

The Workforce Housing Organization

HOUSING REPORT

For The Pescadero Community Foundation

2022

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WHAT COULD BE

Stage Road, a vibrant downtown street, could connect bicyclists, hikers, and car club visitors touring San Gregorio, Pescadero and La Honda to sample the range of local pasture-raised beef, pork, vegetables, berries and wine. Weekend visitors could discover artisanal crafts and foods in local shops prepared by micro businesses connected to local farms and ranches. A special express bus could bring visitors to rent kayaks or bikes locally, explore the marsh, then go home again with no traffic or parking worries. Local institutional landowners such as Peninsula Open Space Trust could collaborate with County and community organizations on bike parking, bathrooms, maps and interpretive signage.

During the week, parents could push strollers along the new trail next to the creek, making a loop to the high school to get their fitness steps in, while high school kids ride their bikes the other way to their afternoon jobs, or a bus to one of the local community colleges for classes. Kids looking forward to local careers, and someday raising their own families in the area, might start by renting an ADU from extended family members, saving money until they can afford their own home. Later, they might offer an ADU to aging parents, who can walk to groceries and a public transit stop in town. New housing offers space for

teachers and other essential workers to live within the community at affordable rates—even more affordable because they can walk to their places of work.

WHAT IS

Pescadero High/Middle School students can't drink the water. Downtown Pescadero and surrounding areas regularly deal with flooding that grinds daily business to a halt. Good teachers leave the community because there is virtually no housing they can afford. Farmworkers struggle to find safe places to live and pay exorbitant rents to live in inadequate, even squalid, housing. Visitors and locals stand in line for the porta-potty that enjoys pride of place on Pescadero's primary downtown intersection. Because Pescadero is unincorporated, with no paid staff, community volunteers struggle to invest the time needed to deal with the layers of regulation around housing and coastal community issues.

Each of the communities of the south coast is treated very differently under planning rules, with no coherent overall strategy for developing resilient neighborhoods, while institutional landowners continue to acquire larger tracts of land to turn into parks that will attract even more visitors. The under-resourced school district struggles to attract and retain teachers

as home prices skyrocket. The district maintains large areas of land for a shrinking student population, even as it struggles to budget for critical building maintenance and repair. The schools also function as emergency shelters, voting centers, health clinics, and every other type of community resource because they're the only large community space. Local HOAs in Butano Canyon and La Honda provide some amenities, but only for members of their own communities.

WHAT'S IN THE WAY

County government, institutional landowners, community organizations, local businesses and residents bicker about who is in charge and who is at fault for the lack of housing, as well as the lack of a coherent plan for moving toward a more resilient and sustainable future. A sewer solution the county proposed is too expensive for local residents to shoulder. A divisive and underfunded planning process has made it difficult to achieve momentum for necessary infrastructure investments. Different community organizations with different goals approach the problems from unique perspectives, but without the funding for a professional planning process to drive community planning toward a specific plan to implement change, roadblocks to new housing like lack of wastewater treatment remain insurmountable obstacles.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

We can build an inclusive, resilient future with a truly integrated planning process that brings the community together and includes representatives of every part of the community -- past, present, and future: institutional owners, individual owners, and those who own nothing. Recent events have shone a light on the deplorable living conditions for so many in the rural south coast, in a way we have been unable to do for the 25 years represented in this report. It's time, now, to move this forward. We could be a

sustainable, resilient, equitable community with an appropriate investment in planning. Residents have an important role to play in this process, attending workshops, voting, contributing as volunteers for community organizations like The Pescadero Community Foundation, Puente de la Costa Sur, and the school district. Institutional landowners like POST, MidPen, and LHPUSD must play key roles as stakeholders, with County government removing obstacles as a funder and planning gatekeeper.

INTERACTIVE DOCUMENT

This document is a printable PDF as well as an online, interactive document. URLs are underlined and blue. If you are reading a printed copy, you may visit <https://indd.adobe.com/view/6df8c652-861c-47ad-9803-68b1444ba22f> to read the interactive version, in order to take full advantage of the bookmarks, cross-references and links.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The rural south coast of San Mateo county is the traditional land of Ohlone peoples, including the Amah Mutsun, Ramaytoush and Muwekma bands. The Ohlone peoples cared for the land for thousands of years before being driven forcibly from it. Their descendants are still here among us, and their stories are still written on the landscape, if we have the will to look for them.

I'd like to thank Catherine Peery and Lynne Bowman at The Pescadero Community Foundation for believing in this project and supporting it, even as it evolved considerably from the original plan to develop a chronology of events and documents based on interviews. Through the Workforce Housing Organization (WHO), the foundation helps fund and coordinate local efforts to plan and build attractive, walkable neighborhoods, medical facilities, parks and gathering places on the south coast. The Pescadero Community Foundation is a 501(c)3 non-profit that acts as a fiscal agent for a number of volunteer-driven, grassroots, member organizations to increase their access and reach, and its fiscal support made this project possible.

I'd like to thank Alex Melendrez of the YIMBY Action Network and Jeremy Levine of the Housing Leader-

ship Council of San Mateo County for early background interviews that provided essential context for understanding how the Housing Element process would impact housing in San Mateo County, and led to the gradual evolution of this project into a larger, richer "toolkit" for housing action.

In addition, Nic Erridge, Dave Lococo, and Rob Skinner were generous in providing essential background interviews about the work of PMAC, the history of CSA-11 and the lighting utility district, as well as the course of the fire station project, among other topics. Mollie Whipp was also generous in her time providing background information about the local real estate market, sales, buyers, and property conditions. Kathy Webster provided an insightful background interview on food, fire, and local ranching issues. This project evolved substantially as it came together, and these interviews just barely scratched the surface of the many issues surrounding housing. While it was not possible to do enough interviews to represent the many voices and opinions about housing on the coast, these generous background interviews nevertheless pointed the way for key next steps in the research process.

I'd like to thank Rita Mancera and Hyun-mi Kim for

taking the time to read and provide comments on an early draft of this report. This report is not intended to reflect or represent the views of Puente de la Costa Sur, and Puente did not agree to provide formal recorded interviews for it, but Rita and Hyun-mi's personal comments provided invaluable background and the report is immeasurably improved by them. I'm deeply grateful for their time in considering the topics covered here.

Irma Mitton was also generous with her time and provided invaluable feedback on an early draft of this report as well. Her participation in the 2022 Coastal Recovery Report and her thoughts on improving outreach on the coastside were insightful.

This report benefited from the work of many others who have documented the history of Pescadero and surrounding coastal areas, as well as local artists, story and community memory keepers. Special thanks to those who contributed to The Pescadero Walking Tour, a delightful little pamphlet with just enough historical info to pique the interest of those interested in this complicated area of the south coast. It was first created by Joan Valentine in 1988, and revised in 1996 by Maeva Neale, with the help of John Dixon, Toni Danzig, Janet Murphy, Meredith Reynolds and others, some of whom have now passed. Some of the pen and ink illustrations of community buildings created for that book by Logan Payne are here adapted with her permission.

Any mistakes, errors or omissions are solely my own.

Thank you as well to Tony, who in teaching Pomo beadmaking techniques to the next generation, shows that even against the hardest of obstacles, we are stronger when we roll together.

Kelly Greenwood, ASLA

WHO Housing Report
2022
The Pescadero
Community Foundation

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FOREWORD

It's clear that San Mateo County is a painfully challenging place to try to stick-build anything. Or even rehab or remodel anything. Permits are tough to get and take forever. Material costs have skyrocketed. The availability of both materials and labor is sketchy. Unpredictable costs and time frames have made planning and budgeting a moving target. The last rough cost estimate the Workforce Housing Organization was quoted to build even multi-family homes was in the neighborhood of \$1 million per unit.

Adding to the complexity the last few years has been an increased understanding of the risks of fire, flooding, and sea level rise to this coastal community surrounded by park land. The crisis is so acute in the south coast area that the community must take an "all hands on deck" approach to housing, each organization using the tools and expertise at its disposal.

Recently, when the coach at the high school noted that the kids were trying to form a track team, but running on the asphalt roads was giving them shin splints, community members fired up a tractor and carved out a dirt running loop around the high school. Like a lot of things on the rural south coast, it is a quick-and-dirty, underfunded, and incomplete solution, but it's a line in the sand--or a tractor trail in

the dirt--to mark what *could* be, with better resources and planning.

I don't have a tractor, but as a landscape architect, I hope to bring some organization and clarity to what's happened before, what's happening now, and what the opportunities are for the future. This report has been prepared on behalf of the Workforce Housing Organization, with support from The Pescadero Community Foundation. It will attempt to trace the story of housing efforts in our local area, and the folks involved in advocating for housing here, as well as some lessons the Workforce Housing Organization has learned over the past 25 years as it has supported various projects to bring affordable housing to the south coast. Much of this work has been done by community volunteers. It's my hope that documenting this work will help a new generation of community volunteers access the lessons learned of the past, and work more effectively toward housing solutions for the future. Like the track at the high school, it is only a raw beginning. But it is something to mark what *could* be, with more resources, and a professional planning process.

Like the rest of California, the rural south coast community suffers from a crisis-level shortage of hous-

ing. Different community organizations are focused on different ways of addressing the problem. This document will discuss a few different ways to support paths to housing in the community, including ways to add workforce housing and market rate rentals, as well as add housing that offers a path to ownership.

This is the story of a tiny community making a huge effort to do this “right”: to approach housing in an inclusive way, seeking input from the entire community, in two languages, so that anyone who wanted to participate was truly welcome. In the process of doing this, we’ve learned that it was actually a pioneering effort, which in a small way, has served as a model for other communities attempting to do a public process about housing.

This is an evolving conversation, with a number of active projects moving forward in the community currently. Inevitably, there will be new information as soon as this document is released. Nevertheless, the work to collect historical information and reports, with chronological context, in one place may provide a sort of toolkit to those hoping to advocate for housing, both from within the community and from outside.

Is there a “cookbook” or recipe for what a successful community process looks like? And if so, how do we repeat it, until we build the housing necessary to truly address the crisis?

The ever-increasing population of the Bay Area exerts a tremendous pressure for development from the east. In reaction to this relentless pressure for development, a network of land preservation organizations formed in San Mateo County as a counterpoint, to lobby for new laws and to preserve the land

THREE TYPES OF HOUSING

What is the recipe for successful community planning in the south coast? We know the area needs people as part of the landscape in order to sustain it. Safe places for people to live are absolutely critical to sustaining the ongoing agricultural function of the community. What stands in the way of desperately needed change?

The report will briefly describe the physical, geographic, and regulatory issues that contribute specifically to the housing crisis here, and touch on the specific dynamics that storms, fires, and emergency preparedness for other disasters add to the search for a solution to the problem of where to add housing.

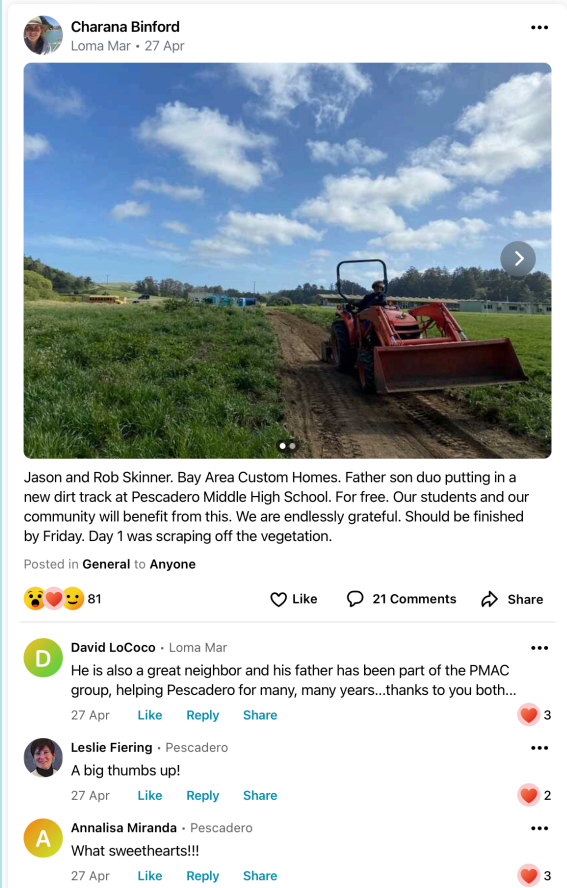
This report will discuss the **three major types of housing needed in the area**, as well as the policies around the three different categories that stand in the way of the community adding more.

The three categories of housing are (1) workforce or employer-based housing, of which safe, quality, farm labor housing is most critical; (2) market rentals; and (3) ownership/equity-building housing. In addition, this report will include some maps to clarify the physical and regulatory opportunities and limits for any projects that may be proposed.

The purpose is to describe some of the possible solutions, and to begin to assemble a toolkit for a successful and transparent community planning process, not to recommend any one solution.



It's always better to have a plan and the resources to do things the right way. But sometimes "something" is better than "nothing". The kids may be drinking bottled water at the high school, but they don't have to suffer shin splints from running on asphalt.



from development. As a result, in addition to the expected infrastructure issues core to rural housing everywhere, rural San Mateo County housing has an added layer of complexity to navigate from the statewide Coastal Commission, San Mateo County's "Local Coastal Program," and the influence exerted by large, institutional land trusts organized around the acquisition and management of coastal property, like Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) and Midpeninsula Regional Open Space (MidPen—not to be confused with MidPen Housing, an unrelated organization.)

The goal of preserving open space is vitally important for endangered species and equitable access to the outdoors, and nothing in this report argues against that. There does, however, need to be an ongoing effort to nurture a more open and inclusive planning process. One that addresses historic, systemic inequity and seeks to include a broader range of voices. In recent years, these organizations have made an increased effort to collaborate with local interests and improve communication, but there's still a lot to be done.

Whether city or county, all jurisdictions in California are required to create and periodically revise a General Plan. General Plans serve as the local government's blueprint for how the city and/or county will develop, and include seven "elements": land use, transportation, conservation, noise, open space, safety, and housing. The "Housing Element" of the General Plan is revised every eight years, and San Mateo County is in that process right now.

To know how much housing it must plan for, each jurisdiction relies on a regional housing needs assessment process. The [Association of Bay Area Governments](#) (ABAG) conducts this assessment across the entire region, and then decides how to divide up the amount of housing needed into a Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) number for each individual city and county. It must also estimate how much will be needed at a variety of affordability levels in order to match the needs of the people projected to live in each area (see "HOW DO WE DECIDE WHAT IS AFFORDABLE?" on page

40 for a chart of what is considered affordable in San Mateo County.)

San Mateo County has received its RHNA numbers, or the amount of new housing it must plan to build at various affordability levels, from ABAG and now is required to submit a revised Housing Element plan to the [California Department of Housing and Community Development \(HCD\)](#).

The housing element process began in 1969, when California passed a law requiring jurisdictions like cities and counties to periodically plan for housing needs across all income levels, in order to address systemic patterns of housing segregation.

But for decades, this process did next to nothing! The goals were too low, and there were no consequences for ignoring them. Cities were able to cheat by identifying sites for new housing that had little chance of ever being developed. In one example, the City of Orinda designated all of its low-income housing for a single parcel, which was already occupied by a church. RHNA became an elaborate shell game. The result: since the 1970s, California cities have built less and less housing relative to population growth, resulting in today's staggering shortage of millions of homes.¹

The Housing Element process didn't have the teeth or resources needed to cut through the complex policies and funding patterns reinforcing underinvestment in historically disadvantaged communities. The process

also did not require jurisdictions to include the input of community members in the process.

It is also now widely understood that concentrating affordable housing only in certain areas will not solve the housing crisis, only compound the strain on neighborhoods that already struggle with underinvestment. In order for California to meet the housing crisis, communities need to increase density in high income areas as well as low income areas, and the need for development of new affordable housing units is critical across all regions.

On the south coast, the urgent need to upgrade existing housing as well as to add new housing options comes into direct conflict with laws meant to restrain and reduce urban "sprawl." This has historically led to very little or no investment at all, beyond single family homes and estates owned by individuals with the resources to engage in protracted permit processes. Individuals and families who can't afford that process have been left behind.

The entire rural south coast has struggled with a history of underinvestment, lack of access to resources, and lack of community participation in the formal process to determine development goals for the coastside. In order to address the housing crisis in San Mateo County's rural south coast, the county and housing organizations must address the crisis across the three different categories of housing: workforce housing (including farmworker housing), market



So much effort has been made by so many people over this period of 25 years to get us to this point, we felt it was important to have it written and recorded and available to everyone.

**Lynne Bowman, President
The Pescadero Community Foundation**



rental housing, and path-to-ownership housing.

In 2018, in order to give the Housing Element process more teeth to break down these historic patterns, California passed Assembly Bill 686. This bill established new requirements for local general plans to “affirmatively further fair housing” (AFFH) to create real housing choices, rather than just trying to prevent discrimination.

The AB 686 law requires each jurisdiction to take action to overcome “patterns of segregation” and to address disparities in housing needs. It is really encouraging for the coastside community that the bill details requirements for outreach to all community stakeholders, as well as a thorough analysis of housing issues, patterns of segregation, and current practices. In addition, the bill requires that planners evaluate specific proposed housing sites as to whether they will meet the needs of families at all income levels, as well as replacing segregated neighborhood patterns and racially or ethnically concentrated areas of poverty with areas of opportunity. Available sites for lower income housing must also be located equitably around the community rather than concentrated, with fair access to opportunities and resources.

In this rural area, that means ensuring a balance of housing opportunities and choices for local workers, including farmworkers. Affordable housing opportunities should include choices between affordable housing on an employer’s property, dependent on an employment relationship, usually remote from town, and affordable housing opportunities in a denser environment, close to resources like groceries, gas, a bus stop, and within walking distance of a school.

Finally, AB 686 not only requires that jurisdictions implement programs and activities to affirmatively promote fair housing, but restricts them from taking actions that materially counteract that obligation. The governor also budgeted for additional enforcement resources, so the California office of Housing and Community Development (HCD) established the Housing Accountability Unit with a staff of 25 to

enforce the new state housing mandates.

The state has created a system of both carrots and sticks to enforce this process. The potential impact to San Mateo County, and other jurisdictions, for not complying with the Housing Element process could include lawsuits, loss of permitting authority, and serious financial penalties and fines. On the other hand, compliance with the process opens up eligibility for state and regional grants and funding sources.²

A housing element is no longer a paper exercise – it’s a contract with the state of housing commitments for eight years, and the Housing Accountability Unit will hold jurisdictions to those commitments,” said Megan Kirkeby, deputy director for housing policy, California Housing and Community Development department in an October 2021 press release.³

The [Campaign for Fair Housing Elements](#) is a coalition of housing organizations that has formed with a mission to ensure that communities across California adopt equitable housing policies as part of the 6th RHNA cycle. The Campaign’s website [features a tracker](#) showing the status of Housing Elements throughout the state, as well as [additional resources](#) to explain how the Housing Element process works and how residents can become involved in their process locally.⁴

This document is printable as well as interactive, with bookmarks and cross-references provided for easy navigation. The first section of the report, “Mapping The Challenges”, is intended to establish a toolkit for understanding the current efforts around housing on the rural south coast. “Planning For Equity” on page 17, outlines the results of earlier community planning meetings, and then looks at how the “CZU Fire” (on page 71) impacted housing. This section will also describe the La Honda Pescadero Unified School District (“LHPUSD” on page 25) as well as “Pescadero” on page 27, “San Gregorio” on page 32, “Loma Mar” on page 33, and “La Honda” on page 35.

Next, the report will discuss the three main categories



Why is it so hard to fix things in this area? I've driven by this home, which was severely damaged by a large redwood tree years ago, nearly every day and wondered.

of housing in these areas, “Workforce” on page 36, which for the purposes of this report, refers to all employment based housing, including and especially farmworker housing. Employers are motivated to provide housing, but it’s not always a secure choice for workers. A balance of options between “Market Rentals” (on page 38) and “Opportunities For Ownership” (on page 39) are also needed.

The county of San Mateo has recently decided to relocate CalFire Station #59 next to the Pescadero High School, which already acts as a central location for storing county emergency supplies like sandbags for flooding.

The school district currently pays to import bottled water for drinking and school lunch preparation. The report will also discuss on page 34 that “LHPUSD is the Largest Landowner in CSA-11.” The population

and geography of the school district has important impacts on planning in the area.

The high school served as the primary initial evacuation point for the community during the CZU fires. As part of the fire station relocation, the county is evaluating expanding CSA-11 boundaries to include the fire station and potentially the school, which has not had potable drinking water for the children in at least a decade. Pescadero Elementary is already within CSA-11 boundaries.

“What’s Next?” (page 46), will briefly recap some community history and talk about how this impacts the “recipe” or “toolkit” for successful community planning efforts on the south coast.

A very limited grant from the Workforce Housing Organization made it possible to gather the information presented here, focused primarily on assembling a toolkit of information to help address the impact of the Housing Element process, which is concluding in January 2023.

This process began with some initial background interviews with community members. However, this is just a small first step towards tracking the progress of grass-roots efforts to add affordable housing on the south coast. More research is required to interview a broader cross-section of impacted community members, to better understand how to balance efforts between the three different types of housing needed. The time and effort-intensive interview process is also the only way to effectively debrief local housing

activists, as well as to understand the full impact of the CZU fires on the three types of housing. It is our hope that in future reports, with additional funding, we can also provide more photographs of actual housing conditions, and translate the report into Spanish to continue our efforts at bilingual outreach.

The conclusion (“What’s Next?” page 46) will summarize opportunities for The Pescadero Community Foundation to focus its efforts going forward to support housing opportunities in the rural south coast.

Conclusions are highlighted in orange at the end of “WHAT’S NEXT?” on page 46

For reasons described in detail in “Mapping the Challenges,” the Workforce Housing Organization recommends primarily focusing on “urban infill” opportunities to build housing *within the Urban-Rural boundary around Pescadero*, rather than focusing on greenfield development in the agricultural land surrounding the town center, or in San Gregorio, Butano, or Loma Mar. There may be additional opportunities for new infill housing in La Honda, but more planning, research and support would be required to better define those opportunities. As noted in the demographic detail outlined in “Pescadero” on page 27 and “La Honda” on page 35, La Honda is substantially more dense in population than Pescadero.

While additional housing opportunities may be very limited in the agricultural and “Resource Management” zones outside of these denser areas, updating planning rules to better support Tiny Homes may be a way to provide relief for residents at immediate risk of displacement (see “Are Tiny Homes the Answer?” on page 7.

A chronology is included as an appendix, summarizing the community’s efforts to address the housing crisis (see “CHRONOLOGY” on page 70.) This timeline, with links to reports and additional appendices, can provide a reference for local community members looking to advocate for affordable housing in the community. Again, the Chronology is also merely a beginning. Additional interviews with local housing activists and community volunteers is often the only way to uncover additional records and detail about various projects.

We hope this report can provide additional input to the county and the state HCD to better evaluate the effectiveness of future San Mateo County Housing Elements, and to create plans that can truly offer the community a path to safe, quality housing for essential workers, flexible market-rate and affordable rentals (especially for young people and seniors), and equity-building ownership opportunities for local families who might otherwise be displaced by the housing crisis.

There is funding, expertise, and leadership available from the various departments of state and county government, as well as nonprofits like Habitat for Humanity, Silicon Valley Community Foundation, and MidPen Housing. But without a targeted effort from us—the volunteers within our community—we won’t be able to take advantage of the resources that are available. As time passes and community members retire and move away, it’s important to collect the information about where we’ve been and what we’ve tried so far, and whether it has worked or not, so the lessons we’ve learned are remembered.

Sincerely,

Kelly Greenwood

MAPPING THE CHALLENGES

First, this section will look at planning process so far, as well as the larger geography of the area. Then it will look at some regional organizations that impact planning, and finally focus on some of the demographic and geographic differences between key neighborhoods.

The 2004 and subsequent 2019 community planning workshops successfully built energy and momentum for change, but didn't immediately lead to housing being built as some may have hoped. What made these meetings successful for building community support, compared to more contentious community planning projects? And why didn't they lead to more housing?

Three main elements were part of the success of the process: first, the preparation and map work to create a set of shared facts. Second, inclusive and open community meetings. Third, a shared record of the results that could be used to build on for future projects.

