

# **COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO**

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THE LAND USE AND CIRCULATION ELEMENTS  
OF THE SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY GENERAL PLAN

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## **LAS PILITAS AREA PLAN**

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ADOPTED BY  
THE SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
SEPTEMBER 22, 1980 - RESOLUTION 80-350

*Revised January 1, 2003*

# COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO

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# COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO

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## Amended

April 25, 1989	Ord. 2399
April 16, 1991	Ord. 2498
October 8, 1996	Ord. 2776
November 5, 2002	Ord. 2983

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

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The Las Pilitas planning area includes much of the mountainous portions of the county east of Santa Margarita, and is bounded by the Los Padres National Forest to the east, south and southeast.

This report describes county land use policies for the Las Pilitas planning area, including regulations that are also adopted as part of the Land Use Ordinance. This area plan allocates land use throughout the planning area by land use categories. The land use categories determine the varieties of land use that may be established on a parcel of land, as well as defining their allowable density and intensity. A list of allowable uses is in Article 2 of the Land Use Ordinance.

Specific development "standards" are included in Article 9 of the Land Use Ordinance (Chapter 22.98 -Las Pilitas Planning Area) to address special problems and conditions in individual communities. These include standards for public services, circulation, and land use and provide criteria for detailed evaluation of development projects. The text of this report is for general planning guidance only and is not to be used as a basis for approval or disapproval of development or land division proposals. Careful reading of the standards in the Land Use Ordinance will assist creating projects that are consistent with adopted policies and regulations.

Proposed "programs" are also noted at the end of the chapters on public services (Chapter 3), circulation (Chapter 4), land use (Chapter 5), and combining designations (Chapter 6). Programs are non-mandatory actions recommended to be initiated by the communities through the county or other specified public agency, to work toward correcting local problems or conditions. They are also intended to support community objectives in implementing the general plan. Because many recommended programs involve public expenditures, their initiation will be dependent upon the availability of funding.

In addition to the land use categories and programs, one or more combining designations have been applied to specific areas. Combining designations identify potential natural hazards and locations of notable resources. The designations are shown on the maps at the end of this report.



## CHAPTER 2: POPULATION AND ECONOMY

The Las Pilitas planning area contains only a small percentage of the total county population. The present population is estimated to be 1,101. Since the planning area contains no urban areas, a large population increase is not expected.

Population growth in the Las Pilitas planning area has been slightly less than 2% per year and is expected to slowly decline as the countywide growth rate also declines. Area population is projected to approach 1,560 by the year 2000, an increase of approximately 45% in slightly over 20 years.

Table A contains population projections for the planning area, excerpted from countywide projections found in Framework for Planning. For comparison, Table B contains the projected population absorption capacity which is the potential planning area population resulting from unconstrained growth and fully-occupied development to the maximum permitted in each land use category (Framework for Planning offers a more detailed discussion of absorption capacity).

TABLE A POPULATION PROJECTIONS LAS PILITAS PLANNING AREA		
Year	Planning Area	Percentage of County
1979	1,061	0.73
1980	1,082	0.72
1985	1,192	0.70
1990	1,301	0.69
1995	1,423	0.70
2000	1,557	0.70

TABLE B ABSORPTION CAPACITY LAS PILITAS PLANNING AREA			
Land Use Categories	Rural Area	Pozo	Total
Agriculture	691	-	691
Rural Lands	1,288	-	1,288
Residential Rural	163	-	163
Residential Suburban	-	101	101
<b>ABSORPTION CAPACITY</b>	<b>2,142</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>2,243</b>
Existing Population	1,050	32	1,082
<b>POTENTIAL ADDED POPULATION</b>	<b>1,092</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>1,161</b>

It is anticipated that the Las Pilitas planning area will have a stable economic future, with small population growth. Factors that contribute to the future growth potential and economy of the area are: (1) retention of agricultural uses; (2) modest expansion of rural residential development; and (3) expansion of recreational activities related to Santa Margarita Lake. The planning area will continue to be dependent on communities such as Atascadero, Santa Margarita and San Luis Obispo for commercial needs and employment opportunities.

