

**General Location** **1**  
**San Ysidro Community Plan** **FIGURE**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

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### **SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF THE PLAN**

The updated San Ysidro Community Plan (Plan) is a comprehensive revision of the original plan adopted in 1974 and includes the urbanized portion of the Tijuana River Valley. The update was authorized at the City Council budget hearings of July 1987 and work on the project began in December of that year. The Planning Department, with the assistance of the San Ysidro Planning and Development Group, has studied San Ysidro's major issues and challenges and has developed alternative solutions to realize the community's potential. Included in the Plan is a set of recommendations based upon those alternative solutions to guide the development and the redevelopment of the San Ysidro community.

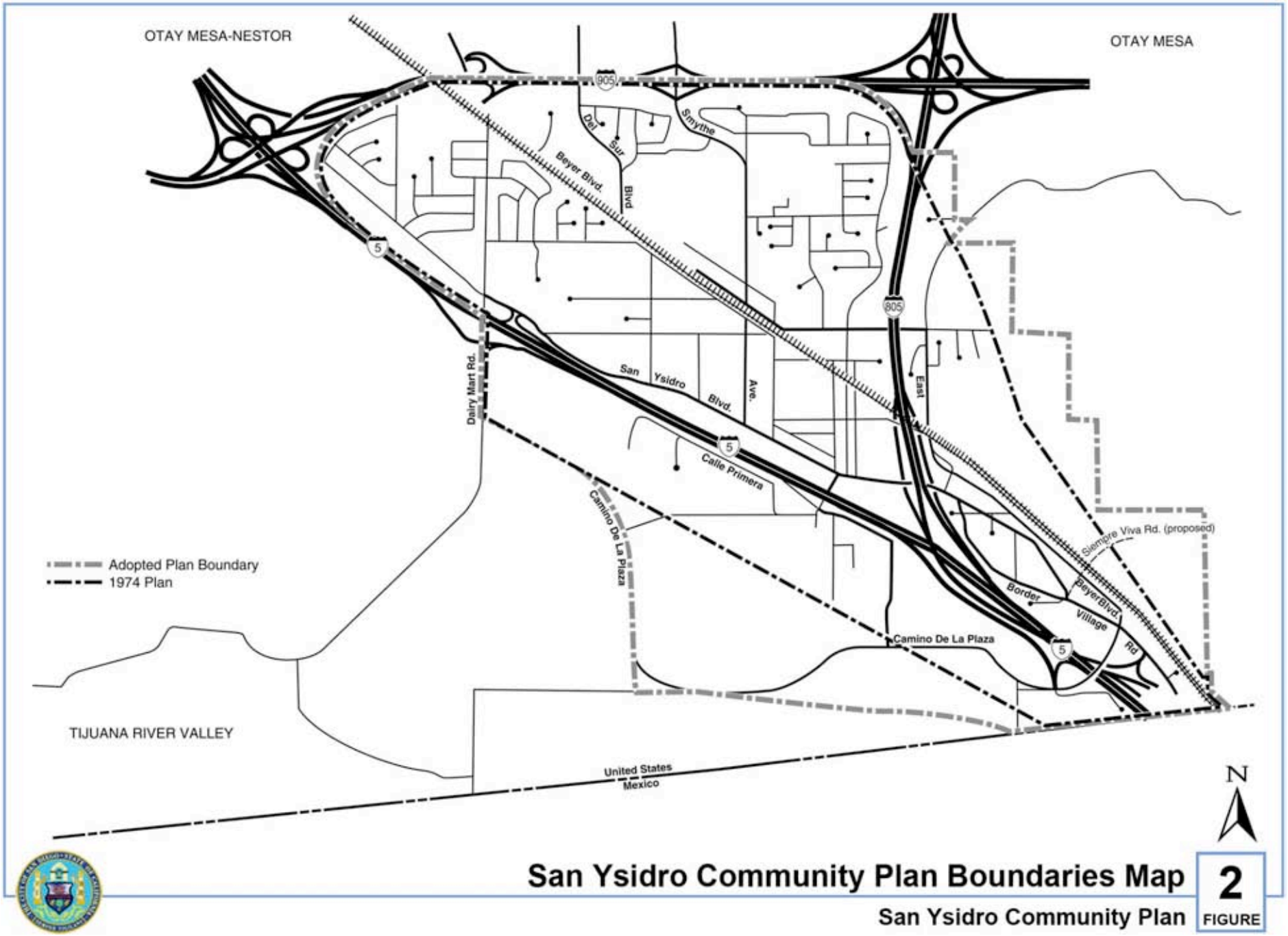
Formal adoption of the revised Plan requires that the Planning Commission and City Council follow the same procedure of holding public hearings as was followed in adopting the original community plan. Adoption of the Plan also requires an amendment of the Progress Guide and General Plan (General Plan) for the City, which will occur at the first regularly scheduled General Plan amendment hearing following adoption of this Plan. Once the Plan is adopted, any amendments, additions or deletions will require that the Planning Commission and City Council follow City Council Policy 600-35 regarding the procedure for Plan amendments.