Families who live in the Pescadero area have been attending community meetings, contributing their

comments, and hoping to be heard by county government and large institutional stakeholders since at least 1976⁵, when the county presented options for the 1976 Community Plan, which envisioned expanding Pescadero with subdivisions of homes on cul-de-sacs. Many were opposed to this approach for expanding housing in the area, and the presentation of the 1976 plan left some with bitter, contentious memories.

The Pescadero Community Foundation formed the Workforce Housing Organization (WHO) in 1997 to pursue opportunities for housing teachers and farmworkers, seen as the two most critical needs. See "Chronology" on page 70 for a timeline of the various meetings, reports, and community events that have occurred in this process⁶. (This chronology is incomplete at this time, but can hopefully be expanded as time and funding for additional interviews and research allow.)

The four towns of Pescadero, La Honda, San Gregorio and Loma Mar are the four anchors of community life for residents in the rural southern part of San Mateo County. They are collectively part of the La Honda

nity for housing because of the existing water system and because of the availability of urban infill space. In other words, there are a number of vacant lots, as well as homes built on large lots with plenty of space for second units, and businesses downtown that would welcome the opportunity for employee housing as well as the diversified income stream second floor apartment rentals can provide. All of this space with little risk of impacting red-legged frogs and garter snakes. So what is stopping us from building housing in an area already designated for building housing? As it turns out, it's mostly about wastewater.

PLANNING FOR EQUITY

The 2019 “[Planning for Equity](#)” report based on the results of the community meeting, and the focus groups leading up to it, actually grew out of an earlier process begun by The Pescadero Community Foundation in 2004, and funded by the S.H. Cowell Foundation. At that time, more than 120 residents participated in a meeting to identify and prioritize local needs like affordable housing, wastewater treatment, flood zone mitigation, a town plaza, and “a new zoning code that would require new development to match the pattern of historic and walkable Pescadero instead of allowing suburban sprawl.”⁸ [A video summary of this process is hosted online by PMAC](#) (see “ADDITIONAL RESOURCES: PMAC.”)

The 120 attendees of the original 2004 workshop represented a substantial portion of the community, which was over 500 people at that time. The 2019 workshop had an even better turnout, at 217 participants, even though local population has reduced. According to the most recent census, Pescadero is home to just 362 people, although the community meeting attracted some attendees from the surrounding farms and neighborhoods of Loma Mar, Butano, and possibly San Gregorio.

The 2019 meeting and report were the culmination of years of earlier work. According to Catherine Peery, Treasurer of The Pescadero Community Foundation,

WHY NOW?

The County of San Mateo is revising the Housing Element of its General Plan this year, as well as its Local Coastal Program. This is a process reviewed by the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD), which studies how much housing is needed to meet demand in various regions over the next eight years.

HCD has given a number—called the Regional Housing Needs Allocation, or “RHNA”—to the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) to divvy up throughout the Bay Area. ABAG has in turn determined what piece of that RHNA belongs to San Mateo County.

Now San Mateo County needs to figure out where and how it will build enough housing to meet its share of the RHNA. Essentially, San Mateo County has to come up with a very specific plan for where and how it is going to build enough housing, and the HCD will be holding San Mateo County to its commitment. The HCD can enforce large fines and other serious funding consequences if the county does not submit the plan and get approval.

The new Housing Element of the General plan will be in effect for eight years, until 2031. More information about the county’s progress is available at the official [San Mateo County Housing Element Update 2023-2031](#) site. A number of housing organizations have teamed up to create [The Campaign for Fair Housing Elements](#) to track and influence this process throughout the state. The public can submit suggestions for sites for affordable housing to their [web page](#).

THE LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM

To guide development in the coastal zone, the county prepares a Local Coastal Program (LCP) on a similar cycle to the Housing Element. Each cycle, when the county approves a revised LCP, it is reviewed by the California Coastal Commission to ensure it complies with the Coastal Act.¹⁷ San Mateo County is reviewing its LCP this year.

The goal of the LCP is to preserve and protect the scenic beauty of the coast, as well as protected species and public access to the beaches. It is also intended to protect against loss of life and property from coastal hazards. To balance protection of sensitive habitats and prime agricultural lands with development, it is this plan that establishes the “Urban-Rural Boundary” around Pescadero (see “MAPPING THE CHALLENGE” on page 12.)

La Honda and Loma Mar are not within the Coastal Zone established by the Coastal Commission Boundary, so they don't have an “Urban-Rural Boundary.” San Gregorio and Butano do not have one either: they are within the Coastal Zone but treated as rural for zoning purposes. Changes to regulations allowing more ADUs might impact San Gregorio and Butano, if concerns about wastewater can be overcome, but overall density limits will severely constrain other types of development to preserve views, habitats, and prime agricultural land in these areas.

her original interest in forming the Workforce Housing Organization began with finding a site for teacher housing in Pescadero:

[In 1997] there was a big problem finding housing for teachers as there is to this day, and I joined forces with Carol Young-Holt, who had formed the South Coast Collaborative [which later became Puente], to find ways of providing housing specifically for teachers. We did survey the 29 teachers at the time and 10 of them wanted local housing. I know there are still teachers who struggle with housing every year.

This led to meetings of all sorts. I went to Half Moon Bay for meetings about overcrowded and substandard housing as a public health crisis. We went to County meetings about funding for different housing initiatives. We held meetings in town with those interested in more housing here to study the Local Coastal Plan, with the help of Lennie Roberts [Committee for Green Foothills], who was part of those early housing meetings.

After learning about the different kinds of zoning on the coast, she recommended we try the Warheit site, near the transfer station, which was zoned for community resources, and could be a possible place for what we hoped at first to be a 10-unit teacher housing complex. We got three main grants, one to study the septic capabilities of the area with the help of Atlas Engineering in Santa Cruz. We also got a grant for Atlas Engineering to study the water table to determine if the Warheit site could handle a well on its own, separate from the town well, because we had learned that the town well could provide water to CSA-11 only, not to the Warheit site. Then we got a grant to study the environmental impact of housing.

In the course of that study, we discovered that the old quarry was now a habitat to red-legged frogs. That meant that there would have to be mitigations against any harm to that protected species, but that there could be SF Garter Snakes in the area. Sure enough, an environmental researcher found an SF Garter Snake in the vicinity of the Warheit site and

*essentially shut the project down overnight.*⁹

The WHO would not be the only organization frustrated by finding endangered species on undeveloped potential housing sites. Several potential sites for farmworker housing have ultimately been found unsuitable due to the presence of endangered species. As recently as this year, San Mateo County's own Farmworker Advisory Committee was blocked in pursuit of a promising site by the presence of endangered species.

It was this frustrating experience with exploring the feasibility of the Warheit site that led to a broader interest in community planning both *for* the town of Pescadero, but also *within the limits* of "CSA-11", where water was already available and housing was less likely to be stymied by a very important snake.

The Workforce Housing Organization (WHO) pursued additional grants to fund the 2004 community planning meeting, hoping to get community members together in the same room to talk about a new vision for Pescadero.

A Site Analysis plan (page 9) was created for the meeting to show residents some of the factors impacting where housing could be built. *This was critical to providing a shared understanding of the limits, options and trade-offs of any potential projects.* Because of the lack of consistent local news coverage for this very rural area, the most important first step for a constructive community meeting was to ensure a shared understanding of the constraints as well as the opportunities for any project. Visually communicating those constraints to participants helped everyone start on the same page.

Without paid staff or funding, and with limited volunteer capacity, just a few ideas could be pursued.

The top vote getter from 2004 – the creation of a new zoning code for Pescadero that would require new buildings to be designed to encourage walkability – was explored in depth using grant funding again from the S. H. Cowell Foundation. The idea of a new

custom zoning code for Pescadero was ultimately abandoned because the grant-funded research uncovered enormous costs to prepare the environmental documents that are required in the California Coastal Zone. The California Coastal Commission is a state agency with quasi-judicial regulatory oversight over land use and public access in the California Coastal Zone.

What was this top vote-getter from the workshop referring to, about a "new zoning code"? Many towns and cities had already found success in breaking through the housing logjam by creating special "zoning overlays" or "Specific Plans" to precisely define what types of projects could be built where within a tightly defined area. Key to the process was employing a series of open and transparent community meetings guided by landscape architects and planners to hammer out community-wide issues, as well as completing area-wide environmental reviews where applicable.

San Mateo County has completed the Specific Plan process for Redwood City (2011), Burlingame (2010), and Menlo Park (2012) downtowns as well as South San Francisco (2015) and Millbrae (2016) station areas. According to San Mateo County's Home for All program website,

Specific plans are planning documents that guide the development of a particular geographic area within a city or county. They are separate from, but must be consistent with, a jurisdiction's adopted general plan. Specific plans implement the general plan by providing a special set of planning policies and development standards. Any new developments or subdivisions within the defined area must be consistent with the specific plan. While specific plans vary in their level of detail, from providing broad policy frameworks to guiding every aspect of development and design, the distinguishing feature of a specific plan is its focus on implementation.

Precise plans are similar to specific plans, but are more loosely defined and allow communities to estab-

lish planning priorities for a defined area.

Specific plans or precise plans are often focused on downtowns and redevelopment areas that a jurisdiction wants to transform through a mix of uses, including housing. Specific plans in these locations typically call for a range of housing types at mid- to high densities, and this mix of housing often includes affordable units.

Specific plans can provide the necessary environmental review for subsequent developments in the plan area. Under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), any residential development project or zone change undertaken to implement a specific plan that has a certified Environmental Impact Report (EIR) is exempt from CEQA. Residential projects consistent with the general plan can avoid going through a separate and lengthy environmental review process, making the development process shorter and more predictable.¹⁰

While community volunteers were not able to come up with the funds to pursue a Specific Plan process for Pescadero to facilitate building affordable housing, the 2004 community meeting was still widely considered successful. Residents could see from the dots on various image boards that, while they might not agree on everything, there was overwhelming support from their neighbors for more density, and more housing—especially affordable housing—downtown. Residents also largely agreed on the overall look and feel of the building styles they wanted, and to preserve the walkable charm of Pescadero. The research and visuals prepared by the professional planner helped attendees see these areas of agreement.

It was the success of the 2004 planning meeting that led to plans for another, more specific community planning meeting, with even more and better bilingual outreach in collaboration with Puente de la Costa Sur (formerly South Coast Collaborative, founded in 1998.) This time, community volunteers wanted to be sure there was a lasting record of the opinions and sentiments of residents for the direction the town

needed to take.

In the fall of 2016, a group of community members representing local organizations including The Pescadero Foundation, the La Honda-Pescadero Unified School District and Puente, with the support of staff from the office of San Mateo County Supervisor Don Horsley, came together to apply for a county grant to start a town planning initiative in Pescadero. The goal was to coordinate an equitable process in the Pescadero region to identify residents' top priorities for services and missing physical components of a strong community. Although the proposal was not funded, the group continued to work together and seek alternative funding sources under the name of Sustainable Pescadero Collaborative. Due to cost, processes like this are very unusual in rural communities, even more so in isolated areas such as the South Coast, which is unincorporated and relies on its community members, local non-profits and the Pescadero Municipal Advisory Council for leadership. Most communities organize town planning efforts with the support of or under the leadership of their town government or official representatives.

On behalf of the Sustainable Pescadero Collaborative, Puente revised the project for submission to the Silicon Valley Community Foundation and in 2018, received a grant for \$75,000.¹¹

The grant paid for professional planning services from [Fisher Town Design](#) to conduct focus groups with various interest groups in the community prior to the meeting, and to coordinate the community meeting itself. It also paid for professional community outreach, coordinated by Puente. A bilingual professional community organizer planned focus groups in Spanish, provided special outreach to farmworkers, and coordinated bilingual materials. Additional staff were hired to provide interpretation of the community meeting itself.

The 72 Spanish speakers, 99 English speakers, and 24 bilingual speakers who came together to review 25 ideas that arose in a series of earlier focus groups rep-

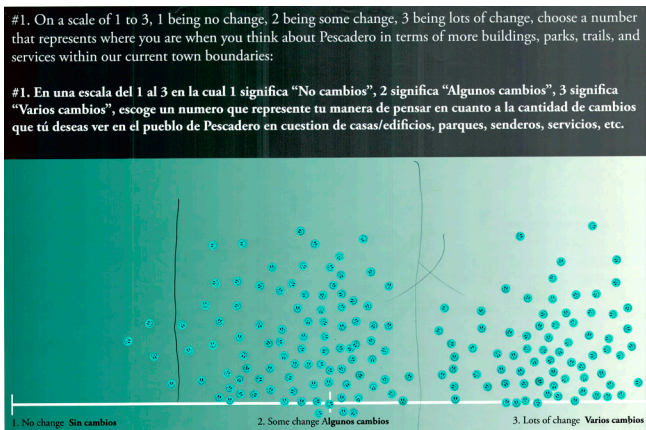
resented a significant portion of the local community.

The most ‘voted-for’ items for infrastructure were trails, housing, a community center, solutions to the septic/water problems in town, and a public pool.

The most voted for items for services and businesses were a healthcare clinic, laundromat, and a playground.¹²

According to the [Planning for Equity](#) report,

The desired outcome of having an inclusive process, finding consensus among a diverse group of residents and identifying next steps for the wellbeing of the community and its residents was achieved.¹³



Posters displayed at the 2019 community planning meeting posed questions to participants, who could place one dot on each to respond.

When residents were asked during the 2019 community meeting whether they even wanted to see changes in Pescadero, the response was overwhelming. According to [Planning for Equity](#), “4 people wanted no change, 92 wanted some changes, and 75 wanted to see lots of change in Pescadero.”¹⁴

The top 11 changes, with vote scores ranging from 196 votes to 160 votes, were in order:

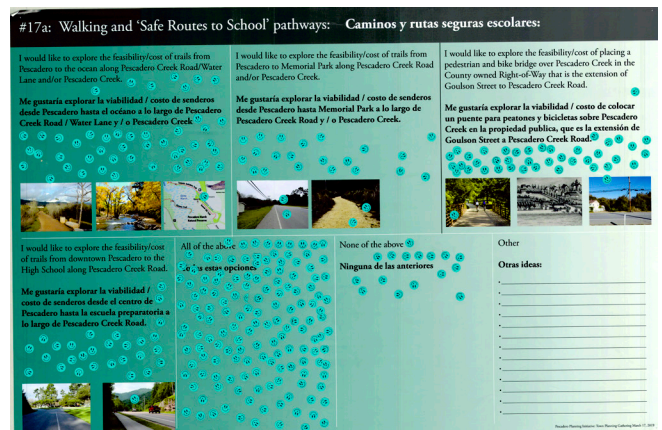
- Trail from Pescadero to the ocean
- Housing: small individual homes
- Pedestrian/bike bridge over Pescadero Creek in the
- Goulsen right-of-way* Community Center
- Trail from downtown to the High School
- Housing: upper floors of ‘mixed use’ downtown buildings

- Trail from Pescadero to Memorial Park
- Laundromat
- Affordable Housing and teacher housing on North Street school site
- Publicly accessible pool

Three of these top 11 items relate to housing, four relate to safe bike/walking trails, and two to accessibility of services not available in the town. In terms of total “net yes” votes related to housing (in other words, the number of yes votes out of the total votes cast) “Housing: Very small individual homes” received 193 yes votes out of 194 votes cast, “Housing: upper floors of ‘Mixed Use’ downtown buildings” received 173 yes votes out of 174 votes cast, and “Housing: apartment buildings” received 119 yes votes out of 120 cast.

There was also a poster with free space for residents to write about community values, and what they liked best about Pescadero. Common responses centered around the following themes:

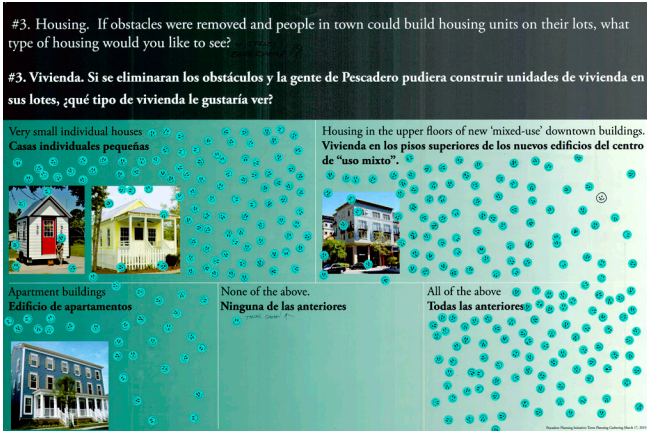
- Deep sense of connectedness to people and nature
- Feeling safe, never having to lock house or car door in town
- Family, farming and history
- Inclusion, equity and justice
- Sense of community
- Scenic beauty, farming heritage and local economic support



Planning meeting attendees vote overwhelmingly for “all of the above” to explore feasibility of trails including “Safe Routes to School” from the high school to the ocean.

• *That we all come together in disasters and emergencies*¹⁵

It's easy to see that the residents of the area have a pretty clear idea of the priorities for change. If “Housing: upper floors of ‘Mixed Use’ downtown buildings” and “Housing: Apartment Buildings” received such overwhelming support from residents of Pescadero, why didn't the workshop lead to more housing?



Community members vote for “all of the above”, including “mixed use” housing on the upper floors of downtown buildings.

The ability to follow through with projects, even those with substantial community support, has been a big source of frustration for community activists, even before the 2004 community planning meeting. Catherine Peery recounted of that early time:

One of the effects of the many housing meetings we held [leading up to the 2004 community meeting] was that we had somehow gotten the local farmworkers very hopeful that we could actually get them housing. It was a big disappointment for them to learn that we couldn't. At one point, we had about 20 farm families coming to our housing meetings every month. At that point, we had to stop having the meetings. We were just getting people's hopes up, without being able to do anything.

The WHO was exploring whether a non-profit builder of affordable housing like Mid-Peninsula Housing could coordinate a project within Pescadero. At that time, Catherine Peery notes,

Mid-Peninsula Housing had told us early on in our

*research that the town needed infrastructure, or housing would be impossible, and they were talking about not just water, but wastewater treatment. That came to be prophetic, and we discovered that the lack of wastewater treatment in the town was the main reason that housing could not be built. Not the Local Coastal Plan, which allowed for about 33 Affordable Homes, but the lack of a waste water treatment plan.*¹⁶

The 2004 community planning meeting was pulled together on a shoestring of local grant funds, and funding was not included for follow-on work.

Nevertheless, the WHO and other community volunteers continued to collaborate to explore ways to solve the wastewater treatment problem in Pescadero, to clear the way for housing solutions.

The informal Sustainable Pescadero Collaborative formed in 2018 to bring local experts and activists together on a monthly basis to explore solutions and drive the community planning process forward. These meetings included representatives from Puente, the Pescadero Municipal Advisory Council (PMAC), the Resource Conservation District, and sometimes the school district. As community members organized for the 2019 meeting, Puente provided professional staff time to apply for a grant from the Silicon Valley Community Foundation to fund the professional preparation for the meeting, the professional outreach staff, and the followup report documenting the results of the meeting in 2019.

THE CZU FIRES

As disruptive as the Covid pandemic was, 2020 brought a one-two punch. A pandemic AND a disaster large enough to require a mass evacuation, in a remote area with large gaps in cell phone coverage.

The CZU complex fires started after a severe lightning storm ignited numerous small fires in the open spaces and forests south of Pescadero. The fires prompted the evacuation of Loma Mar, Butano, Whitehouse



Jeff Haas with firefighters near the Loma Mar Store.

Canyon, and other surrounding communities into Pescadero. The high school, as is typical in emergencies, served as the initial shelter for evacuees, and businesses in downtown Pescadero, like the taqueria, provided gasoline and food to emergency workers.

In fact, during the CZU disaster, the owner of the gas station had to be given special permission to re-enter the evacuation zone to provide gasoline to emergency workers, because the county had not made provision for that in an emergency.

There is no gasoline available in Loma Mar, La Honda, or San Gregorio, so the nearest gasoline is Half Moon Bay along Hwy 1 to the north (approx 17 miles), Sky Londa along Hwy 84 to the east (23.4 miles), or at the Gazos Creek Alliance, if it's operating. If not, then Santa Cruz along Hwy 1 to the south (35.5 miles).



The view east from Cloverdale road, showing a plume of smoke from the CZU complex fires rising over the high school gym in the lower left. The trailers of evacuees can be seen in the parking lot in front.

Ultimately, the fire jumped Highway 1, and all routes to the south were blocked by fire or fire-fighting crews for days. Even Pescadero itself had to be evacuated, as the fire grew, although a number of residents and business owners stayed behind to help fight the fire and provide resources for emergency workers.

The owners of the Loma Mar Store, Jeff and Kate Haas, kept their store open to serve as a rest point for emergency workers, providing hot coffee and food, as well as a giant area map on the side of their water tank to help orient the crews coming from other areas to help fight the fire. When most fire-fighting crews were called south to help defend communities like Felton and Ben Lomond from the devastation of the fire pushing south, the Loma Mar volunteer fire department directed a few residents who stayed as they protected structures from spot fires with hoses.

Some residents in White House Canyon lost their homes completely to the CZU fires, and others suffered damage to barns, water systems, and outbuildings as well as homes.

More research needs to be done to understand in detail how housing in rural south coast communities has been impacted by the CZU fires, and what can be done to improve planning & building response to homeowners impacted by fire (and perhaps, thereby, other disasters.) How many homeowners were impacted? How many renters? Have they been able to return to their homes, and what was the impact of county services on their recovery or lack of recovery?

The combination of fire and wet weather also leads to regular danger of severe mudslides in winter, which can block roads for many hours or days. A single large fire falling during any season can—and regularly does—block a road and/or shut off power and access for hours at a time, even when there is no particular weather or wind event. Many local residents still remember the big El Niño mudslides of 1998, which swept several homes into Pescadero Creek.

La Honda-Pescadero Unified School District, CA

School District (Unified) in: [San Mateo County, CA, California, United States](#)

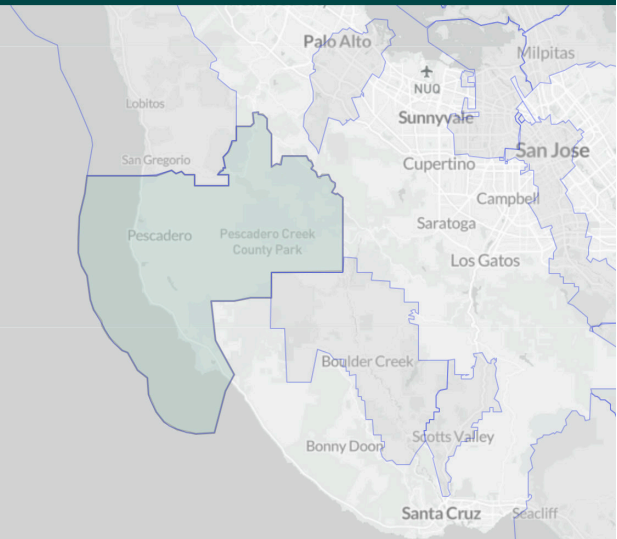
3,814

Population

136 square miles

28 people per square mile

Census data: ACS 2020 5-year unless noted



Publicly available census data for LHPUSD. The 2020 census was done during the pandemic, so it may be on the low side, particularly for harder-to-reach rural areas like ours. It still provides a way to roughly compare the size and composition of the main coastside communities. The LHPUSD area encompasses most of San Gregorio valley to Skyline, as well as those living outside the downtown core of Pescadero, Loma Mar, and La Honda, including farms and the Butano

The Workforce Housing Organization should take steps to locate and interview families impacted by the CZU fires, to determine if there are additional specific changes to recommend to the county to improve disaster recovery and prevent homelessness due to severe weather events.

LA HONDA PESCADERO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

The south coast has one school district, the La Honda Pescadero Unified School District (LHPUSD) which is the largest geographically in San Mateo County. It has three campuses: Pescadero Elementary, La Honda Elementary, and Pescadero High School, which has been the evacuation center in each of the recent disasters, including the CZU fires.

When land was first set aside for LHPUSD in the 60's, the original plan imagined the development



LHPUSD recently completed an assessment of their facilities and the projected cost of deferred maintenance.

of subdivision housing, such as was proposed in the original 1976 Community Plan. The Pescadero Road right-of-way was widened in anticipation of accommodating more traffic, and large tracts of land were set aside for the size of elementary and high schools needed to accommodate the imagined growth.

