
Chapter 1: Introduction

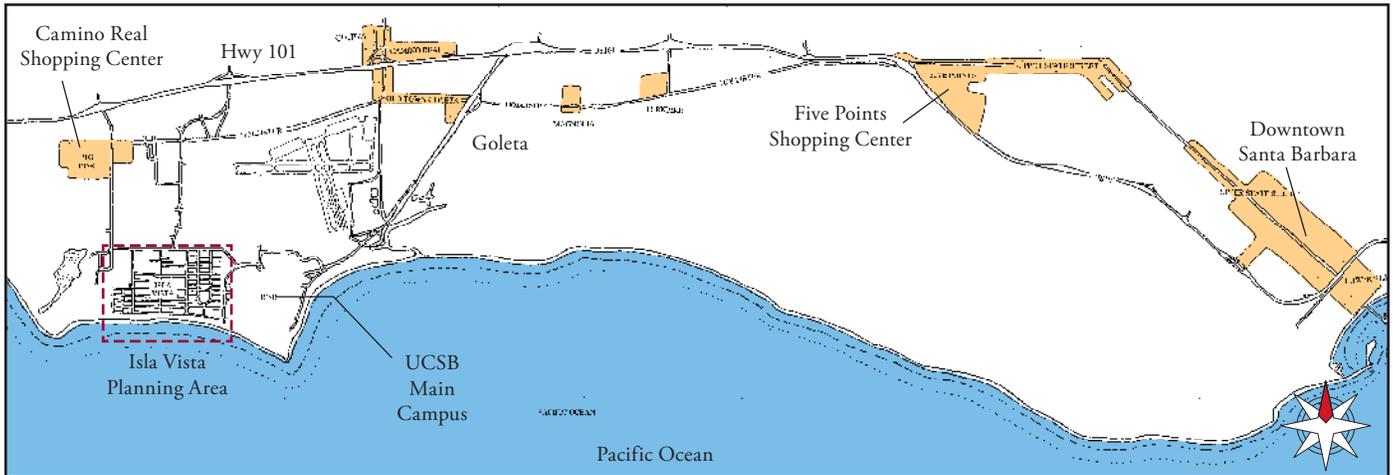
Overview: Isla Vista Master Plan

For the last 35 years, the public planning process in Isla Vista has been active. Numerous issues have been identified during successive planning efforts including limited parking, overcrowding, substandard housing, and deteriorating infrastructure. The problems in Isla Vista have persisted for years, and past attempts to solve them have resulted in relatively little permanent change.

The framework for this Master Plan is based on the existing land use patterns of Isla Vista. The Plan makes strategic adjustments to the way the community is designed and operated, so that it will better suit the needs and aspirations of its residents.

This chapter presents an overview of the existing land use patterns within the context of the community's goals for change and the guiding principles for the Plan.

Local Setting



Isla Vista is an unincorporated community located 9 miles west of the City of Santa Barbara on the South Coast of Santa Barbara County, California. Surrounded on three sides by the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB), Isla Vista is located on a coastal bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean.

Isla Vista is located adjacent to UCSB, near the Santa Barbara Airport, a short distance from Goleta, and about 9 miles from Santa Barbara.

The current population of Isla Vista is approximately 20,000; some 13,000 of whom are students. Isla Vista is known primarily for its role in providing housing for students from UCSB as well as Santa Barbara City College. However, the community is also home to approximately 7,000 non-student residents. Isla Vista is $\frac{1}{2}$ square mile or 320 acres. The streets form a rectilinear grid with the exception of Embarcadero Del Norte and Embarcadero Del Mar that create a loop defining Anisq'Oyo' Park and the downtown. A typical block pattern exists in the northeast and southwest corners, but the blocks become quite large and irregular in the center.

More than 200,000 people live on the South Coast of Santa Barbara County. The region's economy is largely driven by education, tourism, and service sectors, though technology and agriculture also play a significant role.