Although this Plan sets forth procedures for implementation, it does not establish new regulations or legislation, nor does it rezone property.

The rezoning and design controls recommended in the Plan will be enacted concurrently with Plan adoption. Public hearings on the proposed zone changes will be held jointly with the hearings on adoption of the Plan. Proposals within this Plan are consistent with the General Plan for the City of San Diego.

### **THE SAN YSIDRO COMMUNITY AND ITS PEOPLE**

The San Ysidro planning area encompasses approximately 1,800 acres and is bounded by the Otay Mesa-Nestor community and State Highway 905 (SR-905) in the north, by the Tijuana River Valley in the west, by the Otay Mesa community in the east, and by the International Border with Mexico in the south. (See **Figures 1** and **2**.) Much of the planning area is moderately level; however, hilly terrain dominates its northeastern portion. A sharp rise in topography occurs immediately east of Interstate 5 (I-5) in the area of the border crossing. The Tijuana River floodplain comprises most of the planning area south and west of I-5.



San Ysidro’s proximity to Mexico and its strong Hispanic heritage are among the community's greatest resources. Although San Ysidro originally grew as a small, quiet border community in an agricultural setting, it is also the location of the busiest International Border crossing in the world. In many respects, San Diego and Tijuana constitute a single, large metropolitan area; the border is only a partial barrier to communication and exchange between the two cities. The community lies at the crossroads between the two cities and has important relationships with both. San Ysidro’s location adjacent to Mexico provides opportunities for the development of a center of cultural exchange and commerce serving both the tourist and the resident population. In addition, the strong interpersonal support which exists in the Hispanic family, creates a tightly knit community. San Ysidro’s location and its ethnic heritage, however, also present the community with its greatest challenges such as border traffic congestion, the language barrier and sub-standard socio-economic levels. The issues that are addressed in the Plan stem from these challenges and are identified in the following Plan elements.

