

# Santa Barbara Happenings



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## Santa Barbara Hotel Tourism is Decreasing

According to a recent report by Visit Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara hotel occupancy has decreased by 4% compared to the same time last year. The average rate of a hotel room in Santa Barbara has also decreased (by 1%) as well as the revenue per available hotel room (by 5%). The CEO of Visit Santa Barbara stated that "September 2023 marked the twelfth consecutive month where travelers booked fewer Santa Barbara south coast hotel rooms." Overall, Visit Santa Barbara reports a substantial decline in the amount of tourism, especially with regard to the number of tourists from outside of California. Maybe it's because State Street is closed to vehicles.

## Santa Maria: Healthy, Succeeding and Growing



Image: Japanese Cultural Center Noozhaw.com

Many new developments are underway in Santa Maria. These include multiple apartment buildings and single-family homes, which are under construction, as well as,

many accessory dwelling units and a few mixed-use buildings which will feature commercial and residential space. There are also plans for a new Holiday Inn Express, a second Chick fil-A, a new playground, a four-field sports-center and a Japanese Cultural Community Center. The mayor also recently discussed the modernization of the waste water treatment plant.

## Bob Nelson Launches Bid for Second Term on Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors

Bob Nelson, who is currently serving as the Fourth District County Supervisor, is running for re-election. The Fourth District includes Orcutt, Los Alamos, Vandenberg Village, Vandenberg Space Force Base; Garey, Sisquoc, Casmalia and part of Santa Maria.

Nelson has been focusing on libraries, public trails, parking, traffic flow, homelessness and public safety while in office and will likely continue his work in

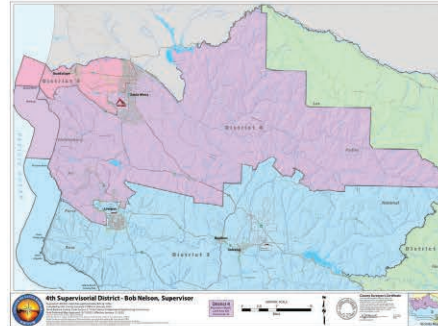


Image: Santa Barbara County 4<sup>th</sup> District ap (countyofsb.org)

these areas if re-elected.

Nelson, who has lived in the Fourth District for many years, was the Chief of Staff for the former Fourth District Supervisor, Peter Adam, before being

being elected himself. Before that, he worked as a school teacher. His many endorsements include: the Santa Barbara County Farm Bureau, the Santa Barbara County Deputy Sheriff's Association, the Santa Barbara County Firefighter's Association, retired Fourth District Supervisor Peter Adam, retired Third District Supervisor Brooks Firestone and current Fifth District Supervisor Steve Lavagnino.

## Fire-Ravaged Boy Scout Camp at Rancho Alegre Nearly Ready to Welcome Back Campers

The Los Padres Council Boy Scouts of America's Rancho Alegre Outdoor School which opened in 1985 and hosted fifth and sixth graders from public schools in the Santa Barbara area for a science camp program, was badly burned in the Whittier Fire. It is set to re-open in April 2024.

The Whittier Fire destroyed the dorms, staff housing and the nature center in 2017, and although the process of rebuilding began in 2018, it was significantly impeded by the COVID-19 epidemic.

The Boy Scouts of America's Rancho Alegre offers an instructional program in geology, ecology, native plants and animals and Chumash Culture mixed with outdoor activities including hiking, campfires and archery.

The total cost to rebuild the Campus at Rancho Alegre was \$18 million.

## Santa Maria Planning Commissioners Approve Nearly 1,500 Residential Units

Canfield Development's proposed project (as part of the Blosser Ranch development) was approved. It includes 58 for rent, family homes with a community center, and another 175 for rent units with another

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community center for residents of those units. In all, the development at Blosser Ranch will include 1492 units which will be made up of single-family units, multi-family units and accessory dwelling units. Land has also been set aside for city sports fields, a new school, a new fire station, a new stormwater retention basin and a retail center.

The smaller of the single-family housing projects proposed will consist of houses with one story detached one bedroom craftsman style ADUs while the larger single family home project will be made up of houses with modern farmhouse style ADUs. Each single-family home in both projects will have a 2-car garage and 2 parking spaces in the side yard.

The entire Blosser Ranch development is expected to be completed by 2030.



Image: One of the new apartment projects proposed for Santa Maria would use craftsman-style architecture. The project would be built near the intersection of Blosser Road and Western Avenue. (Courtesy rendering) Noozhawk.com

### **Santa Barbara City Council Permanently Ends Single-Family Zoning**

The AUD (Average Unit Density) program, a previously temporary program intended to incentivize the development of “affordable by design” housing, has been permanently adopted by the Santa Barbara City Council.

Under the AUD program, developers can build projects with higher building densities and less parking than zoning requirements typically allow. The program, adopted in 2013, was supposed to end in 2021 or after 250 housing units were built. Now, two extensions past the deadline, at least 697 units have been built and 466 more units are in the planning process but have yet to be built. Single family neighborhoods are a thing of the past.

### **Increase in Renters Looking to Live Alone and Decrease in Students Pre-leasing Housing**

According to a report by Yardi Matrix (a subsidiary of the Santa Barbara based property management software company, Yardi Systems, Inc.) that was

released in October, late summer and early fall pre-leasing for student housing dropped by 1.1% in 2023. Student housing rent is also significantly higher than previous years.

Another report (from RentCafe another subsidiary of Yardi) released in October found that more renters are trying to live alone. The number of renters living alone rose 6.7% between 2016 and 2021. The report also found that most of the renters who live alone are Baby-Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) while very few of those considered Generation Z (born between the mid-late 90s and the early 2010s) are able to afford living alone. According to the report, 10 of the 20 cities where it is most difficult to afford living alone are in California and these include Santa Barbara, Santa Maria, San Luis Obispo and Oxnard.

### **Santa Barbara City Attorney Sarah Knecht to Fill Role of Interim City Administrator**



Image: Sarah Knecht, keyt.com

Sarah Knecht, who has been working for the City Attorney’s Office since 2004 and has been City Attorney since 2022, will be temporarily acting as City Administrator in place of Rebecca Bjork while the City conducts nationwide recruitment to find a permanent replacement who will ultimately be appointed by the City Council. Knecht will

appoint someone from the City Attorney’s Office to act as City Attorney while she fulfills this interim role.

### **Santa Barbara Officials Need to Show Us the Cost of a State Street Remodel**

Although the closure of 9 blocks of lower State Street was extended until 2026, the State Street Advisory Committee has not discussed the potential costs of building a 9-block pedestrian promenade.

For comparison, the remodel of the Santa Monica Promenade cost \$10 million in 1986. Local business owner, Kevin Boss recently pointed out that \$10 million in 1986 adjusted for inflation is over \$27 million today and that the Santa Monica Promenade is only 3 blocks that were already closed to traffic before the area became a pedestrian mall.

He also pointed out that estimated cost of remodeling the State Street undercrossing (a significantly smaller project) is \$11 million and, based on the cost of these other projects, estimates that the cost of the State Street Promenade could be over \$100 million. The City should start discussing costs as soon as possible.

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