

# Healthy Community Development in San Luis Obispo County

ACTION FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES  
UNVEILS A NEW QUALITY OF LIFE STUDY

HIGHLIGHTS OF HEALTHY COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
IN OUR COUNTY

*Why is the word healthy so important to the way San Luis Obispo County approaches community development and what exactly does it all mean?*

*A common definition of community development is the process of helping a community strengthen itself and develop towards its full potential. Community development creates long-term solutions and is a process to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of communities.*

There are many definitions of a healthy community. According to the Centers for Disease Control, a healthy community is “A community that is continuously creating and improving those physical and social environments and expanding those community resources that enable people to mutually support each other in performing all the functions of life and in developing to their maximum potential.”

Residents in San Luis Obispo County have concerns about preserving open spaces, water, air pollution, traffic, and other environmental and social issues affecting their quality of life.

For a closer look at what issues may affect healthy community development in San Luis Obispo County, please read on.



*ACTION for Healthy Communities is a consortium of public and private organizations that collaborate to assess the quality of life in San Luis Obispo County. The goals of the project are to raise public awareness, provide accurate and reliable data, improve decision-making, establish community goals, and develop collaborative action plans to achieve those community goals.*

ACTION started collecting data about the county in 1999 and has updated the data in 2001, 2003, 2006 and 2010. This 2010 project includes a telephone survey of a representative sample of 1,101 San Luis Obispo County residents. The term “residents” is used to identify the telephone survey respondents. The overall study also includes a face-to-face survey with homeless individuals, dependent adults, and Spanish-speaking parents. The data pieces have been combined with data from a wide range of federal, state and local sources to bring you a picture of life in San Luis Obispo County. The full report may be found at <http://ActionSLO.org>

## TOP ISSUES FOR COUNTY RESIDENTS

Residents said the top 3 issues facing San Luis Obispo County are jobs, growth in the community, and water issues.

When asked what the most important issue facing San Luis Obispo County in the next few years, the top three issues for residents were:

- Employment and jobs (22%);
- Fast and uncontrolled growth (13%)
- Water (12%)

Employment and jobs replaced the 2006 top concern, cost of housing, which has declined since the recession.

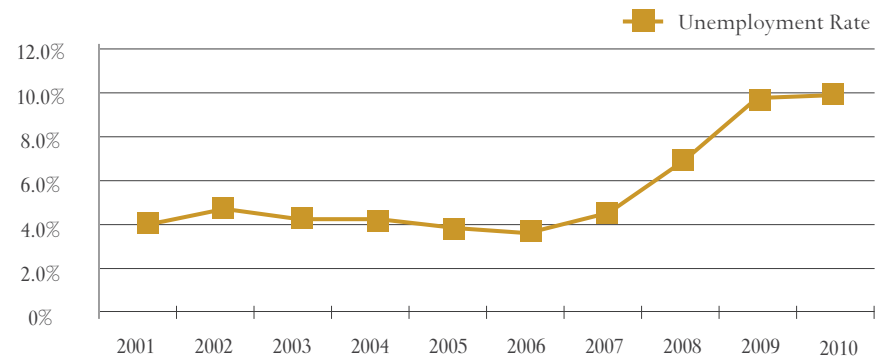
## EMPLOYMENT AND JOBS

An adequate income in a growing economy is the foundation of a healthy life.

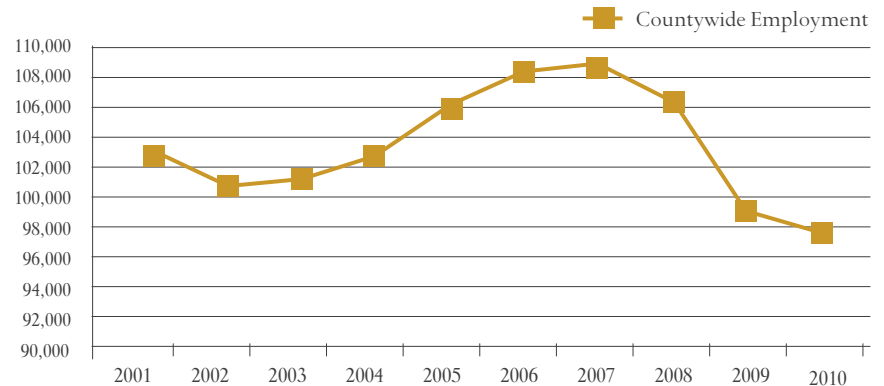
Nearly half of residents felt worse off economically this year than last year.<sup>1</sup>

- The region's overall unemployment rate has more than doubled in the last decade, from a rate of 4.0% in 2001 to 10.2% in 2010 due to the prolonged recession.<sup>2</sup>
- Overall the region has experienced a net loss of 5,100 jobs in the last 10 years. Despite adding jobs in the region in the middle of the decade, the region lost 9,500 jobs between 2007 and 2009.<sup>2</sup>

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE (2001-2010)



COUNTYWIDE EMPLOYMENT (2001-2010)



## GROWTH AND LAND USE

Healthy living is supported by a balance between the environment and community development.