**San Ysidro Community Characteristics**

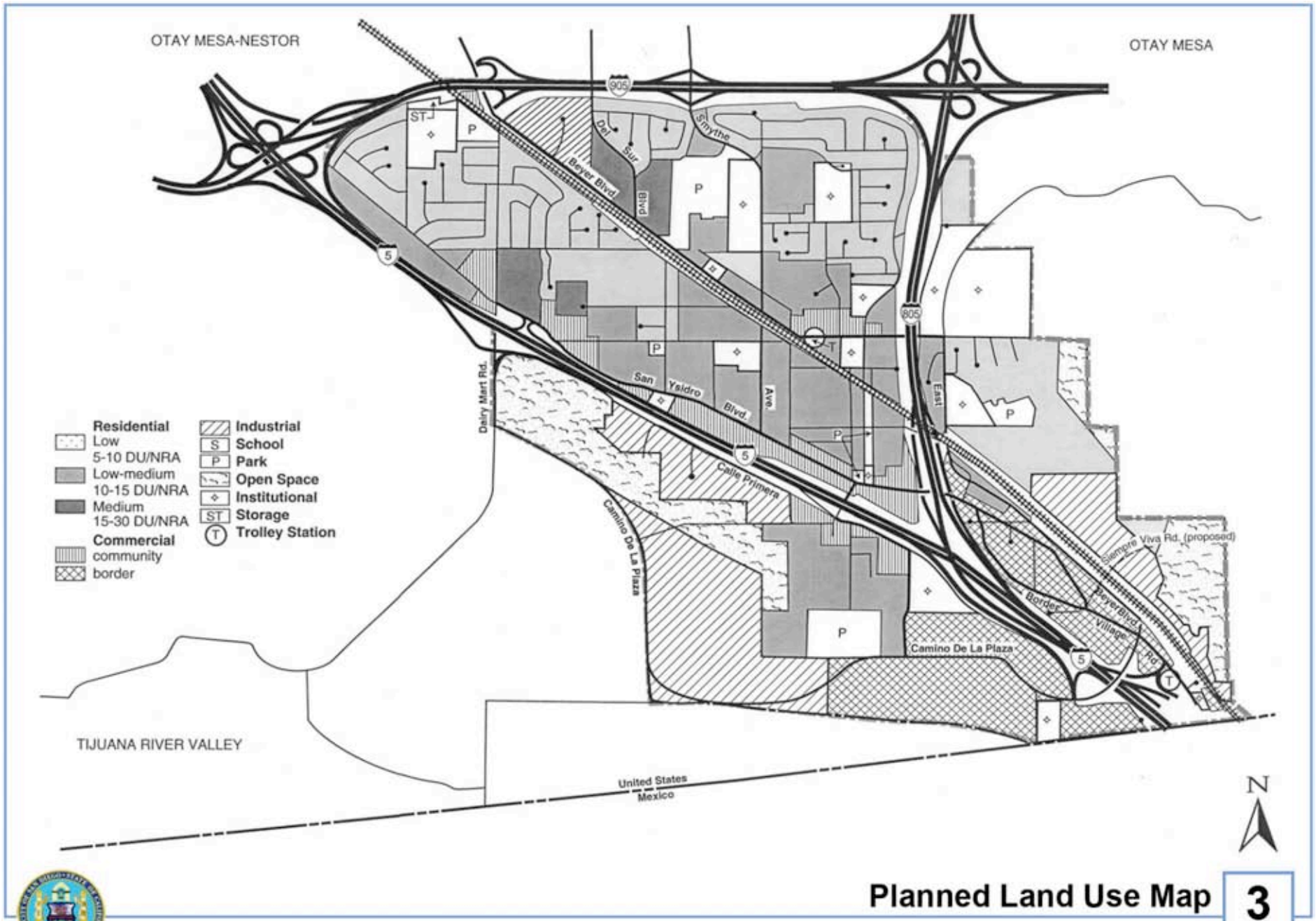
**Table 1** lists the major characteristics of the community, including the total acreage, zoned acreage, total existing residential units, population and existing land use acreage. These figures do not include the area east of Interstate 805 (I-805) and the railroad. (See **Figure 3** for 1989 generalized existing land use and **Figure 4** for 1989 existing zoning.)

**TABLE 1  
SAN YSIDRO COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS – JANUARY 1988**

(Does not include the area east of I-805 and the railroad.)

| <b>ZONED ACREAGES</b>             |              | <b>EXISTING LAND USE ACREAGES</b> |              |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|
| Agriculture                       | 659          | Residential                       | 606          |
| Residential                       | 681          | Single-family (345)               |              |
| Single-family (310)               |              | Multifamily (261)                 |              |
| Multifamily (371)                 |              | Commercial                        | 98           |
| Commercial                        | 212          | Industrial                        | 142          |
| Industrial                        | 69           | Public and semi-public            | 126          |
| <b>Total</b>                      | <b>1,621</b> | Agriculture                       | 3532         |
| Total Existing Residential Units: | 6,467        | Vacant                            | 296          |
| January 1988 Population:          | 22,130       | <b>Total</b>                      | <b>1,621</b> |





**Planned Land Use Map**  
**San Ysidro Community Plan**

**3**  
**FIGURE**



## **PLANNING HISTORY**

Efforts by the City of San Diego to prepare a development plan for all of South San Diego began in 1963, approximately six years after the area was annexed. At that time, San Ysidro was the core of the South San Diego area. The plan, which was prepared in conjunction with an economic study, was presented to the City Council in 1965. This “San Diego Border Area Plan” continued to forecast San Ysidro as the core of South San Diego.

