Section 4
Comparative Evaluation

Introduction

This section evaluates the three alternatives based on how they addresses countywide issues identified by the community, GPAC, Planning Commission, and Board of Supervisors during the General Plan Update. This evaluation is qualitative and based on the profession judgment of County staff and the General Plan Update Consultant Team, which includes land use planning, economics, transportation, infrastructure, and environmental experts.

This section first describes each evaluation topic and its implications for future change in the county, and then evaluates how each alternative addresses the issue. Finally, this section includes a summary matrix. Evaluation topics discussed in this section include:

Land Use and Housing

- Land Use Efficiency
- Agricultural Land Conversion
- Housing Options
- Jobs-Housing Balance
- Rural Character Concepts

Transportation and Circulation

- Vehicle Miles Traveled
- Roadway Impacts
- Alternative Modes

Economic and Fiscal

- County Economic Growth
- Fiscal Impacts

Public Services

- Emergency Services
- Water Supply
- Aquifer Recharge

Environmental

- Biological Resources
- Scenic Resources
- Energy Consumption
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions

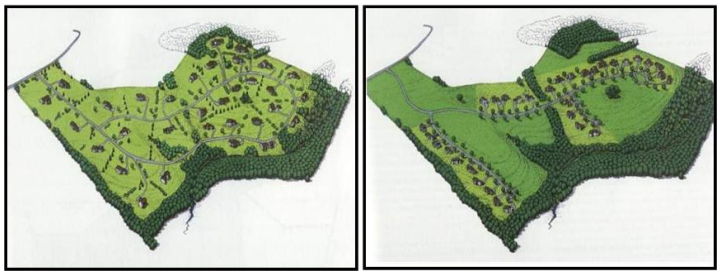
Land Use Efficiency

Land use efficiency is measured by the amount of urban land used per person. The less land per capita needed for homes, shopping, schools, and jobs, the more efficient the land use. Land use efficiency directly relates to the location, density, and intensity of growth. In particular, higher average residential densities result in an increase in land use efficiency. In rural, agricultural counties like San Benito County, increased land use efficiency generally means reduced conversion of productive agricultural land to urban uses and increased efficiency in the ability to provide public infrastructure and services. Rural residential growth is typically the most inefficient use of land due to large parcel sizes, very low population density, and the scattered nature of the development.

Existing Five-Acre Residential Subdivisions

Photo by Mintier Harnish

Conventional Subdivision **Clustered Subdivision**



Source: Resourceful Communities Program

Alternative A

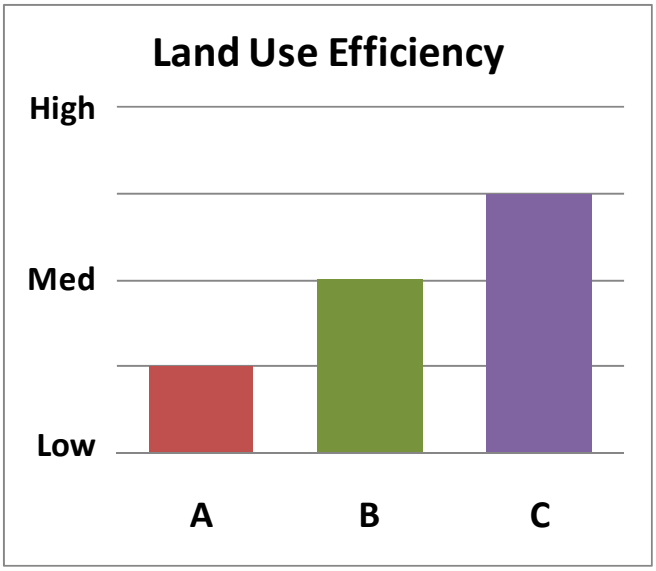
Alternative A would result in the least efficient use of land since it has the greatest potential for scattered rural residential development on five-acre lots in the Hollister and San Juan Valleys. This would result in more productive agricultural land being converted to residential and urban uses, and a greater cost for the County to provide infrastructure and public services.

Alternative B

Alternative B would result in a more efficient use of land than Alternative A, but less efficient than Alternative C. Rather than the scattered rural residential growth that would occur under Alternative A, rural residential growth under Alternative B would be clustered on smaller lots away from productive farmland, using less land and potentially requiring less infrastructure investment.

Alternative C

Alternative C would result in the most efficient use of land of the three alternatives since population and employment growth is concentrated near Hollister. Nearly all new residential and commercial development would occur at urban densities and intensities in, or adjacent to, existing urbanized areas. This would happen as a result of strict land use regulations in the unincorporated county.



Agricultural Land Conversion

Between 1992 through 2008 over 2,300 acres of agricultural land were converted to urban uses. Much of this conversion occurred on high-value farmland, including prime farmland. Compared to the other six counties in the Central Coast Region, between 1990 and 2004 San Benito County ranked first in the percentage of new urbanized land that was high-quality farmland. Loss of productive agricultural land to urban uses raises several concerns, including economic consequences of the loss of agricultural jobs and income, reduced productivity of adjacent agricultural land, and increased agriculture/urban conflicts. Conversion of farmland to urban uses can be minimized through increased land use efficiency and/or directing growth to cities and other areas not located on or near productive farmland.

Alternative A

Alternative A would result in the greatest amount of agricultural land conversion due to the potential for scattered five-acre lot residential development in the Hollister and San Juan Valleys. Much of the land currently (2010) zoned either Agricultural Productive (AP) and Rural (R), where five-acre lot subdivisions are allowed, is located on prime farmland with highly-productive agricultural soils.