More than 80,000 people live in the Goleta Valley. Traditionally an agricultural community, the University of California at Santa Barbara is now the region's largest employer. Enrollment at the University is currently capped at 20,000 students. U.S. Highway 101 divides the Goleta Valley and is the principal route connecting the Valley to other communities. Los Carneros Road connects Isla Vista to U.S. Highway 101 and a number of major employers. The Goleta Valley is also host to the Santa Barbara Municipal Airport (SBMA), which is located in close proximity to Isla Vista and UCSB.

The Goleta Community Plan has guided land development patterns in the area since its adoption in 1993. The City of Goleta recently adopted a General Plan in 2006. This General Plan regulates land use within the new city. Decisions made by the new city will influence the quantity, timing, and quality of growth in areas neighboring Isla Vista.

Local Setting

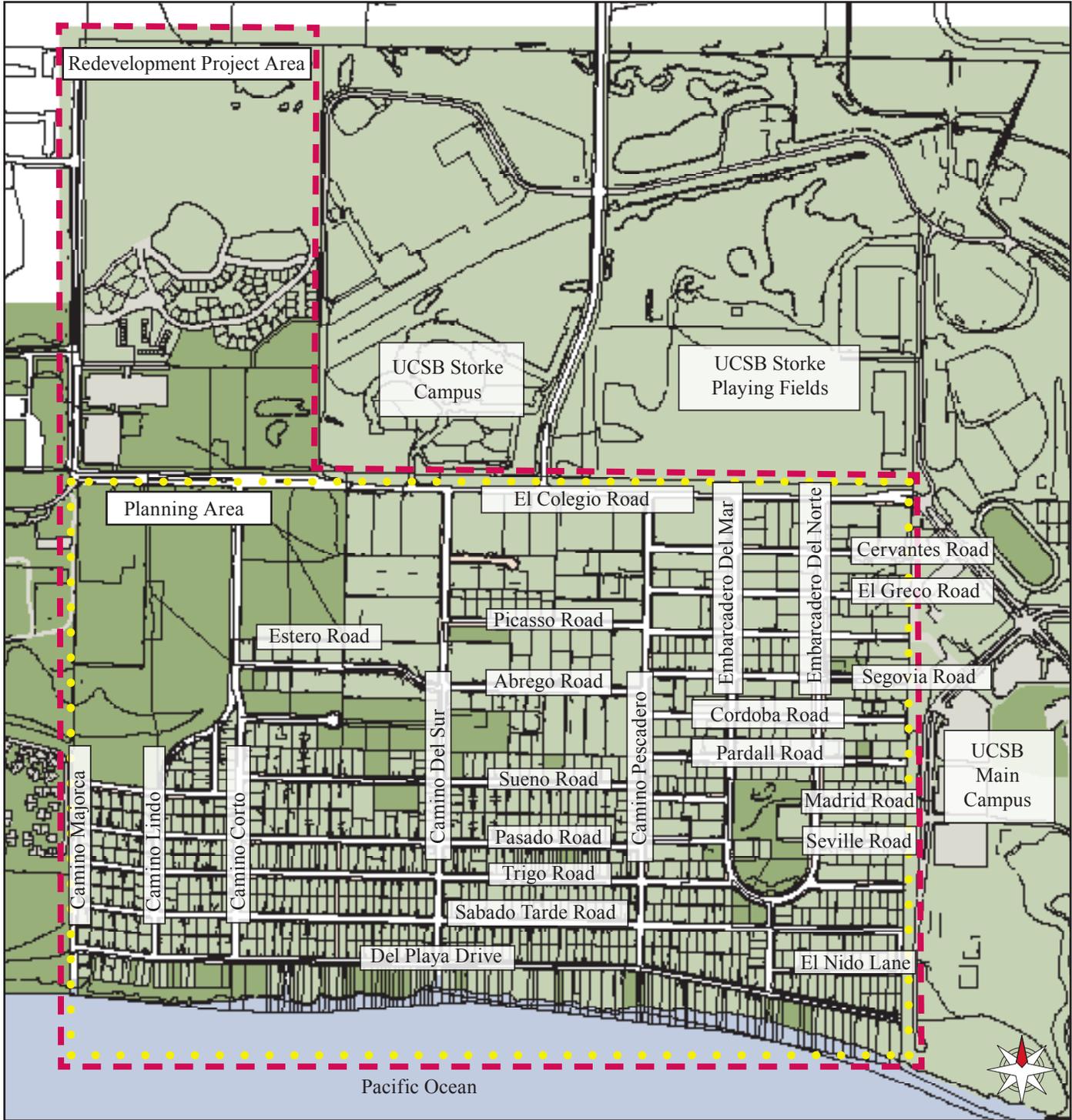


Due to its location adjacent to UCSB, Isla Vista will remain a student-oriented community. There are many examples of densely populated student-oriented communities across the United States that are vibrant and attractive places for students and non-students to live that could serve as a model for Isla Vista. The primary difference between these communities and Isla Vista is many of these places were built around or integrated with urban communities. As a result, necessary services are located within or very near these communities. However, Isla Vista is a compact community that currently does not provide all the services a typical urban area would offer. At the same time, Isla Vista supports higher densities than typical suburban development. This planning effort addresses the question: How can Isla Vista better serve the people who live in the community?

This aerial photograph illustrates Isla Vista's magnificent setting. The community is framed by the Pacific Ocean to the south and the Santa Ynez Mountains to the north. The urban area is directly bordered by the University of California at Santa Barbara to the west, north and east.

The goal of planning for the future of Isla Vista is not to change the function of the community, but rather to adjust the form of the community to improve residents' quality of life and create a vibrant and attractive place for students and non-students to live.

Local Setting



This map illustrates the 1/2 square mile area of Isla Vista and its immediate context. Redevelopment Project Area boundary shown by dashed line; Isla Vista Planning Area shown by dotted line.

