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# City of El Paso de Robles General Plan 2003

## *Open Space Element*

*Prepared for:*

**City of El Paso de Robles**  
**Department of Community Development**  
1000 Spring Street  
Paso Robles, California 93446

*Contact:*

Bob Lata, Community Development Director  
(805) 237-3970

*Prepared by:*

**Rincon Consultants, Inc.**  
1530 Monterey Street, Suite D  
San Luis Obispo, California 93401

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## OPEN SPACE ELEMENT

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## **OPEN SPACE ELEMENT**

Conservation of open space within and around Paso Robles will contribute to the City's quality of life. Paso Robles is characterized by its agricultural and naturally scenic setting that provides economic and recreational opportunities. Agricultural lands supply a great source of income to business and employees in the Paso Robles area. Recreational land is also an important amenity of the planning area, and the City will preserve land for recreational activities, and encourage private recreational developments and other uses beneficial for the residents of the planning area. Scenic land is a prized asset to Paso Robles and will remain one of the principal attractions for residents and visitors of the City.

### **1.0 Goals, Policies, And Action Items**

#### **GOAL OS-1: Preserve/expand the amount and quality of open space in and around Paso Robles.**

**POLICY OS-1A: Open Space/Purple Belt.** Develop an open space plan/program for establishing an open space/ purple belt (agricultural preserve area) surrounding the City.

**Action Item 1.** This plan/program is to address the following:

- Open space acquisition
- Acquisition priorities
- Maintenance and Monitoring of City-owned open space areas

**Action Item 2.** Reserve easements for public access, preferably trail access, to large units of public land.

**Action Item 3.** Develop strategies for pursuing federal, state, and private funding for the Open Space/Purple Belt plan/program.

**Action Item 4.** Review development projects to ensure they complement the natural environment and agricultural lands, as applicable, in their location and design.

**Action Item 5.** Investigate and implement, if feasible, the transfer of development rights from open space lands to other lands and dedication of conservation easements where appropriate.

**Action Item 6.** Strive to establish an agricultural buffer between publicly-accessible open spaces and bordering agricultural lands.

**Action Item 7.** Coordinate the City's Open Space/Purple Belt plan/program with neighboring communities, the County of San Luis Obispo, and non-profit agencies.

**Action Item 8.** Investigate and implement as appropriate and feasible with San Luis Obispo County, establishment of permanent agricultural and open space areas that buffer communities from continuous urbanization and promote efficient growth patterns.

**Action Item 9:** Take steps to ensure that the County retains surrounding lands in very low-density rural residential, open space (including natural resource), and agricultural uses. Oppose the creation of new parcels within the County.

**Action Item 10:** Implement strategies that help preserve or protect agriculture, including:

- Establishment of agricultural buffer easements, berms and/or vegetative screening, on property proposed for urban development as a condition of approval of discretionary development applications.
- Implement the City's adopted "right-to-farm" ordinance.
- Participation in the Williamson Act and other farmland preservation programs.

**Action Item 11.** Require disclosure agreements for new non-agricultural development within 500 feet of an existing agricultural use. Such disclosure agreements should describe potential nuisances (e.g., dust, noise, pesticide spraying, etc.) associated with normal agricultural operations.

## 2.0 Open Space Issues

Three types of open space identified in and near Paso Robles are:

- Agriculture;
- Natural Resources; and,
- Recreation Areas.

Each of these open space resources are discussed separately. Recreation areas are addressed in the Parks & Recreation Element.

### Agriculture

The majority of the agricultural soils in Paso Robles had historically been used for cultivated crops and rangeland. Cultivated crops in the planning area include dry farmed grain hay, barley, oats, safflower and wheat. Orchard crops include apples, walnuts, pistachios, and almonds.

Over the past 20 years, croplands in Paso Robles have been increasingly converted from dry grain crops and pasture to wine grape vineyards. Wine grapes now dominate the agricultural landscape both within the City and in adjacent areas. These wine grapes are both dry farmed and irrigated.

Agricultural uses within the City limits are concentrated north of Highway 46 East and north of the City's Airport. These agricultural lands contribute to the rural setting surrounding Paso Robles and provide a transition between urban development and the surrounding areas.

### **Soils**

Prime soils in the City include Lockwood shaley loam, Hanford and Greenfield gravelly sandy loam, Arbuckle fine sandy loam, and Cropley Clay, when irrigated (refer to Table OS-1). Soils within the City are generally well to moderately-drained soils with a surface layer of coarse sandy loam to shaley loam west of the Salinas River, ranging to clay loam east of the River. The soils in this unit were formed in alluvium derived from mixed rock on terraces. Soils in the eastern portion of the City are considered to be moderate-to-poorly drained. The frost-free season for the City is about 200 days. Figure OS-1 illustrates Important Farmland within the City and existing and proposed Sphere of Influence areas. Soils and agricultural compatibility are listed below in Table OS-1.

According to the California Department of Conservation, San Luis Obispo County lost approximately 260 acres of agricultural land during the 1996-1998 mapping period. Additionally, the County committed 725 acres of agricultural land to non-agricultural use during this period. Since the California Department of Conservation's 1988-1990 mapping cycle, approximately 8,365 acres of agricultural land in the County have been placed in non-agricultural use. However, the net loss of agricultural land in the County has been partially offset by the conversion of 163 acres of urban land to cropland and grazing land, with many acres of new vineyards planted in the Paso Robles area.

The Chandler Ranch area has been historically utilized for grazing and dry land farming. This area is currently vacant and is characterized by rolling hill terrain with a major north-south trending ridgeline in the central portion of the site.

