

Written (email) public comment from James and Catherine Gentilucci on 6/8/24:

Subject: Approve 1% Growth in Los Osos

Dear Basin Committee Members:

We write to express our strong support for the proposal to lift the building moratorium in Los Osos. We are long-time Los Osos residents (44 years) and owners of a vacant lot within the current prohibition zone. We have been on the county "list" for a building permit for 23 years, and we believe current water data provided to the Basin Committee is sufficient to justify a 1% annual growth rate in the community.

We are aware that there are individuals and groups in Los Osos who are opposed to ANY growth in Los Osos, and they couch their opposition in terms and phrases such as "sustainability", "additional studies are needed", and "we have not had opportunity for input." The water situation has been studied in depth, and the LOCP process involved copious input from all community stakeholders. It is time to move Los Osos forward in a reasonable and responsible manner.

Sincerely,

James and Catherine Gentilucci

During Emily Miggins's public comment on item 7 - Public Comments on Items Not Appearing on the Agenda, she distributed the attached letter to the Directors as a supporting document for her comment.

**Request for Continuance of Decision – San Luis Obispo County Local Coastal Program
Amendment Number LCP-3-SLO-21-0028-1-Part G (Los Osos Community Plan)**

**From: Emily Miggins and Ronald Smith
To: California Coastal Commission (CCC), email transmission**

Date: June 4th, 2024

Dear California Coastal Commission,

We are writing to respectfully request a continuance of the Coastal Commission's consideration of the Los Osos Community Plan (LOCP) currently set for June 13th, 2024.

Reasons for Continuance

More time is needed for expert consideration of the complex water supply issues: The Coastal Commission staff has been working on the complex issues implicated by the County's proposed major revisions to the Estero Bay Area Plan, particularly those associated with the LOCP. Whereas the Commission Staff and the County have been working on this issue for months if not years, the public has only been presented with the technical reports and the Commission's analysis for just a couple of weeks. As a result, the public has not had adequate time to retain experts to thoroughly analyze and comment on the complex and vexing water supply issues that have resulted in a virtual ban on new water- demanding construction in Los Osos for the past decades.

Need for More Public Input: The current proposal for the LOCP and growth management (GM) has not received sufficient public input from the citizens of Los Osos. A continuance would allow for additional community outreach and education efforts, ensuring a more informed and inclusive decision-making process. An open house or Town Hall with CCC staff and the County of San Luis Obispo Planning Department and Los Osos Basin Management Committee would be an excellent way to garner true, transparent governance and most importantly community based scientific input.

Potential Impacts Require Further Scrutiny: The potential environmental and social impacts of the LOCP are potentially irreversible and therefore require thorough analysis and public input. A continuance would allow for more time to assess these impacts and explore potential mitigation strategies and garner community support for how growth will be managed by the County of San Luis Obispo.

- There are many subject matter experts that live in the community of Los Osos, such as hydrogeologists, geologists, environmental scientists, ecologists and engineers and regional academics in these fields that work full time and cannot attend Basin Management Committee meetings that occur during the day. While the LO Community Service Utility Committee meeting is held during evening hours – the CSD is a utility that serves a very small percentage of the water users in our community.
- There have been no concerted efforts by the CSD Board or County BMC & Planning to reach out to local citizens to discuss the new Community Plan in light of the County and Commission's freshly minted water supply analysis. Instead, these matters have been discussed at Board Meetings that do not encourage or even allow free opportunity to openly ask questions without the constraints of the Brown Act. For example, there was a very well attended open house held in 2019 with County Planners and their consultants, and

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California Fish & Wildlife and U.S. Fish & Wildlife representatives, regarding the draft Los Osos Habitat Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Report. Many community and county stakeholders attended this meeting, in fact it was standing room only at the meeting, so the government professionals and consultants could engage deeply with concerns in the community and stakeholder groups. There were even in person follow up meetings with stakeholders such as Fire Safe Council. No such meetings have been held to discuss the important issues that are raised by the Commission's analysis and conclusions concerning the health of Los Osos groundwater and the evidence that allegedly supports the conclusion that sea water intrusion has been adequately curtailed.

Some of the Specific Concerns:

- The LOCP has both potential positive and negative impacts with an increase in population – an increase in housing but also water use demand and traffic congestion, how can the citizens of Los Osos be assured that there will be sufficient human resources to protect against wildfire, including appropriate care and restoration for drought parched coastal chaparral and its potential conflagration (as discussed during the Los Osos Fire and Emergency Preparedness Townhall in 2019)? We have had no large-scale public town halls since this time or regular smaller routine focus group meetings with CALFIRE.
- There are essentially no well-advertised local public forums for the citizens of Los Osos to engage in community-based initiatives and issues, such as LOCP. Los Osos has a Community Advisory Committee (LOCAC) and is attended by a county supervisor (District 2), but most Los Osos are unfamiliar with LOCAC because the meetings are essentially unadvertised, and our county supervisor has not held open “Los Osos Office Hours” the past few years. Ideally the LOCAC meetings would be advertised on social media platforms like Facebook group Support Los Osos and NextDoor, or noticed in our local newspaper Estero Bay News, or in the mail (e.g., a “postcard drop” or a notice in our water bills) and our “Los Osos Office Hours” would resume.
- What are the qualifications and backgrounds of the staff behind the technical recommendations in growth management? For example, the annual basin reports published by the Los Osos Basin Management Committee are verified/approved by a certified professional hydrogeologist. Why is there no ‘citizen at large’ representative on our Basin Management Committee working with our ‘Water Master’?

