

2. Existing Conditions and Opportunities

Setting

Regional Location

Nipomo is an unincorporated community that is located in the southern part of San Luis Obispo County, seven miles south of Arroyo Grande, 3.5 miles north of Santa Maria and seven miles east of the Pacific Ocean. The community occupies the approximate center of the Nipomo Creek watershed, which extends south from Los Berros Creek, west of Temattate Ridge (a prominent range three miles to the east and south to the Santa Maria River). Nipomo Creek bisects the community and forms the eastern edge of the Nipomo Mesa, an ancient dune complex to the west. East of Nipomo Creek the soils are clay, while the mesa is sandy soil.

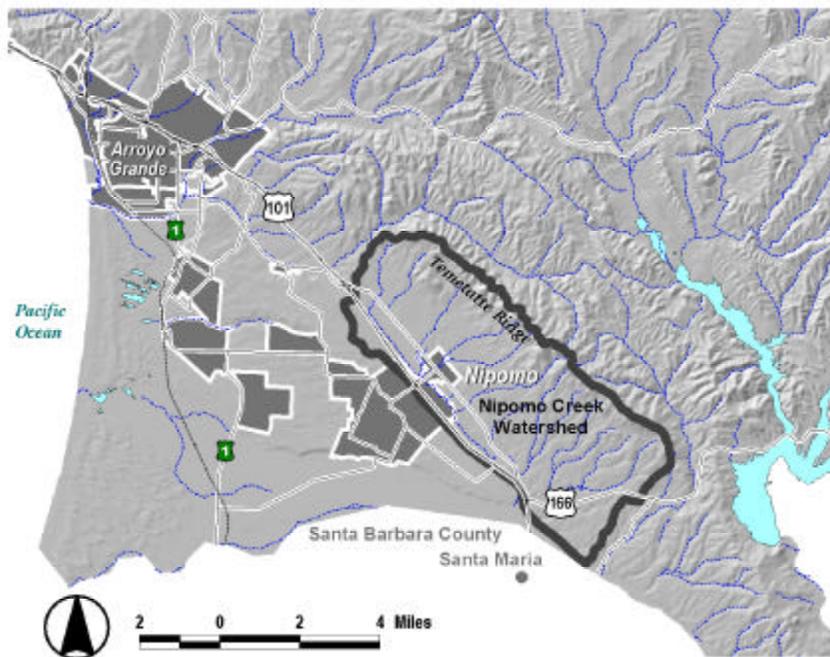


Fig. 2-1 Regional setting of Nipomo

Cultural History

Design considerations can enhance the sense of place that makes Nipomo unique by relating to community's cultural and physical history. At the time of European exploration, Nipomo was the name and location of a village of the Chumash people. During the era of Mexican governance, Governor Alvarado granted the 38,000-acre Rancho Nipomo to Captain William Goodwin Dana in 1837. The original subdivision for Nipomo was platted in 1882 east of Nipomo Creek to form an agricultural town, and

soon after, the Brookside, Fairview and Runnels Additions created larger lots to extend the community on the Nipomo Mesa.

The physical location of Nipomo reflects its formation as an agricultural town and as a destination along the Pacific Coast Railway beginning in the 1870s. The community grew as the rancho was subdivided and commercial agriculture evolved, and it provided urban and suburban housing for employees in the south county region. It continues to provide relatively affordable housing for a larger employment area that extends between Vandenberg Air Force Base and San Luis Obispo. Commuter transportation has grown at least as fast as population growth, with notable traffic problems along the main artery through Nipomo - the West Tefft Street Corridor.