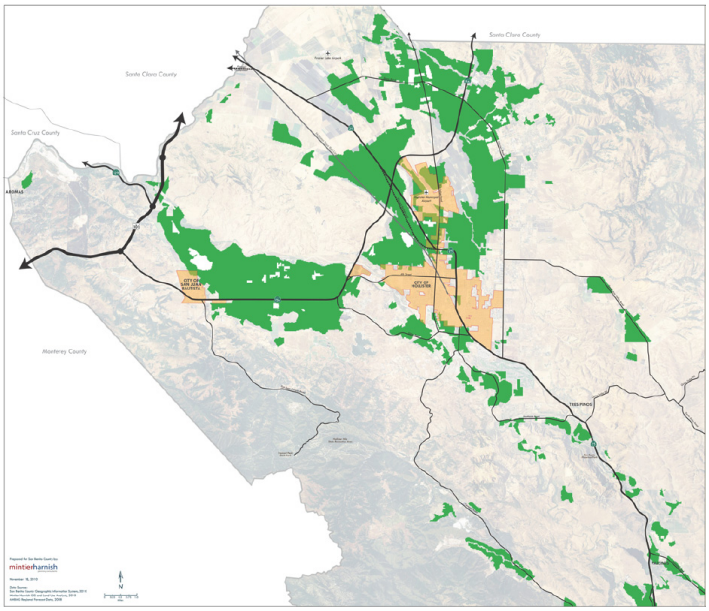
Alternative B

Alternative B would result in fewer acres of agricultural land converted to urban uses than Alternative A, but more than Alternative C. The Transfer of Development Credit (TDC) program established under this alternative would provide incentives for the preservation of some farmland in conjunction with clustered residential development. This program would encourage residential development away from prime farmland to areas with more marginal agricultural value.

Alternative C

Alternative C would result in very little farmland conversion in the unincorporated county; however, some prime farmland located at the edge of the city limits of Hollister would potentially be converted if Hollister continued to grow outward. Overall, Alternative C would result in the greatest amount of protected agricultural land through the establishment of a mandatory Transfer of Development Credit (TDC) program.

Prime Farmland In San Benito County



Sources: San Benito County, 2010; Mintier Harnish, 2010

Photo by Rene Rodriguez

Housing Options

A broad range of housing options includes not only traditional detached single-family homes on a variety of lot sizes, but attached single-family, second units, duplexes, stacked flats, lofts, live/work, apartments, condominiums, and mobile homes. A broad range of housing types, sizes, and affordability increases the opportunities for residents to find housing suitable to meet their needs and incomes. Increased housing choices also mean a greater jobs-housing balance and increase opportunities for new businesses to locate where their employees can find adequate housing.

All of the alternatives include urban density single-family residential (i.e., 6+ units per acre) development south of Hollister along the SR 25 corridor. This is consistent with the draft Hollister/County Housing Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The MOU is designed to promote cooperation between the City and County in accommodating the need for affordable housing.

Photos by Christopher Mayer and Mintier Harnish

Alternative A

Alternative A would potentially result in the least variety of new housing options and the least affordable new housing since a larger share of new homes would be large-lot, single-family homes. These types of homes tend to be more expensive since they are located on larger lots.

Alternative B

Alternative B would potentially result in the greatest variety of housing options. This alternative encourages urban-density residential development in and around Hollister, but also allows for clustered rural residential housing.

Alternative C

Alternative C would result in the most urban-density housing options, and likely the most affordable housing options than the other alternatives. This is because more homes on fewer acres tends to reduce housing costs. However, opportunities for new rural residential living are more limited under Alternative C.

Jobs-Housing Balance

San Benito County has faced tremendous residential growth pressures over the past few decades because of its beautiful natural environment, relatively low land values, and location near the Silicon Valley. The Cities and County have made serious efforts to establish growth controls in order to prevent or limit the county from becoming a bedroom community.

Jobs-housing balance describes the relationship between the number of jobs and the number of housing units located within a given area. The concept behind a jobs-housing balance is to create housing opportunities to enable people to live close to their jobs if they so choose. The underlying objectives of achieving a balance between jobs and housing include reducing commute lengths, traffic congestion, air pollution, travel costs, and public expenditures for capital facilities and ongoing operations and maintenances of roads.

Alternative A

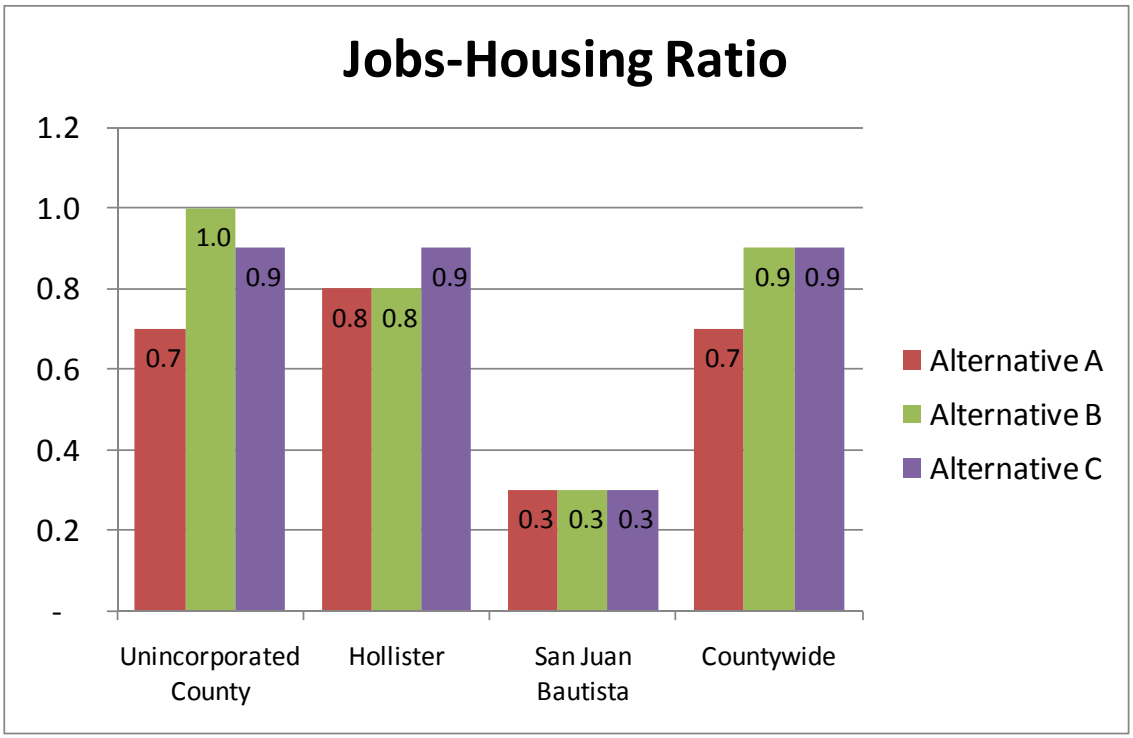
Alternative A would include a smaller number of new jobs (4,320) than the other alternatives, resulting in the lowest jobs-housing ratio in 2035. This is because the employment projections for Alternative A are based on AMBAG's regional projections, which anticipate slow future employment growth in the county. The result is a 2035 jobs-housing ratio of 0.7, the lowest of the three alternatives.

