THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Report to the Planning Commission

DATE ISSUED: October 29, 2026 REPORT NO. PC-26-038

HEARING DATE: November 5, 2026

SUBJECT: Rancho Bernardo Community Plan Update Workshop

SUMMARY

This workshop gives the Planning Commission an early opportunity to provide input on the Rancho Bernardo Community Plan Update. This aligns with the Planning Commission's past preference for participating in workshops during the community plan update process to share their ideas and priorities. No action is required on the part of the Planning Commission at this time. This workshop provides an opportunity for discussion and feedback from the Planning Commission on the *Rancho Bernardo Atlas: Existing Conditions Report* (*the Atlas*) and to help guide the Rancho Bernardo Community Plan Update process. Staff appreciates and welcomes Commission feedback during the workshop.

BACKGROUND

The City updates community plans to address changing conditions and community needs and implement the General Plan and Climate Action Plan. Through these updates, the City works with the community to develop a guide for future development by identifying opportunities for homes and jobs near transit and services, and planning for infrastructure, parks and public facilities. Since 2014, the City has comprehensively updated 16 community plans. The City launched the Rancho Bernardo Community Plan Update in October 2026, after receiving grant funding from SANDAG.

The Rancho Bernardo planning area covers approximately 6,500 acres (about 10 square miles) in the northern region of the City of San Diego. It is bounded by Hodges Reservoir and the San Pasqual Valley to the north; the unincorporated San Diego County community of 4S Ranch to the west; the City of Poway to the east; and the City of San Diego's Black Mountain Ranch, Rancho Peñasquitos, and Carmel Mountain Ranch communities to the south, as shown on Attachment 1. Rancho Bernardo had approximately 41,700 people and 18,000 homes in 2025, while businesses provided about 21,000 jobs in 2023.

History of the Community Plan

The Rancho Bernardo community was officially annexed into the City of San Diego in 1962, initiating construction of the community's initial neighborhoods, including Bernardo Greens, Bernardo Hills, and Seven Oaks. By 1963, the first residents had moved into the community, and both the Rancho Bernardo Inn and the community's first shopping center opened. As the community grew, the Rancho Bernardo Master Plan was revised in 1966 and 1971 to respond to changing development patterns. The Rancho Bernardo Community Plan was adopted in 1978 and replaced the Master Plan, reflecting the community's increasing population, expanding mix of land uses, and a growing diversity of housing types.

Since adoption of the Community Plan, the City has approved several amendments to address changing community needs and development proposals. A major amendment was adopted in 1988

to update the plan and ensure it continued to serve as an effective guide for public and private development decisions as Rancho Bernardo matured as a residential and employment center. Subsequent amendments in 1989, 1997, 1999, and 2016 primarily addressed site-specific land use changes to facilitate individual development projects while maintaining the overall vision and character of the community.

Housing & Demographics

While the City of San Diego experienced a 15.2 percent increase in total population between 2000 and 2025, Rancho Bernardo's total population has increased by 6.1 percent during the same period, as shown in Table 1. This translates to an estimated 2,400 more people living in Rancho Bernardo.

Table 1. City of San Diego and Rancho Bernardo: Population Change 2000 to 2025

	2000	2025	% Change
City of San Diego	1,223,400	1,409,400	15.2%
Rancho Bernardo	39,600	42,000	6.1%

Source: U.S. Census, 2000; SANDAG, 2025 Estimates

In 2024, 69 percent of homes in Rancho Bernardo are owner-occupied, compared to 47 percent citywide, while renter-occupied homes accounted for 31 percent of homes, compared to 54 percent citywide, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Percent of Homes Occupied by Renters and Owners for the Rancho Bernardo Community and Citywide in 2024

	Owner Occupied	Renter Occupied
City of San Diego	47%	54%
Rancho Bernardo	69%	31%

Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey, 2024
Note: American Community Survey estimates for household occupancy were not yet available at the time of publication; therefore, the most recent available ACS estimates were used.

The homes in Rancho Bernardo are predominantly single-family, accounting for 74 percent of homes, compared to 48 percent citywide, as shown in Table 3. Multi-family homes make up more than one quarter of the homes, compared to just over half citywide in 2025. Additionally, the community contains no mobile homes.

Table 3. Percent of Housing Type for the Rancho Bernardo Community and Citywide in 2025

	Single-Family Homes	Multi-Family Homes	Mobile Homes
City of San Diego	48%	51%	1%
Rancho Bernardo	74%	26%	-

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey Estimates; SANDAG

The number of homes in Rancho Bernardo had modest growth over the 25-year span from 2000 to 2025. In 2000, Rancho Bernardo grew from 17,100 homes in 2000 to 18,000 homes in 2025. The community added approximately 900 homes, which is a 5.3 percent increase, as shown in Table 4. Rancho Bernardo has a lower average household size of 2.42 persons per household compared to the citywide average of 2.52 in 2025.

Table 4. City of San Diego and Rancho Bernardo: Total Housing Change 2000 to 2025

	2000	2025	% Change
City of San Diego	469,700	569,800	21.3%
Rancho Bernardo	17,100	18,000	5.3%

Source: U.S. Census, 2000; SANDAG, 2025 Estimates

Affordable Housing

According to San Diego Housing Commission data from October 2025, Rancho Bernardo contains 437 deed-restricted affordable homes, which represents about 2.4 percent of the community's total homes, compared to 5 percent citywide. These figures do not capture naturally occurring affordable housing, that also exists within the community.

Land Use & Zoning

Residential designations account for 45 percent of the land within Rancho Bernardo, broken down into 83 percent for single-family use and 17 percent for multi-family use, as shown in Attachment 2. Parks, open space or recreation uses encompass 23 percent of the community plan area, followed by employment or retail uses at 12 percent, transportation (including roads and freeways) at 17 percent, and institutional uses or public facilities at 2 percent. The community plan land use designations are implemented through zoning, as shown in Attachment 3.

Recent Planning Efforts

Bernardo Plaza - City View (11818 – 11858 Bernardo Plaza Court)

On October 15, 2026, the Planning Commission recommended that the City Council approve a Community Plan Amendment to redesignate 5.5 acres from Specialized Commercial to Residential – Medium Density (14-29 dwelling units per net residential acre) and rezone from CC-2-3 to RM-2-5 to allow 122 new townhomes.

Transit

Existing

Part of the Rancho Bernardo community is within a Transit Priority Area. Local bus and Bus Rapid routes provide connections from the community to the Rancho Bernardo Transit Center, which provides regional connections to job and educational centers, as shown in Attachments 4 and 5.

