Chapter 3: Land Use Descriptions and Setting

3.1 Land Uses in the Community

The Los Osos Community consists mostly of residential neighborhoods. Serving these residential areas are two commercial areas, the downtown area or Central Business District centered around Los Osos Valley Road and the Baywood commercial area centered around Second Street.

The primary method of allocating land use within the community is through mapping of 13 land use categories. The uses that are allowed within each category are shown in Table O in Coastal Zone Framework for Planning. Further limitations on allowable uses may be set by planning area standards in Chapter 7. Land use policies and programs are located in Chapter 2.

The location and distribution of land use categories (zones) and the type and intensity of development allowed within them helps carry out the goals and policies of this plan. This plan provides a sufficient amount and arrangement of land use categories to meet projected population and development for the next twenty years, consistent with available resources and services. The location of land use categories is shown on the official maps on file in the Department of Planning and Building. They are also shown on the informational report maps following Chapter 7, but those maps are included for illustrative purposes only--they are not the official maps.

Table 3-1: Land Use Summary					
Land Use Category	**Acreage**	**Land Use Distribution (%)**	**Dwellings at Buildout**	**Population at Buildout[1]**	**Maximum Non-Residential Square Feet at Buildout[2]**
Residential Multi-Family	104	2.9	1,272	3,053	–
Residential Single Family	1422	40	5,493	13,183	–
Residential Suburban	780	22	222	533	–
Residential Rural	69	1.9	10	24	
Commercial Retail	92	2.6	175	420	668,100
Commercial Service	27	0.76	23	55	186,600
Office and Professional	12	0.34	35	84	61,600
Open Space	775	22	0	0	-
Recreation	41	1.2	39	94	10,000
Public Facilities	116	3.3	0	0	–
Morro Shores Mixed Use (RMF, RSF, CS[3])	63	1.8	414	994	98,000
West of South Bay Boulevard Mixed Use (RMF, REC)	19	0.54	128	307	3,000
Midtown Mixed Use (PF, REC)	12	0.34	0	0	-
TOTAL	**2,974 (net) 3,539 (gross)[4]**	**100%**	**7,811**	**18,747**	**1,014,300**

Notes:

(1) Population estimates are based on 2.4 persons per occupied dwelling unit and 0% vacancy.

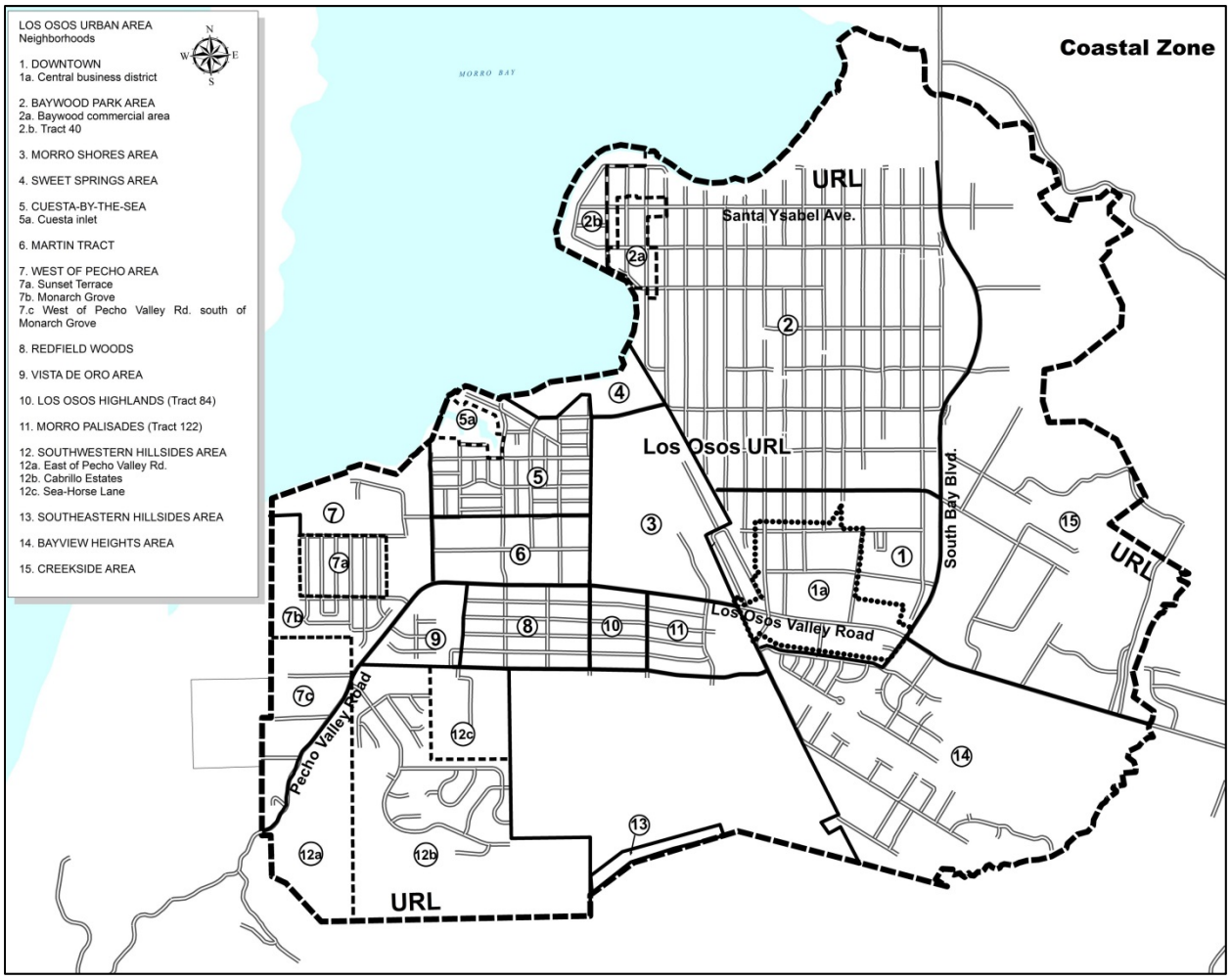
(2) The maximum non-residential floor area is based on floor area averages for each land use category; does not include potential lodging units.