Instead, the modern environmental movement was born in the same decade, and groups like Save the Redwoods challenged the 1976 Community Plan. They were successful in preserving open space land, as well as suppressing nearly all residential

development on the rural coast.

Catherine Peery, Treasurer of The Pescadero Foundation, explained how the need for teacher housing prompted her to get involved in finding a solution:

*In 1997, Pescadero High School lost two well-liked teachers, Mr. Maskell and Mr. Maganini. Maganini was a PE and Math teacher, and Maskell was a science teacher who had gotten a grant to have his students study Pescadero Creek for the presence of Coho Salmon. Steve Maskell had been commuting from over the hill and got a job in San Mateo at Aragon High School. Mr. Maganini had been commuting from El Granada for 18 years and had decided to work at Half Moon Bay High School. At that time, there was as big a problem finding housing for teachers as there is to this day, and I joined forces with Carol Young-Holt, who had formed the South Coast Collaborative [which later became Puente], to find ways of providing housing specifically for teachers. We did survey the 29 teachers at the time and 10 of them wanted local housing. I know there are still teachers who struggle with housing every year.*¹⁸

Most LHPUSD structures were originally built in the 60's and 70's. Recently pre-fab structures were added to the Pescadero Elementary campus and the La Honda Elementary campus to replace defunct classroom space, but the overall population remains extremely small relative to the overall amount of acreage that LHPUSD manages: 26.6 acres for approximately 260 K-12 students. Schoolworks, Inc. recently completed a Strategic Facilities Plan for LHPUSD which projects enrollment increasing for K-5 students in the district through 2028, while dropping by nearly half for 6-12 grade students.

The Pescadero Elementary campus is the smallest at 3-5 acres¹, all within the boundaries of CSA-11, while the La Honda Elementary campus is 6 acres. These

¹ Schoolworks defines the campus as 3 acres, but the lot size is larger according to The Pescadero Community Foundation records.

LHPUSD IS THE LARGEST LANDOWNER IN CSA-11

Pescadero Elementary School sits on 3 acres within the CSA-11 boundary. The full lot is actually 5 acres, including the land the Puente offices are on.

THE "MULTI" BUILDING



BALL FIELD VIEW NORTH



BALL FIELD VIEW NORTHWEST



WHAT ABOUT EXISTING AMENITIES?

Community members are justifiably proud of their self-sufficiency and resilience. Like many rural areas, there has never been a budget for public amenities. There is no public playground, no public swimming pool, no public bathrooms. HOAs like the Butano vacation community and La Honda's Cuesta Guild formed to manage funds for water systems, pools, and playgrounds which are accessible to members of the HOAs, which only serves to further emphasize the difference in accessibility between those who have access to amenities and those who do not.

In Pescadero, parents and staff have raised money through the PTA to fund some basic amenities, including a softball field. Children and parents are, of course, sentimentally attached to the softball field they contributed hard-earned money for, so that their children would have the benefit of after-school sports. If LHPUSD were to consider selling this land to an outside organization to develop affordable housing for local teachers and families, would these amenities be replaced?

The strategic facilities plan developed by Schoolworks proposes a plan for budgeting deferred maintenance for existing facilities. It doesn't show parents a long-term plan for consolidating and improving school facilities. The county has only recently set aside money to acquire a park or plaza property, but there is no planning process in place yet to determine what, if any, public amenities will be funded in that process.

Residents are faced with a Hobson's Choice: the possibility of future housing vs the opportunity for their own children to play now.

two campuses combined serve approximately 130 TK-5 students.

The upper school campus is 17.6 acres and currently serves 129 students in grades 6-12.

Sequoia High in Redwood City, for comparison, is just under 40 acres for approximately 2,040 (2019-2020) students, which is about 854 sq. ft. per student. Woodside High in Woodside is just under 36 acres for 1,848 (2017-2018) students, which is about 848 sq. ft. per student.

Parents have raised money to utilize some of the space in creative ways, and LHPUSD boasts an extraordinary school garden program that provides outdoor classroom space, produce for the school lunch program, and other benefits. Parents have also raised money and contributed volunteer labor to create sports fields.

Pescadero High School has not had access to potable drinking water for decades. Even now, the county Planning Commission must still approve a permit application, and the county supervisors must vote to amend the county's own Local Coastal Plan, in order to extend CSA-11 water access to the high school. Once the county has voted to amend the Local Coastal Plan, the revised LCP must be approved by the Coastal Commission. The earliest drinking water could be provided to the school at this point-if all goes well with the process--is 2024.

The Coastside Recovery Report 2022 noted that:

Pescadero high school students have to dual enroll in community college for Advanced Placement courses or other classes to be competitive for a four-year university thus having to balance their schedules and try to get to those classes on their own because of limited public transit options. Many of these students are the first to attend college in their families, experience financial hardship and face difficulties navigating the system. These students need an array of academic counseling, financial coaching, public benefits enrollment, and other support services.¹⁹

Helping students complete their education, or even just complete the kind of courses necessary to be competitive with other students in urban areas, requires access to transportation, internet and other wrap-around services. The San Mateo Community College District is equipped and motivated to provide some of these support services, but bridging the gap for students who need transportation or access to technology in such a rural area is a challenge.

“WHAT IF”

There are individual lots in town that are within CSA-11 boundaries and could potentially accommodate a few homes, especially if new rules were adopted to encourage gentle density (like ADU’s, duplexes, and apartments over commercial.) However, once we see how complicated it is to build housing for farmworkers on agricultural land, even when that is theoretically specifically allowed within the code, we begin to understand how significant it is to have a lot of 42 acres inside the urban-rural boundary and inside the boundaries of CSA-11.

The greater Pescadero community is so starved for public resources and amenities that the sports fields and playground the elementary offers serve as community gathering places, and the idea of removing them or replacing them with something else is frankly painful, because of the amount of heart and soul that has been poured into creating just these few shared public spaces. The community has extremely limited experience with equitable community planning, and justifiable fears of losing the only amenities they’ve managed to create through their own effort.

In a world of magic, though, where we could simply waive a magic wand and move things around, it’s hard not to consider “What If?”

What if we had drinkable water at the high school? What if we could build a new elementary school next to the high school and the new fire station, with public wi-fi and a laundromat and a public pool and

showers? How vital could such a campus be in an emergency evacuation?

How much would a non-profit housing developer pay to the school district to build homes for us to live in, and what could LHPUSD do with that money? How much money are taxpayers spending now to maintain two campuses, and what else could we do with that money? It’s hard to imagine how we would answer these questions when it means losing your kid’s ball field. But these processes take time.

Even if we had such a magic wand and could start the process tomorrow, any housing on the elementary school property would be under construction when the children in second or third grade now are graduating from high school. But what would it look like if, when they graduated, there was an affordable way to continue to live near their families, while they raise families of their own?

PESCADERO

The town of Pescadero was officially founded the same year as San Mateo County itself, 1856. Pescadero is located in unincorporated San Mateo County, two miles east of State Highway 1 and Pescadero State Beach. Here, Pescadero Creek expands into a wide tidal marsh before squeezing under the Highway 1 bridge to meet the ocean.

Hikers and birders enjoy the Pescadero Marsh Trail and Sequoia Audubon Trail through the marsh, and school buses can regularly be seen parked at the Pescadero Beach lot on weekdays while children from outside the school district come to hike in the marsh.

Throughout the workweek, the bucolic town composed of historic buildings dating from the late 1800’s is sleepy and peaceful, following the rhythms of planting and harvest for the farms surrounding the town. Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) leases farm land in the area, Jacobs/del Cabo Farm is widely known for its tomatoes, shipped all over the country, and Harley Farms raises goats that produce

Pescadero, CA

Place in: [San Mateo County, CA](#), [San Francisco-Oakland-Berkeley, CA Metro Area, California](#), [United States](#)

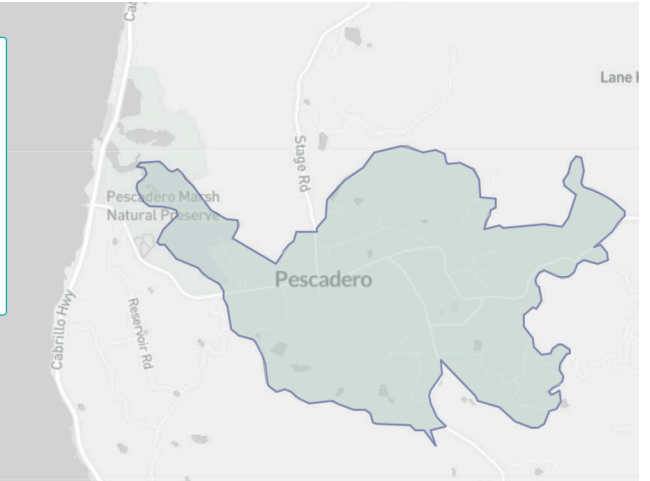
362

Population

4 square miles

89.9 people per square mile

Census data: ACS 2021 5-year unless noted



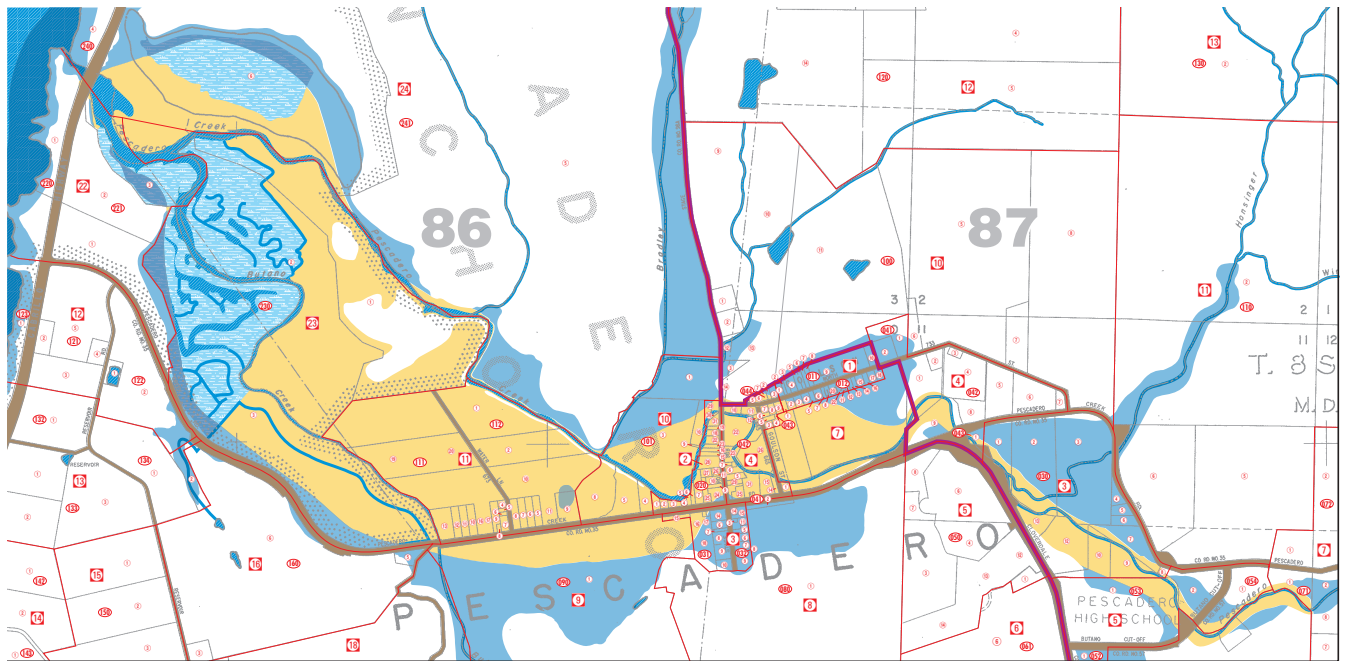
These screenshots were taken from the Census Reporter site, an independent non-profit project to make it easier for journalists to write stories using information from the U.S. Census bureau. This shows census data for Pescadero, including downtown and the valley to the east.

national award-winning goat cheese. Every weekend hundreds of tourists arrive to bicycle, bird watch in the marsh, explore the tidepools at the beaches, camp, and generally enjoy the many opportunities for outdoor recreation presented by the large tracts of publicly accessible preserved forests, woodlands, and

coastal open space.

The circuit of Highway 84, Highway 1 and Pescadero Creek Road also create an attractive loop for car, motorcycle, and bicycle clubs, which park in large groups in Pescadero and Loma Mar to enjoy lunch

This flood way map was used to create the 2004 community site analysis map for Pescadero. Recently, flood maps were updated. So much time has passed since that work was done, the community would benefit enormously from a new analysis based on revised information.



Pescadero Floodway Map

Disclaimer: The digital flood hazard data used on this map was derived from scanned and composited FEMA Floodway maps. The base cartographic map information was derived from a combination of Assessor and Public Works maps. For the reason and several others, including the scale or resolution that the information is displayed at, these maps should be considered an advisory tool for general hazard awareness, education, and flood plain management. This map is not a legal document to be used when making a single site flood hazard determination. That determination will have to be made by direct use of the FEMA FIRI or Floodway maps. (This is a non-archival inkjet print and is subject to fading when exposed to direct sunlight. Please store or display accordingly for maximum longevity.)

- Flood plain
- Floodway
- Marshland
- Creeks; perennial
- Lake
- Major Roads
- 87 Assessors book number
- Assessors book boundary
- Assessors page boundary
- Assessors page number
- Assessors block number
- Assessors parcel number



SOURCES: SMC General Plan Map, 1988; FEMA Floodway Map, July 1984 and Geological Survey USGS Map, 1978. For visual reference only.

pescadero floodway map.dwg 11/10/05 drc. m 2/21/07

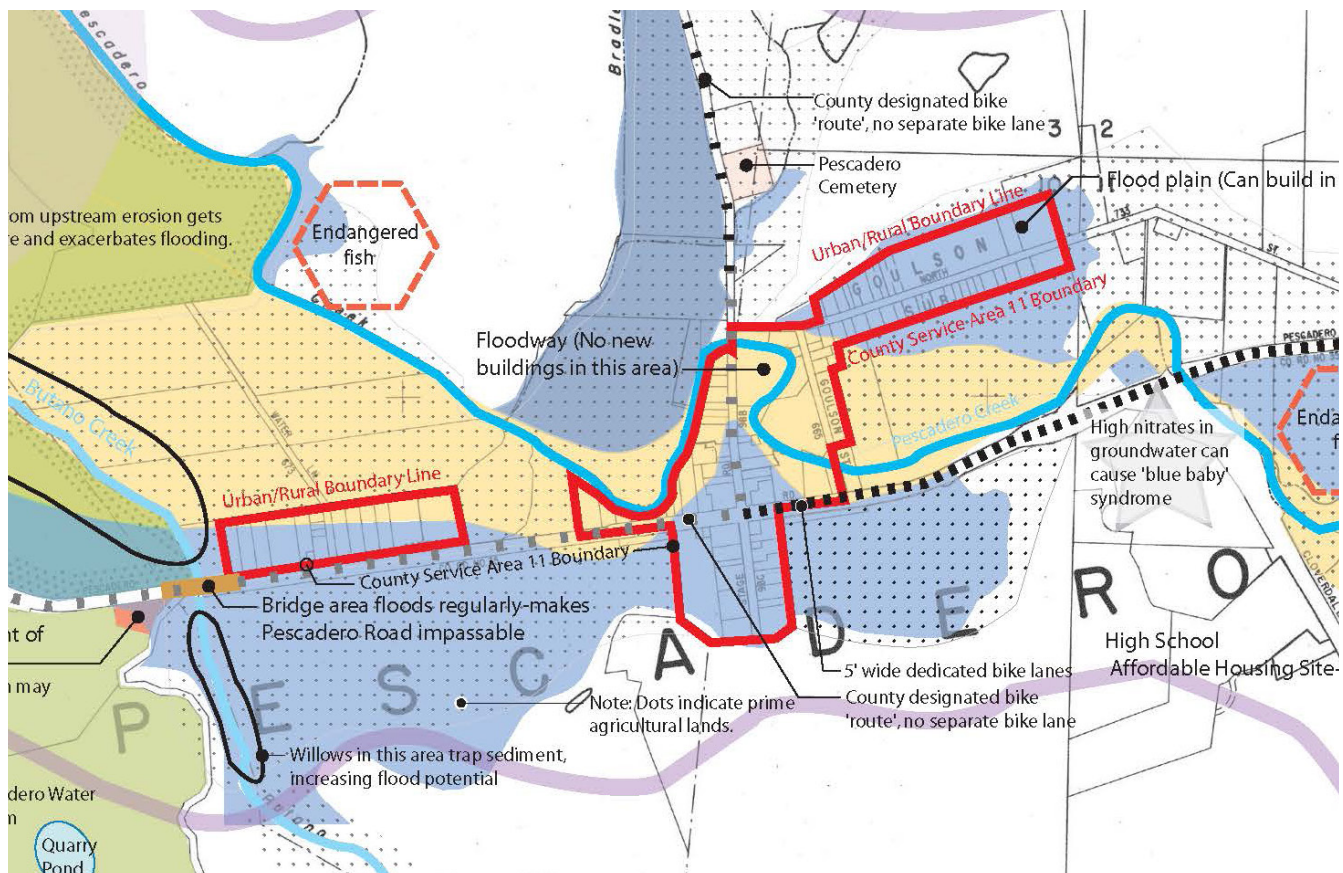
or dinner. The county budget allots three CHP units for the entire coastside, so there is generally some tension about enforcement of speeding and reckless drivers passing unsafely on the narrow, winding roads. Bicycle racing clubs regularly work out on this loop, and major bicycle races are held on the road several times a year. The circuit has been so attractive for such a long time, the founder of GoPro, the sport cameras that capture video of adventurous escapades, started his business in Pescadero.

The town of Pescadero itself is composed of one gas station with a celebrated taqueria that also functions as a general store (Los Amigos), one deli/market (Arcangeli's Market), a coffee house (Downtown Local), one post office, one bank, two bed & breakfasts, and Duarte's restaurant, a fixture since 1894. Today only the bar remains of the original Duarte's, which burned to the ground in 1926, just a few years after the major 1921 fire that leveled the Swanton

House Hotel, along with most of the rest of downtown. There are also some retail shops like Made in Pescadero and Lunasea, as well as micro-businesses housed in temporary shed structures. A number of the residences that survived the fires in the 20's still date from the early days of the town, the late 1800's.

There are two historic churches, St. Anthony's Catholic church and a Congregational Church, The Pescadero Community Church. Because St. Anthony's is owned by the Diocese, all preservation projects are at the discretion of the bishop. However, The Pescadero Foundation assisted in the preservation and restoration of the Community Church, which was established in 1868 and is the oldest church still on its original foundation in San Mateo County. The sanctuary has also been used to host community musical events, and the social hall is in continual use for community meetings like Pescadero Municipal Advisory Committee (PMAC), social gatherings, AA meetings, and even to hold preschool.

Zooming in on the 2004 community site analysis map for Pescadero, the lots with access to CSA-11 water are outlined in bold red.



According to a 2008 study, “Currently, the area within the Rural-Urban Limit, which generally encompasses most of the urbanized area of Pescadero, has a population of approximately 755 according to the County’s internal GIS database.” (Hydroscience Engineers 2008) However, according to Census Reporter, which publicly reports census data for use by journalists, the current population of not just the area within the urban-rural boundary, but in the surrounding valley, is just 362. In 2020, it was reported as 418. It may be difficult to determine exactly what the population is, and whether this is because people are shifting to other neighborhoods within the rural south coast or leaving the area altogether, but it seems certain that the population is trending downward substantially from what it was 10-15 years ago.

The population is younger and considerably more Hispanic than the other three communities discussed here. The 2021 ACS reports about 44% white, 38% hispanic, and 17% two or more identifications, with a median age of about 35. 30% of residents report being born in another country, 83% of them in Latin America. Census data indicates 83% of units are occupied, 75% by renters.

The town is laid out in a triangle, with Pescadero Road running parallel to Pescadero Creek from east to west, and Stage Road crossing it north to south, where most of the businesses are located. Here the creek bends substantially, creating a hairpin that hugs the downtown strip tightly on either side. The creek flows west roughly parallel to Pescadero Creek Road, entering town from the east, before bending sharply north behind Duarte’s. It runs north behind the row of downtown lots north to historic McCormick house before crossing Stage Road at the north end of town, and then turns sharply south to wrap the backside of the Pescadero Community Church. The creek flows south from the church along the backside of the Arcangeli Market and the foundation of the former Pescadero Country Market, and then bends west just before the Los Amigos taqueria, spilling into the marsh that opens out to the west.

The third main street in town, North Street, intersects Stage Rd at the apex of the creek’s northward bend, on the other side of the “new” bridge, and angles east to meet Pescadero Creek Road on the eastern end of town. North Street then encloses Harley Farms in the acute end of the triangle at the easternmost end of town. Most of the businesses in town, therefore, are sandwiched inside the bend of the creek, located in the flood zone. Indeed, most of Pescadero is at least partially inside the official “flood zone” boundaries, as the entire town runs along the creek. Life here is marked by periodic severe flooding, to the extent that the local high school parking lot is regularly used to distribute sand bags for homes and businesses during large storms every winter.

CSA-11

Within the community of Pescadero itself, there is a smaller group of homes and businesses that participate in County Service Area 11, or CSA-11, which was formed in 1988 to provide water service. CSA-11 currently has 101 customer connections, although 115 lots are considered part of its service area. CSA-11 has three wells, two drilled in 1992 and the current primary service well, drilled in 2018.

The San Mateo County Department of Public Works manages the water system and finances of CSA-11. According to a recent Municipal Service Review (MSR) conducted by LAFCo, water levels at the CSA-11 well field are in decline, and the aquifer CSA-11 relies on is considered to be in overdraft. In addition, because of the small population base, the cost of water service and solid waste collection are relatively high compared to other communities. (San Mateo County 2022)

BUTANO

The community of Butano just a couple miles to the south of Pescadero began as a collection of summer cabins tucked into a heavily wooded notch around

BG 2, Tract 6138, San Mateo, CA

Block Group in: [San Mateo County, CA, California, United States](#)

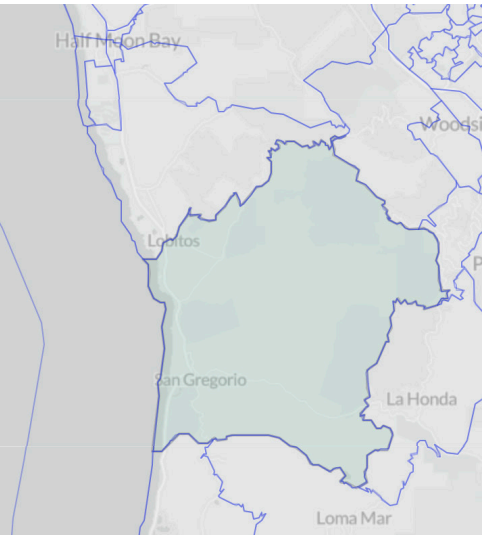
492

Population

48 square miles

10.2 people per square mile

Census data: ACS 2021 5-year unless noted



San Gregorio is only calculated as part of a larger census tract area. This area showed population of 599 according to the 2020 American Community Survey (ACS). The ACS for 2021 shows the population reduced by more than a hundred people.

the opening of Butano State Park. Most residents now live there year-round. Some of the cabins are quite old, and built right into the gaps between very large redwoods. The community maintains a water system, swimming pool, single lane roads, and access bridges. Butano does not have specific census numbers, but it is a particularly dense bedroom community of Pescadero with shared community interests, so is mentioned here for reference.

SAN GREGORIO

San Gregorio is located at the junction of Highway

84 and Stage Road, a mile or so east of Highway 1 and San Gregorio State Beach.

The historic San Gregorio Store includes a small post office, and there are some residences, which are detached single family homes on large lots. There is a historic (not functional) gas station/hotel property on the south side of the intersection, which is now a residence.