Planned

SANDAG's 2025 Regional Plan proposes investments to bolster regional connectivity. Planned improvements include increased service frequencies during peak and off-peak periods and extended service hours. The Regional Plan also identifies service additions, including four new Rapid Bus Routes (237 and 238 to UC San Diego via Sorrento Valley, 290 expanding the existing route to Downtown San Diego, and 484 to Carlsbad and Kearny Mesa via I-15), Express Bus 246 to UC San Diego via State Route 56, and the Circulator Route 675 to provide local connections to the employment center within Rancho Bernardo.

Public Facilities

Rancho Bernardo is served by key community facilities including a library, schools, and emergency services, as shown in Attachment 6.

Library

Within the Rancho Bernardo community, the 23,000-square-foot Rancho Bernardo Branch Library serves as a community anchor. It opened in 1996 and is one of the library system's largest facilities. It provides computer access, meeting/study rooms, outdoor space, and features the IDEA (Digital Memory) Lab. To help guide future facility needs, the City's 2023 Library Master Plan Master Plan, recommends renovating the existing Rancho Bernardo library, rather than a replacement or expansion.

Schools and Childcare

The Rancho Bernardo community is served by the Poway Unified School District with operates 2 elementary schools, two middle schools and a high school. The District has schools in adjacent communities that also serve students living in Rancho Bernardo. The Palomar Community College District operates the Rancho Bernardo Education Center. LifeBridge Elementary School is a private elementary school in the community.

In Rancho Bernardo, childcare is provided through smaller home-based providers, preschools, and schools. The number and location of childcare facilities may change over time as providers open, close, or modify their services.

Emergency Services

Proximity to emergency services ensures good response times during emergencies. Portions of the community are identified as being within a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone due to potential hazard from wildland fires. Rancho Bernardo is served by the City of San Diego Fire-Rescue Department station 33. Rancho Bernardo is served by the Northeastern Division of the San Diego Police Department and includes a community relations storefront in the center of the community on Bernardo Center Drive.

Parks

Rancho Bernardo's system of existing parks includes a large community park with a recreation center and senior center, trails in a resource-based park and the San Dieguito River Park, and several private recreation facilities, as shown in Attachments 7 and 8.

Open Space and Habitat

Rancho Bernardo includes 854 acres of designated open space, of which 493 acres (57.8 percent) are publicly owned. San Dieguito River Park serves as an open space buffer for the Rancho Bernardo community, as shown in Attachment 9. It provides Rancho Bernardo residents multi-use trails, staging areas, and opportunities for passive recreation such as hiking, biking, horseback riding and wildlife viewing.

Private Facilities

Rancho Bernardo's phased, master planned development has shaped the management of its neighborhoods and recreational facilities. Many neighborhoods are organized as common interest developments managed by separate homeowners' associations, with their own governing documents, assessment structure and maintenance responsibilities. Homeowners' associations also provide access to community centers, swimming pools, tennis facilities, and other shared amenities accessible to dues-paying members. The prevalence of Homeowners' Associations and Common Interest Developments plays a significant role in managing private recreational facilities.

DISCUSSION

What are the Community Plan Update's Key Objectives?

The following are the key objectives for the Rancho Bernardo Community Plan Update that will be addressed, as well as others that arise through the update process:

- Expand opportunities for new homes and jobs near transit
- Review industrial areas and their land uses in the context of local and citywide needs;
- Improve walking, biking, and transit connections between homes, jobs, and key destinations;
- Increase climate resiliency, enhance biodiversity, and preserve open space areas;
- Enhance access to the San Dieguito River Park;
- Address public facilities, parks and recreation, and infrastructure needs.

How would the Community Plan Update be consistent with the General Plan?

The Community Plan Update would identify potential focus areas for new homes, businesses and public facilities informed by community engagement and technical analysis. Guided by the General Plan's City of Villages Strategy, the Community Plan Update would identify opportunities for land use changes along transit corridors and commercial nodes by using the Village Climate Goal Propensity Map, as shown on Attachment 10. The General Plan identifies areas within Rancho Bernardo as having medium to medium-high propensity around the bus rapid transit and surrounding area for adding density to meet climate goals To address future recreational needs, the community plan update process would identify opportunities for new and improved parks, recreation facilities and public spaces.

What will the Community Plan Update process involve?

The Community Plan Update will be prepared through a phased process to guide how Rancho Bernardo evolves, with opportunities for community members and the Planning Commission to provide input throughout, as shown on Attachment 11. The Community Plan Update process includes the following stages:

- Phase 1: Existing conditions and community vision: The Atlas and initial engagement will help identify community needs, priorities and aspirations to guide the update.
- Phase 2: Concepts and alternatives: Building on this input, staff will prepare an Ideas Report to include a range of ideas for land use, housing, mobility, parks, public spaces and other community improvements for discussion and feedback.
- Phase 3: Draft Community Plan and supporting analysis: Feedback on the concepts and alternatives, together with technical studies, will inform a draft Community Plan and proposed zoning changes and regulation materials.
- Phase 4: Public hearings and adoption: Following public review and refinement, the proposed Community Plan and associated documents will be presented for consideration and further feedback throughout the public hearing process.

What is the status of the Community Plan Update?

Phase One formally launched in October 2026 with a suite of public engagement resources, including the project website, an interactive web map, an informational fact sheet, the initial online community survey, and the publication of the existing conditions atlas. The first phase focuses on existing conditions and establishing a shared community vision. This phase provides an opportunity for community members and the Planning Commission to identify issues, opportunities and priorities that will help shape future land use, mobility, parks, and public facility concepts. During this phase, the City Planning Department is seeking input on the Atlas and gathering feedback on the community strengths, areas for improvement, and the long-term vision and goals.

What is the role of the Rancho Bernardo Community Planning Group?

The Rancho Bernardo Community Planning Group plays a foundational advisory role in the update process, and the City Planning Department presented to the full planning group on July 16, 2026, to provide an overview of the Community Plan Update process, timeline, and engagement strategy and the Atlas on November 2, 2027. The Community Planning Group formed a subcommittee to be involved throughout the entire community update process, responsible for reviewing public engagement materials, research, and technical studies; providing initial community ideas; and evaluating draft proposals to help shape the community plan. City staff hosted a community meeting at the Rancho Bernardo Library on November 2, 2026, to review Atlas and describe the plan update process and timeline. Members of the Community Planning Group and Subcommittee were in attendance.

What does the Draft Rancho Bernardo Atlas: Existing Conditions Report address?

The October 2026 *Rancho Bernardo Atlas: Existing Conditions Report* (Attachment 12) provides a snapshot of existing conditions, challenges and opportunities using maps, photos, charts and tables about the history and place, sustainability, equity, resilience and conservation, land use and development, mobility, and parks and public facilities. The Atlas is intended to inform and facilitate community visioning, inform the design of land use and mobility concepts and alternatives, and guide policy formulation for the updated community plan. The City Planning Department welcomes feedback, which will be used to refine the report and inform the draft Community Plan.

How will awarded grant funds be used to support the Community Plan Update?