(3) Morro Shores Mixed Use categories: RMF,RSF,CS: 63 acres

(4) Gross acreage includes road rights-of-way

Table 3-1 shows a summary of the different land use categories, the approximate acreage of each category and its relative distribution as a percentage of the total net acreage. For residential land use categories, the table identifies the buildout (the theoretical maximum amount of development that could likely result under this plan) in terms of dwelling units and population. In the Commercial Retail, Commercial Service and Office and Professional categories, non-residential buildout is shown in terms of potential floor area expressed in square footage. The total figures are the maximum at buildout of this plan.

FIGURE 3-1: Los Osos Urban Area – Neighborhoods



The community is divided into neighborhoods for easy reference in this plan (see Figure 3-1). These neighborhoods are referenced in the following discussion of residential, commercial and mixed use land uses.

3.2 Residential

3.2.1 Residential Single Family

Part of the charm of Los Osos is the variety of neighborhoods and building styles. This quality will naturally be maintained with infill development in existing neighborhoods. However, for major new projects such as subdivisions, standards are needed to ensure that new development contains a diversity of design features such as architectural styles, facades, colors, and building materials. In addition, new development should provide an attractive face to the street, with garages set back behind the rest of the house or otherwise designed to appear less dominant.

Major new development should be integrated with adjacent neighborhoods and the community to provide efficient circulation, emergency access, neighborhood continuity, and social interaction. Perimeter walls and fences that isolate development should not be used, unless necessary for reasons such as noise mitigation in accordance with the Noise Element of the County General Plan.

New discretionary projects should be designed to maximize energy conservation, including solar access, consistent with the Conservation and Open Space Element of the county General Plan and the EnergyWise Plan.

While much of the residential development in Los Osos is on smaller lots, parcel sizes of one acre or more are appropriate in neighborhoods that will not be served by the community wastewater system (see Figure 3-2). The larger lots could help retain a more suburban character in these neighborhoods with large stands of trees and open areas. As these neighborhoods develop, adequate circulation that connects to adjacent areas must be provided**.**

