

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL GOALS



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## **I. PURPOSE OF THE ESTERO AREA PLAN**

The purpose of this area plan is to establish a vision for the future of the Estero Planning Area that will guide development over the next 20 years. The vision described in this plan represents the desires of the affected communities, and the plan contains the policies, programs and standards to help achieve it. This plan is intended to be the community's plan, and was developed with substantial community participation. Only with ongoing community involvement can we hope to successfully achieve the vision.

This area plan is consistent with the intent and policies of the California Coastal Act and the San Luis Obispo County Local Coastal Program (LCP). All other county plans, policies and programs that involve the Estero Planning Area and are subject to the LCP are to be consistent with and implement this plan. In addition, where applicable, all public and private development in this planning area is to be consistent with this plan. It should be recognized, however, that this plan is subject to higher legal authority; for example, federal and state statutes, case law, and regulations.

~~This report describes county land use policies for the coastal zone portion of the Estero Planning Area, including regulations that are also adopted as part of the Land Use Ordinances and Local Coastal Program. 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 Chapter 7 (Coastal Table O) of Framework for Planning.~~

~~Specific development "standards" are included in this report to address special problems and conditions in individual communities. Standards for public services, circulation, and land use are found in Chapter 8 (Planning Area Standards) and provide criteria for detailed evaluation of development projects. The text of this report, other than Chapter 8, 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 Planning Area Standards 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 6), and Combining Designations (Chapter 7). 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, programs and standards, one or more combining designations have been applied to specific areas. Combining designations identify potential~~

## PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

~~natural hazards and locations of notable resources. The designations are shown on the maps following Chapter 8.~~

~~This report also initiates the Resource Management System in this planning area. Three estimated population thresholds are provided for the levels of severity for the resources of water supply, sewage disposal, schools and roads.~~

## II. PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

The Estero Planning Area is shown in Figures 1-1 and 1-2. It is one of four planning areas within the coastal zone and encompasses the central coastal area of San Luis Obispo County from Point Estero on the north to Point Buchon on the south. The boundary of the Estero Planning Area corresponds to the coastal zone boundary established by the California Coastal Act that was enacted in 1976. The planning area occupies a narrow strip along the coast north of the city of Morro Bay and south of the unincorporated community of Los Osos. Elsewhere, the planning area extends as far as seven miles inland. It includes large portions of the Morro and Little Morro Creek watersheds on the north, a portion of the Irish Hills on the south, and a portion of Cuesta College on the east, ~~and from the coast inland to Los Padres National Forest. The planning area includes~~ Three identified urban areas include the city of Morro Bay and the unincorporated communities of Cayucos and ~~South Bay~~ Los Osos. ~~These urban areas are discussed in greater detail as urban area plans.~~

The planning area (including the city of Morro Bay) occupies about 71.5 ~~73,181 acres or 114~~ square miles. In addition to the Estero Planning Area, secondary study areas were considered in connection with preparing this area plan (see Figure 1-2). One such area was included in order to study the effects of the entire Morro Bay watershed on the Estero Planning Area, especially the Morro Bay estuary. That area includes portions of the Salinas River, San Luis Obispo and San Luis Bay Planning Areas and consists of about 27 square miles beyond the Estero Planning Area. The other secondary study area is the "Cayucos Fringe," which covers nearly 53 square miles surrounding Cayucos in the Adelaida Planning Area. The "Cayucos Fringe" was studied because that area has an effect on the Cayucos urban area, especially since it includes most of the watersheds that affect Cayucos. The "Cayucos Fringe" also includes scenic areas that are visible from the coast.