Blue House Farms is located on POST land across from the store to the east, which recently installed workforce housing. The housing is in walking distance of the San Gregorio Store and Post Office. The



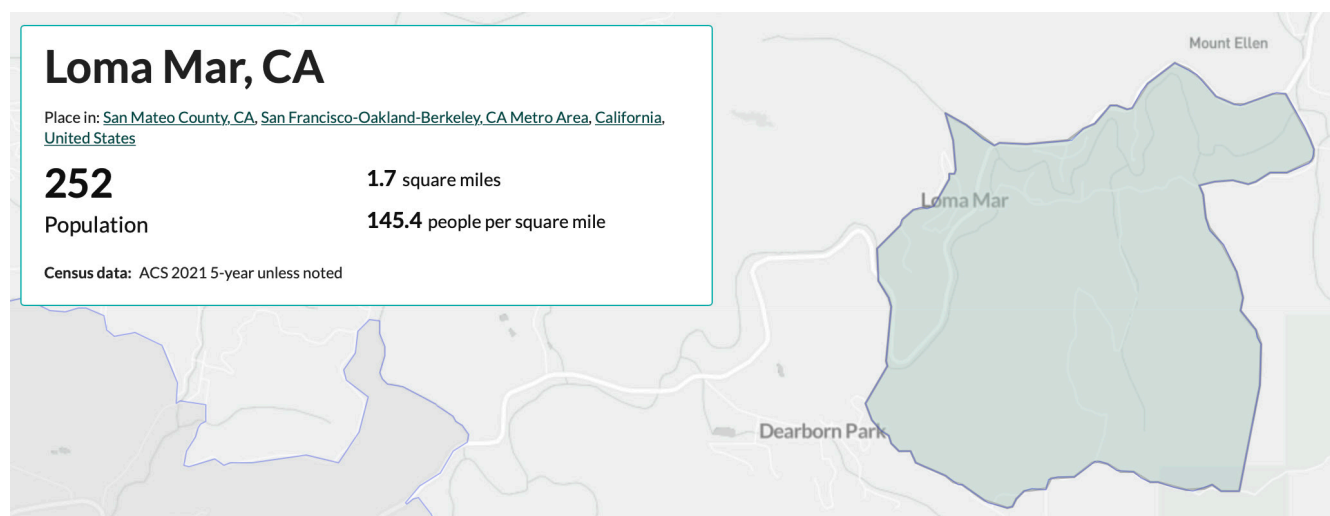
Left: the "San Gregorio House" gas station today, photo by Kelly Greenwood. Above: a 1973 photo from the Planning Department archives, for the application to the National Register

hilly north side of San Gregorio is largely grazed by Markegard cattle on MidPeninsula Regional Open Space land. Many privately owned farms also line the valley.

The flatter areas are all considered Prime Agricultural land. The hilly sides of the valley are grazed along the north and wooded to the south, until the valley meets the beach in a small brackish marsh that empties out onto San Gregorio State Beach.

Stage Road skirts and partially traverses this small marsh, winding through the scenic wooded hills to the south and ultimately terminating in downtown Pescadero.

PMAC, or the Pescadero Municipal Advisory Council, is a local board that provides advice and recommendations to the Board of Supervisors. The Pescadero Municipal Advisory Council has 13 seats but currently only nine members, who represent four districts: (1) Pescadero area, (2) Hwy 1 to Santa Cruz line area, (3) Butano area, and (4) Loma Mar area.



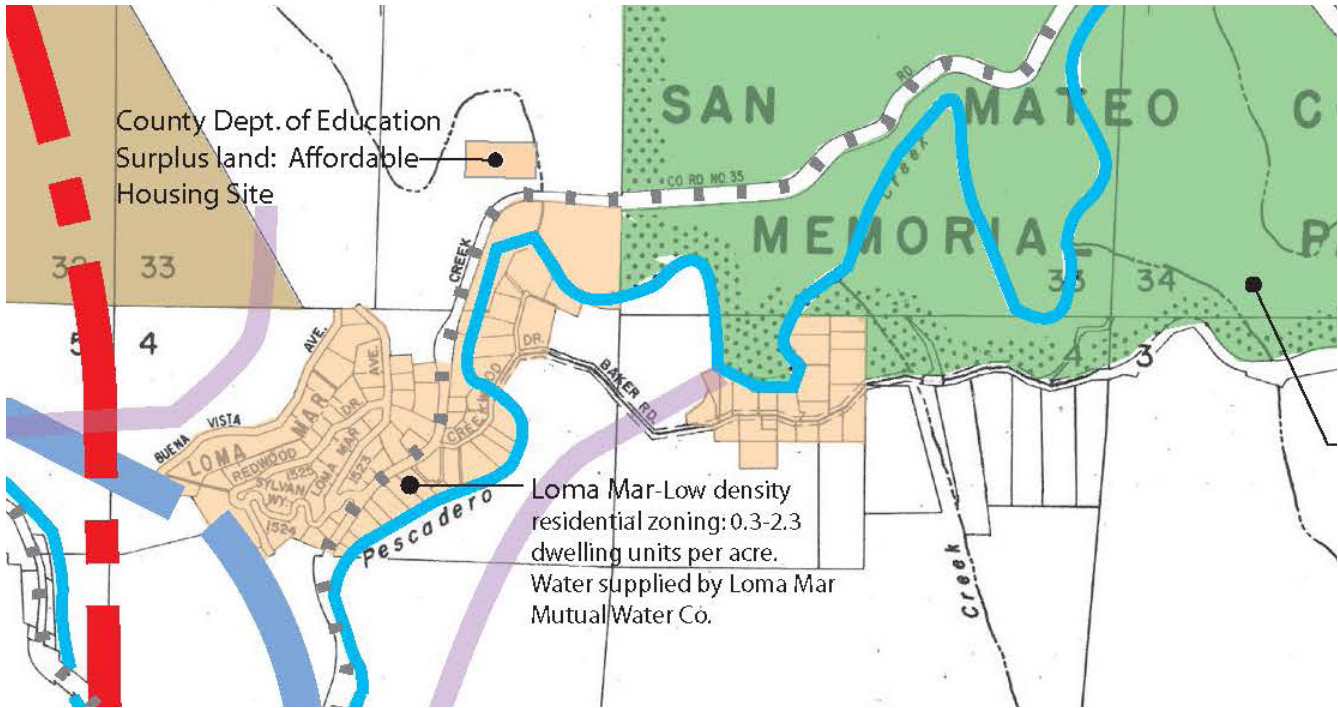
San Gregorio (opposite page) is treated as a general census area, encompassing most of the San Gregorio valley on either side of Highway 84, from the ocean to Skyline. Whereas data for Loma Mar includes a much smaller geographic area, the area around the store, and the Dearborn Park community, it does not include the Burns Valley area. Neighbors consider this part of Loma Mar, but according to this census data, it's counted as part of La Honda. The population is lower by about 30 than last year's report.

LOMA MAR

Loma Mar is located deep in the redwoods about seven miles east of Pescadero, almost halfway between Pescadero and La Honda. The neighborhood is centered around the Loma Mar Store, which was recently extensively renovated after years of neglect. The total population of the 1.7 mile area defining the census data is 252, almost twice as dense as Pescadero's 89.9 people per square mile, at 145.4 people per square mile. It has the lowest per capita income of the four main communities, at \$97,170. 100% of units are

occupied, 67% by owners.

The core of the neighborhood shares a large water system that pulls from Pescadero Creek, although homes outside of the core are all on wells. Memorial Park and Pescadero Creek Park bracket this neighborhood on the east and west. Additional homes extend along Pescadero Creek Road, with surrounding land owned by two YMCA Camps, Sam MacDonald Park, and Peninsula Open Space.



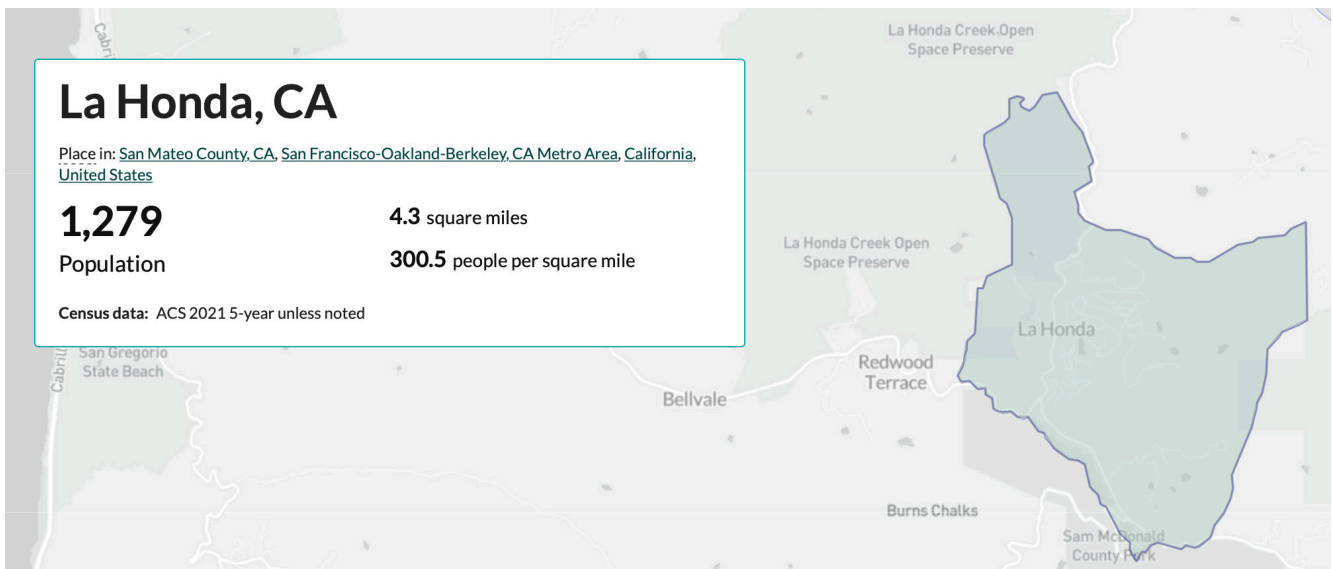
Zooming in on the 2004 community site analysis map, the lots that make up the neighborhood of Loma Mar can be seen. The County Dept. of Education lot has since been transferred to county parks to extend Memorial Park, and is a well-loved dog-walking trail for locals.

Loma Mar Volunteer Fire department is located just to the east of the core neighborhood, surrounded by Memorial Park. Loma Mar Volunteers and neighbors stayed behind to hose down decks and roofs, to save the neighborhood from the CZU fire, which was held to the creek. Volunteers are also regularly the first responders to local motorcycle and vehicle accidents along Pescadero Road between La Honda and Pescade-

ro.

All of Pescadero Creek Road between Highway 1 and La Honda is considered a county “Scenic Route” which applies additional restrictions to homeowners with regard to building placement, tree removal, etc. County “Scenic Route” regulations do not apply to PG&E, however, which has power lines that run the

Publicly available census information for La Honda from Census Reporter.



entire length of the road, and has a standing emergency permit to do any and all vegetation management it sees fit, without regard to scenic conditions or character. Historically, this has meant topping redwood trees among other questionable vegetation management practices. There does not currently appear to be any plan by PG&E to prioritize putting lines underground in this heavily wooded, scenic stretch of road in a high fire area, nor has the county communicated any effort to prioritize this. PG&E typically looks to counties to apply for this process.

The Loma Mar area between La Honda and Pescadero currently receives no cellular coverage. There is no regular public transportation service to La Honda, Loma Mar or the county park.

LA HONDA

Compared to Pescadero's reported population of 362 in a 4 square mile area vs. La Honda's 1279 in a 4.3 square mile area, La Honda by the numbers is considerably denser at 300.5 people per square mile.

La Honda is centered around the intersection of Highway 84 and Sears Ranch Road. A general store, post office, Puente office, the La Honda Volunteer Fire Department, and AppleJack's bar are clustered around this intersection. The La Honda Volunteer Fire Department has one of the highest CERT activation rates for any volunteer fire department in the state.

To the south of the intersection lies the Cuesta La Honda community, which maintains a pool, playground, the PlayBowl park, lake, tennis courts, community building, and large water system with a reservoir for its Guild members. The Guild is managed by a board of volunteers. Across Highway 84 to the north is the La Honda Elementary School, which backs up to what is now La Honda Open Space Preserve. West of town is the La Honda Trailer Park.

La Honda is outside the boundary of the Local Coastal Zone, so there is one less layer of complexity to

building housing in the area. However, it is rural, so outside of the shared water system of Cuesta La Honda, most building projects are going to require wells. There is no public infrastructure for wastewater in La Honda, so all properties require septic. However, there are vacant lots and underutilized spaces, including the vacant lot between the fire station and the post office. The school district is another large landowner here, with 6 acres for the elementary school, which serves 50-60 children each year.

The population of La Honda, like Loma Mar, is somewhat older than Pescadero area, with a median age of 44.8, and highly educated, with 80% having a bachelor's degree or higher. This makes a certain amount of sense, as La Honda is just 30 minutes from the Stanford campus and is a convenient bedroom community for people who work at Stanford University, the hospital, or in the neighborhoods around the campus.

In the 2021 survey, residents reported an average drive to work of 42.7 minutes and just 16% of residents work at home, despite continuing pandemic cautions. In comparison, Pescadero residents report an average drive time to work of 20.7 minutes, with 40% reporting carpooling to work and 30% reporting working from home.

Census data indicates that 84% of residents identify as White, 9% identify as Asian, and 20% of residents report being born outside the US. 47% of children speak English at home, 6% speak Spanish, and 45% speak another Indo-European language at home, double the usual rate for the Bay Area. Per capita income is \$113,588, with about 580 households and no children born in the past year. No births were reported for Loma Mar, either. La Honda census data indicates 84% of units are occupied, 72% by owners.



I think it would actually help the ranches hire people because that's probably one of the biggest things... to be able to say, look, the job comes with a place to live on the ranch, that helps.



Kathy Webster

WORKFORCE/ EMPLOYER HOUSING

Workforce or employer-based housing is, at root, housing tied to employment. Farmworker housing is the majority of this type of housing on the south coast. It's the most studied and addressed so far because of the critical relationship of this housing to the agriculture-based economy of the area.

Employees may pay rent (which could be market rate or could be subsidized) or they may receive housing as a benefit of employment at the discretion of the employer. Employees may or may not have a written lease agreement. The type and condition of repair of employer housing varies widely. Most critically, the security of the housing depends on continued employment with the organization that owns or manages the housing. Any change in employment, whether voluntary or involuntary, can mean eviction with no affordable option to remain in the community.

Puente de la Costa Sur advocates for farmworkers as they navigate the landscape of this type of housing, which can have many benefits, but can also present important equity issues. Farmworkers still pay a very high proportion of their income in rent, frequently do not have written leases, must negotiate with landlords without understanding their legal rights, and often without access to information in their native language (which may be Spanish, or an indigenous language such as Chatino, or other languages.)

The rents farmworkers pay can provide stabilizing income for farms, but without many (or any!) other options for housing, farmworkers are uniquely vulnerable to exploitation through high rents for low quality housing.

It is also important to keep in mind that farms owned by individual farmers are not the only organizations on the south coast that provide employees with housing. Land preservation organizations like Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) and MidPeninsula Regional Open Space (MidPen) also hold large tracts of land that may have existing structures or housing on them, and may lease large portions of their land that fall in Prime Agricultural Soils areas to others to be farmed or grazed. As a result, these large institution-

Housing was recently added for farmworkers at Blue House Farms in San Gregorio. The housing is in walking distance of services at the post office and store.



al organizations are often also landlords, and may provide housing to lessees, farmers, their workers, as well as non-farm employees of the institutions themselves, who may live in pre-existing single family houses on the acquired properties. However, housing set aside specifically for farmworkers, rather than other types of land management employees, is also regulated by different quality standards than housing by any other name. Special rules also apply to farms that want to develop housing for specifically for farmworkers.

The county has a system of density units for Prime Agricultural land that typically allows one house to be built for many acres, except under certain circumstances. For farms building housing for their workers, the county allows property owners to apply for special permission to build small clusters of housing on large tracts of Prime Agricultural Land. Large production farms and floriculture operations can then provide housing to employees essential to running that particular property.

In 2022, an informal collaboration formed between organizations to try to encourage and accelerate the process of building housing for farmworkers.²¹ Unfortunately, one of the most promising sites encountered an endangered species and could not move forward. Local Coastal Program rules restrict all other types of housing on the Prime Agricultural land that surrounds and abuts the Urban-Rural boundary, but *does allow building farmworker housing*.

Employers or non-profits may be motivated to provide housing for their own key employees, but are not organizations oriented toward building or managing housing, and therefore can't be a reliable solution for the larger problem of affordable housing for workers of other organizations, like teachers who work for LHPUSD.



The Arcangeli Grocery has been a fixture of downtown Pescadero since 1929. The building is built according to historic patterns, with an entry right on the sidewalk and second-floor apartments.

Meanwhile, relying exclusively on farms to provide enough housing for their workers' families leads to creating segregated areas of housing far from resources provided in town, like public transportation, groceries, school, and social services. The area has been at a steep deficit of housing for so long, and local workers are in direct competition for what housing is available with families priced out of housing options on the more developed Bay side of the hill. Any approach to addressing the crisis must consider all three categories of housing: workforce housing, market rental housing, and ownership housing.

Puente is applying important pressure by supporting a paid advocate to amplify the voices of farmworkers and to promote safe, stable housing options for critical farm labor. This is a critical element of the problem, but the local agricultural and tourism economy relies on additional types of workforce for whom farmworker housing is not a solution. Finding housing for the Amah Mutsun fire tenders (see Amah Mutsun on page 44-49) who work across multiple ranches and forest areas, is just one example of the need for affordable, flexible market rate rentals.

MARKET RENTALS

Rental housing provides opportunities for people to retain flexibility while avoiding the unanticipated financial surprises of home ownership or property maintenance. This category includes long-term rental of single family homes, long term rental of apartments, including apartments over retail, and detached rear cottages or attached “in-law” units on single-family lots (also called accessory dwelling units, or ADU’s.)

To a lesser extent, it is also important to consider availability of short-term vacation/sabbatical rentals such as VRBOs and AirBnB’s and traditional B&B (Bed&Breakfast) opportunities on the coastside.

This type of housing is typically thought of only in terms of “tourists”, but temporary workers, artists, specialist professionals, and family visitors from out of town also need this type of short-term housing, so some availability is important, even if not oriented to servicing the full extent of potential tourist demand.

Traditionally Pescadero has always been both an agricultural community and a getaway destination within “day trip” distance of San Francisco and the Peninsula. Originally the Swanton House hotel was an anchor of downtown Pescadero, until it burned along with the northwest end of downtown in 1921, leaving only the enormous magnolia tree that still grows next to the taqueria to mark its original location.

A subsequent fire in 1926 leveled the rest of the business district, from which fire fighters saved only the original bar from Duarte’s Tavern, still in use in the rebuilt taproom. The bank and the Arcangeli market building were also rebuilt at that time. Duarte’s and the Arcangeli Market (“Norm’s”) both included apartments over the businesses—a time honored strategy that has kept the footprint of traditional towns small and walkable. The traditional building pattern of housing over storefronts also provides opportunities for housing very close to services, as well as keeping small businesses resilient by providing owners with multiple income streams.

As noted earlier, these apartments are key to providing rental availability in town, where services are easily accessible. Balancing the agricultural character and historic character of the town is very important to residents, who indicated their preference for this type of housing overwhelmingly at the 2019 community meeting.²² Unfortunately, this style of building is currently discouraged by county planning regulations. The Pescadero Country Store at 251 Stage Road burned down a few years ago, and the empty lot stands as a physical reminder of the loss of such a key gathering place, as well as the opportunity to add new rental apartments as part of any rebuild project.

History shows us that this type of housing increases the sustainability of the business district and the opportunity for residents to continue to live in town as their housing needs change. During the pandemic, there were many examples of downtown areas with few residents suffering financially when tourists or office workers stayed home, while downtowns with a higher proportion of residents were more resilient.

Providing private businesses with a crystal clear path to build according to the community’s wishes, with heights, materials, and building volumes that reflect the historic architecture and agricultural character of the area, is a proven and successful recipe for promoting market-rate building projects, particularly rental apartments, and for reducing expensive permit approval cycles.

Businesses have access to capital and a commitment to the long-term viability of the community, as well as an incentive to diversify their income, so can be reliable partners for building market-rate rentals.

In Pescadero, even one downtown building at a time could make a huge difference in providing new rentals

year over year, and additional residents living downtown could provide more revenue during the workweek when town is otherwise empty of weekend tourists.

There are numerous non-profit organizations making efforts across California to build affordable rental housing. One of the largest and most consistently successful at building award-winning housing with sustainable practices and following green building guidelines is MidPen Housing.

MidPen Housing is a non-profit developer that works with cities and counties to translate their smart growth plans into real housing. Over the past 50 years, MidPen Housing has built over 100 communities and 8,500 homes. With a staff of over 500 and offices on the coast, in the North Bay, East Bay, and headquarters on the Peninsula, MidPen Housing has the ability to coordinate multiple layers of financing, acquire sites, contract with architects for site design, and deliver projects on budget with construction management.

Non-profit developers like Mid-Pen partner with community stakeholders to design housing that fits into neighborhoods, taking advantage of existing infrastructure like transportation and jobs. Staff also understand how to apply for state and federal loans and tax credits to make the project affordable. In Half Moon Bay, for example, MidPen developed and continues to manage Half Moon Village for seniors, Lesley Gardens for extremely low-income seniors, as well as Main Street Park and Moonridge, which was designed to meet farmworker housing needs. MidPen specializes in rental communities, but organizations like Habitat for Humanity specialize in ownership housing, each has pros and cons.

Main Street Park was built with LIHTC and HOME Investment Partnerships Program funds, so most apartments are restricted by AMI limits (See “HOW DO WE DECIDE WHAT IS AFFORDABLE?” on page

40.) Moonridge, at 2001 Miramontes Road has 160 two, three, and four-bedroom units and includes a playground, picnic/BBQ area, computer center, community garden, and a community room. MidPen Housing also coordinates community college classes and early childhood development services through HeadStart. Moonridge took 15 years to develop, but was awarded the national Low-Income Tax Credit Coalition’s Best Rural Project in the Nation award, the Pacific Coast Builder’s Conference Gold Nugget Award, and an award from the California Council of American Institute of Architects.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR OWNERSHIP

The third category of housing is ownership housing, which allows buyers a path to build equity and long-term investment in a community, but also comes with the burden of managing infrastructure (water, wastewater, and power) as well as paying property taxes. Typically, home ownership is associated with single family residential, which might also include shared ownership obligations.

Cuesta La Honda Guild is one example of an HOA formed to share these infrastructure and amenity investments. Cuesta La Honda shares maintenance of a water system, club house, lakes, playground, and pool. The Butano community south of Pescadero, originally built as a small community of summer cabins that is now occupied by many year-round residents, also shares maintenance of a water system, bridges, road, and a pool. A small group of Loma Mar homeowners around the Loma Mar store also share maintenance of a water system.

There are a number of other smaller home clusters that share maintenance of roads or water systems, which can be a substantial hidden expense for buyers unfamiliar with rural property. The purchase price of a property doesn’t include a record of public utility bills that can help a homeowner budget. There might not be a monthly water bill, but when the well pump

OPEN SPACE NETWORK

Peninsula Open Space Trust, Mid-Peninsula Regional Open Space, California State Parks, County Parks, Committee For Green Foothills, and more...

A complex network of organizations govern the open space throughout the community. In addition to the beaches, which are all state parks, the Pescadero Marsh itself is managed by California State Parks, as is the Butano State Park surrounding the Butano Canyon community south of Pescadero, and Portola Redwoods State Park to the east. Much of the farmland around San Gregorio and Pescadero remains privately owned, or is managed by Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) and MidPen and leased to farmers and ranchers. Memorial County Park, Pescadero Creek Park, and Sam McDonald Park to the east, between Pescadero and La Honda, are owned and managed by San Mateo County Parks.

Purissima Creek Redwoods, El Corte de Madera, Tunitas Creek, and La Honda Creek Open Space preserves to the north, between Pescadero and Half Moon Bay, Russian Ridge and Skyline Ridge to the east, and Cloverdale Ranch to the south, are all managed by Midpeninsula Regional Open Space. POST and MidPen, then, are neighbors with a very big voice in planning for the rural south coast.

MidPen is currently planning for the acquisition of Cloverdale Ranch, immediately to the south of Pescadero. Access to these lands will bring more visitors to the area. POST is currently planning for a Coastal Trail, connecting beaches and trail access along Highway 1, also accessed through the town of Pescadero.

on a private water system goes out, there's no water until the money is found to repair it.

