



## SECTION 3

# LAND USE ELEMENT

San Benito County has land use regulatory authority over all unincorporated land in the county, which includes everything except land within the city limits of Hollister and San Juan Bautista, or land owned/managed by either the State or Federal governments (e.g., State Parks, National Parks, Bureau of Land Management areas, and tribal lands). The County's jurisdiction covers roughly 83 percent of all land in the county, the vast majority of which is designated either Rangeland (RG) or Agriculture (A). However, there are more intensive residential and urban uses within the San Juan and Hollister valleys, particularly surrounding the two cities.

The purpose of the Land Use Element is twofold. First, this element includes a series of land use designations that identify the type and intensity of uses permissible on unincorporated property in the county. This includes the Land Use Diagram, which graphically illustrates where land use designations are applied. Second, this element includes a series of goals and policies identifying the County's philosophy for future change, development, and resource protection in the county over the next 25 years. The focus of this element is to identify ways the County can encourage growth in existing unincorporated communities or clustered residential developments in order to preserve prime farmland and rangeland, protect natural habitats, and reduce the financial, social, and environmental impacts of urban sprawl.



## LAND USE DESIGNATIONS

Generally speaking, land use designations are policy statements the County has developed to guide decisions about the type and intensity of development envisioned on each unincorporated parcel during the life of the General Plan. Unlike zoning districts, which are detailed regulations that identify permitted uses, building envelopes, setbacks, high limits, etc., land use designations are intended to be broad descriptions.

Ultimately, zoning districts must be consistent with land use designations included in the General Plan. However, the County may use one or more zoning districts to implement a single land use designation. The following describes the two main features of each land use designation: the description and the development standards.

### Land Use Descriptions

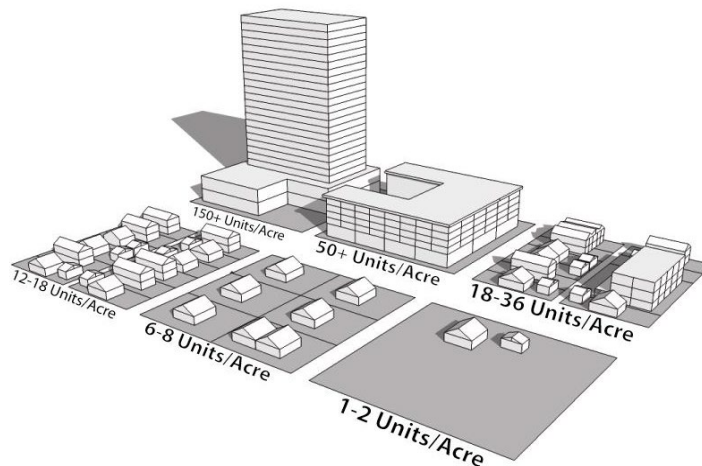
Each land use designation starts out with a text description. The description includes a summary of the purpose of the designation, generally where it is applied, and what the intended uses are. Table 3-1 provides a description of each land use designation appearing on the Land Use Diagram.

### Development Standards

Each land use designation also includes a series of development standards. Standards are statements of allowed density and intensity, usually described in a range (e.g., four to eight dwelling units per gross acre). Standards operate in two ways, depending if they are describing residential or non-residential uses. Residential standards are described in terms of “density,” and non-residential standards in terms of “floor area ratio.”

#### Residential Density

Standards of building density for residential uses are stated as a range (i.e., minimum and maximum) of the allowable number of dwelling units per gross acre. Standards of population density for residential uses can be derived by multiplying the allowable number of dwelling units per gross acre by the average number of persons per dwelling unit assumed for the applicable residential designation. The diagram below shows various building configurations representing different density ranges from rural home sites to city neighborhoods.



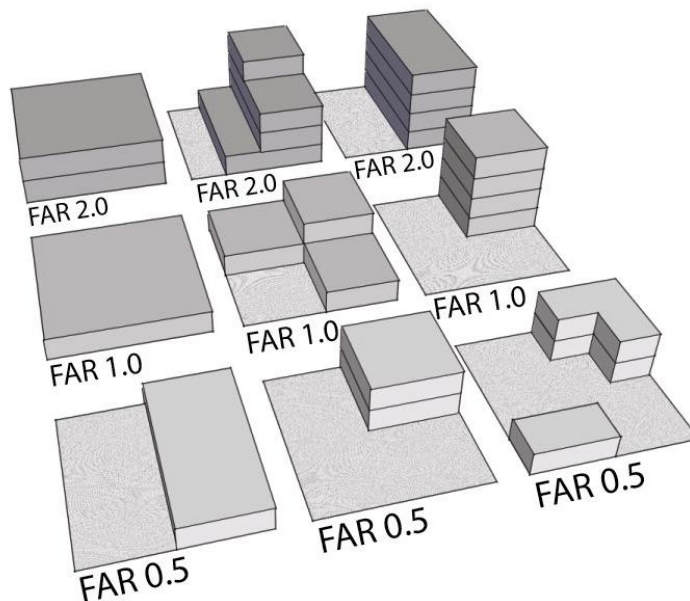


### Non-Residential Floor Area Ratio

Standards of building intensity for non-residential uses such as commercial, industrial, public, or mixed-use development are stated as a range (i.e., minimum and maximum) of floor area ratio (FAR). The FAR is a ratio of the gross building area on a site, excluding structured parking, to the net developable area of the site. The net developable area is the total area of a site excluding portions that cannot be developed (e.g., right-of-way, public parks). A site includes all contiguous parcels that will share parking or access. For example, on a lot with 25,000 square feet of land area, a FAR of 0.50 will allow 12,500 square feet of useable building floor area to be built, regardless of the number of stories in the building (e.g., 6,250 square feet per floor on two floors or 12,500 square feet on one floor). On the same 25,000-square-foot lot, a FAR of 1.00 would

allow 25,000 square feet of useable floor area. The diagram below shows various building configurations representing FARs of 0.50 and 1.00. In the case of mixed-use developments that include residential uses, the FAR includes residential building square footage, and the density range is not applicable.

While FAR provides for the overall development size and intensity, it does not specify the form or character of the building. Different interpretations of the same FAR can result in buildings of very different character. Other County regulations such as zoning guide the form of buildings within a given FAR range. The diagram below illustrates how FARs can apply to a one acre parcel. Table 3-1 shows the development standards for each land use designation.





**Table 3-1  
Land Use Designations and Standards**

Land Use Description	Development Standard(s)
<p><b>Rangeland (RG)</b> The purpose of this designation is to maintain open space and grazing land on hills, mountains, and remote areas of the county. This designation is applied to areas that have minimal transportation access, high to very high fire hazard, and no public infrastructure (e.g., sewer, water, drainage). Most of these areas are located within remote parts of the county. This designation allows support uses that directly support agricultural operations and one principal residential dwelling unit per lot. Secondary dwellings are allowed for relative, caretaker/employee, and farm worker housing. This definition, including the Maximum Density and Maximum FAR, was readopted by voter initiative and may not be amended except by a vote of the people, except as provided by the Empower Voters to Make Land Use Decisions Initiative.</p>	<p><u>Maximum Density:</u> 1 dwelling unit per 40 acres</p> <p><u>Maximum FAR:</u> 0.1</p>
<p><b>Rangeland Management Area (RGMA)</b> The purpose of this designation is to maintain open space and grazing land on hills, mountains, and remote areas of the county that are managed by a local, regional, state and/or federal agency. This designation is applied to areas that have minimal transportation access, high to very high fire hazard, and no public infrastructure (e.g., sewer, water, drainage). Most of these areas are located within remote parts of the county. This designation allows support uses that directly support agricultural operations.</p>	<p><u>Maximum FAR:</u> 0.1</p>
<p><b>Agriculture (A)</b> The purpose of this designation is to maintain the productivity of agricultural land, especially prime farmland, in the county. This designation is applied to agriculturally productive lands of various types, including crop land, vineyards, and grazing lands. This designation allows agricultural support uses, such as processing, wineries, and other necessary public utility and safety facilities and one principal residential dwelling unit per lot. Secondary dwellings are allowed for relative, caretaker/employee, and farm worker housing. These areas typically have transportation access, but little to no public infrastructure. This definition, including the Maximum Density and Maximum FAR, was readopted by voter initiative and may not be amended except by a vote of the people, except as provided by the Empower Voters to Make Land Use Decisions Initiative.</p>	<p><u>Maximum Density:</u> 1 dwelling unit per 5 acres</p> <p><u>Maximum FAR:</u> 0.5</p>
<p><b>Parks (P)</b> This designation applies to the land within San Benito County that is presently owned by Federal, State, or County agencies and used as active or passive parkland. The uses allowed within the Federal and State parks are dictated by those agencies. Permissible uses within the Parks, Public category are public recreation facilities such as public golf courses, community park, neighborhood park, local park, community center, campgrounds, recreation corridors, and trails.</p>	<p><u>Maximum FAR:</u> 0.1</p>