~~The majority of the area outside of the urban communities is rolling countryside largely devoted to grazing, while the level valley areas of Los Osos, Morro and Chorro Creeks are devoted to more intensive agricultural uses.~~

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

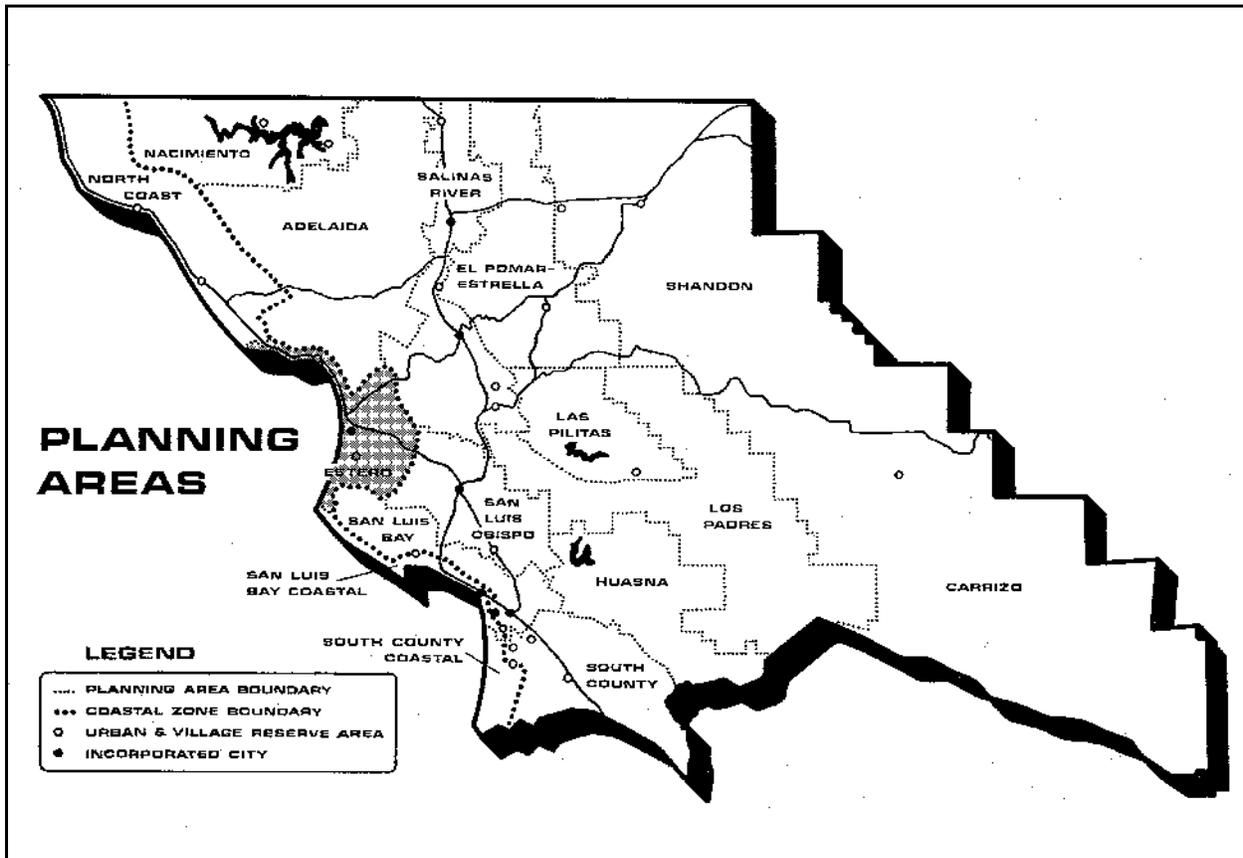


Figure 1-1: Estero Planning Area

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

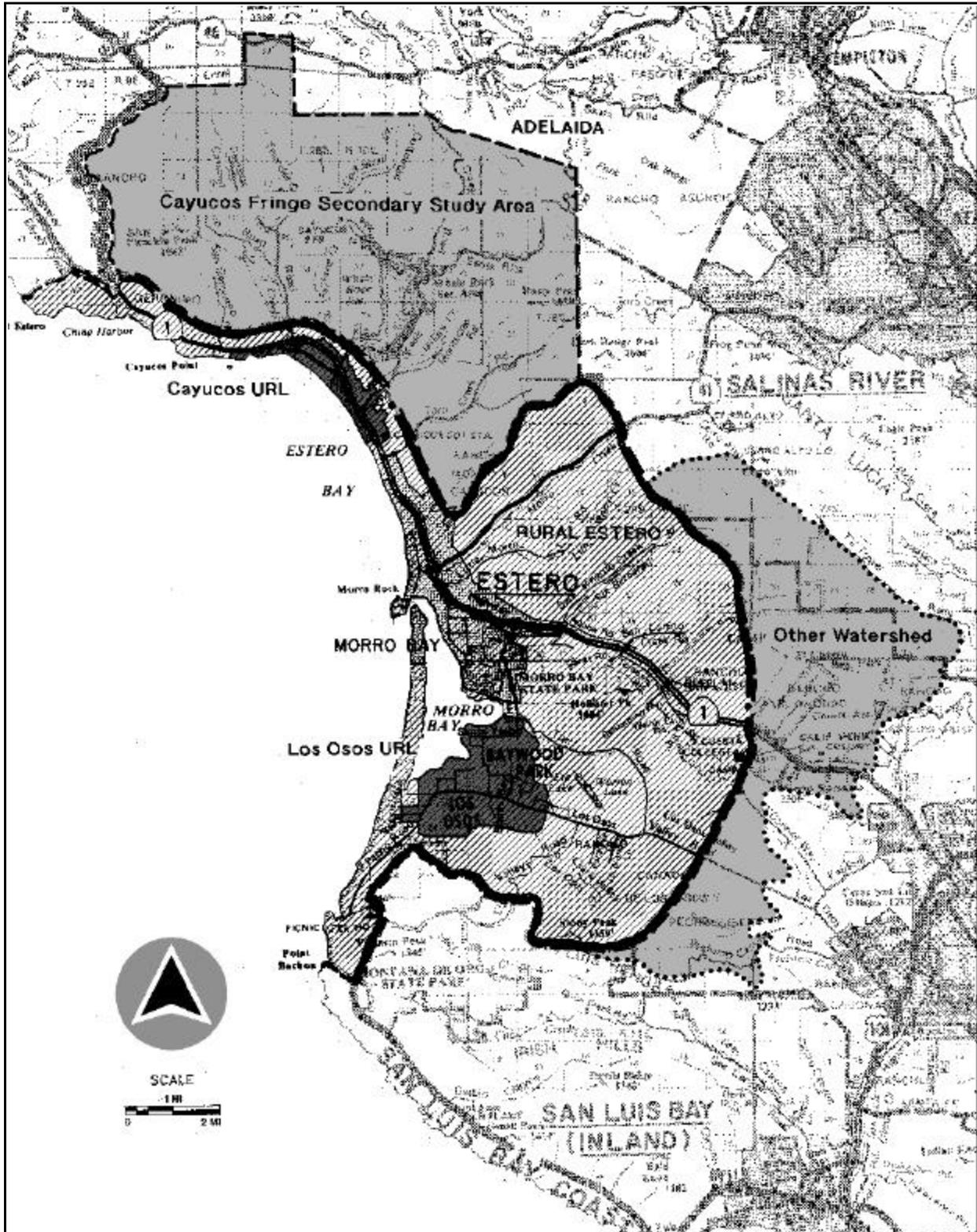


Figure 1-2: Estero Planning Area and Secondary Study Areas

### III. NATURAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES

The Estero Planning Area contains a wealth of natural resources and environmental assets that define the character of the area, contribute to its high quality of life and are vital to the local economy. The following are examples of these resources:



**Agriculture.** Agriculture is the dominant land use in the planning area and is a cornerstone of the local economy. As an added benefit, agriculture provides scenic open space that is enjoyed by locals and tourists alike.



**Morro Bay Estuary.** This nationally recognized area of relatively pristine tidal lands and open waters supports abundant wildlife, provides recreation, supports visitor-serving businesses, and is essential to the health of the local commercial and sport fishing industries.

## NATURAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES



**The Morros.** This chain of volcanic peaks that separates the Los Osos and Chorro Valleys is a unique natural landmark and scenic wonder that supports agriculture and wildlife, and offers potential for recreational use.



**Montaña de Oro and Morro Bay State Parks and Beaches.** These outstanding parks and recreation areas attract over 1.5 million visitors every year, many from all over the globe, to enjoy a variety of recreation and beautiful scenery (Source: State Department of Parks and Recreation).

## NATURAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES



**Hillside and Creekside Areas Ringing Los Osos.** These highly scenic, biologically rich areas surround Los Osos on the south, east and northeast, and could become a greenbelt around the community.