The City was awarded a Smart Growth Incentive Program grant from SANDAG to fund the Rancho Bernardo Community Plan Update to identify opportunities for homes near transit, improving mobility connections to transit, and enhancing parks, trails and public spaces.

CONCLUSION

This first workshop for the Rancho Bernardo Community Plan Update provides an opportunity for the Planning Commission to provide staff with early feedback. Staff will continue to conduct public engagement with the Community Planning Group and community members to help inform the community plan update. Staff welcome and value ongoing feedback from the public and the Commission. All community plan update information and documents are available on the Community Plan Update website: www.SanDiego.gov/PlanRB

Respectfully submitted,

Nathen Causman
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City Planning Department

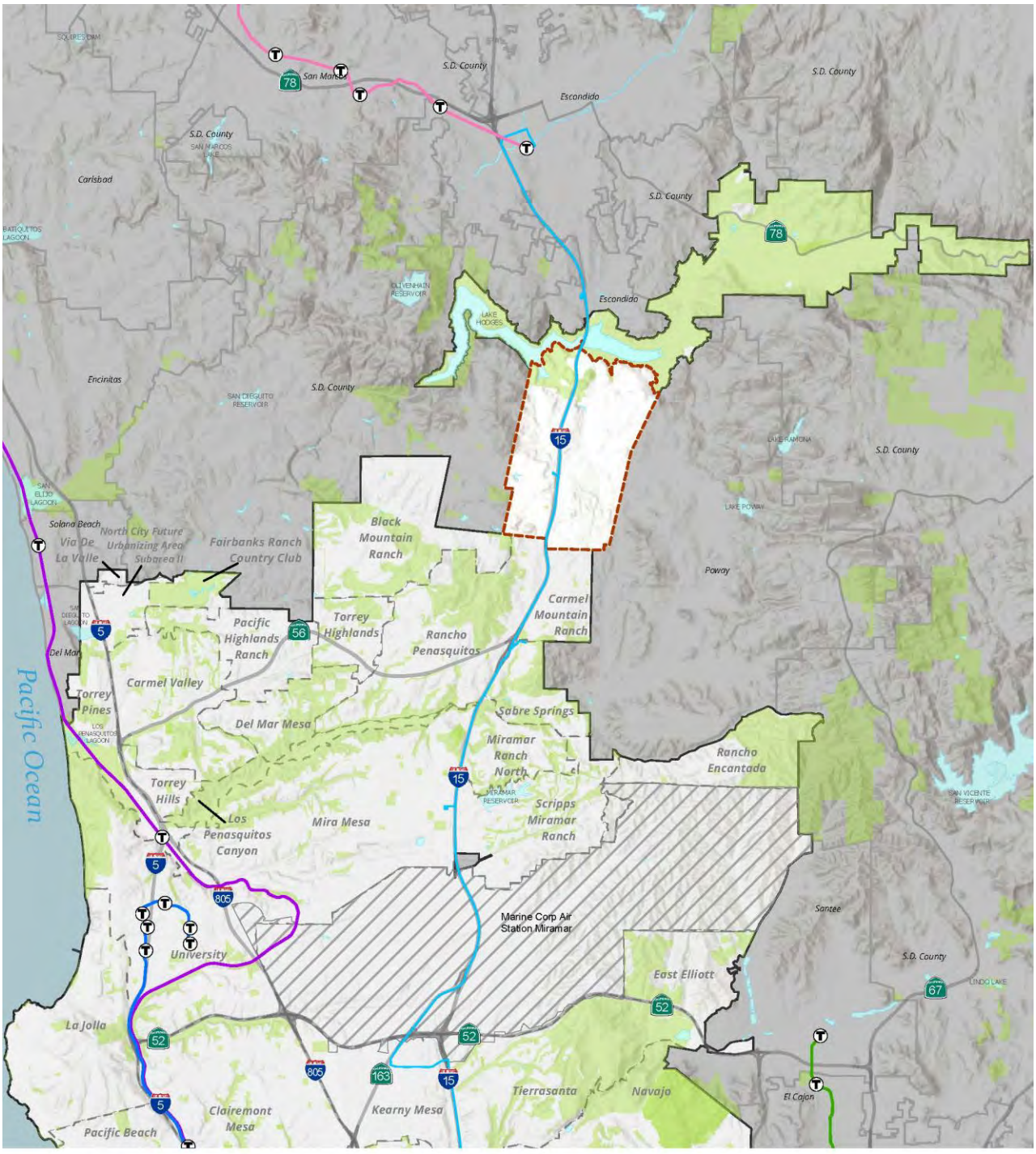
Coby Tomlins
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Attachments:

1. Rancho Bernardo Regional Location Map
2. Planned Land Use Map
3. Zoning Map
4. Transit Map
5. Transit Priority Area Map
6. Public Services and Facilities Map
7. Existing Parks, Recreation and Open Space Map
8. Rancho Bernardo Private Parks Map
9. Vegetation and Multiple Habitat Planning Area Map
10. Village Climate Goal Propensity Map
11. Community Plan Update Process and Timeline
12. Draft Rancho Bernardo Atlas: Existing Conditions Report link