3.2.2 Residential Rural and Residential Suburban

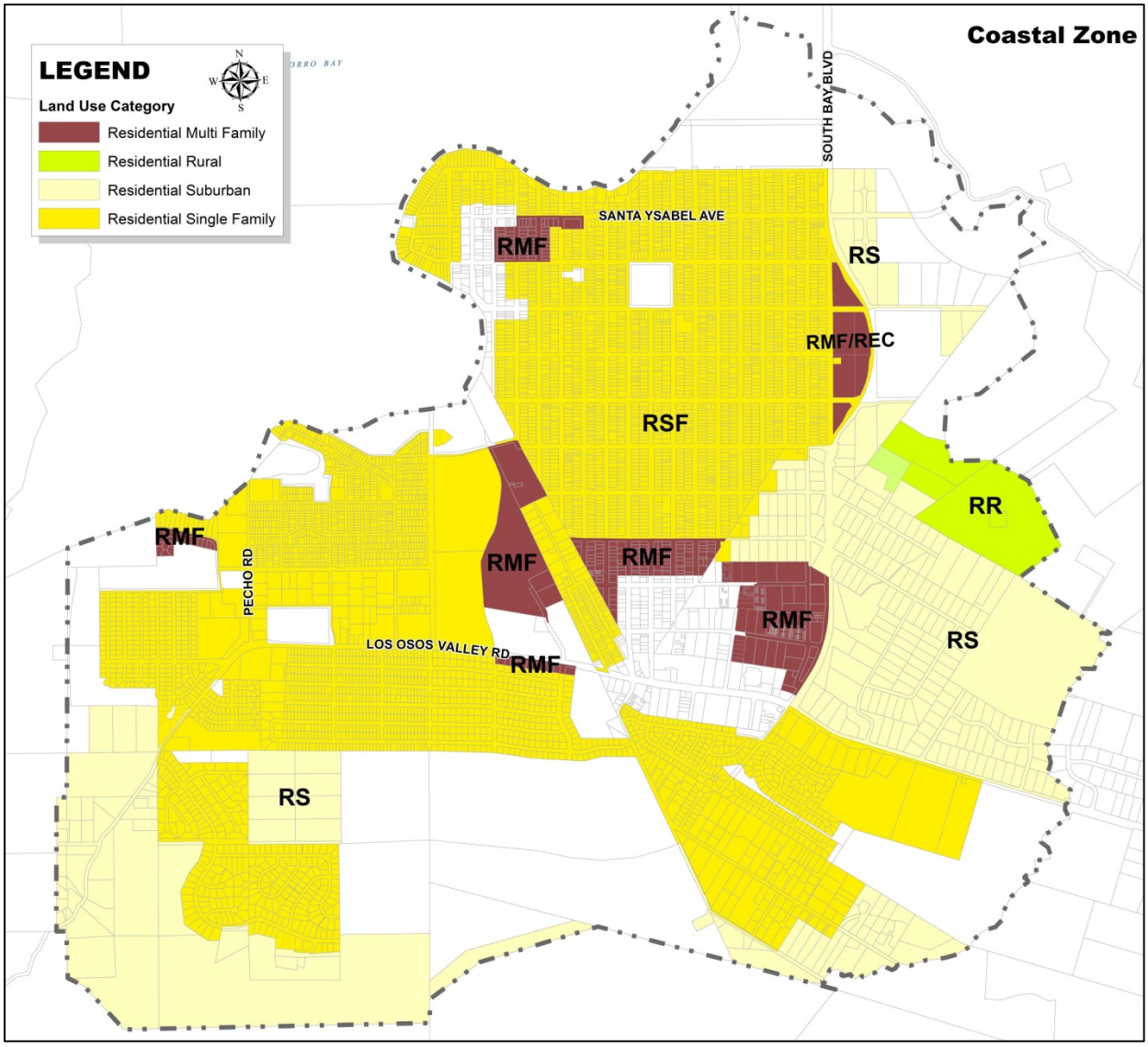
The eastern fringe of Los Osos near Los Osos Creek is an environmentally sensitive area. The creek and its riparian corridor are habitat to rare and endangered species, and land uses next to the creek affect the Morro Bay Estuary. Pygmy oak groves are also found here. The Creekside area (see Figure 3-1), where agricultural uses also occur, provides a visual contrast to the more intensively developed areas to the west and forms the urban edge of Los Osos. This neighborhood with larger lot sizes complements the greenbelt, and helps protect the valuable habitat and visual quality of the area.

3.2.3 Residential Multi Family

The Residential Multi Family (RMF) category allows for a broad range of housing types that can include apartments, condominiums, small-lot detached units, and senior housing. It is important that multi-family development be visually and functionally compatible with the existing pattern of residential development, reflecting the neighborhood character, streetscape and scale. Senior housing and projects with higher density should be encouraged close to the Central Business District.

Minimum densities are established in most multi-family areas in order to prevent lower-density single family development from reducing opportunities for multi-family housing. However, the Housing Element goals for providing increased opportunities for multi-family housing must be balanced with Coastal Act goals and policies to assure that the future population of Los Osos can be accommodated by the available water supply.