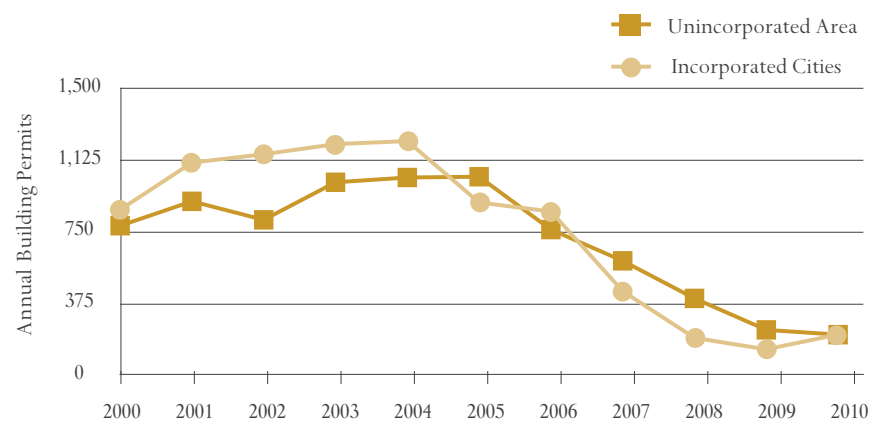
### Residents said that the second most important issue facing the region was growth.<sup>1</sup>

- More than two-thirds of residents surveyed (69%) reported being “very or somewhat concerned about building in open spaces.”<sup>1</sup>
- There was an increase of 3,032 acres of urban and built-up land between 2002 and 2008, an increase of about 7 percent.<sup>3</sup>
- Although the rate of growth is a concern, housing construction has actually declined 59% over a three-year time frame, from 2007 to 2010. The average of 1,842 housing units that were built annually from 2000 to 2007 decreased over the past three years to an average of 465 new housing units per year between 2008 and 2010. Between 2000 and 2010, a total of 16,131 housing units were built throughout the region.<sup>4</sup>
- Rural sprawl continued in the unincorporated area over the past decade. Of the 8,233 new homes built in the unincorporated county during that period, 3,238 new homes (39%) were built in rural areas. The other 4,995 new homes (61%) were built in County urban or village communities, such as Nipomo, Oceano, Templeton, and Woodlands.<sup>6</sup>
- Uncoordinated development and transportation planning has caused traffic congestion during peak commute hours on Los Osos Valley Road at the Highway 101 interchange in San Luis Obispo; West Tefft Street and Highway 101 in Nipomo; and on the southbound Avila/Shell Beach segment of Highway 101 during the evening commute.<sup>6</sup>
- Traffic congestion at peak commute times on local streets is occurring on Halcyon Road/Highway 1 in Arroyo Grande, on and

near Tank Farm Road in San Luis Obispo, and on South Bay Boulevard at South State Park Road in Los Osos.<sup>6</sup>

- Recent shifts in housing and population patterns are making it difficult for school districts to “keep up” given the amount of fees and budgets they receive. All larger school districts in San Luis Obispo County have at least one school where enrollment equals or exceeds school capacity.<sup>6</sup>

RESIDENTIAL BUILDING PERMITS  
IN SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY (2000-2010)



Source: Construction Industry Research Board

## WATER QUALITY AND WATER SUPPLY

Water is a primary resource that is essential for us to sustain for future generations.

### Water quality and supply are a concern to residents.<sup>1</sup>

- In 2009, six out of 19 cities and communities reached a point where their water demand exceeded their supply, or their water delivery system had reached its capacity. Those communities were Cambria, Los Osos, Nipomo Mesa, San Miguel, San Simeon, and Shandon.<sup>6</sup>

- The public is advised to avoid water contact during and 72 hours after rain events, as the ocean water may be contaminated. Local beaches have had health advisory postings that warn bathers to avoid water contact on nearly 840 days in the last decade (or an average of 7 days in a given month).<sup>5</sup>

## AIR QUALITY

Fresh air cannot be imported to replace the polluted air that is increasing in the region.