For some homes, it is possible to locate a water storage tank on a hill, so the gravity creates pressure in the system to move water to the house. But in most cases, power is required for a pump to move water from the storage tank to the house, so if the power goes out, there is no running water.

Pescadero itself is a little more complicated, with a larger shared water system, or County Service Area 11, or "CSA-11." Unlike the Butano and Cuesta La Honda systems, and the many mutually maintained small water systems, the business district in Pescadero is also a part of the CSA-11 water system. The street lighting for the downtown intersections and business district is also governed by a lighting district managed by the county.

Having access to water and a system to filter and pressurize it is just the first step, though. The next important piece of infrastructure is wastewater. Here, all of the south coast is in the same boat. Whether housing is rented or owned, on the market or by an employer, *everyone on the south coast relies on a septic system.*

While new single-family homes are occasionally built (usually after multiple years of permitting) those are typically at the very top of the market and so rare as to do nothing for the housing crisis. In any case, increasing the density of single family homes in this rural area is a slippery slope to suburbia and counter to everything most residents love about the rural coastside.

That leaves one main avenue to increase affordable housing options in the near term: adding legal market rate rentals within the already built areas. In other words, within the Urban-Rural boundary of Pescadero, and wherever else is practical around San Gregorio Store, and in La Honda. The two ways to do this are to encourage apartments over businesses, and to encourage and support the financing and building of Tiny Homes as ADUs wherever possible.

Recently the county applied to the Coastal Commission for approval of new regulations to align treatment of ADUs in the coastal area with new state law, so they would not be subject to permits as second units, among other changes. According to the Summary of Staff Recommendation:

With the suggested modifications, the LCP's ADU provisions will be appropriately tailored to protect coastal resources while also encouraging development of ADUs, thus helping to increase ADU stock, and more affordable housing options, in the County's coastal zone.²³

Unfortunately, while it is helpful to reduce the number of hurdles to permitting ADUs in the Coastal Zone, it is unlikely to lead to more legal ADUs in the area because of the details of Environmental Health permitting in the rural areas of the county. Until the problem of permitting wastewater solutions is resolved, it will continue to confound most attempts to add housing. As long as a Tiny Home is on wheels, similar to the many RVs tucked in driveways and farmyards and side yards throughout the coastside, as long as they are not hooked up to septic they occupy a grey market of mobile housing. As soon as permission is sought to connect them to water and septic, things get complicated.

While ADU's can be added quickly, and can make more efficient use of small lots, this strategy can't meet the long-term need for enough affordable housing. To really address the need for enough housing for local families employed in the area, multi-family options should be explored.



PROPERTY TAXES

Land trusts like POST acquire tracts at a significantly discounted rate. The act of purchasing the land to “preserve” it as open space also removes it from the private market where the appreciated value could gradually increase the property tax rolls. POST then transfers the land in a tax-advantaged sale to public organizations like MidPeninsula Regional Open Space (which is often called “MidPen” but has no relationship to MidPen Housing.)

While there are obvious public benefits to these Open Space transfers, the hidden cost is the increasing squeeze on property tax revenue, the source of funds for school repair & upgrades, emergency preparedness, public toilets, and fire response.

By suppressing overall regional property tax values, it also reduces the amount of money the LHPUSD is allowed to borrow for building projects. Recently, land organizations reached an agreement to pay a negotiated fee each year intended to offset the impact of the reduction in property taxes to the area. However, the fee is substantially lower than the value of the lost property tax.

Land preservation comes at a steep cost in public funds for schools & maintenance in our local Property Tax funded system.



HOW DO WE DECIDE WHAT IS AFFORDABLE?

There is a term called AMI, which stands for “Area Median Income,” a number the national Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) calculates each year for every region in the US to help define “affordable” housing. HUD provides funding for affordable housing projects through the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program among others, but requires that the housing built with the funds be reserved for families that earn below a certain percentage of AMI.

Every year, HUD calculates the midpoint of each specific area’s income to determine AMI rates and provides those to the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD—the same department approving the Housing Element process.) The HCD works with cities and counties to ensure that applicants for affordable housing projects built with HUD funds meet these income limits, adjusted for family size.

In San Mateo County, for example, the AMI adjusted for a family of four, as of April 18, 2022, is \$166,000. A family of four earning less than \$149,100 qualifies as “low income” (80% AMI) and a family earning \$93,200 qualifies as “very low income” (50% AMI) A complete chart of San Mateo County’s AMI income



and rent limits for affordable housing developments based on this AMI can be found online, as well as on the facing page.

There are non-profit developers who specialize in building housing to meet the specifications of the LIHTC program, as well as other affordable housing incentives. For example, MidPen Housing has successfully built a number of these developments on the Peninsula, including Main Street Park, Moon Ridge, and Half Moon Village. Despite the similarity in the name, MidPen Housing is completely unrelated to MidPeninsula Regional Open Space, often called “MidPen” for short. MidPen Housing is one of the largest non-profit developers of affordable housing in Northern California, with a strategic plan goal of building 3,000 units in the next five years.

These developments are typically managed by MidPen as rental units, with strict income limits set according to the AMI for San Mateo County. According to MidPen Housing:

Built on former agricultural land along Main Street in downtown Half Moon Bay, Main Street Park construction began in the early 1990s and was completed in two phases: 36 affordable family units in 1996, and 28 units in 2001. Its first phase recently



Half Moon Village, built in the 90’s and 2000’s, provides housing for local families who qualify based on the AMI for San Mateo County. MidPen also included a playground, computer room, community room, and laundry facilities as part of the development.

2022 San Mateo County Income Limits

as determined by HUD - effective April 18, 2022

revised 05/13/2022

For HUD-funded programs, use the Federal Income Schedule. For State or locally-funded programs, you may use the State Income Schedule. For programs funded with both federal and state funds, use the more stringent income levels.

Please verify the income and rent figures in use for specific programs.

San Mateo County Income Limits (based on Federal Income Limits for SMC)

Effective 4/18/2022 - Area median Income **\$166,000** (based on household of 4)

| Income Category | Income Limits by Family Size (\$) | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------|------------|-------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| Extremely Low (30% AMI) * | \$ 39,150 | \$ 44,750 | \$ 50,350 | \$ 55,900 | \$ 60,400 | \$ 64,850 | \$ 69,350 | \$ 73,800 |
| Very Low (50% AMI) * | \$ 65,250 | \$ 74,600 | \$ 83,900 | \$ 93,200 | \$ 100,700 | \$ 108,150 | \$ 115,600 | \$ 123,050 |
| Low (80% AMI) * | \$ 104,400 | \$ 119,300 | \$ 134,200 | \$ 149,100 | \$ 161,050 | \$ 173,000 | \$ 184,900 | \$ 196,850 |
| Median (100% AMI) | \$ 116,200 | \$ 132,800 | \$ 149,400 | \$ 166,000 | \$ 179,300 | \$ 192,550 | \$ 205,850 | \$ 219,100 |
| Moderate (120% AMI) | \$ 139,450 | \$ 159,350 | \$ 179,300 | \$ 199,200 | \$ 215,150 | \$ 231,050 | \$ 247,000 | \$ 262,950 |

Publicly available census information on income and rent limits available from [San Mateo County's Department of Housing](#).

underwent an extensive rehabilitation. Main Street Park maintains the charming, small-town feel of Main Street with front porches and traditional coastal architectural details like “shiplap” siding. At the center of the site is a small public park with a play structure and open space. Adjacent to the park is the community building, computer center, and management office. Main Street Park was awarded the Gold Nugget award for Best Affordable (Attached) Property at the 2002 Pacific Coast Builders Conference (PCBC) and Project of the Year from Merritt Community Capital Corporation.

The WHO is most concerned with housing for essential community workers, farmworkers as well as teachers. One of the things that’s attractive about working with a non-profit developer is that this third party organization manages the property, vetting tenants to ensure they meet criteria for affordable housing.

But what does that mean? Who would really benefit from the housing? Salary information for LHPUSD is available online, so it’s not hard to calculate whether our local teachers would benefit, and how local affordable housing could benefit recruiting and retention for the district.

According to Transparent California, the top

salary paid in 2019 by LHPUSD at \$142,792 (to the superintendent.) This would qualify as “low income” (or 80% of AMI) for affordable housing, if it were the sole income for a family of four. Hypothetically, if LHPUSD had to recruit a new superintendent, the pool of potential candidates would be limited to those who already had secure local housing, or who already had a viable second income in the rural south coast, in order to afford a place to live.

The median home value in the 94060 zip code (Pescadero, where district offices are located) is \$1,012,800, or a new candidate could commute from La Honda, where the median value is \$838,200 (in the 94020 zip code.) If the salary of the *top executive of the district* is 80% of area median income to support a family of four, what home buying power do the teacher salaries have?

Total pay for the seven elementary school teachers in the district averaged \$79,000 in 2020, which would qualify any single person as “low income.” Even with two incomes, a teacher’s partner would have to earn more than \$70,000 per year for a family of four to be bumped out of the “low income” bracket of AMI. The lowest paid elementary teacher at \$63,962 in total pay for 2020 would qualify as Very Low Income for affordable housing, as a single person.

For families of farmworkers, this type of housing also has advantages. Denser housing closer to the services provided in town, like groceries, health clinic, public transportation, and a walk to school for children are important to quality of life. Families in this type of housing also do not face displacement if their employer changes. Residents in communities like Main Street in Half Moon Bay, built with additional community amenities after an inclusive community process, also have access to services like a computer room, laundry, and a small playground that they requested.

Rental apartments are not the only option for adding affordable housing. Organizations like Habitat for Humanity also help communities build homes that can be sold to residents. Offering residents a path to build equity through ownership offers long-term benefits to the community in terms of stability, but has some trade-offs in terms of how to ensure homes remain “affordable” and continue to offer affordable access, as well as the cost burden of maintaining utility systems.

ARE TINY HOMES THE ANSWER?

With all the frustration around whether multi-family housing can be built in Pescadero, and if so, where, it’s hard to know what can be done now to address the needs of families at immediate risk of displacement.

The Pescadero Community Foundation is primarily focused on adding paths to equity-building ownership to keep families in the community, as well as market-rate rentals that can provide additional economic stability for families and small businesses.

One of the promising strategies being explored is the Tiny Home. Big enough to be comfortable for one or two people, or even a small family. Efficient enough to keep energy costs minimal. Small enough to fit into a community with other Tiny Homes, or on land that’s available in town or near town. All of this, at

costs that range from \$20,000 to \$100,000 or more make ownership, as opposed to rental, a realistic part of the formula.

While manufactured or “mobile” homes have always been a successful way to create small, affordable neighborhoods, the aesthetics have been an obstacle to incorporating them into existing communities, including ours.²⁴ With their charm and curb appeal, as well as their construction quality, Tiny Homes are changing that. Combining the friendliness and community feeling of well-designed, well managed mobile home parks with increased energy efficiency, construction quality, and appealing, individual design, we believe Tiny Homes can be the new “starter home” for the rural south coast.

Tiny Homes give us a way to create comfortable, attractive, sustainable housing that offers the additional advantage of mobility when needed. But even Tiny Homes need water, wastewater, and power. To really improve housing conditions in rural San Mateo County, the permitting process needs reform. It’s essential to improve equity in who can apply and get permits, as well as how long it takes, which has an enormous financial implication for every project.

Ultimately, it will take a combination of efforts to truly address the deficit of housing needed. Tiny Homes are one way to address paths to ownership and stability, as well as rental income and economic stability for families trying to stay in homes they already own.

If a way is found to build multi-family affordable housing in Pescadero at the current or slightly higher level of density, such a project would potentially provide housing for more families with children, who may need more space than Tiny Homes can provide. In the Pescadero area where the birth rate is higher and family sizes are larger, this will be an important consideration.

WHAT'S THE RECIPE?

Often these three different types of housing—employer housing, market rentals, and path to ownership housing—are considered in opposition to each other. The more houses are rented, for example, the fewer would be for sale; or, the more focus is put on farm housing, the less is put on rentals in town.

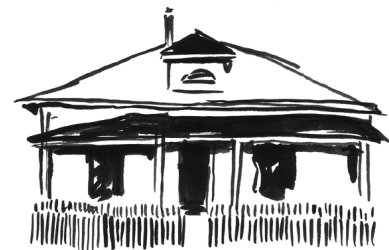
It is the goal of this report to look for opportunities to move all three housing categories forward, and to find ways for them to complement each other. The simplest example of this is: the more homeowners are allowed to build ADUs and rent them for income, the more rental units are available on the market.

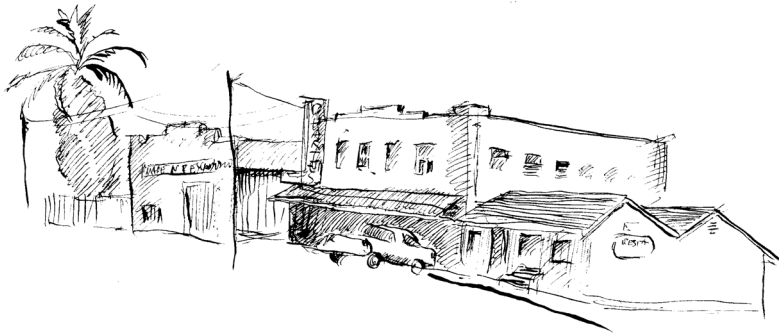
At the same time, the more homeowners can legally build ADUs to rent, the more families can defray the cost of ownership with rental income, helping families afford to stay in their homes in good economies and bad, and making the community as a whole more resilient.

Whether affordable homes are built as multi-family apartments or free-standing ADUs, and whether they are offered as rentals, or for ownership, or some combination of the two, is a question for the community to deliberate together, where a wide range of voices and perspectives can be considered. That must include people who are here today, those who have been displaced in the past, and those who may benefit from the housing in the future: the kids who are in school now.

The important part of the recipe is to (1) provide the community with robust site analysis information, so everyone is on the same page about the opportunities as well as the constraints, (2) create an inclusive and open forum with effective translation so that all per-

spectives can be heard, and (3) to record the results in such a way that the will of the community can be implemented effectively, such as with a Specific Plan.





WHAT'S NEXT?

It might appear that this stretch of the coast is a forgotten idyll of views and pastoral peacefulness preserved in amber, but what appears to be tranquil has been shaped by dynamic natural events as well as a history of loss and violence.

This report is about housing, but houses are homes. Homes are physical dwellings that protect us from weather; they are personal and private spaces, where families are formed; and they are cultural spaces, where neighborhoods connect at their most basic level. They are shaped by family histories as well as cultural and economic forces. This report doesn't pretend to be a complete or thorough accounting of local history, but if we are looking for a recipe for how to nurture an inclusive process for designing the future of our community, it's important to take a brief step into the past to understand this history of loss and violent displacement.

For tens of thousands of years this stretch of coast was groomed by Costanoan peoples, with managed fires that produced food and materials, as well as maintaining open grazing areas. The Amah Mutsun are one of several groups of Coastanoan descent.²⁵ According to their website, "The Mutsun insured a

sustained yield of plant and animal foods by careful management of the lands. Controlled burning of extensive areas of land was carried out each fall to promote the growth of seed bearing annuals."²⁶

This "food forest" approach to agriculture was destroyed when the Spanish forcibly colonized California and introduced ranching and the mission system. The bands of Ohlone peoples who had actively managed the landscape were forcibly driven from it, and practices like cultural burning that played a key role in the ecology of the landscape were banned.

Kat Kerlin notes in "Rethinking Wildfire: Cultural Burning and the Art of Not Fighting Fire":

When Native Americans were removed and displaced, they not only lost access to their ancestral lands, they also were banned from the practice of cultural burning itself. With these losses came, too, the decline of practices, like basket weaving, that access to land and traditional plant materials afforded.²⁷

Even before the disastrous CZU fires decimated large areas of Santa Cruz and San Mateo counties in the fall of 2020, historic fire management practices were getting another look. According to a November 2020 article in the Santa Cruz Sentinel:

First, Spanish colonists banned Indigenous peoples of California from the practice, because it impacted shrubs that cattle grazed on. But Indigenous peoples were still holding burns in some areas of the state, explained Alec Apodaca, a UC Berkeley anthropology graduate student and researcher. In the early 1800s, Mexican settlers also outlawed cultural burning. But it wasn't until later in the 19th century when American settlers colonized California that the practice was completely removed from the landscape, Apodaca said.

“Fire exclusion became more integrated into policy over time,” according to Apodaca.

When American settlers began to view the forest as a resource, for logging and recreation, the banning of Indigenous burning was finalized. Forests in areas like Santa Cruz County became overgrown.

“There’s been a disruption in the knowledge and the stewardship practices — that’s a byproduct of these colonial enterprises,” Apodaca said.²⁸

While true cultural burning is still not something that can be widely practiced, the Amah Mutsun Tribe is training fire tenders to help ranches to collaborate with CalFire on managed burns in the local area.

Reporter Hannah Hagemann describes the context for “cultural burns” as part of a larger practice of land management by the Amah Mutsun for materials production and habitat:

The Awasas and the Mutsun-speaking peoples would divide landscapes in up to seven segments based on the different species of plants, trees, and animals, explained Valentin Lopez, the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band chairman. Those Amah Mutsun ancestors would burn one swath of land per year, sparking low intensity fires.

“When you burn at that frequency you avoid a huge buildup of fuels, that become so dangerous when those fires burn, they burn hot and sterilize and kill everything around them,” Lopez said. “That’s what happened in the Santa Cruz fires.”

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

The Muwekma Ohlone are not yet federally recognized, but according to the tribe’s website, Muwekma.org,

The present-day Muwekma Ohlone Tribe is comprised of all of the known surviving American Indian lineages aboriginal to the San Francisco Bay region who trace their ancestry through the Missions Dolores, Santa Clara, and San Jose; and who were also members of the historic Federally Recognized Verona Band of Alameda County. The aboriginal homeland of the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe includes the following counties: San Francisco, San Mateo, most of Santa Clara, Alameda, Contra Costa, and portions of Napa, Santa Cruz, Solano and San Joaquin. This large contiguous geographical area, which historically crosscuts aboriginal linguistic and tribal boundaries, fell under the sphere of influence of the aforementioned three missions between 1776 and 1836. The missionization policies deployed by the Catholic Church and militarily supported by the Hispanic Empire, brought many distantly related, and in some cases, already inter-married tribal groups together at the missions.

However, the Amah Mutsun are centered on the coast in Santa Cruz, and along with the Ramaytush centered in the Half Moon Bay/Pacifica/San Francisco Peninsula area might more accurately represent the descendents of the Costanovans of San Mateo County’s south coast.

Usually, flames don't grow higher than a foot and a half in cultural burns and the fire moves slowly across the landscape. The practice creates a checkerboard of burned and unburned swaths of land, Lopez said. Indigenous burns prevent blazes from becoming disastrous and cultivate a more fire-resistant landscape.²⁹

This is a report on local housing issues, not a historical text on the violent--and at times genocidal--history of California. But this history directly relates to access to housing, because the descendants of people forcibly moved have not been included in the conversation about access to housing on the coast.

The rural south coast area governed by the Coastal Commission, within the Local Coastal Program boundary, is the traditional, unceded territory of the Ramaytush, Muwekma, and Amah Mutsun.³⁰ Of the fire stewards training in the area, Hagemann continues:

In the wake of the CZU Complex fire, the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band is working on securing some essentials for the native stewards.

Their housing at Cascade Ranch was damaged in the blaze, so for now the conservation crew is staying at the Butano Creek Girl Scout Camp, through an emergency grant from the Community Foundation of Santa Cruz County. Finding a permanent headquarters for the native stewards and housing is paramount, said Sara French, interim executive director of the Amah Mutsun Land Trust.

"Tribal members don't have land or financial support, and they live three or four hours away in the Central Valley, where it's cheaper," French said.³¹

The people with the traditional knowledge to help manage the land were forcibly dispossessed from it, and now their descendents are priced out of both affordable rentals and paths to ownership in the area.

The native stewards are working to establish themselves as a crew that not only lights cultural burns, but also responds to wildland fires, and works

prescribed burns, French said. The conservation crew is also working with California State Parks to down Douglas fir trees, and introduce native plants in the Quiroste Valley Cultural Preserve, a part of Año Nuevo State Park that's Tribal Band ancestral territory.

At Pie Ranch, the native stewards are cleaning and restoring parts of the property that were damaged in the CZU Complex fire. French said they're hoping to contract with more private land owners in Santa Cruz County to do this type of work.³²

These crews are critical to managing the landscape and yet accessing stable housing is a constant struggle. Since the November article in the Santa Cruz Sentinel, housing at the Girl Scout Camp has become unavailable and these workers are once again on the hunt for a stable place to live. Up to now, the conversation about workforce housing access has largely focused on farmworkers and teachers. But recent emergencies like the CZU Fires remind us that affordable housing access for fire tenders, as well as grocery and healthcare workers, is essential, too.

FINDING A NEW WAY FORWARD

How do we arrive at an equitable shared vision for what land management should look like? In local indigenous traditions, people are a completely integral element of the ecology of the landscape. In the European tradition, people are separate and apart from the landscape, spiritually destined to control it for the use and enjoyment of whoever can enforce control of it through ownership.

In the 19th century, as the United States was taking shape and California was set to become the 31st state in 1850, new attitudes were beginning to emerge about the West. John Muir first visited Yosemite in 1868, sparking a lifetime of advocating for preservation of the Yosemite area from the invading horde of loggers and cattle ranchers. The exploitative cultural

model of ranchers and loggers at the time was decimating the carefully groomed, actively managed food forest John Muir saw through white eyes as “wilderness”.

“Except, the ‘wilderness’ Muir called Yosemite was already named—*Ahwahnee*, meaning gaping, mouth-like place—and beloved by the Ahwahneechee people who lived in the grand valley,” according to a recent article on the Sierra Club’s reckoning with the racism of its founder. “Muir’s desire to protect Yosemite, which led him to found the Sierra Club in 1892, was not for the benefit of the valley’s original inhabitants, or even the full palette of American diversity.”³³

Muir saw the original people of the Yosemite valley as a hindrance to “preserving” it for the enjoyment of White campers, hikers, and naturalists. In fact, to return to Kat Kerlin in “Rethinking Fire”:

When John Muir first walked to the Yosemite Valley not far from this property, he walked through wide meadows scattered with flowers and trees tens of feet apart – not a closed canopy forest. When a fire burned in Yosemite, it ate through grass and young trees, rarely gaining enough traction to burn with high severity.

Kat Anderson, an ethnobotanist with the UC Davis Department of Plant Sciences and USDA, wrote in her book Tending the Wild that what Muir was really seeing “were the fertile gardens of the Sierra Miwok and Valley Yokuts Indians, modified and made productive by centuries of harvesting, tilling, sowing, pruning and burning.”³⁴

But if people are a critical part of managing the landscape, as opposed to a hindrance or burden to it, how do we decide who has the right to live in it and how? What is our vision for how it will look for our grandchildren and their grandchildren, and how do we propose to achieve that vision? California established the Coastal Commission through the California Coastal Act in 1976, the same year as the original Community Plan, and at the beginning of a surge in the “preservation” approach to land management.

THE HOUSING ELEMENT GOALS

The County of San Mateo will prepare a “Priorities, Goals, & Actions” section of the Housing Element to outline their policies to promote fair housing.

The HCD will decide whether the priorities, goals, and actions the county outlines will:

Address the disparities in housing needs and lack of opportunity on the rural south coast

Replace segregated living patterns with truly integrated and balanced living patterns

Employ place-based strategies to encourage community conservation and revitalization

Transform racially and ethnically concentrated areas of poverty into areas of opportunity

Protect existing residents from displacement



Neighborhoods at risk of displacement associate

improvement with destruction and displacement.



**Sara Zewde, Assistant Professor of Practice
Harvard University's Graduate School of Design**

Does our current approach to housing in the rural south coast, with no particular strategy or organization, no particular “recipe” for inclusion, really align with the Coastal Commission mission?

The Commission is committed to protecting and enhancing California’s coast and ocean for present and future generations. It does so through careful planning and regulation of environmentally-sustainable development, rigorous use of science, strong public participation, education, and effective intergovernmental coordination.³⁵

The very word “landscape” evokes a picture, a framed view to be seen, enjoyed, and preserved from outside, but not experienced within.