FIGURE 3-2: Residential Areas in Los Osos



3.3 Commercial

Los Osos has two primary commercial areas which serve the community: the Central Business District and the Baywood Commercial Area (see Figure 3-3). The community's vision for these areas includes: attractive streets, streetscapes, and parking lots; buildings which encourage pedestrian use and activity; and site design that emphasizes the importance of public spaces.

3.3.1 Central Business District

The central business district is envisioned as a lively hub of commercial activity for the entire community. It should offer a variety of retail, office and professional, service, entertainment, and other uses, including mixed residential and commercial uses. A wide variety of uses are allowable.

Incentives should be given to encourage a combination of commercial and residential uses. Such mixed uses can enable people to live in close proximity to the workplace, reduce vehicle trips and congestion, encourage affordable housing, promote commercial activity by increasing the daytime population downtown, and promote general activity and interest in the downtown.

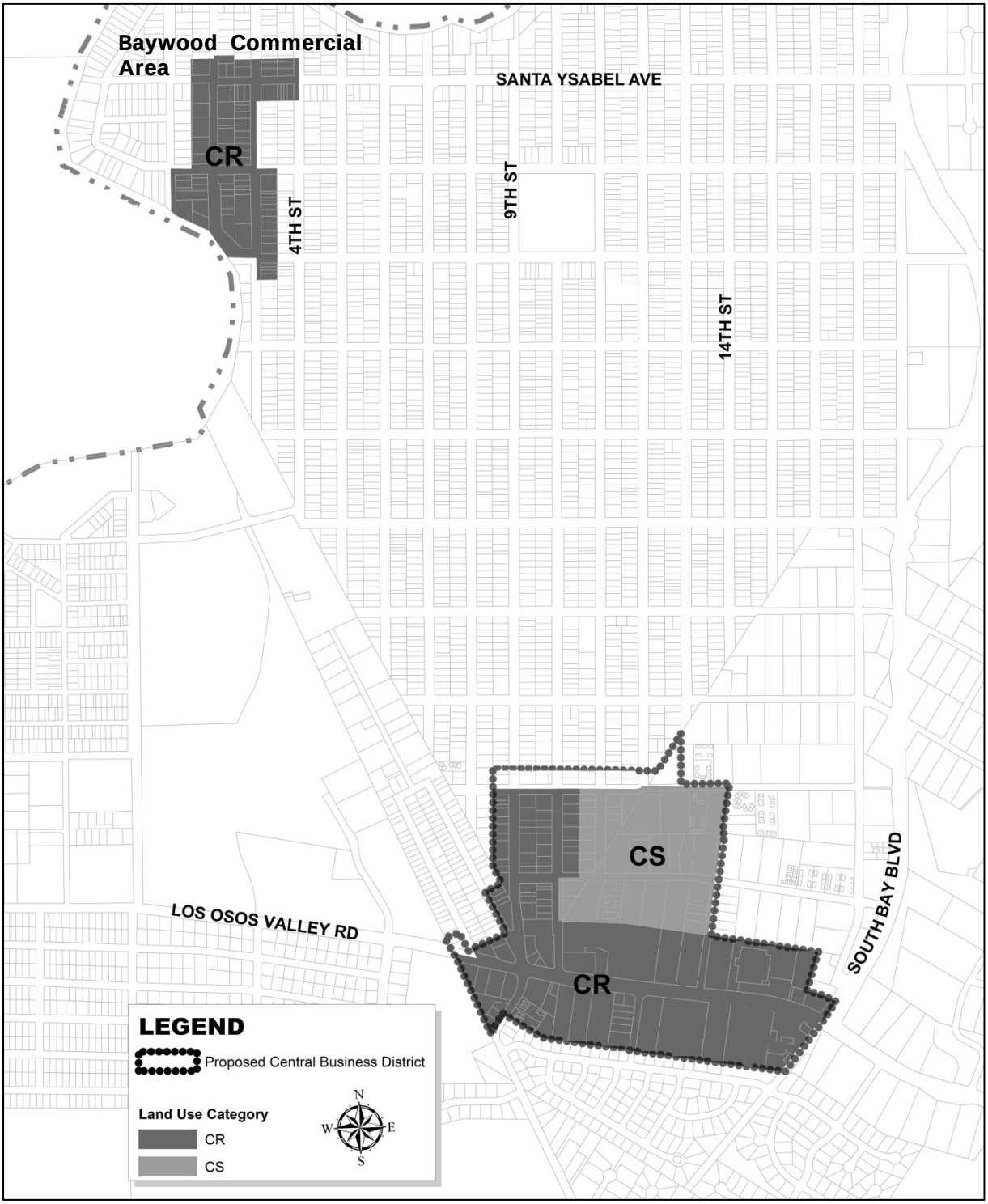
3.3.2 Baywood Commercial Area

The Baywood commercial area is situated in a beautiful natural setting along the shores of the Morro Bay estuary. It offers an excellent opportunity to develop into a pedestrian-oriented center that attracts visitor-serving and tourist-oriented uses, while serving neighborhood commercial needs and retaining a quaint, small-scale character. Several uses appear to be well suited to this area, besides typical neighborhood-serving commercial uses. Examples include a visitor/historical center, an amphitheater, a small playhouse/live theater, arts and crafts galleries, restaurants, coffee houses, bed and breakfast accommodations, recreational equipment rental (kayak, canoe, bicycle), nature stores, farmers markets, arts and crafts shows, and sidewalk sales.

3.3.3 Commercial Service within the Central Business District

This 24-acre area, located along Los Olivos Avenue and the south side of Santa Ynez Avenue (primarily between 10th Street and Fairchild Way) is home to a variety of existing businesses, but also contains several vacant or under-utilized parcels. This land use category provides an opportunity to attract more businesses that provide head-of-household jobs. However, the size, scale, and design of such facilities must be consistent with the existing small-town character of Los Osos and compatible with adjacent residential and retail development.

FIGURE 3-3: Commercial Areas in Los Osos



3.4 Mixed Use

There are three areas in the community which feature multiple land use categories (see Figure 3-4):

3.4.1 Morro Shores Mixed Use Area (RMF, RSF, CS)

Much of the Morro Shores Area is designated as the Morro Shores Mixed Use Area that is included in the RMF, RSF and CS land use categories (see Figures 3-4 and 7-24). It occupies a key, central location in the community where a combination of multi-family and single family residential, commercial service and lodging uses can be developed as part of an overall plan. Higher intensity residential uses are encouraged in order to provide opportunities for a variety of housing types for different income levels, including senior housing. A multi-use business or commerce park is desirable in order to offer opportunities for local employment. These uses would be included in a master Development Plan or a specific plan that determines the precise location and extent of development.

New development should include efficient pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular connections to other neighborhoods and important activity centers within the community.

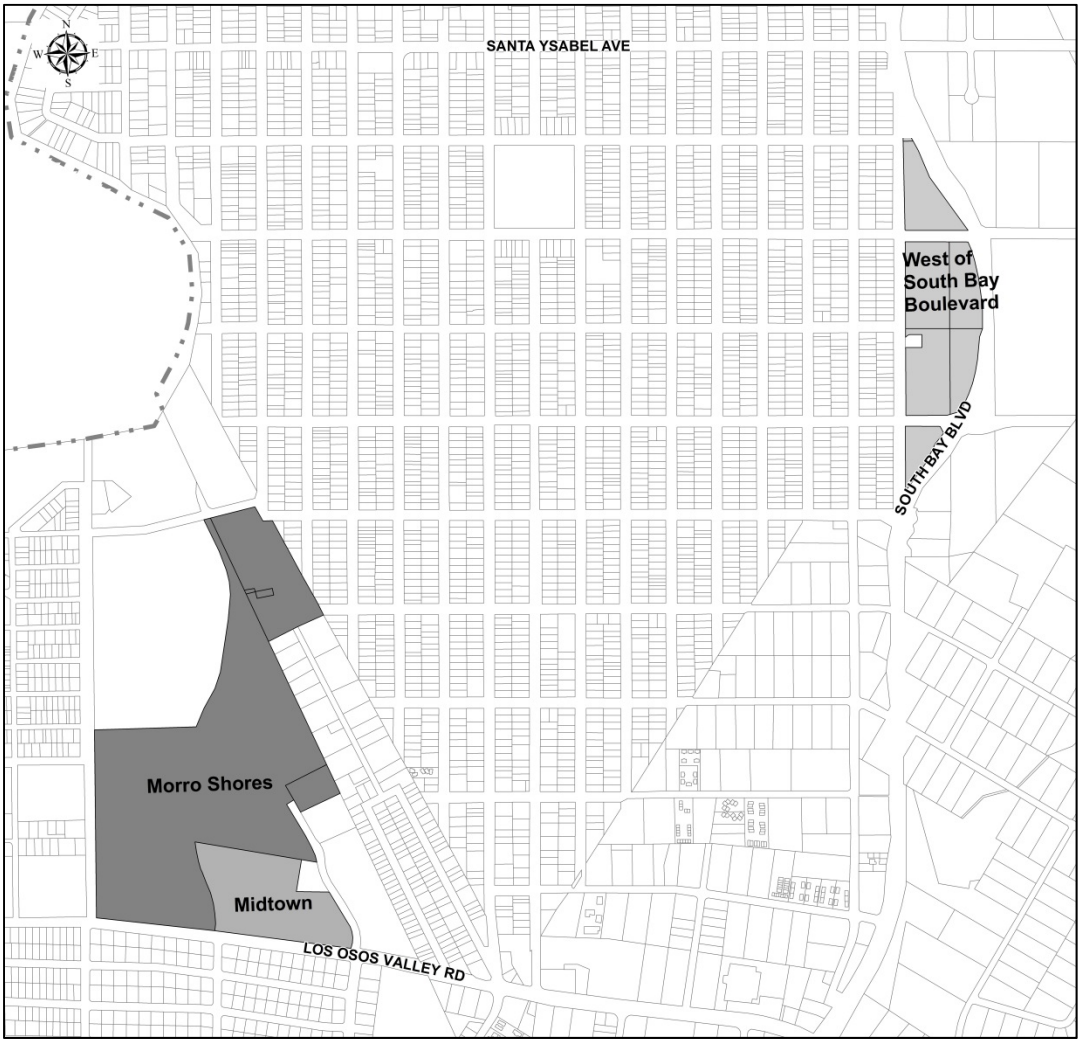
3.4.2 Midtown Area (PF, REC)

