

# Plan Overview 1



## SUSTAINABLE SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

The Sustainable Santa Cruz County plan is a planning study that describes a vision, guiding principles, and strategies that can lead to a more sustainable development pattern in Santa Cruz County. The time horizon of the Plan is through 2035.

While a primary goal of the Plan is to reduce production of greenhouse gas emissions, which in Santa Cruz County are generated principally by the use of cars, the strategies can also positively affect many other aspects of community life:

- When housing, employment, and services are closer together the “walkability” and diversity of an area increases. When needs can be met within the neighborhood car trips are shorter and some trips can be made without a car.
- When development is directed into already developed areas and projects are designed to be compact, land is conserved and housing choices can increase.
- When certain streets give priority to pedestrians and bicyclists, rather than cars, active lifestyles are supported and it is easier and more pleasant to get around.
- When the local economy is strengthened, job opportunities increase. Well-paying jobs in the local area can reduce long commutes. Good local jobs can also increase expenditures in the local economy, which strengthens businesses and increases the fiscal health of public agencies.

This Plan was shaped by community input about the challenges that County residents currently face and the desires they have for the future. At more than sixteen

community workshops residents responded to questions about sustainability, neighborhoods, transportation, and more. Many residents expressed frustration with traffic congestion, lack of safe infrastructure that feels safe and inviting for biking and walking, limited transit options, housing that is not affordable for many, and lack of investment in commercial properties. Residents also expressed strong desire to preserve the natural environment and to have high quality neighborhoods. This Plan responds to that input by recommending strategies for improving community quality of life through coordinated land use and transportation policies.

The work upon which this Plan is based was funded in part through a grant awarded by the Strategic Growth Council (SGC). SGC grants help local government to plan for more sustainable communities, with an emphasis on reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Local government may decide on the contents of these grant-funded plans; no mandates or specific requirements are attached to the grant funding.

## AN EVOLVING ENVIRONMENTAL ETHIC

Santa Cruz County is a place of great natural beauty. Mountains, forests, and valleys define the landscape and support ecosystems rich in biodiversity. Agricultural land adds open space and contributes to the local economy. Coastal habitat extends into the Pacific Ocean and the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, one of the world’s most productive ocean environments.

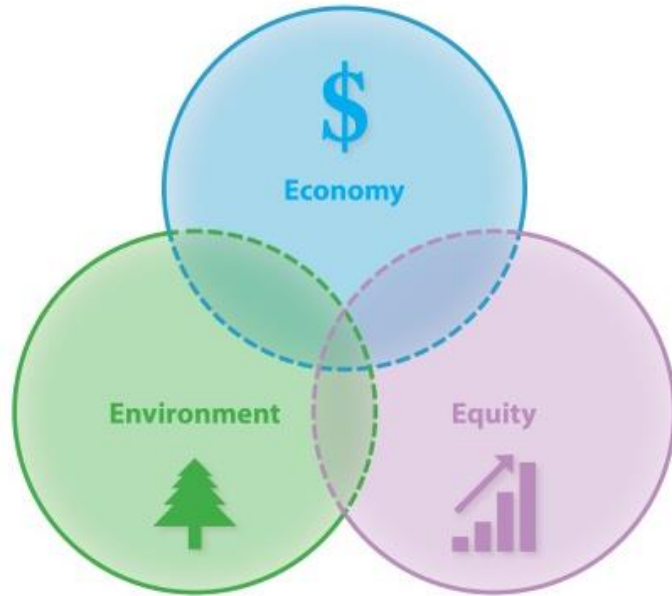
Santa Cruz County has been a national leader in the protection of these natural resources. In 1978, Santa Cruz County voters approved Measure J, which established an annual population growth goal intended to limit the rate of growth to manageable levels. Measure J

### Community Voices

The Sustainable Santa Cruz County Plan is based on public input received at 16 community workshops. Direct quotes from these workshops are shown throughout this Plan in “Community Voices” text boxes such as this one.

also included agricultural preservation requirements, established an Urban Services Boundary to direct growth to the urban area, and created an affordable housing policy.