## **CHAPTER 3: PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES**

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Appropriate levels of service for urban, suburban and rural areas are discussed in Chapter 5 of Framework for Planning. The following portions of the text discuss concerns that directly affect the Las Pilitas planning area.

### **A. SPECIAL DISTRICTS**

Detailed information on county special districts is provided in a 1977 report by the San Luis Obispo County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) entitled "Special Districts: An Inventory and Analysis." Public services are provided the Las Pilitas planning area by two special districts:

1. The Santa Margarita Cemetery District, which provides cemetery and associated services.
2. The Upper Salinas Resource Conservation District was formed in 1951 to serve as a coordinating agency between individual landowners and the Soil Conservation Service of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. Major district programs include flood control such as clearing streams and river beds, and introducing advanced methods of soil and water conservation. No boundary or service changes are recommended.

### **B. UTILITY SERVICES**

#### **Water Supply**

The Pozo basin is the only water-bearing formation within the Las Pilitas planning area. The basin is east of Santa Margarita along the Salinas River and Pozo Creek valley, and provides water primarily for agriculture and scattered residential users. The basin is shallow, with an estimated storage capacity of 2,000 acre-feet and an estimated safe yield of 1,000 acre-feet per year. The basin also provides water for storage in Santa Margarita Lake for release into the Salinas River to supply urban areas in the Salinas River planning area as well as the city of San Luis Obispo. The lake will not supply the Las Pilitas planning area. Remaining portions of the planning area are mostly without water-bearing geologic formations, and water availability will be a problem for future development. This problem has begun to be felt in the Park Hill area, where recently-proposed 10 to 20-acre residential lots have highlighted the need for new development to recognize a limited water supply.

#### **Sewage Disposal**

The entire planning area relies on septic tanks for sewage disposal. This method should continue to be satisfactory for anticipated levels of development. As development occurs adjacent to the entrance to Santa Margarita Lake, special care must be taken that septic tank leach fields do not pollute drainage courses leading to the lake.

#### **Solid Waste Disposal**

Inappropriate dumping in rural areas is a continuing problem. Rural container stations have been proposed in various areas: at Pozo, the Santa Margarita Lake Recreation Area, and the intersection of Park Hill and Las Pilitas roads.

## **C. EMERGENCY AND SOCIAL SERVICES**

### **Police and Fire Protection**

The entire area is served by the Sheriff's Department substation in Atascadero. Fire protection is provided the planning area by both the California Department of Forestry (CDF) and the U.S. Forest Service. The CDF has primary responsibility for private lands outside Las Padres National Forest. The CDF Santa Margarita Station on Park Hill Road east of Highway 58 serves the entire planning area. The 15-minute response area of that station includes Park Hill and Santa Margarita/Pozo Roads, to about three miles south of Santa Margarita Lake. CDF can reach most remaining portions of the planning area within 30 minutes; however, the rugged, more remote areas north and east of Santa Margarita Lake and at the southeasterly edge of the planning area have response times from 30 to 60 minutes. Responses in excess of 15 minutes provide little possibility for saving a structure; response times of 60 minutes could mean disaster in steep, chaparral-covered areas.

The Forest Service Station at Pozo, and CDF air tankers from Paso Robles Airport are also available if needed.

### **Emergency Medical Services**

Ambulance service is provided from the adjacent Salinas River planning area. Emergency hospital service is provided at Twin Cities Community Hospital west of Templeton. The Sheriff's Department is also available if needed.

### **Human Services**

Counseling, mental health, welfare, and family planning services are in Paso Robles, Atascadero and San Luis Obispo.

### **Schools**

The entire planning area is within the Atascadero Unified School District. Elementary students travel to Santa Margarita or Creston, and high school students travel to Atascadero. No new schools are envisioned within the planning area due to the low projected population.