Land Use Pattern

The West Tefft Corridor is composed primarily of shopping center uses with some offices along the edges of the study area. The pattern of large lots makes large-scale

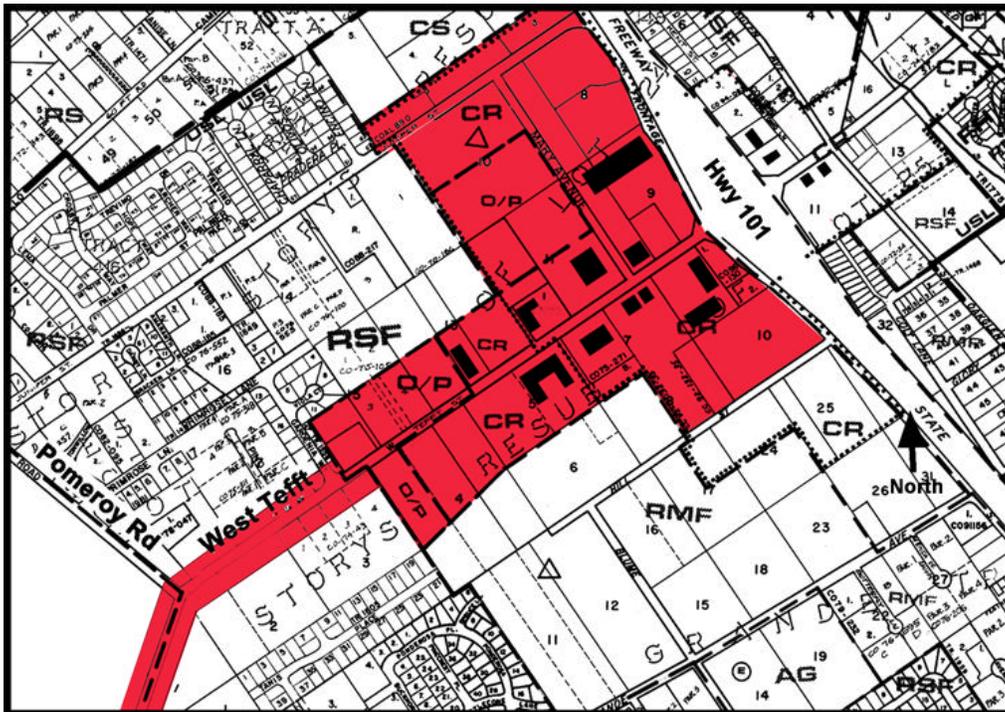


Fig. 2-2 Major uses in the design plan area

development feasible, yet it also supports typical suburban designs with parking lots in front of stores. At the western end, single-family dwellings are located along the street on large lots with wide setbacks. The area is surrounded by single-family and emerging multi-family development. The Nipomo Community Park, which is located at the west corner of the intersection of Pomeroy and West Tefft Street, serves the community and surrounding area. The Nipomo Library and Dana Elementary School are also located on West Tefft Street adjacent to the park.

Existing and Potential Development

Development within the Commercial Retail and Office and Professional zones has occurred in single-story buildings. The *developed* parcels have an average of 19 percent in building floor area, which is expressed as a floor area ratio (F.A.R.) of 0.19. This FAR is actually below that of typical suburban development, which may range from 0.25 to 0.3, due to incomplete development and large areas devoted to parking, landscaping and drainage detention.

Opportunity: Given that some projects are complete and not likely to add buildings, it is important for new development on *vacant* and *partly developed* lots to create the urban environment necessary for the West Tefft Corridor to succeed. Table 1 shows existing development within the commercial and office areas and potential development at two potential floor area ratios within vacant and underdeveloped parcels. Substantial new development, at least six times the existing floor area, is possible within the West Tefft Corridor.

Floor Area Ratio (F.A.R.) is defined as the ratio of square footage of building area to the area of the site (which may be a number of underlying parcels). A floor area ratio of one means that the building area equals the site area; a ratio of 0.5 indicates that the building area is half of the site area.

Table 1: Existing and Potential Development (in square feet)		
Existing Development on All Parcels	Vacant & Under-developed Parcels	
	Potential Development at 0.3 F.A.R.	Potential Development at 0.5 F.A.R.
149,729	863,267	1,438,779

The goals of this plan encourage more intensive development than found in typical suburban projects having a 0.3 FAR. A floor area ratio of 0.5 F.A.R. would be the maximum *single-floor* building area that could also accommodate standard surface parking lots at average parking requirements and allowances. If buildings are *two-story* on a site, room is available at the 0.5 F.A.R. for other amenities such as patios, plazas, walkways and supplemental landscaping beyond requirements.