**Table 3-1  
Land Use Designations and Standards**

Land Use Description	Development Standard(s)
<p><b>Rural (R)</b> The purpose of this designation is to allow very low-density residential development in areas that are not primarily suited for agricultural uses, but due to the lack of public infrastructure (e.g., water, sewer, drainage) or for geographical reasons are unsuited for higher density residential designations. This definition, including the Maximum Density, was readopted by the Empower Voters to Make Land Use Decisions Initiative and may not be amended unless in conformity therewith.</p>	<p><u>Maximum Density:</u> 1 dwelling unit per 5 acres</p>
<p><b>Rural Transition (RT)</b> The purpose of this designation is to allow traditional rural development as a transition between rural and urban areas. Development within this designation should be associated with rural standards and will typically lack public infrastructure (e.g., water, sewer, drainage). These transitional areas are intended to fulfill the need for buffering higher density residential development from exclusively agricultural areas, in order to minimize the conversion of agricultural lands to urban uses.</p>	<p><u>Maximum Density:</u> 1 dwelling unit per 2.5 acres</p>
<p><b>Residential Rural (RR)</b> The purpose of this designation is to allow for large-lot rural residential homes within areas of the county that are generally unsuitable for productive agriculture because of existing small property sizes, multiple property owners, and proximity to other more intensive residential development. These properties will typically lack public infrastructure (e.g., water, sewer, drainage).</p>	<p><u>Maximum Density:</u> 2 dwelling units per acre</p>
<p><b>Residential Mixed (RM)</b> The purpose of this designation is to allow areas of unincorporated urban uses where circulation and utility services exist. This will provide individuals with the opportunity to live in an unincorporated village or neighborhood atmosphere composed primarily of residential land uses with some commercial uses serving the residences. This designation applies to areas that are largely developed and have public infrastructure and services necessary to support the increased density.  The intensity of development will be directly proportional to the level and availability of public infrastructure and services. A maximum of 20 dwelling units per acre can be achieved in those areas so designated. Thirty percent of new residential dwelling units with available public sewer and water shall include mixed residential types with an average development density of 8 units per acre. The exception shall be the Residential Multiple zoning category where densities of 8 to 20 units per acre are allowed. This designation also allows mixed-use developments that include residential, retail, and office uses.</p>	<p><u>Maximum Density:</u> Single-family up to 20 dwelling units per acre  or  Mobile home parks with an average of 8 dwelling units per acre  <u>Maximum FAR:</u> 0.8</p>



**Table 3-1  
Land Use Designations and Standards**

Land Use Description	Development Standard(s)
<p><b>Residential High (RH)</b> The purpose of this designation is to allow for strategically placed higher-intensity multi-family housing in locations where urban services and circulation capacity are available or planned. The RH designation will allow multi-family housing at 20-45 dwelling units per acre. Areas designated RH are intended to accommodate a variety of apartment, condominium, and townhome building types in a walkable pattern with access to transit, jobs, schools, and commercial services. Wherever possible, RH areas should be located where public water, sewer, and transportation infrastructure exist or can be provided; near activity centers, transit corridors, and employment areas; and where site configuration supports higher-density housing with appropriate transitions to adjoining lower-density neighborhoods. New development shall provide context-sensitive transitions—such as upper-story stepbacks, building articulation, and landscape screening—where RH areas abut lower-intensity residential designations, consistent with adopted objective standards.</p>	<p><u>Density:</u> Multi-family from 20 to 45 dwelling units per acre</p>
<p><b>Commercial Neighborhood (CN)</b> The purpose of this designation is to provide convenience goods within or near communities or other concentrations of population. This designation intends to reduce unnecessary vehicular trips to commercial centers in the cities of Hollister and San Juan Bautista and outlying cities in other counties, encouraging a focus on local businesses, with a destination retailer or restaurant. This designation also allows mixed-use developments that could include residential, retail, and office uses.</p>	<p><u>Maximum FAR:</u> 0.8</p> <p><u>Maximum Density:</u> Up to 20 dwelling units per acre</p>
<p><b>Commercial Thoroughfare (CT)</b> The purpose of this designation is to provide commercial services for motorists near highway interchanges, along thoroughfares, and near Federal, State, and regional parks, and other tourist attractions to capture pass-through traffic, and to allow for commercial uses that serve the agricultural and rural unincorporated community. These uses could include small shopping centers, truck and automobile stations, and tourist-serving commercial uses.</p>	<p><u>Maximum FAR:</u> 0.8</p>
<p><b>Industrial Light (IL)</b> The purpose of this designation is to allow light industrial development near existing transportation systems (e.g., highways, rail, air). This includes: warehouses, contractor yards, nurseries, lumber yards, auto repair shops, light manufacturing and/or assembly, and research and development operations that do not cause significant environmental hazards or create major pollution.</p>	<p><u>Maximum FAR:</u> 0.8</p>



**Table 3-1  
Land Use Designations and Standards**

Land Use Description	Development Standard(s)
<p><b>Industrial Heavy (IH)</b> The purpose of this designation is to provide areas for heavy industrial activities that are not suitable for urban areas because of their size, noise, dust, traffic, or safety concerns. This could include large-scale manufacturing operations, mining and aggregate production facilities, recycling transfer centers, chemical and explosives manufacturing, or other similar uses.</p>	<p><u>Maximum FAR:</u> 0.8</p>
<p><b>Public/Quasi-Public (PQP)</b> The purpose of this designation is to provide for public and quasi-public uses, including public utility facilities and services. This designation applies to the following uses: schools, landfills, recycling, resource recovery, government lands (non-parkland), sewage treatment plants, fire stations, sheriff stations/substations, jails, religious meeting areas, libraries, energy generation and distribution, water distribution, and public meeting halls, and other similar uses related to the operation of County government services, provided, however, that new or expanded landfills shall not be an authorized use on lands that were designated Agriculture (A), Rural (R), or Rangeland (RG) as of March 1, 2024, unless in compliance with the Empower Voters to Make Land Use Decisions Initiative. An alternate use of property designated PQP may be approved without an amendment to the Land Use Diagram if such alternate use is compatible with existing and planned uses on neighboring properties and is consistent with applicable General Plan policies.</p>	<p><u>Maximum FAR:</u> 1.0</p>
<p><b>Santana Ranch Specific Plan (SRSP)</b> This designation applies to the Santana Ranch Specific Plan area. The plan area encompasses approximately 292 acres located east of intersections of Fairview Road with Hillcrest Road and Sunnyslope Road. Specific land uses in this area must be consistent with the Santana Ranch Specific Plan, which sets forth a comprehensive planning vision and regulatory framework for the project.</p>	<p>Multiple (see SRSP)<sup>2</sup></p>
<p><b>Fairview Corners Specific Plan (FCSP)</b> This designation applies to the Fairview Corners Specific Plan area. The plan encompasses approximately 60 acres located adjacent to the proposed Gavilan College San Benito Campus, directly north of Airline Highway (State Route 25) and east of Fairview Road. Specific land uses in this area must be consistent with the Fairview Corners Specific Plan, which sets forth a comprehensive planning vision and regulatory framework for the project.</p>	<p>Multiple (see FCSP)<sup>3</sup></p>



**Table 3-1  
Land Use Designations and Standards**

Land Use Description	Development Standard(s)
<p><b>San Juan Oaks Specific Plan (SJOSP)</b> This designation applies to the San Juan Oaks Specific Plan area. The plan encompasses approximately 1,994 acres located approximately three miles southwest of the City of Hollister, approximately 3 miles southeast of the City of San Juan Bautista, and approximately 1 mile south of State Route 156. Specific land uses in this area must be consistent with the San Juan Oaks Specific Plan, which sets forth a comprehensive planning vision and regulatory framework for the project.</p>	Multiple (see SJOSP) <sup>4</sup>
<p><b>Planned Development (PD)</b> This designation identifies areas where future development is anticipated to occur through preparation of a Specific Plan, which may also incorporate form-based zoning. General Plan land use designations will be applied to the area through a General Plan Amendment to incorporate the Specific Plan as a part of this General Plan, once more detailed planning is conducted and applicable CEQA environmental review is completed.</p>	N/A

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> FAR = Floor Area Ratio

<sup>2</sup> The Santana Ranch Specific Plan includes a total of 1,092 dwelling units of various housing types and densities, including 774 single-family residential units at densities of 1.0 to 5.0 units per acre, and 318 multiple residential units at 5.1 to 12 units per acre. It also includes 9.7 acres of commercial retail and 2.0 acres of office development.

<sup>3</sup> The Fairview Corners Specific Plan includes a total of 57-acre single-family residential units located to the east of the City of Hollister, including 220 housing units and open space.

<sup>4</sup> The San Juan Oaks Specific Plan includes a total of 1,084 dwelling units, including 1,017 age-restricted single-family units and 67 conventional (non-age restricted) single-family units. It also includes a 200-room resort hotel, a 65,000-square foot neighborhood commercial center, a four-acre assisted living/skilled nursing/memory care facility with up to 100 beds, seven acres of private neighborhood parks, 17 acres of community parks, 114 acres of common open space, a 41-acre on-site agricultural preserve, and a 1,243-acre permanent wildlife habitat.



## Land Use Diagram

The Land Use Diagram depicts the boundaries of land uses for San Benito County through the year 2035 and beyond. The boundary lines between land use designations are delineated as specifically as possible, in most cases following parcel lines. For larger parcels, particularly outside of the Hollister and San Juan valleys, the boundary lines between land use designations are indicated more generally. These boundaries will be more clearly delineated by subsequent general plan amendments as more detailed planning is undertaken for these areas in the future (e.g., community plans, specific plans).

The 2035 General Plan includes three diagrams that collectively comprise the Land Use Diagram (shown on the following pages). These include:

- **Figure 3-1: Land Use Diagram (County-wide).** This diagram shows land use designations for the entire county.
- **Figure 3-2: Land Use Diagram (North County Detail).** This diagram is a detail of the land use designations in the northern part of the county, primarily the Hollister and San Juan valleys and surrounding areas.
- **Figure 3-3: Land Use Diagram (Census-Designated Places Detail).** This diagram is detail of the land use designations of the Census-Designated Places in the county: Aromas, Ridgemark, and Tres Pinos.