In recent years, environmental protection has increasingly been viewed through the lens of sustainable development. A common definition of sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable development aims to promote environmental protection, a strong local economy, and social equity.



**The Three E's of Sustainability**

The concept of sustainability is broad, and can be defined in a variety of ways. For some, sustainability focuses on limiting human impacts on the natural environment,

maintaining a healthy ecosystem, and ensuring diverse and productive biological systems. For others, sustainability means improving human quality of life for all populations. Others see sustainability as respecting the carrying capacity of planet earth, which necessitates limits on population and economic growth.

The concept of sustainable development as used in this Plan links environmental protection to the wise use of urban land resources. In Santa Cruz County, this is particularly important given the relatively limited amount of urban land (see Figure 1-1). Long-term protection of natural resources depends on the efficient use of limited urban land in a manner that supports the County's social, environmental, and economic goals.

Within this framework of sustainable development, this Plan addresses questions such as:

- How can we utilize land resources more efficiently to protect open space and agricultural land?
- How can we provide housing that is more affordable for county residents?
- How can we increase transportation alternatives and reduce reliance on the automobile?
- How can land use and transportation infrastructure patterns help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions?
- How can we strengthen existing communities?
- How can we increase the supply of good jobs available to county residents?
- How can we ensure the fiscal health of governmental agencies so that adequate services are available to protect the public health, safety, and welfare?



## PLAN AREA

The area covered by the Sustainable Santa Cruz County Plan is part of a larger regional context that will influence future growth and development within Santa Cruz County. As shown in Figure 1-1, the County is close to the economic engines of Silicon Valley and the San Francisco Bay Area. Immediately to the west is the City of Santa Cruz, home to the University of California Santa Cruz campus. The Plan area surrounds the City of Capitola and Capitola Mall, and the City of Watsonville is approximately 10 miles to the east.

Figure 1-2 shows the boundaries of the area studied as part of the Sustainable Santa Cruz County Plan. The area includes the parts of Live Oak, Soquel, and the northern portion of Aptos that are within the County's Urban Services Boundary. The Urban Services Boundary was first designated in the early 1980s and indicates the area within which an urban level of services, such as public water and sewer, are available.

Soquel Drive is the primary transportation corridor connecting the Plan area to Highway 1, the City of Santa Cruz, and Watsonville. Other corridors include Soquel Avenue fronting Highway 1 and the major arterial streets in Live Oak. The Santa Cruz branch rail line also crosses the Plan area through Live Oak and Aptos. The Plan area contains the Dominican and Sutter medical centers, Cabrillo College, numerous public schools, and the Soquel, Aptos, and Seacliff village centers.

The boundaries of the Sustainable Santa Cruz County Plan were chosen to include the portion of unincorporated Santa Cruz County with the greatest potential to achieve more sustainable land use and transportation patterns. This area has the highest concentration of jobs and

housing within unincorporated Santa Cruz County, the strongest connections to regional employment centers, and the most extensive transit, bicycle, and pedestrian infrastructure. There are a number of sizeable vacant and underutilized properties with access to water, sewer, and good roads. The Plan area represents the County's best opportunity to contribute to a new regional transportation and land use framework that prioritizes sustainable outcomes for the local economy and county residents.