Speaking with Brian Melley of the Associated Press, Stanford historian Richard White says Muir’s very conception of wilderness bakes in racial bias. Muir’s “unblighted, unredeemed wilderness” in which the “galling harness of civilization drops off” was only possible through the erasure of America’s Indigenous peoples, whose villages and way of life had been destroyed. For Muir, Native Americans “seemed to have no right place in the landscape.”

There is a dark underside here that will not be erased

by just saying Muir was a racist,” White tells the AP. “I would leave Muir’s name on things but explain that, as hard as it may be to accept, it is not just Muir who was racist. The way we created the wilderness areas we now rightly prize was racist.³⁶

Many conservation agencies are rethinking their approach to activism in light of this reckoning with the past. The Sierra Club, and other traditional “conservation” model organizations have to grapple with the history of John Muir and other founders who not only did not see the grandchildren of the indigenous inhabitants as part of the vision for the future, but really any inhabitants of the landscape at all.

“The Muir ideal of the lone white man at one with nature in the wilderness excludes all kinds of people from that relationship,” said Jon Christensen, an environmental historian and professor at the University of California, Los Angeles.

“That ideal has caused a lot of damage.”

There are real efforts to prioritize urban access to neighborhood parks and trails, said Yvette Lopez-Ledesma, the Urban to Wild director for the Wilderness Society, rather than thinking of wilderness as Muir did – as a far-off place to escape to.

“Conservation, when we professionalize it, it is a very white space,” said Ms. Lopez-Ledesma, whose grandmother “hiked her way” to the United States from Mexico. “But culturally, conservation, that’s what we do. That’s just who we are as people.”

“Brown has been very green for a very long time,”

she said.³⁷

Do we choose to manage the landscape in a sustainable, forward-thinking way, and what does that look like? Is it possible to rethink our approach without repeating the exploitative mistakes of the past? Kat Kerlin notes in “Rethinking Fire”:

Before the Gold Rush, an estimated 4.5 million acres burned annually in California. In the early 1900s, the U.S. Forest Service adopted a policy of fire suppression that stayed in place for nearly 70 years. Native Americans, ranchers and private landowners could be fined for conducting burns on their properties. Since the 1970s, fire has gradually been reintroduced to the landscape but only at a fraction of what once occurred.

As wildfires and smoke events upend life in California year after year, some of the same entities that once banned Native Americans from cultural burns are now looking to them for advice. The proposition is sensitive and one that demands reciprocity, not just another opportunity to take from Native people...

“I think it’s really important that we don’t think about traditional burning in a context where Native people are again being extracted from, such as sharing their knowledge about how to care for a place when they’re still federally unrecognized and don’t have land within their homeland,” said course instructor Beth Rose Middleton Manning, a professor in the UC Davis Department of Native American Studies. “So we’re teaching and learning from each other, but we’re also investing in justice so people can protect their homelands and cultural places.”³⁸

Manning was speaking in the context of a state-wide program run by UC Davis; the Amah Mutsun are federally recognized, while the Ramaytush and the Muwekma Ohlone are not. The importance of not being able to find affordable housing options for fire tenders, and of including this topic in the conversation around the future of housing in the area remains. Should only teachers and farm workers have access to affordable housing, or does access need to be

wider?

There is an additional important group that has not had a voice in the process to date. Prior to World War II, there were a number of local farm families of Japanese descent, shown in this photo from 1928.³⁹ Continuing the violent history of forcible removal and dispossession, these families were rounded up at the Native Sons Hall on Stage Road (which until then had served as a Japanese cultural center) and shipped to internment camps to wait out World War II. Although the Native Sons Hall remains standing downtown, little of this period of history is noted or marked on the landscape of the town.

The Half Moon Bay Review recently published an article about an internment camp in Pacifica, noting the shocked surprise of residents to find that signs of this disturbing history were still in their own neighborhoods:

The capacity fluctuated between 450 to 1,200 people, but at one time it held 2,500 German, Italian and Japanese internees. The camp was manned by armed guards and surrounded by 10-foot-high fences topped with barbed wire and five watchtowers. Quonset huts were originally used before barracks were built. The barracks were destroyed after the war. One of the Quonset huts was moved onto Carmel Avenue and is a classroom at the Pacifica Co-op Nursery School.

This photo of local Japanese immigrant families in traditional dress was taken by Dorothy Regnery of Portola Valley and dated Christmas of 1928. The background is the Native Sons Hall, which was at that time the Methodist-Episcopal Church.⁵³





This photo taken in 1934 shows the original steeple still in place, when the Native Sons Hall was the Methodist-Episcopal Church.⁵⁴

Today, you'd be hard-pressed to find any clues of the internment camp in the overgrown vegetation now adjacent to the San Francisco Archers Club...

"We didn't know this was even here," Olivolo said. "It got to me. Why weren't we told? We should have been told. People need to know. I found it very disturbing that we didn't even know about it."⁴⁰

The historical context lost in Pacifica points to the yawning gap in context lost in Pescadero. The Native Sons Hall, which played a key role in the local experience of World War II and the traumatic displacement and dispossession of local families, shows no sign of this history. Most days it stands empty, a silent monument of an extraordinary loss, every year slumping closer to a tipping point of extreme disrepair.



Honor Community Values, History & Character in the Planning Process



Look for ways to make community history more visible, and remember significant stories, honor community members, and celebrate contributions from the full rainbow of residents. Residents who don't see themselves recorded or reflected in the landscape rightly fear displacement; residents who see their stories everywhere are more secure.



Assess opportunities to record Pescadero and other relevant spaces of the south coast as a "cultural landscape" or special district.



Create a Specific Area Plan or Special Planning District to apply the characteristics the community has been asking for, to ensure that new structures complement the character of the town.



Follow a collaborative process with community members, farmers, and small businesses to develop wayfinding for Businesses/Safe Routes to School, based on Design Guide process.

IN CASE OF EMERGENCY

Climate change is happening. Floods, fires, and severe storms will happen more and more frequently, and infrastructure investments are critical.

Managing emergency response is already a deeply ingrained part of life on the rural south coast, but the increasing frequency and severity of events and the inevitability of emergency response must be included in how and where the community plans to build housing.

Unlike a city, where long-established utilities are often located next to or even already on a given plot, the first question for any rural building project is “where will the water come from?” Followed immediately by, “where will the power come from?” And inevitably, “where will the wastewater and trash go?”

Whether water is being pumped from a creek or a well, the pumps themselves all require power. If you have no power, at some point you have no water, either. In urban areas, losing power means losing your air conditioning and whatever melts in your freezer. In some cases, people with fragile medical situations need assistance. For all rural areas in California, where wildfire is now a year-round threat, no power also means no water to fight fires in case of emergency, and can mean the difference in losing your home. Dealing with medical emergencies as a result of no power is also complicated by the distance to services in rural areas.

When the power goes out, the cable internet system has an hour or so of battery backup. In suburban

communities, a truck would arrive shortly and begin to sort out the cause of the power outage. However, in the south coast region, it may take an hour for a truck to drive to the source of the power outage, much less begin a repair. In areas where there is no cellular coverage, home wifi systems would normally fill the connection gap by connecting phones to the internet to complete calls. When the power goes out, these Wi-Fi systems go down, and the San Mateo County emergency text alert system becomes useless to anyone in a coverage gap.

So the next thing a homeowner must consider is power. The south coast region has always been out at the end of the power lines, where any one tree along the miles of redwood forest can take down a power line on a good weather day, and during a storm season, power can be out for days. Recently, the addition of Public Safety Power Shutoffs implemented by PG&E mean that residents are not only impacted by regular lengthy outages in the winter, but can also be impacted by power outages for days at a time during summer

The combination of summer and fall fires and wet winter weather also leads to regular risk of mudslides, which can block roads for many hours or days.

A single large tree falling during any season can—and regularly does—block a road and/or shut off power and

access for hours at a time, even when there is no particular weather or wind event.

PG&E also regularly shuts off power for PSPS events in the summer and fall to reduce the risk of the elevated wires sparking a wildfire.



and fall's peak fire season, with or without notice.

The recently released Coastside Recovery Report noted

*Parts of the Coastside, such as Pescadero, have been designated as “difficult to access and at higher risk of catastrophic wildfire.” As a result, PG&E has adjusted the settings on power lines to ultra-cautious. Two squirrels on a power line can cause it to be switched off until a low-flying helicopter can check every section of line to ensure conditions are safe. The lack of adequate digital infrastructure and power outages are threats to the region’s future economic growth and competitiveness. Fragile broadband and cellular connectivity pose grave threats during natural hazards, which in the Coastside region can be anything from flood and landslide, fire, tsunami, or an earthquake.*⁴¹

PG&E protocols require that each time the lines shut down, crews must visually inspect the lines. Some of that can be done by helicopter, and some must be done by crews on foot in heavily wooded areas, and only during daylight hours.

The solution for many is to purchase and install generators, which are noisy, expensive, require an electrician, and usually run on diesel, emitting clouds of noxious blue smoke that drift between the houses. Solar and batteries are a solution in some cases, if redwood trees don't block solar access and if batteries are available, but only for those who are willing and able to shoulder the steep investment these systems require. The state has a program for providing additional rebates to homeowners in Wildland-Urban-Interface (WUI) areas with electric well pumps to support purchases of battery backup systems, but few know about it, and the program regularly runs out of money almost as soon as it opens.

It's not just individuals that need to invest in hardening their homes against flooding, fire, and severe storms, but public infrastructure. In April, the California Legislature's own advisors released [a series of six reports](#)⁴² outlining the potential economic

disruption climate change may cause. According to a summary published in CalMatters:

- *Wildfires, heat and floods will force more frequent school closures, disrupting education, child care and availability of free school lunches. More than 1,600 schools temporarily closed because of wildfires each year between 2017 and 2020, affecting nearly a million students a year.*

- *Workers in outdoor industries like agriculture, construction, forestry and recreation – 10% of California’s workforce and mostly made up of Latinos – will continue to bear the brunt of extreme heat and smoke.*

- *Wildfire smoke may have killed about 20 people among every 100,000 older Californians in 2020, and is projected to become more deadly. A 50% increase in smoke could kill nine to 20 more people among every 100,000 each year.*

- *Housing, rail lines, bridges, ports, power plants, freeways and other structures are vulnerable to rising seas and tides. “Between \$8 billion and \$10 billion of existing property in California is likely to be underwater by 2050, with an additional \$6 billion to \$10 billion at risk during high tide.”*

- *Extreme heat is projected to cause nine deaths per 100,000 people each year, “roughly equivalent to the 2019 annual mortality rate from automobile accidents in California.”*

- *Lower-income Californians, who live in communities at greater risk for heat and floods because of discriminatory housing practices, will be hit especially hard by climate change and have fewer resources to adapt.*

- *Housing will be lost: For example, in the San Francisco Bay Area alone, 13,000 existing housing units and 104,000 job spaces “will no longer be usable” because of sea rise over the next next 40 to 100 years.*

Beaches will disappear, too: Up to two-thirds of Southern California beaches may become completely eroded by 2100.

The report's unsaid but unambiguous conclusion: Climate change could alter everything, and spare no one in California, so legislators should consider preparing for sweeping impacts.

ADAPTING TO “NEW NORMAL”

The Pescadero Elementary campus is entirely within CSA-11, making LHPUSD the largest landowner within the Urban-Rural/CSA-11 boundary. But according to the Half Moon Bay Review,

Since the 2014-15 school year, enrollment in California public schools has steadily declined as a result of a drop in overall population, lower birth rates, and some families with children leaving the state. Over the past two years, enrollments across the state dropped by more than 4 percent...La Honda-Pescadero Unified School District reported a total enrollment of 257 at the end of August, a drop of about 5 percent from last year.⁴³

With a very large campus relative to the size of the student body, and the high school campus at a strategic central location for emergency preparedness, the district is a very important stakeholder in both town and regional planning.

Despite providing the de facto disaster response center for the community, LHPUSD has no strategic facilities plan to adapt to the climate crisis.

The LHPUSD is not alone in this—according to a recent article in the Washington Post,

In the 2021 Report Card for America's Infrastructure—data released every four years by the American Society of Civil Engineers—school buildings were given the grade of D-plus. Of the approximately 84,000 public schools in the United States, 4 in 10 don't have a long-term facility plan, the report states. Over half of public school districts report the need to upgrade or replace multiple buildings as well as HVAC systems, and more than one third of public schools

have students in portable buildings of which nearly half are in poor or fair condition. A separate report last year warned that “the state of our schools is a national emergency” and found that infrastructure improvements were underfunded by \$85 billion.⁴⁴

The same article advises:

The best case scenario is also an impossible one: Many public school buildings need to be rebuilt, moved or significantly retrofitted. At a minimum, that will take time, Until then, we should at least make sure that students don't miss so many days because of a climate event,” says Kevin Kupietz, a chair of the department of aviation and emergency management at Elizabeth City State University in North Carolina.⁴⁵

In the case of the LHPUSD, there is already a bond fund for construction at the high school, but without a better understanding of the changing demographics of the school system, it's hard for the community to make informed decisions about planning for the future.

The high school has been without potable drinking water for years, and it has taken the potential construction of a fire station to leverage aid from the county to extend water from CSA-11. Even if all goes well with that plan, the school won't have water until 2024. If the plan runs into obstacles, it could take longer.

If the district finds that demographic trends will lead to a similar or smaller student body in the coming decades, it may make sense to consider consolidating some facilities to reduce the amount of budget spent maintaining them. The district may also look for ways to leverage community partnerships to share some spaces for other community uses. For example, San Mateo Community College system provides community access to gym, pool, and recreation facilities to community members for a fee, which helps offset costs.

Programs like this require time and money invested

for research and planning. Even so, planning, funding and construction of new facilities or changes to facilities could take 10-15 years or more. LHPUSD is currently evaluating a facilities plan provided by Schoolworks, Inc to budget for deferred maintenance. However, this “strategic” facilities plan does not make recommendations about adapting to climate change, or more frequent emergencies.

Ultimately, understanding the direction of the LHPUSD will have far greater impact on the next Housing Element, rather than an immediate impact on the 2023 Housing Element. The primary impact to the 2023 Housing Element is to evaluate whether the county can assist the school in funding the planning process, through a wider Community Planning initiative.

LHPUSD must be a partner in planning and design for community resiliency and equity

The draft facilities plan recently issued by Schoolworks, Inc for LHPUSD includes cost estimates for deferred maintenance and demographic projections for the next five years or so. But the district should continue to rigorously evaluate plans as birth projections become available each year. According to recent data becoming available for 2021, enrollment projections may be higher than actual births and actual population trends suggest.

This plan should be rigorously evaluated in intervals of 8-16 years as each new Housing Element identifies opportunities for new housing.

LHPUSD should collaborate with the county in an open, transparent process

with the community, ideally guided by professional facilitators, to design a second, complimentary “resiliency hub” at the southeast end of town around the new fire station. This process should be designed to incorporate community feedback and meaningfully involve all community stakeholders.

LHPUSD already functions as an evacuation center and activity hub in emergencies. LHPUSD, the county, and the community need to prioritize ideas that have been raised in past community meetings that would be complementary with an evacuation center, including a health clinic, a laundromat, microgrid, electric car charging stations, clean water, publicly accessible toilets/showers, along with community equity projects like a publicly accessible swimming pool.

A professional planning process facilitated by landscape architects or planners familiar with rural projects can help evaluate options, as well as identify additional grants and funding sources now, while they can be incorporated into the construction plans for the high school. That might include wastewater treatment system(s), Safe Routes to School funds for street upgrades, sidewalks and trails (connecting the high school to the ocean where POST is planning their Coastal Trail Project), and climate resiliency funds earmarked for community “resiliency hubs”.

Assess the school’s need for workforce housing in the context of the new Resiliency Hub.

The district needs housing for teachers. Can the rules for farmworker housing on Prime Ag land be used to build teacher housing on the Prime Ag land around the school? Can land at the elementary school be used for teacher housing? Can land at the La Honda Elementary campus be used for teacher housing?

These questions are fraught, and can really only be explored with the community once residents have more information about the school’s changing demographics and the county’s plan for housing.

Explore planning for two complementary “Resiliency Hubs” for East & West ends of town to manage for fire and water emergencies

A professional community engagement process to understand how park & plaza projects work together or separately can also evaluate opportunities to establish a second “emergency resiliency hub” downtown. This might include public wi-fi, multi-use building/shelter, microgrid, electric car charging, publicly accessible restrooms, flood control in the creek, and other disaster preparedness planning. Research needs to be done about how these ideas would function, how they could be incorporated into park/plaza projects, how much they would cost. This type of preparation could help residents and community members thoughtfully evaluate how to balance these ideas between the two projects, or if they make sense for a different project (such as the old fire station property.) Openly and transparently evaluating these options will lead to positive community engagement and support for implementation.

SINGLE FAMILY ZONING

The Housing Element process, which outlines the county’s policy for developing new housing over the next eight years, and serves as a legally binding commitment to fulfill those plans, concludes in January 2023 and will have important implications for the ability to meet the housing needs of people and small businesses in an agritourism-focused economy on the south coast.

As the participants noted in the 2019 workshop, “we all come together in disasters and emergencies.” No one community member, business, or non-profit in the rural south coast has the means to take on the tangled regulatory, planning, and funding issues that stand in the way of adding housing across all three categories needed: workforce housing, market rentals, and paths to ownership.

The glacially slow pace of processing building permits for repairs and renovations of existing structures in rural San Mateo County is even more vitally important to address now, as severe weather and other acts of nature are expected to occur closer together and potentially with increasing severity. Property owners, including and perhaps especially landlords, need clear guidelines to be able to respond quickly, to either make needed repairs, or upgrades to water and power systems, before the next disaster occurs.

State lawmakers have recently tried to address the state-wide housing crisis⁴⁶ by giving owners of *single*



A photo of The San Gregorio House taken in 1973 for the Planning Department, and included in the application for National Register status. The San Gregorio House is now private housing.

family zoned properties the explicit right to split their home into a duplex (SB9) or add an accessory dwelling unit, or “ADU”. Some local jurisdictions have tried to find their way around these new laws, and the state primarily relies on grass-roots housing advocacy organizations to notify them when enforcement issues arise.

Neither the attorney general nor the housing department [HCD] is dispensing their limited resources to track the local city council and planning meetings in which duplex law-related ordinances unfold, and in which city council members say things like, “What we’re trying to do here is to mitigate the impact of what we believe is a ridiculous state law.”

Instead, they depend largely on advocates and local journalists to report on the shenanigans. That’s how Bonta’s office found out about Woodside, a Silicon Valley town that claimed immunity from the duplex-law because the town, in its entirety, was a mountain lion habitat. A local paper first reported the story, and it went viral on Twitter—where many YIMBY activists pointed to Cougar Town as a poster child of the NIMBY (“not in my backyard”) mindset. Several news stories later, Bonta wrote the city a letter, and Woodside reversed course.”⁴⁷

Woodside has traditional single family zoning, and is

outside the boundaries of the Coastal Commission, so must comply with SB9. However for Pescadero, within the bounds of the Coastal Zone, and for surrounding areas with agricultural or resource management zoning, laws like SB9 don’t apply.

It’s important to take another brief step back in history to acknowledge the chilling history of single-family zoning in California:

Single-family zoning, which SB9 seeks to eliminate, has deeply racist roots. Originally introduced in Berkeley in 1916, the designation was used to block a Black-owned dance hall from moving into a primarily white neighborhood. The zoning not only precluded the dance hall, but also multi-family units more commonly occupied by people of color.

Single-family zoning was quickly adopted by cities across the United States. So to many California housing advocates, eliminating what they call “exclusionary zoning” is a symbolic and necessary act.

“This is about getting rid of symbols of segregation and racism,” said Kendra Noel Lewis, executive director of Sacramento’s Housing Alliance, which supports a similar local zoning change to allow duplexes, triplexes and fourplexes throughout the city.⁴⁸

Before jurisdictions across the state implemented single family zoning, agricultural communities were full of multi-family arrangements, whether it was several generations or branches of family living together, or families of workers living on a property with the owners. There is a long rural tradition of clustered multi-family housing.

However, after World War II, single-family zoning and other zoning types based on single-family, began to seriously encroach. The 1976 Community Plan shows this (see “1976” on page 77.)

According to Dave Schleicher, a professor at Yale Law School and very wordy expert in land use law, in the Yale Law Review:

But zoning procedure sets up all sorts of hurdles limiting the ability of small developers to buy zoning

approval. Getting a project through the City Planning Commission (or the multiple steps in places with ULURP-like processes) takes a lot of time and requires hiring lots of lawyers, specialists and city planners. A way to characterize this development process is that it generates both fixed and variable taxes for getting a zoning change of any sort. Whatever the content of your proposed change, you have to pay a “tax” – in time, actual outlays, revised plans, and risk – to get it through the city planning apparatus.⁴⁹

In other words, the planning process in San Mateo County that requires so many specialist reports and add-on fees essentially creates an additional “tax” of time, risk, and unanticipated additional fees to any project is not unusual. It’s part of a larger model of land use law that puts the burden for each additional layer of reports, revisions, and unanticipated fees on individual applicants.

The process the WHO went through to explore the Warheit site for housing is an example of how this burden falls unequally on a rural community of primarily volunteers, who must find a way to navigate an endless loop of grant applications to fund the process. Even finding what assistance is available from agencies for this process requires time and resources from volunteers. San Mateo County has, recently, formed a task force to allocate paid staff time to help explore potential sites for farmworker housing.

However, San Mateo County needs to do a better job of understanding how much “tax” in time, professional fees, and specialists are involved in the permit process and how that can be reasonably streamlined for affordable housing that provides a community-wide benefit.

Institutional landowners like POST and MidPen could also benefit from lending support to infill housing projects within the Pescadero Urban-Rural Boundary, that will not only locate the families of workers closer to services, transportation, and schools, but are less likely to be blocked by endan-

gered species or other site conditions in greenfield development projects.

PLANNING CAPACITY

The San Mateo County planning and building departments are woefully understaffed, but this is a two-fold problem. First, *streamlining the permit process itself* is a key way to reduce both the workload for planning staff and the amount of time it takes applicants to correctly and completely file for a permit. *Reducing the hours required for county staff to process each permit also fees up time for planning staff to work on other priorities.*

The permitting process in San Mateo County is not designed to be transparent or adhere to any kind of schedule. Timelines for different styles of permit are vague, and apply *only once the permit is correctly and completely filed.*

There are no defined boundaries to the process for applicants, so staff can continue to provide round after round of comments in a piecemeal and serial fashion. What transparency the county provides, tracking permit completion times, does nothing to surface the amount of time permit applicants go through just trying to get the permit filed in the first place. What records the county keeps of how long applicants spend in the process begin *only once the permit is correctly and completely filed.*

Merely submitting a permit application can be needlessly complex, subjective, and expensive. Many existing structures in the rural south county date from between 1880 and 1950, and include unusual building features like hand-made windows and redwood milled on site in the early 1900’s. This makes upgrading them a complicated and often heartbreaking process, as often county regulations encourage removing or demolishing these features, or the whole home, to meet regulations more easily and have better visibility into how long the permit process will take.

Dave Schleicher describes, in a very Yale way, how

this drives “downzoning” or deterring gentle increases in density:

*The combination of seriatim decisionmaking and these political “taxes” generates the dynamics of the politics of downzoning. If the tax is a fixed cost, it will not deter big projects with large profit margins from moving forward.*⁵⁰

In other words—as many locals who didn’t attend Yale have observed—wealthy individual and institutional private landowners can afford to wait out the excruciatingly extended permit process, so large single family homes continue to eventually get built. Law changes over the past 25 years have made upgrading old homes a fraught and uncertain process. Because the Planning department addresses issues one at a time, or *seriatim*—in a series—there’s no “big picture” approach to simplifying or rationalizing the planning process. In Pescadero, Butano, and San Gregorio, all within the Local Coastal Program zone, homeowners and small business owners are therefore subject to paying this unspoken “tax” of time, risk, revised plans, additional unexpected outlays, permit fees and special exemption fees Schleicher describes to complete even small renovations.