### **Library**

The county branch library system includes a library in a small temporary structure in Pozo. A major branch county library is also located in Atascadero. The branch library is expected to relocate at the old Pozo school building when the present restoration project is completed.

## **D. RECREATION SERVICES**

Recreation services are provided by the county on lands adjacent to Santa Margarita Lake leased from the U.S. government. Recreational facilities that will allow maximum use of the county lease area on the south shore of the lake should be developed. There are also private lands near the lake that are developed with a privately operated campground. Both the public and private facilities are discussed further in the Recreation land use category.

## **E. PLANNING AREA SERVICE PROGRAMS**

"Programs" are non-mandatory actions or policies recommended by the LUE to achieve community or areawide objectives identified in this area plan. The implementation of each LUE program is the responsibility of the community, through the county or other public agency identified in the program itself. Because programs (some of which include special studies) are recommended actions rather than mandatory requirements, implementation of any program should be based on consideration of community needs and substantial community support for the program and its related cost. The following public service programs are grouped under general headings that identify the service they each address.

### **Solid Waste Disposal**

1. **Collection Stations.** The county should establish rural container collection stations in the Pozo village area, at the Santa Margarita Lake recreation area and at the intersection of Park Hill and Las Pilitas Roads.



## CHAPTER 4: CIRCULATION

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The circulation system of the Las Pilitas planning area is planned to accommodate anticipated traffic along existing roads and new routes as future development justifies construction. The low level of development projected for the planning area will not require substantial changes to the existing circulation system. Because of the rural nature of the planning area, transportation is expected to continue to be automobile-oriented, with little or no likelihood of alternative circulation (i.e., transit, bikeways, etc.) meeting daily transportation needs.

### A. ROADS

The LUE official maps show functional classifications of existing and proposed roads. This plan also coordinates road policies with the county Transportation Plan and "Standard Improvement Specifications and Drawings." Improvements will be required with proposed land divisions by the county Real Property Division ordinance and planning area standards.

The following is a listing of the major proposals for the road system. These and other improvements are shown on the plan map; the listed order does not imply any priority.

#### Collectors

Several roads shown as existing collectors are being used for this purpose, but in fact are not improved to county standards for a collector road. Recommended improvements are not intended to allow for more intensive development in the planning area, but rather to bring the roads up to proper standards to serve the existing development patterns and the modest level of anticipated growth.

Pozo Road - Improve to rural collector standards with bicycle lanes to Santa Margarita Lake Road.

Park Hill Road - Improve to rural collector standards to accommodate local traffic.

### B. OTHER TRANSPORTATION MODES

#### Bikeways

Pozo Road is designated a Class II bikeway from the western edge of the planning area to Santa Margarita Lake. A Class II bikeway is a "bike lane" within the road right-of-way at the edge of the vehicle lanes. Recommended bike lane width is four to six feet on each side of the road.



## CHAPTER 5: LAND USE

This chapter addresses land use issues affecting the Las Pilitas planning area. The chapter is divided into rural and village areas. The "rural" portion of the text discusses the area outside the village reserve lines; the "village" portion discusses land within the Pozo village.

The LUE official maps separate the planning area into land use categories, which define regulations for land uses, density and intensity of use. Land use "programs" at the end of this chapter recommend actions by the county or other public agencies. Article 9 of the Land Use Ordinance (Chapter 22.98 -Las Pilitas Planning Area) contains development standards related to the land use categories to assist in guiding planning area development. Standards are actions required for new development to be consistent with the general plan.

### A. RURAL AREAS

The rural portions of the Las Pilitas planning area include all lands outside of the Pozo village reserve Line. The primary land use is agriculture, with steeper and more remote areas used for grazing and serving as watershed.