Local Context

Pedestrian and Bicycle Orientation



High population density, younger median age, and proximity to the UCSB campus all contribute to high level of pedestrian and bicycle traffic in Isla Vista.

Housing



Housing in Isla Vista consists mostly of medium and high-density housing types, aside from the 8 blocks of single family residences in the southwest corner. Most of the original housing stock dates from the 1960s and 1970s and is often either poorly designed, poorly maintained, or both. Some of the more recent construction and renovations have begun to incorporate courtyard housing types and housing design that result in a higher quality street environment.

Local Context

Natural Setting & Parks and Open Space



The natural setting of Isla Vista is one of the area’s most significant attributes, with the Pacific Ocean and Channel Islands to the south and the Santa Ynez Mountains to the north. The open space within Isla Vista reinforces its natural context and provides opportunities for relaxation and recreation for residents.

Downtown



Downtown Isla Vista consists of mainly one-story structures. The Pardall Road corridor is the focus of most commercial activity.

Streets



Isla Vista is composed primarily of a rectilinear street grid. This pattern supports pedestrian and bicycle traffic. Several streets are wider than may be necessary, resulting in high-speed traffic and most streets are undefined by the buildings.

Local Context

A Strategy for Beneficial Change

A community is a man-made environment built for the purpose of housing the social and economic activities of its residents. The existing physical environment in Isla Vista, in many significant respects, does not “fit” the way its inhabitants want to live. Many of Isla Vista’s streets and other public spaces could be redesigned and managed to better serve area residents and visitors. Many of its buildings could be designed to better fit the needs of their users - residents, businesses, and institutions. There are important social activities that lack suitable places to occur, and public institutions that lack adequate facilities to serve the community. The quality of the building stock, the current transportation system, and parking management efforts do not optimally support the residential or commercial uses that are the core of the Isla Vista economy. Accordingly, the Master Plan is structured to repair and correct many of the issues that have been identified by the community.