Overall, there are currently 1,067 acres of land currently designated Agriculture within exiting City limits, comprising approximately 9 percent of the City's total land designation area. No lands designated for Agriculture by the City would be converted to other uses under the 2003 Open Space Element.

### **Purple Belt**

In the Paso Robles area and the County as a whole, the vineyard industry has experienced growth over the past 20 years. In 1997, San Luis Obispo County became the fourth largest premium coastal vineyard area in California, after Sonoma, Napa, and Monterey Counties. In 1977, the total planted winegrape acreage in the County was approximately 4,000 acres. Currently, in the Paso Robles area alone, approximately 17,500 acres are planted with winegrapes (Paso Robles Vintners and Growers Association, 2001), with approximately 13,000 acres bearing (Don Curlee, Western Agricultural Publishing Company, Grapegrower Magazine, 2000). Of this acreage, approximately 6,100 acres are planted with Cabernet Sauvignon grapes, approximately 2,900 acres are planted with Merlot grapes, and approximately 2,300 acres are planted with Chardonnay grapes. More than 35 different varieties of winegrape are grown in the Paso Robles area.

**Open Space Element**

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The Open Space Element does not, at this time, establish the boundaries of the belt, but instead establishes a policy to study and determine the boundaries of a Purple Belt (wine grape belt) and a process through which the City could purchase development rights in the Purple Belt area. The boundaries of a Purple Belt (wine grape and other agriculture belt) is intended to ensure protection of vineyard and other AG resources, open space, and to prevent expansion and sprawl of urban development. It is intended to preserve the County's sense of rural character by preserving open space corridors between existing communities. Open space can also serve the function of a buffer between conflicting land uses and allow clustering of residential uses within the planning area with density incentives for setting aside lands for open space.

**Natural Resources**

Natural Resources within the planning area include groundwater and surface water resources, biological resources, visual resources, cultural resources, and mineral resources. These resources and goals and policies that address these resources are discussed in the Conservation Element. Open space for flood plain purposes is addressed in the Land Use Element, and open space for public health and safety related to earthquake fault zones, and unstable soil areas are addressed in the Safety Element.

**Land Use Conflicts**

Residents living adjacent to agricultural lands often cite odor nuisance impacts, noise from farm equipment, vehicle conflicts, dust and pesticide spraying as land use conflicts. Conflicts between farm vehicles and high-speed automobiles used by residents on adjacent roadways can lead to accidents. Pesticide spraying can result in health hazards, while odor and noise are nuisances that can affect the enjoyment of private dwellings. Increased dust from soils and farm equipment can be both a nuisance and a health hazard.

**Table OS-1: Soils and Agricultural Capability**

Soil Name and Number	Agricultural Capability Subclass
Linne-Calodo Complex (152, 153, 154)	Class IVe-1 (15) Irrigated Class IVe-1 (15) Nonirrigated
Lockwood Shaley Loam (158)	Class IIe-4 (14) Irrigated Class IVe-4 (14) Nonirrigated
Hanford and Greenfield Gravelly Sandy Loam (150)	Class IIe-4 (14) Irrigated Class IVe-4 (14) Nonirrigated
Metz-Tujunga Complex (167)	Class IVw-4 (14) Nonirrigated
Xerofluvents (Riverwash) (212)	Class VIIIw (14) Nonirrigated
Metz Loamy Sand (166)	Class IIIs-4 (14) Irrigated Class IVs-4 (14) Nonirrigated
Arbuckle Fine Sandy Loam (100)	Class I (14) Irrigated Class IVc-1 (14) Nonirrigated
Cropley Clay (132)	Class IIs-5 (14) Irrigated Class IVs-5 (14) Nonirrigated

*Class I soils have few limitations that restrict their use.  
 Class II soils have moderate limitations that reduce the choice of plants or that require special conservation practices or both.  
 Class III soils have severe limitations that reduce the choice of plants or that require special conservation practices or both.  
 Class IV soils have very severe limitations that reduce the choice of plants or that require very careful management or both.  
 Class VIII soils and landforms have limitations that nearly preclude their use for commercial crop production.  
 Capability subclass letters describe the main limitations for soil types, as follows:  
 "c": Too cold or too dry; "e": Erosion; "s": shallow, droughty or stony; "w": water interference.  
 Soil types with a Land Resource Area designation of (14) occur in the Central California Coastal Valleys; soils with a designation of (15) occur in the Central California Coastal Range.  
 Source: NRCS, Soil Survey of San Luis Obispo County, California, Paso Robles Area (1983).*

The placement of residential development adjacent to farmland can also have several negative impacts on farm operations. Direct physical impacts include vandalism to farm equipment or fencing, and theft of fruits and vegetables. Soil compaction from trespassers or equestrians can also damage crop potential. These can result in indirect economic impacts. Decreased air quality from adjacent urban development can also result in impacts to farmland.

Placement of residences adjacent to cultivated agriculture can also have economic impacts to growers. Increased regulations and liability insurance to protect the farmer from adjacent urban uses cost time and money. Some farmers sensitive to nearby residences voluntarily limit their hours of operation and do not intensively use the portions of their property closest to urban uses, in effect establishing informal buffer zones on their own property. This has the effect of lowering crop yields, which can potentially affect the long-term economic viability of the agricultural operation. These types of economic impacts could ultimately cause the loss of agricultural production due to cessation of operations if the economic impacts become severe enough. The City's has a right to farm ordinance to assist in the protection of on-going agricultural operation from nuisance lawsuits. Conflicts between agriculture and other land uses can be minimized by protecting the rights of farmers, increasing communication and education between farmers and adjacent property owners, and maintaining buffers between potentially conflicting uses. Policies are included in this Open Space Element and the Land Use Element to minimize land use conflicts.