In addition to the area's valuable natural resources, its human resources are essential to its future. The communities of Los Osos and Cayucos are fortunate to have active and effective community advisory committees, as well as many involved and talented people who care deeply about the future of their communities. The residents of Los Osos and Cayucos and surrounding areas are committed to making a better future, and they are among the area's greatest assets.

## IV. OPPORTUNITIES

The area possesses scenic beauty, a mild coastal climate, and natural resources that contribute to a high quality of life. These assets also present opportunities to improve jobs and services for local residents, and to improve recreation and tourist-oriented uses for both locals and visitors.

## OPPORTUNITIES

Following are examples of some opportunities for the future in Los Osos:

- ! Focus on infill and mixed use development, while creating a greenbelt around the community to protect scenic qualities and environmentally sensitive habitat
- ! Improve job opportunities for local residents by encouraging environmentally-friendly businesses
- ! Improve the road system and promote alternative transportation such as walking and bicycling, especially in attractively redeveloped commercial areas
- ! Develop a community that is more able to be sustained by the local environment, resources and economy
- ! Improve recreation and tourist-oriented uses, considering the area's natural assets and existing tourist presence

## V. VISION AND GENERAL GOALS

The following general goals provide the direction for the Estero Area Plan and the vision for the future of this area. These goals, together with policies, programs, standards, and other parts of the Land Use Element (LUE) and Local Coastal Program (LCP), constitute the plan for the Estero Planning Area for the next 20 years.

The goals are specific to the Estero Planning Area. They were developed by the public; primarily, the communities of Los Osos and Cayucos. The goals are expanded on and implemented by the policies, programs and standards found in the following chapters. The goals are consistent with the countywide general goals of the Land Use Element found in Coastal Zone Framework for Planning, but further refine and elaborate on those countywide goals.

The goals also function as criteria to help determine consistency of development proposals with the LUE/LCP. New development should be located, designed, and built in a manner that furthers these general goals and complies with all other applicable regulations.

## **A. Planning Areawide**

- 1. Provide maximum public access, and protect existing public access, to the coast, the shoreline, the bay, and public recreation areas, consistent with the need to protect natural and agricultural resources and private property rights.***

## **B. Los Osos**

The community of Los Osos has developed a vision for its future. The following key goals express that vision. Other important aspects of this vision are described by policies in the following chapters.

The following goals are based on a "Vision Statement for Los Osos" that was approved by the Los Osos Community Advisory Council (LOCAC) on June 22, 1995. The vision statement is included in its entirety in Appendix A. This statement is the product of substantial community involvement and hard work by the LOCAC. It was developed after a community survey, neighborhood meetings, and public discussion of the vision statement itself. Although residents of Los Osos hold a diversity of opinions and community agreement can not be expected on all issues, this vision statement is intended to generally reflect the community's desires.

The vision statement describes a community where urban development is contained within the existing urban reserve line (URL). Development occurs at a controlled rate and is sustained by resources and services. The URL is clearly defined by a greenbelt, including productive agricultural lands and open space that are managed to protect the Morro Bay estuary.

In the vision statement, Los Osos maintains its small-town, rural atmosphere and is environmentally-oriented, yet promotes expanded tourism and environmentally-friendly businesses that provide jobs for local residents. Automobile transportation is accommodated, but the need for automobile travel is reduced by encouraging alternative transportation such as walking and bicycling. For example, pedestrian activity is encouraged, especially in commercial areas. Los Osos takes advantage of its environmental assets, offers a high quality of life and exhibits a high degree of community involvement and local control over its future.

***Los Osos desires to uphold its community values and scale, take control of its own destiny, discourage gated communities, encourage neighborhood and community continuity, and best of all, be unique--not a replica of some other vision or model.***

## **Environment**

- 1. Protect and enhance the Morro Bay Estuary so that it is a clean, healthy, functioning ecosystem that harbors a diversity of wildlife.***

### **Economy**

- 2. Improve and diversify the local economy to make Los Osos more economically self-sufficient.***

### **Air Quality**

- 3. Minimize the amount and length of automobile trips through planning decisions and land use practices.***

### **Population Growth**

- 4. Establish a maximum rate of growth within the Los Osos urban reserve line, consistent with available resources, services and infrastructure provided and the community's sense of place.***

### **Distribution of Land Uses, Location and Timing of Urban Development**

- 5. Focus on infill and mixed use development.***

### **Residential, Commercial and Industrial Land Uses**

- 6. Maintain a small-town, rural atmosphere.***
- 7. Provide flexible zoning that enables businesses to expand and remain in the community, and establish incentives to encourage good design of commercial development.***

### **Visitor-Serving, Recreation and Resort Development**

- 8. Encourage improvement of tourist-oriented facilities.***
- 9. Develop additional neighborhood and community parks and recreation facilities in order to serve existing and future populations.***

### **Public Services and Facilities**

- 10. Base all land use policies and plans on sustainable development that meets the needs of current population and visitors without endangering the ability of future population to meet its needs or drawing upon outside resources.***

- 11. Carefully manage water resources to provide a clean, sustainable resource for the community.***

### **Circulation**

See Chapter 5, Circulation Element.

### **Implementation and Administration**

- 12. Promote a high level of community participation and voice in land use planning decisions. Ultimately, achieve self governance.***

### **C. Cayucos**

The community of Cayucos has developed general community goals that were recommended by the Cayucos Citizens Advisory Council (CCAC) following public discussion. The following goals are based on CCAC's recommended goals, which are stated in their entirety in Appendix B. The goals encourage carefully planned development that respects the area's natural assets, maintains the community's small-town character as a beach community, and balances and promotes both the residential and visitor-serving aspects of the community.

### **Environment**

- 1. Plan with consideration for preserving the natural environment of Cayucos. Protect the seashore, estuaries and coastal area with minimal impairment of physical and visual accessibility.***
- 2. Protect ecological systems and wildlife habitats.***
- 3. Plan for land use to take full advantage of the natural and agricultural assets of the area.***

### **Residential and Commercial Land Uses**

- 4. Preserve the character of Cayucos as a beach community.***
- 5. Stress the residential nature of the community.***
- 6. Provide for essential services.***

## VISION AND GENERAL GOALS: CAYUCOS

7. ***Plan for the visitor-serving and residential features of the community to coexist in harmony and supplement each other. Emphasize both features of the community and promote their excellent potential.***
8. ***Carefully plan for future commercial and residential development that is consistent with the current nature of the community. Since major development projects can have a devastating effect on a small community, carefully examine such proposed projects to see that they do not destroy the character of the community or so dominate it as to cause an imbalance between the residential and recreational elements of the community.***
9. ***Maintain the community's small-town character.***

### **Compact Development**

10. ***Focus on infill and mixed use development.***
11. ***Create a greenbelt that forms a hard edge around the community and protects scenic qualities, agricultural resources and sensitive habitat.***

### **D. Rural Area**

#### **Distribution of Land Uses; Open Space**

1. ***Maintain agriculture and the rural character of the area.***
2. ***Permanently protect the agricultural, open space and scenic resources of the Morros.***
3. ***Prevent further urban and suburban encroachment into the Los Osos and Chorro Valleys in order to maintain valuable agricultural and open space resources.***
4. ***Preserve agriculture, open space and sensitive resources.***
5. ***Protect and enhance the watershed of the Morro Bay estuary so that the estuary is a clean, healthy, functioning ecosystem that harbors a diversity of wildlife.***

## **VI. FEATURES OF THIS PLAN**

### **A. Background Information**

This plan provides information on land use, population, availability of resources and public services, and environmental characteristics. This information is the basis for many of the plan's recommendations and is current at the time of the last update.

### **B. Planning Policies**

Chapters 2 through 6 and 8 contain the policies of this plan. The policies expand on and implement the goals in this chapter, providing further direction for the future of the Estero Planning Area. The policies, in turn, are implemented by programs and standards found in the following chapters (see following items C and D).

The policies also function as criteria to help determine consistency of development proposals with the LUE/LCP. New development needs to be located, designed, and built in a manner that furthers these policies and complies with all other applicable regulations.

### **C. Planning Programs**

Proposed programs are listed at the end of the following chapters: Population and Economy (Chapter 2); Public Facilities, Services and Resources (Chapter 3); Land Use Programs and Policies (Chapter 4); Circulation Element (Chapter 5); Policies and Programs for Special Features (Chapter 6); and Coastal Access (Chapter 8). Programs are non-mandatory actions. They may be initiated by the communities, the county or other agencies in order to correct or improve local problems or conditions, and to otherwise help implement the goals and policies of this plan. Since many recommended programs involve public expenditures, their initiation depends upon availability of funding.

### **D. Planning Area Standards**

Specific development standards are included in Chapter 7, Planning Area Standards, to address special conditions in the communities and help implement the goals and policies of this plan. The planning area standards deal with land use, public services, circulation, sensitive and scenic resources, and natural hazards (the latter two are combining designations). The standards provide criteria for detailed evaluation of development projects. Compliance with the standards is mandatory. The text of this plan may also be used as a basis for evaluating proposed development and subdivision applications.

## **E. Guidelines**

In addition to planning area standards, Chapter 7 includes guidelines that provide further direction on how to implement the goals and policies of this plan. Guidelines are advisory, but are to be used in evaluating projects subject to discretionary review. However, alternative approaches that achieve the same or better results may also be used. The guidelines in this plan generally deal with design issues; for example, design guidelines for residential development in Cayucos and commercial development in the central business district and Baywood commercial areas of Los Osos.

## **F. Resource Management**

Chapter 3, Public Facilities, Services and Resources, describes the existing and future status of water supply, sewage disposal, schools, roads/circulation, air quality, and other public services. Included are estimates of population thresholds at which potential resource capacity problems may occur.

## **G. Area Plan Maps**

Due to limitations of scale, the fold-out maps in this plan are for reference purposes only. The official maps are at the more suitable scale of 1" = 400 feet (urban areas) and 1" = 1,000 feet (rural areas). Those maps are available at the County Department of Planning and Building.

### **THIS PARAGRAPH MOVED FROM BOTTOM OF PAGE**

Land use and combining designation maps are shown following Chapter 7, and the circulation maps are at the end of Chapter 5. They illustrate the following:

**Land Use Categories** determine the uses that are allowable on a piece of property, including density and intensity of development.

**Combining Designations** identify areas of hazards, sensitive resource areas, environmentally sensitive habitats, visitor-serving priority areas, historic and archaeologically sensitive areas, energy and mineral resources, and public facilities. The combining designations do not map all such areas; for example, existing areas of sensitive resources and environmentally sensitive habitats. Areas having such resources and habitats shall be treated as if they were included in the Sensitive Resource Area/Environmentally Sensitive Habitat combining designation (see the areawide standards for resource protection in Chapter 7, Section IIIA).

**Circulation** consists of roads, bikeways, pedestrian and equestrian facilities, and coastal access.

Maps illustrating the locations of coastal access are included in Appendix E.

## **VI. RELATIONSHIP OF THE ESTERO AREA PLAN TO THE LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM.**

### **A. Introduction.**

The following provides a brief outline of relative state and local provisions guiding the preparation and update of the Estero Area Plan.

### **B. State Law - Zoning and Planning.**

Key provisions from the California Government Code and California Coastal Act guide the preparation and adoption of local plans.

- 1. The California Government Code.** The Government Code guides the preparation and adoption of general plans, zoning ordinances, and regulations for subdivision and environmental review. The Code establishes mandatory elements of the general plan, and various content and procedural requirements.
- 2. The California Coastal Act.** Policies in the California Coastal Act of 1976 guide the conservation and development of California's 1,100 mile coastline with the goal of protecting California's coastal resources and providing for their wise use. The Act establishes the California Coastal Commission as a permanent state coastal management and regulatory agency and requires each of the state's coastal cities and counties to adopt a long-term management plan, known as a Local Coastal Program. Each Local Coastal Program consists of a land use plan, zoning ordinances and other implementing actions. The Act also requires "maximum public participation" in the preparation of proposed plans.

Key Policy sections include Public Access, Recreation, Marine Environment, Land Resources, Development and Industry. These policies function as criteria for finding consistency of both development and local coastal plans with the Coastal Act.

### **C. County Organization of the Local Coastal Program (LCP).**

The LCP is part of the county general plan and zoning ordinance, and applies to those areas lying within the Coastal Zone. Consistent with State law, the county's Local Coastal Program also functions as the mandatory Circulation Element and Land Use Element of the General Plan.