Alternative B

Alternative B would result in the highest jobs-housing ratio in the unincorporated county (1.0), and overall the same countywide jobs-housing ratio as Alternative C since both Alternatives B and C include 7,720 new jobs.

Alternative C

Alternative C would result in the same countywide jobs-housing ratio as Alternative B, but a lower jobs-housing ratio for the unincorporated county (0.9). This is because the future employment growth is focused in Hollister.



Rural Character

San Benito County is defined by its rural character, small town atmosphere, and distinct unincorporated villages (e.g., Tres Pinos, Aromas). Yet, with its proximity to the Silicon Valley, the county continues to face enormous growth pressures. Accommodating and attracting sensible growth while maintaining and enhancing rural character and quality of life will continue to be a challenge for the county. Key components of a strategy to preserve rural character include:

- Maintaining the agricultural landscape and preserving natural lands;
- Investing in existing downtowns, neighborhood centers, and infrastructure; and
- Building vibrant neighborhoods that complement the unique character and beauty of the county and serve the needs of all age groups.

Alternative A

Alternative A has the greatest potential to result in the fragmentation of the rural landscape through residential development on five-acre lot splits. This alternative does not support as much investment in already urbanized areas as the other alternatives. It would also allow residential lots splits on agricultural parcels that currently provide buffers between the cities and unincorporated villages.

Alternative B

Alternative B would help preserve the rural character of the county by encouraging clustered residential development and the preservation of the agricultural landscape. However, this alternative also includes the greatest amount of urban-style residential development in the unincorporated county, which would change the rural character in some parts of the county.

Alternative C

Alternative C has the greatest potential to preserve the rural character of the unincorporated county by directing growth to already urbanized areas. It would support investment in downtown Hollister and build off of existing infrastructure. However, this alternative would also result in significant urbanization and outward expansion of Hollister. In addition, without some investment in existing unincorporated communities, disinvestment would result in the degradation of the quality of life in unincorporated communities.

Vehicle Miles Traveled

Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) is a tool used to measure the extent to which a particular land use pattern would be expected to increase or decrease the quantity of cars and the distances traveled on the regional or local roadway system. A land use pattern that is dispersed or does not provide a good mix and balance of complementary land uses generally results in higher overall VMT.

Alternative A

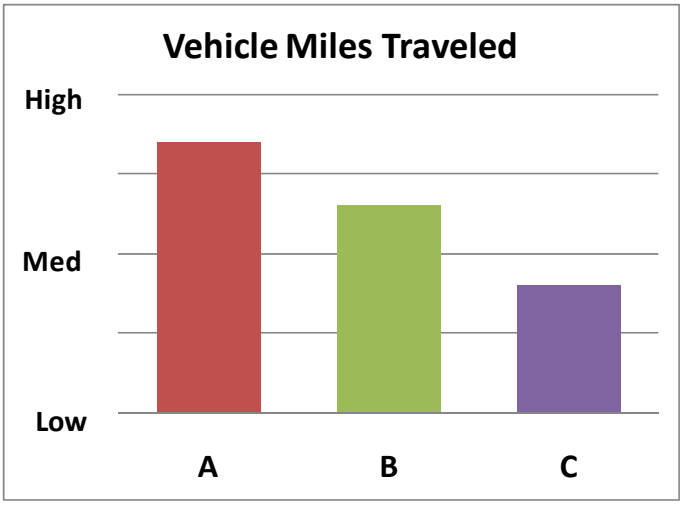
Alternative A would likely result in the greatest amount of VMT due to the dispersal of residential land uses throughout the unincorporated county away from existing and future jobs (located along the US 101 corridor and within Hollister). This separation of housing from jobs and other community services (retail/ commercial) will most likely result in longer vehicle trips.

Alternative B

Alternative B would result in less VMT than Alternative A, but more than Alternative C. Alternative B would locate a larger proportion of residential development near existing community services (retail/commercial) and employment centers, therefore minimizing the trip lengths within the county. This alternative would also lessen the amount of out-of-county trips because there would be more jobs within the county.

Alternative C

Alternative C would likely result in the least VMT of the three alternatives because it would concentrate most of the residential growth and most of the employment growth in or in the immediate vicinity of Hollister. Alternative C will result in more internal trips within the Hollister area and will reduce out of county commuting. Similar to Alternative B, this alternative would also lessen the amount of out-of-county trips because there would be more jobs within the county.