Between Highway 101 and Mary Avenue. In the first block west of Highway 101, the South County Area Plan encourages visitor-serving uses. Two service stations and a few fast food outlets have been developed. Community-serving shopping centers were developed at the rear of two of these parcels (see Figure 2-3).

Vehicle access to, from and across Highway 101 is the highest priority in this block. Vehicular travel and parking rather than pedestrian access dominates the layout of the shopping centers and the street. Sidewalks are isolated from most buildings. Along Mary Avenue, commercial properties are currently vacant or underdeveloped and lie below the grade of Mary Avenue, which ramps down to Juniper Street from a hill. Where Mary Avenue is planned to be extended to Hill Street, the alignment is bordered

by commercial zoning to provide a smaller scale of specialty or neighborhood projects. Land in this corridor to South Frontage Road is vacant or under-developed.

Between Mary Avenue and Blume Street (extended). This long block is defined by the west edge of the office and commercial complexes on the south side of West Tefft Street. Several long-standing and newer uses are built in shopping centers within this part of the corridor. Most properties are not completely developed, and some vacant properties occur.

West of Blume Street (extended) to Pomeroy Road. Commercial properties on the south side of West Tefft Street are lower than street grade and are either underdeveloped or vacant.

Opportunity: A large drainage basin here with multi-use capability would be appropriate to serve the area. If the basin is designed to be shallow, it could be unfenced and serve as a park or open space resource. The lower elevation south of West Tefft Street could also provide for parking beneath buildings with first floors at street grade. From the western edge of this sub-area a better appearance could be created by including tree-lined parkways, two and three-story buildings near the street.

South of the Pomeroy Road/West Tefft intersection, residential properties on the south side extend up a hill. A negative sense of arrival exists because the tall retaining walls impose a stark unwelcoming appearance on the community.

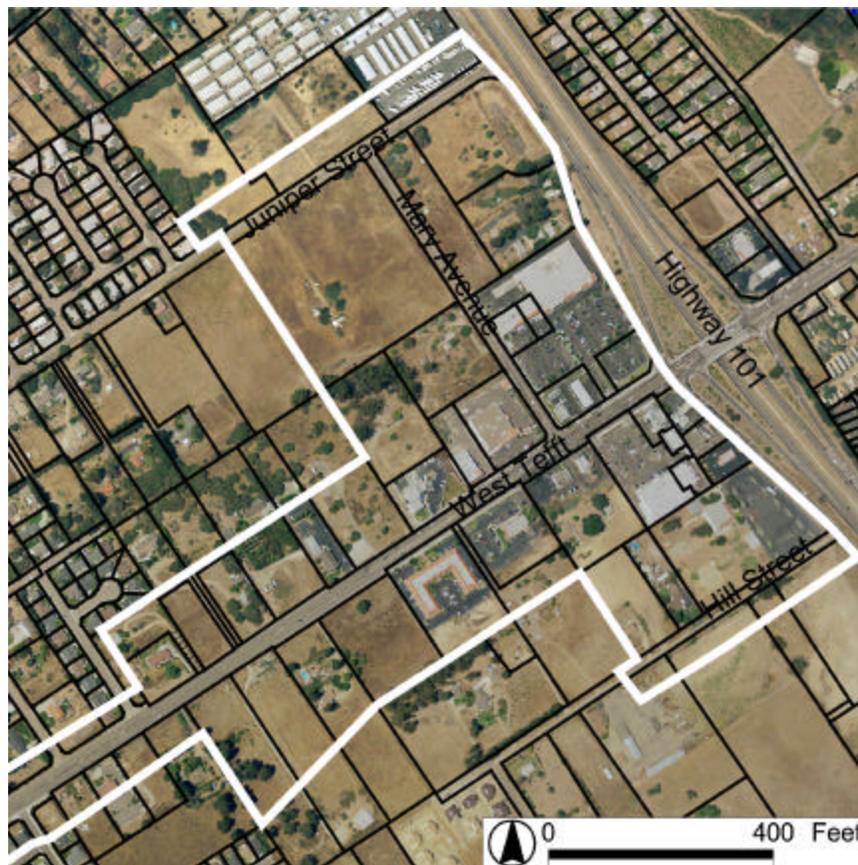


Fig. 2-3 Aerial Photo (2003)

Gateway Corridor to Downtown.