#### Open Space

The Open Space designation is applied to lands surrounding Santa Margarita Lake owned by the U.S. government, except for the recreational lease area held by the county. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has administered the property to protect the quality of water to the lake. Leases have been granted for agricultural grazing, and limited non-vehicular public access has been permitted from the lake shore. Intensive recreational use has not been encouraged due to the possibility of wildfires or sewage contamination of the lake water. The current level of use succeeds in maintaining a low probability of these occurrences. Additional public access should be considered only if these concerns are addressed and mitigated.

TABLE C LAND USE ACREAGE LAS PILITAS PLANNING AREA			
Land Use Categories	Rural Area	Pozo	Total
Agriculture	21,270	-	21,270
Rural Land	39,628	-	39,628
Recreation	460	-	460
Open Space	3,520	-	3,520
Residential Rural	625	-	625
Residential Suburban	-	39	39
Commercial Retail	8	1	9
Public Facilities	-	2	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>65,511</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>65,553</b>

## **Agriculture**

Agriculture comprises a substantial use of land within the planning area. Some of the best quality soils are found in the Santa Margarita Rancho lands in the southwest portion of the planning area along Pozo Road, much of which is in agricultural preserve. There are also substantial areas under agricultural preserve contracts that are used for dry farming, as in the Santa Margarita Rancho area, or for grazing, as in the area around Pozo. There are also existing agricultural operations found in the San Jose-La Panza Road area north of Pozo, including a large turkey ranch east of the Las Pilitas Road/San Jose-La Panza Road intersection. Lands designated Agriculture are primarily in large ownerships, and must rely on locally-available water resources for continued agricultural operations. Special uses such as gun clubs and dude ranches may be appropriate in some areas.

## **Rural Lands**

Most portions of the planning area are designated as Rural Lands. These are generally large ownerships used for grazing, and watershed leading to Santa Margarita Lake and the Salinas River. There are also many Bureau of Land Management parcels scattered throughout the Rural Lands category.

Rural residential uses have recently been established along Las Pilitas, Park Hill and San Jose-La Panza Roads. Rural residential parcels are scattered and are generally 10 to 20 acres with some up to 40 acres. Due to remoteness and the rugged terrain of these parcels, they are not appropriate for the Residential Rural land use category as they would not be in keeping with the surrounding character of Rural Lands if further divided to lot sizes below 20 acres.

Inappropriate use of Rural Lands can lead to adverse environmental impacts due to a loss of vegetative cover and soil erosion that impairs the watershed capability of the land. Much of the area is a high fire hazard area and the introduction of more people into these remote areas only serves to increase the potential hazards for both the Rural Lands and the neighboring Agriculture lands. The Rural Lands should remain in low intensity residential and agricultural use. However, development of non-intensive recreational activities such as dude ranches and camps would also be appropriate as long as added precautions are taken to deal with problems of providing adequate water for both domestic use and fire protection.

## **Recreation**

The Recreation category is applied to private lands along Santa Margarita Lake Road and to the lands leased by the county from the U.S. government adjacent to Santa Margarita Lake. Santa Margarita Lake is a recreational resource, but is presently under-utilized. Recreation facilities that will allow maximum use of the county lease area on the south shore of the lake should be developed. A specific plan should be prepared to determine whether intensification of recreational uses is feasible, the proper administration of recreational activities, and where those uses are most appropriately located. In addition, the feasibility of a downstream terminal reservoir to enable water sports at the lake should be studied. Unless a separate terminal reservoir were built downstream from Salinas Dam to maintain water quality for domestic use, the lake will continue to be restricted to non-water contact activities.

The private lands designated as Recreation are currently developed with a privately-operated campground. This could provide a much better setting for the lake recreation area if unsightly litter and open material storage were removed from some properties. The area should develop with uses that are directly related to recreation at the lake and a design character should be established that will provide an area identity.

## **Residential Rural**

The two areas designated as Residential Rural are not suited for commercial agriculture because of soil conditions, topography, small property size, broken ownership patterns and prior residential commitments. The area at the westerly edge of the planning area primarily encompasses an existing group of lots that are about 10 acres in size. They have access from Highway 58 and are located near Santa Margarita, Garden Farms and Atascadero for goods and services. Building single-family residences should be allowed on these parcels; however, this type of use should not be allowed to expand beyond the present locations.

