

# Santa Barbara Happenings



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## County Moves Forward on Housing Rezone Sites

Santa Barbara County Supervisors must rezone commercial and agricultural land for residential housing units in order to comply with state housing element law. 36 potential rezone sites were proposed for 660 acres of land (18 in North County and 18 in South County). Glen Annie golf course and San Marcos Growers were two of the most contested sites. The City of Goleta has submitted a letter requesting that agricultural land be considered last.



Image: Glen Annie Golf Club

A workshop concerning potential rezone sites and the developments proposed for the County's unincorporated areas was held in March. At the workshop, developers went before the Board of Supervisors to present renderings and describe their projects. Although many were well-received some noted the relative lack of low-income units proposed.

The majority of the proposals were for the Eastern part of Goleta Valley. Both the development proposed near Turnpike Shopping Center and the development proposed at Bailard in Carpinteria are collaborations between Red Tail Multifamily Development and The Housing Authority.

Since the workshop, the Santa Barbara County Planning Commission has approved plans to rezone 16 sites that will add 7,693 units on the South Coast which is 3,130 more than the state Regional Housing Needs Allocation. Some of the projects that include a certain percentage of low-income units that were not approved could still be built under the state mandated builder's remedy if the RHNA has not been met.

## Goleta Adds Two Roundabouts, Bridge Replacement, and Street Extensions

A Project intended to better connect East and West Goleta by revitalizing and adding infrastructure to Old Town began in March. The project includes roundabouts on

each side of Hollister under Route 217 to assist with traffic flow, as well as an onramp onto Highway 101. Ekwill Street and Fowler Road will be extended, a roundabout will be added at Pine Avenue, and the bridge over San Jose Creek will be replaced. The project which has been around since 2002 will likely cost \$100 million (a third of which will be provided by federal grants). The project will occur alongside another \$2.1 million project that aims to revitalize Hollister Avenue by adding bike lanes, a center median, angled parking and new traffic signals. The projects should be completed within the next three years.

## County Jail Remodel and Other Projects

The County Board of Supervisors recently approved the issuance of \$130 million in Certificates of Participation (a bond-like instrument of municipal debt) to accomplish 6 construction projects: rehabilitating a portion of the South County Jail (\$20.4 million), New County probation headquarters (\$53 million), a regional fire communication center (\$17.6 million), a public safety radio network (\$16 million), renovations of Cachuma Lake RV Park (\$7.5 million), and Fire Station 27 (\$5.2 million).



Image County Jail Rehab, Noozhaw.com

## County Approves Expansion of Tajiguas Landfill

Failure of the County's massively expensive trash-recycling facility means we need more space to bury all our trash and recycling.

The County of Santa Barbara recently approved the expansion of the Tajiguas Landfill in Gaviota so that it may continue receiving garbage up to 650 ft above sea level. This unanimous decision by the Board of Supervisors was opposed by the Gaviota Coast Conservancy and nearby residents due to already pervasive creek pollution and pervasive downwind odors.

There have been well documented complaints about the functioning and running of the landfill as well as

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its recycling operations but the Supervisors pointed out that the expansion of the landfill will be less expensive than moving the material by truck to Chiquita Canyon or Santa Maria.



Image: Vision Zero State Street Undercrossing, Edhat.com

### State Street Undercrossing

The Vision Zero State Street Undercrossing Project is underway. Pedestrian traffic is being maintained on the Western side of State Street and crews are working to minimize the impact on the public. The project is intended to connect downtown with the waterfront more safely and effectively. More space is being added for pedestrians and cyclists along with new lighting and reconstructed bridge columns and railways. And, yes, it is expensive.

### Arbor Week

Last month for arbor week many new trees were planted by the City of Santa Barbara's Urban Forestry Program (which operates as part of the Parks and Recreation Department). The street tree planting project is part of a larger initiative to provide more shade on streets where it is lacking. Engelman Oak, Catalina Ironwood and other non-Palm species will be planted, with each are being planted and given attention for 2-3 years to ensure the survival of the trees and efficient utilization of resources. Santa Barbara already has one of California's most diverse urban forests.

### Updating Water Infrastructure

One of the City of Santa Barbara's largest investments, the water distribution infrastructure, will be receiving an extra \$17 million in funding as part of a 30-year plan to replace 2% of the pipelines per year.

### Remaining Businesses Need a Chance to Survive. Bring cars back to State Street.

The current configuration, a State Street without access by vehicles, was adopted as a result of the COVID pandemic. It was designed so that some economic activity could occur on State Street during the pandemic emergency and is no longer necessary or helpful.

For the last 4 years, State Street has been in its current configuration and while possibilities to revitalize State Street (as part of the State Street master plan) remain under discussion little has been decided. Once a project is selected it will need an Environmental Impact Report and Historic Landmark Commission approval (and likely City Council approval if an appeal is filed). In the mean-

time, many businesses have closed and those that remain are struggling because of the lack of vehicle traffic.

Incredibly, high parking fees are being considered in a misguided effort to get the struggling downtown back on track. In reality this will lead to less economic vitality as fewer people come downtown and pay those fees. There is plenty of free parking on Coast Village Road, upper State Street, and in Goleta.

Changes should be made now to return vehicle traffic to State Street while the "master plan" continues under discussion.



Image: State Street Promenade, Youtube.com

### New Commission Rules for Realtors, Sellers and Buyers

The recent policy changes around realtor commissions due to the National Association of Realtors' litigation settlement will likely affect the market. Three key changes are: 1. Listing agents are now banned from offering co-fee sharing with the buyer's agent, 2. Buyers are now required to pre-negotiate agent fees Realtors are now prohibited from insisting sellers offer compensation to cooperating brokers, and 3. Because of the elimination of automatic co-fee sharing between sellers' and buyers' agents, buyers will now be responsible for directly compensating their agents.

There will likely be some uncertainty as the new rules are understood by sellers and buyers and shack out in the real world. But the model currently works in Australia so I assume we will get the hang of it here.

### California's Latest Hustle: Utility Bills Based on Ratepayers' Income

The state government adopted new laws which require the California Public Utilities Commission to add a fixed charge onto residential electric bills, along with the current usage-based charge, by July 2024. This fixed charge will be income based, meaning lower rates for low-income households and higher rates for high-income households. It has not yet been decided how these rates will be determined. This is really additional income tax paid through your utility bills.

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