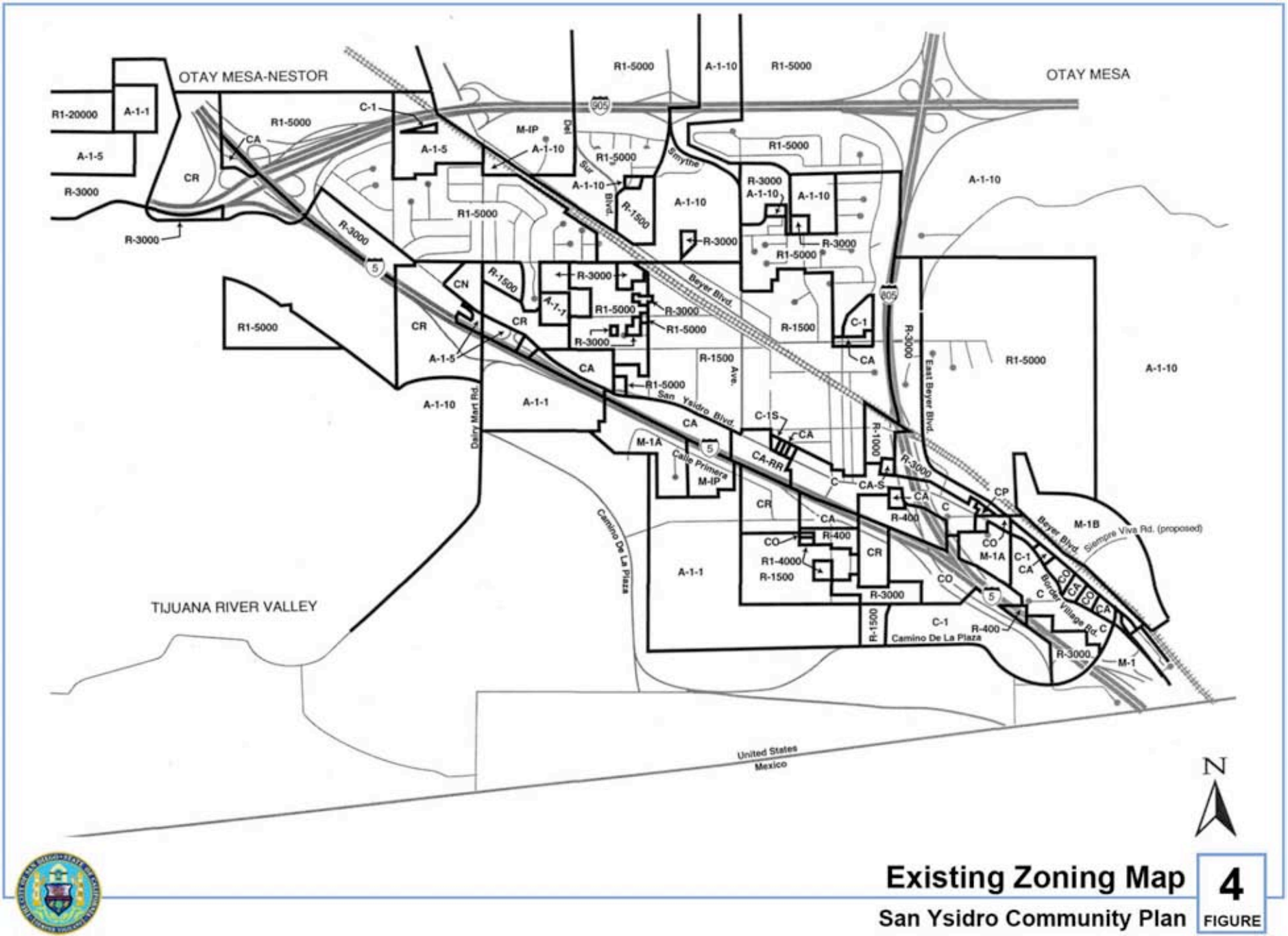
In the mid 1960s, San Diego began a decentralized planning program and divided the City into numerous community planning areas. Consistent with this program, in 1967, the City Council recognized the San Ysidro Planning and Development Group as the citizen planning committee that would work with the City Planning Department in preparing a community plan for San Ysidro. The group’s initial concern was that ramps from the proposed new freeways be provided to adequately serve the community and that the persons residing within the freeway rights-of-way be appropriately relocated. To this date, the community planning committee continues to meet on a monthly basis.