The second area of rural residential uses, along Park Hill Road, has developed in recent years as properties have been divided. The area has limited water resources, and properties must rely on individual wells located in Moreno Creek and small local drainage ways. Rural residential use should be confined to existing lots in this area so as to not further over-burden an already limited water capability. These lands should not be developed with agricultural uses that will require intensive irrigation, thereby adversely impacting existing users in the area. Some existing residences appear to have been located in the creekbed, which subjects them to potential flooding. This practice should be corrected, especially since many of these properties have relatively flat areas adjacent to the road located out of the flood hazard area and off of the steep, brush-covered hillsides (where slopes often exceed 30%).

### **Commercial Retail**

Commercial uses (including a small grocery store, tavern, service station, antique store, dance hall and recreational vehicle park) presently exist at "Rinconada Corner" at the intersection of Santa Margarita Lake and San Jose-Santa Margarita Mountain Roads. These uses are primarily oriented to the Santa Margarita Lake recreation area but also provide limited commercial needs to the scattered rural residences throughout the area. There are also some full-time residents in the recreational vehicle park. The commercial activity should be confined to a compact node near the intersection rather than strung out along the approach to the lake entrance gate and the businesses should be related to the recreation area. The existing uses should be upgraded to provide a better visual entrance to the area, setting the tone for a pleasing experience in the adjacent recreational lands. Properties designated Commercial Retail should also be included in the specific plan cited previously for the nearby Recreation area.

Other minor commercial uses in the planning area are found in the Pozo Village. Due to low demand and low population projections, the residents will continue to travel to communities outside the Las Pilitas planning area to satisfy their daily convenience and service needs.

### **B. POZO**

The Pozo Village consists of approximately 42 acres along Pozo Road in an agricultural area originally known as San Jose Valley. Early descriptions of the area noted its scenic beauty, productive agricultural land and apparently ample water supplies. In the 1870's, area farms ranged from 160 to 640 acres, with wheat being the primary crop.

Pozo (in Spanish means a well or hole) was the way of describing the physical characteristics of the area, i.e., San Jose Valley surrounded by mountains. This name was chosen as the name for the first post office established in the area in 1881. The town of Pozo was platted and recorded in 1922 and called for creating 192 lots, most of which are about 8,400 square feet. The plat map also designated a school site and a civic center site. All the town streets were dedicated to public use. However, they have never been developed, and the offer of dedication has never been accepted by the county Board of Supervisors. The lots on the northerly and easterly edge of the village were created separately from the townsite subdivision.

The village contains very few improvements: a few residences, U.S. Forest Service fire station, the Pozo library and the historic Pozo Saloon. Water supply is by individual wells, sewage disposal is by septic tanks, and these methods should prove adequate for the future. The village should develop as a Residential Suburban area, but with the minimum building site required to be large enough to accommodate both a well and septic tank system on each parcel. It is expected that minimal development will occur. The Pozo Saloon is an attraction to both visitors and residents of the area and is expected to remain so. If commercial expansion is to occur in Pozo it should be in conjunction with the saloon and be confined to only meeting daily needs.

The U.S. Forest Service station is expected to remain at its present location. Through volunteer citizen efforts the old Pozo school is being renovated and converted into a community meeting center, possibly including the Pozo library.

## C. PLANNING AREA LAND USE PROGRAMS

"Programs" are non-mandatory actions or policies recommended by the LUE to achieve community or areawide objectives identified in this area plan. The implementation of each LUE program is the responsibility of the community, through the county or other public agency identified in the program itself. Because programs (some of which include special studies) are recommended actions rather than mandatory requirements, implementation of any program should be based on consideration of community needs and substantial community support for the program and its related cost.

The following programs for the Las Pilitas planning area are grouped under the names of communities or rural areas, and then under land use categories or other location headings to identify specific areas where they each apply.