From Dana Elementary School to Gardenia Avenue, West Tefft Street provides the route into the downtown from the Nipomo Regional Park, the Dana Elementary School and the Library. In this corridor, sidewalks are intermittent and where they exist they are uninviting designs adjacent to traffic and retaining walls.



Fig. 2-4 Gateway corridor

Opportunity: A landscaped gateway corridor could beautify West Tefft Street as an entry to the downtown area with sidewalks behind landscaped parkways and street trees. The corridor would also enhance the edge of Nipomo Regional Park and link pedestrian circulation along West Tefft Street.

Urban Design and Development Image

For the community, the West Tefft Street downtown offers locations for large-scale retail and mixed-use centers, individual stores and offices that cannot fit within the small lot pattern and historic fabric of Olde Towne. Parcel sizes are much larger than in Olde Towne and can accommodate shopping centers and large retail and office buildings. This part of the downtown is designated as the central business district, which is by definition intended to be the central focal point of community life.

Opportunity: As the larger-scale downtown, West Tefft Corridor can also generate community life to supplement that of Olde Towne.

Recently developed large shopping centers have been designed in a suburban pattern of separated projects behind large parking lots. This approach can often necessitate multiple, short-distance vehicle trips and exacerbate traffic conditions. With heavy traffic projected on West Tefft Street and Mary Avenue, more efficient circulation within the downtown is desirable. Continuation of the suburban pattern will result in a low density of stand-alone buildings or projects, which can dampen merchandising and social life within the downtown,

Opportunity: The size and partially developed pattern of the West Tefft downtown create an opportunity to provide substantial commercial and employment growth that could make the community more complete.

Visually, the West Tefft corridor lacks a unified appearance; buildings are designed primarily behind parking lots and not related to other projects or the public space of the streets. A common architectural vernacular is also lacking, so that a 'sense of place' is difficult to define, even though individual developments may have well-done designs.

Opportunity: As “infill” development is planned, the opportunity presents itself for a more pedestrian-oriented style of site usage. Access lanes within properties can be created to provide slow vehicle travel that would serve interior businesses. Vehicle parking could be located behind buildings to enclose the wide space of West Tefft Street, Mary Avenue, Blume and other streets as they develop.

Urban vs. Suburban Character Options

Within Nipomo, development is distinctive as either urban or suburban. In suburban development, commercial uses are clustered in buildings behind parking lots, with a higher emphasis on automobile use and easy driving access throughout the area. Blocks are long along arterial streets with few crossing streets.

In urban development, as recommended by this plan, block sizes are smaller to allow for convenient alternate routes to uses, which are adjacent to sidewalks to attract pedestrians, enabling shorter walking distances between stores, offices and restaurants. Urban communities are known to provide more social contact that is public in nature, since the sidewalk serves as an attractive place to stand and talk, or sit at a bench. The public street serves more complex functions than a vehicle artery, and streets tend to be smaller in recognition of the diversity of public use. Parking lots are secondary uses that are located away from the street. Smaller boutiques or locally owned stores and businesses make up a majority of the economic base in the area, and traffic-calming measures typically accompany new development.

Business Access

A key component of community form is the concentration and location of businesses and their access points. If they do not link with the public areas of the community such as streets and plazas, major aspects of public life may be discouraged or ignored.

Currently development is focused on the ease of automobile use, rather than the efficiency of economic and social use. Each business has its own parking lot typically located in front of the business itself. However, time is spent driving and parking between uses in order to complete trips. Pedestrian travel is on private property and focused on vehicle-to-store access. Many left turn lanes, driveways and wide setbacks are present throughout areas with this character.

Urban development locates buildings at the front and side property lines, and the majority of surface parking lots are at the rear of buildings. Business access is usually from the street sidewalk, and walkways or paseos provide access to rear parking. These parking lots can be used as service access.

Opportunity: Business access at the sidewalk attracts pedestrian use of the public space, which adds value to the community experience. If wider spaces or plazas are provided for resting, socializing and events, they can also attract the public to nearby businesses. This plan is intended to build this relationship.