## Countywide Growth and Development

The County has a direct role in shaping the character of rural and urban development as it manages growth in the unincorporated county. At the same time, the County seeks to support and encourage the cities in their land use planning efforts to ensure that a quality living environment is provided for all existing and future county residents. The focus of this goal section is to identify general countywide

growth and development patterns envisioned in the unincorporated parts of San Benito County that will be able to sustainably accommodate the county's projected growth. (*Note: see city General Plans for land use policies within city limits.*)



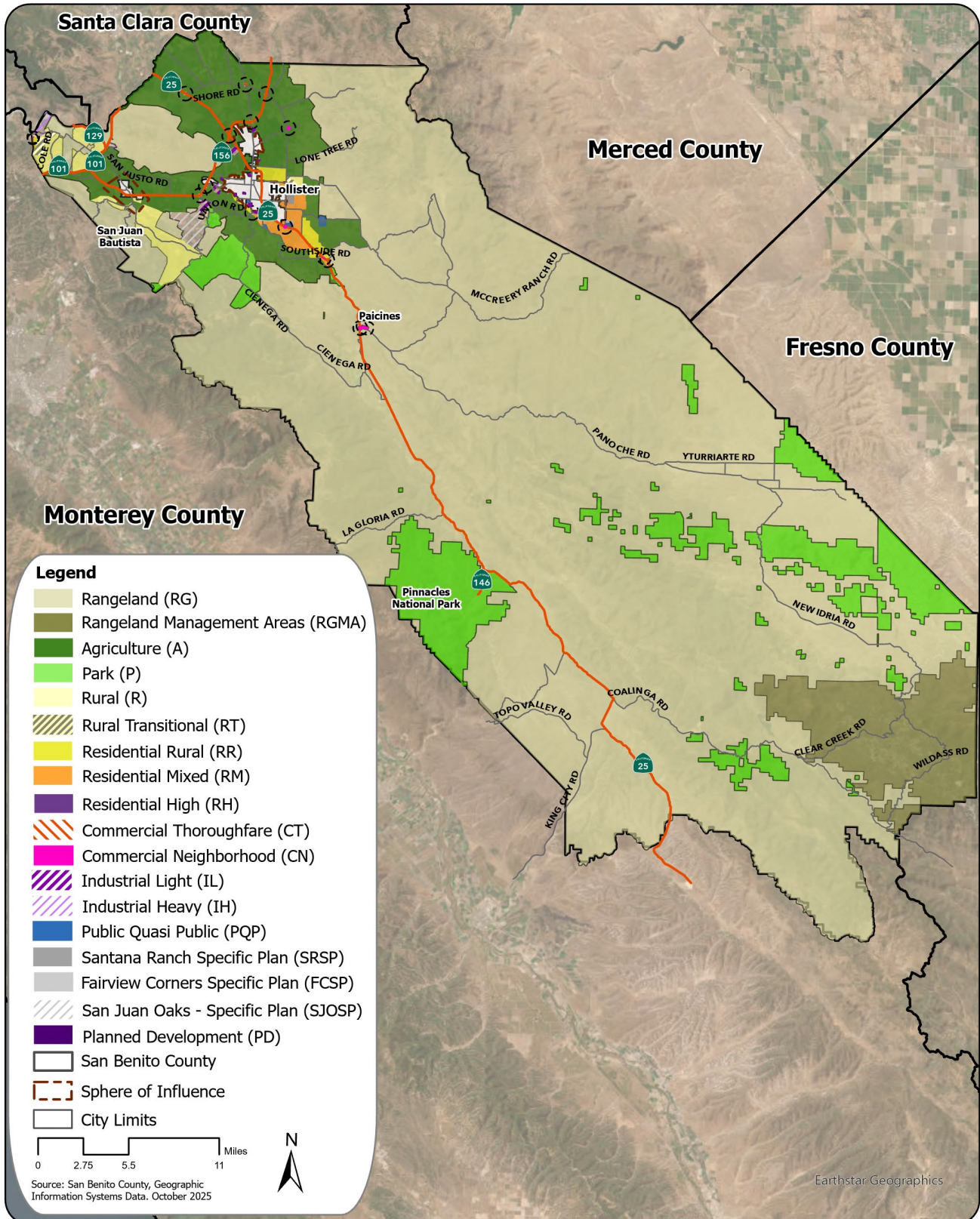
View from Park Hill in Hollister. (Photo by Rene Rodriguez)

### GOAL LU-1

**To maintain San Benito County's rural character and natural beauty while providing areas for needed future growth.**

#### LU-1.1 Countywide Development 🌍

The County shall focus future development in areas around cities where infrastructure and public services are available, within existing unincorporated communities, provided they meet the requirements of goal section LU-7 and demonstrate a fiscally neutral or positive impact on the County and any special districts that provide services to the project. (RDR)



**Figure 3-1**  
**Land Use Diagram (Countywide)**



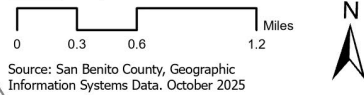


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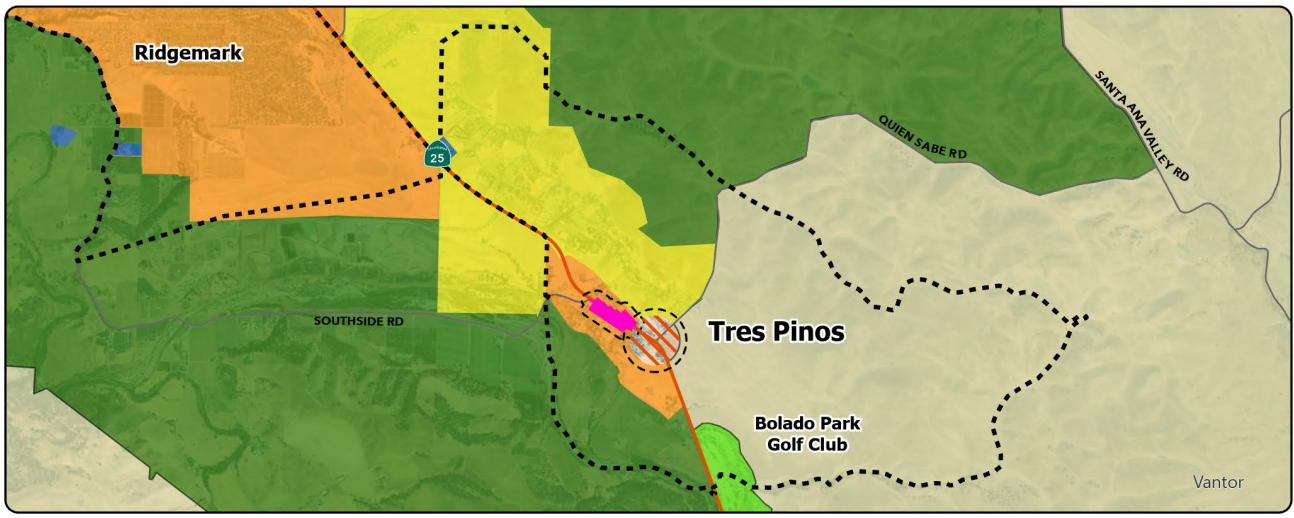
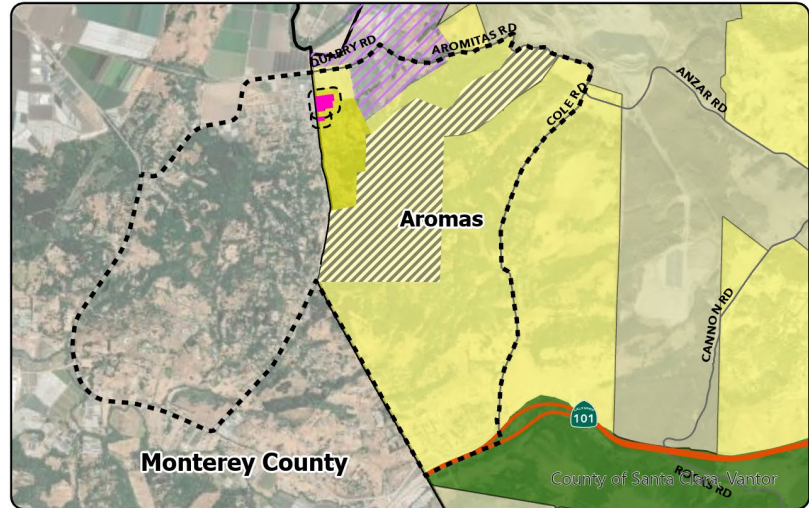
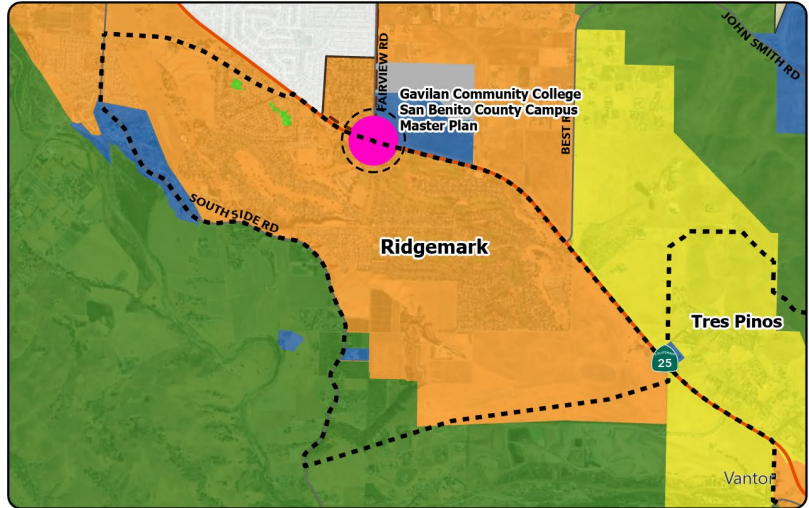


**Legend**

-  Rangeland (RG)
-  Rangeland Management Areas (RGMA)
-  Agriculture (A)
-  Park (P)
-  Rural (R)
-  Rural Transitional (RT)
-  Residential Rural (RR)
-  Residential Mixed (RM)
-  Residential High (RH)
-  Commercial Thoroughfare (CT)
-  Commercial Neighborhood (CN)
-  Industrial Light (IL)
-  Industrial Heavy (IH)
-  Public Quasi Public (PQP)
-  Santana Ranch Specific Plan (SRSP)
-  Fairview Corners Specific Plan (FCSP)
-  San Juan Oaks - Specific Plan (SJOSP)
-  Planned Development (PD)
-  San Benito County
-  Sphere of Influence
-  City Limits



Source: San Benito County, Geographic Information Systems Data, October 2025



**Figure 3-3**  
**Land Use Diagram (Census Designated Places Detail)**



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### **LU-1.2 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS**

The County shall promote compact, clustered development patterns that use land efficiently; reduce pollution and the expenditure of energy and other resources; and facilitate walking, bicycling, and transit use; and encourage employment centers and shopping areas to be proximate to residential areas to reduce vehicle trips. Such patterns would apply to infill development and unincorporated communities. (RDR)