### Areawide

1. **Agricultural Preserves.** The county should continue to encourage owners of eligible lands to participate in the agricultural preserve program.

### Recreation

2. **Santa Margarita Lake - Specific Plan.** The county General Services Department should work with the Planning and Public Works Departments to prepare a specific plan for the Santa Margarita Lake watershed area (including the commercial retail areas adjacent to the lake), to identify:
  - a. Appropriate levels of use and measures to reduce environmental and human hazards to lake water quality;
  - b. Proposed methods for allowing financially self-supporting recreational use of the lake and surrounding lands while protecting water quality;
  - c. Feasibility of a downstream terminal reservoir to enable contact water sports at the lake.
3. **Public Campgrounds.** The county General Services Department should work toward establishing public camping facilities, including both permanent and temporary facilities.
4. **Trails.** The county Public Works and General Services Departments should work with affected state and federal agencies to investigate the feasibility of establishing a riding and hiking trail system on public lands to link public and private recreational areas and related commercial uses.

## CHAPTER 6: COMBINING DESIGNATIONS

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### A. COMBINING DESIGNATIONS

Combining designations are special overlay categories applied in areas of the county with hazardous conditions or special resources, where more detailed project review is needed to avoid adverse environmental impacts or effects of hazardous conditions on proposed projects. The following areas are subject to special combining designations. In some cases, specific standards have been adopted for an area where a combining designation is applied. These standards are found in Article 9 of the Land Use Ordinance (Chapter 22.98 -Las Pilitas Planning Area) and are applicable to development proposals in addition to the standards of Chapter 22.14 of the Land Use Ordinance.

**Pozo Saloon (H)** - This fine example of Pioneer architecture built in 1865 was and still is the main social gathering place for the Pozo area. It was a rest stop for riders and stagecoaches in earlier days, and the saloon is still in operation today.

**Rinconada Mine Botanical Area (SRA)** - Most of this area is within the Las Padres planning area. *Monardella palmeri*, a plant included on the California Native Plant Society's list of rare and endangered species, is known to this area. In addition, the site is significant as an outstanding representative foothill woodland community, with a wide diversity of species.

**Salinas River, Huer Huero Creek (FH)** - The Salinas River below Salinas Dam, and portions of the Huer Huero Creek, are designated flood plain.

**Santa Margarita Lake Watershed (SRA)** - This area is comprised of the public and private lands that are within the immediate watershed of the lake. While the county has no jurisdiction over the public lands (BLM), every effort should be made to establish a working arrangement between the county and the federal government to carefully review any development proposals. Low-intensity recreational uses would be appropriate, but these watershed lands should not be used for resource extraction operations of any kind.

**La Panza Granitics (EX1)** - This is a large area totaling approximately 12,238 acres mostly in the Las Pilitas Planning Area, with portions also extending into the El Pomar-Estrella and Salinas River Planning Areas. This area is located generally east and southeast of the city of Atascadero and extends southerly to an area northwest of Santa Margarita Lake. The La Panza Granitics are included in the EX1 combining designation to reflect that they are classified by the State Department of Conservation's Division of Mines and Geology as containing or being highly likely to contain significant deposits of Portland cement concrete aggregate materials. As of 1989, there were no quarries operating in the portion of the La Panza Granitics included within the Las Pilitas Planning Area (Amended 1991, Ord. 2498).

## **B. COMBINING DESIGNATION PROGRAMS**

"Programs" are non-mandatory actions or policies recommended by the Land Use Element to achieve community or areawide objectives identified in this area plan. The implementation of each LUE program is the responsibility of the community, through the county or other public agency identified in the program itself. Because programs (some of which include special studies) are recommended actions rather than mandatory requirements, implementation of any program should be based on consideration of community needs and substantial community support for the program and its related cost.

### **Sensitive Resource Area (SRA)**

1. **Santa Margarita Lake Watershed.** The county should work with affected state and federal agencies to prepare a resource protection plan for the watershed area.