Business Development Trends

Recent trends in retail development add public value and lifestyle and cultural amenities to basic shopping and entertainment needs. As big-box or discount centers have

become commonplace; customers are becoming more discerning, and individual projects need to have reasons for customers to visit more frequently and stay longer.

Opportunity: Developers are encouraged to have a mix of uses such as residential development, office space, hotels, churches and civic plazas and facilities, to create hubs of activity. Larger-scale specialty retailers and restaurants that do not compete with Olde Towne are encouraged as tenants or anchors, to supplement smaller store spaces. Vibrant retail “destinations” with community amenities and connections should be the result of this plan.

Selected Demographics¹

Population

Information about population characteristics is available from the 2000 U.S. Census for Nipomo, which the Census defined in a slightly larger area than the community Urban Reserve Line (URL). Census information is not available for the South County Planning Area, so Nipomo data is compared to countywide information in Table 1. Total population within Nipomo was 12,626, and the rural area population was estimated by the Department of Planning and Building at 8,618 from the Census, or a total of 21,244 people in year 2000 in the South County Planning Area. In 2004, the Department of Planning and Building estimated the planning area population at approximately 24,000. Between 1990 and 2000, Nipomo grew 78 percent, compared to a 14 percent increase countywide².

The 2000 U.S. Census provided the following information about the characteristics of the community. It estimated that 49.4 percent of the Nipomo population was male and 50.6 percent was female, and about 67 percent were married. Families occupied 82 percent of the total households, with 41.4 percent of the families having children. Of those households, 46.4 percent had children under the age of 18. The overall average household size was 3.13 people.

Age

The median age in Nipomo in 2000 was 35.6 years of age, with 41 percent being between the ages of 25 and 54, and 33 percent of the population was under 19 years of age.

Race

Characterized by race, the population of Nipomo is divided up into significant numbers of Caucasian and Hispanic, where 61 percent are white, 35 percent Hispanic, and four percent identify themselves as ‘other’.

Housing

In 2000 there were over 4,000 housing units, 77 percent of which were single-family detached units. Over 57 percent of these houses were built after the year 1980 and as a result, 68 percent of the population moved to Nipomo after 1980 as well. Almost 80 percent of the total units were owned, leaving a little over 20 percent renter-occupied. The second largest types of housing were mobile homes, at almost 17 percent. Between 2000 and 2004, the median home price within Nipomo increased from

¹ Source: US Census Bureau 2000 and the South County Area Plan

² Source: 2005 Regional Profile; San Luis Obispo Council of Governments

\$221,000 to \$460,100³. Countywide in 2004 (the smallest unit of data), only 17 percent of households were able to afford the median home price of \$475,000, which declined to 13 percent in January, 2005⁴.

Economics

The median household income in 2000 was \$49,852 and the median family income was \$54,337. Over 78 percent of Nipomo residents had at least a high school education equivalency.

Commute

Over 90 percent of Nipomo residents commuted to work in a car, truck, or van, taking less than 29 minutes, and the remaining 10 percent either walked or used some means of public transportation.

	Nipomo, CA		San Luis Obispo County	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
TOTAL POPULATION				
	12,626	100	246,681	100
Age Distribution				
Under 5 years old	922	7.3	12,358	5.0
5 to 9 years old	1,112	8.8	14,912	6.0
10 to 14 years old	1,188	9.4	16,174	6.6
15 to 19 years old	987	7.8	20,893	8.5
20 to 24 years old	622	4.9	22,647	9.2
25 to 34 years old	1,360	10.8	28,177	11.4
35 to 44 years old	2,157	17.1	38,416	15.6
45 to 54 years old	1,672	13.2	36,150	14.7
55 to 59 years old	569	4.5	11,787	4.8
60 to 64 years old	504	4.0	9,482	3.8
65 to 74 years old	894	7.1	18,094	7.3
75 to 84 years old	506	4.0	13,415	5.4
85 years old and over	133	1.1	4,176	1.7
Sex				
Male	6,231	49.4	126,704	51.4
Female	6,395	50.6	119,977	48.6

³ Source: 2005 San Luis Obispo County Economic Outlook

⁴ Source: Housing Affordability Index; California Association of Realtors