In 1968, San Diego applied for and received a Model Cities planning grant from the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development. San Ysidro was designated as part of the Model Neighborhood, and guidelines for the Model Cities Planning Program to address physical, economic and social problems were incorporated into the San Ysidro Community Plan adopted by the City Council in 1974. The community planning area included approximately 1,600 acres south of then State Highway 117 (now SR-905), west of I-805, north of the Republic of Mexico and east of the Tijuana River.

The plan proposed a community that would, at buildout, contain a population of approximately 22,500. The City’s most recent population estimate (January 1988) indicated a population of approximately 22,130.

Since adoption in 1974, the community plan has been amended six times. Landowners requested these amendments to obtain increases in residential densities on properties totaling approximately 16 acres. Collectively, these six amendments add roughly 300 housing units above the original community plan forecast of approximately 4,000 units.

The City Planning Department has also been involved, in conjunction with the Engineering and Development Department, in a variety of programs to alleviate traffic congestion on San Ysidro Boulevard, the major arterial in the community. In 1980, the City Council adopted a feasibility study aimed at correcting this congestion problem. A detailed program was approved in 1984 which is now being implemented. This first phase of the program resulted in the widening of the Boulevard between Via de San Ysidro and I-805 and other improvements including the undergrounding of utilities, street furniture, landscaping and the addition of off-street parking. The next phase of this program will address the area south of I-805 to the southern terminus of Border Village Road.



**4**  
**FIGURE**



In March 1987, the American Institute of Architects and the City-County Reinvestment Task Force conducted a Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) project in San Ysidro. The R/UDAT project was a four-day urban design/community awareness workshop that culminated in a presentation of the R/UDAT report to the City Council. The City Council accepted the report from the project team and directed the City to begin implementation of the report recommendations.

To begin implementation of the R/UDAT project, the Planning Department presented a series of recommendations to the Planning Commission. The Department especially emphasized the need for a comprehensive revision of the San Ysidro Community Plan. In July 1987, the City Council approved the Planning Department's Overall Work Program and Budget for fiscal year 1988, including the update of the San Ysidro Community Plan.

In September 1987, the general membership of the community planning group conducted elections of its board of directors. The R/UDAT project, having bolstered community awareness, encouraged more active community involvement in the election process. Eight new members were elected to the board and new officers were chosen. This greater involvement fostered new enthusiasm in the community planning program.

In December 1987, the Planning Department began the community plan revision process. This update of the San Ysidro Community Plan includes recommendations formulated during a series of community workshops and design guidelines developed at an Urban Design workshop. The completed document represents the efforts of a successful partnership between the Planning Department and the San Ysidro Planning and Development Group and the community.

## **HISTORY OF SAN YSIDRO**

The settlement, growth and development of San Ysidro revolves around its proximity to the United States/Mexico border and its status as a border crossing. As such, perhaps the most significant date in San Ysidro's history is 1848. In that year, the United States and Mexico concluded the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo which created the International Border we acknowledge today.

The first settlement in San Ysidro was a Spanish trading post established in 1818 and named for the patron saint of agriculture, Saint Isidore. The name "San Ysidro" is especially appropriate because a portion of San Ysidro lies in the rich valley between Otay Mesa to the east and the mountains to the south. This agricultural area proved to be fertile farmland and an impetus for early development in the region.

William Smythe, a San Diego booster and historian, founded the present day townsite of San Ysidro in 1909. Smythe carefully selected the area as the location for his agricultural colony, the Little Landers. This unique settlement flourished from 1909-1916. Residents lived by the motto, "A Little Land and A Living," which expressed the colony's primary goal—that a family could sustain itself, and even prosper, by intensively farming just one acre of land. Smythe's followers purchased lots in the newly platted town, built houses and began to farm.