### **LU-1.3 Future Development Timing**

The County shall ensure that future development does not outpace the ability of either the County or other public/private service providers to provide adequate services and infrastructure. The County shall review future development proposals for their potential to reduce the level of services provided to existing communities or place economic hardships on existing communities, and the County may deny proposals that are projected to have these effects. (RDR/MPSP)

### **LU-1.4 Identifiable Community Boundaries**

The County shall encourage defined boundaries between communities (e.g., cities and unincorporated communities). (RDR/IGC)

### **LU-1.5 Infill Development**

The County shall encourage infill development on vacant and underutilized parcels to maximize the use of land within existing urban areas, minimize the conversion of productive agricultural land and open spaces, and minimize environmental impacts associated with new development as one way to accommodate growth. (RDR/IGC)

### **LU-1.6 Hillside Development Restrictions**

The County shall prohibit residential and urban development on hillsides with 30 percent or greater slopes. (RDR)

### **LU-1.7 Community Plans**

The County should consider the development and adoption of Community Plans for existing unincorporated communities in order to maintain/establish a community identity, coordinate traffic and circulation improvements, promote infill development where public services are already in demand, identify recreational needs, and ensure coordinated development. (RDR)

### **LU-1.8 Site Plan Environmental Content Requirements**

The County shall require all submitted site plans, tentative maps, and parcel maps to depict all environmentally sensitive and hazardous areas, including: 100-year floodplains, fault zones, 30 percent or greater slopes, severe erosion hazards, fire hazards, wetlands, and riparian habitats. (RDR)

### **LU-1.9 Airport Land Use Coordination and Consistency**

The County shall coordinate planning and zoning with the San Benito County Airport Land Use Commission and ensure that all land uses and regulations within the Hollister and Frazier Airports areas of influence are consistent with the adopted San Benito County Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan. (RDR/IGC)

### **LU-1.10 Development Site Suitability**

The County shall encourage specific development sites to avoid natural and manmade hazards, including, but not limited to, active seismic faults, landslides, slopes greater than 30 percent, and floodplains. Development sites shall also be on soil suitable for building and maintaining well and septic systems (i.e., avoid impervious soils, high percolation or high groundwater areas, and provide setbacks from creeks). The County shall require adequate mitigation for any development located on environmentally sensitive lands (e.g., wetlands, erodible soil, archaeological resources, important plant and animal communities). (RDR)



### LU-1.11 Empower Voters to Make Land Use Decisions Initiative

The voters of San Benito County have adopted the Empower Voters to Make Land Use Decisions Initiative. Pursuant to the provisions of the Initiative, the following shall obtain:

a.) The provisions setting forth the land use designations for Agriculture (A), Rural (R), and Rangeland (RG) in the General Plan, as amended through March 1, 2024, and as referenced herein and amended hereby, shall not be further amended, except as set forth herein, unless such amendment is approved by a vote of the people or by the Board of Supervisors pursuant to the procedures set forth herein.

b.) All those lands within the unincorporated area of the County designated Agriculture (A), Rural (R), or Rangeland (RG) on the General Plan's Land Use Diagram, as amended by the Empower Voters to Make Land Use Decisions Initiative, shall remain so designated unless a re-designation is approved by a vote of the people, or by the Board of Supervisors pursuant to the procedures set forth in this Policy LU-1.0.

c.) The Board of Supervisors, following at least one public hearing and any procedural requirements associated with any underlying requested approval, and after compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act, may place any amendment to the provisions setting forth the land use designations Agricultural (A), Rural (R), or Rangeland (RG), or changing the designation of any property designated Agriculture (A), Rural (R), or Rangeland (RG) (except as expressly exempted herein), on the ballot for approval by a vote of the people at a special or general election pursuant to the mechanisms provided by state law.

d.) The Board of Supervisors may, without approval by a vote of the people, reorder or renumber individual provisions of the General Plan, including the provisions set forth in this policy, in the course

of making updates to the General Plan in accordance with the requirements of state law. The Board of Supervisors may, without a vote of the people, make technical, non-substantive modifications to the General Plan for clarification and internal consistency, provided such modifications are consistent with the Purpose and Findings of the Empower Voters to Make Land Use Decisions Initiative.

e.) The Board of Supervisors may, without approval by a vote of the people:

- i. Re-designate lands not designated Agriculture (A), Rural (R), or Rangeland (RG) to Agriculture (A), Rural (R), or Rangeland (RG);
- ii. Re-designate lands designated Rural (R) to Agriculture (A) or Rangeland (RG);
- iii. Re-designate lands designated Agriculture (A) to Rangeland (RG);
- iv. Re-designate lands designated Agriculture (A), Rural (R), or Rangeland (RG) to Parks (P) as set forth in Table 3-1, provided that lands so re-designated may not subsequently be re-designated to any land use designation other than Agriculture (A), Rural (R), or Rangeland (RG) without a vote of the people;
- v. Re-designate lands designated Agriculture (A), Rural (R), or Rangeland (RG) to Public/Quasi-Public (PQP) as set forth in Table 3-1, below, but only for the following uses: schools, recycling, resource recovery, government lands (non-parkland), sewage treatment plants, fire stations, sheriff stations/substations, jails, religious meeting areas, libraries, energy generation and distribution, water distribution, and public meeting halls, and other similar uses related to the operation of County government services. Alternate uses are not permitted on such re-designated lands without a vote of the people



pursuant to this Initiative. The use of this exemption requires that lands so re-designated may not subsequently be re-designated to any land use designation other than Agriculture (A), Rural (R), or Rangeland (RG) without a vote of the people. No such re-designation shall authorize the use of/ands designated Agriculture (A), Rural (R), or Rangeland (RG) for use as new or expanded landfills on any lands in the unincorporated areas of the County, without compliance with the voter approval requirements of this policy.

Once designated to Agriculture (A), Rural (R), or Rangeland (RG), lands shall become subject to the rules contained in this policy for any further re-designation. Any re-designations made pursuant to this subdivision (e) must comply with the provisions for making such amendments as set forth in state law and all Board adopted policies.

f) The Board of Supervisors may, without approval by a vote of the people, and if the Board of Supervisors deems it to be in the public interest, create a new "Open Space" land use designation, and re-designate lands designated Agriculture (A), Rural (R), or Rangeland (RG) to such "Open Space" land use designation, provided that such "Open Space" land use designation allows only for preservation of natural resources, outdoor recreation, and areas for public health and safety such as flood plains, earthquake fault zones, unstable soil areas and other areas requiring special management or regulation because of hazardous or special conditions.

Lands re-designated pursuant to this subdivision may not subsequently be re-designated to any land use designation other than Agriculture (A), Rural (R), or Rangeland (RG) without approval by a vote of the people.

g.) The Board of Supervisors may, without approval by a vote of the people, amend the General Plan to redesignate lands designated Agriculture

(A), Rural (R), or Rangeland (RG) if required for a proposal to develop housing, and only as necessary to comply with state law regarding the provision of housing for all economic segments of the community. Such amendment may be adopted only if the Board of Supervisors makes both of the following findings, based on substantial evidence, that: (1) the proposed development is necessary to comply with State housing requirements, and (2) the re-designation only includes the land necessary for that compliance.

Nothing in this policy is intended to prevent the Board of Supervisors from re-designating lands that were not designated Agriculture (A), Rural (R), or Rangeland (RG) as of March 1, 2024, to any other designation without approval by a vote of the people.

This policy does not apply to, and is not intended to alter current or future land use designations for, lands within the boundaries of the three existing designated Specific Plan Areas in San Benito County (the San Juan Oaks Specific Plan Area, the Santana Ranch Specific Plan Area, and the Fairview Corners Specific Plan Area) as those boundaries existed on March 1, 2024.

For the purposes of this policy, approval by a vote of the people is accomplished when a General Plan amendment is placed on the ballot through any procedure provided for in the state Elections Code, and a majority of the voters votes in favor of the amendment. Whenever the Board of Supervisors proposes an amendment requiring approval by a vote of the people pursuant to this policy, the amendment shall not take effect unless it is approved by the voters. The Board of Supervisors shall follow the provisions of the state Elections Code in all matters pertaining to placing such a measure on the ballot. [Enacted by voters under Measure A in 2024]



### LU-1.12 High-Intensity Petroleum Operations Prohibition

Per the “Protect Our Water and Health: Ban Fracking Initiative,” the development, construction, installation, or use of any facility, appurtenance, or above-ground equipment, whether temporary or permanent, mobile or fixed, accessory or principal, in support of High-Intensity Petroleum Operation(s) is prohibited on all lands within the County’s unincorporated area.

Definitions:

- “High-Intensity Petroleum Operations” mean (1) Well Stimulation Treatments and/or (2) the operation of Enhanced Recovery Wells.
- “Well Stimulation Treatment” means any treatment of a well designed to enhance oil and gas production or recovery by increasing the permeability of the formation. Well Stimulation Treatments include, but are not limited to, Hydraulic Fracturing Treatments and Acid Well Stimulation Treatments.
- “Hydraulic Fracturing Treatment” means a Well Stimulation Treatment that, in whole or in part, includes the pressurized injection of hydraulic fracturing fluid or fluids into an underground geologic formation in order to fracture or with the intent to fracture the formation, thereby causing or enhancing the production of oil or gas from a well.
- “Acid Well Stimulation Treatment” means a Well Stimulation Treatment that uses, in whole or in part, the application of one or more acids to the well or underground geologic formation. The Acid Well Stimulation Treatment may be at any applied pressure and may be used in combination with Hydraulic Fracturing Treatments or other

Well Stimulation Treatments. Acid Well Stimulation Treatments include acid matrix stimulation treatments and acid fracturing treatments. Acid matrix stimulation treatments are acid treatments conducted at pressures lower than the applied pressure necessary to fracture the underground geologic formation.

- “Enhanced Recovery Wells” means wells that are injected with brine, water, steam, polymers, carbon dioxide, or other gasses into oil-bearing formations to recover residual oil and in some limited applications natural gas. The injected fluid thins (decreases the viscosity) or displaces small amounts of extractable oil and gas, which is then available for recovery. Examples include waterflood injection, steamflood injection, and cyclic steam injection.
- “Effective Date” means the date that the Protect Our Water and Health: Ban Fracking Initiative became effective pursuant to State law.