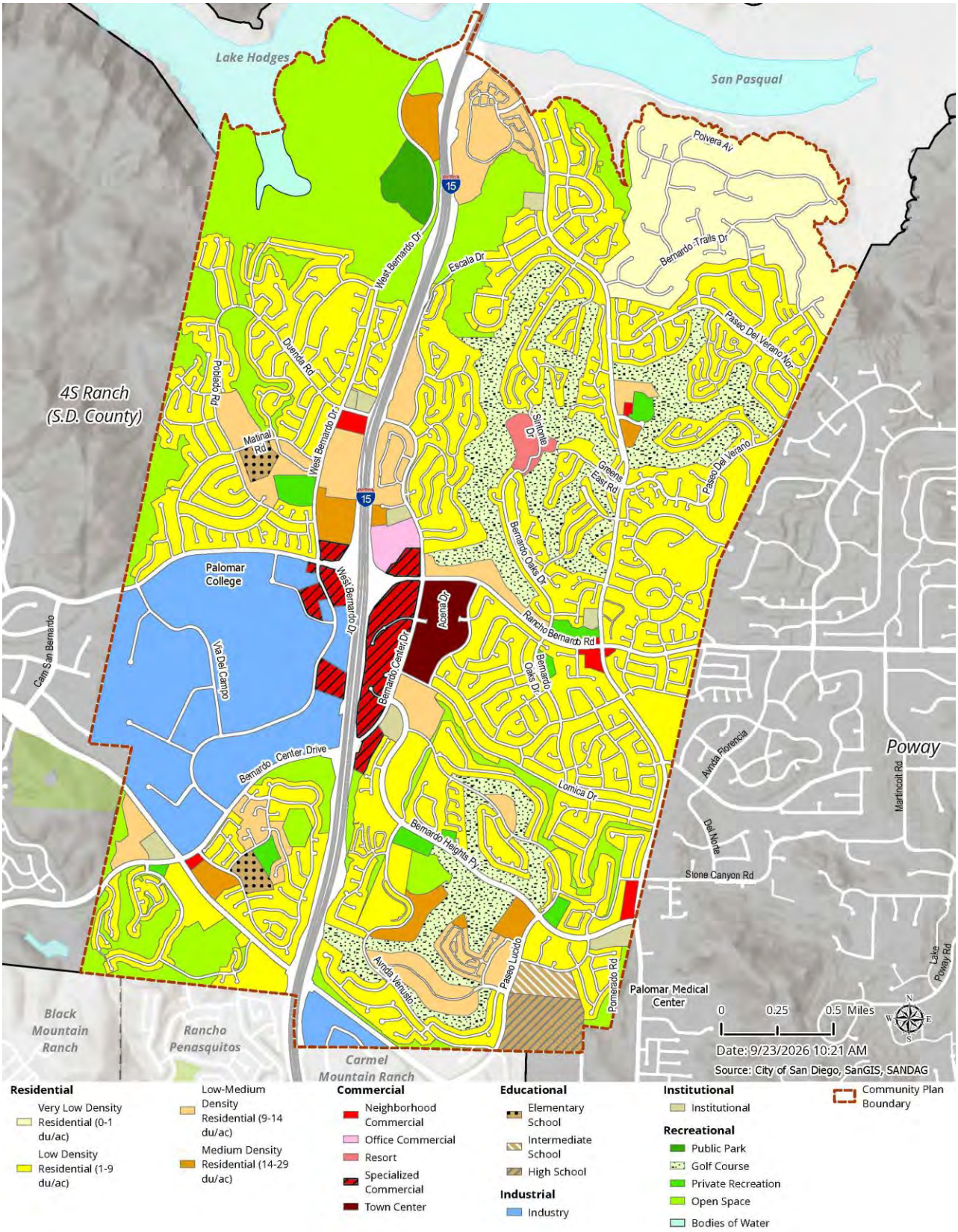
Attachment 1: Rancho Bernardo Regional Location Map



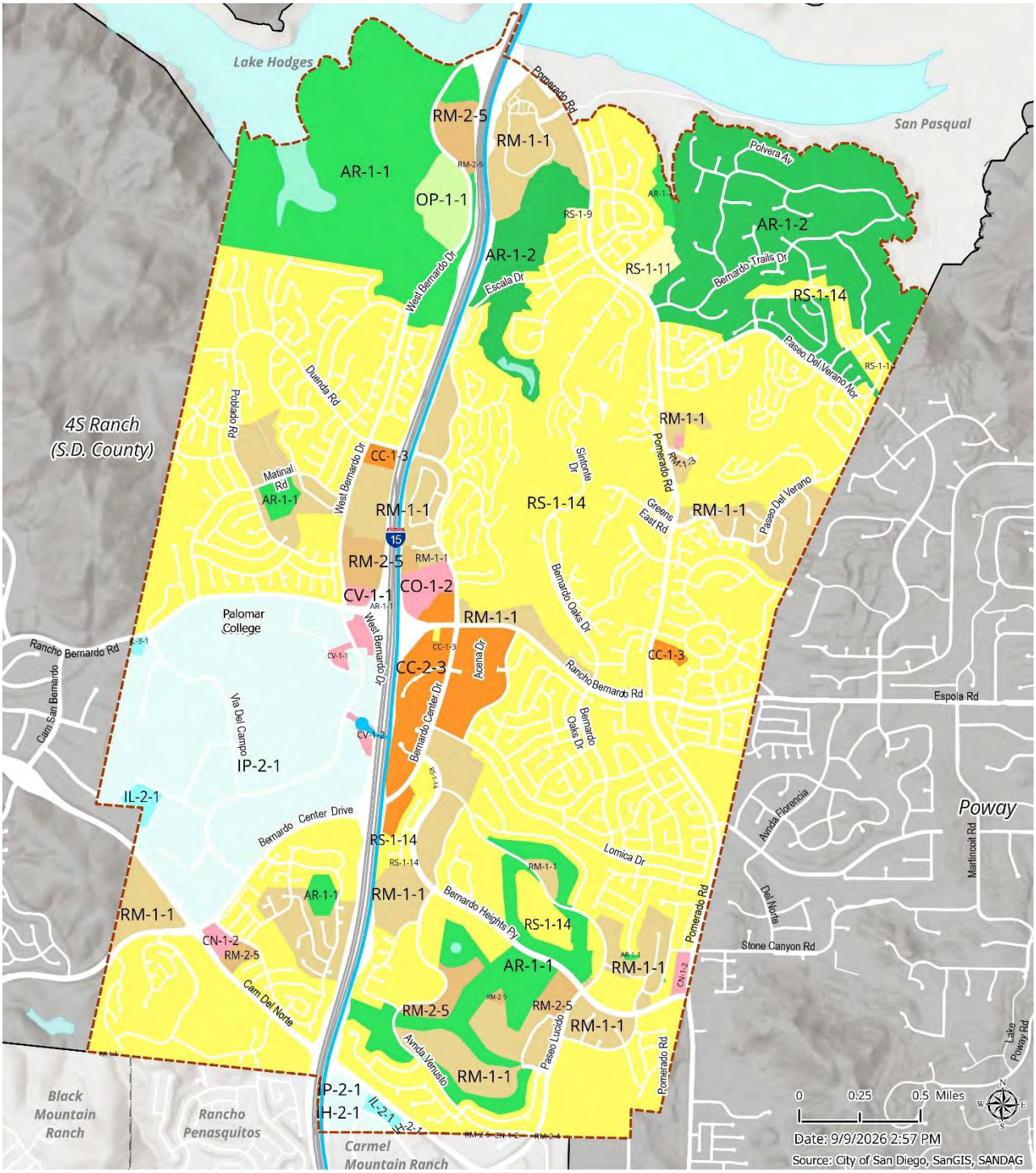
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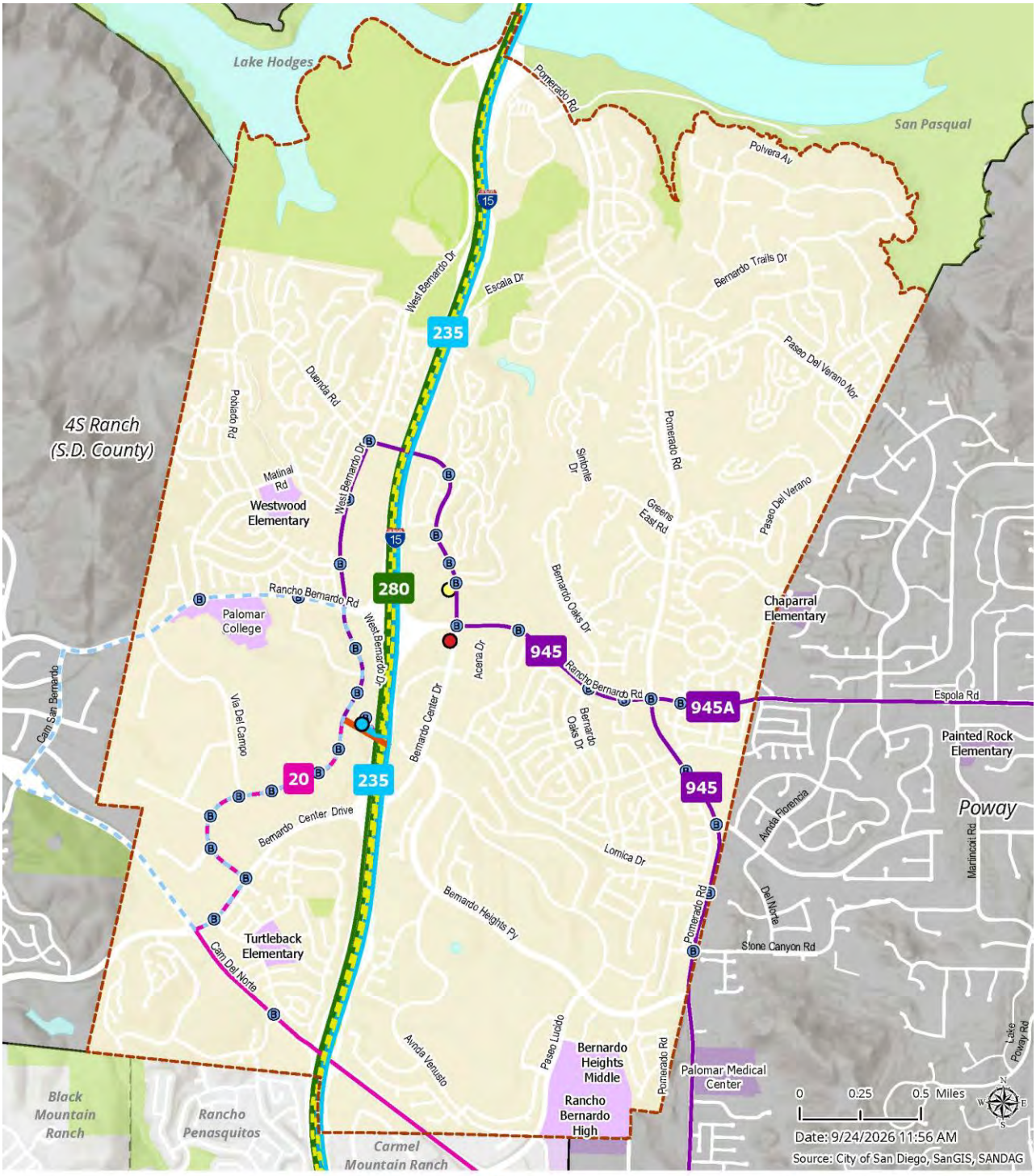
Attachment 2: Planned Land Use Map