As long as there is no up-front strategy to create incentives for a different approach, planning decisions will be made piecemeal, one property at a time, with inconsistent results, and small businesses are less likely to take on the burden of such process:

*But it will deter small or more marginal developers from applying for changes to allow granny flats or small new buildings in a neighborhood. Downzonings matter because they stop landowners from engaging in small-bore redevelopment that they would have engaged in if their building was as of right or if they could easily buy the right to build.*⁵¹

More clarity in the county planning process about the right for business owners to build second floor apartments and for homeowners to add ADUs (Accessory Dwelling Units, or “granny flats” as Schleicher refers to them) would lead to more people building them.

The county doesn’t even need to address the rules across the entire south coast, where rural zoning and the Local Coastal Plan complicate housing: a substantial impact could be made just by looking at ways to increase ADU’s and second floor apartments within the already existing Urban-Rural Boundary of Pescadero. Facilitating ADU’s in La Honda could have an impact as well, especially in Cuesta La Honda where there is a large existing water system. Adding housing within these boundaries also takes advantage of existing resources, like access to groceries, a county bus stop, and the ability for kids to walk to school.

The efficiency and timing of the permit process could also be improved by hiring additional planning and building staff, as well as providing more training about the special requirements and conditions that apply to permits on the rural south coast.

Permit fees in general need to be re-evaluated for equity and accessibility as well. The system now relies on overly complicated formulas for the value of a project rather than clearly posted flat fees for ADUs and farmworker housing.

However, the location of the county offices has an additional impact on the cost and accessibility of permits. It is a one hour drive over the mountain from Pescadero to the County Center offices in Redwood City, and at least 35 minutes from La Honda. To travel to County Center requires a personal vehicle, as there is no direct public transportation to County Center from the rural south coast. Even the new public transit plans only provide for the ability to schedule transportation to Half Moon Bay with advance notice, and there is no option at all from La Honda. It requires a minimum of half a day to visit the office, which is only available on weekdays.

Navigating a permit can require numerous trips in person to resolve the difficulties that arise from permit requirements that are conflicting or unclear. Establishing a small office on the coastside, staffed by someone bilingual, with experience and training appropriate to processing coastside permits (under-

standing that all properties have septic systems, for example) is key to providing more equitable access to the county permit process. This type of access is important for homeowners navigating the process of adding an ADU, a farmer or farmworker with questions about farmworker housing, or a small business owner legalizing an apartment.

IMPROVING ACCESS

A small office on the coastside would also provide a representative of the county an opportunity to work more closely with Puente, the Pescadero Municipal Advisory Committee and potentially the new Farmworker Affairs Committee (FAC) to facilitate communication with the county about projects in line with the community's needs.

Create a Specific Plan to streamline permitting and commit the funding and staffing necessary to reduce permit approval times.



Identify stock plans, pre-fab units, and any other options that can be “pre-approved” within the guidelines developed in the Specific Plan.



Homeowners with lots within the limits of the Specific Plan Area should be able to get same-day approval “over the counter” for their ADU, if they choose a “pre-approved” building plan.



Develop a “no-fault” amnesty program for legalizing pre-existing in-law units or ADUs, with a goal of encouraging repairs and sustainability/community resilience upgrades like roofing, batteries, energy-efficient windows, etc.



Collaborate with non-profit partners like Puente and The Pescadero Foundation to connect homeowners with bank funding/loan assistance.



Identify and connect homeowners with other non-profit organizations that can assist with technical information, expertise, investment, and volunteer labor, within the framework of the Design Guide or Specific Plan (see “RESOURCES” on page 82.)



The county should proactively educate homeowners on ADU reg’s, in-law units, lot splits, renting, duplexes, amnesty for pre-existing units (“Establish a Local Housing” on page 61) ideally bilingual.



Commit to providing the funding and staffing necessary to the Planning & Building Department to handle realistic volume of permits.



The Planning & Building Department need to publicly and transparently report the average time from filing to approval for different types of permits (i.e. basic repair vs remodel vs ADU or addition) and include the time from the first attempt to file to the actual complete filing date.

Establish a Local Housing Resource Center

One way for the county to make an impact on housing on the south coast is to **establish a bilingual Housing Resource Center in Pescadero**, where rural south coast residents can get assistance locally during daytime business hours with understanding county procedures & programs, expediting permits, and communicating with county staff about local conditions and needs.

This office should be based in Pescadero to be as accessible as possible to agricultural workers and small businesses, who otherwise can spend half a day or a whole day (depending on access to transportation) accessing county services. Just one or two days a week

could make a difference.

The Housing Resource Center should also be used to display current information about county plans for the region in all appropriate languages, including any plans for park or plaza, as well as information about permits for ADU's, in-law units, and other means of adding housing.

In The Coastside Recovery Report, “Team Vibrant” recommended:

Support formation of a new, professional staff role or increased capacity to drive economic and community development projects in Pescadero.

The need for a dedicated staff role or for increased capacity to drive economic and community development projects is not new. In fact, these needs were documented in the report for the town planning process described earlier with a recommendation to hire a full-time housing design, entitlements, permitting and construction project manager for a three-year term at The Pescadero Foundation. There is no other local agency whose mission is economic and community development in the area. This type of work is not within Puente de la Costa Sur’s strategic plan and although the Half Moon Bay Coastside Chamber of Commerce serves the South Coast, it does not have a physical office in the area. Some County programs and services also have limited visibility in the area.

Pescadero had a vulnerable economy and tenuous social cohesion before the pandemic. Now, in the face of increasing climate disasters, economic uncertainty, and the pandemic-that-will-not-end, the area is extremely fragile. There is an opportunity to invest in capacity that will revitalize the Pescadero community and its public spaces so that the area can contribute to the vibrancy of the Coastside and greater San Mateo County.⁵⁵



Establish a paid staff position to run the Housing Resource Center, as well as to drive economic and community development projects through the approval process, as recom-

mended by the Coastside Recovery Initiative.⁵⁶



The paid staff person would also provide support for PMAC (and could also support the potential new Farmworker Affairs Committee, another proposed advisory group), facilitating communication with the Board of Supervisors. This person could work directly with small business owners and farmers on the coastside to deeply understand business conditions and how the county can better streamline services and incubate agriculture-related microbusinesses, who may need assistance with permitting.



The Housing Resource Center should have a space to host collaborative workshops with Puente and the RCD on topics like wastewater treatment options, house hardening for fire and floods, resources for emergencies like PG&E’s PSPS events and evacuations, as well as how to generate income from house hacks, building ADU’s, and splitting lots to avoid displacements after disasters.

HOUSING ELEMENT, MEET LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM

While San Mateo County is getting its marching orders for how much housing to build from the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG), it also has to balance that demand against the demands of the [California Coastal Commission](#) to preserve and protect coastal areas through the Local Coastal Program element of the General Plan.

Development within the Coastal Commission Boundary (or Coastal Zone, see “MAPPING THE CHALLENGE” on page 45) is subject to the details of this program, meaning any project must either receive a Coastal Development Permit or an explicit exemption from one. The county is in the process now of seeking a Coastal Development Permit to expand the CSA-11 water system to include the high school, which has

been without clean drinking water, trucking in bottled water for students and the school lunch program, for more than a decade.

Puente de la Costa Sur identified housing as its number one priority in their strategic plan document this year⁵⁷, and hired a full-time Housing Advocacy Director to implement this goal. In addition to advocating for healthcare and education needs in the community, Puente is focused on advocating for developing safe, quality housing for farmworker families, and educating farmworkers on tenant rights. These are critical elements of improving fair housing practices for farmworkers.

According to their strategic plan document, Puente also plans to “support two housing developments to provide affordable housing to low-income residents” and “Establish a South Coast Housing Collaborative, with diverse representation, to lead the effort to find housing solutions for the south coast.” These are important and valuable goals, but without a reliable partner at the county to turn community desires into action, housing will continue to be stymied by the permit process and by the lack of a cohesive guiding plan generated by a community process.

Navigating the web of conflicting county rules about water, wastewater, and zoning, and overlapping layers of regulatory authority may be a primary stumbling block to building housing, but so is aligning community will around a vision for Pescadero’s future. Residents made clear in the 2019 community meeting, which was attended by a broad cross-section of residents, that change – even a lot of change – was important. But Pescadero itself recently confronted a “NIMBY” (“Not In My Backyard”) dilemma.

When the school district proposed studying the idea of consolidating the Pescadero Elementary school next to the High School and exploring alternative uses for the lot on North Street, like teacher housing, local residents who live on North Street closed down the discussion. Despite a bilingual workshop of community members voting overwhelmingly for afford-

LOSING THE PESCADERO COUNTRY STORE

The Pescadero Country Store was a community market and restaurant with a wood-fired pizza oven that frequently hosted live music, until it tragically burned to the ground in 2017.

This lot is squarely in the flood way, but ironically rebuilding at ground level would be easier than redesigning a new building under current planning procedures.

A new building could likely accommodate several new market rental apartments upstairs, which would not only provide additional revenue for this business, but additional residents downtown could provide more stable business activity during the week, balancing tourism business.

Sadly, the shell of the building remains in the center of town five years later. The grassy area is still used for the weekly farmer’s market.



able housing options, homeowners from the blocks around the school opposed moving forward were able to attend one school board meeting and effectively halt discussion.

When a few local residents can oppose a housing project (saying, effectively, “Not in My Backyard”) that other local residents might support, or that displaced people might support but aren’t privileged to participate in the discussion, they are being given a tremendous amount of power in the housing conversation, at the expense of those who weren’t invited or included. As mentioned earlier, the LHPUSD is the largest landowner within CSA-11, and as the ultimate landowner, the school board has the right to hold these discussions within school board meetings. However, if the goal is to have an equitable, community-wide conversation about how to meet housing goals, with residents armed with a complete understanding of the trade-offs of various options, the LHPUSD needs to be a partner in a larger, inclusive planning process.

The North Street property is the only one within CSA-11 (meaning, with access to potable water) large enough to support multiple affordable housing units, and is now effectively off the table, unless the school board decides to reconsider.

Individual commercial enterprises that own their own buildings have the incentive to build apartments over retail to diversify their income and improve their resilience, but the current punitive and glacial planning and building process discourages business owners from investing in changes to their buildings or new buildings on the vacant lots downtown.

Other cities and towns have solved this problem by establishing “Specific

Plans” for neighborhoods with unique needs, to provide a clear permit approval process with an emphasis on over-the-counter approvals for items that meet the terms of the Specific Plan.

Redwood City created a Downtown Precise Plan in 2011⁵⁸, anticipating 10 years or more for businesses to respond, and instead the Redwood City building department was caught somewhat by surprise when the plan ignited a fury of rebuilding projects downtown. Burlingame and Menlo Park similarly adopted Specific Plans in 2010 and 2012, respectively.

Private developers and businesses--provided with a highly specific plan for building volumes, heights, materials and design, and the promise of speedy approval as long as they designed within the rules approved after years of community meetings--sprang into action to fill the gaps in these downtown plans. Lots in downtown Redwood City that only a few years ago were vacant or under built now support multi-story apartment buildings. These buildings began to house families just in time to support the businesses of downtown Redwood City, even as the new “work from home” normal starves other downtowns of regular business.

Pescadero has different needs than downtown Redwood City, and the people who live here love the bucolic historic vibe, but the process of involving the community upfront in negotiating a shared vision for these downtown areas and engaging the planning staff in creating a streamlined plan for approving projects that met the terms of the shared vision led to the kind of substantial change that residents and housing advocates were hoping for in Redwood City.



A view of the Diaz lot looking northwest towards Pescadero Road.

The same type of community-based, collaborative process could unlock the changes community members have been asking for in Pescadero and the south coast for years.

Recently, San Mateo County implemented a neighborhood-wide sewer and streetscaping project in the Fair Oaks neighborhood.

The Project consists of the following components: roadway improvements including a new traffic signal system near and including the South County Health Clinic (Clinic)/Redwood Junction driveway,

A view of the Diaz lot looking South towards Turkey Hill.



pedestrian and bicycle improvements, utility undergrounding, sanitary sewer replacement work, public WiFi along the Project corridor, and replacing the existing streetlights with a new streetlight system. The roadway improvements will reconfigure Middlefield Road between Pacific Avenue and Fifth Avenue from a four-lane roadway to a three-lane roadway (one travel lane in each direction with a center left turn lane) with parallel parking, bike lanes, and wider sidewalks. The wider sidewalks will accommodate the street amenities recommended by the North Fair Oaks Community Council (benches, trees and landscaping, streetlights, trash receptacles, street art, and public spaces) and low-impact development features for storm water quality management.⁵⁹

In the case of the Specific Plans, new zoning and streamlined permitting allowed private developers and business owners to quickly make their own building investments according to the city’s plan, while in the case of Fair Oaks, the county planned for and invested in major infrastructure improvements, including drainage, sewer replacement, lighting and streetscaping, but did not change the zoning or streamline permitting.

Both types of intervention are important for Pescadero, as the Urban-Rural Boundary makes every inch count. Investments in wastewater treatment, drainage, streetscaping and other infrastructure would revitalize the downtown neighborhood, but if not accompanied by serious future planning, environmental evaluation, and streamlined permitting, will not lead to more housing. This future planning needs to be accompanied by a serious evaluation of how Pescadero, which has historically been organized along the banks of Pescadero Creek, will handle the flooding, fires, and other inevitable acts of nature that will only increase in strength and severity as the climate crisis worsens. Local residents can’t afford to shoulder the full cost of infrastructure upgrades, including public toilets, parking, and safe lighting, which are driven by the massive weekend influx of tourists from the bay side, and no individual property

owner, volunteer-led community group, or school district has the capacity to lead this type of project.

Due to the rigidity of the Urban-Rural Boundary, and the extreme difficulty of approving development outside of it, as well as the overlapping transportation, drainage, development and planning considerations that all must be taken into account, Pescadero is a unique candidate for a Specific Plan.

Specific Plans are often used for dense downtown transportation hubs. However, as a major draw for bicyclists, motorcycle and car clubs, hikers seeking open space, marsh and beach trail access, and locals trying to walk safely to school, Pescadero presents unique challenges as a transportation hub for the coastside, providing services for the surrounding neighborhoods of Butano, San Gregorio, Loma Mar, and even La Honda.

The current process relies on individual businesses, farms, and families to bear the brunt of the time and cost for the planning process, encountering the same barriers and delays across various projects. This “tax” of time and money weighs heaviest on a community least able to afford it, and perpetuates a history of underinvestment in what used to be a vital hub for local services. This report just begins to scratch the surface of the many factors that need to be considered, and a truly robust planning process is needed to research all the factors that need to be weighed by the County and the local community in a Specific Plan. However, adopting a Specific Plan for the area that accounts for Pescadero’s special status as a multi-modal transportation hub and gateway to POST’s Coastal Trail project could unlock the ability for local business owners to add rental units and infill development within the downtown area.

PARK VS PLAZA

Among a number of vacant lots, two are key in size and location: the “Diaz Lot” at the intersection of Pescadero & Stage, owned by the heirs of Noel Diaz, and the “Haas Lot” next to historic McCormick House, with a long frontage of both downtown Stage Road at the front and the creek along the back. The large, flat grassy Haas lot at the less busy end of downtown where there is more parking on weekends has made it important for hosting barn sales and community events. The Diaz lot is at a highly visible intersection, and at least some portion of it appears to be outside of the flood way, meaning it might be possible to build structures.

In the Coastside Recovery Report issued earlier in 2022, completing the plaza project was one of the “Team Vibrant” recommendations:

Create a community plaza in Pescadero which includes space for entertainment, local businesses, and recreation.

Even before the pandemic, a well-organized and inclusive planning process documented residents’ desire for an accessible, beautiful, functional public space with features such as bathrooms, drinking fountains, trash cans, bike parking, and a playground. Residents also wanted a town plaza to be a place not just for people to gather, but also to entertain, to exchange ideas, to showcase local artisans and local businesses. The idea of a town plaza received overwhelming support earning nearly 99 percent of total votes among residents who participated in the planning process. As a result, Supervisor Don Horsley took action and set aside funding to support assessment and potential purchase of a vacant parcel for a future park or town plaza. Two vacant lots have been identified as potential sites for a town plaza that could serve as a model for climate-resilient building design, water conservation and other sustainability innovations.⁶⁰

Don Horsley has worked with local community

volunteers to allocate county funding for planning and development of one of these lots into a plaza or a park. Recently the county completed the purchase of the Diaz lot. Should it be a plaza or a park? The community's thorny questions of toilets, parking, bicycle storage for tourists, and flooding must all be addressed.

Some residents feel strongly that adding a roundabout to the hugely oversized intersection and right-of-way at Pescadero and Stage Road would calm traffic and create a sense of "arrival" and "town center" for this "one stoplight" town. Other residents feel that a park is the highest priority, with play elements and flexible market space for micro-businesses incubated in trucks, sheds, and other temporary structures.

POST is currently creating a plan to link coastal trails along Highway 1 to provide better trail access for hikers, bicyclists, and horseback riders. However, most visitors to these beach trails will pass through either Pescadero or San Gregorio. Does this coastal trail plan consider the connections with these critical nodes? Will this increase the pressure of bicycle traffic, storage, and public restrooms on these towns?

Everyone seems to agree that Pescadero is in desperate need of infrastructure like public toilets, as well as car and bicycle parking/storage for the huge influx of tourists that arrive every weekend. Some organizations are also thinking ahead about disaster resilience, where a secure community building with indoor toilets and car charging could be important elements in case of evacuations like those for CZU.

If the county is able to acquire both lots, the town may be able to achieve solutions to more challenges. Volunteers have created a website at pescaderoplaza.com to collect thoughts and opinions from residents.

All of these discussions are important, and none address the thornier issue of integrating more housing into the downtown core. Commercial lots have historically been important contributors to market rental housing, accommodating apartments

on the second floor. The Diaz lot in particular appears to be all or partway outside the floodway. It is, therefore, one of just a few lots capable of supporting both desperately needed commercial space for incubating local agricultural micro businesses and artisans, as well as potentially supporting second floor apartment space. An updated Site Analysis of the town comparing the revised flood way with other planning restrictions would be helpful for community members to evaluate these options in light of other opportunities and restrictions within CSA-11.

Can the Diaz lot be both a park and a commercial space? Is it safe to put a park with play space at a commercial intersection? Or is the Haas lot a better space for play and a community building, or a farmer's market space? These difficult questions with many moving parts deserve a thorough planning process that will allow the community to fully consider the trade-offs.

What remains to be seen is if the community can successfully apply the lessons learned from the 2019 community process: (1) professional preparation and community outreach to all constituencies, (2) an open, inclusive community engagement process that balances the many voices involved, and (3) professional documentation that records the results in a meaningful way.

The county should allocate funds for a Meaningful, Open, and Interactive process for intentional community design supported by professional analysis and community outreach

The county has included funds for a planning process of some kind, but it remains unclear what the

scope of planning will be, and how inclusive the process will be of the community. The area has been under-served for decades, and planning for a plaza or park is a wonderful start to meeting some of the community's needs, but cannot possibly address them all. There needs to be a formal, guided community process to choose which elements to address with a plaza or park project, which elements need to be prioritized for other types of projects, and how they will impact future housing opportunities.

The county should hire a planning firm with experience working in under-served agricultural communities to create an overall special district plan for Pescadero.

The goal of the plan should be to provide professional outreach support to elicit community participation review the requests from the community and assess opportunities for joint grants and projects where needs and stakeholders overlap.

The result should be a map of potential projects for funding, including the Park Project, the Plaza Project, a Resiliency Hub at the High School, and the creek/street/bridge/trail connections needed to tie them together.

In this way, the community conversation around the new community space won't be derailed by the fear that this project will be the only infrastructure investment the town will see. Residents will be able to understand the larger picture, and how a park or plaza would contribute to the whole. The county, likewise, could begin to budget for future projects like wastewater treatment, storm water management, sidewalks and outdoor lighting—questions that will come up in the course of any park or plaza design, but may be outside the scope of an individual lot, and will impact the town as a whole.

The 2019 process was guided by a collaboration between Puente, The Pescadero Community Foundation and other community groups. This is a good model for a community partner to provide the type of local engagement that can make a professional planning process successful.

The community meetings that took place in 2004 and 2019 have demonstrated that the capability for community outreach exists, if the funds can be found to support the planning work. However, the 2019 process also showed the benefit of the research, maps, and planning support from professional landscape architects and planners in organizing a productive community conversation, as well as the benefit of professional bilingual outreach and community organizers in facilitating the event itself.

A professional planning organization can put in the work needed up front to guide a public conversation about which needs can be met with a park project and which are appropriate for a plaza project, and any coordinating elements like transportation nodes. A professional planning partner can also help identify grants and partners for stakeholders to collaborate on multi-use infrastructure investments.

The south coast deserves a comparable level of investment in professional planning support as other historically under-invested communities like Fair Oaks.



Employ county resources to meaningfully explore collaboration with POST and State Parks for a trail from the High School to the Ocean, in conjunction with POST's Coastal Trail project.



Analyze opportunities to improve connection, circulation, and flood control, while improving access to the creek and marsh for the community and visitors.



Invest in evaluating the causes of flooding and impacts to development to the com-

munity as a whole, as well as the potential impacts of sea level rise to the current “urban-rural” boundary line.



Assess opportunities for bioswales, stormwater capture, other flood control into the community space project, as well as any sidewalk/street modifications, bicycle trail connections through town, or future park/trail connections.



Include realistic plans to manage the impact and opportunities of tourism on the community, including integrating Infrastructure for visitors (toilets, trash, car and bicycle parking, etc.)



Evaluate options and opportunities for small package wastewater, constructed wetlands, public charging stations, microgrids, etc, to enhance resilience.



Assess resilience of current lighting and water system in light of new opportunities, and whether management should be consolidated.



Evaluate vacant lots and sites that are or may become available for affordable housing in the context of the town’s expressed wishes in the Community Design process, and the opportunities in the Resiliency Hubs.



CHRONOLOGY*

2023

Housing and Community Development Deadline

The Housing Element must be reviewed and approved by the HCD by January, 2023.

The proposed [San Mateo County Housing Element](#)

2022

Coastal Trail Survey Begins

Peninsula Open Space Trust begins public outreach for a continuous trail along the coastside with its [Coastal Trail Survey](#). POST engaged Zander Design Landscape Architecture & Planning to design the project.

2021

February, 2021 Coastside Recovery Initiative Launched

City of Half Moon Bay leads a task force of representatives from farms, businesses, school districts, colleges, park districts, etc throughout the south coast to develop recommendations for recovering from the economic hardships exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

San Mateo County Housing Element Process Begins

San Mateo County begins work on revising the Housing Element of its General Plan. The Housing Element must be reviewed and approved by the HCD by January, 2023. [San Mateo County Housing Element](#)

Puente Strategic Plan Released

[Puente Strategic Plan](#)

Coastside Recovery Report Released

[Coastside Recovery Report](#)

* This Chronology is incomplete. More research and interviews of local housing advocates are required to ensure completeness and accuracy, but this is a start. If you have something to add to the timeline, email greenwoodkelly3@gmail.com

2020

August
CZU Fire
Evacuation

Farmworker
Affairs Coalition
formed

The Farmworker Affairs Coalition (FAC) arose as a collaboration between citizen volunteers and community representatives in 2020, with initial goals responding to the pandemic, including the organization of ongoing bilingual education on Covid-19 prevention and response, provide ongoing testing during non-working hours in accessible locations, providing PPE, especially N-95 masks, coordinating access to resources in the event of a positive test, including housing assistance, food assistance, transportation to services, and financial support, and encouraging census participation.⁶² Matthew Chidester Brae Hunter & Lena Silberman, Supervisor Don Horsley's Office, Judith Gurrero, Coastside Hope CEO Lauren Silberman, Rudy Espinoza-Murray, Victoria Sanchez De Alba

March
Covid-19
Pandemic

2019

August
"Planning for
Equity"
Pescadero Town
Planning Report

[Planning for Equity Report](#)

March 17
Town Planning
Meeting held at
Pescadero Ele-
mentary

"217 people attended the Town Planning Gathering at Pescadero Elementary School on March 17, 2019. ... Shay Barton and Monica Resendiz, served as keynote speakers, addressing attendees eloquently about their desire for "net zero" housing (buildings where energy generation and use are equal) and their experiences growing up in Pescadero. Attendees then moved out-of-doors to participate in a facilitated community activity designed to meet each other despite language barriers by mixing groups of English, Spanish and bilingual speakers. This endeavor was very well received... attendees heard a brief history of planning efforts in Pescadero and an explanation of the selection process of 25 ideas ...Area residents then voted on the [most popular ideas raised in the focus groups.](#)"⁶¹

2018

July 18, 2018
Fall Creek
Engineering
Proposal

[Fall Creek Engineering Proposal](#)

A proposal and cost estimate for a wastewater treatment feasibility study for the town of Pescadero. "The feasibility study will identify the potential service area of a new centralized wastewater system that will serve the central and primarily commercial zone of the town. Once that service area is defined, FCE will identify the layout of a new sewer collection system, which will likely include a combination of gravity sewers and at least one or two pump stations. FCE will identify with the Town a potential location for a new wastewater treatment system and will evaluate up to four alternative commercially available treatment systems that could be installed to treat the water for subsequent land disposal or potential reuse at the elementary school or agricultural property in the vicinity of Town."