This is the site of a previously proposed wastewater treatment plant. The County now owns this site and has restored the site as part of the community wastewater project (a condition of the Coastal Development Permit issued by the Coastal Commission). The site is next to the Los Osos Community Park and the community library and would be an appropriate site for additional park and community facilities. However, the County would need to amend the Coastal Development Permit for the wastewater project in order to allow other community uses on this site. Such uses could include outdoor sports and recreation, public assembly and entertainment, temporary events, water wells and impoundments, outdoor retail sales, and offices.

3.4.3 West of South Bay Boulevard. Mixed Use Area (RMF, REC)

The West of South Bay area is made up of a group of vacant parcels west of South Bay Boulevard in close proximity to the Los Osos Middle School. This area is ideal for a mix of residential and neighborhood serving uses. The overall density is proposed at seven units per acre; however, some portions may support up to 15 units per acre for multi-family housing and 26 units per acre for senior citizen housing. Additionally, park and recreational uses are encouraged. Neighborhood commercial uses are limited to food and beverage retail sales, general merchandise, and personal care uses.

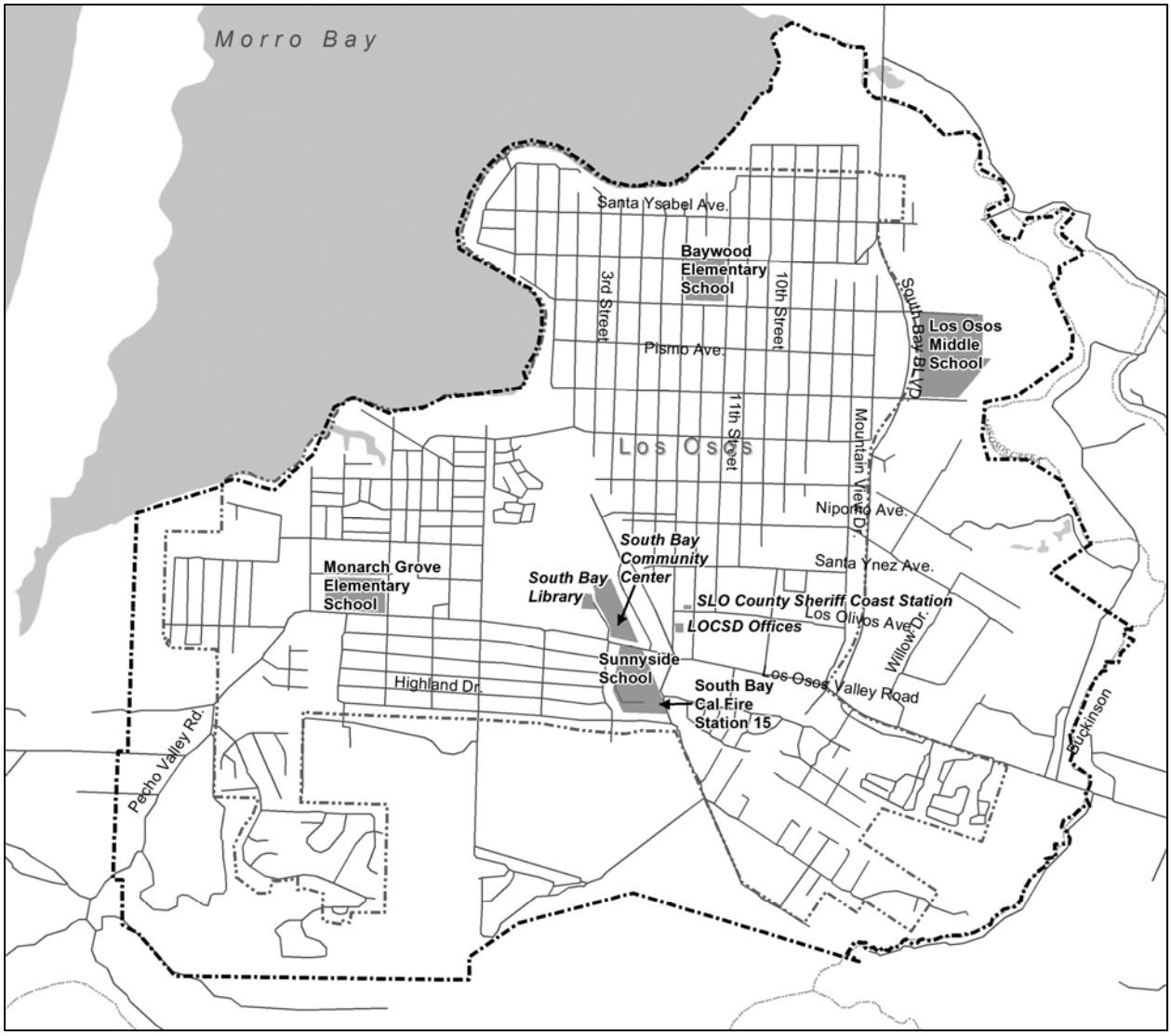
FIGURE 3-4: Mixed Use Areas in Los Osos



3.5 Public Facilities

Most community facilities are located within the Public Facilities land use category. These facilities include schools, community drainage basins, a community leach field, the South Bay Fire Department station, and the library. Existing and proposed schools and a proposed government center are discussed in Appendix E, Status of Public Facilities, and in Chapter 2, Community Plan Policies. Existing public facilities are noted in Figure 3-5 and proposed public facilities (parks) are noted in Figure 3-6.

FIGURE 3-5: Existing Public Facilities in Los Osos



Note: Not all public facilities are located within the Public Facilities land use category. Proposed public facilities are shown on the combining designations maps.

FIGURE 3-6: Proposed Public Facilities in Los Osos

3.6 Open Space

Properties included in the Open Space category have been acquired primarily for habitat protection. Several of these properties compose a greenbelt around the periphery of Los Osos.