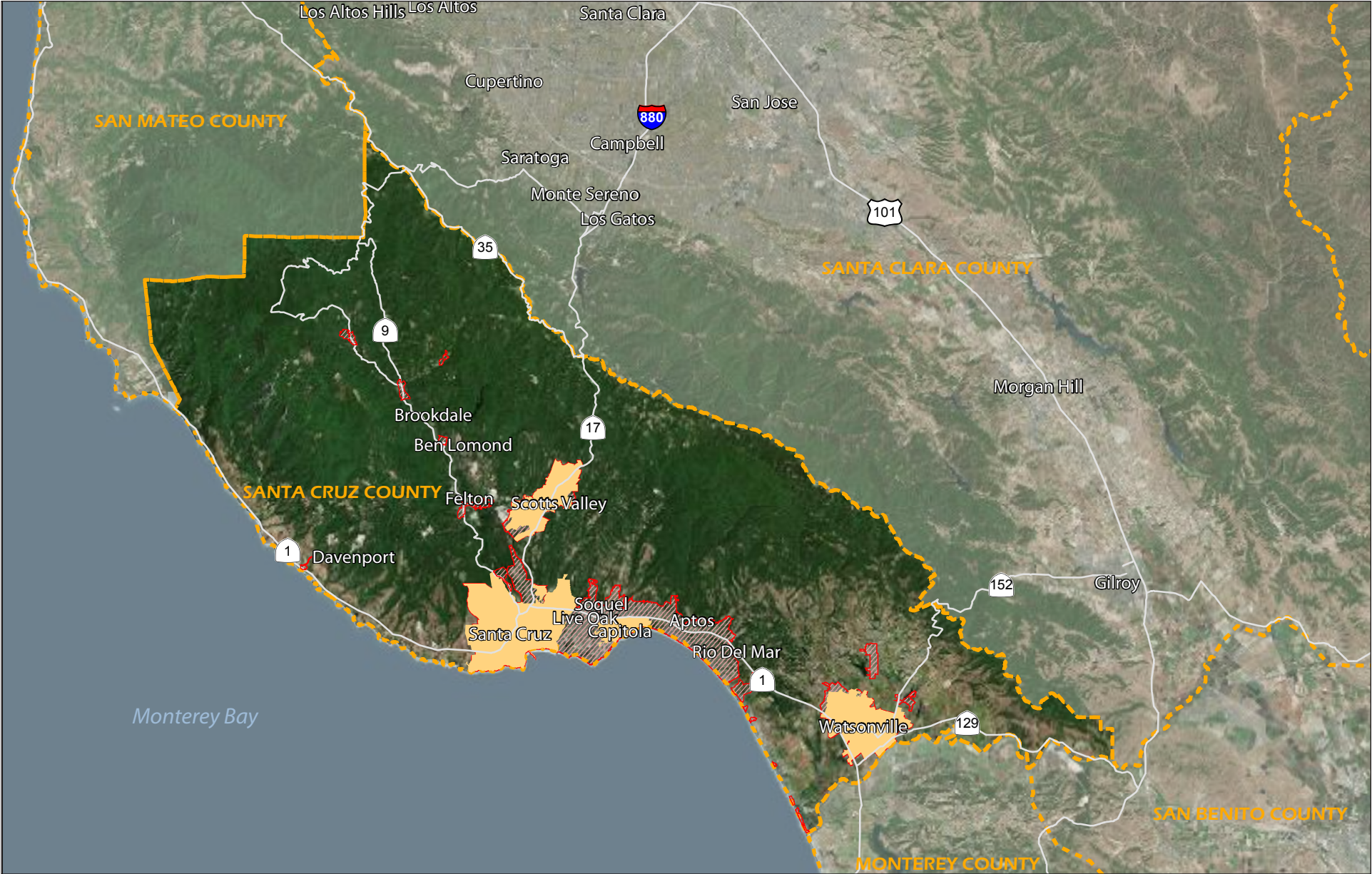
While this Plan focuses on the urbanized areas, certain of the strategies will be applicable in rural areas of the County, especially those strategies related to increasing the types and safety of transportation choices. The future circulation Element Update is expected to transfer ideas and strategies of this planning study to both urban and rural areas.

## RELATIONSHIP TO EXISTING PLANS AND POLICIES

Land use and transportation are regulated by a number of different plans and ordinances in Santa Cruz County. The Sustainable Santa Cruz County Plan reflects the contents and requirements of these documents. Among the most important are the following:

- General Plan and Local Coastal Program
- Climate Action Strategy
- Zoning Ordinance (County Code Chapter 13.10)
- Growth Management System (Measure J)
- Economic Vitality Strategy (in public draft form, July 2014)
- Town and Community Plans (Aptos, Soquel, Seacliff and Pleasure Point)

FIGURE 1 - 1 AREAS WITHIN THE URBAN AND RURAL SERVICE BOUNDARIES



- Urban and Rural Service Boundaries
- County Boundaries
- Cities

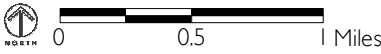




FIGURE 1 - 2 PLAN AREA



- Plan Area
- Corridors within Plan Area
- Corridor Outside Plan Area
- Rail Line



## Climate Change and Sustainability

The Sustainable Santa Cruz County plan is closely linked to the issue of climate change and greenhouse gas emissions, and is intended to be consistent with the County's Climate Action Strategy, adopted in 2013. In Santa Cruz County, approximately 60 percent of greenhouse gas emissions are generated by the transportation sector. Coordination of land use and transportation policies to decrease reliance on the single-occupancy vehicle, increase the use of transit, and support walking and biking is key to reducing emissions.