Roadway Impacts

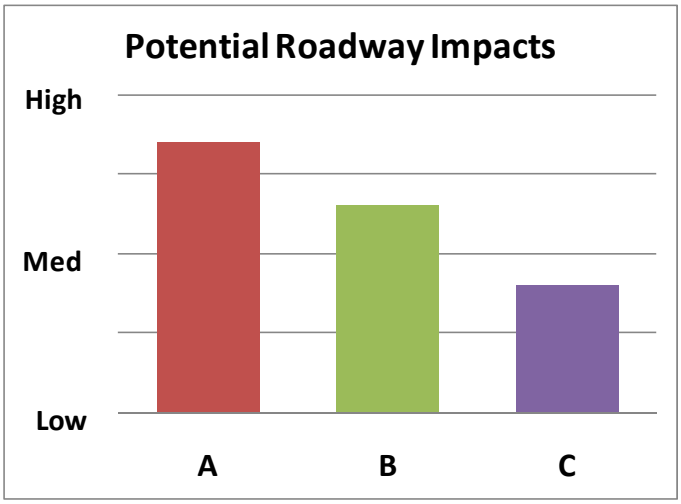
The amount and location of new growth can impact both the condition of existing roadways and the amount of new roadways needed. The amount of transportation investment required to maintain the County's level of service standards can vary based on the future development pattern.

Alternative A

Alternative A would likely result in the need to improve or construct more roadways throughout the unincorporated county due to the dispersed pattern of residential and employment land uses. This alternative would result in the County spending more money to improve the unincorporated roadway system due to increased traffic.

Alternative B

The traffic impacts under Alternative B will likely be less severe than Alternative A because of the shortened trip lengths. The location of commercial and employment uses near residential land uses along major roadways will isolate traffic impacts and lessen the cost to maintain unincorporated roadways. There would also be fewer out-of-county trips because there would be more jobs within the county.



Alternative C

Alternative C would likely result in the least impacts to the roadway system due to the concentration of a larger portion of trips within the Hollister area. The large concentration of employment and housing within the Hollister area will help contain school, shopping, personal, business, and recreational trips to the roadway system within Hollister. Improvements would largely be isolated to the local roadway system in the city and reduced by the decrease in total trips. There would also be fewer out-of-county trips because there would be more jobs within the county.

Alternative Modes of Transportation

Land use types and locations influence whether people have good access to alternative modes of transportation, such as walking, bicycling, and transit. Complementary land uses, such as residential and commercial uses, can be located close to each other to reduce the need for automobile trips. To ensure that investments in transit and other modes of transportation are feasible, concentrated areas of complementary land uses can be linked by transit, bicycle facilities, and sidewalks.

Alternative A

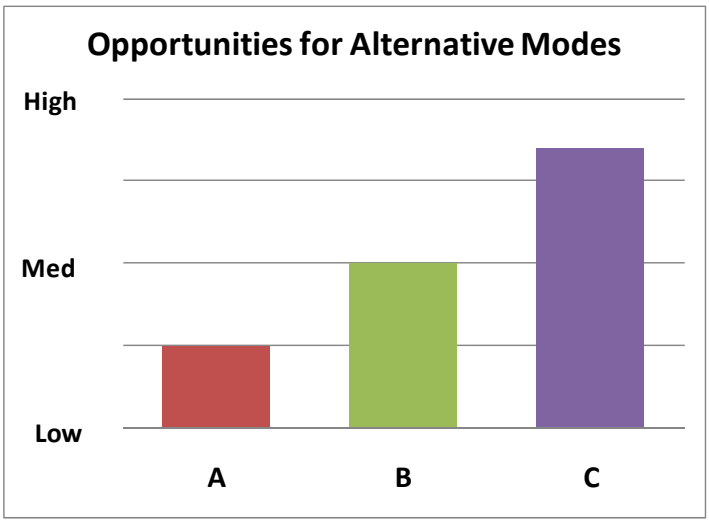
Alternative A would provide the fewest opportunities for transit, bicycling, and walking. The dispersed land use patterns will result in trip lengths that discourage pedestrian and bicycle travel. Increased use of transit would require an extensive expansion of the existing transit system that may not be feasible due to the lack of concentrated demand for services. In addition, dispersed developments will not be less likely to provide centralized transit facilities in residential or employment centers.

Alternative B

Alternative B would provide more opportunities for transit use than Alternative A due to the location of more commercial, employment, and residential land uses along selected major roadways. Transit services would be more feasible along major roadway corridors with facilities centrally-located within dense residential areas. As with Alternative A, connecting the rural residential areas to the commercial and employment areas with transit and bicycle facilities would likely be infeasible. Alternative B may create bicycle and pedestrian opportunities in, however, they would not be as extensive as those in Alternative C.

Alternative C

Alternative C would provide the best transit, bicycle, and pedestrian opportunities due to the centralized location of future growth. A centralized transit system would be implemented within Hollister with enhanced bicycle and pedestrian facilities along identified routes that would serve nearly all of the future growth, with the exception of the potential employment and commercial centers along the US 101 corridor.



Economic Growth

Economic growth is typically measured as a combination of employment and income growth. The goal in economic development is to attract more and higher paying jobs for local residents. In the long term, economic growth in the county will depend on the public and private sectors working together to provide a high quality of life and access to jobs for its residents and workers.

Alternative A

Alternative A, which is based largely on the AMBAG Forecast, includes less future commercial and employment growth in the county than Alternatives B or C. Because of this there are fewer opportunities for future business parks or commercial centers. While the alternative does allow for residential growth in the county, it does not actively promote (i.e., unincorporated) job and County tax base growth. This alternative would also hurt the agricultural economy since it allows lot splits within the Hollister and San Juan Valleys.

Alternative B

Alternative B assumes a higher amount of future commercial and employment growth than Alternative A in order to promote economic development. This alternative also includes more unincorporated growth, particularly in commercial or employment center nodes at key intersections along US 101 and SR 156. Since the amount of employment growth projected by AMBAG is fairly modest, allowing more areas for commercial or employment center development may encourage too many weak centers rather than a few strong ones. This alternative would also help the agricultural economy by preventing lots splits of productive farmland.

Alternative C

Similar to Alternative B, Alternative C assumes a higher amount of future commercial and employment growth than Alternative A in order to promote economic development. The major difference between Alternative C and Alternative B is that this alternative directs the majority of future commercial and employment center growth to Hollister. This future growth has the higher likelihood of being successful because the growth is concentrated in the existing urban areas. This alternative would best help the agricultural economy by protecting all agricultural land in the Hollister and San Juan Valleys.