The Morro Coast Audubon Society, a private, non-profit conservation organization, manages properties that are included in the Open Space land use category. One property is the Sweet Springs Marsh, a nature preserve open to the public. Deed restrictions placed on that property by the State of California prohibit any additional improvements. Another property managed by the Morro Coast Audubon Society also contains wetlands and is located adjacent to Morro Bay, opposite the intersection of 3rd and Paso Robles Streets.

3.7 Recreation and Tourism

Tourist-oriented development such as hotels is found in the Recreation and the Commercial Retail land use categories. There are also a limited number of residential vacation rentals in the community. The community's shoreline is a special place where many passive recreation areas are located, such as Sweet Springs Nature Preserve, the Elfin Forest, Audubon 3rd street Lookout, and street-end easements. Local residents and tourists enjoy the shoreline.

The Recreation land use category includes areas for parks, special recreation activities and lodging facilities. It also includes environmentally sensitive areas used for passive recreation. When additional park and recreation facilities are acquired for public use, the land use categories of those areas should be changed to Recreation or Open Space, depending on site sensitivity, through future general plan amendments.

Recreation land in Los Osos may be divided into active and passive recreation areas. Active recreation areas include community parks, areas for special recreation activities and tourist lodging facilities. Passive recreation areas have limited or no access and are intended for protection of their natural biotic and scenic resources.

3.7.1 Parks

Los Osos has one community park, the 6.2-acre Los Osos Community Park. In addition, Los Osos residents have convenient access to Montana de Oro State Park, and other "special" recreation facilities, including Sweet Springs Nature Preserve, Elfin Forest Natural Area, Morro Bay State Park and Golf Course, and Los Osos Oaks State Reserve. Public schools augment the community's recreational facilities. The California Education Code allows community use of public school facilities and grounds, including supervised recreation activities. Although the County has no joint-use agreements with the school district, school sites are extensively used by local neighborhoods for recreational purposes.