Attachment 3: Zoning Map



Attachment 4: Transit Map



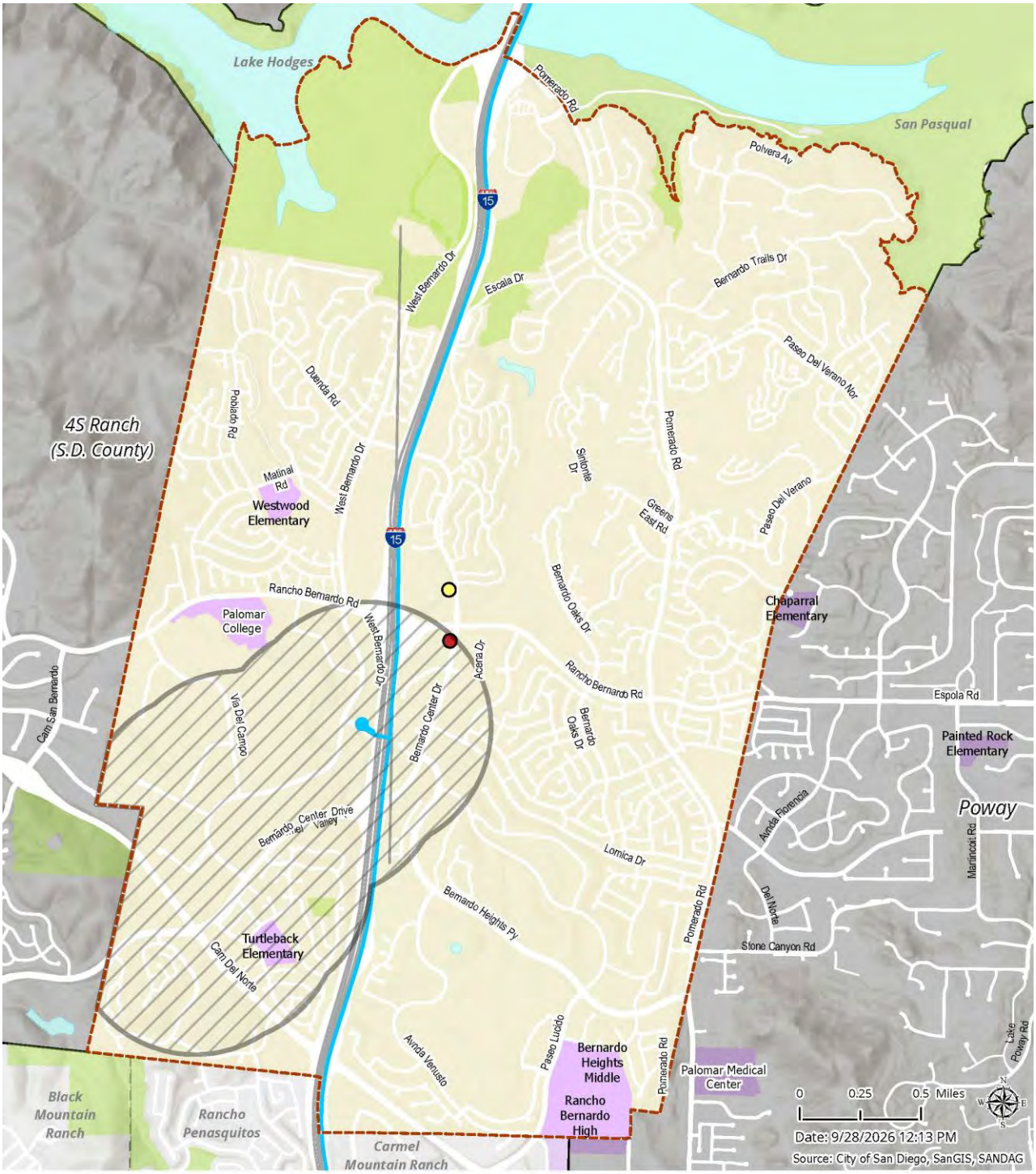
Existing Transit Service
- 235 Rapid
- 280 Rapid
- 20 Local Bus
- 945 Local Bus
- 945A Local Bus