County Fiscal Impacts

The location of new commercial and employment center growth strongly influences the long-term fiscal health of the County. The efficiency and cost-effectiveness of countywide services can be affected by whether new growth is concentrated or dispersed. For example, the cost of providing Sheriff patrols to scattered rural locations is less cost-effective than providing patrol services to more densely-populated communities.

The type of future growth also influences the long-term fiscal health of the County. Employment uses typically generate more tax revenues than service costs, resulting in positive fiscal impacts for the County. These land uses also generate jobs and economic growth that can contribute to the health of the local economy. On the other hand, residential uses typically generate more service-related costs than revenues, resulting in a potential fiscal deficit. A balance of residential and employment-related growth is needed to maintain a balanced economy and a healthy County budget.

Alternative A

Alternative A would result in significant future strains on the fiscal health of the County. This is because this alternative has the potential for many new scattered and low-density residential developments. This type of land use creates an inefficient and costly service pattern. It requires longer distances for Sheriff patrols and does not provide as much tax revenue as other forms of development.

Alternative B

Alternative B would result in the greatest positive fiscal impacts to the County. This is because it promotes the most unincorporated commercial and employment center growth. It also creates a more efficient residential land use pattern by encouraging clustered development.

Alternative C

This alternative would result in overall cost savings for some County services, since most future growth would be concentrated in Hollister. However, this alternative would provide the least amount of new commercial and industrial tax revenues for the County.

Emergency Services

As population increases, demand for both law enforcement and fire protection services will increase. The location of new development within the county will impact emergency response times. For example, as the size of a Sheriff patrol area increases, or if development occurs further from existing fire stations, response times will increase as the distances from responders increase. Alternatively, as population centers become denser, traffic congestion may worsen, lengthening response times.

Alternative A

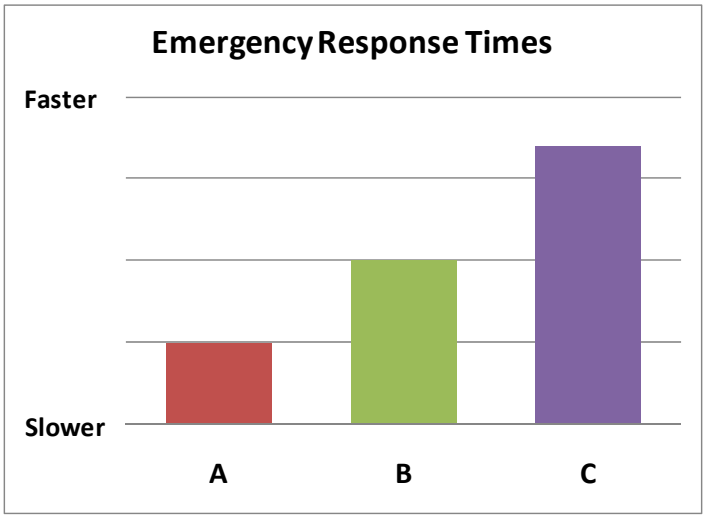
Alternative A would result in the greatest impact on the County's Sheriff and fire protection services because it has the greatest potential for scattered rural residential development on five-acre lots in the Hollister and San Juan Valleys. Population growth in low-density housing would place many new residents in rural areas with reduced Sheriff or fire protection services and longer response times. Therefore, growth in rural areas would require expanded emergency protection, which would increase County costs.

Alternative B

Alternative B would result in fewer impacts to Sheriff and fire protection services than Alternative A, but greater impacts than Alternative C. Unlike Alternative A, the distribution of growth would be clustered into higher-density single-family residential subdivisions and commercial nodes along major arteries and key interchanges. As a result, the distribution of emergency services would be focused in areas south of Hollister and locations along SR 25, where response times would be shorter and the timing and provision of urban services, such as water supply for fire suppression, would more efficient.

Alternative C

Alternative C would focus most population growth away from unincorporated areas of the county where service levels and response times would be the lowest, and in urban locations where service levels and response times are high. As a result, Alternative C would result in the fewest impacts to Sheriff and fire protection services, require the fewest new deputies, and the least investment in new infrastructure to maintain service levels. The majority of the growth would be concentrated in high-density residential communities, closer to existing Sheriff and fire stations and reliable water resources. However, existing emergency access routes along major arteries have the potential to become constrained due to increases in traffic congestion and limited ingress/egress accessibility near existing and new residential and commercial development.



Water Supply

There are three sources of water for municipal, rural, and agricultural uses in the county. These include water purchased and imported from the Central Valley Project (CVP) by the San Benito County Water District (SBCWD), local surface water stored in and released from the SBCWD-owned and operated Hernandez and Paicines reservoirs, and groundwater pumped from wells. In general, the groundwater in most of the productive areas of the county is poor quality, especially compared to the quality of surface water.

While the SBCWD is the CVP wholesaler and has jurisdiction for water management throughout the county, much of the population is served directly by water purveyors including the City of Hollister, Sunnyslope County Water District (SSCWD), and other small purveyors. In developed areas the existing purveyors would need additional supply capacity to serve new development.

Some communities within the county are not served by water districts or do not have public water systems. These communities and rural residents rely on private wells and groundwater. Any new development in a currently unserved area would need to rely on groundwater for its water supply.

Alternative A

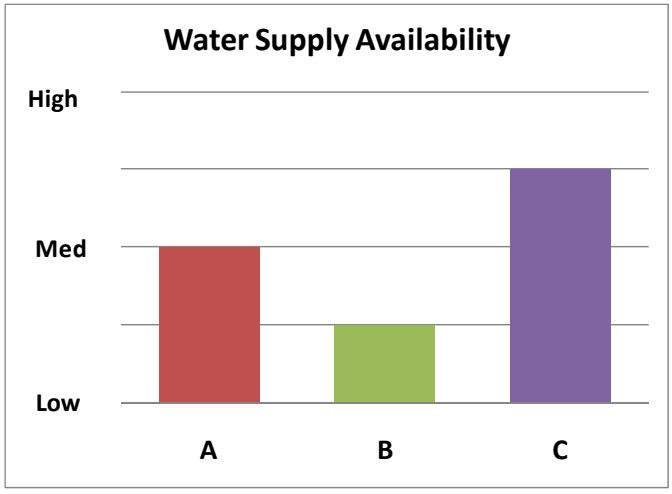
Water supply for the scattered rural developments in Alternative A would likely be local groundwater. While agricultural users currently (2010) consume water in this area, the water supply source has been largely CVP imported water. SBCWD generally does not transfer CVP water from agricultural uses to serve low-density residential developments. If development replaces agricultural land that previously relied on groundwater, then there should be adequate supply. In some locations, local groundwater quality may be too poor for residential users.

Alternative B

The clustered residential development in Alternative B is in areas of the county where water supply resources are limited. There are some existing small water supply systems in the proposed residential areas of the county, but they rely primarily on limited groundwater. In addition, the clustered residential areas in this alternative are primarily aquifer recharge zones and increasing use of groundwater in these locations would deprive the rest of the groundwater basin of important high-quality recharge. The clustered development in the San Juan Valley is near several existing uses that have previous water quality issues, including high concentrations of perchlorate and volatile organic chemicals. This contamination would further limit water supply in this area. New commercial developments along SR 156 would probably rely on local groundwater for water supply, while those along US 101 are in areas where local groundwater is limited.

Alternative C

The areas designated for development in Alternative C are already served by the City of Hollister and SSCWD. Both of these agencies have the ability to expand their water supply capacity from regional groundwater sources, while additional imported supply would need to be acquired. Both the City and SSCWD have plans to increase the volume of water supply to their service areas in the future. They include increased delivery of imported water, groundwater banking, and development of other water supply sources.



Aquifer Recharge

There are 12 groundwater basins that are entirely or partially within San Benito County. Most groundwater production occurs in the northern part of the county in the Gilroy-Hollister Groundwater Basin. This basin underlies the area included in the alternatives. Aquifer recharge to the basin has historically been from deep percolation of rainfall; natural and managed flow in the San Benito River, Tres Pinos Creek, Santa Ana Creek, Pacheco Creek, Arroyo De Las Viboras, and Arroyo Dos Picachos; and inflow from the hills surrounding the basin on the south and northeast. Some recharge to the aquifer has also historically come from agricultural, and to a lesser extent urban, return flows.

Alternative A

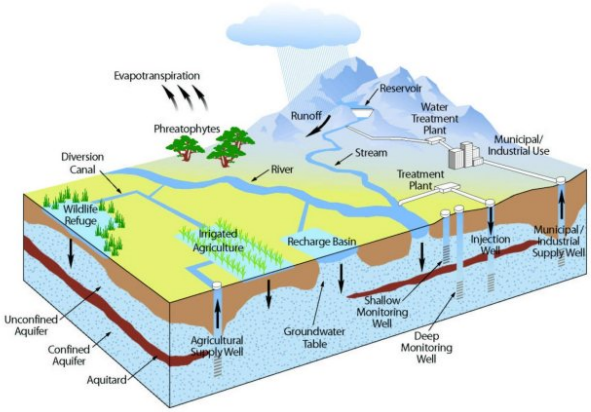
Development under Alternative A would replace agricultural land uses with residential development. These developments would likely rely on individual wells and septic or small community water supply and wastewater systems. The ratio of water consumption to return flow of such systems is generally very similar to that of agriculture. If the replaced agriculture used local groundwater as a supply, the effect of development in this alternative may be negligible with regard to the volume of aquifer recharge. If the replaced agriculture used CVP water, then there would be a net loss in the volume of aquifer recharge because of the loss of return flow. Impacts of building and paving would be minimal, as runoff from impervious surfaces would likely flow to surrounding pervious areas, where recharge would occur.

Alternative B

The areas of potential residential development in Alternative B overlie important aquifer-recharge zones of the basin. Development in these areas would have deleterious effects as a result of increased impervious area, resulting in decreased infiltration of precipitation and increased use of groundwater. Both groundwater levels and quality in the rest of the basin may be negatively affected by this reduction in high quality recharge. Stormwater collection and recharge systems may serve to mitigate some of the impact of the development but are unlikely to fully replace the natural recharge.

Alternative C

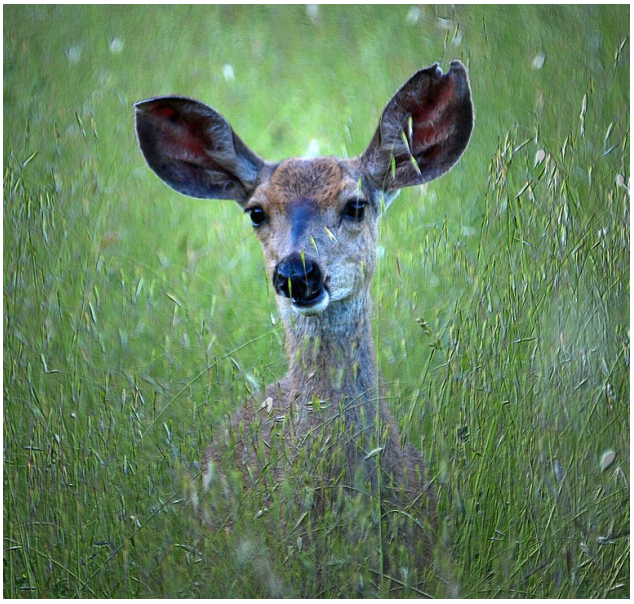
In Alternative C population and employment growth is concentrated in the Hollister urban area, which has a limited potential for recharge from deep percolation of rainfall due to existing impervious area. Because of its location in the basin, the Hollister area is a less important recharge zone than those identified for development in Alternative B. Focusing development in the urban corridor would reduce local recharge, but would allow aquifer recharge to continue to function as it has historically in the important recharge zones. A major factor in the effect on recharge in the urban areas would be the effectiveness of existing and new stormwater systems in protecting or improving local recharge. If local stormwater systems generally discharge rapidly to streams without providing retention and recharge, the impact will be increased. If local stormwater systems are designed to retain and recharge stormwater, the effect of this alternative on aquifer recharge would be minimal.



Groundwater recharge is a hydrologic process where water moves downward from surface water to groundwater. Groundwater is recharged naturally by rain and snow melt and to a smaller extent by surface water (rivers and lakes). Recharge may be impeded somewhat by human activities including paving and urban development.

Biological Resources

The quality of wildlife habitat varies depending on the level of nearby development, the surrounding land use, and the types and availability of vegetation and other habitat features. In general, wildlife habitat in urban areas is of lower quality, consisting of landscaped areas with a mix of both native and exotic ornamental plants. Species inhabiting these areas are conditioned to a greater level of human activity than those in natural and less developed areas. Generally, the more developed an area becomes, the less species diversity it will have. Higher quality habitat is found away from urban areas and typically consists of natural habitats and low-intensity agricultural landscapes.



Photos by Rene Rodriguez

Alternative A

Alternative A would result in the greatest amount of agricultural land conversion due to the potential for scattered five-acre lot residential development in the Hollister and San Juan Valleys. Fragmentation and habitat loss poses a threat to biodiversity. Even though agricultural land is considered less preferred habitat, numerous species use it for foraging and migratory corridors. Land conversion from agricultural uses to rural residential or urban uses further fragments the landscape and isolates wildlife populations by disrupting the migration and dispersal of species. Species dependent on habitat interiors or with large habitat area requirements are especially vulnerable to fragmentation. In general, fragmentation reduces the diversity of species. Only certain species, such as those that are adapted to habitat edges or dependent upon human activity, are able to persist in these fragmented habitats.

Alternative B

Alternative B would result in fewer acres of agricultural land converted to residential ranchette or urban uses than Alternative A, but more than Alternative C. Rural residential development in this alternative would be clustered in areas with few biological constraints. Fragmentation would continue to occur due to rural residential development and commercial growth allowed outside of urban centers, although less than what would potentially occur under Alternative A.

Alternative C

Directing growth to the cities would protect natural habitat and minimize the continued fragmentation of the landscape. Alternative C would result in the least amount of habitat fragmentation in the unincorporated county. However, some farmland located at the edge of the Hollister city limits would potentially be converted if Hollister continues to grow outward. Overall, the majority of areas with high biological importance will not be exposed to additional adverse impacts.

Scenic Resources

Elevations vary in the county, from valley floors to the higher elevations, which offer views of mountains, rangelands, agricultural fields and croplands, natural ridgelines, and grasslands. The county is traversed by several County-designated scenic highways (US 101, SRs 129 and 146) and eligible State scenic highways (SRs 25 and 156). Croplands and rangelands also have high scenic values and constitute more than 75 percent of the total land in the county. Population growth and urban development would impact these scenic resources by converting agricultural landscapes to urban uses. Development near the foothills would also impact natural ridgelines, and as a result, diminish a range of views and prominent scenic vistas.

Alternative A

Alternative A would result in the greatest impact to scenic resources due to a potential conversion of agricultural lands to scattered residential growth on five-acre lot ranchette development in the Hollister and San Juan Valleys. Alternative A would also result in a greater dispersion of residential development along the foothills and towards ridgelines, as growth spreads away from the valley floor. As a result, more viewsheds and important vista points would potentially become diminished with homes and roadways, decreasing the aesthetic value of adjacent agricultural and grazing land.

Alternative B

Alternative B would result in fewer acres of agricultural land converted to residential development because residential ranchettes would be discouraged in favor of clustered residential development in areas away from existing agricultural fields. As a result, Alternative B would better maintain scenic viewsheds along eligible State scenic highways, such as SRs 25 and 156. However, while agricultural views would be protected between Hollister and San Juan Bautista, views are more likely to be obstructed around the San Justo Recreation Area and to the northeast of SR 156 as development spreads outward.

Alternative C

Alternative C would result in the fewest impacts to scenic resources in the unincorporated county by directing the majority of future growth to the city of Hollister and protecting agricultural lands, thereby limiting growth along the urban fringe and near the foothills. However, the increase in high-density development within the city of Hollister may affect the rural character and small town aesthetic of the area, even though commercial growth along the perimeter of the county would be limited.

Photo by Rene Rodriguez

Energy Consumption

While California produces a large portion of power in-state, there are currently (2010) very limited energy production facilities in the county. Energy use is expected to increase proportionate to population growth. Rising energy prices, increases in demand, and supply concerns continue to underscore the importance of improving energy efficiency and reshaping land use patterns as additional homes and commercial space are built, and vehicles are added to the road each year. Existing State policies encourage local governments to plan communities in a way that deters urban sprawl, better aligns and balances land use plans with transportation and housing needs, increases energy conservation, and invests in renewable energy production to reduce energy use that is dependent on fossil fuels.

Alternative A

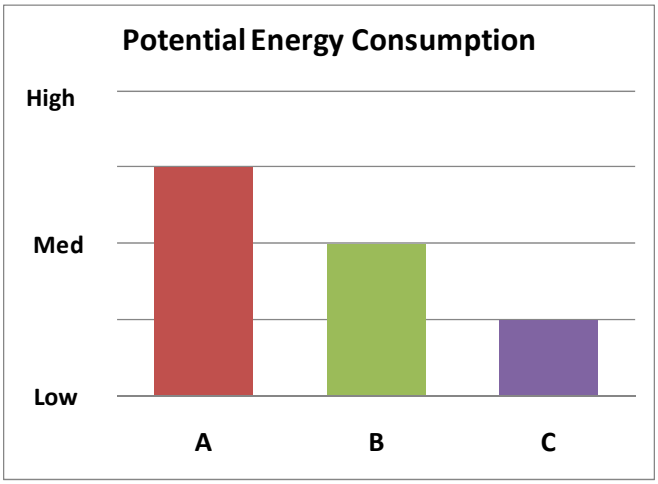
Alternative A has the potential to result in the greatest increase in energy consumption because residential growth would occur on five-acre ranchette lots at scattered locations in the Hollister and San Juan Valleys. Low-density development on larger lots often involves the construction of larger homes that use proportionally greater amounts of electricity and natural gas compared to smaller dwellings or compact development. Also, because Alternative A would place residences farther from basic services and employment, it would be more likely to generate a higher proportion of vehicle trips, which would increase gasoline consumption.

Alternative B

Alternative B would result in slightly less energy consumption than Alternative A, but more than Alternative C. Clustered residential development is often associated with lower levels of per capita household energy use because it involves a combination of both higher- and medium-density housing units. In addition, because growth would be more concentrated in clustered neighborhoods closer to major arterials and existing electrical and natural gas utility infrastructure, the distribution of energy supplies would be more efficiently provided to customers at central locations rather than to scattered rural locations in the unincorporated county.

Alternative C

Alternative C would result in the smallest increase in overall energy consumption and the greatest energy savings because of the high-density, compact development pattern and limited commercial building construction. Because Alternative C directs most growth to Hollister and lesser growth to rural locations within the unincorporated county, this alternative would result in compact and smaller housing units that use relatively less energy. Alternative C would result in the lowest increase in vehicle miles traveled (VMT) due to greater infill and transit-oriented development, which is more conducive to walking, biking, and transit use. Alternative C would also place the majority of future residential units and job growth within urbanized locations near major transportation corridors that have existing infrastructure, utility hook-ups, and a better distribution of energy services.



Greenhouse Gas Emissions

The single largest source of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions is passenger vehicle travel, accounting for up to 30 percent of California's total emissions. In an effort to reduce GHG emissions, the Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006 (AB 32) requires that California reduce its GHG emissions to 1990 levels by 2020. In order to meet this requirement, the State requires local governments to help meet the GHG emission reduction goal through land use and development regulations. Without GHG reduction efforts, emissions within the county would continue to increase as population and employment grow.

The most significant way the County can influence emission reductions is through trying to ensure that people spend less time in their cars and finding ways to reduce electrical energy consumption. The greatest differences in GHG emissions among the alternatives would be related to how each alternative reduces or increases major GHG emission contributors, such as VMT, commercial electrical energy use, and agricultural water use. Agricultural water use is of particular importance for San Benito County since most water comes from the Central Valley Water project and is pumped over the coastal range, which requires a large amount of electricity.

Additionally, there are several programs that seek to increase energy conservation, reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT), encourage more compact development patterns, balance jobs and housing, and implement green building standards. Although there are a myriad of GHG regulations in place, future GHG emissions are expected to be substantially higher than current conditions. The differences in emissions among the alternatives and the amount of GHG emissions produced would be minimal.

Alternative A

Alternative A would result in higher GHG emissions than the other alternatives primarily because the transportation emissions would be the highest. Higher transportation emissions would be due to the number of trips and the distance residents would need to travel from homes scattered throughout the northern and western Hollister and San Juan Valleys to commercial and employment centers. Commercial building construction would contribute to some GHG emissions, but its relative contribution would be less compared to the contributions under Alternatives B and C, since fewer commercial nodes are proposed in the unincorporated county under Alternative A. Also, as agricultural uses are converted to urban uses, less water would be used, under the assumption that agricultural practices related to crop irrigation typically use as much as three times more water than urban uses. Therefore, while Alternative A would result in the greatest increase associated with transportation emissions due to a low-density development pattern, GHG emissions would be slightly offset by a reduction in indirect water use.

Alternative B

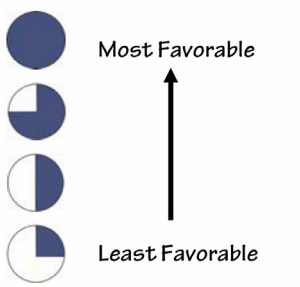
Alternative B would result in fewer GHG emissions compared to Alternative A, but more than Alternative C, because it directs most growth away from five-acre lot subdivisions within agricultural areas to clustered residential subdivisions and higher- to medium-density single-family residential areas near the city of Hollister. Consequently, higher-density, more energy-efficient compact residential development that is closer to basic services and employment centers would reduce the number of vehicle trips, resulting in a lower VMT. However, water savings due to the conversion of farmland to urban uses would not offset GHG emissions under Alternative B.

Alternative C

Alternative C would create the greatest potential for energy conservation and the smallest increase in energy demand, thereby resulting in the lowest increase in GHG emissions compared to the other alternatives. Directing residential and commercial growth to the city of Hollister would reduce the length and average number of daily trips generated by households. Consequently, it would result in greater investments in transit-oriented development, which in turn would result in further reductions in VMT, through improved walkability and better transit use.

Comparative Evaluation Summary

The following table provides a qualitative comparison of the three alternatives based on County Staff's and the Consultant Team's professional judgment.



Criteria		A	B	C
Land Use and Housing	Land Use Efficiency			
	Agricultural Land Conversion			
	Housing Options			
	Jobs-Housing Balance			
	Rural Character Concepts			
Transportation and Circulation	Vehicle Miles Traveled			
	Roadway Impacts			
	Alternative Modes			
Economic and Fiscal	County Economic Growth			
	County Fiscal Impacts			
	Emergency Services			
	Water Supply			
	Aquifer Recharge			
Environmental	Biological Resources			
	Scenic Resources			
	Energy Consumption			
	Greenhouse Gas Emissions			