**Vested rights/legal nonconforming uses:** The Protect Our Water and Health: Ban Fracking Initiative (“Initiative”) establishes a reasonable amortization period of one year after the Effective Date for any land use in support of a High-Intensity Petroleum Operation(s) that has obtained, as of the Effective Date, a vested right pursuant to State law (including legal nonconforming High-Intensity Petroleum Operations) as determined by the Planning Commission.

Within one year of the Effective Date, the owners and operators of all vested High-Intensity Petroleum Operations shall bring land uses into conformity with this Policy. Land uses may support Low-Intensity Petroleum Operations, in compliance with all applicable law, on properties formerly supporting High-Intensity Petroleum Operations.



The one-year amortization period may be extended on a case-by-case basis if the Planning Commission determines that a well owner or operator has shown that one year is not a reasonable amortization period pursuant to State law. Any extension shall not exceed two years (in addition to the initial one-year period for a total of three years) and may be only for the minimum length of time necessary to provide a reasonable amortization period.

All Planning Commission determinations made under this Policy must be made at a duly noticed public hearing. The Planning Commission's determinations may be appealed to the Board of Supervisors.

Nothing in this Policy is intended to affect any existing County authority to terminate operations found to be a nuisance.

This Policy LU-1.12, along with Policy LU-1.13 and Articles VII and VIII of Chapter 25.29, § 19.21.031, and related definitions in the San Benito County Code were adopted by the Protect Our Water and Health: Ban Fracking Initiative and may not be amended or repealed except by a vote of the people. [Enacted by voters under Measure J in 2014]

**LU-1.13 Prohibition of Petroleum Operations in All Residential Land Use Designations**

The development, construction, installation, or use of any facility, appurtenance, or above-ground equipment, whether temporary or permanent, mobile or fixed, accessory or principal, in support of Petroleum Operation(s) is prohibited on all lands designated Rural, Rural Transitional, Rural Residential, Rural/Urban, and Sphere of Influence Rural/Urban, within the County's unincorporated area. Note that certain land designations may have been removed since the enactment of Measure J in 2014. "Petroleum Operations" mean all activities in connection with the exploration, drilling for and the production of petroleum, gas and other hydrocarbons, together with all incidental equipment and

appurtenances thereto until the abandonment of all wells in accordance with applicable law.

**Vested rights/legal nonconforming uses:** This Policy LU-1.13 shall not apply to prohibit the use of land in support of any Low-Intensity Petroleum Operation that has obtained, as of the Effective Date of this Policy, a vested right (including legal nonconforming Low-Intensity Petroleum Operations) pursuant to State law. "Low-Intensity Petroleum Operations" mean all Petroleum Operations that are not High-Intensity Petroleum Operations as defined by Land Use Policy LU-1.13. [Enacted by voters under Measure J in 2014]

**Sustainable and Energy Efficient Development**

San Benito County is committed to promoting development that is sustainable and energy efficient. Efficient development can benefit the county in many ways. It helps reduce energy costs for home and building owners, and helps protect electrical delivery systems from being overburdened during times of high demand. Location can also impact efficiency. Development located in proximity to other major developments, major transportation corridors, or areas with public transportation accessibility can reduce travel demand. The focus of this goal section is to provide direction on the use of innovative building technologies, energy efficiency, and ways to achieve sustainable development practices.



A “whole system” approach is a way to design and construct buildings that consume less energy, water, and other resources; facilitate natural ventilation; use daylight efficiently; and are healthy, safe, comfortable, and durable.

## GOAL LU-2

**To promote energy efficiency through innovative and sustainable building and site design.**

### LU-2.1 Sustainable Building Practices

The County shall promote, and where appropriate, require sustainable building practices that incorporate a “whole system” approach to designing and constructing buildings that consume less energy, water, and other resources; facilitate natural ventilation; use daylight efficiently; and are healthy, safe, comfortable, and durable. (RDR)

### LU-2.2 Green Sustainable Building Practices

The County shall encourage sustainable building practices that go beyond the minimum requirements of the Title 24 CalGreen Code (i.e., Tier 1 or Tier 2 measures) and to design new buildings to achieve a green building standard such as Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED). (RDR)

### LU-2.3 Energy Conservation Standards for New Construction

The County shall cooperate with the local building industry, utilities, and air district to promote enhanced energy conservation standards for new construction. (RDR/IGC/JP)

### LU-2.4 Solar Access

The County shall encourage new residential subdivisions and new commercial, office, industrial, and public buildings to be oriented and landscaped to enhance natural lighting and solar access in order to maximize energy efficiency. (RDR)

### LU-2.5 Energy Retrofits

The County shall promote the retrofitting of existing buildings with new and innovative energy and water efficiency technologies and encourage structures being renovated to be built to a green building



standard such as Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED). (RDR)

**LU-2.6 Green Building Standard** 🌍

The County shall require all new County buildings be constructed to green building standards, such as Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), and all existing County buildings to be retrofitted with energy efficient technologies. (MPSP/SO)

**LU-2.7 Sustainable Location Factor** 🌍

The County shall encourage new development in locations that provide connectivity between existing transportation facilities to increase efficiency, reduce congestion, and improve safety. (RDR)

**Agricultural and Rangeland**

Most of the non-urban land within the Hollister and San Juan valleys is used for productive agriculture (as defined in the Glossary). Agriculture is a major industry in the county and plays a critical role in the regional economy. Local agriculture and agricultural operations also benefit the community by providing accessible fresh produce. In addition, almost all of the land in the central, eastern, and southern parts of the county is designated as Rangeland. The County is determined to protect and support the agricultural and ranching industries in the county. See Figure 3-4, Wine/Hospitality Priority Area.



Panoramic view of agriculture in the San Juan Valley  
(Photo by Mintier Harnish)

The focus of this goal section is to emphasize the importance of farming and ranching in San Benito County, identify ways to protect productive agricultural operations, and identify ways to promote and sustain the industry. This includes balancing the needs of farmers and ranchers with the concerns of adjacent rural residential and urban uses. (Note: see Section 4: Economic Development Element for specific policies related to the expansion of the agricultural and ranching industries, wineries, and agritourism).

**GOAL LU-3**

**To ensure the long-term preservation of the agricultural industry, agricultural support services, and rangeland resources by protecting these areas from incompatible urban uses and allowing farmers to manage their land and operations in an efficient, economically viable manner.**

**LU-3.1 Agricultural Diversification**

The County shall support existing farms, vineyards, and other agricultural operations and encourage the agricultural industry to continue diversification that includes organic, value-added, small-scale, sustainable, and community-supported agricultural practices throughout the county. (RDR/MPSP)

**LU-3.2 Agricultural Integrity and Flexibility**

The County shall protect the integrity of existing agricultural resources, and provide for flexibility and economic viability of farming and ranching operations. (RDR)

**LU-3.3 Increased Agricultural Sustainability and Energy Efficiency** 🌍

The County shall encourage and support farms, vineyards, and ranches that seek to implement programs that increase the sustainability of resources, conserve energy, and protect water and soil in order to bolster the local food economy, increase the



viability of diverse family farms and improve the opportunities for farm workers. (RDR)

#### **LU-3.4 Lower-Impact Agricultural Practices** 🌍

The County shall encourage and support farms, vineyards, and ranches that use lower-impact agricultural and/or organic practices and shall recognize the benefits that a flourishing organic sector industry can provide. (RDR)

#### **LU-3.5 Locally-Grown and Produced Food** 🌍

The County shall encourage the purchasing of locally-grown and produced food by county residents and public institutions, including schools, hospital, and jail. (PI)

#### **LU-3.6 Agricultural Support Services**

The County shall encourage services such as trucking, warehousing, and distribution centers in appropriate locations, to provide support for the economic viability of commercial agriculture. (RDR)

#### **LU-3.7 Visitor Serving Uses in Agricultural Areas**

The County shall encourage visitor serving uses in areas designated Agriculture (e.g., wine tasting rooms, hotels, and bed and breakfast inns), especially within the Wine/Hospitality Priority Area, as long as they do not adversely affect the agricultural production activities of the area. RDR/MPSP)

