Placetype (land use district). Policies are identified to preserve and foster community character when exploring opportunities for growth. This chapter outlines goals and policies for development citywide, including unique areas within Atascadero. Key new or expanded policy areas include:

- The use of **Placetypes** to define both the primary uses of land allowed and the character of those uses. While most of the Placetypes reflect existing and long-established development types such as Rural Residential, Commercial, and Industrial, new Placetypes are established as part of this General Plan, such as Mixed-Use and Innovation/Flex. New Placetypes also expand multi-family categories and consolidate open space and commercial designations.
- Renewing the City’s commitment to concentrate new and infill development where utilities already exist.
- Creating **Innovation/Flex Areas** that allow and encourage a mix of lighter, creative employment uses, entertainment, and services.
- Transforming **Morro Road**, over time, into a medical and office focused corridor with allowances for mixed-use projects.
- Intensifying the **Downtown** core with higher residential density and a focus on retail, restaurant, and entertainment uses on the ground floors.
- Refining uses in the **Industrial** areas to focus on employment opportunities, lower intensity manufacturing, and indoor service-related uses.

B. Chapter 4: Economic Development. This chapter provides policies to diversify the economic base and expand employment opportunities by attracting new businesses and supporting existing businesses. This chapter was emphasized by community members and City leaders, but it is not required by State law. Key new or expanded policy areas include:

- Facilitating the establishment of a **full range of goods and services** desired by Atascadero residents, workers, and visitors.
- Attracting **new development and enterprises** that provide jobs and services for current residents and that build the local jobs base of higher-wage positions.
- Coordinating **economic development efforts** with local businesses and organizations such as workforce development organizations and businesses and the Chamber of Commerce.

- Continuing to take a **long-range view of the City's fiscal condition**, including the possibility of enhancing revenues to maintain and, wherever possible and desirable, enhance current levels of service.

C. Chapter 6: Mobility. Fulfills State requirements for the Circulation Element and outlines policies to balance all modes of travel throughout Atascadero, with an emphasis on multi-modal transportation along major corridors, strategies to improve circulation at key intersections and freeway overpasses, and identifying opportunities for expanded bicycle routes and pedestrian connections and trails. Key new or expanded policy areas include:

- Increasing **pedestrian and bicycle connections and safety** between residential areas and commercial areas along major corridors, parks and recreation opportunities, and neighboring communities.
- Maintaining an adequate and well-designed supply of **off-street parking**, particularly in commercial, industrial, and higher-density residential areas.
- Proactively lobbying for State funding and project prioritization of **Highway 101 interchange improvements** in Atascadero.

D. Chapter 7: Recreation, Open Space, and Natural Resources. Fulfills State requirements for the Conservation and Open Space Elements, which focus on resource preservation, park space, and recreation resources. Key new or expanded policy areas include:

- Providing adequate **park and recreation facilities** to accommodate current community needs and planned future growth and developing a method of financing park and recreational facilities and services using a variety of revenue sources.
- Maintaining standards that require new development and subdivisions to blend in with surrounding topography by **minimizing disturbance** to the existing natural environment.
- Ensuring that development along Atascadero Creek, Graves Creeks, the Salinas River, blue line creeks, and natural springs, lakes, and other **riparian areas** does not interrupt natural flows or adversely impact ecosystems and water quality.
- Encouraging the conservation and preservation of places and buildings of **historical and architectural significance**.

E. Chapter 8: Public Services and Infrastructure. Addresses topics required for the Safety and Circulation Elements, in addition to other utility related topics, including water supply, storage, and delivery, wastewater collection and treatment, flood control and stormwater management, solid waste management, energy, and telecommunications. Key new or expanded policy areas include:

- Ensuring that **new development pays its fair share** of providing and/or installing capital facilities needed to support it, including infrastructure necessary to attract high-tech and professional support businesses.
- Ensuring that the City's Water Reclamation Facility Master Plan responds to **long-term growth** objectives and local water quality goals.
- Constructing and maintaining a **water reclamation facility** with capacity for forecasted growth that allows for beneficial reuse of treated wastewater.

- F. Chapter 9: Safety and Emergency Preparedness.** Fulfills State requirements for the Safety and Noise Elements. This chapter establishes goals and policies regarding adequate emergency services and response systems, encompassing both preventative and proactive practices. It also outlines policies to enhance community protection from wildland fire hazards, noise, hazardous materials, adverse effects of climate change, and geological events. Key new or expanded policy areas include:
- Focusing new development in areas of the community that have **lower risk of wildfire hazards** and ensure new development in higher risk areas is consistent with Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) standards.
 - Increasing **wildfire resiliency** by using required and voluntary risk reduction regulations and strategies.
 - Ensuring land use strategies consider **flood control and stormwater management** tactics to reduce the adverse impact of potential minor and major flooding.
 - Implementing building code and site design measures to mitigate **noise impacts** while allowing business enterprises to thrive.
 - Supporting staff training, coordination with regional agencies, and implementation of programs to better equip the City in its **response of all emergency events**.

CONCLUSION:

The Atascadero 2045 General Plan will provide a framework for decision makers and the community for the next 20 years and beyond. The Plan strives to identify policies and actions aimed at achieving the City's overall goals and vision. The public review period gives decision makers, the community, and interested parties a chance to understand the framework and collaborate on key policies and action items well in advance of document adoption and EIR circulation.

NEXT STEPS:

The release of the Draft Plan is the first step in Phase 4 of the process. Phase 4 includes public review of the Draft Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR). Phase 5 includes the culmination of final outreach efforts, public hearings, and final Plan adoption and EIR certification.

1. Draft Environmental Impact Report (January 2026)

Staff and consultants are finalizing the Draft EIR. The Draft EIR analyzes a range of potential environmental impacts associated with implementation of the Draft 2045 General Plan. Identification and mitigation of these potential impacts will be included in the Draft EIR. Policies in the Draft 2045 General Plan have been incorporated into the analysis. The Administrative Draft EIR is expected to be released by the end of the year. Staff will review the Administrative Draft EIR and guide the consultant team towards edits and refinement before the release of the Public review Draft in early 2026.

2. Draft Fiscal Analysis (January 2026)

The Draft Fiscal Analysis will address costs and revenue associated with implementation of the Plan. This analysis will continue to inform land use, infrastructure, and service policies prior to adoption to ensure feasibility of Plan implementation.

3. Public Review Period and Community Engagement (late 2025/early 2026)

During the public review period for the Draft Plan and EIR, staff will conduct media campaigns and identify outreach opportunities to solicit input. The website (www.Atascadero2045.org) has been updated to allow for public comment and questions.

4. The Grand Finale – Plan Adoption (Spring 2026)

The culmination of the update will be City Council adoption of the new 2045 General Plan and certification of the EIR. The formal adoption hearing process will include one or more Planning Commission hearings where a recommendation will be made to City Council. City Council will review final recommendations and approve the Plan, making way for adoption of an updated zoning map and ordinance to facilitate implementation of the 2045 General Plan.

The final Plan will be converted to a web-based digital format allowing goals, policies, and actions to be linked and cross-linked providing for greater searchability. This will enhance staff's and the public's experience and use of the General Plan and make the living document more accessible to all.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The Draft Plan will be analyzed for fiscal impact based on the preferred land use alternative and guiding policies. A draft and final analysis will be presented during the public review period and prior to Plan adoption.

ATTACHMENTS:

The Draft General Plan and additional information is available online at:
www.atascadero2045.org/documents