March 7, 2018
Sustainable
Pescadero
is formed

The Sustainable Pescadero Collaborative is an informal network of community members, business owners and leadership from The Pescadero Foundation, the La Honda-Pescadero Unified School District (LHPUSD), the Pescadero Municipal Advisory Council (PMAC), Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST), the San Mateo County Resource Conservation District (RCD), and Puente.

The group discusses issues including wastewater treatment, emergency preparedness, and housing. The group discussed organizing business owners in the Stage Road commercial zone, potentially creating a private utility district, and how to quantify total outflow for businesses so that a wastewater treatment system could be properly sized. The state Water Resources Control Board would have to review a project as well as the county. It was also discussed at this meeting that the Butano Canyon community was recently recognized by the state for having the best managed & operated small water system in the state, averaging 6000 gallons per day.

2017

October 4, 2017 Acqualogic Water Treatment pre- sents to PMAC

Acqualogic's presentation claims their product is 25% more energy efficient compared to other wastewater technologies and include integration of natural wastewater treatment systems for total water reuse. The modular system design easily adapts to spaces where others can't from building interiors, steep slopes and remote or sensitive environments. The innovative, collapsible panel tank framework is easy to store, transport and install without heavy equipment, and can be installed above ground. Acqualogic customers include Redwood Glen Camp, YMCA Camp Jones Gulch, MidPen Housing, Post Ranch Inn at Big Sur, Driscoll's Ranch, and San Lorenzo Valley High School.

February, 2017 Silicon Valley Community Foundation Report

SVCF commissioned independent journalist Julia Scott to write this report, based on her extensive background in covering regional and environmental issues in the South Coast

area of San Mateo County. The information presented in this report is based on the author's interviews with South Coast residents, local and state government employees, topical experts at nonprofits, and research from relevant documents and reports dating back to the 1980s. All interviews and research were conducted between June and September 2016.

Conclusion: "There are solutions, and they boil down to three elements: Buildable land. Money. Political and community will. County, state and federal legislators and administrators can all play a role in bringing the recommendations contained in this report to fruition. The community itself also has a strong role to play in developing a unified vision with clear priorities." (SVCF Report, 2017)

A policy change could radically improve their chances of survival. The most important would be a countywide rent stabilization plan. Several cities have put forward rent control measures for a vote, but the County of San Mateo could push forward on its own to cover residents in its unincorporated areas.

2016

Agricultural Workforce Housing Needs Assessment

The Agricultural Workforce Housing Needs Assessment was completed by San Mateo County in 2016.

The Parking Lot

The county constructed a parking lot in the public right-of-way at the corner of Stage Road and Pescadero Creek Road by the County in 2016. The County also installed portable restrooms at the edge of the public parking lot and continues to maintain them.

Cabrillo Farms Housing

The County financed the purchase and installation of two new homes for low-income farm workers on Cabrillo Farms.

2015

Silicon Valley Foundation Board Visits Pescadero

*"In September 2015, several members of our board went on a day-long site visit to better understand how South Coast residents contribute to our local economy and the conditions in which they work and live. Our board members were appalled by what they saw and learned. The conditions and quality of life that some South Coast residents experience would be intolerable in a developing country and are inexcusable in one of the wealthiest countries in the United States."*⁶³

Housing Element Adopted

As part of the General Plan, the County has also adopted the following area plans for specific communities in the unincorporated area: North Fair Oaks Community Plan, Emerald Lake Hills Community Plan, Montara-Moss Beach-El Granada Community Plan, San Bruno Mountain General Plan Amendment, Skyline Area General Plan Amendment and the Colma BART Station Area Plan. Each of these area plans contains housing-related policies that apply to the specific area.

2014

Puente Establishes Health Clinic

In partnership with Coastside Clinic, Puente launched a healthcare clinic with two examining rooms in 2015, with funding from the county.

Farm Labor Housing Rehabilitation Pilot Program

In 2014, San Mateo County created the Farm Labor Housing Rehabilitation Pilot Program which supports the creation of new farmworker housing, the rehabilitation or repair of existing farm labor housing and the replacement of existing dilapidated mobile home units.

Resource Conservation District Flood Control

In 2014 the RCD completed an effort identifying flood control projects that would benefit fish and wildlife, public health and safety, and reduce downstream flooding.

2013

Local Coastal Program Adopted

2011

Puente Launches Farmer's Market

Resource Conservation District

From 2008 to 2011, the RCD built multiple reservoirs for farms to have water security while keeping water in creeks for threatened and endangered fish, helped landowners prevent and repair catastrophic erosion on their properties, repaired and rebuilt rural roads that are the only access or egress for people in the redwoods, as well as critically important for fighting wildfires.

2012

2010

2009

Initial Study Pescadero Community Sewer Project

Jim Porter, San Mateo County Director of Public Works, submitted the initial study or “Mitigated Negative Declaration” for the Pescadero community sewer project to the board of supervisors and recommended a resolution certifying the study and urging Mr. Porter to submit the study to the State Water Resources Control Board.

From the resolution:

“The community of Pescadero has not yet agreed on how they would fund the construction, operation and maintenance of the proposed sewer system. The Department cannot proceed with the Design Phase of this project until the community has established the funding mechanism.”

Resource Conservation District

Calfire and San Mateo County Resource Conservation District (RCD) completed a Community Wildfire Protection Plan in 2009 that identifies hazards and priorities for mitigating fire risk and brings resources to reduce the threat of wildfire.

2008

October 28, 2008 SMC Board of Su- pervisors adopted Resolution No. 069768

Accepting the recommendations set forth in the Facilities Planning Report prepared by HydroScience and titled, “Pescadero Community Sewer Project, Facilities Planning Report,” dated October 2008 - Final, in which a Draft Revenue Program has been incorporated.

“Pescadero Com- munity Sewer Project: Small Community Wastewater Grant Facilities Plan”

Produced by Hydroscience Engineers of Napa for the county of San Mateo, stamped by Curtis Lam, civil engineer. “Currently, each parcel within Pescadero has its own individual septic system. The community does not have a centralized sewer collection system or wastewater treatment plant (WWTP). In 2004, The Regional Water Quality Control Board, San Francisco Bay Region (RWQCB), issued Resolution 04-R2-0088, supporting a 2004 Public Health Declaration by the County. The County declaration stated, “inad-

equately soil structure and high groundwater in the area provides poor conditions for adequate treatment of septic wastes from the residences and businesses in the Community resulting in a threat to public health, and precludes the installation of effective new septic systems”. The RWQCB Resolution is attached as Appendix A.”

2007

October 2, 2007 SMC Board of Su- pervisors adopted Resolution No. 069050

Authorizing execution of an agreement with HydroScience Engineers, Inc. (HydroScience) in the amount of \$154,228 for engineering services in connection with said Facilities Planning process.

2007 Questa Engineering Proposal, 2007 Hydroscience Proposal, 2007 Summit Engineering, 2007 Nute Engineering Additional Wastewater Treatment proposals/files/maps including constructed wetlands authorizing the Department of Public Works (Department) to serve as the lead agency in the application and acceptance of grant funding from the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB), under their 2004 Small Community Wastewater Grant (SCWG) Program; to perform a feasibility study; and complete an environmental review as part of the SCWG Facilities Planning phase for installing a sanitary sewer system in the Community of Pescadero. Said Facilities Planning phase requires submittal of a Facilities Planning Report, Draft Revenue Program, and Environmental Documentation.

2004

South Coast Collaborative and Puente de la Costa Sur organizations merge, with new director Kerry Lobel

March 27, 2007, SMC Board of Supervisors adopted Resolution No. 068624

2006

2005

July 28, 2004 The Pescadero Community Foundation, with Fisher & Hall, produced a Community Planning Summary

In preparation for the workshop, officers of the foundation and Fisher & Hall met with PMAC Housing Group, Reverend Wendy Taylor, the Spanish Leadership Council, local Pescadero farmers, the San Mateo County Farm Bureau, and the Director of Communications for Peninsula Open Space Trust.

The community's voice came through clearly in the bilingual visual and written surveys during the workshop. There were 13 visual questions and 20 verbal questions. Each workshop participant received 33 green dots to be used for "yes" votes and 1 red dot to be used for a "no" vote.

July 17, 2004 Community Planning Workshop

A bilingual newsletter was mailed out to over 2,000 postal customers in the Pescadero area on July 2nd. The Half Moon Bay Review published an article on July 14th titled, "Town's two cents sought on affordable digs in Pescadero." The San Mateo County Times published an article titled "Residents plan for new

Pescadero" on July 15th. And a video describing the workshop process was played numerous times on the local public access channel. Because of this extensive outreach and the fact that so many people care so much about Pescadero's future, over 120 attended the workshop.

March 5, 2004 Pescadero Butano Watershed Assessment

The 2004 [Pescadero Butano Watershed Assessment](#) report is available online in PMAC's files.

Pescadero Community Church Restoration Completed

2003

2002

Maeva Neale steps down and Lynne Bowman becomes the new President of The Pescadero Foundation

2001

Pescadero Community Church Restoration Begins

Restoration begins on The Pescadero Community Church. The project was completed in 2004.

2000

1999

South Coast Collaborative Report

1998

El Niño Flooding

El Niño creates a flooding disaster in downtown Pescadero, as well as mudslides and road

[Pescadero Memories](#)

Puente Ministry/ Puente de la Costa Sur forms

Reverend Wendy Taylor establishes Puente Ministry, located at the Pescadero Community Church. Later known formally as Puente de la Costa Sur, an organization dedicated to outreach to farmworkers on the south coast.

1997

South Coast Collaborative Forms

“In 1997, Young-Holt, with her husband’s support, was among a small group of locals who met to figure out how they could solve the most intractable problems on the South Coast. Their goal was to leverage county services and private funds to address the needs of Pescadero’s least fortunate residents. Eventually, the group became known as the “South Coast Collaborative.”

The newly funded services included mental health for the local schools; safety net services; English Language Learning classes; expanded and new preschool services at Pescadero Elementary and La Honda Elementary Schools; a new south coast transportation system, SamCoast; and bringing the County’s mobile health van to La Honda. All of these services were provided under the auspices of a spinoff called North Street Community Resource Center, which formally merged with Puente on April 1, 2007.”⁶⁴

“The convening of the South Coast Collaborative started out with a group conversation of about 30 people, meeting monthly or bi-monthly, sharing their hopes and dreams and their concerns for the South Coast communities as well. Within a year of meeting, we had discerned that we needed to hear directly from the residents about their hopes and dreams in order to have information to share with San Mateo County

to gain services and support for our region.

“The Peninsula Community Foundation granted funds for a community-wide survey that produced a report: Looking, Listening and Dreaming: A Report of the South Coast Collaborative Community Profile.”⁶⁵

A copy of the Looking, Listening and Dreaming Report is available upon request from the Pescadero Community Foundation.

Workforce Housing Organization forms to explore the feasibility of the “Warheit site” for housing

1996

1995

1994

USGS REPORT

[The Potential for Developing Groundwater Supplies in the Pescadero Area](#)

1992

USGS REPORT

[Final report on habitat of the San Francisco Garter Snake](#)

1990

USGS REPORT

[Final report on habitat of the Red-legged Frog](#)

1976

1976 Community Development Plan

The plan identified the following goals for Pescadero:

- Improve the quality of life of the residents of Pescadero.
- Protect and enhance the environmental quality and historic character of this unique coastal community.
- Identify the future role of this Rural Service Center in providing services to residents and to such economic activities as agriculture, floriculture and recreation.
- Assess the future needs of the region it serves, and determine the level of growth and expansion of community services required to meet these needs.

The Objectives were to:

- 1) Analyze how the possible alternative futures support the above planning goals and select the most desired growth level,
- 2) Determine the amount of domestic water required to serve the land use plans associated with each of these possible alternative futures.

Unfortunately, while the report successfully identifies potable water resources as a restriction on growth, the report failed to identify the role of wastewater treatment as a critical limiting factor. **It also fails to identify several issues at cross-purposes to development.**

The population was assessed at

about 450 at this time, and the report contemplated growth to a population of about 900 in the next twenty years (or by about 1996.)

“A” “B” and “C” proposals for the community are presented, where “A” proposes new residential zoned lots around the edges of town, with proposed increase of population to 900 residents, “B” is a “low-growth” alternative that provides for fewer sprawl lots around the edge of town and growth to 700 residents, and “C” is a “no-growth” or “do-nothing” alternative with no new residential lots. This plan is described as “The unique visual character of Pescadero is maintained.” No plan was presented that offered returning to the style of building Pescadero was known for historically, with apartments over stores in an old-fashioned, densely walkable downtown with two to three story frontages. A plan to address housing problems for farm laborers and other workers in need of affordable housing options (i.e., alternatives to single-family, large-lot homes) was also not proposed.

The 1976 Report notes Pescadero’s status as a “Rural Resource Center” providing commercial services to the agricultural community around it. But the plan did not address planning goals concerning improvement of the quality of life of Pescadero residents, or provision of the urban expansion necessary for this rural center to provide services to the residents and economic activities within the region.

The plan proposes a few different ways of adding housing to the community, noting without irony both that residents have indicated a desperate need for affordable housing for young families working in the surrounding businesses, and that lots must be a minimum of ¼ of an acre to accommodate septic systems.

The irony of most of the productive farmland NOT being subject to Williamson Act protection, but much of the slopes suitable for building, with less suitable agricultural soil, being protected by the act is acknowledged. It is noted that most of the community lies within the flood zone and that “construction of additional homes and businesses in a flood zone is considered hazardous to the residents and their property” so “If construction does occur within the flood plain, adequate mitigation measures must be incorporated into the design.” Correspondingly, the “Policy” indicates that, as much as possible, “new development should be discouraged in the 100-yr flood plain.” (pg 18) In other words, only the flat part can be built on, but the flat part is Prime Agricultural land in the flood way.

Lots are universally declared RM (“Resource Management”) zoned at this time, regardless of size.

“The main roads within the Pescadero Service Center are Pescadero Road, Stage Road, and Cloverdale Road. These roads are proposed as “Scenic Roads” by the County’s Scenic Road Element of the General Plan.” (pg 19)

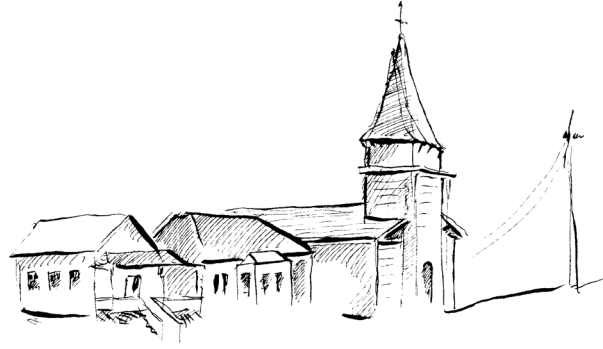
POLICIES

The scenic quality of Cabrillo Highway, Pescadero Road, Stage Road and Cloverdale Road must be maintained under the guidelines of the State Master Plan for Scenic Highways and the Scenic Roads Element of the County General Plan. (p 20)

Safe, scenic connections between parks, beaches, open space and service centers for pedestrians, bicycles, and horseback riders should be provided. (p 20)

All new roads should be constructed in a manner which complements the rural character of the existing roads system. (p 20)

At no point does the plan indicate prioritizing the undergrounding of power lines and critical utilities in the scenic zone.



ENDNOTES

Endnotes

- 1 Campaign For Fair Housing Elements, [Fair Housing Elements Explainer](#)
- 2 Association of Bay Area Governments, [Consequences of Non-Compliance with Housing Element](#)
- 3 Association of Bay Area Governments, [Consequences of Non-Compliance with Housing Element](#)
- 4 Campaign for Fair Housing Elements [Resource Library](#)
- 5 1967 Community Plan
- 6 1999 South Coast Collaborative Report
- 7 [Planning for Equity](#), Page 1
- 8 [Planning for Equity](#), Page 2
- 9 Peery, Catherine. Personal email, September 17, 2022
- 10 [San Mateo County Home For All Toolkit](https://homeforallsmc.org/toolkits/specific-plans/) (https://homeforallsmc.org/toolkits/specific-plans/)
- 11 [Planning for Equity](#), Page 2
- 12 [Planning for Equity](#), Page 1
- 13 [Planning for Equity](#), Page 1
- 14 [Planning for Equity](#), Page 8
- 15 [Planning for Equity](#), Page 12
- 16 Peery, Catherine. Personal email, September 17, 2022
- 17 California Coastal Commission, [Local Coastal Programs](#)
- 18 Peery, Catherine, personal email September 17, 2022
- 19 Coastside Recovery Report 2022, p. 37
- 20 [Housing Leadership Council Housing Element Platform](#)
- 21 The Farmworker Affairs Coalition arose as a collaboration between citizen volunteers and community representatives in 2020, with initial goals responding to the pandemic. “Our Covid-19 Farmworker Affairs Coalition is made up of community organizations serving the farmworker community, agricultural advisory committee members, and dedicated citizens who are all passionate about coordinating services and resources to support farmworkers and their families as well as the entire agricultural community... We have identified the following community needs and specific goals for this coalition: 1. Education: Organize ongoing bilingual education on Covid-19 prevention and response at both work sites and afterhours at home sites; 2. Testing: Provide ongoing testing during non-working hours in accessible locations; 3. PPE: Provide PPE, especially N-95 masks required for pesticide handling; 4. Coordinate access to resources in the event of a positive test, including housing assistance, food assistance, transportation to services, and financial support; and 5. Encourage census participation.” Letter of Intent from Rudy Espinoza-Murray Coordinator, San Mateo County Farmworker

Affairs Coalition (SMCFAC) to supervisor Don Horsley, October 14, 2020. “The original roles of the leadership team were representative of the following stakeholder groups: Government (City & County), Nonprofit Social Services, Agriculture, Public, and Communications. The original leadership team is as follows:

City - Matthew Chidester (taking a step back due to new role as HMB City Manager - congrats again!)

County - Brae Hunter & Lena Silberman, Supervisor Don Horsley’s Office

Nonprofit Social Services - Judith Gurrero, Coastside Hope CEO

Agriculture - myself, SMC Agricultural Advisory Committee Member

Public - Rudy Espinoza-Murray, Community Organizer/Political Consultant

Communications - Victoria Sanchez De Alba, Communications Consultant (De Alba Communications)” via email, Lauren Silberman, October 11, 2022

22 [Planning for Equity](#), Page 11

23 [California Coastal Commission Th15a](#), June 25, 2021

24 Some farms have recently incorporated manufactured homes with customizations as farmworker housing.

25 The [Indian Canyon Chualar Tribe](#) are also federally recognized, centered south of Hollister, and provide botanical trainings, Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) workshops, field trips, and more. The [Muwekma](#) represent a more disparate group of descendents, and are not yet federally recognized.

26 <http://amahmutsun.org/history>

27 Kerlin, Kat (October 1, 2020) “[Cultural Burning and the Art of Not Fighting Fire](#)” UC Davis [Science & Climate](#)

28 Hagemann, Hannah (November 25, 2020) Santa Cruz Sentinel “Amah Mutsun Band Reignites Cultural Burning”

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54 Photo: National Register of Historic Places application
55 Coastside Recovery Report 2022, page 22
56 Coastside Recovery Report 2022 page 22
57 [Puente de la Costa Sur Strategic Plan 2021-2025](#)
58 [Redwood City Downtown Precise Plan](#), 2011
59 [San Mateo County Middlefield Road Improvement Project Description](#)
60 Coastside Recovery Report, Page 21-22
61 [Planning for Equity](#), Page 1
62 see endnote 21
63 2017 SVCF Report, pg 1
64 [“Why We Give to Puente: Carol Young-Holt and David Sandage”](#) mypuente.org
65 [“Two Beloved Board Members Retire”](#) mypuente.org



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

HOUSING

[Habitat for Humanity](#)

[House Hacking Catalog](#)

[Mid-Pen Housing](#)

[Campaign for Fair Housing Elements Resource Library](#)

[“Whatever Happened to the Starter Home”](#) Emily Badger, *New York Times*, September 25, 2022

TINY HOMES

[1000ADUs](#)

[Abodu](#)

[Dykes with Drills](#)

[“ADU Construction Financing: Opportunities to Expand Access for Homeowners”](#) Report by the Turner Center for Housing Innovation at UC Berkeley

OTHER

[Pescadero Community Space](#)

[First Street Foundation “The First National Flood Risk Assessment”](#), *1st Street Foundation*, 2020
[“How Extreme Weather Has Created A Disaster for School Infrastructure,”](#) by Andrea Stanley, *Washington Post*, April 13, 2022

[“While Pescadero School Waits for Water, Nitrate Problem Worsens Statewide”](#) Grace Scullion, *Half Moon Bay Review*, September 7, 2022

[Landscape Architecture and the Science of Climate Change: Food](#) by Andrew Watkins, *SWA Group*, May 6, 2022 2021-22 CPPLA Public Lecture Series

[Healing Earth](#) John Todd

[Silicon Valley Community Foundation Japanese Families at Native Sons Hall, Christmas 1928](#)

[Native Sons Hall Historical Register](#)

[Congregational Church Historical Register](#)

[San Gregorio House Historic Register](#)

[City Climate Corner: Microgrids Podcast](#)
[Transparent California Teacher Salaries](#)
[Census Reporter](#)

PMAC

[Pescadero Municipal Advisory Council](#)
[Video Summary of 2004 Community Planning Meeting](#)

Community Planning Summary Fisher & Hall July, 2004 (Hosted by PMAC)

[2018-07-10 Fall Creek Engineering Proposal](#) Fall Creek Engineering, 2018 (Hosted by PMAC)

[2018-03-07 Collab Meeting Notes](#) Sustainable Pescadero group meeting notes, 2018 (Hosted by PMAC)

[2017-10-04 Aqualogic Water Treatment Acqualogic presentation slides](#), 2017 (Hosted by PMAC)

[2008 Pescadero Wastewater Treatment Study Hydroscience Engineers](#), 2008 (Hosted by PMAC)
[PMAC Bicycle Races](#)

PUENTE

[Strategic Plan](#)

[Planning for Equity 2019](#) Puente and Silicon Valley Community Foundation

[Appendix A: Tabulation of Votes](#)

[Appendix B: Voting Boards](#)

[Appendix C: Comment Posters](#)

[Appendix D: Outreach Posters](#)

[Appendix E: Press](#)

[Appendix F: Evaluation Comments](#)

[Profile of a Southcoast Farmworker](#)

[Profiles of Two Southcoast Farmworkers](#)

[“No me siento legal, pero nunca he hecho nada mal tampoco.”](#)

[Profile of a Woman and a Southcoast farmworker](#)

[Portrait of a New Southcoast Farmworker](#)

[Profile of a Southcoast Farmworker Family](#)

SAN MATEO COUNTY

[Coastside Recovery Report 2022](#)

[Fire Station Health Portals: Strategic Site Assessment Report](#)

[CSA-11 and Fire Station 59 Project](#)

[San Mateo County General Plan](#)

[San Mateo County Housing Element Update](#)

[San Mateo County Resource Conservation District Projects](#)

[San Mateo County Sea Level Rise Assessment](#)

[San Mateo County Income and Rent Limits](#)

[Home for All San Mateo County: Specific Plans](#)

[Home For All San Mateo County: Multi-Family Housing](#)

STATE OF CALIFORNIA

California Regional Water Quality Control Board
RESOLUTION -04-R2-0088 October 20, 2004
[CA Wastewater Treatment Rules](#)

[UCANR Publication 8335 \(Storie Index, 2008\)](#)

[Legislative Analyst's Office Reports on Climate Change Impacts Across California](#)

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