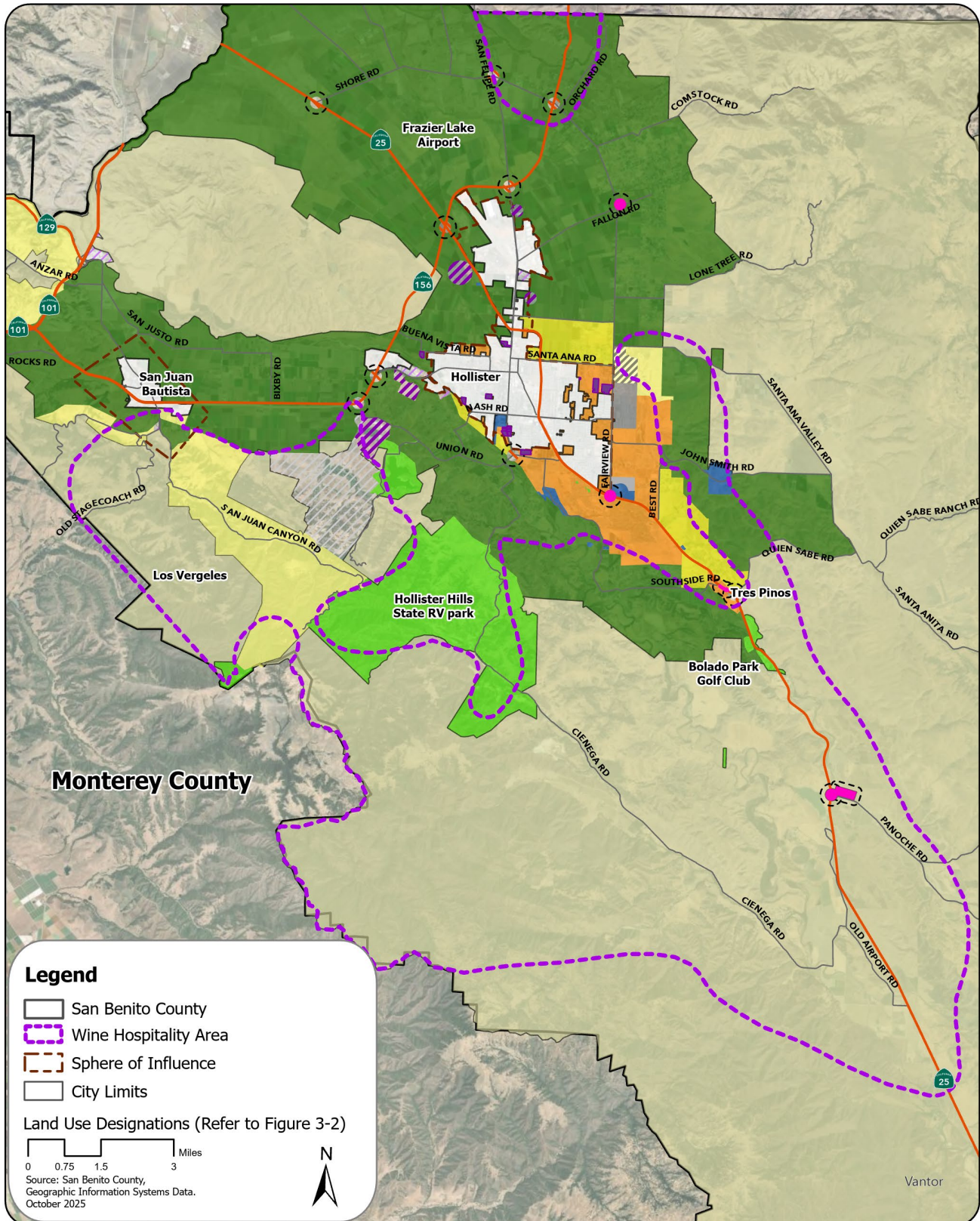
#### **LU-3.8 Urban Residential Buffer Requirement**

The County shall encourage the establishment of a buffer, by the residential developer, between new urban density residential development (i.e., greater than two dwelling units per acre) and existing conventional agricultural operations. (RDR)



#### **LU-3.9 Right to Farm and Ranch**

The County shall protect the rights of operators of productive agricultural properties (as defined in the Glossary) and ranching properties to commence and continue their agricultural and ranching practices (a “right to farm and ranch”) even though established urban uses in the general area may foster complaints against those agricultural and ranching practices. The “right to farm and ranch” shall encompass the processing of agricultural and ranching products and other activities inherent in the definition of productive agriculture and in ranching activities. The County shall require all parcel maps approved for locations in or adjacent to productive agricultural areas and ranching areas to indicate the “right to farm and ranch” policy. The County shall require the program to be disclosed to buyers of property in San Benito County. (RDR)



**Figure 3-4**  
Wine/Hospitality Priority Area



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#### LU-3.10 Agricultural Land Mitigation

If new development permanently converts Prime Farmland that is Class 1 soil to non-agricultural uses, the County shall encourage project applicants to preserve up to an equal number of Prime Farmland acres (i.e. up to a 1:1 ratio) either on- or off-site. An applicant may pay an in lieu mitigation fee(s) for some or all of the converted Prime Farmland that is designated Class 1 soils to non-agricultural uses as agreed in a development agreement. The funds collected shall be used for agricultural protection and/or affiliated programs within San Benito County. Further, the County shall work with the City of San Juan Bautista and the City of Hollister to encourage them to adopt a similar agricultural conversion mitigation ratio. *(RDR/MPSP/IGC)*

#### LU-3.11 Williamson Act Contract Non-Renewal on Small Parcels

For parcels not operated as part of a larger farming operation, the County shall consider not renewing current Williamson Act contracts on small parcels that are not devoted to commercial agriculture. *(MPSP)*

#### LU-3.12 Agricultural Viability of Small Parcel Sizes

The County shall require project applicants seeking to subdivide agriculturally-zoned parcels to demonstrate the continued viability of lots less than 40 acres for commercial agriculture operations. *(RDR)*

#### LU-3.13 Illegal Dumping

The County shall work with property owners, waste collection providers, and law enforcement to find solutions to illegal dumping on agricultural properties such as offering free trash drop-off days and increased penalties for illegal dumping. *(MPSP)*

#### LU-3.14 Land Trusts and Financial Incentives

The County shall consider land trusts and financial incentives to preserve agricultural soil resources and to protect the integrity of important agricultural areas for future use. *(MPSP/FB)*

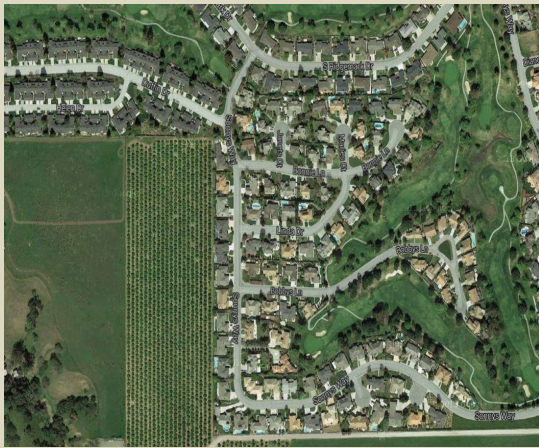
#### LU-3.15 Williamson Act Minimum Parcel Size

For parcels not operating as part of a larger farming operation, the County shall encourage larger parcel size minimums (40 or more acres) and/or evidence of commercial agricultural use for entering new Williamson Act contracts.

### Residential Development

San Benito County contains a wide array of housing types – from urban multi-family complexes near Hollister to rural residential uses surrounding Aromas. The various densities of residential development in the county not only provide housing choices, but their location and design play a critical role in the character and quality-of-life of county residents. Table LU-1 identifies the various residential land use designations used in San Benito County. The County is committed to protecting existing residential development rights, while also providing guidance on the location, design, and components of new subdivisions.

The focus of this goal section is to guide residential development in the county. This includes establishing requirements for new subdivisions, providing incentives for clustering residential units, and providing incentives for transferring development credits away from important agricultural and natural resources. *(Note: see Section 5: Housing Element for policies related to affordable and special needs housing.)*



Ridgemark area residential clustered development.  
(Photo by Google Earth Imagery)

## GOAL LU-4

**To encourage variety in new unincorporated residential development while also providing incentives for clustered residential as a means to protect valuable agricultural and natural resources.**

### LU-4.1 Housing Stock Diversity 🌐

The County shall encourage a balance of housing types, locations, and price ranges within the county to accommodate a variety of families from all socio-economic backgrounds. (RDR)

### LU-4.2 Urban Residential Development 🌐

The County shall ensure new urban residential development (e.g., greater than two units per acre) occurs in areas that have, or can provide, adequate public facilities and services to support such uses, and are near existing and future major transportation networks, transit and/or bicycle corridors, pedestrian paths and trails, and employment centers. (RDR)

### LU-4.3 Residential Density Reductions

The County shall consider reducing the base density of a proposed residential development project if a combination of environmental hazards (e.g.,

fire, seismic, flooding, greater than 30 percent slope) and/or natural resources (e.g., sensitive habitat, wetlands) existing on the site, after consideration of the mitigations to be implemented to address those hazards, make higher densities less appropriate. (RDR)

### LU-4.4 Multi-Family Residential 🌐

The County shall encourage, where feasible, multi-family housing to be located within walkable mixed-use neighborhoods that include uses such as employment centers, shopping districts, civic uses, and other forms of residential development, and have good automobile access and are near transit. (RDR)

### LU-4.5 Innovative Site Planning and Residential Design 🌐

The County shall encourage new residential developments to use innovative site planning techniques and to incorporate design features that increase the design quality, and energy efficiency, and water conservation of structures and landscapes while protecting the surrounding environment. (RDR)

### LU-4.6 Clustered Residential Program 🌐

The County shall continue to encourage the clustering of residential uses and the use of creative site planning techniques to promote preservation of agricultural land and open space areas. (RDR)

### LU-4.7 Clustered Residential Site Layout 🌐

The County shall encourage clustered residential development be designed to respect existing natural features (e.g., rivers and streams, hills and ridge lines, and substantial tree stands) as appropriate to the density and character of the development, and if applicable to use such features to separate clustered parcels from farming areas. (RDR)



**LU-4.8 Conservation Easements Related to Clustered Residential Development** 🌐

The County shall encourage new clustered residential development to provide agricultural and/or other appropriate open space easements on farming or open space parcel(s) at the time that the development occurs, or if a multi-phased Planned Development, according to an adopted specific plan. (RDR/MPSP)

**LU-4.9 Transfer of Development Credit Program**

The County shall maintain and implement the voluntary Transfer of Development Credit (TDC) program as an incentive to protect farmland and focus future development away from the most productive farmland. (RDR/MPSP)

**Commercial and Mixed-Use Development**

Historically residential growth in San Benito County has outpaced commercial and mixed-use growth. The County desires to promote commercial uses on strategic unincorporated parcels in order to accommodate commercial demand, promote economic development, and increase revenue. The focus of this goal section is to identify types and areas for future commercial and mixed-use development. Figure 3-5 shows the locations, Table 3-1 describes the land use designations, and Appendix A defines the new commercial nodes. (Note: see Section 4: Economic Development Element for policies related to countywide economic growth and diversifications, winery expansion, and new business promotion.)