Planned Service
- Future Route
- Future Circulator
- Direct Access Ramps (DAR)

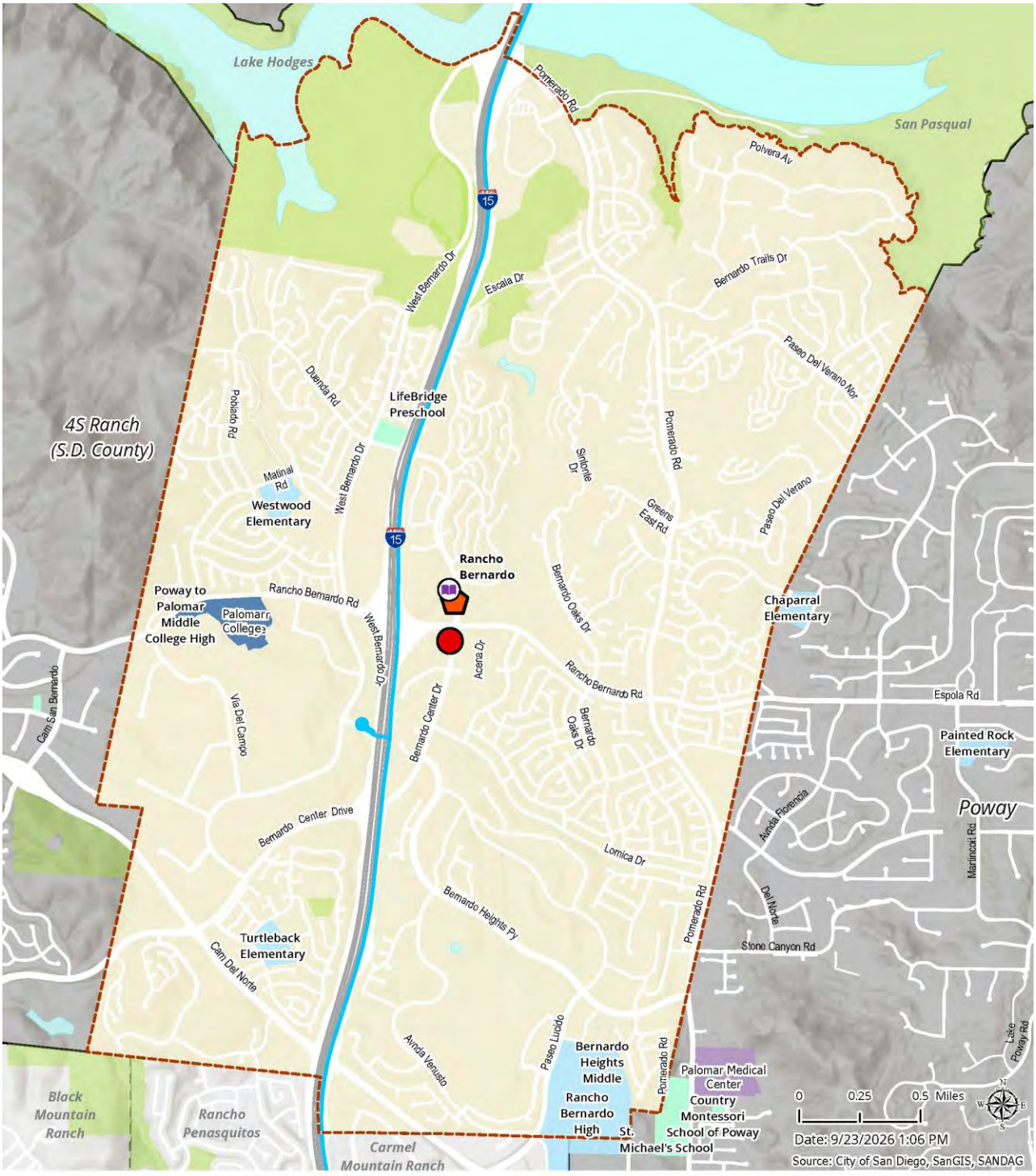
- Community Plan Boundary
- Other Community Planning Area
- Municipal Boundary
- Other Jurisdiction
- Institutional
- Park or Open Space