- 1. The LCP Policy Document.** The Local Coastal Program Policy document contains 13 chapters that respond to policies from the California Coastal Act. They are: Shoreline Access, Recreation & Visitor Serving, Energy & Industrial Development, Commercial Fishing, Environmentally Sensitive Habitats, Agriculture, Public Works, Coastal

## RELATIONSHIP OF ESTERO AREA PLAN TO LCP: COUNTY ORGANIZATION OF THE LCP

Watersheds, Scenic Resources, Hazards, Archaeology, and Air Quality. Each chapter discusses the relationship to Coastal Act policies and issues, and formulates locally-based policies that implement the Act.

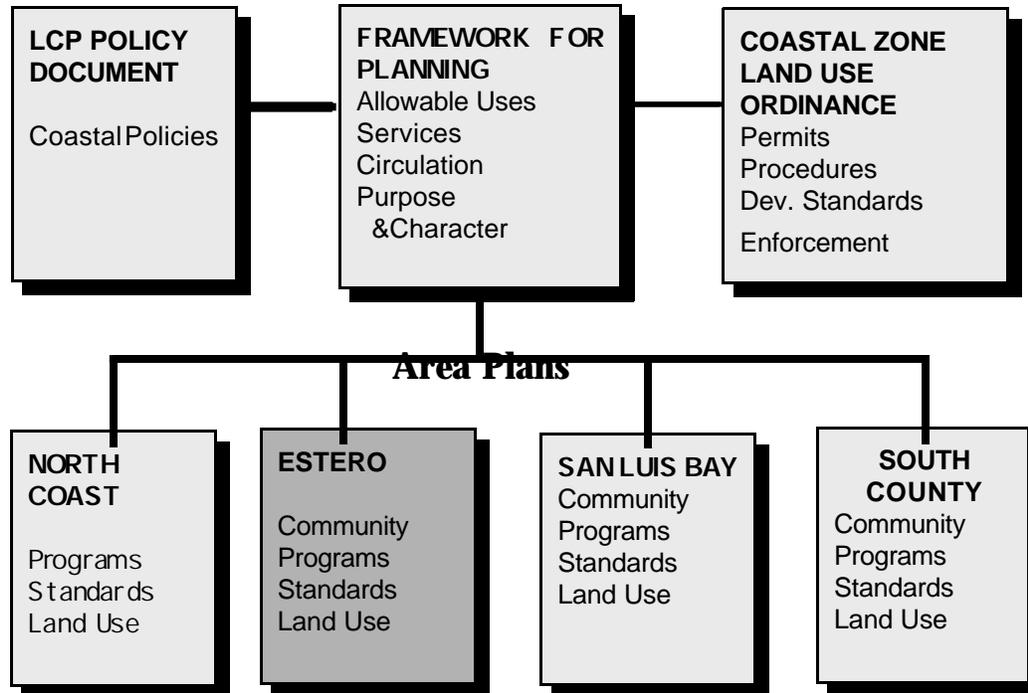
- 2. Framework for Planning.** Framework for Planning serves as an organizational document linking land use, resource management, and circulation. It also provides general goals for county decisions on land use, development, and circulation. A key part is Coastal Table O - Allowable Land Use Chart that shows what land uses are allowable in each of the 13 different land use categories.
- 3. Coastal Zone Land Use Ordinance (CZLUO).** The CZLUO contains provisions typically found in zoning ordinances. They include permit and appeal requirements, site design, development and operational standards, and enforcement.
- 4. The Area Plans.** The area plans replace the former community general plans, and provide goals, objectives, policies, programs, and standards unique to each area. The Coastal Zone of San Luis Obispo County is divided into four segments, North Coast, Estero, San Luis Bay, and South County. The area plans work with the other elements of the LCP and the county general plan. Key provisions found in the area plans are land use maps, programs, and standards that guide development. In addition, standards guide resource management, conservation, environmental protection, and community character.

# Relationship of Estero Area Plan To LCP and State Law

## State Law - Planning and Zoning



## County of San Luis Obispo Land Use Element and Local Coastal Program



**This Plan**