From an urban and community design perspective, Isla Vista represents a tremendous opportunity. Isla Vista has one of the highest concentrations of people (62.5 people per acre) in California, heavy pedestrian and bicycle traffic, and a wonderful geographic location adjacent to a prominent university. In addition, most characteristics inherent to good neighborhood and town planning are already in place here in rough form. Isla Vista has an integrated network of streets, well defined edges, an obvious center, a walkable size, a diverse mix of uses and building types, and the community was developed in a pattern that could support a transit system. As a result of these characteristics, there is a real potential for change in Isla Vista.

Document Format

Columns

The two-column format of this document is intended to provide information to the reader on two parallel, but distinct tracks.

The left column contains the main narrative of the Isla Vista Master Plan. Goals and policies for Isla Vista will be located in the main column. The right column provides the opportunity to state related information, including:

- Isla Vista Master Plan actions, programs and/or development standards related to the main text and diagrams.
- Existing County General Plan goals, policies and programs that are relevant and applicable to Isla Vista. For example, references to the Goleta Valley Community Plan (GV) and Coastal Land Use Plan (CLUP) are included. Please note that for GV references, it is important to refer to the January 2000 addenda and errata, containing the most current policies.
- Existing State law and planning background information.
- Cross-references to other sections of the Isla Vista Master Plan.

Planning History

Early reports that outline Isla Vista problems and potential solutions include The Report of the Commission of Isla Vista (“The Trow Report”) 1970, Recommendations for Isla Vista Planning, 1973, and the Isla Vista Enhancement Report, 1996.

In 1990, the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors, in an effort to begin addressing issues identified in past reports and then-up-to-date studies, adopted the Redevelopment Plan for the Isla Vista Redevelopment Project (Redevelopment Plan). The objectives of that plan were to acquire environmentally sensitive property, increase public open space, develop public infrastructure improvements, construct a community center, and encourage housing rehabilitation. Only some of these objectives were achieved by early redevelopment efforts; the recession in the early 1990s slowed development and many of the projects expected to generate substantial revenue for the agency were delayed.

In 1999, a working group composed of UCSB, Isla Vista Recreation and Park District (IVRPD), and Santa Barbara County Planning and Development (P&D) began meeting to discuss the status of Isla Vista and how to address community issues. In 2000, Santa Barbara County, UCSB, and IVRPD signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to establish a strategy to jointly fund and develop a Master Plan for Isla Vista. The multi-agency planning team held an international design competition in 2000, selecting Opticos Design to assist in the development of the Master Plan.

To facilitate community participation and formal review of the Master Plan and potential amendments to the Isla Vista Redevelopment Plan, a Project Area Committee/General Plan Area Committee (PAC/GPAC) was formed in October 2001. The Isla Vista PAC/GPAC is a group of residents, property owners, business owners, and representatives of community organizations from the project area.

In April 2002, the project partners held an intensive 8-day Design Workshop for community members to interact with urban planners, architects, designers, engineers, and financing experts to discuss the future of Isla Vista. The results of the Workshop were published in the Design Workshop Summary Report (DWSR).

Community Advisory Body

The Isla Vista Project Area Committee/General Plan Advisory Committee (PAC/GPAC) played a critical role in developing the Master Plan. The PAC/GPAC reviewed land use issues presented by County planning staff and provided community perspective regarding: 1) land use, 2) new development policies, 3) amendments to the zoning ordinances, 4) design standards, and 5) catalyst redevelopment projects.

Project Area Committee role in Redevelopment Plan Update

State law requires that a Project Area Committee (PAC) review certain types of amendments to the redevelopment plan. The PAC advised the County concerning policy matters that affect residents in the project area during the Master Plan process.

General Plan Advisory Committee Role in General Plan Update

The GPAC played an important role by providing community input into land use policy for this Isla Vista Comprehensive Plan update. The GPAC’s role was to assist and advise the Board, Planning Commission, and County staff in developing amendments and updates to the Comprehensive Plan. [The Master Plan updates the Comprehensive Plan in Isla Vista.]

Why a Long Range Plan?