- Ranch Bernardo Transit Station
- Library
- Fire Station
- Bus Stop

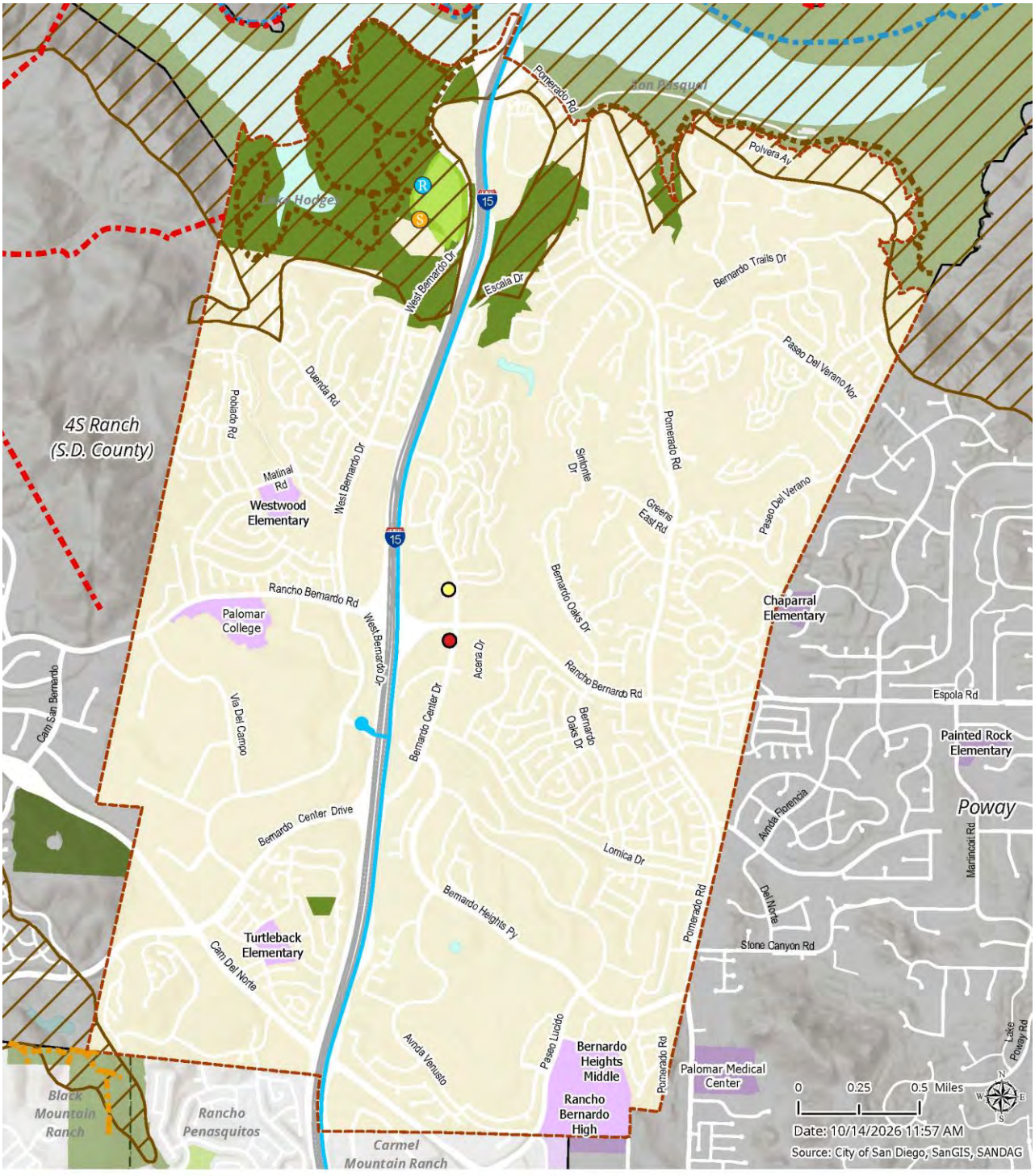
Attachment 5: Transit Priority Area Map



Attachment 6: Public Services and Facilities Map



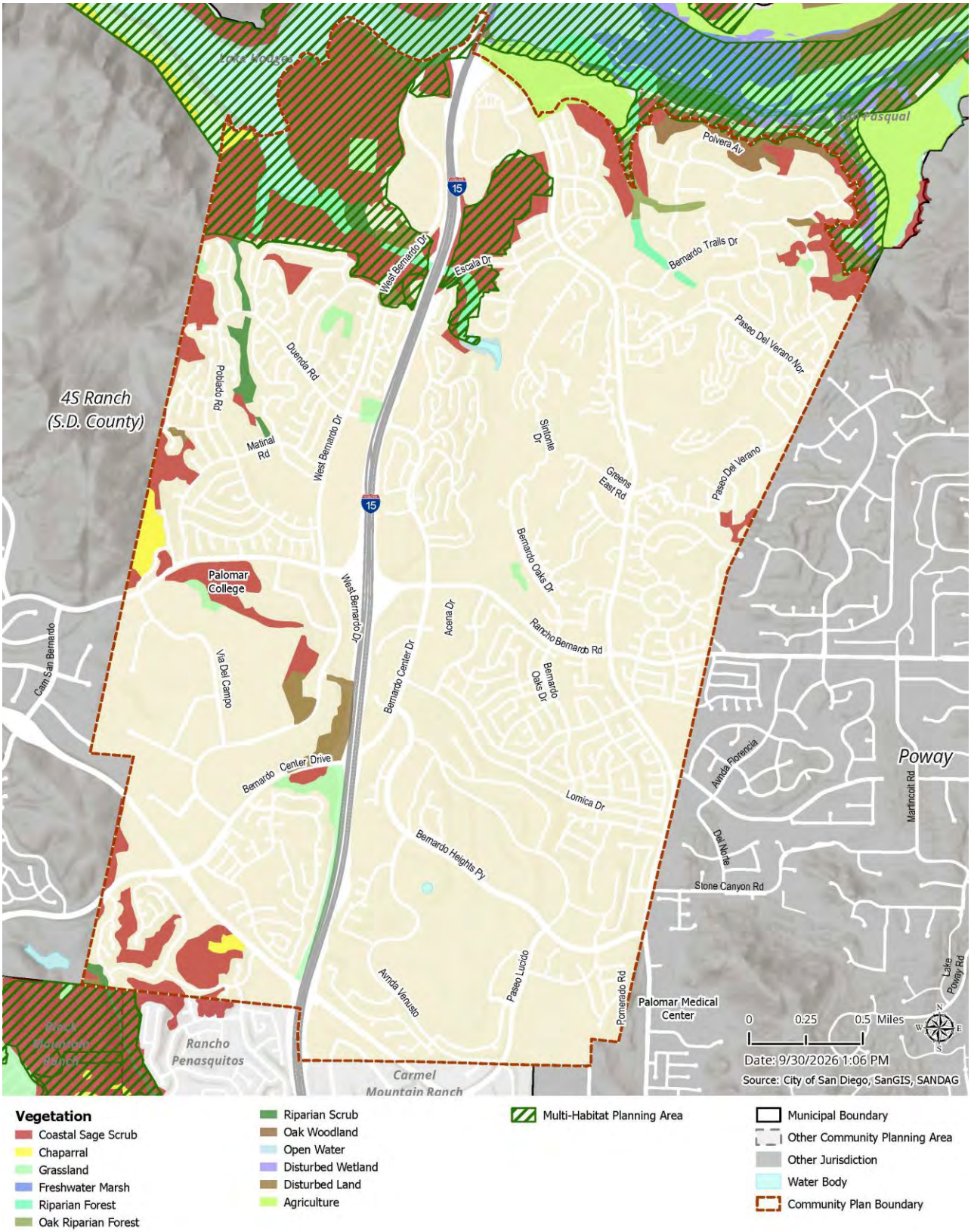
Attachment 7: Existing Parks, Recreation and Open Space