The County's Parks and Recreation Element indicate that a reasonable goal for the amount of parkland needed is a minimum of three acres of parkland per 1,000 people. Using this guidance, new parkland is needed for the current population of Los Osos. The County should work with the community to develop sufficient parkland (neighborhood and community parks and recreation facilities) to accommodate the needs of existing and future populations. Proposed programs to provide more parks for Los Osos are discussed in Chapter 2, Community Plan Policies.

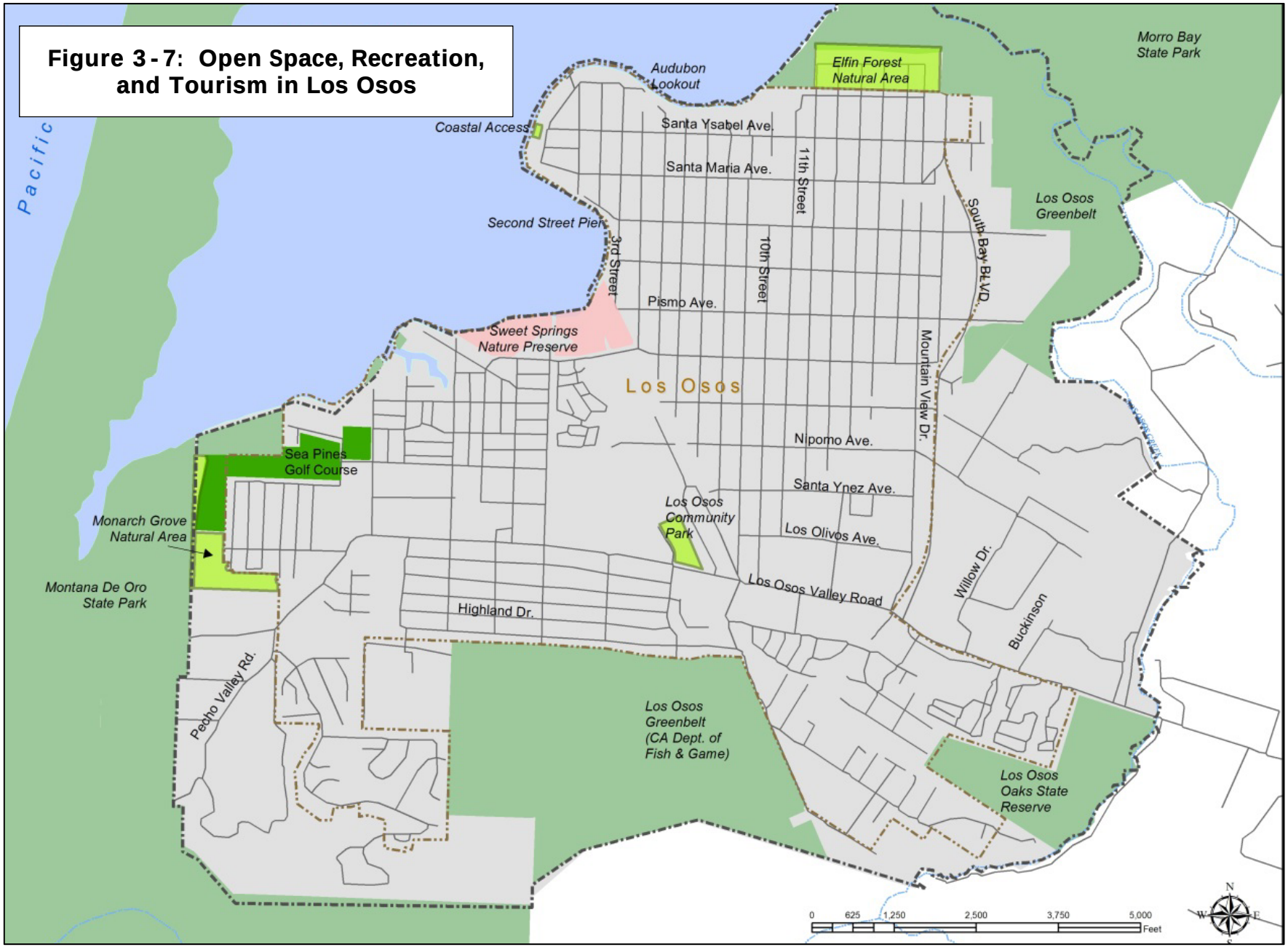


Figure 3-7: Open Space, Recreation, and Tourism in Los Osos

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