As is the case with all communities, Isla Vista is a complex collection of physical, social, and economic systems. The physical systems are composed of natural and built environments. The built environment consists of public and private improvements, while the natural environment consists of ecosystems that function in and around the community. The social systems include neighbor to neighbor interactions, as well as a range of institutions and businesses that bring people together. The economic system includes a wide range of relationships - landlord/tenant, customer/shopkeeper, student/University, business to business, and others, both internal to Isla Vista and also serving to connect it to neighboring communities within the South Coast region.

In undertaking this planning process, the community identified physical, social, and economic systems - individually and as they interact with one another. The Master Plan specifies relationships to improve and establishes a series of policies, programs, regulations, and design guidelines that address imbalances and conflicts.

It is specifically intended that most elements of change identified in this Plan will occur in reasonably small increments, such that the community will see the effect of each change, and determine if the results are satisfactory, or the course of change needs to be adjusted. The ability to observe and steer the process of change and growth as it unfolds is essential in managing a complex urban system.

The concept of balance is key to all elements of the Plan. The over-arching mission statement of this process is:

Improve the quality of life by developing policies, programs and implementing projects to create a physically, socially, and economically viable Plan for Isla Vista.

Existing Plans for Isla Vista

The Coastal Land Use Plan (CLUP) and Goleta Valley Community Plan (GV) will continue to apply to Isla Vista after Master Plan adoption. While the Isla Vista Master Plan does not duplicate policies already in place in the CLUP or GV, the Isla Vista Master Plan must be consistent with these documents and all of the other Comprehensive Plan documents.

Coastal Land Use Plan

The Coastal Land Use Plan serves in part as the “land use element” for the coastal areas of the county. The purpose of the Coastal Land Use Plan (CLUP) is to protect coastal resources, provide greater access and recreational opportunities for the public, allow for orderly and well-planned urban development, and appropriately locate coastal-dependent and coastal-related industry.

Other Comprehensive Plan elements and community plans are applicable within the coastal zone, however, where conflicts exist, the CLUP takes precedence. The CLUP specifies that whenever multiple similar policies apply, the policies most protective of coastal resources takes precedence. For the Goleta area, the CLUP prioritizes low and moderate income housing as the highest priority use, followed by public recreation and visitor serving commercial uses.

Goleta Valley Community Plan

The 1993 Goleta Valley Community Plan is one of the community/area plans that have been adopted in Santa Barbara County. The community plans are intended to address the special concerns and needs of the community and to preserve the unique character of each community through adopted land use maps; goals, objectives, policies, and development standards. Policies and actions referenced from the Goleta Valley Community Plan are identified by “GV” for Goleta Valley.

Isla Vista Redevelopment Plan

Redevelopment law provides local government with a powerful tool to revitalize communities and eliminate blight. When a project area is established, a redevelopment plan is adopted by ordinance of the County Board of Supervisors. The plan, which must be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and any Community or Area Plans, describes goals, purposes, and objectives to eliminate physical and economic conditions of blight.

The Isla Vista Redevelopment Plan was adopted by the Board of Supervisors on November 27, 1990 (Ordinance No. 3894) and amended on December 7, 1999 (Ordinance 4382). It provides the Agency with powers, duties and obligations to implement and further the program formulated for the redevelopment, rehabilitation, and revitalization of the Project Area.

Comprehensive Plan Framework

Generally, a long-range plan defines issues, establishes goals, and defines policies used to implement these goals. The text of a plan will also contain background information, maps, and graphics. Policies often have associated implementing actions and development standards.

1) Goals are specified in the text of the Comprehensive Plan. Goals are intended to specify an ideal future end, condition, or state related to the public health, safety, or general welfare toward which planning implementation measures are directed.

2) Policies are specific statements that implement goals and guide decision-making. Policies indicate a clear commitment by the local legislative body. A policy should be based on the Comprehensive Plan's goals as well as all available data. For a policy to be useful it must be clear and unambiguous.

3) Development Standards are measures that will be incorporated into land use projects to provide development consistency with certain policies of the Community Plan.