Attachment 8: Rancho Bernardo Private Parks

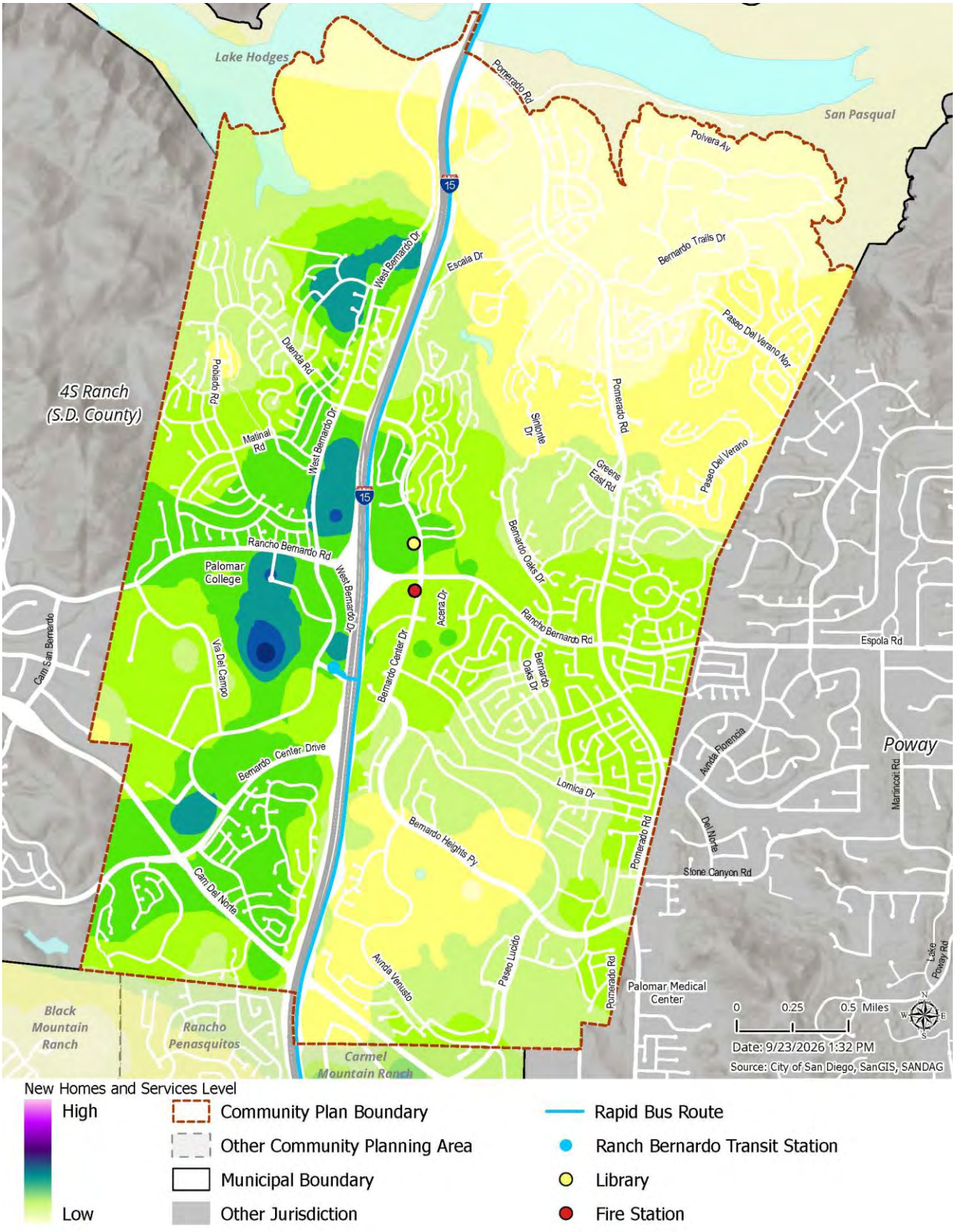


Attachment 9: Vegetation and Multiple Habitat Planning Area Map



Vegetation
- Coastal Sage Scrub
- Chaparral
- Grassland
- Freshwater Marsh
- Riparian Forest
- Oak Riparian Forest
- Riparian Scrub
- Oak Woodland
- Open Water
- Disturbed Wetland
- Disturbed Land
- Agriculture
- Multi-Habitat Planning Area
- Municipal Boundary
- Other Community Planning Area
- Other Jurisdiction
- Water Body
- Community Plan Boundary

Attachment 10: Village Climate Goal Propensity Map



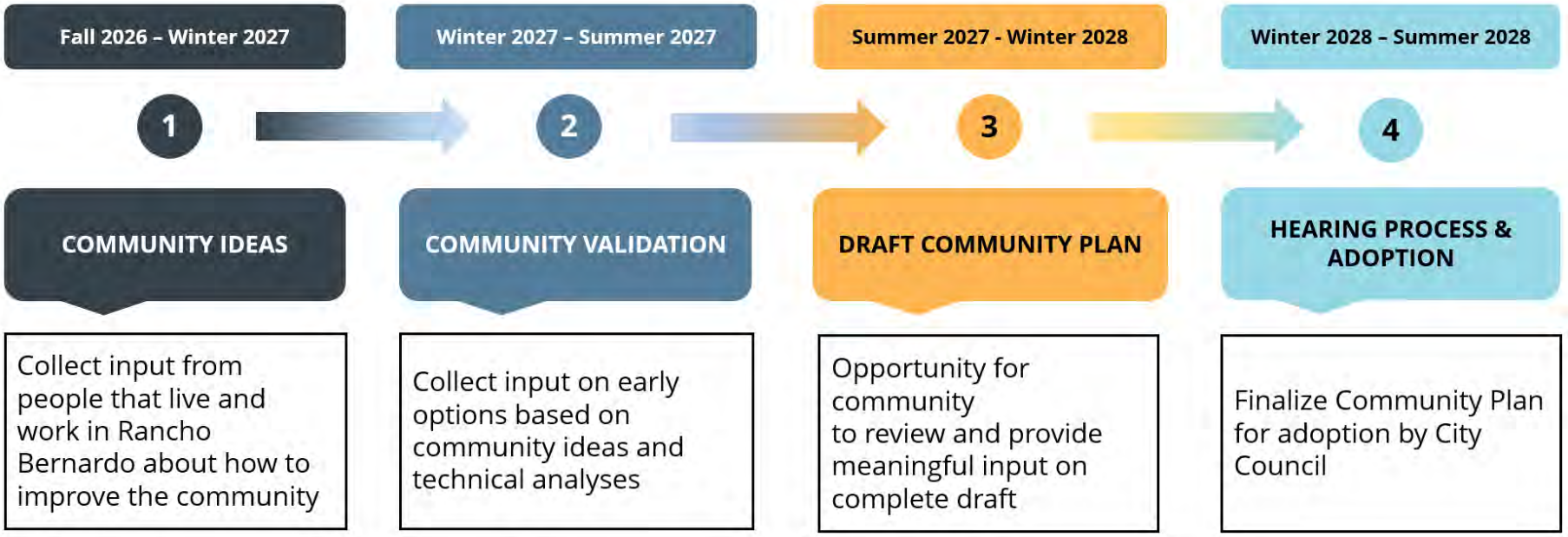
New Homes and Services Level

High

Low

- Community Plan Boundary
- Other Community Planning Area
- Municipal Boundary
- Other Jurisdiction
- Rapid Bus Route
- Ranch Bernardo Transit Station
- Library
- Fire Station

Attachment 11: Community Plan Update Process and Timeline



Attachment 12: Draft Rancho Bernardo Atlas: Existing Conditions Report link

LINK

https://www.sandiego.gov/planning/rancho-bernardo-community-plan-update#docaccess-214bb4139d20d60204d9a1f4cc1af165