**GOAL LU-5**

**To promote the development of thoroughfare, and locally-serving commercial uses at key opportunities sites in the unincorporated county.**

**LU-5.1 Commercial Neighborhood** 🌐

The County shall allow additional development in existing Commercial Neighborhood (CN) nodes, as shown on the Land Use Diagram, so long as it is located where the need for expanded neighborhood commercial services can be demonstrated. The County shall encourage neighborhood commercial uses to connect to residential uses along transit corridors and bicycle and pedestrian paths, as appropriate to the context, and include appropriate transit, bicycle, and pedestrian facilities. No land designated Agriculture (A), Rural (R), or Rangeland (RG) shall be re-designated Commercial Neighborhood or Commercial Thoroughfare without a vote of the people as required by Section 2.A of the Empower Voters to Make Land Use Decisions Initiative. (RDR)

**LU-5.2 New Commercial Thoroughfare Nodes** 🌐

The County shall encourage new Commercial Thoroughfare (CT) nodes, as shown on the Land Use Diagram, serving travelers and tourists along state routes. The County shall require these uses to have adequate public services, be compatible with surrounding land uses, and respect the scenic character of the county. (RDR)

**LU-5.4 New Commercial Nodes Vision**

The County shall encourage developers to reflect a cohesive vision for node development in site plans submitted as a part of applications for discretionary approval that recognizes the importance of the County's scenic resources and local character and quality of life attributes. (RDR)



### LU-5.5 Strip Commercial

The County shall discourage the creation of new strip commercial developments (e.g., non-cohesive commercial fronting a major arterial or state highway) in favor of centralized commercial node development that is located in the commercial nodes identified on the Land Use Diagram, and in Policies LU-5.1 to LU-5.3. (RDR)

### LU-5.6 Visitor-Oriented Commercial Uses

The County shall encourage visitor-oriented commercial uses that promote the local history, local economy (e.g., agriculture, wineries, recreation), and market locally-produced agricultural products. (RDR)

### LU-5.7 Mixed-Use Development

The County shall encourage both vertical and horizontal mixed-use development within community centers and near or along transportation and transit corridors, bicycle paths, and pedestrian and trail routes as a means of providing efficient land use, housing, and transportation options for county residents. The County shall ensure that mixed use developments include appropriate transit, bicycle, and pedestrian facilities. (RDR)

### LU-5.8 Live-Work Development

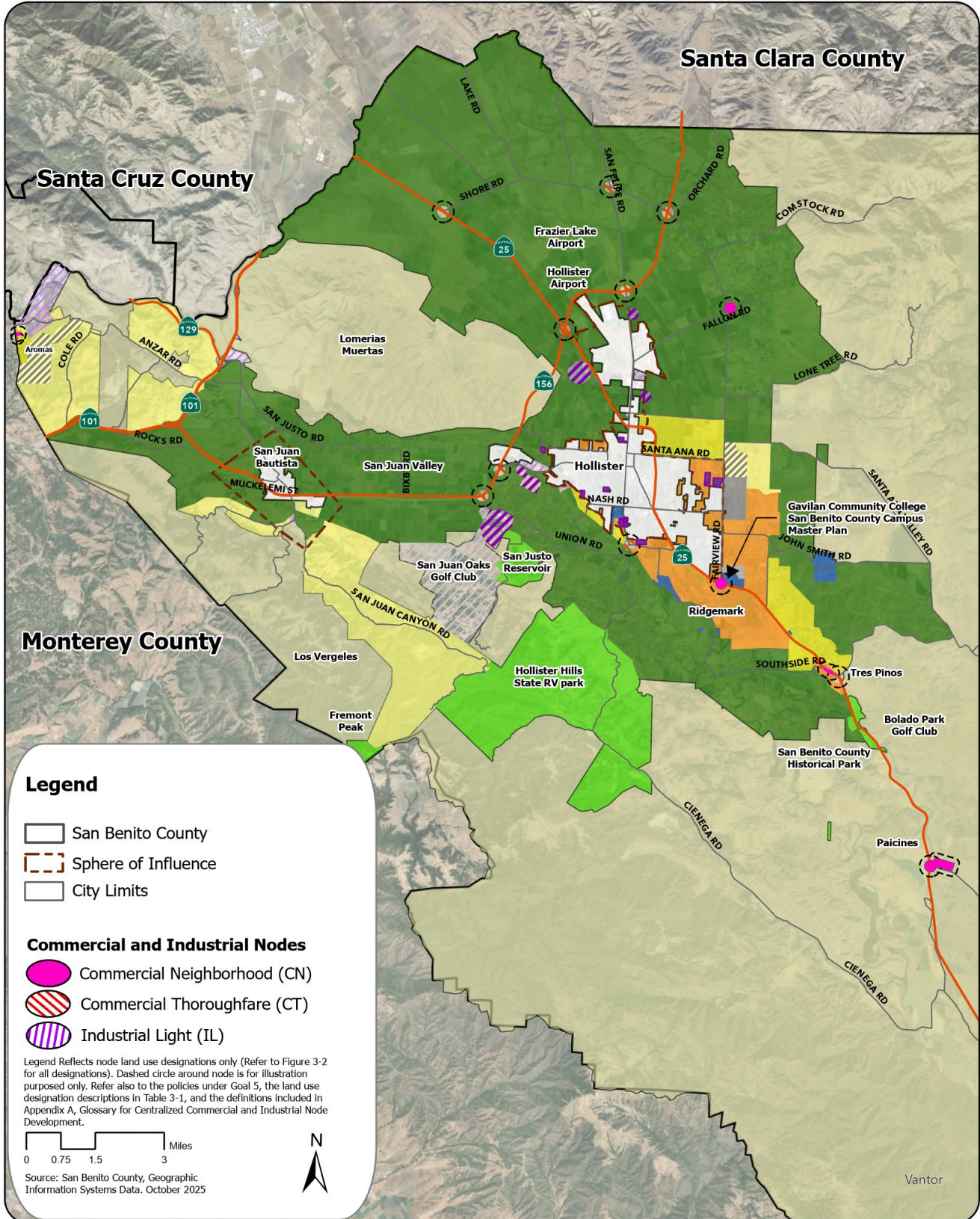
The County shall encourage mixed-use developments to include live-work floor plans for residents who desire office, commercial, or studio space adjacent to their living space. (RDR)

## Employment and Industrial Development

Most San Benito County residents currently (2011) commute outside of the county daily for work. This out migration of workers hurts the county by limiting economic growth and increasing energy consumption. The County is determined to help promote new employment opportunities within the county for residents. The focus of this goal section is to provide guidance for future employment and industrial uses in the county. These uses are vital to the economic health of the community. (*Note: see Section 7: Public Facilities and Services Element for policies related to schools, community centers, libraries, airports, fire stations, and sheriff stations; and Section 4: Economic Development Element for policies related to business retention, expansion, and relocation.*)



The 2035 General Plan promotes the development of locally-serving commercial uses. (Photo by Rene Rodriguez)



**Figure 3-5**  
**Commercial and Industrial Nodes**



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Promoting the development of new employment uses in the unincorporated parts of the county is a major goal of the 2035 General Plan.

## GOAL LU-6

**To promote the development of new industrial and employment uses in the unincorporated parts of the county that are compatible with surrounding land uses and meet the present and future needs of county residents.**

### LU-6.1 Employment Centers

The County shall encourage the development of visually attractive, carefully planned employment centers and industrial uses in areas with suitable topography and adequate public infrastructure, including water, sewer, and transportation access. (RDR)

### LU-6.2 Employment Center Access

Where appropriate, the County shall encourage new employment centers and industrial developments near existing or future highway interchanges and major intersections and along existing or future transit, bicycle, and pedestrian and trail corridors, and include transit, bicycle, and pedestrian facilities. The County shall ensure that industrial uses and employment center developments include appropriate transit, bicycle, and pedestrian facilities. (RDR)

### LU-6.3 Industrial Uses

The County shall encourage industrial land uses to locate in areas that would not pose significant land

use conflicts and in a manner appropriate to the type of industrial activity proposed, such as industry in direct support of agricultural operations in agricultural areas and general light industrial services nodes near existing and proposed major transportation infrastructure (e.g., highways like State Route 25 corridor in the North County, arterial roads, rail, and airports). Figure 3-5 shows the locations, Table 3-1 describes the land use designation, and Appendix A, Glossary defines “Centralized Industrial Node Development”. (RDR)

### LU-6.4 Sustainable Technologies

The County shall encourage all employment and industrial projects to incorporate sustainable technologies including energy and water efficient practices. (RDR)

### LU-6.5 New Industrial Heavy Areas

The County shall require a general plan amendment for the establishment of new heavy industrial uses, not located within Industrial Heavy (IH) designated lands. Applicable CEQA environmental review shall be required for consideration of any such general plan amendment to minimize near- and long-term effects on the environment. In some limited situations, the County may allow new small-scale isolated industrial operations or quarries as overlay zoning in other land use designations, if not located within Industrial Heavy (IH) designated lands, at the discretion of the Planning Director. New or expanded heavy industrial uses on Industrial Heavy (IH) designated lands shall require a use permit and applicable CEQA environmental review. (RDR)

### LU-6.6 Local Labor.

The County shall encourage developers and contractors to evaluate hiring local labor, hiring from or contributing to apprenticeship programs, increasing resources for labor compliance, and providing living wages.



## Community Character

One of San Benito County’s distinguishing characteristic is its rural, small town character. Surrounded by large open spaces composed of agrarian landscapes and natural areas, the county’s traditional communities and residential settlements were relatively compact and self-contained. Unincorporated communities, including the census-designated places of Aromas, Ridgemark, and Tres Pinos, and the community of Paicines, have a historical land use pattern and historical structures. Preserving this community character requires both the preservation of historical structures and development patterns, as well as the preservation of the surrounding agricultural land and open space. It also requires promoting infill development within existing communities that fosters the maintenance and improvement of community character, in addition to the development of new neighborhoods that reflect traditional development patterns.

The focus of this goal section is to protect and enhance the county’s historic communities and structures, and promote an attractive and safe design in new buildings, neighborhoods, and communities in order to preserve and enhance the quality of life in the county.