4) Actions are one-time actions, programs, procedures or development standards that carry out Comprehensive Plan policies. Actions usually specify a specific step or endeavor.

The Isla Vista Master Plan will create a set of goals, policies, actions and development standards to address specific issues in Isla Vista.

Community Objectives

Beginning in 1999, the project sponsors held a series of meetings in which community members were invited to share their concerns, hopes and visions for Isla Vista. Through the design competition process many additional ideas were generated, and during the 8-day Design Workshop of April 2002 many more community concerns, and potential responses to those concerns, were documented. An outcome of these two outreach processes included the Isla Vista Master Plan, community objectives, which are listed below.

1. **Create a physically, socially, and economically sustainable plan for Isla Vista.**
2. **Improve the quality of life and sense of community for all Isla Vista residents by enhancing the character and quality of the built environment, promoting a more diverse population, and providing more amenities for residents.**
3. **Preserve and enhance Isla Vista's distinctive character and establish a greater sense of community among Isla Vista's diverse residents by providing venues for social interactions.**
4. **Design a community based on a mixed-use, sustainable urban village model, where dependence on the automobile is reduced, people can live close to where they work and shop, pedestrian and bicycle traffic is encouraged, and public mass transit is easily accessible and convenient to use.**
 - **Automobile traffic and parking should not be allowed to dominate the streets of Isla Vista, detracting from the appearance of the community and making it unpleasant to walk or ride a bicycle.**
 - **Streets and other public spaces should be designed and managed to encourage neighbors to meet one another and socialize in public.**
5. **Develop an efficient parking strategy that minimizes visual impact on the community.**
6. **Create aesthetically attractive housing to meet the needs of its residents while efficiently using the limited amount of land.**
 - **A variety of housing types should be provided that appeal to a range of household sizes and income levels.**
7. **Develop a balanced, robust, and economically viable commercial core, complete with a variety of uses, services, and public open spaces that allow people to gather and socialize in the center of the community. These services should include day-to-day amenities that can raise the general quality of life and decrease automobile dependency.**
8. **Blur the interface between Isla Vista and UCSB by enhancing the connections through building improvements and the provision and maintenance of public space.**
 - **Connections between Isla Vista and UCSB should include commercial and civic activities that appeal to both UCSB students and the larger community, fostering social contact in a civil public setting.**
9. **Preserve and enhance existing natural resources, such as the beach, wetlands, coastal sage scrub, trees, native species, and riparian habitat.**
10. **Improve existing parks and recreation resources, and expand recreational opportunities and beach access.**

Concept Plan

Since initiation of this planning effort, a primary goal of the Master Plan has been to enhance the existing strengths of the Isla Vista community. As a result, the Plan does not propose significantly altering the land use pattern in the area. The concept for the Master Plan, however, does describe the public infrastructure improvements, programs, and public policies necessary to initiate improvement to the quality of life for all members of the community.

These changes to infrastructure, programs, and public policies are intended to stimulate private sector investment in Isla Vista. This investment will be critical to the success of this Plan as public funds will not solely implement all projects described in this document. In an effort to steer and direct public investment, this document describes very clearly the building types the community and County would like to see in Isla Vista. This clarity is intended to accelerate the entitlement process and resolve questions regarding what can and cannot be permitted in each neighborhood.

Those neighborhoods serve to organize the Plan. As a basic principle of planning, Isla Vista was divided into two neighborhoods of walkable size. A focal point for each neighborhood was identified and developed. These two focal points, or neighborhoods, shape the content of this place-based planning effort. The remaining chapters of the Plan describe proposals for Isla Vista's streets, transit programs, parks, open spaces, downtown area, Estero neighborhood, housing system, and UCSB interface. Projects are identified at the end of each chapter in the Plan. Many of those projects have been incorporated into other County and Redevelopment Agency infrastructure and funding plans, including the Redevelopment Agency Five-Year Implementation Plan, the Agency annual budget, and the County's Goleta Transportation Improvement Plan.

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