The Little Landers weathered the initial lack of water and public facilities, the 1911 Flores Magon Revolution, a series of battles between the Federal government of Mexico and rebel forces in Tijuana, and bandit raids in Tecate which caused some residents to consider leaving the settlement. Many residents were able to sell surplus produce in San Diego. Although not prosperous, the colonists were living proof of the feasibility of Smythe's theory, that one acre of land could support a family. Little Landers Colony Number One had almost become a permanent fixture in the South Bay when disaster struck. The so-called Hatfield Flood in January 1916 destroyed the homes, livestock and household possessions of one hundred families, all of them Little Landers. These settlers were left penniless because all of their capital was in the land (underneath water). The colony was unable to recover from such a blow, and many of the original residents sold their holdings to the employees of the newly established Sunset Racetrack, south of the border, and non-participants in the Little Landers experiment. Almost overnight, San Ysidro became a tent city that accommodated a sudden influx of employees who traveled to work across the border.

By World War I, San Ysidro's dependence upon border commerce was well established. The closing of the border crossing for one year during the war had a crippling effect upon the little town's economy. When the border reopened, the U.S. was in the midst of Prohibition and Americans involved in the sale of alcohol flocked to Mexican border towns and opened saloons. Customers followed to patronize these establishments. Once again, San Ysidro became home to the employees of businesses across the border. Although still a predominantly agricultural region, tourist and gambling interests began to play an increasingly important role in the economy.

In contrast to the growing metropolis across the border, San Ysidro strived to maintain its small town atmosphere. Locals established community-serving businesses, such as hardware and feed stores and lumberyards along San Ysidro Boulevard, the community's main thoroughfare. The town's economy continued to prosper, however, due to the tourist. The opening of Agua Caliente Racetrack in Mexico in 1929 served only to increase tourist traffic through San Ysidro.

Despite all of this, San Ysidro, like many small agricultural communities, was severely affected by the Great Depression and was devastated in 1933, when President Cardenas of Mexico seized and nationalized all foreign-owned businesses. American investors withdrew all their money from Tijuana and San Ysidro and fled the region. The border was left to its own resources, which without tourists, were few. San Ysidro resumed its identity as a sleepy agricultural village.

The advent of World War II dramatically changed the face of San Ysidro. In 1942, due to the shortage of manpower, United States farmers convinced the federal government to initiate the Bracero Program. This allowed thousands of Mexicans to work in the United States legally for a limited time. The homogeneous settlement of early San Ysidro experienced a cultural transformation as many Mexicans crossed the border to participate in the Bracero Program. The expiration date of the legislation was extended, and extended again, until 1964. Meanwhile, many Mexican farmworkers remained, sent for their families and settled in the area.

The border, like the rest of America, enjoyed postwar prosperity and Tijuana re-emerged as a desirable destination for American tourists. Indeed, its popularity reached such a level that plans emerged in the late 1940s to build a major highway from San Diego to the border. The eventual construction of I-5 in 1954 bisected San Ysidro, displaced many residents and caused considerable disruption to local businesses. The freeway was also the major reason that the San Ysidro border crossing became the busiest port of entry in the United States.

Confronted with this fact, the U.S. Government began to exert more control over the border crossing to prevent illegal immigration.

In the early 1950s San Ysidro residents began to question the town's abilities to provide basic municipal services. Community leaders approached the City of San Diego about annexation, primarily to meet the increased demand for water.

San Diego responded favorably to the idea; the City was anxious to maintain some control over the border. After study of the issue, the City Council annexed a narrow strip of land under the San Diego Bay to establish contiguity. The community leaders then obtained the required signatures from 25 percent of the local residents, and in 1957, the City Council voted to annex San Ysidro, thus extending the City's boundary to the International Border. In 1973, San Ysidro residents briefly considered de-annexation from the City because some believed that the community had an adequate tax base to provide its own services. The attempt failed, however, due to lack of local support. The City also opposed the measure.

Begun as an experiment to preserve rural America, San Ysidro has emerged as a bicultural community and the busiest border crossing in the world. It is at the same time a small town and bustling city, a gateway to San Diego and the United States.