The Climate Action Strategy identified reduction of "vehicle miles traveled" through long-range planning efforts, such as this plan, as the main method to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector (Climate Action Strategy, Table 3-2, page 22). Recommendations in this plan would implement three of the top five strategies in the Climate Action Strategy.



*Resource preservation is linked to the wise use of urban land.*

- Live Oak/Soquel Redevelopment Area Implementation Plan
- County Bicycle Plan
- 2035 Metropolitan Transportation Plan and Sustainable Communities Strategy

This Plan includes suggestions for specific amendments to the General Plan and Zoning Ordinance and for policies that will encourage the type of development described in the sustainability vision. Any amendments will require the preparation of a CEQA environmental review document and noticed public hearings before they may be implemented. Once the regulatory framework is in place, individual development projects will also be subject to a public hearing and environmental review process consistent with current procedures and State law.

The Plan also recognizes plans prepared by other governmental agencies in Santa Cruz County and the Monterey Bay Area region. This includes General Plans recently updated by the cities of Santa Cruz and Capitola. Relevant regional plans include *Envisioning Monterey Bay*, the Metropolitan Regional Transportation Plan for the Monterey Bay region, prepared by the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG), the *Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Plan*, and the *Short Range Transit Plan* prepared by the Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District (SCMTD or Metro).

## PLAN CONTENTS

The Sustainable Santa Cruz County Plan is divided into the following chapters:

- **Chapter 1: Plan Overview** presents the purpose of the Plan and explains its relationship to existing County plans and policies.
- **Chapter 2: Vision and Guiding Principles** highlights core values and aspirations that serve as a foundation for the Plan.
- **Chapter 3: Sustainable Land Use and Transportation Pattern** graphically presents the Plan's key land use, urban design, and transportation concepts.
- **Chapter 4: Focused Development and Community Character** identifies possible goals and strategies to promote a more sustainable land use pattern and healthy communities.
- **Chapter 5: Transportation** describes how the transportation system in the Plan area can better support sustainability objectives.
- **Chapter 6: Natural Resources** describes how development within urban areas can protect natural resources.
- **Chapter 7: Focus Areas** presents detailed land use, community design and circulation concepts for five geographic areas in the Plan area.
- **Chapter 8: Next Steps** describes additional actions that would be needed to implement the Plan, including amendments to the County's General Plan/Local Coastal Program and Zoning Code.

A number of appendices are attached to this Plan that describe the process to prepare the Plan and identify specific transportation improvements recommended to support the Plan's vision and goals.

- **Appendix A: Illustrative Street Cross Sections** presents sample illustrations of street types discussed in Chapter 6.
- **Appendix B: Transportation Improvements** identifies possible transportation improvements to implement the Plan's vision and goals.
- **Appendix C: AMBAG Population and Employment Trends and Projections** presents population, dwelling unit and employment Projections from 2010 to 2035 prepared by the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG) and the County's housing need allocation for 2014 to 2023.
- **Appendix D: Potential Multimodal Levels of Service Methods and Next Steps**, prepared by Fehr & Peers, outlines issues and options for adopting new County policies to support a multimodal transportation system.
- **Appendix E: Guiding Principles for Future of East Cliff Village Shopping Center Site** identifies key goals for the future the East Cliff Village site based on public input from two community workshops.
- **Appendix E: Existing Conditions Report**, prepared at the beginning of the project, provides a detailed discussion of existing conditions relevant to the Plan.
- **Appendix F: Public Participation** includes a description of the plan preparation process, a list of all public meetings and workshops, and summaries from all community workshops.