The 2035 General Plan strives to preserve San Benito County’s historic identity and rural community character.  
(Photo by Rene Rodriguez)

## GOAL LU-7

**To preserve San Benito County's historic identity and rural community character.**

### LU-7.1 Historic Communities and Structures

The County shall protect historic communities and structures by requiring new or remodeled development to respect their architectural and historical significance. (RDR)

### LU-7.2 Historic Preservation

The County shall coordinate with property owners, neighborhood associations, and preservation groups to improve building facades and exteriors consistent with each community’s unique history and visual character. (RDR/IGC/JP)

### LU-7.3 Adaptive Reuse

The County shall encourage the adaptive reuse of historic structures in order to preserve the historic resources, so long as the reuse of the structure is consistent with the individual history of each community. (RDR)

### LU-7.4 New Development in Historical Areas

The County shall require new development in historical areas to be compatible with existing historic structures. (RDR)

### LU-7.5 Crime Deterrence through Design

The County shall require public open space areas, bicycle and pedestrian systems, and multi-family housing projects to be designed so that there is as much informal surveillance by people as possible to deter crime. (RDR)

### LU-7.6 Minimizing Parking Impacts

The County shall minimize the visual impact of public and private parking by requiring it to be located at the rear and/or side of buildings and screened with landscape, where feasible, in order to



preserve character and promote human-scale development. (RDR)

#### **LU-7.7 Screening**

The County shall require screening of storage, trash receptacles, loading docks, and other building or site features to reduce visual impacts from public areas. (RDR)

#### **LU-7.8 Signage Program**

The County should develop, adopt, and maintain a unified signage and way-finding program that identifies historic communities and structures and directs residents and visitors to points of interest. (MPSP)

#### **LU-7.9 Art in Public Places**

The County shall encourage the placement of art in public places such as social gathering spaces, plazas, bicycle/pedestrian areas, commercial shopping centers, and employment centers. (RDR/MPSP)

#### **LU-7.10 New Development Design**

The County shall encourage the design of new development to complement its surroundings, including nearby development, nearby open landscapes, and gateways into populated areas, as well as to show coherence within itself, including with regard to architectural style, human-scale development, and street layout. (RDR)

### **City Fringe Areas**

The “city fringe area” is generally defined as the area outside of the city limits of either Hollister or San Juan Bautista, but within their adopted spheres of influence. This area is unincorporated and under County jurisdiction until such time properties are annexed into either city. Determinations on annexations and sphere of influence boundaries are made by the Local Agency Formation Commission, which is an independent multi-agency governing body. While the County is a member of LAFCO,

the County does not make decisions on future annexations or sphere of influence boundaries.

The County coordinates planning efforts with the Cities under the assumption that eventually land within the city fringe areas may be annexed to the Cities. Consultation, coordination, and cooperation between the County and the Cities is important in order to ensure there is enough capacity for future growth, and that future growth develops in an orderly and efficient manner. The focus of this goal section is to identify ways for the County to work with the Cities to facilitate orderly, efficient growth in city fringe areas.



### **GOAL LU-9**

**To ensure that planning and development approvals within city fringe areas are coordinated between the County and the Cities in order to ensure future growth in these areas is orderly, efficient, and has sufficient and necessary public facilities and infrastructure.**

#### **LU-9.1 Orderly City Expansion**

The County shall support the orderly expansion of urban uses within the spheres of influence of Hollister and San Juan Bautista, recognizing that the



Cities have primary responsibility for determining the type, intensity, and timing of future development in these areas. *(RDR/IGC)*

#### **LU-9.2 City Sphere of Influence Expansion Proposals**

The County will support spheres of influence expansion proposals only when the Cities sufficiently demonstrate the need for additional land to accommodate planned growth and document a good faith effort to implement an infill development program(s) to minimize the conversion of productive agricultural land and reduce impacts on environmental resources. *(RDR/IGC)*

#### **LU-9.3 Sphere of Influence Area Coordination**

The County shall coordinate with the Cities of Hollister and San Juan Bautista on all County planning and permit approvals for properties located within the City's adopted spheres of influence, and where appropriate, require a concurrent application for any general plan amendment on property located within the City's adopted spheres of influence. *(RDR/IGC)*

#### **LU-9.4 New Annexation Timing**

The County shall encourage the Cities of Hollister and San Juan Bautista to include in their annexation proposals to LAFCO only properties that are proposed for development in the near future. *(RDR/IGC)*

#### **LU-9.5 Annexation Impacts on Adjacent Agricultural Land**

The County shall encourage the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) to consider the impacts of annexations on nearby agricultural lands. *(RDR/IGC)*

#### **LU-9.6 County/City Cooperation**

The County shall continue to cooperate with the Cities of Hollister and San Juan Bautista in order to

promote cooperative planning of city fringe areas, reduce fractured boundary lines, and identify mutually-beneficial solutions to development of unincorporated "islands" within city limits. *(RDR/IGC)*

#### **LU-9.7 County General Plan Consistency Report**

The County shall monitor and report to the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) regarding the consistency with the General Plan with any proposed changes in the sphere of influence or other urban boundaries for governmental entities that provide water or sewer services. *(RDR/IGC)*


#### **LU-9.8 Sewer and Water Service Commitments**

The County shall require new development within the spheres of influence of Hollister or San Juan Bautista to obtain sewer and water service commitments from either the Cities or appropriate special districts prior to project approval. *(RDR)*


#### **LU-9.9 Special Needs Housing within Spheres of Influence Areas**

The County shall cooperate with the Cities to protect land within adopted spheres-of-influence for future urban density. However, the County may allow development of unmet special needs housing for the following special need groups: lower-income households, seniors, farm workers, persons with disabilities, the local work force, persons in need of emergency shelter or transitional housing, and group homes for mentally disabled/substance abuse. *(RDR/IGC)*




Land Use Implementation Programs		2015-2017	2017-2020	2020-2035	Annual	Ongoing
 <p><b>LU-A: Urban/Agricultural Buffer Requirement</b> The County shall prepare and adopt guidelines and regulations to assist in the determination of the appropriate location, type, and width of buffer areas necessary to minimize agricultural and urban-scale residential conflicts. Urban-scale residential refers to any residential uses greater than two units per acre. (RDR)</p>		<b>x</b>		<b>x</b>		
Implements Policy(ies)	LU-3.8					
Responsible Department(s)	Planning and Building Inspection Services					
Supporting Department(s)	Agricultural Commissioner					
<p><b>LU-B: Agricultural Mitigation Program</b> If new development permanently converts Prime Farmland that is Class 1 soil to non-agricultural uses, the County shall encourage project applicants to preserve an equal number of acres (i.e. a 1:1 ratio) either on- or off-site. An applicant may pay mitigation fees for some or all of that mitigation as agreed in a development agreement. (RDR/MPSP/IGC)</p>		<b>x</b>		<b>x</b>		
Implements Policy(ies)	LU-3.10					
Responsible Department(s)	Planning and Building Inspection Services					
Supporting Department(s)	Agricultural Commissioner					
<p><b>LU-C: Right-to-Farm and Ranch Ordinance</b> The County shall periodically review and update the Right-to-Farm and Right-to-Ranch Ordinance to describe normal farm practices expected to occur in agricultural areas and ensures the right of the farmer to continue such practices subject to appropriate health and safety standards. The ordinance shall specify that it applies only to areas in which agricultural and ranching activities are permitted and to lands adjacent to such areas. A summary of the ordinance shall be mailed annually to all property owners with tax bills. (RDR)</p>						<b>x</b>
Implements Policy(ies)	LU-3.9					
Responsible Department(s)	Planning and Building Inspection Services					
Supporting Department(s)	Agricultural Commissioner					
<p><b>LU-D: Agricultural Tax Assessment Incentives</b> The County shall periodically review, update, and evaluate tax assessment policies in order to identify financial ways to promote the long-term preservation of agricultural activity while recognizing that agricultural land uses require a minimum of public expenditure for protection and servicing. (FB)</p>						<b>x</b>
Implements Policy(ies)	LU-3.1 through LU-3.15					
Responsible Department(s)	County Assessor					
Supporting Department(s)	Planning and Building Inspection Services					



 <b>Land Use Implementation Programs</b>		2015-2017	2017-2020	2020-2035	Annual	Ongoing
<b>LU-E: Agricultural-Industrial Zoning</b> The County shall consider adopting a new zoning designation to apply to agricultural-related industrial uses in agricultural areas in order to meet the evolving needs of the agricultural industry. <i>(RDR)</i>		<b>x</b>		<b>x</b>		
Implements Policy(ies)	LU-3.2, LU-3.6					
Responsible Department(s)	Planning and Building Inspection Services					
Supporting Department(s)						
<b>LU-F: Clustered Residential Program</b> The County shall periodically review and update the Clustered Residential Program to identify additional incentives to encourage any new residential development proposals in rural areas to use a cluster design in order to preserve the maximum amount of agricultural and open-space land. <i>(MPSP)</i>						<b>x</b>
Implements Policy(ies)	LU-4.6, LU-4.7, LU-4.8					
Responsible Department(s)	Planning and Building Inspection Services					
Supporting Department(s)						
<b>LU-G: Transfer of Development Credit Program</b> The County shall periodically review and update the voluntary Transfer of Development Credit (TDC) program as an incentive to preserve farmland and focus future development away from the most productive farmland. <i>(MPSP)</i>						<b>x</b>
Implements Policy(ies)	LU-4.9					
Responsible Department(s)	Planning and Building Inspection Services					
Supporting Department(s)						
<b>LU-H: Signage Program</b> The County shall prepare, adopt, and periodically update a comprehensive Signage Program which includes standards for signs and wayfinding in the county. The Planning Commission shall be responsible for enforcing the Signage Program. <i>(MPSP)</i>			<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>		
Implements Policy(ies)	LU-7.8					
Responsible Department(s)	Planning and Building Inspection Services					
Supporting Department(s)						
<b>LU-J: County General Plan Consistency Report</b> The County shall prepare a written report to the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) regarding the consistency with the General Plan of any proposed changes in the sphere of influence or other urban boundaries for governmental entities that provide water or sewer services. <i>(PSR)</i>						<b>x</b>
Implements Policy(ies)	LU-9.7					



 <b>Land Use Implementation Programs</b>		2015-2017	2017-2020	2020-2035	Annual	Ongoing
		Responsible Department(s)	Planning and Building Inspection Services			
Supporting Department(s)						
<b>LU-K: Zoning Consistency</b> The County shall review its zoning ordinance to ensure consistency with the goals and policies set forth in the Land Use Element of the General Plan.		<b>x</b>		<b>x</b>		
Implements Policy(ies)						
Responsible Department(s)	Planning and Building Department					
Supporting Department(s)	Planning and Building Inspection Services					