Measurement Matters:

Is Staff's current conclusion that groundwater supplies in Los Osos are “trending towards sustainability” a *scientifically defensible* proposition? This conclusion would mean that Los Osos is open for new water use consumption despite the monitoring data showing seawater intrusion (i.e., chloride content in drinking wells) continues to rise?

- What within the adjudicated basin metrics supports the statement “trending towards sustainability”?
- What is behind the technical recommendations in the LOCP – and over what period were they developed?

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As scientists we find “big picture decision making” for sustainability to be a risky proposition. For approximately the last decade there have been four groundwater metrics and goals for the BMC, regulatory agencies, and the public to evaluate the “health” of the Los Osos groundwater basin “through objective, numerical criteria that can be tracked over time.” These include metrics for basin yield, water level, chloride, and nitrate. The goal for the basin yield metric has been met seven of the last nine years, but **the goals for the water level, chloride, and nitrate metrics have never been met.**

While the nitrate metric goal has not yet been achieved, at least the nitrate levels have steadily decreased over the last seven years. As one would expect, the water level metric is sensitive to precipitation and recharge, and we saw a nice increase in water levels the last two above-average precipitation years. The chloride metric, on the other hand, has been variable the last nine years, but not trending in any direction. The 2023 Basin Report showed once again an increase in chloride levels. According to the most recent draft 2023 Basin Report “seawater intrusion is a major concern for the Lower Aquifer. The seawater intrusion front corresponds to the position of the 250 mg/L chloride concentration isopleth, which has been advancing inland for decades, and continues to advance under current Basin conditions, based on the monitoring program data. A significant reduction in Lower Aquifer production in the Western Area, together with other LOBP programs, is necessary to halt, slow and/or reverse intrusion.”

A number of **important questions** have not been addressed by the Staff Report:

- How will a moderate to extended drought impact the metrics that are behind the technical recommendations for growth management? The BMC basin yield and water level metric are sensitive to drought (or lack of recharge) and could trend “in the other direction” during drought.
- Saltwater intrusion into the Los Osos groundwater basin is a huge concern, how will an increase in population and water demand impact this? Title-19 retrofits do not negate the total water use footprint each new citizen can create like landscaping (think grocery store operations, restaurants, bars, coffee houses, cars washed, visitors hosted, and new vegetable and fruit tree gardens watered, specialty crop acreage added, hobbyist livestock operations established, hot tubs installed and even the perennial issue of illegal VRBO’s operated and Guesthouses illegally occupied as fulltime living accommodations.)
- What is the plan if trends reverse, and we start “trending towards unsustainability?” Will the BMC or County Planning have the power to immediately stop development and rescind already issued building permits?
- How much actual development will be generated under the Staff’s proposed 1% growth scenarios? Are commercial builds, ADUs, Guesthouses and/or affordable housing projects subject to or exempt from the 1% cap?

Benefits of Continuance:

The decision before you are a major land use decision that would affect the health and welfare of the Los Osos Community for decades to come. Increase in water consumption could effectively compromise the groundwater basin by accelerating seawater intrusion. By granting a continuance and taking steps with the County of San Luis Obispo to engage in depth with the community of

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Los Osos at a public forum where a sincere Q&A can be had, the Commission can ensure a more robust and well-rounded decision-making process. This will ultimately lead to growth management that better serves the needs of the community and protects the delicate coastal environment and resources in Los Osos without the risk of further contaminating our only source of drinking water. We would like to remind the Commissioners, and hardworking Planning Staff that changing only when you have to usually means it's too late. If you don't anticipate the future, you will be run over by it.

Again, we strongly urge Commissioners to practice good governance and uphold Coastal Commission values of *strong public participation, education, and effective intergovernmental coordination* by facilitating open transparent communication via a public forum to interact with our community scientifically, and socially as with the previously mentioned example regarding the Habitat Conservation Plan open house.

We are available to discuss our concerns further at your convenience as well as offer suggestions for solutions for community engagement. Please feel free to contact us at 510.292.9078 or LosOsans4GoodGovernance@gmail.com.

On behalf of **Los Osans for Good Governance**, thank you for your time and consideration,

Handwritten initials "EM" and "RS" in black ink.

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