### Air pollution is significant in some areas of the county.

- Ozone levels in the sparsely populated eastern portion of the county exceeded the federal ozone standard from 10 to 40 days per year in the last 15 years, due to pollution transported from other areas of the state, and this pollution violated the more stringent state standard from 40 to 70 days per year. In contrast, the populated western region of the county rarely exceeded the federal ozone standard while violations of the state standard only occur about 2 days per year, on average.<sup>7</sup>
- In the south county, the state 24-hour particulate matter (PM) standard was exceeded 60 to 70 days per year, on average, due to dust blowing from the Oceano Dunes. Violations of the state PM standard otherwise typically occur just a few days per year throughout most of the county.<sup>7</sup>

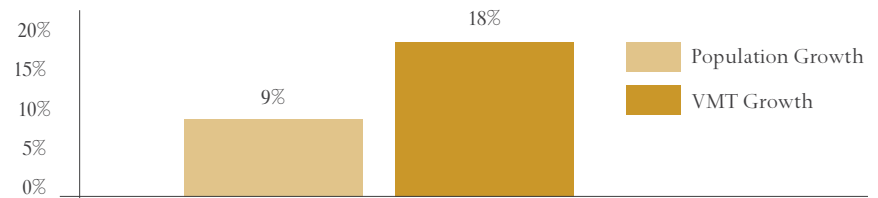
## TRANSPORTATION AND TRAFFIC

Healthy community development offers workplaces and shopping convenient to home to enable frequent use of public transit, walking, and bicycling instead of driving.

### As the county continues to grow, driving alone has become a significant transportation issue in the community.

- San Luis Obispo County has seen an 11% increase in peak-hour traffic volume over the last eight years.<sup>6</sup>
- The number of vehicle miles traveled in San Luis Obispo County increased 18% over the last 10 years, which was double the 9% population increase.<sup>8</sup>
- Over half of residents surveyed (56%) live less than 15 minutes from work or they work at home. However, 41% of residents take 16 minutes to an hour, and 3% require over an hour to commute.<sup>1</sup>
- Dependent adults, Spanish-speaking parents, and homeless persons face greater challenges in securing transportation for themselves; 45% of dependent adults, 65% of Spanish-speaking parents, and 77% of the homeless population surveyed identified transportation as a problem in 2009.<sup>9</sup>
- Over half of residents surveyed (59%) requested more frequent public transportation and more routes (54%), while one-third of residents asked for more stops, as possible improvements to the public transportation system.<sup>1</sup>

POPULATION GROWTH COMPARED TO VEHICLE MILES TRAVELED (VMT) IN SLO COUNTY (2000-2010)



Source: 2010 Census; Caltrans MVSTAFF 2008 VMT Projections

## WALKABILITY

Walkable neighborhoods are close to destinations and well-connected by sidewalks or good paths, to encourage walking for healthy living.

### Only 25% of children walk or bike to school.<sup>1</sup>

- At least 75% of school-aged children were driven (60.5%), took the bus (14.2%), or drove themselves to school (22.1% of high school students), while fewer than 25% of elementary and middle-school children walked or biked to school.<sup>1</sup>
- Forty-four percent (44%) of parents said that sidewalks and street improvements for safety would encourage children to walk.<sup>1</sup>

### Only 29% of families live within a walkable half-mile distance from an elementary school.

- Living closer to school (65%) and sidewalk or street improvements for safety (44%) were the top two factors that would encourage respondents' children to walk or bike to school more frequently.

### Parks and trails are over a walkable half-mile away from home for 51% of most people.

## RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Parks and play areas are needed as part of community development to attract healthy activity.

### The majority of residents are visiting recreation sites more often.

- About half of residents surveyed (51%) visited outdoor recreation sites between 1 and 10 times in a three month period. Over the past decade, an increasing number of residents visited outdoor recreation sites more than 10 times (from 26% in 2001 to 39% in 2010). The number of residents who never visited outdoor recreation sites declined from 21.8% in 2001 to 9.4% in 2010.<sup>1</sup>

IN THE PAST THREE MONTHS, HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU VISITED ANY OUTDOOR RECREATION LOCATIONS IN SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY SUCH AS A PARK, TRAIL, OR BEACH?

Response	2001	2003	2010
None	21.8%	12.5%	9.4%
1-10 times	52.4%	51.7%	51.2%
11-50 times	21.4%	24.2%	28.6%
More than 50 times	4.5%	11.3%	10.8%
Total respondents	804	522	1,098

#### Endnotes:

1. ACTION for Healthy Communities, Telephone Survey, 2010.
2. State of California Employment Development Department, Labor Market Information Division, 2010.
3. California Department of Conservation, Division of Land Resource Protection, Farmland Conversion Report, 1994-2008. Note: The Division of Land Resource Protection defines "urban and built-up land" as land that is "occupied by structures with a building density of at least 1 unit to 1.5 acres, or approximately 6 structures to a 10-acre parcel. Common examples include residential, industrial, commercial, institutional facilities, cemeteries, airports, golf courses, sanitary landfills, sewage treatment, and water control structures."
4. Construction Industry Research Board, 2011
5. San Luis Obispo County, Environmental Health Division, Beach Health Advisories, August 2010.
6. Resource Management System's Annual Summary Report 2009-2010, San Luis Obispo County Department of Planning and Building, 2009.
7. San Luis Obispo County Air Pollution Control District, 2011.
8. California Department of Transportation (CalTrans), MVSTAFF2008 VMT Projections. 2010 Census.
9. ACTION for Healthy Communities, Face-to-Face Survey, 2010.

*Action*

FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES