



CITY OF WATSONVILLE

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

250 MAIN STREET • WATSONVILLE, CA 95076

TELEPHONE: (831) 768-3050 • www.watsonville.gov

NOTICE OF PREPARATION

To: Distribution (refer to attached list)

Date: January 24, 2025

Subject: Revised Notice of Preparation – Watsonville 2050 General Plan Environmental Impact Report (EIR)

Lead Agency:

Agency Name: City of Watsonville, Community Development Department
Street Address: 250 Main Street
City/State/Zip: Watsonville, California 95076
Contact: Justin Meek
Interim Community Development Director
Telephone: 831-768-3050

Consulting Firm:

Name: Circlepoint
Street Address: 42 S First Street, Suite D
City/State/Zip: San Jose, California 95113
Contact: Marco Mendoza
Project Manager
Telephone: 657-208-6882

A notice of preparation (NOP) was released for the project on September 13, 2024, for public comment through October 14, 2024 (original NOP). Since that time, approximately 55 acres of land was added to the Highway 1 Gateway area for possible annexation and future non-residential development. The total number of residential units remain unchanged in this revised version of the 2050 General Plan, although slight adjustments were made to their distribution within the existing City limits and designated growth areas. No other changes have been made to the project. Given this, the City of Watsonville (City) is reissuing an NOP to solicit comments from your agency on the scope and content of the project's environmental information that is germane to your agency's statutory responsibilities. As described in the original NOP, the City will be the Lead Agency and will prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Watsonville 2050 General Plan (project) (see **Attachment 1: Project Description, which includes the new project component**) pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines (14 California Code of Regulations Section 15060(d)).

As previously described in the original NOP, in accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15063(a), the City of Watsonville determined that an EIR would be required for this project and did not prepare an initial study. The EIR will address the potential physical environmental effects of the project for each of the environmental topics outlined in the CEQA Guidelines. As of the date of this revised NOP and based on currently available information, it is anticipated that the project may have potentially significant impacts in connection with aesthetics, agricultural resources, air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, energy, geology and soils, greenhouse gas emissions, hazards and hazardous materials, hydrology and water quality, land use and planning, noise, public services and utilities, population and housing, recreation, transportation/circulation, and wildfire. Cumulative impacts will consider impacts of relevant foreseeable projects in and around the plan area in combination with those of the project. An evaluation of project alternatives that could reduce significant impacts will be included in the EIR.

Due to the time limits mandated by State law, your response must be sent at the earliest possible date and **not later than 30 days** after receipt of this notice. The review period for public comments pertaining to this revised NOP extends from January 24, 2025, to February 24, 2025. Please send your response to Justin Meek, AICP, Interim Community Development Director at the address shown above. We will need the name of a contact person in your agency.

A Virtual EIR Scoping Meeting for this project will be held at the following date, time, and location:

When: Tuesday, February 18, 2025, from 1:00 to 2:00 p.m.

Where: Zoom (please join by clicking here: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/87459122142>)

Meeting ID: 87459122142

Signature:

Justin Meek

Attachments:

Attachment 1: Project Description

Attachment 2: Project Location Map

Attachment 3: Planning Area Boundaries Map

Attachment 4: Measure U/Q Development Planning Areas and Urban Limit Line Map

Attachment 5: Areas of Projected Growth within the City's Sphere of Influence

Title: Interim Community Development Director
City of Watsonville

ATTACHMENT 1 – PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Project Title: Watsonville 2050 General Plan Environmental Impact Report (EIR)

Project Location:

The City of Watsonville (City) is in the southern portion of Santa Cruz County, approximately 14 miles southeast of the city of Santa Cruz and 16 miles north of the city of Salinas (see **Attachment 2: Project Location Map**). Watsonville is bordered to the west, north, and east by unincorporated Santa Cruz County and to the south by the Town of Pajaro in unincorporated Monterey County. Major transportation routes that provide access to the City include Highway 1, which runs north-south along the western edge of the City; State Route (SR) 152, which begins at Highway 1 and passes through the City along Main Street and East Lake Avenue; and SR 129, which also begins at Highway 1 and heads eastward through the southern portion of the City along Riverside Drive to U.S. 101. The City is approximately 4,200 contiguous acres or 6.5 square miles in area, including 5 areas on noncontiguous land at the Watsonville Wastewater Treatment Plant (0.03 acres), Buena Vista Landfill (0.08 acres), Pinto Lake (0.12 acres), Corralitos Water Filter Plant (0.02 acres), and Browns Valley Intake (0.05 acres).

Planning Area Boundaries:

Several boundary lines define the framework for this general plan update (see **Attachment 3: Planning Area Boundaries**) including:

- The existing City limits;
- The City's Sphere of Influence (SOI), which represents the Watsonville Planning Area Boundary and encompasses parcels served by existing City public services (e.g., water services) both within and outside City limits. The land use jurisdiction remains within Santa Cruz County outside City limits; and
- The Urban Limit Line (ULL), which was established in 2002 by a vote of residents through Measure U, to limit where new growth can occur and under certain conditions through 2027, and extended to 2040 via a 2022 vote of residents through Measure Q. Potential annexation areas projected to accommodate new growth within the ULL include Area A (Buena Vista) and Area B (Atkinson Lane). Annexation areas within the ULL that are already developed or largely developed include the Freedom Area (Phases I and II), Area E (Villages), Area F (Manabe/Burgstrom), Area G (West of Highway 1), and the South Manfre Road Area (see **Attachment 4: Measure U/Q Development Planning Areas and Existing Urban Limit Line**). Anticipated growth involves amending the ULL to include Area C and the Highway 1 Gateway and expanding Buena Vista to Freedom Boulevard (see **Attachment 5: Areas of Projected Growth within the City's Sphere of Influence**).
- Compared with the release of the NOP in 2024, the Highway 1 Gateway planning area includes four additional properties totaling approximately 55 acres of prime agricultural land (APNs 052-273-17, 052-273-18, 052-273-23, 052-273-25).

The proposed General Plan planning area (the planning area) is defined as those areas within the ULL and the existing City limits.

Project Description:

The City is preparing a comprehensive update of the *Watsonville 2005 General Plan* in response to changes in conditions in the City and new state laws enacted since the preparation of the existing General Plan, including AB 1358 (Complete Streets), SB 99 (Evacuation Analysis), SB 379 (Climate Adaptation), SB 932 (Safe Systems), SB 1241 (Wildfire Hazards) and SB 1000 (Environmental Justice).

The proposed *2050 General Plan* will include updates of the following elements required by State Planning and Zoning Law: (1) Land Use and Community Character, including the Land Use Map; (2) Open Space; (3) Public Facilities and Services; (4) Mobility and Access; (5) Resource Conservation and Management; (6) Safety; and (7) Noise. In addition, the General Plan will include an Airport Land Use element. The updates to these elements will address environmental justice in accordance with California Government Code Section 65302. The City's 2023-2031 Housing Element was certified by the California Department of Housing and Community Development on October 28, 2024. The City's Zoning Ordinance will be updated, as needed, to maintain consistency with the 2050 General Plan.

The *2050 General Plan* will include goals, policies, and implementation actions – developed with extensive community input – to advance the City's vision and community priorities, including: revitalizing Downtown Watsonville; introducing a range of new housing choices, both single-family and multi-family; attracting new employment and revenue-generating uses; maintaining the existing character of the City's residential neighborhoods, preserving the City's natural open spaces, especially the sloughs; improving the City's existing parks and community facilities, and introducing new ones; accommodating planned passenger rail service, including a station in Downtown Watsonville; implementing complete streets improvements; and rerouting truck routes around town.

Infill growth within the City Limits – primarily multi-family and mixed-use development – will be focused along the East Lake Avenue and Freedom Boulevard corridors and within Downtown Watsonville, which is governed by the recently adopted Downtown Watsonville Specific Plan per Ordinance no. 1457-23 (see **Attachment 5: Areas of Projected Growth within the City's Sphere of Influence**). New growth beyond existing City limits would

be accommodated in the Buena Vista, Atkinson Lane, Area C, and the Highway 1 Gateway area. Growth within Buena Vista and Area C would consist of single-family and multi-family housing and small mixed-use neighborhood centers and may offer a significant number of new home ownership opportunities. Growth within the Highway 1 Gateway would consist of regional retail, community recreation, and visitor-serving uses. New development within Buena Vista and Atkinson Lane, which are already within the ULL, would require annexation into the City of Watsonville. New development within the planning area beyond the ULL – the parcels adjacent to Buena Vista, within Area C, and within the majority of the Highway 1 Gateway – would require approval via a Citywide referendum and subsequent annexation. If a Citywide referendum does not result in approval, these parcels will not be eligible for development until 2040. To further enable infill development along North Freedom Boulevard and within the Buena Vista new growth area, the Watsonville Municipal Airport crosswind runway (9-27) is anticipated to be closed. To further enable aviation activities at the Airport, including jet aircraft, the main runway (2-20) would be lengthened from 4,501 to 5,181 feet. A NOP was released for the project on September 13, 2024, for public comment through October 14, 2024 (original NOP), and has been revised and re-released because approximately 55 acres of prime agricultural land was added to the Highway 1 Gateway area for planning possible annexation and future non-residential development. No other project components have been modified.

Project Growth:

The original NOP, released on September 13, 2024, projected that the *2050 General Plan* would accommodate up to 5,980 new residential units and 1.725 million square feet of non-residential development. However, with the inclusion of 55 acres in the Highway 1 Gateway area, the anticipated non-residential development has increased by approximately 769,000 square feet. The total number of residential units remain unchanged in this revised version of the *2050 General Plan*, although slight adjustments were made to their distribution within the existing City limits and designated growth areas. In addition, the “pipeline” projects within the Manabe Ow Business Park Specific Plan area and the addition of neighborhood serving retail in the Buena Vista and Area C areas are detailed below. Altogether, the updated *2050 General Plan* envisions up to 5,980 new residential units and 2,672,000 square feet of non-residential development, as follows:

- 4,560 new residential units are projected to be developed within the existing City limits, primarily in Downtown Watsonville;¹
- 1,420 new residential units within the Buena Vista and/or Area C growth areas;²
- 513,000 square feet of new non-residential development is anticipated to be developed within the existing City limits (Downtown Watsonville, entitled industrial projects, and along East Lake Avenue and Freedom Boulevard);³
- 2,129,000 square feet of non-residential development within the Highway 1 Gateway new growth area including regional retail, community recreation, and visitor-serving uses;⁴ and
- 30,000 square feet of neighborhood-serving retail in the Buena Vista and Area C new growth areas.⁵

Project Alternatives:

The EIR will evaluate a reasonable range of project alternatives that, consistent with CEQA, meet most of the project objectives and reduce or avoid potential environmental effects, including a No Project Alternative.

When a draft of the EIR is completed, it will be available for review at the City's offices located at 250 Main Street, Watsonville, California 95076 and online at: <https://www.cityofwatsonville.org/2440/General-Plan-Update>. The City will issue a Notice of Availability of the draft EIR at that time to inform the public and interested agencies, groups, and individuals on how to access the draft EIR and provide comments on the adequacy of the document.

If you have questions regarding this NOP, please contact Justin Meek, AICP, Interim Community Development Director at (831) 768-3050 or via email at general.plan@watsonville.gov.

¹ Consists of 3,883 units within the Downtown Watsonville Specific Plan area; 581 units along Freedom Boulevard and East Lake Avenue; and 96 new units within Watsonville's existing neighborhoods. The original NOP projections totaled 4,320 units, comprised of 3,890 units within the Downtown Watsonville Specific Plan area; 390 units along Freedom Boulevard and East Lake Avenue; and 40 units within Watsonville's existing neighborhoods.

² Consists of 716 units in the Buena Vista new growth area and 704 units in the Area C new growth area. The original NOP projections totaled 1,660 units, comprised of 720 units in the Buena Vista new growth area and 940 units within the Area C new growth area.

³ Consists of 115,000 sf within the Downtown Watsonville Specific Plan area; 127,000 sf along Freedom Boulevard and East Lake Avenue; and 271,000 sf of entitled “pipeline” projects within the Manabe-Ow Business Park Specific Plan area. The original NOP did not account for the pipeline projects.

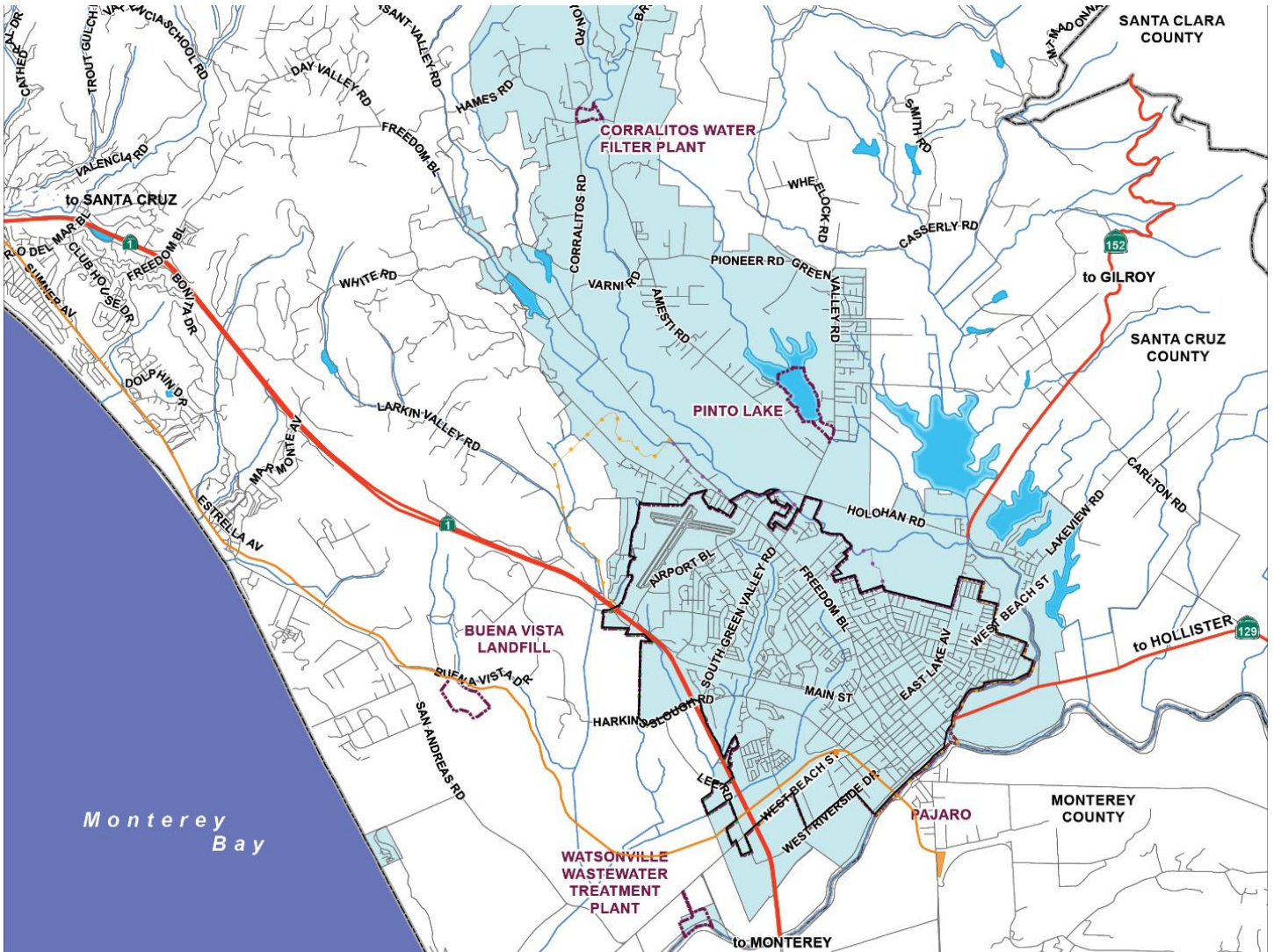
⁴ Includes increased growth potential of 769,000 sf from the addition of four agricultural parcels located between Riverside Drive and W. Beach Street (APNs 052-273-17, -18, -23, and -25). The original NOP projected 1,450,000 sf of non-residential new growth.

⁵ Consists of 20,000 in the Buena Vista new growth area and 10,000 sf in the Area C new growth area. Neighborhood-serving retail in these two new growth areas was not broken out in the original NOP.

ATTACHMENT 2 – PROJECT LOCATION



ATTACHMENT 3 – PLANNING AREA BOUNDARIES



Legend



City Limit



County Boundary



Sphere of Influence



ULL Segment 1



ULL Segment 2



ULL Segment 3



Street



Highway



Railroad

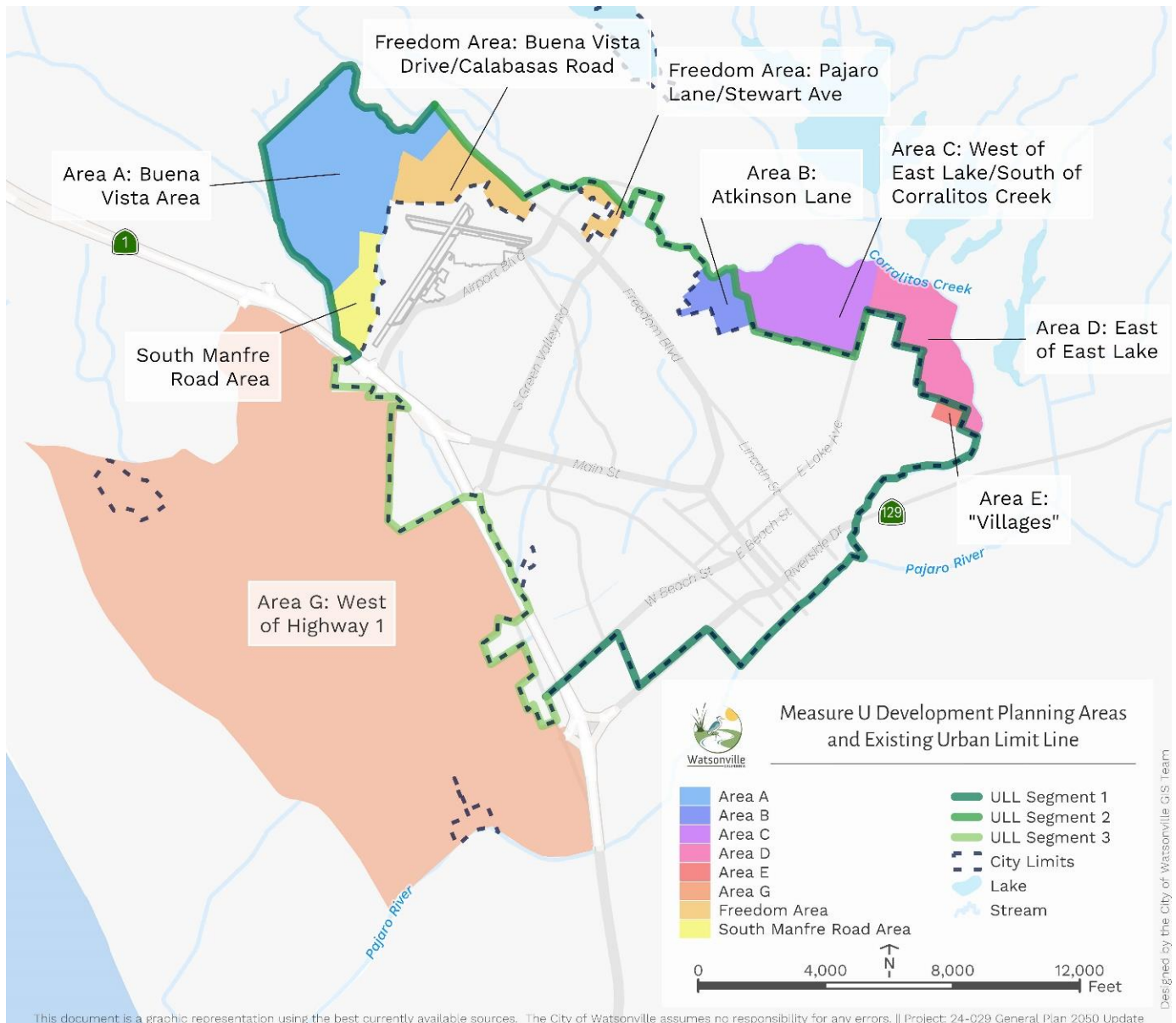


Stream



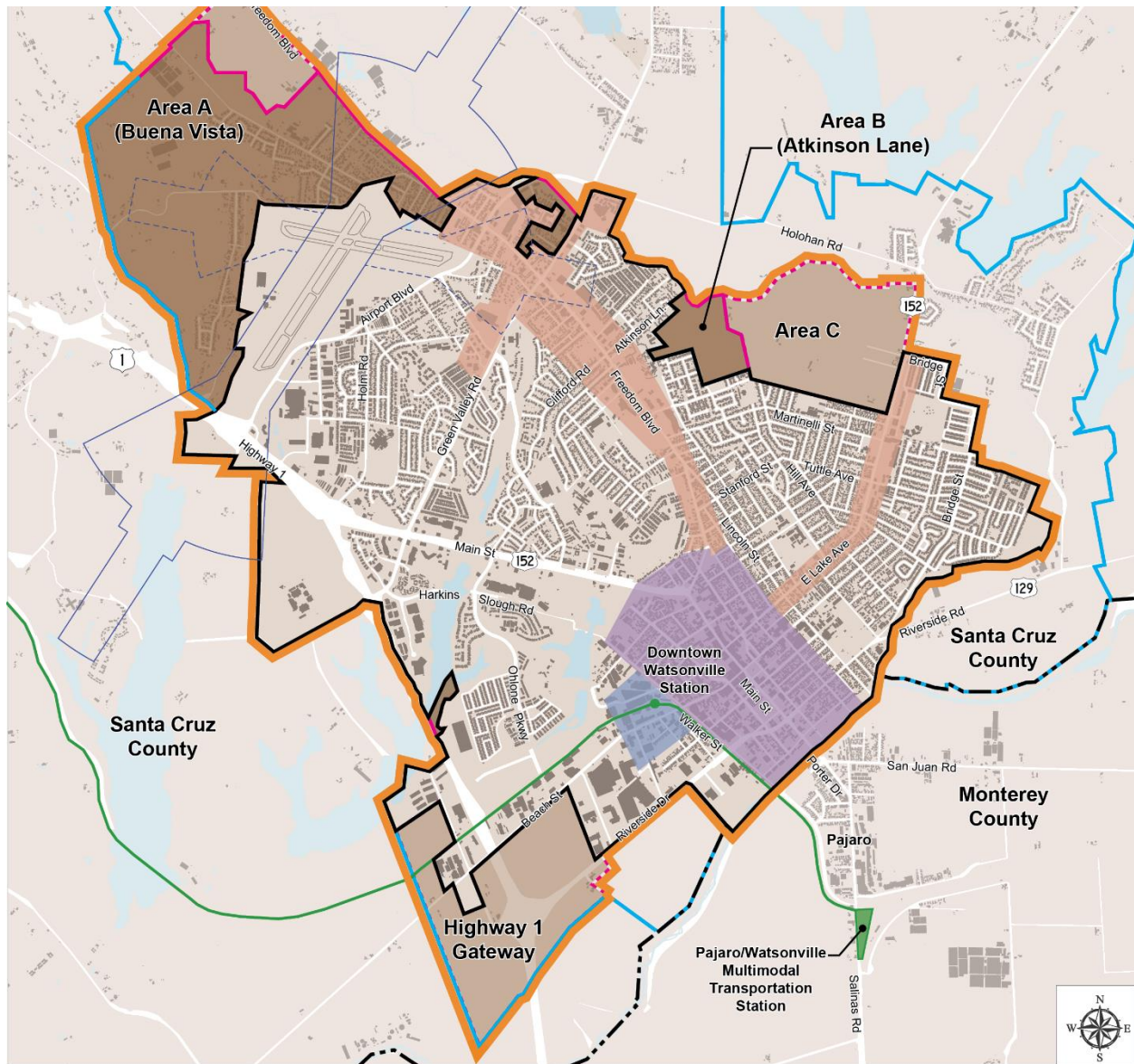
Lakes

ATTACHMENT 4 – MEASURE U/Q DEVELOPMENT PLANNING AREAS AND EXISTING URBAN LIMIT LINE



This document is a graphic representation using the best currently available sources. The City of Watsonville assumes no responsibility for any errors. || Project: 24-029 General Plan 2050 Update

ATTACHMENT 5 – AREAS OF PROJECTED GROWTH WITHIN THE CITY'S SPHERE OF INFLUENCE



Legend

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| — City Limit | ■ Downtown Infill | --- Main Runway Airport Safety Zones 1-5 |
| - - - County Boundary | ■ Station Area Infill | --- Crosswind Runway Airport Safety Zones 1-5 |
| — Plan Area | ■ Corridor Infill | — Proposed Passenger Rail Line and Station |
| — Sphere of Influence (SOI) | ■ New Growth Area within ULL | |
| — Existing Urban Limit Line (ULL) | ■ New Growth Area outside ULL | |
| - - - Proposed Urban Limit Line (ULL) | | |